Transforming Ecuadorian EFL Teacher Practices Through Biography-Driven Instruction

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Abstract

The intensive English development/TESL program (TESL-GT) was created through a partnership between Ecuador and one Midwestern university. Through this program, Ecuador's Ministry of Education sought to enhance the instructional effectiveness of secondary English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. The 67 Ecuadorian teacher participants in this study engaged in a 10-week pilot program. This program was aligned to the CREDE *Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning*, which serve as universals (transnationally researched) standards of effective teaching practices. The 67 Ecuadorian program completers were subsequently observed in their Ecuadorian classrooms using the *Inventory of Situationally and Culturally Responsive Teaching* (ISCRT) rubric. Composite ISCRT scores were calculated as well as group means on each of the five standards reflected in the 22 indicators of the tool. Findings indicated unexpectedly robust levels of enactment of effective instructional practices for English learners. The significance of these findings and implications for teacher education are elucidated.

In order to increase the English proficiency of their citizens and expand opportunities for global communication and networking, many countries seek to enhance their educational systems through international partnerships. This study focuses on the partnership between Ecuador and one Midwestern university to increase the instructional effectiveness of Ecuadorian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education and SENESCYT, Ecuador's governing body of higher education, collaborated with the university in order to provide specialized professional development for secondary-level EFL teachers. Participating educators in this 10-week pilot program traveled to the United States to enhance their pedagogical knowledge and skills, experience the culture of a native English-speaking environment, and bolster their own English skills.

This innovative program incorporated pedagogical curricula that emphasized promising teaching practices for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Specifically, the program was designed to build teachers' capacity for *biography-driven instruction* (Herrera, 2016; Herrera, Kavimandan, & Holmes, 2011; Murry &

Herrera, 2011; Murry, Herrera, Miller, Fanning, Kavimandan, & Holmes, 2014). Given that this intensive English development/TESL program was funded by the Ecuadorian government's Go Teacher scholarship, the moniker TESL-GT will be used to refer to the Midwestern university program.

Program Hallmarks and Theoretical Framework

At the core of the TESL-GT professional development program is biography-driven instruction (BDI). This method of instruction serves as a means for providing culturally responsive pedagogy to English learners in both domestic and international settings (Herrera, 2016; Herrera & Murry, 2016). The "biography" of the learner reflects a holistic view of a student's sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic dimensions. Attention to the biography, including pre-assessment of a student's background knowledge relevant to a given lesson, provides the teacher with foundational information about the student's assets that the teacher then uses to maximize teaching and learning throughout the lesson. Each BDI lesson comprises three phases: the opening (Activation), work time (Connection), and closing (Affirmation). Briefly, the

teacher uses the *Activation* phase of a lesson to establish conditions of trust and respect and to provide all students with structured opportunities to document their initial associations between their background knowledge and the target concepts and vocabulary. Students use both words (in whatever languages they choose) and images to record their ideas. Learners are encouraged to consider their knowledge and experiences related to their home (funds of knowledge), community (prior knowledge), and school (academic knowledge).

During the *Connection* phase, the teacher bridges between the language, words, images, and ideas that the students produced at the opening of the lesson and the academic content and vocabulary of the curriculum. The teacher uses strategies and activities to establish classroom conditions and situations reflective of a reciprocal process of teaching and learning. The teacher works *with* the students to navigate the demands of the curriculum and to ensure that learners progress linguistically and academically. By continually attending to what students produce individually and in collaboration with peers in pairs and small groups, the teacher is able to respond to learners' needs and scaffold their evolving understanding. The teacher highlights/revoices key connections made by students and uses these to further the learning of the entire class.

In the *Affirmation* phase, the teacher provides opportunities for students to individually demonstrate their learning. Students use the concepts, academic language, and ideas that they have documented via hands-on, strategy-based tools throughout the lesson to scaffold their engagement with writing and other curricular tasks. The teacher celebrates students' individual and collective learning, affirming linguistic and academic gains. Students also reflect on ways their background knowledge provided a foundation for their attainment of the lesson objectives.

