"I'm not a traditional teacher anymore" : Ecuadoran teacher perspectives regarding a US professional development program

Gail Boone Cappaert
ABSTRACT

“I’M NOT A TRADITIONAL TEACHER ANYMORE”: ECUADORAN TEACHER PERSPECTIVES REGARDING A US PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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In this dissertation, the retrospective perspectives of five Ecuadoran English teachers regarding their experience in a seven-month professional development program in the US were investigated. Attention was given to how they believed the program impacted their identity, self-efficacy and how they perceived the program functioned as a community of practice (CoP). Data were collected through interviews using stimulated recall based on classrooms observation notes and memos in the teacher participants’ Ecuadoran schools. Findings included that the Ecuadoran teachers felt they were positively impacted by the program. They perceived themselves as more legitimate speakers of English and more effective educators; however, there were areas in which they believed the program did not meet their needs. The five teachers perceived that the program was frequently not contextualized for the Ecuadoran system of education. Additionally, none of the five teacher participants believed that there was a collective CoP; however, four of the five teacher initiated small communities of practice, which they felt were significant in their success in the program. Once back in their Ecuadoran schools, these five teachers created small CoP with their colleagues and in their classrooms. The fifth Ecuadoran teacher believed that his Kichwa identity was not understood within the context of the program and that this inhibited his inclusion into any community.
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“I’M NOT A TRADITIONAL TEACHER ANYMORE”: ECUADORAN TEACHER PERSPECTIVES REGARDING A US PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of beloved family members:

My grandfather, Dr. Adolf Bigge, who was my first example of a scholar.

My grandmother, Alma Bigge, who encouraged me to love languages.

My father-in-law, LeRoy Cappaert, who told stories that still make me laugh and reflect.

My mother-in-law, Lael Cappaert, who found something positive in every situation.

My father, Louie Boone, who taught me the value of hard work.
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On a frigid January afternoon, 37 Ecuadoran teachers bowed their heads against the freezing wind as they left the airline terminal and ran toward the bus. They had journeyed to the United States to spend seven months in ¡Aprenda! (pseudonym), a professional development program designed to help them become more effective teachers of English. During these seven months in ¡Aprenda!, they lived and attended classes together. The teachers became students as they studied culture, linguistics, second language acquisition, and pedagogical methods from a social justice perspective in classes especially designed for them; they also took courses in English language conversation and composition along with university students outside their program.

The teachers were drawn from the entire country of Ecuador. Many were from some of the larger cities, such as Quito, Cuenca, and Guayaquil, while others hailed from rural regions of the mountains, Amazon, or coastal areas. When the seven months came to an end, there was a tearful celebration, and then the Ecuadorans boarded a plane to take them back to South America. Once in Ecuador, they resumed their positions in schools across the country as teachers of English.

¡Aprenda! was an Ecuadoran Ministry of Education subsidized program developed in response to a government call to raise English fluency for Ecuadoran public school students. The Midwestern university in this study was one of the institutions granted funds to host an
¡Aprenda! program cohort. To explore the effectiveness of the program and its implications for Ecuadoran education, I investigated the retrospective perspectives of five Ecuadoran teachers. Through observations, interviews, and reflective memos, I studied how the teachers believed their teacher identity and teacher self-efficacy were impacted through ¡Aprenda! and to what extent the program constituted a CoP. Understanding the perspectives of these teachers could enhance the effectiveness of an English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) professional development study abroad model.

Problem Statement

There is general acknowledgment that professional development for teachers is linked to positive outcomes in education (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). However, there is dissent regarding the overall quality of the professional development and teachers frequently evaluate the programs offered through their schools as being pointless and irrelevant (Desimone, 2009). In a study of teacher perspectives on staff development, Smylie and Eckert (2018) reported that teachers rated professional development as the least helpful support available to them. This disconnect warrants attention. If high quality professional development can improve teaching, why are so many teachers dissatisfied with the professional development made available to them? Are teacher perspectives being accounted for when developing programs for teachers?

Frequently, professional development comes in the form of discipline specific programs. This is logical, as the different domains have varied ways of approaching subjects (Alexander, 2003). In the field of language teaching, professional development may be accomplished through a study abroad program. Teachers who instruct acquisition of a particular language often travel to the country where the language is spoken to attend language classes to facilitate their own
skills. In addition to language acquisition, there are a growing number of programs in a variety of countries that include classes designed to enhance pedagogical skills (P. H. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Diao, 2014; McLeod & Wainwright, 2009; Nelson & Appleby, 2015). While there is ongoing research on the effectiveness of study abroad programs for language teachers (P. H. Anderson et al., 2006; McLeod & Wainwright, 2009), there is a paucity of qualitative studies that explore teacher perspectives regarding how these experiences impact their teaching practice. One reason may be that an investigation of this nature depends on the development of relationships, requiring substantial time and energy by both the researcher and the participants.

Significance of the Study

Because of the well-documented dominance of the English language (Canagarajah, 2004b; Kachru, 1992; Luke, 1997; Nunan, 2003; Pennycook, 1994), the governments of many countries are seeking to expand the English fluency of their citizenry. Teachers of ESL and EFL are highly sought after in a variety of areas around the world (Duff, 2001). Therefore, many institutions have developed programs in English speaking countries purporting to prepare teachers to effectively instruct English (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Cowan, Light, Mathews, & Tucker, 1979; Smith, 2007). Studies investigating the success of these ESL and EFL teacher training programs have tended to focus on quantitative measures of student outcomes (Brown, 2017). What has not been widely studied are the perspectives of ESL/EFL teachers regarding these programs.

In this study, I provide a deeper understanding of the perspectives of five Ecuadoran ESL/EFL teachers who participated in the ¡Aprenda! program and how they believed the
program impacted their teacher identity, self-efficacy, and understanding of CoP in the Ecuadoran school environments. I utilized a case study approach (Merriam, 2001) to capture rich details to shed light on any number of processes, including, but not limited to, identity, self-efficacy, autonomy, engagement, and participation in CoP. The next section explores the theoretical constructs that guided the study.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I utilized three constructs: identity theory, self-efficacy theory, and communities of practice. While they are distinct constructs, the relationship among them is inextricably intertwined, and intersectionality among the frameworks was of particular interest. I hoped by engaging in this study to gain a deeper understanding not only of the teachers’ perspectives within the individual constructs, but of the directionality of those constructs. In other words, I examined whether all three constructs impacted similarly or if one acted as a mitigating force.

