



Mexican English Teachers' Experiences of International Professional Development in Canada: A Narrative Analysis

John L. Plews

(John.Plews@SMU.CA)

Saint Mary's University, Canada

Yvonne Breckenridge

(ymellis@ualberta.ca)

University of Alberta, Canada

Maria-Carolina Cambre

(mcambre@ualberta.ca)

University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract

This inquiry interprets participant experiences of a Mexican English teacher international professional development/Spanish language monitor program in Canada. Given the laissez-faire nature of such programming, and that the Mexican English teachers were to teach Spanish and not English, we aimed to understand the participants' development as they experienced it and to identify relevant curricular factors in program design. Our narrative emplotment of two participants' experiences echoes the tales of "The Princess and the Pea" and "Cinderella": The first recounts the search for the recognition of authentic merit; the second is about the emergence of inherent ability and confidence. Factors influencing the degree of success include cultural immersion, work schedules, interactions with local teachers, professional homestay, active engagement in classes, time for reflection, imposed roles and professional identity assertion, and (lack of) attention to language development.

1 Introduction

1.1 *Genesis of the program*

In 2004, the province of Alberta, Canada, mandated the compulsory learning of a language other than English (LOTE) in grades four through nine. This put pressure on Alberta's public education institutions to increase second language (SL) professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their linguistic and cross-cultural competencies. Motivated by the concerns of implementation, capacity, and quality, the provincial Ministry for Education approached the International Office of the University of Alberta to discuss whether existing international study courses in SL and foreign cultures could be integrated into professional development opportunities for school teachers. In response, the university offered its expertise in building international partnership to bring together different education institutions with an international partner. It intended to

establish international programming involving Alberta education institutions with a partner state in Mexico. The growth in learning Spanish in Alberta's public schools was by far the highest of all LOTEs being taught there (Alberta Learning, 2004, para. 8) and the concern for Spanish language and cross-cultural proficiency of Spanish teachers in Alberta matched a similar need in the Mexican state to improve its English language teaching. Thus representatives of education institutions in Alberta and the Mexican state met in 2004 to explore international programming as a mutually beneficial way to address the two regions' SL education concerns. One of the outcomes of the meeting was a Spanish language monitor program in Alberta. Participant experiences of that program comprise the focus of this article.

1.2 The program in Alberta

The Ministry of Education in the Mexican state selected four experienced master teachers to send to Canada for three months each, two in the fall term and two in the winter term. The program comprised twelve hours of work per week in the Spanish program of a university modern languages department and twelve hours per week assisting Spanish classes in a local public school district in a large urban area. The monitors were also required to take part in a paid homestay with a teacher or administrator from one of the school districts. The monitors were given a bursary for their work from a university endowment, which also covered the cost of the homestay.

The Ministry of Education in the Mexican state selected four experienced master teachers to send to Canada for three months each, two in the fall term and two in the winter term. The program comprised twelve hours of work per week in the Spanish program of a university modern languages department and twelve hours per week assisting Spanish classes in a local public school district in a large urban area. The monitors were also required to take part in a paid homestay with a teacher or administrator from one of the school districts. The monitors were given a bursary for their work from a university endowment, which also covered the cost of the homestay.

The cross-cultural concept of the program intended to provide Alberta university and school teachers and students with linguistic and cultural support from a Mexican native speaker of Spanish while serving as a SL professional development opportunity for Mexican teachers of English. Thus, the Mexican teachers' presence in the Alberta classroom was to encourage greater cross-cultural literacy and increased Spanish language proficiency among Alberta teachers and students of Spanish. Meanwhile, the amount of time spent in Alberta classrooms and the formal (and informal) contact with Alberta teachers and other education professionals would provide the Mexican teachers of English opportunities to observe and use potentially new and different SL teaching methods as well as experience a different educational culture. The pedagogical learning for the Mexican teachers of English conversely depended on teaching their native tongue of Spanish as a foreign language rather than English, which they instruct in their Mexican classrooms. Teaching one's native tongue in a country of one's target language is common to international programming, especially foreign language assistant programs for university foreign language students.

1.3 The concerns of international programming for SL teachers

International education services offering study/work abroad programs to SL teachers often assume that linguistic and cross-cultural learning occurs simply by being abroad and rarely consider pedagogical and professional learning. Certainly research (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Bennett, 1990; Bertocchini & Costanzo, 1996; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Myers, 1997; Osnes-Taylor, 1994; Stachowski & Mahan, 1995) has maintained that SL teacher education programs that immerse teachers in foreign language environments improve cross-cultural competence. However, Brierley and Coleman (1997) questioned this laissez-faire attitude and drew attention to the lack of articulation of study/work abroad with the pedagogical goals of home institutions. Similarly, Wilkinson (2000, 2001) cautioned that cross-cultural learning does not occur automatically through

exposure to an individual partner or environment. She emphasized the importance of structure in international programming for increased linguistic and cultural learning (see also Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Bertocchini & Costanzo, 1996; Brecht & Robinson, 1995; Gorsuch, 2003).

As past participants of SL study/work abroad programming at schools and universities in various countries, we recognize the benefits of participating in international education programs. However, we are also aware of how international study/work abroad programs rely for their success on the mere fact of the immersion setting and, particularly, the formal structure of a job and its responsibilities (see also Mahan & Stachowski, 1985; McCabe, 2001). The foreign assistantship programs in which we took part often attended only superficially to curriculum planning or assigning tasks that were relevant to our needs and interests. In our experience, both cross-cultural and linguistic growth while abroad were significantly regulated by work and social life frequently conducted in our native tongue. Often there was insufficient level-appropriate practice or challenge in our SL. Further, some colleagues tended to overlook our qualifications and prior experience and treated us as guests rather than peers or juniors. Consequently, our expertise was not always fully utilized. Training and orientation, if present, was generic and brief and occurred only at the beginning of a program. We were often on tight schedules that almost never allocated time to reflect on or apply new linguistic or pedagogical learning under purposeful, professional supervision. These schedules also rarely made time for us to attend university language or teacher education classes. Finally, our international SL study/work abroad programs placed us in SL classes but rarely, if ever, the SL that we taught or were intending to teach at home. Thus, based on our experiences, we believe that profound and sustained cross-cultural experiences depend on a combination of chance, an individual's degree of initiative and determination to remain in the SL (especially when faced with challenges), the development of relationships with locals at work and outside of work, and the dedication of individual hosts.