The theoretical significance of the TESL-GT program to the field may be best extrapolated from the degree to which key elements of the program model align with standards for best practice with CLD students as specified by the *CREDE Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning* (Doherty,

Hilberg, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2002; Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003; Doherty & Pinal, 2002; Tharp, 1997; Tharp & Dalton, 2007; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, Yamauchi, 2000). The development of the CREDE standards spanned more than a decade of research and analyses and yielded five *universals* for *transnationally effective* teaching practices (Doherty et al., 2002; Doherty et al., 2003; Tharp, 1997; Tharp & Dalton, 2007; Tharp et al., 2000; Yamauchi, Im, & Mark, 2013). In teacher education, the CREDE standards, like the curricula of TESL-GT, are applicable to both the preparation of future teachers for diverse classrooms and the kinds of teaching that in-service teachers should implement in their   classrooms, whether in the United States or abroad. Discussion to follow will articulate these arguments and alignments, and is organized according to the five transnational universals of CREDE.

Table 1 illustrates the key and supporting elements of the TESL-GT program that align with the transnational universals of the CREDE standards. Column one of this table specifies each of the five CREDE standards. Column two identifies which element of TESL-GT most directly builds teachers' capacities for professional practices that target the corresponding CREDE universal/ standard. In turn, column three of the table specifies the professional practice with CLD students that the matching TESL-GT element targets through the professional development program. Finally, column four synopsizes other elements of the TESL-GT program that further support teachers' development of practices that align with the corresponding CREDE standard.

It is appropriate to highlight implications of the table that may tend to be less evident. First, the table illustrates the important fact that a wide variety of TESL-GT elements tend to bolster teachers' capacity building for best practice with CLD students, as indicated by CREDE standards. Second, key elements of the model often tend to operate concomitantly to develop teachers' capacities for standards-aligned, biography-driven practices with diverse student populations. The sections to follow discuss the BDI perspective on instruction, as aligned to each of the CREDE standards.

Table 1

Key Aspects of Alignment Between the TESL-GT Program and

CREDE Standards of Best Practices for CLD Students

CREDE Standard	Key Element(s) of TESL-GT Program	Key Processes of Teacher Growth	Supporting Element(s) of TESL-GT
Contextualization	Critically Reflective Practice	Checking assumptions about CLD student assets versus perceived deficits	Focus on School/Site-Specific Dynamics
	Cross-Cultural Competency	Appreciating/ maximizing students' culture-bound ways of knowing	Innovative, Needs-Based Coursework for Teachers
Language and Literacy Development	Focus on School/ Site-Specific Dynamics	Pre-assessing and valuing CLD bilingualism and L1 develop-ment	Critically Reflective Practice
	Innovative, Needs-Based Coursework for Teachers	Innovating ways to build up-on students' L1 capacities as a means to L2 development	Lifelong Capacity Build-ing for Advocacy
Instructional Conversation	Innovative, Needs-Based Coursework	Creative curriculum and instruction that facilitates dialogue that nurtures, scaffolds, stretches, and affirms	Cross-Cultural Competency
Joint Productive Activity	Critically Reflective Practice	Checking assumptions about grouping, collaboration, pedagogy, and efficacy	Focus on Site/School Dynamics
	Innovative, Needs-Based Coursework	Biography-driven curriculum and instruction utilizing strategies that are reciprocally beneficial	Cross-Cultural Competency
Challenging Activities	Lifelong Capacity Build-ing for Advocacy	Asset versus deficit-driven decisions about teaching and learning	Critically Reflective Practice

Contextualization

Teachers who contextualize their instruction intentionally preassess what assets students bring to the classroom. Of particular importance are the students' culture-bound ways of knowing and their background knowledge and experiences to date. Especially valuable is the teacher's preassessment in these areas at the opening of the lesson. With information and insights gained, the teacher is in the best position to connect the educational content (what is to be learned) to students' lives and their preferred (mostly culture-driven) ways of knowing. Integrating new information in contexts that are familiar to the student facilitates the structuring of that new content into long-term memory by activating or enhancing the availability of associated knowledge; this integration of new knowledge with existing schemas promotes retention and later recall (Herrera, 2016; Murry & Herrera, 2011; Sousa, 2011). The emphasis in BDI on cultural responsiveness makes it an especially effective method for building teacher capacity for contextualization.

As delineated in Table 1, teachers' capacity for instructional practices that promote localized contextualization is most directly bolstered by the *critically reflective practice* and *cross-cultural competency* elements of TESL-GT. Pivotal to these efforts are the teacher's emergent capacities to check and test his or her assumptions about the assets for learning that the CLD student may already bring to the lesson. Such foundational, biography-driven practices often necessitate letting go of a deficit perspective on the teaching and learning of CLD students through recurrent critical reflection on practice (Herrera, 2016; Herrera & Murry, 2016).