Identity

Identity theory seeks to understand how people are marginalized, stereotyped or celebrated (Moje & Luke, 2009). There are any number of ways in which identity can be discussed (Alsup, 2006). However, a common theme among identity constructs is the understanding of the social nature of identity. Identity guides the manner in which people satisfy their needs for recognition, safety and belonging (West, 1992). For the purpose of this study, identity theory focused on positioning theory as a form of social identity and how it relates to teacher identity.
The field of social identity was developed by Tajfel (1970) who experienced imprisonment as a Jew in a German prisoner-of-war camp. Using the Holocaust as an example of how individuals are driven to belong to groups, Tajfel studied the nature of prejudice and other behaviors generated socially and noted that people of all ages tended to favor anyone they perceived as belonging to their group. In these studies, Tajfel also found that many individuals opted to disadvantage other groups, even if there was a correlating negative consequence to that individual’s own group. Looking at Tajfel’s studies, it appears that a relationship to a group is a central factor for many individuals in understanding their position in society, which leads to a discussion of positionality.

According to positioning theory, in every social setting people position themselves and/or are positioned with regard to their rights and their duties (Davies & Harré, 1990). This transpires through discourse, interaction, and activity, as people determine each other’s beliefs and understandings about rights and duties (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991; Moje & Luke, 2009). In this manner, it is determined which speech patterns and acts have cultural capital, or recognized status (Bourdieu, 1991). Individuals may choose to associate or disassociate themselves with a particular language depending on its perceived symbolic capital (Canagarajah, 2004b; Day, 2002; Erikson, 1994; Norton, 1997, 2010b; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Kanno and Norton (2003) investigated linguistic identity in their work with a teenager of Japanese heritage. Although he had grown up in Europe and was unable to speak Japanese, this youth felt a deep connection to the culture and language of Japan. Likewise, in a study of adolescents in Chicago who identified as being “Mexirican” (both Mexican and Puerto Rican descent), it was noted that the participants identified the Spanish language as being one of the most fundamental ways in
which they established their identity, despite the fact that many of them spoke only basic Spanish and used English as their primary mode of communication (Potowski & Matts, 2008).

Positions are negotiated, and within any social context, participants can choose to accept or resist the positions accorded to them (Harré & Moghaddam, 1999). In Walkerdine’s (2003) study of transitions from poverty to affluence, she noted that Australian women accepted the rights and duties of what they understood as their position. The participants indicated that they felt an obligation to take on a middle-class mindset, even if they disagreed with the tenets of such a perspective. This mindset included avoiding foreigners who were perceived as having little cultural capital, and they accepted this as a duty. The women also expressed a pervasive sense of shame from having roots in poverty and guilt regarding the family and friends who continued to live in substandard circumstances. This feeling of shame appeared to be related to not complying with the duty they believed they had to assist struggling relatives and friends. Social identity, positioning, cultural capital, and linguistic identity are all significant in the formation of teacher identity, as revealed in this study.

**Self-Efficacy**

The social cognitive construct of self-efficacy was developed by Bandura (1977) and proposes that behaviors are influenced in a great part by how successful people believe that they can be at a particular task. Thus, people who believe that they are capable within a specific realm behave differently than people who lack the conviction that they have the necessary skills to manage the desired outcome. Additionally, self-efficacy manifests itself differently according to the various realms of people’s lives. Therefore, a doctor may have a strong sense of efficacy in a hospital but lack efficacy in other areas (Bandura, 2006).
Central to the understanding of self-efficacy are mastery experiences. These help form the understanding of the individuals, giving them confidence that they can expect to complete what they set out to accomplish (Bandura, 1977). This conception is distinct from self-esteem. While self-efficacy forms the understanding of the capability of an individual, self-esteem is a value judgment of individual worth. Mastery experiences are thought to also play a role in self-esteem; however, self-efficacy is more directly concerned with what individuals believe they can accomplish rather than what they deserve or how they will be judged (Bandura, 1993).

Self-efficacy theory has been used to investigate the behavior of teachers in the classroom. Studies have indicated that teachers are more likely to invest time and energy in working with students if they believe that their efforts will be successful (Bandura, 1993; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Henson, 2001). Conversely, teachers are more likely to give up trying to help students if they do not have confidence that the students will respond positively (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Studies indicate that school climate is highly predictive of the perceived efficacy levels of teachers (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Moore & Esselman, 1994; Webb & Ashton, 1986). Positive school climates include opportunities for collaboration, feedback on teaching performance, coordination of curriculum and services for students, and parent involvement (Rosenholtz, 1989). Conversely, there are also factors that are correlated with diminished rates of perceived self-efficacy, such as isolation, lack of positive feedback, and perceived low status (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Because of the strong indications that self-efficacy is linked to positive student outcomes, it is important to consider the self-efficacy of the teacher participants in this study and whether the program was a mitigating force.
Communities of Practice

The concept of CoP refers to groups of people who share a common collaborative goal. The term was used first by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their study of apprentices and how they learned. They identified elements that distinguish a CoP from another type of group. There must be a common domain of practice, which could be work, school, or interest related. Some of them can be experts and some novices, but they still work toward a common goal. The knowledge relating to the domain is valued by group members even if it is not highly regarded outside the group. For example, teenagers who play a particular type of video game could constitute a CoP. The group members also meet and collaborate in the interest of their pursuits, forming relationships they perceive as instrumental in developing knowledge and skills.