Spaulding, Mauch, and Lin (2001) indicated that international students are often placed into programming that does not integrate their interests (see also Liu, 1998). This circumstance extends to international programming for practicing teachers. Indeed, Bertocchini and Costanzo (1996) pointed out that while international teacher visits provide language practice and raise awareness of common problems and cultural differences, without structured and obligatory seminars and assignments, they amount to teacher tourism. These findings along with our own positive and negative experiences comprise, in hermeneutic terms (D.G. Smith, 1991), the forestructure of our understanding and our prejudgment of study/work abroad programs that motivates our interest in the Mexican teachers' experiences in Alberta. We were also concerned about whether the structure of the Spanish language monitor/Mexican English teacher international professional development program constituted a curriculum that sufficiently addressed the Mexican participants' needs and interests. Since much of the Mexican teachers' working day was to focus on assisting the teaching of their native tongue of Spanish as a foreign language, we wondered what they would perceive as experience relevant to their professional development as nonnative-speaker teachers of English as a foreign language in Mexico. Also, we were interested in finding out how the less structured or unstructured program components, such as school visits and homestays, related to the more structured teaching assistance. Thus, our study intended to further understand the participants' interests, needs, and development as they experienced it, to ascertain what needed to happen for the participants to feel the experience was worthwhile, and thus to identify relevant curricular factors in the program's design and delivery. We also hoped to suggest ways to improve such programs.

2 Method

Research acts are guided by the nature of the research topic and the researcher's purpose and questions (Ellis, 1998; Packer & Addison, 1989; D.G. Smith, 1991). By researching the Mexican English teachers' experiences of a Canadian professional development program as Spanish language monitors, we hoped to understand *what it is* like for Mexican teachers to take part in a program in Alberta that requires them to teach their native tongue in an English-speaking environment

and to encourage changes to be made to the program based on our findings. Since our interest concerns potential personal, social, and (cross-)cultural aspects of SL teacher professional development, our study is associated with the *participation* approach to SLs rather than with the *acquisition* approach that examines linguistic systems (Sfard, 1998) and has been the traditional focus of SL research (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Thus our study requires a method that is sensitive to the subjective processes and situated nature of human activity rather than one that isolates linguistic facts.

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) maintain that interpretive research methods such as narrative-based approaches not only complement the traditional experimental methodologies of the hard sciences, but also are more insightful regarding questions concerning the social and personal or psychological dimensions of SL learning and use. The constructivist paradigm informing interpretive and narrative approaches maintains that meaning is created in the dialogic encounter between the interpreter and a text, phenomenon, or social situation; this encounter occurs in the context of a particular time and place, and so meaning is apprehended as relative, socially specific, multiple, and perhaps conflicting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; D. G. Smith, 1991; J. K. Smith, 1993). Thus, in order to engage with how the Mexican teachers make sense of their experience, we chose to conduct an interpretive inquiry influenced by philosophical hermeneutics (D. G. Smith, 1991; J. K. Smith, 1993) and to present this inquiry by means of “narrative configuration” (Polkinghorne, 1995).

D.G. Smith (1991) contends that central to the creation of meaning by interpretation are the relational process of conversation and researchers’ self-reflective accounts of the dialogical transformations that they experience as a result of their conversations with others. Thus our research acts started with two researcher think aloud sessions to establish our preconceptions, one early in the fall term before interviewing the first two participants and one early in the winter term before interviewing the second two participants. We interviewed all four participants individually for up to 90 minutes, beginning by discussing pre-interview participant expressive art exercises and participant schedules. During the interviews, we referred to a set of prepared questions, but, in seeking a genuine conversation, we were also keen to digress, returning to the questions only when we went far off topic. After the formal interviews, we continued to meet with the participants more informally for a total of six hours. Our data was gathered on eight occasions over six months. After transcribing the interviews, we undertook several rounds of rereading the transcripts and our notes and several rounds of individual and team writing in order to configure our conversations with the participants as narratives and to reflect on our preconceptions as they reemerged or changed. The narratives were not presented to the participants since they were composed after their departures. Together, these acts represent how we have come to new understandings of international professional development.

We analyzed the interviews by following Polkinghorne’s (1995) concept of “narrative configuration,” which uses events and actions as data, looking for their particularities, and composing stories to explain certain outcomes. Polkinghorne promotes the value of narrative analysis for presenting qualitative research data since storytelling is able to reflect the complexity of human existence as situated action that is motivated yet contingent and changing. Narrative analysis relies on the process of “narrative configuration” or “emplotment” by which the researcher arranges events and actions into a coherent whole organized according to time and an overarching theme or plot. Researchers as interpreters or storytellers create new meaning by selecting, synthesizing, and describing the episodes and actions in research participants’ lives that the researchers see as significant in forming a particular outcome. Furthermore, presenting research data through storytelling enables an immediate connection with the readers of research for as Frank (1993) explains, “The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other” (p. 18). In the following, we present the storied experiences of the first two participants, who encountered the program as initially conceived. We intend to publish the second two participants’ narratives as a comparative sequel.