Researchers who have recently explored ways to uncover and maximize the assets of CLD and other marginalized students argue that these biographical assets are typically embedded in social and ecological systems including: families, neighborhoods, cultural groups, institutions, and the political climate (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012). For this reason, *service and community learning opportunities* are an intentional component of the TESL-GT program for Ecuadorian teachers.

Language and Literacy Development

Language and literacy development is highly correlated with overall student achievement, as emphasized through the English literacy emphases italicized in the Common Core standards. The development of language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing is fundamental to academic discourse, problem solving, personal expression, and persuasive argument (Herrera, Perez, Kavimandan, & Wessels, 2013). As such, language and literacy development is no longer a concern for just primary grades, English learners, and ESL/EFL educators (Fair & Fair, 2013). Increasingly, all teachers are called upon to assume significant roles in academic language and literacy development among all students (e.g., through questioning, rephrasing, modeling).

The TESL-GT program most directly targets teachers' capacity building for practices that promote language and literacy via a focus on *site/ school dynamics* and *innovative, needs-based coursework* (see Table 1). In capacity building for the first of these, teachers learn to ask themselves and others fundamental questions, such as: What are the demographics of the students and families that we serve at this school? What first languages and multiple literacies are represented? What assets, from culture, experience, prior schooling, and more may be maximized among my students to target and enhance language acquisition and literacy development?

The TESL-GT element of *innovative, needs-based course work*, on the other hand, is designed to effectively model biography-driven practices at the programmatic level. That is, through targeted program structures and activities, TESL-GT models how teachers should build their instruction upon students' language and literacy assets as well as their identified needs. Participants learn how to support students through resources, scaffolding, peer interaction, assessments, and more. Moreover, they experience these same kinds of support themselves as they engage in TESL-GT programming.

Instructional Conversation

Three of the most potent factors in student learning

are the frequency, duration, and quality of teacher-student academic interactions (Herrera, 2016; Doherty et al., 2002). One essential goal for teachers of CLD students is to elicit and extend student talk on academic, social, and cultural experiences as related to the academic topic of the lesson (Herrera et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2013; Yamauchi et al., 2013). Teachers challenge students to develop autonomy as learners—to think critically, articulate their views, and ask personally meaningful questions about what they are learning.

TESL-GT bolsters these capacities through *innovative, needs-based coursework* (see Table 1). For example, BDI strategies promote regular planned, and especially *unplanned,* discourse with CLD students in the classroom that enables authentic, responsive conversations. Such ongoing dialogue pushes students to higher levels of thinking about the academic topic of instruction and incorporates opportunities for the teacher to revoice connections and bridge between student talk and academic language. TESL-GT encourages participating teachers to build their academic discourse skills through interactions with peers in pairs and small teams. As they grapple with curricular concepts in these contexts, they negotiate meaning and scaffold linguistic and academic learning for one another (Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

Joint Productive Activity

Teaching strategies and activities that promote joint productive activity encourage multi-faceted student collaborations, along with the active engagement of the teacher, to attain a common goal or generate a collectively created product. These goal-driven collaborations rely heavily on heterogeneous groups of students that reflect differential levels of skills and expertise. Such opportunities for interaction encourage perspective taking, collaborative problem solving, and the valuing of all learners as equal members of the classroom community.

Two key elements of the TESL-GT program build teacher readiness to organize and facilitate joint productive activity (see Table 1). One element is *critically reflective practice.* Such praxis offers teachers structured ways to check and test their assumptions about issues related to questions such as the following: Which grouping arrangements (regardless of the noise they may generate) encourage goal-directed collaboration? In what ways does my classroom environment need to change if it is to facilitate joint productive activities? How can I be transparent about connections between individual strategies/activities and the larger lesson?

As they prepare to initiate and sustain joint productive activity in the classroom, teachers also benefit from the TESL-GT element of *innovative, needs-based coursework.* Specifically, they learn about and gain practice with implementing BDI strategies that have been explicitly designed to facilitate collaboration toward a common goal and promote group problem solving. These strategies support participants' own learning during their program experience and contribute to their capacities to advance the linguistic and academic development of their future students.