Another important element of CoP is legitimate peripheral participation, which refers to socially constructed knowledge that takes place within the CoP (Lave, 1996). Members who are newer or less skilled learn by taking on tasks that are authentic yet less demanding than ones done by more experienced members. This might occur, for example, in a restaurant kitchen. The experienced cooks prepare the complex sauces, while others do the prep work – chopping, slicing, and mixing. In this way the newer members act as apprentices and gain valuable experience, which helps them construct knowledge and develop skills (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Schools and professional development programs like ¡Aprenda! have the potential to foster multiple communities of practice among teachers, students, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders (Lave, 1996). However, that this will occur is not a given. If teachers attend workshops together but do not work collaboratively to strengthen their pedagogical skills, this is
not a CoP. Likewise, if teachers are given a mandate to work together on a particular project, this
will not automatically constitute a CoP if members do not form the relationships that lead to the
socially constructed knowledge (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Summary

Identity, self-efficacy, and CoP are by nature interdependent. Membership in a group is a
significant element in the development of identity because the common goals, along with the
relationships that are formed through the CoP, provide a powerful mechanism by which
members form a sense of self (Lave, 1991). A strong sense of self promotes self-efficacy
(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), impacting the choices individuals make and the communities
with which they align themselves (Blackledge, 2002). Thus, this examination of the ¡Aprenda!
program undertakes a braiding together of these three constructs while at the same time
recognizing their distinctness.

Research Questions

This study utilized one overarching question and three sub-questions to guide the research. The overarching question was: “What are the Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives
regarding their ¡Aprenda! program experience?”
The supporting questions were

1. To what extent do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have
   impacted their identity as teachers?
2. To what extent do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have
   impacted their self-efficacy?
3. To what extent do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have been a community of practice?

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to state the problem, the purpose, and the significance of the study; give a brief outline of the theoretical framework; and list the research questions that guided the study. In following chapter, I present a review of representative literature.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was concerned with better understanding the perspectives of five Ecuadoran English teachers and their beliefs about how they were impacted through their participation in the ¡Aprenda! program. A review of the literature regarding the three constructs that served as the lenses for analyzing begins with a review of studies on identity. A section on self-efficacy, with a focus on teacher self-efficacy, follows. The chapter concludes with research on communities of practice (CoP).

These three constructs are distinct, yet there is a reciprocal relationship that often has the effect of blurring the boundaries of where one theory ends and another begins. Identity is perhaps the most basic of the constructs. Individuals must address the topic “Who am I?” to progress in knowledge of self. Self-efficacy relates to action and begs the question, “What can I accomplish?” Finally, CoP is a construct that has the potential to mitigate both identity and self-efficacy as members negotiate the query, “What is my position in the community?” Self-efficacy and CoP can be instrumental in the formation of identity; identity in turn may determine the CoP that individuals seek and/or participate in, and the CoP can help determine how efficacious the individuals believe themselves to be.
Identity

There are numerous discussions of how identity can be conceptualized (Alsup, 2006). However, a unifying thread among the various constructs is that identity is understood in a social context and is part of the manner in which people satisfy their needs for recognition, safety and belonging (West, 1992). Studies show that humans are driven to find shared norms or common cultures through the forming of groups (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Belonging to a group is one way in which people understand their relationship to the world, including their opportunities for the future (Norton, 1997). Group members share in low or high status positions compared to other social groups, and there is a tendency to want to move upward into groups that are more favorably positioned (Billig, 2014). Conversely, people also can be deeply suspicious of individuals or groups they perceive to have different values or traditions; such groups may be perceived as threats or competition (Fishman, 2010).

Positioning Theory

Positionality is central to Bourdieu’s (1984) description of how positions are acted and reenacted through the preferences of social groups. Social groups or classes can frequently be distinguished by these preferences. There is much discussion as to whether the pursuit of tastes promotes the position of social class markers or whether they are merely the evidence that such distinctions exist (Holt, 1997). However, what Bourdieu’s writing clearly indicates is that certain tastes become associated with status (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). This can refer to behaviors, such as language usage or physical gestures; items that are acquired, such as clothing; or events that are favored, such as concerts versus sports. The value of taste is also dependent on the mindset of
the social group (Tirado & Gálvez, 2008). For example, in the United States, foreign language films with subtitles may be considered artistic in certain circles but boring and pretentious in others.

The positioning of individuals in groups are examined in the field of social identity developed by Tajfel (1970). After his experience as a Jew in a German prisoner-of-war camp, Tajfel was intent on studying the nature of prejudice and group behavior, which he believed was a core cause of genocide (Billig, 2014). At that time, prejudice was presumed by many to be an innate character deficit (Tajfel, 1979). Tajfel, on the other hand, hypothesized that prejudice was principally the result of the social drive to belong to a group (Tajfel, 1969; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). To investigate this premise, Tajfel devised various social experiments. One of his classic designs looked at tendencies of individuals to categorize information if they perceived preexisting categories to be in place. In this experiment, participants were asked to rank a group of lines drawn on paper according to size. When all the lines were presented randomly, participants tended to assign sizes equally randomly without trying to group the lines. However, when the longest line was labeled A and the shortest line B, participants displayed a desire to categorize the lines. In this phase of the experiment, participants made multiple errors in their quest to label the lines. Tajfel used these data as the basis for his theory that people are driven to associate themselves and others with a specific group and that this tendency can lead to marginalization and oppression (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Social positioning serves to illuminate how group affiliation can serve as a positive or negative force for individuals. In considering both teachers and students, it is essential to examine how group dynamics may affect the ability of individuals to fully participate in any setting. In another social experiment that Tajfel (2001) conducted on multiple occasions, select
subjects in a larger group were given pretend money made from colored paper and asked to award payments to other participants. The participants were randomly designated into two groups, but only those individuals making the payments were aware of group designations. The experiment consistently yielded the same results regardless whether it was conducted with adults or with children: individuals significantly favored those in their group (Tajfel, 1970, 2001).

Positioning theory provides a framework to explain identity development of humans in varied contexts (Harré, 2009). Bourdieu (1990) referred to these contexts as habitus, or the social norms that guide individuals and families in society. Habitus assumes that people are neither entirely free-willed nor entirely controlled by society. This creates an underlying interaction and tension as people choose to assume societal dictates or exert their own agency (Bourdieu, 1991).

Cultural Capital

Inherently linked with positioning theory is the concept of cultural capital, which examines the status afforded to the tastes and practices of groups and individuals associated with those groups (Holt, 1998). Cultural capital is a salient factor in identity theory because of its power in determining how people are positioned (Bourdieu, 1991). In particular, cultural capital is relevant to any study related to teachers and children because of the ability of educational institutions to confer preference and status to the children of powerful members of society while devaluing the cultural capital of marginalized groups (Bourdieu, 1986).