3 Narrative analysis of data

3.1 *The stories of "The Princess and the Pea" and "Cinderella"*

Generally speaking, the outcomes of the two participants' experiences echoed the tales of the "Princess and the Pea" and "Cinderella." "The Princess and the Pea" was originally published by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen in 1835. The story begins with a prince's unsuccessful search around the world for a real princess to become his bride. One stormy evening a bedraggled woman arrives at the town gate claiming to be a princess. The old queen sets out to test her claim by placing a pea under 40 layers of bedding on her bed. The next morning the princess complains about her uncomfortable sleep and everyone realizes that she must be a real princess because only a real princess could be so sensitive. The prince immediately arranges their wedding. Andersen's story not only stresses the importance of sensitivity as a noble human trait (and one especially fit for a ruler) but it also suggests that authentic merit will always reveal itself no matter the difficulty (or absurdity) of the test undergone.

The Cinderella story with which Western readers are most familiar was published as "Cinderella or the Little Glass Slipper" by the French author Charles Perrault in 1697. However, the Cinderella theme is the basis of hundreds of folk tales around the globe, with the ninth-century Chinese "Yeh-Shen" as the oldest known version. Perrault's version begins with Cinderella's father remarrying. Her stepmother and two stepsisters keep her busy with chores, treating her as their servant. She bears her humiliation patiently and silently. When the King invites all the eligible women of the realm to a ball in honor of his son, Cinderella's stepmother ensures that she will be unable to go. Her fairy godmother helps her by giving her clothes and a coach on condition that she returns by midnight. Thus transformed, Cinderella enjoys herself at the ball without being recognized. Forgetful of the time, she rushes out as the clock strikes midnight and leaves behind one of her glass slippers. The Prince picks up the shoe and vows to marry the woman whose foot it fits. In this way, he identifies Cinderella, despite her ragged appearance. Perrault holds to the essence of the tale, which promises that inherent beauty or goodness will become visible sooner or later. The persistence of the Cinderella story connects to the human desire to succeed if given the chance and the right circumstances.

We evoke these tales loosely as frames with which to account for the participants' lived experiences in Canada, their commonalities and differences, in events and actions. We then adapt the narratives of the "Princess and the Pea" and "Cinderella" to emplot and help illustrate the particularity of each of the two participants' stories. We organize the two stories in six intersecting chapters in order to show stages that reflect both their shared and particular experiences, identifications, and understandings of international educational experiences.

3.2 *Far, far away*

3.2.1 *Princess and the pea.*

The teacher from Mexico looks at the classroom in front of her. It is set up for frontal teaching, with the teacher's desk facing out from the board toward the students' desks, which are lined up neatly in rows facing back toward the teacher and the board. She scans the room: "They have a whiteboard, desk, TV monitor, overhead projector, two computers. One for the teacher, one for the students. They have a wall of filing cabinets with materials, and a telephone." She studies this new space and its rigid layout. It is tidy, still, and perhaps even regimented. She takes note of the amount of filing cabinets with all the materials inside. Her gaze rests on the telephone and she thinks, "That's the one piece of technology I don't have in my classroom in Mexico."

Embarking on a new adventure a long way from home, this Mexican teacher does not know exactly what she wants to learn but recalls earlier journeys to educational settings in English-speaking countries and the professional learning she gained. She exclaims, "Oh, I don't know

what's going to happen with me! This is my fourth trip, so that is good and I just want to learn more and more and more and more." Her previous trips to England and America helped her shape her own classroom and develop her approaches to teaching English in Mexico, so she expects her experience in Canadian schools and culture to add to this process. She reflects, "Because what I have now in Mexico is a result of all my trips that I have done, that's the reason I want to come here and learn more and more and more."

She cannot wait to begin, to gain greater expertise, and mix with Canadians: "That's the best part, to be in touch, to live the real life with the students and the teachers."

3.2.2 *Cinderella*

After teaching English for six years, this teacher leaves Mexico for the first time, full of excitement and high hopes for an enriching term. She arrives to find Canada totally different from her expectations and the little she knew about the culture. The initial surprise of brisk fall weather adds to the sense of adventure, underlining the strangeness of her temporary home. She immediately tries to adjust to the new daily rhythm: In Mexico she usually has breakfast at 8 or 9, lunch at 2 or 2:30, and dinner at 8 or 9, but here lunch is at 12 or 12:30 and that makes everything different.

She is excited about her initial experiences and eagerly looks for a computer on campus to email her colleagues, friends, and family in Mexico. In her first week she frequently sends emails about her new life. She even makes telephone calls. She tells them: "I am excited! It is cold here for me, but I am very excited! I have been downtown and to the mall and I'm starting to meet people. Next week I go to the university and the schools to start teaching. I'm a bit afraid." She thinks there will be a lot to learn.

The day she starts teaching, the welcoming Canadian teachers soon make her feel comfortable. "Look at where I am working now," she emails home, "I am like in both places, because I feel in both places at the same time." Her mind is open to different ways and she is planning to improve her teaching and to have something to take back to Mexico and her colleagues, family, and friends.

3.3 *Royal responsibilities*

3.3.1 *Princess and the pea.*

Although she had been told in advance that she would observe and teach classes at the university and in the school system, she did not anticipate just how busy she would be. This teacher-participant's time is divided between three different sites: the university on Mondays and Wednesdays, a high school on Tuesdays, and an elementary school on Thursdays and Fridays. Adding further layers to her complicated schedule, the university insists she alternates her university classes every other week so that more instructors and students can benefit from her presence. Additionally, in the school district, teachers and administrators invite her to other schools, classes (not just Spanish classes), and meetings so she can gain insight into broader Canadian classroom contexts.

Her responsibilities define her place in the classroom. Her hosts do not see her exactly as a teacher, nor is she a student. They introduce her to classes as an observer. But as she spends more time in the classroom, it becomes clear that her role is first and foremost to provide authentic cultural information and assist the students with language learning when they want extra attention. She notices how the students feel better when they get information from a person who has lived in Mexico, and not just from a textbook. She reflects, "If there's a person from Mexico and if that person tells you something that happened in Mexico, of course you're going to be better."