Challenging Activities

The Common Core standards illustrate the increasing importance of teaching higher-order thinking skills and evidence-based/defensible argumentation along with the content (NGA-CCSSO, 2010). When teachers (a) explicitly communicate the learning goals of the lesson, (b) implement challenging strategies/activities that build students' capacities to engage in higher-order thinking, and (c) provide clear expectations for student processes and products, they support all learners to achieve high standards. Recognizing that every student begins the lesson at his or her own starting point, teachers make appropriate accommodations to ensure that students' needs are met and that each learner is able to engage at his or her fullest potential.

TESL-GT targets teachers' capacity building for practices that promote challenging activities via *lifelong capacity building for advocacy* and *innovative, needs-based coursework* (see Table 1). The *lifelong capacity building for advocacy* element of the TESL-GT program bolsters participating teachers' awareness of the need to advocate for their students inside and outside the classroom.

associated with labels such as EFL, ESL, and CLD persist in schools, despite research, theory, literature, and teacher preparation to the contrary (Collier & Thomas, 2009; Herrera & Murry, 2016; Murry, Herrera, Kavimandan, & Perez, 2011). Often teachers are best positioned to nudge colleagues, administrators, and key education stakeholders to consider students and their learning from an asset-based perspective.

Finally, teachers develop enhanced capacities for designing and implementing challenging activities through the TESL-GT element of *innovative, needs-based coursework.* Participants of varying levels of English proficiency are supported to engage and succeed in the same high caliber coursework. Program instructors monitor students' socio-emotional needs as they use BDI strategies to negotiate the curriculum. They adjust instruction and incorporate additional scaffolds as needed to further students' continued learning. Through formative assessments, peer interactions, and individualized feedback, participants receive the kinds of encouragement and constructive critique that leads to fruitful learning.

As outlined in this section, TESL-GT is purposively aligned with the evidence-based and *internationally tested universals of best practice* detailed by the CREDE standards. In turn, these alignments bolster the argument that TESL-GT is an informed, evidence-based model for the professional development of educators who intend to teach English learners and other CLD students in the United States or in a different country, such as Ecuador.

Research-Based Evidence of Program Efficacy

Elsewhere, we have documented the efficacy of professional development programming of the type delivered by TESL-GT and grounded in the CREDE standards, as provided for U.S. teachers and candidates (Murry et al., 2014). The purpose of this study was to assess programming efficacy for the Ecuadorian teacher participants of TESL-GT. At the end of the pilot program, TESL-GT participants were surveyed regarding their perceived changes in efficacy related to the five CREDE universals of effective classroom instruction. Overwhelmingly, the teacher scholars believed they were better

prepared to enact practices that reflected the ideals of CREDE-aligned, biography-driven instruction. Yet teachers' self-reported perspectives on their own efficacy upon program completion cannot provide a picture of their actual implementation in their home country. To explore the degree to which BDI practices were evident in the teachers' Ecuadorian EFL classrooms, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education partnered with the Midwestern university to follow up with program alumni and observe them in their individual school settings.

Methodology

Site and Sample

Among recent classroom observations of program completers were those conducted by 10 evaluators at schools in 11 Ecuadorian provinces and nine education zones in May/June of 2013. During this visit to Ecuador, 67 TESL-GT program completers were observed/evaluated and assessments from these observations were examined. These teacher participants comprised 21 males (31.3%) and 46 females (68.7%). The majority of these educators, as observed in country, taught students at the secondary level (89.6%). All teachers observed had recently completed the initial TESL-GT pilot program in the summer of 2012.

Data Collection

There is broad consensus in the field of education that good teaching matters and that it may be the single most important school-based factor that influences student achievement (e.g., Murry et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008; Tharp & Dalton, 2007). Yet, considerable disagreement exists as to what frameworks for teacher efficacy best reflect what an effective teacher is and does (Henerson, Turpen, Dancy, & Chapman, 2014). Too often, such models or frameworks have not been well grounded in the realities of complex, contemporary classroom environments (Goe et al., 2008; Hinchey, 2010), especially those classrooms where students exhibit progressive levels of first language (L1) and second language (L2) proficiencies and diverse cultural backgrounds and/or biographies (MacDonald, Miller, Murry, Herrera, & Spears, 2013; OECD, 2013).