Enactments of the manner in which cultural capital can position individuals can be understood through Bourdieu’s (1977) clarification of capital as embodied capital, objectified capital, and institutional capital. Families convey embodied capital to their children through the process of socialization, which is frequently enacted in the school setting. Children see how their
parents interact with authority figures, such as teachers and administrators, and learn how to manage similar situations in life. Lamont and Lareau (1988) investigated affluent mothers and poor mothers advocating on behalf of their children and found that affluent mothers were much more likely to directly question the practices of teachers and coaches. Affluent mothers also instructed their children on how to react in a variety of situations. A poignant example is how one affluent mother arranged on her own to have her daughter retested when she missed the cutoff score for the gifted program. The daughter was privy to all of the interactions between the mother and school administration, providing her the cultural capital to know how to negotiate with authority figures.

Tangible objects that represent the status of the class constitute objectified capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This form of capital is represented by items deemed to be valuable and significant, such as cars or technology (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). There is ongoing research regarding the objectified capital of teenagers in relation to having a particular type of clothing or technology (K. Anderson, 2009); students who lack these items often find themselves positioned away from the center of power (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). A further form of cultural capital is institutional capital, which represents the recognition accorded to accomplishments (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, the staff who coach sports and their athletes may have more access to cultural capital than other students and faculty (Holt, 1997). All of these forms of cultural capital translate into power and privilege (Throsby, 1999).

According to Davies and Harre (1990), people’s identity is inextricably linked with how they position themselves and are positioned according to the rights and duties they perceive. If a student is positioned as successful, some of the rights might be to have a voice in the discussion or to have choice in assignments, and the duties could include participating in activities or
helping the teacher. These rights and duties can be verbalized directly, or they might be assumed (Ritchie & Rigano, 2001). The manner in which rights and duties are allotted can also be resisted, and students may resist having limitations imposed on what they perceive as their rights (Harré, 1993). In his work with English learners (ELs), Cohen (2012) noted how English learners resisted being placed in ESL classrooms because they perceived these classes did not offer them opportunities for academic advancement. In contrast to their designated classroom, the ELs presumed to have a right to have a place in the general education classroom.

Positioning theory describes a discursive, relational process that it is co-constructed; thus it takes into account how resources are allotted and the power that emanates from such accordance. (Harré & Slocum, 2003). For example, if one positions oneself as a teacher, the concept of a student has to exist, otherwise the position is meaningless. Harre and Moghaddam (1999) described how positioning theory can explain both group dynamics and the manner in which systems of power are enacted. This is sometimes done overtly through direct discourse. For example, when people in authority use intimidating language to subordinates, this constitutes overt positioning. At other times, positioning is covert and subtle (K. Anderson, 2009). An example of a covert act of positioning can occur when students are placed in remedial classes. Although the intent is ostensibly to mitigate an academic problem, the result can be that those students are positioned as failures (Skerrett, 2012). Similarly, Hall (2010) found that elementary school students in her study resisted being covertly positioned as struggling readers by their teacher. The students acted out their resistance through silence and non-participation, which was interpreted as laziness by the teacher. However, interviews with the students revealed that they were not ready to accept being positioned in that classroom setting.

Students with specials needs are another population that is frequently institutionally
positioned, and once students are positioned negatively, their marginalization tends to increase (Howie, 2014). A study with fifth-graders found that teachers and other staff responded more negatively to students who carried the label learning disabled than to students with no special education label (K. Anderson, 2009). This resulted in the students being identified as disruptive or uncooperative even when exhibiting the same behaviors as general education students. Additionally, Howie (2010) found that students who were labeled as behavior disordered were rarely afforded the right to a voice in their educational plan.

Furthermore, cases in which a student is both an EL and has a learning disability can result in even more extreme positioning. Carger’s (1996) ethnographic study of an immigrant family in Chicago described the struggles the oldest son faced throughout his education because of his learning disability and his status as an EL. The teachers and administrators labeled him as lazy and unmotivated due to his struggles learning to read and write. As he became fluent in spoken English, the school personnel continued to position him negatively despite his efforts to master academic material. After years of not having success, the student positioned himself as an academic failure and subsequently dropped out of school.

The language of the dominant group of a society constitutes linguistic cultural capital, making linguistic identity is a salient topic for language learners, particularly if institutions do not value the linguistic resources of minority languages (Bourdieu, 1986). When one language or language variety is given recognition over another language, it sets up a hegemonic relationship in which some speakers are positioned negatively (Pennycook, 1994). This is highly context dependent; for example, a native Spanish-speaker in Ecuador is generally afforded more cultural capital than a person who speaks an indigenous language. In this context, the Spanish-speaker is positioned as potentially powerful. However, that same Spanish-speaker may not have
the same access to cultural capital in the United States, particularly if their English is not native-like (Valdés, 2001).

The children of immigrants likewise perceive the linguistic status equated with the dominant cultures and frequently seek to distance themselves from a language that represents less power. This may lead them to abandoning part of their identity to gain more social status or cultural capital (Blackledge, 2002). Blackledge (2001) studied Bangladeshi mothers in England and found they spent considerable time working with their children on homework in their native language. However, the school did not accord value to this practice and encouraged families to converse with their children only in English. This is paralleled in studies that document the pressure students often feel to abandon their home language in favor of the dominant language (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Skuttnab-Kangas, 2010; Spolsky, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Bourdieu (1977) proposed that the relationship of dominant languages to less valued languages can be conceptualized in terms of symbolic power; bilingualism is sometimes positioned as a negative rather than a positive, particularly if one of the languages is considered low status (Canagarajah, 2004b). A study of language practice in Macedonia revealed that high levels of bilingualism were associated with untrustworthiness, and individuals who used multiple languages for discourse were positioned as unreliable and without allegiance (Gal & Irvine, 1995). Similarly, Blackledge’s (2002) analysis of the discourse surrounding a proposal in Birmingham, UK, found an assumption that being British excluded non-native English speakers. Blackledge documented how a newspaper article juxtaposed the outsider status of the Pujabi community with the white, English-speaking population by suggesting that signage in Punjabi
would be un-British. While the primary discourse appeared neutral at first glance, there was an underlying negativity that positioned the Punjabi speakers as disturbers of the natural order.