She realizes that the students' desire to get ahead soon turns into a genuine interest in knowing the opinions of a person from Mexico. They ask her questions: "Oh, what is your personal opinion about this?" "What happens in Mexico when ...?" She happily responds. When the cooperating

teacher explains something to the students and asks them if they have any questions, they all say no. But after they go to the teacher from Mexico and ask, "What is this? Am I correct, or what?" It makes her feel good when they come to her. Sharing her experience as a Spanish speaker and native of Mexico, she starts to feel a certain linguistic and cultural authority, even if it is not in her usual domain as an English language teacher.

3.3.2 *Cinderella*

This Mexican teacher first attends a lunch meeting with high school Spanish teachers to talk about the program. She also goes to some seminar workshops for new university graduate teaching assistants that address motivating students and the dos and don'ts of classroom management. The workshops remind her of the pedagogy and didactics classes she took for her BA in Mexico, so she is long familiar with the skills being taught. But she appreciates the lively instructor and enjoys meeting the graduate students.

Then she is put to work. Soon her schedule fills up, assisting several instructors in different courses. She is always running between classes and institutions, frequently checking the bus timetables, being picked up here and dropped off there. Mondays and Thursdays she goes to the university to assist in classes, conduct a conversation club, and offer drop-in sessions. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays she goes to a high school. She is so busy that she cannot go to any more workshops.

Her classroom chores include observing the university instructor present for twenty or thirty minutes and then drilling the students and correcting drafts of their writing. Sometimes she prepares cultural presentations and answers students' questions. She feels like an addendum to the instructor's lesson plan. The university instructors do not seem to know what to do with her: She can provide feedback to the students, but she is rarely trusted to lead the class herself, despite her teaching competence and language proficiency.

Conflicts arise between the Mexican teacher's assistantship schedule and spontaneous invitations. One day a school teacher calls: "I think it's okay for you to visit some of my classes. And I can introduce you to the other teachers in my school."

"Oh, that's a great opportunity. I really want to do this. But I am busy, so busy. I want to be there. I'm just unable to attend. There's an exam. I have to read something and the students have to listen to me."

"What a shame."

The Mexican teacher talks to a school principal, "I don't want to say no to anybody, and sometimes, there are invitations and I cannot go."

The principal tells her, "You don't have to go to everything."

"Yeah, there was an invitation for me the other day at another school and I had to say no. But I want to help the teacher with the exam. And I felt so bad." She is torn between the various demands and requests, yet she is cheerful and dutiful, almost stoic. She wants to please everyone. Eventually she finds a way both to help the teacher who needed her for an exam and to visit the school where she had been invited.

3.4 *Recognition and transformation*

3.4.1 *Princess and the pea.*

More Canadian teachers welcome the Mexican participant-teacher to their classes and strike up conversations about her situation in Mexico. As she interacts with her Canadian colleagues, she becomes aware of their misperceptions about education in Mexico. She laments, "Many people from other countries think that, in Mexico, we are very different, that we don't have technology, that we don't have all the resources."

The Canadians ask her whether she likes being in the Canadian classroom. She pauses before

politely remarking, “I have noticed that the Canadian teacher has only two computers for all the students if they want to check something.” She ponders, “I am sure that all the Canadian students have a computer in their house ... And in Mexico all the students are poorer than here. That’s the reason we have to have a computer for each student in my class in Mexico.”

Intrigued, her Canadian colleagues ask her to tell them more about her classroom in Mexico.

“My classroom is very different from the classes they have here in Canada,” she begins. “It is divided into four sections, each able to hold thirteen students, and there’s a central office with windows where I can supervise my students around me.” Her class in Mexico is a highly organized, complex space endowed with technology. She continues, “In addition to the whiteboard and conference table, books, dictionaries, and shelves with handouts and other learning materials in the conversation area, I have individual stations with TVs, VCRs, and videos in the video area, and tape recorders, earphones, and audio equipment in the audio area. There are dictionaries in all the areas. And there are also thirteen seats in the computer area. Every student there has space with everything. The big table can seat thirteen students or more.” She takes her time over her description, listing and counting out the objects and furnishings, and giving so much detail that her Canadian colleagues can almost see her students, busy learning around her. She emphasizes how sophisticated, occupied, and technologically advanced her class is.

One Canadian teacher is especially impressed: “Wow. It sounds like more than one classroom.” She tells her: “I think you have a better class in Mexico than we have here.”

“Actually, it has four areas. I have been working so hard to have my class as I have it now,” the Mexican teacher replies. “I’m glad that you like it.”

From this conversation the Mexican teacher begins to feel subtle tensions between acknowledging the general educational needs in her country, her experience of Canadian schools, and her ever growing wish to be recognized as a master teacher of English in a unique educational setting. With all the talk of her state-of-the-art classroom, the Canadian teachers begin to wonder about her pedagogical practice—after all, she must know how to use all that equipment—and so they start to see her for the English teacher she really is. They begin to ask, “How are you teaching this?” “How would you do that in your classroom?” They tell her, “Yeah, you’re an English teacher.”

She replies, “Yeah, I am.”

3.4.2 *Cinderella*

In contrast to her workaday service at the university, this participant-teacher has a ball at one high school, thanks to one particularly warm and inviting teacher:

“Cinders? Ah, Cinders! I’ve been expecting you!” She hugs the Mexican.

“Oh, thank you! I needed that hug!”

Mrs. Angel has many years of teaching experience and, in the Mexican’s eyes, is the best of the many good school teachers she meets. She speaks four languages, all of them perfectly. She has traveled to Europe and many other places all over the world. She knows a lot of people and about different cultures, and brings real-life examples of language in use as extra cultural information into her classes. When Mrs. Angel is teaching, the Mexican teacher can but ooh and ah. She tells herself that she has to remember this and take note of that, for she sees many pedagogically useful activities that she wants to integrate into her own repertoire. She is impressed by how Mrs. Angel shares her experiences with her students and always helps them find better language to express their ideas.