Ecuadorian teachers' effectiveness in the delivery of highly differentiated, professional practices for Ecuadorian students was measured using the *Inventory of Situationally and Culturally Responsive Teaching* (Herrera, Perez, Kavimandan, Holmes, & Miller, 2011; Herrera et al., 2013; Murry et al., 2014). This ISCRT (pronounced I-S-Cert or *"i assert"*) is a systematic classroom observation tool that is well grounded in the latest research on teaching in diverse and complex classrooms. The ISCRT tool enables the quantitative measurement of teachers' levels of enactment of critical, pedagogical indicators of situationally (sometimes referred to as *contingency-based*) and culturally responsive teaching amidst high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., Heritage & Chang, 2012; Heritage, Kim, Vendlinski, & Herman, 2009; Kourova, & Modianos, 2013; Walqui & Heritage, 2012).

The ISCRT is also grounded in the universal (transnationally researched) CREDE standards for effective pedagogy (Goh, Yamauchi, & Ratliffe, 2012; Tharp & Dalton, 2007; Yamauchi et al., 2013). The ISCRT rubric operationalizes these internationally applicable universals of best practice to characterize and distinguish effective teaching in any classroom setting. *For example, the Challenging Activities aspect of the ISCRT offers explicit criteria that enable the teacher observer to assess the educators' activities in terms of (a) student accommodations, (b) content and language objectives, (c) standards/expectations, (d) students' affective filters (i.e., anxiety levels) (Krashen, 1982), and (e) feedback offered. Although they are beyond the scope of this manuscript,* elsewhere we have documented the particulars of the ISCRT rubric and its associated 22 indicators of effective practice (Murry et al., 2014).

Findings from past research suggest that the ISCRT observation instrument is a discriminating, *reliable*, and *valid* measure of effective practices for CLD and other students (Murry et al., 2014; Perez, Holmes, Miller, & Fanning, 2012). The reliability coefficient calculated using Cronbach's alpha indicated a high degree of internal consistency ($\square$ = 0.94) among the indicators. The 22 observable indicators of the ISCRT are measured by trained observers on a scale from 0 to 4 (with anchors at 0 = *not observed*, 1 = *emerging*, 2 = *developing*, 3 = *enacting*, 4 = *integrating*), representing increasing levels of teacher enactment. Observable behavioral criteria operationally define each of the indicators as well as the levels of enactment. Scores on each of the 22 indicators are averaged together to provide a quantitative measure of teachers' levels of enactment (that is, their best practices for the student population).

Ecuadorian teachers who complete the TESL-GT program are later surveyed and observed by a Teacher Efficacy Team (TET) across their settings of professional practice in country. The TET is composed of expert teachers/academics who have been trained and normed on the teacher observation inventory. Members of the TET have variously included teacher assessment professionals from school districts and schools of teacher education in the U.S. states of Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire, New York, and Texas. Observations in situ, as undertaken by the TET, are guided by the ISCRT, which in turn is consistent with the CREDE standards for effective teaching practices in transnational contexts.

Each of the 10 observers of the TET associated with this research study demonstrated an acceptable level of inter-rater agreement (0.80) with their supervisor prior to conducting observations in Ecuador. Moreover, results of a one-way analysis of variance revealed that these observers did not account for a significant amount of variance in ISCRT scores across teachers $F(9, 74) = 1.76$, $p = 0.09$. Thus, the observed differences in ISCRT scores between teachers can be more confidently attributed to true differences rather than to differences between observers in their ratings of teachers' practices via the ISCRT.

Ecuadorian teachers were observed for approximately 60 minutes of professional practice. The number of pupils in classrooms where teachers were observed averaged 33 (SD = 12.44), with the smallest class having 9 students and the largest having 60 students. The majority of their students (82.1%) were in grades 8-11.

Data Analysis

Composite ISCRT scores were determined by calculating the mean for all teachers on each of the 22 indicators of best practice represented within the ISCRT rubric (M = 2.08, SD = 0.84). The composite score represented the average level of enactment for all participants across all 22 ISCRT indicators of best practice. Additional scrutiny of each of the individual indicators provided a more detailed description of teachers' capacities for effective teaching practices in their EFL settings. Therefore, the indicators were collapsed across the five standards according to the rubric and a group mean for each of these five standards was calculated: Instructional Conversation (M = 2.18, SD = 0.87), Challenging Activities (M = 2.22, SD = 0.87), Contextualization (M = 1.91, SD = 0.96), Language and Literacy Development (M = 2.15, SD = 0.86), and Joint Productive Activity (M = 2.05, SD = 0.91).