Teacher Identity

The formation of teacher identity is a dynamic process in which teachers are engaging in negotiating and making sense out of their experiences (Sachs, 2001). As they grow professionally, teachers constantly need to adjust and reinvent themselves in response to a changing teaching environment (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Teacher identity is often conceptualized within a particular context, which includes the setting as well as the individuals with whom the teacher interacts. This contextualization includes aspects of the students, such as language, age, socioeconomic status, and other salient features as well as a teacher’s area of expertise, experience, and background. There are also sub-identities within teacher identity. A teacher might identify as being part of a particular school and have sub-identities regarding such areas as subject matter, grade level, or seniority status.

According to many studies, emotions play an important role in teacher identity. Hargreaves (2001) asserts that teaching is a constant expression of emotions, whether positive or negative, acted out in the disposition toward students. Zembylas (2003) defines emotions as the stance teachers take toward students. He maintains that all teachers position themselves emotionally and this dictates much of their teaching style as well as their relationships with their students. Similarly, O’Connor (2008) proposes that educators’ emotions are expressed in how they either choose to care about or to distance themselves from their students.

Maintaining emotional distance can help teachers feel less vulnerable; however, it generally results in less satisfactory student to teacher relationships (Zembylas, 2003). Student-
teacher relationships can also mirror the kind of negative power imbalances resulting from positioning (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Studies of classroom discourse suggest that teachers often unintentionally position students into an identity in ways that marginalize their status (Cohen, 2012; Luke, 2009; Moje & Luke, 2009). This is frequently the case with students who are English learners and lack the cultural capital necessary to advocate effectively for themselves. Kanno and Norton (2003) described how an adult learner in Canada was told by an ESL instructor that her English was not good enough to take a computer course. This student felt insulted because she viewed the teacher as positioning her as a low-level learner. A further example is a case-study by Valdés (2001) of four adolescent immigrants from Mexico that documented how the middle school teachers regarded Spanish-speakers as not capable of rigorous work. Instead of engaging with grade-level material, the ELs were expected to spend most of their time coloring with crayons. Similarly, Hargreaves (2001) found that teachers in his study often positioned themselves as powerful and unapproachable, admitting that they used jargon they knew might be intimidating. This superiority gave them a sense of security because they felt it enhanced their status as experts. However, these teachers also acknowledged that this practice felt inauthentic and did not enhance their positive identity of themselves as educators.

Teachers who identify themselves as individuals who want to grow and improve in their practice look for opportunities to learn, which is correlated with a stronger sense of positive teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Kaasila and Lauilala (2010) look at teacher identity in terms of actual self, recognized self, and ideal self. The actual self takes into account a teacher’s present strengths and weaknesses, regardless of skill or experience. The recognized self refers to the teacher identity that school or society acknowledges and values. The final dimension is the ideal self or that goal to which the teacher aspires. Kaasila and Lauilala
emphasize that there is constant interaction among these identities. In other words, teachers must acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses to understand how they are perceived, which in turn is essential for the planning of growth.

In an educational context, teachers and their students may develop emotional understanding of each other while they interact with the content matter. This is consistent with Nodding’s (2008) work on caring, which affirms that displaying kindness and concern is as at least as important as teaching content. Issenbarger and Zembylas (2006) refer to caring as the emotional labor of teachers, which demands tremendous energy, but is necessary in the development of teacher identity. The perspectives of the five Ecuadoran teachers who participated in the ¡Aprenda! program hinged greatly on how they saw their identity to have been impacted by their experience, which in turn shaped their perspectives regarding their self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

The school of social cognitive theory presumes that most actions are initially constructed mentally (Bandura, 1993). Individuals are thought to have some control over their mental processes, i.e. beliefs and thoughts (Pajares, 2003). Self-efficacy flows from social cognitive theory and is concerned with how much individuals perceive their capability to act (Bandura, 1977, 2006). In this manner, behavior, cognition, and environment are in reciprocal relationships (Bandura, 1986). Thus, people measure their efficacy, which influences how they act and motivate themselves (Pajares, 1997).

Self-efficacy is related to self-esteem; however, they are distinct constructs (Judge & Bono, 2001). Self-esteem is an evaluation of self-worth, as opposed to self-efficacy, which is a
belief about a capacity to perform a task (Bandura, 1977). Stanjikovic and Luthans (2003) maintain that self-esteem is a more stable characteristic, generally based on estimation of character traits, whereas self-efficacy tends to be more dynamic. This is illustrated in studies in which participants reported high levels of efficacy in specific areas of their lives, such as academics, but low self-efficacy in other aspects of their lives outside of school (Pajares, 2003).

These principles are important to consider because they apply to teachers learning the skills of pedagogy – lack of successful experience may cause them to be less effective or to give up on the teaching profession entirely. This section will explore a variety of contexts through which to consider self-efficacy, particularly teacher self-efficacy.

**Learning Processes of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy can be conceptualized through learning processes (Bandura, 1993). Mastery experiences, such as performing a solo in a musical competition or successfully giving a speech, demonstrate capability. Vicarious experiences are another process. By seeing other people do something, individuals gain more competence in a task, which frequently takes place in the context of mentored experiences, such as apprentices in a carpentry program who observe the use of tools before attempting to use the tools themselves (Pajares, 2003). Verbal persuasion is a process by which individuals are convinced by others that they can effectively complete a task. This could take place on a sports team, when beginners are praised for their efforts and reassured that they are making progress (Pajares, 1997). Finally, physiological stimulation refers to emotional engagement or the passion that the individual may have for the task. For example, chess players may spend hours in the study of the game because they become so emotionally involved (Bandura, 1993).
Bandura (1989) described efficacy as a mediating force that is cyclical. For example, students who believe they are good readers will read more. Reading more will help them become even better readers, causing them to continue reading. These behaviors can lead to more mastery experiences, which further develop efficacy (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010). On the other hand, students who lack confidence in their reading skills may avoid reading. If they are not reading, these same students will probably not increase their reading proficiency.