“Wow, even when I am just listening I am learning a lot in your class.”

“Well you are more valuable than that. You have to speak in my class. Speak Spanish as you usually do. I want you to speak about Mexico whenever you can.”

“I’d love to!”

“I like what you have to say when you speak. You have to let me write it down because what you say is interesting.”

The participant-teacher notices how her cooperating teacher is always trying to improve, even

after years of teaching experience. "Wow, I have learned a lot with you."

"No, no, no, I have learned with you. I am lucky I am working with you."

"No, I am the lucky one. You are just great."

The Mexican teacher thinks about her good fortune and begins to recognize an image of her own potential transformation, "I have been lucky to have been with her, in that class in that school because she is just great. I want to be as she is. I want to improve in my teaching. I want to take that example. I want to take that image. I want to become like her."

3.5 *Tried and trying-out*

3.5.1 *Princess and the pea.*

This participant-teacher senses her teaching abilities are being tested throughout the rest of the program. Her cooperating teachers increase her workload in class. But her former experience brings her success and she is up to the challenge. She smiles to herself, "Thank God it's not my first trip. I am prepared with material from Mexico. So now it is possible for me to do all those activities." Yet she sees the tasks that she is asked to do not so much as a chance to refine her teaching skills as opportunities to prove them.

When she teaches, the Canadian teachers are very happy with her class. They ask, "Can you please give me your materials that you were using today?"

She says, "Yeah, why not!"

"And do you have this material? I could do with that too."

"The game for the Spanish simple present? Yeah."

"Oh, you know, I never thought of teaching it that way. That's a great idea."

"Well I'm glad that you like it. So that's great." The Mexican teacher beams back at her Canadian colleagues.

This teacher feels good about her experience. She measures her success by the impact she has on her Canadian colleagues' professional development. She takes full advantage of the tests she is put to: The observing assistant becomes the observed master. These opportunities to share her pedagogical knowledge in a foreign context mean recognition not only for the sake of her (native) language skills or even classroom activities, but specifically as an expert teacher. Though, she is still only occasionally asked to teach a whole lesson.

3.5.2 *Cinderella*

This Mexican teacher and Mrs. Angel constantly capture each other's imagination. They do arts and crafts together. One day Mrs. Angel makes piñatas with her students. She relates the pedagogical tasks to the age of the students. The participant-teacher understands the importance of age-appropriate activities, but she wonders whether she can do such crafts with her Mexican university students because they are in their twenties. Nonetheless, she is going to try.

She also starts to become more engaged in one of the senior-level university classes in which the students are motivated. The syllabus includes music, movies, and famous political figures. When the students are working on salsa, she takes the initiative to teach them about mariachi and las serenatas. The students' curiosity grows and they expect her to tell them about Mexican politics, the economy, and the indigenous cultures.

The Mexican teacher wonders if she can try out in her classes teaching ideas and tasks similar to the ones modeled by Mrs. Angel or done with the senior university students. Mrs. Angel convinces her to try on the teaching identities and styles that she has encountered. Inspired by the piñata activity, she has already bought pumpkin carving tools, found the recipe for pumpkin pie, and photographed carved Jack-o'-lanterns in preparation for trying out Halloween craft activities with her students. She marks the day in her agenda, the day she will actualize her transformation.

3.6 *Happily ever after*

3.6.1 *Princess and the pea.*

As she looks back on the program, she glows. She shares her positive feelings with her Canadian colleagues, “Everything has been good. For me, it’s been a great, great experience and I have learned a lot, a lot, because I have been living it.”

They ask her what she is going to do when she is back in Mexico. She laughs, “I am going to get more filing cabinets. I have one right now but I’ll need more and more. Where am I going to put all the material I have bought?”

What did you buy?” They ask.

“Books. Books on grammar, and on teaching how to read and write in English. They are for me and the other teachers. And I’m bringing back games and pictures, all kinds of stuff.”

She has been a professional throughout. She has kept a notebook with all the ideas and information she has learned in the classes she observed. “I will refer to my notebooks. I like the way one of the university instructors is teaching because he involves the students so much. He’s using movies and music and information from the Internet. I’ll try it when I’m back in my class.”

She looks forward to keeping in contact with her new contacts in Canada. She has swapped email addresses with many teachers and students and is planning an e-exchange between her students and her homestay teacher’s class. “She has helped me a lot with all the information I want to know. If I have a question about the curriculum here, I ask her and she explains everything. And everything she wants to know, she asks me and I explain to her.” She has exchanged information about the differences and similarities between her and her Canadian colleagues’ educational contexts. She remarks: “It has been good also for teachers and students here because it’s a good experience for both sides.”

With her new understanding of Canadians to share with her students, she is ready to return home.

3.6.2 *Cinderella*

Mrs. Angel asks this Mexican teacher how she feels as she prepares to return to Mexico and she replies: “I feel more self-confident, and besides that, you know, I have noticed that my expectations for my job have increased.”

“How so?”

“Well, every time I have learned something new in the high school or the university I remember my students and my school and coworkers in Mexico. And I have just tried to write it down so that I can help my students. So I am going to continue improve my teaching and give more to my students. And I feel more confident because I have a lot of stuff to share with my students and my coworkers.”

This teacher has tried all kinds of new pedagogical tasks and content-based teaching while in Canada and realizes that such naturalistic approaches are a good fit for her. She feels more capable of doing her job: “Yeah, I am not going to change my profession. I have become a better teacher and a better professional.”

“And how do you feel about leaving Canada?” asks Mrs. Angel.

“I never forgot my colleagues and the institution that I work for so I have the feeling that I want to go back to Mexico. But the same time I would like to stay or come back some time.” She elaborates on how the two places contribute intrinsically to her development as a teacher: “This is me and this is what I am looking at, both places, not only one ... If I don’t show the places, the directions I’m looking toward I will be lost, me by myself.”