Findings

The findings relating to the data arising from 67 teacher observations yielded a composite ISCRT level. This level reflects the average extent to which assessed teachers engaged in situationally and culturally responsive practices that are consistent with efficacy in teaching. These analyses indicate that observed educators demonstrated an average composite ISCRT level of M = 2.08. This value suggests that their teaching practices most closely resemble those of an educator who is *developing,* vis-à-vis the aforementioned scale of the ISCRT, ranging from 0 = *not observed*, to 1 = *emerging*, to 2 = *developing*, to 3 = *enacting*, to 4 = *integrating*.

To contextualize this *average* ISCRT level of M = 2.08 – *developing*, it is useful to compare it with the average ISCRT score of teachers in the United States. Recent research involving the observation of teachers from the Midwest found that teachers who completed five semesters of graduate-level coursework involving explicit instruction in BDI improved their scores from Level 1.0 – *emerging* to Level 2.0 – *developing* (Murry et al., 2014). A comparison of these findings with those from the current study indicates that the highlighted Ecuadorian teachers demonstrated comparable ISCRT scores to those of U.S. teachers previously studied.

When interpreting the results of teachers'

performances, as measured by ISCRT observations, it is important to understand the nature of the ISCRT scale. The ISCRT scale ranges not from 1 to 4, but from 0 to 4. So, although the ISCRT extends to a maximum score of 4 – *integrating*, the scale has been designed to measure as much as one teacher's *entire lifetime* of education, preparation, professional development, and experience teaching in the classroom. A score of 4.0 reflects superlative enactment of an indicator and tends to be associated with teaching performance delivered almost exclusively by master teachers.

Accordingly, a mean score of M = 2.08 across 67 Ecuadorian teachers demonstrates a surprisingly high level of performance vis-à-vis this discriminating measure of teachers' capacities for biography-driven professional practices. For example, teachers who score 2.22 on the *Challenging Activities* standard of the ISCRT generally: (a) offer specific accommodations in practice that are based upon students' linguistic and academic assets; (b) verbally share and also post content and language objectives for the lesson; (c) communicate clear expectations and implement strategies and activities aligned to standards; (d) monitor students' affective responses to the lesson and refine the lesson as needed; and (e) provide feedback on student performances to confirm learning. These activities reflect considerable skill and capacities on the part of teachers to deliver biography-driven best practices in the classroom.

As to teachers' performances for each of the dimensions of culturally responsive practice associated with the ISCRT, Table 2 specifies key, descriptive statistics for each of these dimensions, across the sample of 67 teachers. A comparison of means across this table and these dimensions/ standards of best practice indicates that teachers were strongest in offering their students *challenging activities* but struggled most to maximize *contextualization* in ways that facilitated learning that was founded on, and accelerated by, connections to students' background knowledge and individual biographies. The standard deviation column of Table 2 illustrates that variability across teachers' performances was highest for the standard of *Contextualization.* On the other hand,

Table 2
Ecuadorian Teacher Performance vis-à-vis the ISCRT Rubric.

ISCRT Domain	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
Joint Productive Activity	2.05	0.20	3.80	0.91
Language & Literacy Development	2.15	0.00	3.75	0.86
Contextualization	1.91	0.00	3.67	0.96
Challenging Activities	2.22	0.20	3.80	0.87
Instructional Conversation	2.18	0.00	3.60	0.87
ISCRT Composite	2.08	0.09	3.64	0.84

standard deviation was lowest for *Language and Literacy Development.*

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that while, on average, observed educators demonstrated *developing* levels of appropriately accommodative/ differentiated for high levels of classroom diversity, certain program completers performed at the *highest levels of efficacy in differentiated practice* with their respective student populations (see Table 3). As summarized in Table 3 and expressed as both frequencies and percentages, 47.8% of the observed Ecuadorian teachers who completed the professional development program demonstrated teaching actions indicative of *developing*, *enacting*, or *integrating* standards-driven practices as measured by the ISCRT. Moreover, almost one-quarter of the Ecuadorian teachers were *at enacting or integrating levels* of culturally responsive teaching practices (23.9% achieved at minimum a composite ISCRT score of 3.0).

Given the participating teachers' comparatively limited tenures in BDI professional development (10 weeks), as well as their limited time to translate theory into practice in Ecuador (for many completers, only 3-9 months in school placements prior to observation), they demonstrated notably high ISCRT scores. In fact, the scores on the ISCRT are compelling indicators that teachers involved in this TESL-GT professional development program returned to their home country of Ecuador with capacities to enact research-based, standards-driven (CREDE- grounded), biography-driven teaching in urban and rural EFL settings.