A significant factor that appears to affect self-efficacy is the belief in inherent versus acquirable ability (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). In a study of efficacy beliefs by Wood and Bandura (1989), one group of participants was told that the ability to perform the assigned task was an acquired skill. The other group was informed that the task depended on natural ability. Although the participants had been initially assessed as having an equal aptitude for the task, participants who were led to believe that they could acquire the skill scored much higher than the second group. Participants in the second group who believed that natural ability was the defining factor in success were much more likely to give up at the first sign of difficulty.

**Dimensions of Self-Efficacy**

Another way of conceptualizing self-efficacy is through magnitude, strength and generality (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). The magnitude of the efficacy refers to the degree of difficulty individuals believe they are able to manage. Greater magnitude of efficacy is necessary for tasks that are perceived to be more difficult (Wood & Bandura, 1989). For English speakers, learning Arabic is generally considered more difficult than learning Spanish because of the linguistic differences between the language families. Thus, learning Arabic would require a higher magnitude of efficacy.
The strength of the self-efficacy indicates certainty of individuals that they can complete a task of particular magnitude (Pajares, 2002). A study with children of differing mathematical abilities found that strong self-efficacy was the most reliable predictor of successful problem solving (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The children in the study were grouped as having high, medium, or low skills according to their mathematical scores on a standardized test. The children completed a survey designed to gauge their sense of self-efficacy. Students in all groups who had higher self-efficacy scores were able to solve more math problems with accuracy than students at the same skill level but low self-efficacy.

Finally, generality indicates to what degree self-efficacy spans a variety of tasks (Ross, 1994). Individuals who have a high degree of generality in their belief to organize will be able to apply to this in a number of domains (Bandura, 1993). It is important for teachers to be aware of the generality aspect of their students’ self-efficacy because students may not always make the connections between the skills they acquire in school and how they can be applied beyond school (Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002).

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Race and ethnicity may also influence perceptions of self-efficacy. In one study, Hispanic students scored significantly below Caucasian students in self-efficacy beliefs in mathematics, despite the fact that participants were rated as having equal math ability (Stevens, Olivarez, Lan, & Tallent-Runnels, 2004). Likewise, in a study of more than 800 college students, African Americans reported lower levels of efficacy than white students (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008). Similarly, in research with engineering students, Concannon and Barrow (2009) found that African Americans had significantly lower self-efficacy scores than Caucasian students, which
were also correlated with lower career expectations. More specifically, the students expressed concerns about their prospects of obtaining equitable treatment and pay raises in future employment.

The relationship between strength of individual understanding of racial identity and efficacy has also been the subject of research. A study of African American college students found that individuals who had higher scores rating their consciousness of being black had correspondingly higher self-efficacy scores (Okech & Harrington, 2002). Similarly, Bong (1999) conducted research with middle and high school students, in which students were asked to rate their level of confidence about their ability to answer questions or solve problems. Regardless of their ability in Spanish, Latino students scored higher in self-efficacy when the questions related to Spanish language.

In addition to the proposition that non-dominant status may affect self-efficacy, there is also a cultural lens related to ethnicity. Klassen (2004) has suggested that whether an individual is from a communal versus individualistic culture may influence the process of self-efficacy. In his study, Klassen found that Asian immigrant students in Canada indicated that vicarious experiences and persuasion superseded mastery experiences as the mitigating force for self-efficacy. Similarly, Stevens and Switzer (2006) found that Mexican American students reported vicarious experiences rather than mastery experiences as the primary vehicle through which they gained efficacy

There are some studies that indicate disparities between males and females in self-efficacy. Girls tend to demonstrate a reduction in self-efficacy when they enter high school, particularly in math and science (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Some researchers theorize that this occurs because of a more masculine discourse style favored in high school classrooms.
Another perspective is that boys tend to be more self-laudatory regarding their performance and ability (Schunk & Pajares, 2001). Males in a study on scientists were most likely to name personal accomplishments as the basis for their confidence, whereas females frequently named mentors and other significant relationships as primary forces in shaping their efficacy (Zeldin, Britner, & Pajares, 2008). In contrast, other researchers suggest that the nature of efficacy may mean something different to females than males (Pajares, 2002). An efficacy rating could represent an idealized self for males rather than a current self-perspective, that is to say, males may see self-efficacy through the lens of what they could do in ideal conditions (Madewell & Shaughnessy, 2003).

Other research suggests that differences in efficacy ratings have more to do with stereotyped understandings of gender rather than being caused by gender (Hackett & Campbell, 1987). Parajes (2003) found that when stereotyped ideas of gender were accounted for, differences in self-efficacy related to gender tended to be insignificant. In a study of middle school students’ self-efficacy in writing, students were asked to describe the male or female characteristics that they most related to, and students who most closely mirrored the dominant societal definitions of femininity had the highest self-efficacy for writing (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). Writing is stereotyped as a female occupation, whereas math and science are often linked with masculine characteristics (Pajares, 2002). Furthermore, success itself has been looked at as being a masculine imperative, potentially shaping perceptions of efficacy (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993).

The application of race, ethnicity, and gender with regard to self-efficacy is that teachers and students have to negotiate within multiple contexts in society, all of which may have role expectations based to some degree on all of these constructs. The patriarchal nature of many
cultures may influence individuals regarding what they consider to be their abilities and options. In many ways, Ecuador is a very traditional society with role expectations for men and women. Although Ecuador is geographically small, it is in no way homogenous. There are multiple ethnic groups and racial backgrounds represented among the children and teachers of the nation’s schools. To be effective teachers, Ecuadoran teachers need to be aware of the how their self-efficacy as well as their students’ may be impacted by race, ethnicity, and gender. While in the ¡Aprenda! program, the Ecuadoran teachers were encouraged to reflect on these issues through reading, writing, and class discussion.