Having tried new teaching styles and finding an improved professional role that fits her well, this teacher confidently begins to plan for a bright future: “I want to go for my Master’s degree in Canada. I was talking with one of the teachers about that and there are two options for me. There’s

Linguistics or there's Education."

3.7 *Happily ever after?*

3.7.1 *Princess and the pea.*

But not quite all is well that ends well. It is assumed that by being in Canada, she would naturally improve her English language abilities. Certainly, from the moment this Mexican teacher arrived she has had to speak English. She has found the meetings with teachers and the class visits (other than Spanish) particularly helpful. "Here I can learn more and more every day. I have heard different words, even expressions." Yet the question of how she has improved her language ability lingers:

"Have you also been keeping a record of your development in English like you have been with the teaching strategies or material?"

"Not really," she replies.

3.7.2 *Cinderella*

This teacher regrets not being told what was expected of her in the Spanish classes before she came to Canada, so that she could have prepared materials in advance. She admits, "This was difficult for me. Even though I love my culture, I sometimes forget the dates and information. So I had to read what's what. And I asked my sister by email and she sent me notes and I was able to give some information."

But maybe some of the teachers in the school and university also did not know what they were going to do with a language monitor until she was in their classes.

Certainly this teacher has found the lack of direction to be a problem when trying to keep track of her learning: "I have experienced a lot here for my teaching in Mexico. I am afraid of forgetting it because there is so much. How can I keep it all in my mind?"

4 Discussion

Our inquiry has examined participants' experiences of an international professional development program for Mexican teachers of English in Canada. The focus of the program was twofold. First, it was to raise the cross-cultural competence and SL proficiency of participating and cooperating teachers from the two respective countries. Second, it was to foster improvements in methodological approaches to teaching English as a foreign language in Mexico by having the Mexican English teachers assist as Spanish language monitors in Canadian school and university Spanish classes. (Canadian students of Spanish were also to gain linguistically and cross-culturally from the authentic Spanish language and Mexican culture input.) Given the program directive and our concerns about the usual *laissez-faire* and unarticulated nature of such international programming, as well as the fact that the participating Mexican English teachers were to teach Spanish and not English, we were interested in how the Mexican teachers would make sense of this experience, what kinds of learning they would identify, and which formal structures or unstructured elements of the program facilitated that learning.

As anticipated, we have discovered that these two teacher-participants have both had – by their own evaluation – positive experiences in terms of intercultural contact and gains in cultural, pedagogical, and professional learning. Yet while their stories of learning are similar, they are also particular. One participant's story – *The Princess and the Pea* – is one of seeking recognition and the revelation of authentic merit. The other's story – *Cinderella* – is about humble aspiration and the emergence of inherent ability and confidence. The narratives of the participants' lived experiences attend to the positive aspects of their immersion in a different culture and education system, their professional interactions, and their personal professional growth. They also signal problems con-

cerning language development, their busy schedules, and missed opportunities to maximize learning.

Both teachers indicate the success of the program. From the start, the simple fact of travel and cultural immersion inspires a sense of adventure, which computes to a desire to fully experience a new country as well as gain professional knowledge there. The two participants differ in that one has already traveled for educational purposes, whereas for the other this is a new experience. Thus the former – The Princess and the Pea – wishes to build on previous knowledge, while the latter – Cinderella – wants to acquire new knowledge to take home with her. Their experiences of Canadian language, culture, and especially educational culture are informative since they are lived in situ at work and in the homestay rather than gleaned from reading. The length of their stay is especially valuable to them as English teachers since living and working in an English-speaking country gives them greater credibility and confidence in the Mexican classroom (just as being Mexicans affords them special status in the eyes of learners in Canadian Spanish classes).

Yet, while the program structure of immersion through a teaching assistantship and homestay with a professional seems to enable opportunities for achieving the learning goals of increased linguistic and intercultural competence and improved teaching approaches, we find that particularly the goal of (English) language proficiency is conspicuous by its absence from the narrative. The participant-teachers are already proficient speakers of English – after all, the interviews were conducted in English – and have no doubt had opportunity to practice English while working and living with Canadians. But by not offering this as part of their stories, or even elaborating on it when prompted, they reveal that this aspect of the program has been left largely unattended. Wilkinson (2000, 2001) calls for structural components to be included in international education programs specifically to address language learning. In the case of the program in Canada, the structure of cultural immersion through work and homestay is insufficient to guarantee concerted effort on language development. Clearly, there needs to be more level-appropriate language planning and supervision of language development.

As essential as the work experience is to the success of the program, it cannot be guided by the principle of engaging the participants merely by keeping them busy. Nor should professional interactions remain at the level of visitors passively observing or serving as reference points for authentic linguistic and cultural input. Both participants keep records – and materials – of Spanish lessons they assisted in Canada, confident they can implement similar activities once back in their English classes in Mexico. More significantly, the role of observer/monitor is insufficient for the first – The Princess and the Pea – who uses the Canadians' inaccurate presumption of her less adequate educational knowledge and situation as a platform from which to establish her status as a master teacher and subsequently share more of her own prior experience and ideas with cooperating teachers. Her previous international experiences have taught her to take the initiative. Only when she proves herself is she able to have the kind of dialogue in which she too can learn. The second and less experienced of the two – Cinderella – is perhaps more comfortable at first with assisting with language drills and marking. But she too shifts into a more active role when she meets a dynamic mentor teacher who encourages her to experiment. This one-on-one relationship helps her to gain confidence and a new sense of herself as a teacher. Thus, given no specific learning objectives in Mexico nor curriculum details from Alberta before their arrival, the participants reveal a desire to be actively engaged with the classroom community and the preparation and delivery (if not also assessment) of teaching. Only active engagement enables the negotiation of classroom roles, meaningful cooperation, and the development of materials based on skills (rather than only heritage). The narratives in our study show that this program leaves important pedagogical learning to chance.