The Ecuadorian educators in this study exhibited the most difficulty with *contextualization* and *joint productive activity.* The results of similar research on U.S. educators who completed biography-driven professional development indicated that they, too, struggled with efforts to contextualize instruction (Murry et al., 2014). These findings are consistent with research and literature in the field that suggest teachers have difficulty enacting and sustaining contextualization (Bravo, Mosqueda, Solís, & Stoddart, 2014; Nocon & Robinson, 2014; Teemant, Leland, & Berghoff, 2014; Teemant, Wink, & Tyra, 2011; Wyatt, 2014, 2015). By contrast, although the U.S. teachers also had difficulty enacting practices that support language and literacy development (Murry et al., 2014), the Ecuadorian teachers in this study scored relatively high on this ISCRT domain. This is not surprising, given that language development is the key focus for these EFL educators. Anecdotally, Ecuadorian teachers had shared that most teaching in their own Ecuadorian schools is very teacher-centered and grounded in the banking model of teaching and learning. This may account for their difficulties with implementing responsive opportunities for teacher-student and student-student interaction and collaboration that

Table 3

Distribution of ISCRT Composite Scores

ISCRT Range of Scores	Frequency	Percent
0-1	6	9.0
1-2	29	43.3
2-3	22	32.8
3-4	10	14.9
Total	67	100

are indicative of joint productive activity in the classroom. Additional research is needed to further explore these findings.

Implications for Teacher Education

The findings of this study indicate that the Ecuadorian participants of the TESL-GT program derived significant benefits from professional development on BDI. Furthermore, these benefits on teachers' classroom practices were demonstrable vis-à-vis the ISCRT rubric for the measurement of effective teaching practices with CLD students. Accordingly, their resultant instructional practices were (as aligned with CREDE standards) situationally flexible and culturally responsive to the students in their unique learning communities. Like their U.S. teacher counterparts (Murry et al., 2014), however, the participating teachers struggled with implementing instructional practices related to contextualization. Therefore, future professional development efforts should be intentionally designed to foster teachers' understanding and procedural knowledge of strategies and instructional behaviors that support contextualization in the classroom.

Given the results of this study, the TESL-GT model of professional development provides an example pathway for system-wide changes in education. Curricula such as that employed by TESL-GT increase the likelihood that international participants will be able to successfully apply their new knowledge and skills in classroom practice upon returning to their home country. Through its intentional consideration of the site-specific assets

and needs of the funding country as well as its alignment of curriculum and instruction with research-based, universal standards of effective pedagogy, TESL-GT achieved its goal of demonstrating a positive and meaningful impact upon the education of the 67 participating Ecuadorian teachers and their students.

TESL-GT has demonstrably and cumulatively contributed to high-quality teaching and teacher education in Ecuador. To date, over 1,000 practicing teachers from public schools in Ecuador have now completed their studies via the TESL-GT program, located at the Midwestern university or at one of four partner institutions across the United States. TESL-GT is typically a 7-month, 33-credit hour, 540-contact hour certificate program (with approximately half of the hours devoted to pedagogy and the other half allocated to English language development), as negotiated over the first three student cohorts. The program has demonstrated a 99.6% retention rate across six cohorts of teacher scholars and maintained client/ teacher satisfaction, as demonstrated by scores on post-program surveys.

Programs such as TESL-GT also serve as entry points to discussions of future opportunities. To illustrate, the Midwestern university has graduated two cohorts of Ecuadorian Master's students (61 students total), many of whom were returning TESL-GT completers. The Midwestern university also was the first U.S. institution of higher education to participate in the preparation of *future* teachers for Ecuadorian school systems via Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE), the premier agency for

teacher preparation in Ecuador. A cohort of teacher candidates from UNAE participated in College of Education classes at the Midwestern university in 2014-2015. Reciprocally, in the summers of 2014–2017, preservice candidates from the Midwestern univesity have had the opportunity to study and teach in Ecuador as they completed English as a Second Language practicum coursework. The collaborations with schools and universities in Ecuador that made such educational experiences possible were derivatives of the long-standing, mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries that began with TESL-GT. The TESL-GT program illustrates the synergistic outcomes that are possible when educators collaborate and think creatively in the context of international partnerships.

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