**Teacher Efficacy**

There has been much interest in the topic of teacher self-efficacy. The construct of teacher self-efficacy has derived from two strands of research, Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory and influence from Rotter’s (1966) locus of control theory. Teacher efficacy as a term was first used in a large scale survey of a reading program in the Los Angeles schools (Armor, 1976). Teachers were asked to respond to statements by agreeing or disagreeing and indicating the strength of their agreement/disagreement. The first category revolved around the idea that teachers can have little impact on student motivation because of factors in the home environment. The second type of statements communicated the concept that with enough effort, teachers have the potential to positively and significantly impact students’ academic success. The first type of statement measures general teacher efficacy, which is a teacher’s composite view about the ability of educators. The second statement evaluates personal efficacy, which considers the confidence of individual teachers regarding their own ability (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). These two areas were combined to create an efficacy score.
Research indicates that teacher efficacy may play a role in student motivation and academic performance in schools (Pajares, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy have higher goals for their students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). They are also more likely to invest more time in students who are low-achievers (Webb & Ashton, 1986). This is thought to stem from teachers’ confidence that they are able to reach even students who face obstacles to learning such as economic hardship or learning difficulties (Bruce et al., 2010). These practices have been shown to help students develop the ability to regulate their learning as well as to gain greater depth of content knowledge (Ross, 1994). Likewise, high school students who demonstrate high levels of confidence in their ability to complete academic tasks are more likely to enroll in rigorous courses than students who believe that they will not be successful (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). The correlation of teacher efficacy scores and students’ literacy scores was significant. Students whose teachers indicated that they could get through with enough effort had significantly higher literacy scores.

In self-efficacy development, mastery experiences are considered by many to be the most powerful for teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Mastery experiences in the classroom imbue teachers with confidence, while perceived failures decrease expectations of future success (Schunk & Pajares, 2001). Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory of efficacy has helped researchers formulate teacher efficacy as the belief of teachers that they can effectively carry out their professional responsibilities and produce outcomes (Fives, 2003). Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy believe that they have limited opportunities to support students meaningfully (Bruce et al., 2010). Studies indicate that teacher efficacy predicts many important variables, like student achievement, motivation, self-esteem, social success, school effectiveness and innovation (Ross, 1994). This is consistent with data that indicate
teachers with high efficacy are more likely to attempt to incorporate new styles and strategies in their classroom practice and are more likely to persevere once they have set a goal (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Professional Development and Self-Efficacy

Some studies focus on professional development as a key source of knowledge relating to teacher efficacy. Some research proposes that self-efficacy is a mediator rather than a cause of successful teaching. This viewpoint supports the idea that efficacy leads from knowledge to action (Fives, 2003). To put knowledge into action, confidence in a teacher’s belief to successfully execute a process to achieve results is also present. Fives (2003) documents that many teachers are familiar with portfolio projects; however, most teachers choose not to use portfolios with their students because they lack confidence that results can be achieved. Similarly, a study in Canadian schools found that quality professional development was the strongest factor in predicting teacher self-efficacy and related student achievement (Bruce et al., 2010). The authors attributed this relationship to the mediating factor of self-efficacy. In the same study, researchers noted that most teachers in one of the districts who had rated themselves as having high levels of self-efficacy did not perform at levels commensurate with their appraisals. In this case, over-inflated sense of self-efficacy was seen to be disabling, as opposed to empowering. The difference in this case was that teachers in the district had not previously had access to high quality professional development.
Burn-Out and Self-Efficacy

Research supports the idea that efficacy helps prevent teacher burn-out. In his study, study, Betoret (2006) found that teachers with higher self-efficacy reported suffering from less stress than teachers with lower self-efficacy. Similarly, teachers who have high levels of efficacy are less likely to leave the teaching profession (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). This may stem from high efficacy teachers using more coping mechanisms in stressful situations (Bandura, 1993). Other studies suggest that teacher burn-out is often attributed to difficulties that lie outside teacher control, such as lack of materials or large class size (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Self-efficacy may ameliorate the effects of challenging circumstances by helping teachers focus on areas in which they do have control such as seeking out supportive colleagues or working collaboratively to develop lessons (Bandura, 1993).

Collective Efficacy

When an entire school staff has a high sense of self-efficacy, it is referred to as collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993) and can reinforce a positive perspective among a school community (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). This collective understanding influences student outcomes, such as achievement, attendance, and motivation (Webb & Ashton, 1986). Collective efficacy in schools has also been linked to greater involvement of parents in schools. Ross (1994) found that low socioeconomic schools identified as having high collective efficacy made more substantial and creative efforts to mitigate the effect of poverty on students and raise academic success. In a study with high school students, collective efficacy was correlated with higher mathematics
scores, even when controlling for low socioeconomic status of students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Self-efficacy can contribute to teachers’ sense of identity as well as lead teachers to collaborate with a greater sense of confidence. This in turn can facilitate the development of positive relationships that empower teachers to build CoP.

Communities of Practice

There has been much interest in the dynamics of learning within a community. The term community of practice (CoP) was coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) based on their research with apprenticeship models. A CoP is formed when people are engaged collectively in negotiating meaning, beliefs, and understanding within the same domain that are reflected within the practice of a mutual endeavor (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1995). Fundamental to the concept of CoP is the acquisition of knowledge along with a premise that people are inherently social; thus, knowledge is constructed through experience and interaction with others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the construct of CoP, knowledge is equated with competence. Individuals can have knowledge of how to accomplish something, such as learning a language (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). Furthermore, knowledge is gained by pursuing goals. To further knowledge, individuals have to have some vision of where they want to go with their knowledge (Lave, 1996). Finally, knowledge involves gaining meaning by producing. This results in a product, which is evidence that the knowledge has been put to use (Lave, 1991).
Characteristics of a Community of Practice

A shared domain is fundamental to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). There must be an area of interest in which members have a common commitment that also includes a recognition of which members are most proficient in the domain. Thus, a neighborhood in which individuals know each other and interact informally would not constitute a CoP, although it may be considered a community (Rogers, 2000). There is also an aspect of community as group members work together in joint endeavors (Wenger et al., 2002). Individuals assist each other and share knowledge through critical reflection, which in turn builds relationships that help them to learn from each other. This aspect of mutual assistance is critical; people who work together may or may not constitute a CoP, depending on their interactions (Au, Reiner, Urbanowski, & Clark, 2002). Members must also be seeking the mastery of a skill in a CoP (Lave, 1991). For example, people who meet to try different restaurants would not be a CoP because they are not practitioners. In contrast, a group of aspiring cooks seeking to refine their artistry could constitute a CoP (Barab & Duffy, 2000).