Although the Mexican teachers have frequent interaction with Canadian colleagues, their busy schedules also minimize the depth and effect of those interactions by leaving little room for flexibility or to incorporate their own academic and educational interests. For example, they wanted to attend more teacher meetings to gain insight into administration and audit a teacher education class at the university, but these are not program components nor could the busy schedule accommodate

them. There is also no time for formal assignments or regular supervision with the program developers or an assigned professor, teacher, or administrator to help link new classroom experience to theoretical pedagogical knowledge or the local context or otherwise enable the participants to reflect on how exactly to adapt their experiences of different approaches to suit their Mexican classrooms. We question an international professional development program that values exposure to a different teaching context and so places foreign participant-teachers in a SL language classroom (to make good linguistic use of them), but at the same time does not provide for their need to understand the theoretical principles and administrative frames in which that SL teaching is grounded. Likewise, we wonder whether an international program based on immersion and interaction without formal guided reflection diminishes the participants' opportunities to foster increased intercultural awareness or make the most of their pedagogical learning or language development. English (2002) argues for critical reflection and discussion as well as ongoing facilitator support while overseas as two factors necessary for adult educators to learn from their international experiences. Similarly, Barkhuizen & Feryok (2006) cite the need for participants to reflect on and talk about their intercultural, linguistic, and pedagogical experiences. However, in this international program, the Mexican participants received an initial briefing and were subsequently left to reflect on, critique, and apply what they observe on their own.

The ambiguous role of the Mexican teacher-participants at the onset also affected and – certainly initially – hindered their engagement in the classroom. With the title “Spanish language monitors,” instead of “Mexican English teachers,” and no terms of reference, they are treated as guests, observers, authentic living resources, and feedback providers. Only later are they treated like a peer (Princess and the Pea) and an evolving junior colleague (Cinderella). The monitor title impedes the Canadian teachers from recognizing the credentials of their Mexican colleagues; at least at first they do not seem to have differentiated between working as cooperating teachers with pre-service teachers and collaborating with visiting in-service teachers, as the Mexican participants are. Gorsuch (2003) states that program developers should stop stereotyping international teachers based on nationality or a foreign educational culture and focus on their status as teachers with something to give and learn. Had the Mexican teachers been identified as in-service teachers from the start, their function in the Canadian classroom might have been better understood and supported.

Along with pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural learning, the psychological endeavor of further developing one's professional identity as a language teacher while living in, and trying to make sense of, the target language culture has emerged in our inquiry as a fundamental part of participating in international language teacher professional development programs. Since the Cinderella-like teacher began the program with less teaching experience, she has had further to go in her development as a more interculturally and methodologically knowledgeable teacher. This enduring aspiration to realize her potential is the measure of her success and the crux of her story. Consequently, because she has had the chance to engage fully and further evolve as a SL teacher, she appears to have gained the most of the two. However, when regarding the participants' sense of personal achievement as an indicator of program value and success, we in no way wish to underestimate how important the assertion of professional identity has been for the teacher likened to the Princess. Indeed, the importance of professional identity construction while on international educational programs is as if overlooked by program developers and research scholars alike. If program developers and cooperating teachers perceive international teachers as guests to be exposed to culture and do not anticipate and integrate shifts in professional identity that occur in engaged cultural encounters, then the program structure will remain naïve to the complexity of potential personal and professional development.

The participants' (re)negotiation of their roles from guest to peer has affected their personal cultural and professional identities. In having to strive for recognition and assert the identity she seemed to have thought she had, the Princess has developed a cultural perspective that is on one side of a self/other cultural binary. This is exemplified by switching between “I” (for in Mexico) and “they” (for in Canada) when describing classrooms. By foregrounding the particularly ad-

vanced nature of her classroom in Mexico and referring to a rather impersonalized classroom from the ones she has visited in Canada, this teacher takes the opportunity to express her expertise and even superiority. Her professional experience in Canada takes on the objective of the person from one culture observing another culture in situ, in an exchange of understanding, and without feeling a need to question her own, or perhaps even in order to feel more secure in and satisfied with her own. This differentiation is typical of an international as opposed to an intercultural experience.

On the other hand, with the strange advantage of being less experienced and the good fortune of finding a mentor teacher who treats her more like a junior colleague than a guest, Cinderella moves toward an identity that occupies a “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1994) in both cultures at once. This teacher expresses the dual and connected influences of Mexico and Canada on her professional development. She focuses on togetherness and mutual understanding. This associating, combining perspective is characteristic of a more intercultural than international experience.

5 Conclusion

While international educational experiences can enable linguistic gains and increase intercultural awareness, these programs are also often *laissez-faire*, emphasizing exposure to another culture rather than reflective engagement with it. Such programming at once facilitates and limits language and culture learning. Furthermore, there is often little specific articulation with the goals of a participant’s domestic educational program or institution. As former participants of SL study/work abroad programs, we believe international education experiences are beneficial. But on reflection, we add our voices to the concern about whether such programs are structured in optimal ways. The structure of international education experiences seems often to amount to an immersion setting for chance cultural encounters and a work roster with insufficient appropriate opportunity to reflect on linguistic, cultural, or pedagogical learning.

Our narrative inquiry of the lived experiences of two participant-teachers on a Mexican English teacher professional development/Spanish language monitor program in Alberta, Canada, has found that this international program follows the typical structure of chance encounters in cultural immersion and a busy schedule of general teaching responsibilities. Our participants positively evaluate their Canadian experience, enjoying immersion in a new culture and benefiting from the program by expanding their professional network and learning more about culture and SL teaching approaches in Canada. Their interactions with teachers through classroom engagement and a professional homestay are essential to their sense of success. Certainly, the local schools and university benefit from access to live authentic language and culture input.

However, it is unclear whether the participants’ range of language exposure has computed to language development and whether their everyday cultural learning has gone much beyond surface exposure. Also, while the participants keep notes of their classroom experiences in Canada, they are so busy that they do not find the time to reflect deeply on their pedagogical learning in relation to their work as English teachers in Mexico. Finally, both participants have experienced affective or symbolic development not anticipated by the program. Treated initially as guests and later more as colleagues, both have reconsidered their professional identities. Like the Princess and the Pea, one participant has sought recognition of her merit and asserted her status. Like Cinderella, the other has succeeded in finding her abilities and confidence in the right circumstances.

Even though this international professional development program was motivated by shared provincial and state concerns, a curriculum of general cultural exposure and a busy teaching schedule means that the success of the program – that is, the participants’ professional development – is left almost entirely to chance and individual initiative. While such a structure can lead to positive experiences, facilitate linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical learning, and even cause identity assertion or reconstruction, we also observe that it limits professional development by not capitalizing on and formalizing the key interactions between participating in-service teachers and cooperating teachers. We thus suggest five amendments in order to improve such programming. First, participants like the Mexican teachers on this program should be recognized appropriately as

in-service teachers. Second, further dialogue should occur between the participant-teachers, their domestic institutions, and the hosting university and school teachers and administrators in order to establish personal and class goals for the participants both in the Spanish classes in which they will assist and in the other classes they observe. In this context, participants would be introduced to the local curriculum and class syllabus so that they have a context and plan for their experience. Likewise, local teachers would learn about the Mexicans' educational institutions. Third, participants should be invited to set personal targets for their English language development and itemize particular cultural interests or pastimes they could actively pursue. Fourth, along with informal professional homestay, hosts could make formal arrangements for participants to become familiar with the administrative aspects of a given educational institution. Fifth, the participants should be provided sufficient time to critically reflect on their observations, experiences, and identity, preferably with a supervisor (in addition to the cooperating teacher, and educated specifically in teaching English as a SL) from whom they would receive expert feedback. This would both help the participant-teachers connect conceptual and practical knowledge learned in Canada with the needs of their classes in Mexico and also encourage more effective collaboration with their Canadian counterparts. By amending the standard curriculum of cultural exposure and general teaching responsibilities in these five ways, we believe international education experiences for teachers will no longer resemble positive yet uncritical teacher tourism and become more sophisticated critical intercultural professional development opportunities.

References

- Alberta Learning. (2004). *Learning languages in Alberta: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from the Learning languages in Alberta website: <http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/languages/faq.asp>
- Barkhuizen, G., & Feryok, A. (2006). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of a short-term international experience programme. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 115–134.
- Bennett, C.I. (1990). *Comprehensive multicultural education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bertocchini, P., & Costanzo, E. (1996, July). L'Europe et l'autoformation des enseignants de langues. *Français dans le monde*, 282, 62–66.
- Bhabha, K.H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Brecht, R.D., & Robinson, J.L. (1995). On the value for formal instruction in study abroad: Student reactions in context. In B F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 317–334). Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Brierley, B., & Coleman, J. (1997). Supporting language students during their year abroad. *Linguist* 36(1), 2–4.
- Cushner, K., & Mahon, J. (2002). Overseas student teaching: Affecting personal, professional, and global competencies in an age of globalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(1), 44–58.
- Ellis, J.L. (1998). *Teaching from understanding. Teacher as interpretive inquirer*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- English, L.M. (2002). Learning how they learn: International adult educators in the global sphere. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(3), 230–248.
- Frank, A.W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gorsuch, G.J. (2003). The educational cultures of international teaching assistants and U.S. universities. *TESL-EJ*, 7(3), A-1, 17pp.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Liu, D. (1998). Ethnocentrism in TESOL: Teacher education and the neglected needs of international TESOL students. *ELT Journal*, 52, 3–10.
- Mahan, J.M., & Stachowski, L.L. (1985). Overseas student teaching: A model, important outcomes, recommendations. *International Education*, 15(1), 9–30.
- McCabe, L. (2001). Globalization and internationalization: The impact on education abroad programs. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5(2), 138–145.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from "Case study research in education"*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.
- Myers Jr., E. (1997). Some benefits of an education abroad program for elementary preservice teachers. *Education* 117(4), 579–583. EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier database, accession number: 9710065869.

- Osnes-Taylor, T.A. (1994). Going global, one teacher educator at a time. In J.L. Easterly (Ed.), *Promoting teacher education* (pp. 7–13). Reston, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.
- Packer, M.J., & Addison, R.B. (1989). Evaluating an interpretive account. In M.J. Packer & R.B. Addison (Eds.), *Entering the circle: Hermeneutic investigation in psychology* (pp. 275–292, 319–321). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J.P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re)construction of selves. In J.P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 155–177). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5–23). Washington, DC: Falmer Press.
- Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing one. *Educational Researcher*, 27(2), 4–13.
- Smith, D.G. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 187–209). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Smith, J.K. (1993). Hermeneutics and qualitative inquiry. In D.J. Flinders & G.E. Mills (Eds.), *Theory and concepts in qualitative research. Perspectives from the field* (pp. 183–200). New York & London: Teachers College Press.
- Spaulding, S., Mauch, J., & Lin, L. (2001). The internationalization of higher education. Policy and program issues. In P. O'Meara, H.D. Mehlinger, & R.M. Newman (Eds.), *Changing perspectives on international education* (pp. 190–211). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Stachowski, L.L., & Mahan, J.M. (1995). Learning from international field experiences. In G.A. Slick (Ed.), *Emerging trends in teacher preparation: The future of field experiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED385512)
- Wilkinson, S. (2000). Emerging questions about study abroad. *ADFL bulletin* 32(1), 36–41.
- Wilkinson, S. (2001). Beyond classroom boundaries: The changing nature of study abroad. In R.Z. Lavine (Ed.), *Beyond the boundaries: Changing contexts in language learning* (pp. 81–105). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.