The aspects of a CoP can be further broken down into engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger et al., 2002). Engagement is the active and mutual process of negotiating meaning among members of a CoP. This necessitates that all members are actively contributing at their level of competence. Another aspect is imagination (Wenger, 1998), which involves creating mental images of the world and possible scenarios. Using these mental images, individuals create links between past and future experiences. In a study by Au et al. (2002), after student teachers of Native Hawaiian ancestry learned about the history of native language instruction in Hawaii, they reported they were able to imagine themselves teaching in a bilingual
Finally, there is alignment, which is the practice of coordinating energy and resources to contribute toward the goal of the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991). If, for example, a CoP in teaching has a goal of encouraging more minorities to pursue education, alignment might include providing services to support them. This could include services such as childcare or offering online classes (Au et al., 2002). This correlates with studies that propose online CoP offer more equitable access to resources than traditional face-to-face meetings (Schlager & Fusco, 2003).

**Communities of Practice and Identity**

The dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire help establish the identity of the community (Wenger et al., 2002). Mutual engagement specifies that people are working on a common project. Members can be from similar or diverse communities, and the joint enterprise is constantly in negotiation by members. The repertoire is the routines and symbols utilized by the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Wenger (1998), the experience of belonging to a CoP enhances an individual’s sense of identity through association with the community. Transformative learning takes place in the context of CoP (Wenger, 1998), and in a CoP individuals’ efforts are recognized as worth pursuing (Au et al., 2002).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), an important construct in CoP is legitimate peripheral participation. Inexperienced members learn through watching others who have mastered certain skills, and as they begin to practice, often with the help of a mentor, they move closer to the center of the community (Morita, 2004). Legitimate peripheral participation offers a safe space in which participants can make mistakes while they engage in learning but restricts
access to power (Davies, 2005). In contrast to peripheral participants, full participants are insiders with the means of obtaining resources from the CoP (Wenger, 1998).

Davies (2005) suggests that the concept of CoP as conceptualized by Lave and Wenger (1991) is incomplete because it does not account for the gatekeeping mechanisms that allow for or bar individuals from participation. Some research on CoP has focused on how people acquire limited, full or marginal participation. Participants who are judged as having desirable resources may have more access to the group, while others may have limited access to the community and may be on a trajectory that will never provide access to the power of the CoP (Davies, 2005). Factors such as physical appearance or clothing styles can cause individuals to be accepted or rejected by a group (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1995). For example, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) studied adolescent groups in high school and found that many of them wished for fuller participation but could not figure out how to achieve this.

There is various capital held by members that may confer fuller or lesser participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These could include linguistic resources, such as the language or dialect spoken by an individual. Some studies look specifically at speech communities that have a set of shared norms and the obstacles faced by those individuals who wish to gain access to such communities (Labov, 1982). Research has documented that people are frequently required to alter their language use, either by changing an accent or word usage, to be accepted into a group (Davies, 2005; Pennycook, 1994). In his description of the Ann Arbor trial on Black English, Labov (1982) documented how the public schools discriminated against African American students based on their use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Many teachers forbade students to use AAVE in classrooms, and administrators warned families that use of
AAVE would result in special education labels. This discrimination is not unlike some of the prejudicial treatment described by the teacher participants of this study.

Because of the social nature of learning, CoP can act as powerful forces within a school community. This next section will explore the concept of CoP with particular regard to educational settings.

**Communities of Practice in Education**

Schlager and Fusco (2003) suggest that school systems need to be intentional in developing CoP. Accordingly, studies suggest it is essential to pay attention to the existing culture of the school in order to foster CoP (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) investigated a school in Great Britain in which school administrators equated CoP with cliques. These administrators took the position that any type of community within the school should consist of all teachers rather than subgroups. However, the researchers found that teachers in the school resisted working on school-wide projects interdepartmentally, both because they did not feel that this was an effective use of time and because they did not have the relationships outside of their department conducive to working collaboratively.

Research indicates that schools must take into account the multiple identities of teachers and their different areas of comfort and their expertise to be effective in supporting CoP. In a project with a group of science teachers, Avery and Carlse (2001) identified which teachers were developers of innovative applications for technology versus teachers who were only users of the technology. Their study investigated the ways in which the various science teachers saw themselves as fitting into the school systems in terms of their science background as well their expertise in various aspects of technology. The researchers found that through a supportive
environment in which teachers were encouraged and supported to integrate innovative uses of technology into classroom practice, some teachers moved from their initial identity of being a user of technology to becoming an innovator of technology. Moreover, the longer these science teachers participated in their community of practice, the more they developed CoP in their own classrooms with their students. These experiences are illustrative of the power of CoP for members to go from limited peripheral participation to full participation.

An important aspect to consider when trying to develop CoP is how the community will grow and reproduce (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). In a study with science teachers, professors, and doctoral students, Palincsar (1998) documented the growth of CoP through participants’ own initiatives. One group was first begun with the intent to develop inquiry approaches to science. The project included time for planning, discussion of theory, and practice of implementation. Teachers found the experience to be highly rewarding and went on to start two book discussion groups to further study innovative teaching methods. This growth of new components of the project helped establish the stability and strength of the CoP in this district.

The development of leadership is another important component in the health and sustainability of CoP within schools (Barab & Duffy, 2000). To achieve this, all participants must have access to the negotiations of meaning and learning within the group. Leaders appear to be fostered by the dispositions that: 1) participation is seen as an integral process rather than an occurrence limited to particular occasions and 2) knowledge resides within the group rather than solely within the masters (Buysse et al., 2003).

To develop CoP, it is important to understand the existing social networks. Since much of learning is a social process, schools need to encourage interaction among teachers. Research supports the premise that an effective school culture requires an atmosphere in which teachers
feel supported and empowered to take risks to improve instruction (Blumenfeld, Fishman, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 2000). In some circumstances, CoP can form as subgroups within a community. In the previously mentioned case study of art teachers in a school in Great Britain (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003), the art teachers in the study had established a CoP because they did not feel like the school offered much encouragement or support to be creative or progressive. While small, the CoP helped support and rejuvenate the three teachers through the shared discussions of classroom problems and possible solutions as well as success stories.

Although CoP can occur without intervention, Schlager and Fusco (2003) maintain some direction is often necessary to facilitate a CoP and teachers and administrators need to be jointly engaged in the educational vision if a district is going to support CoP. There are successful cases of developing CoP through purposeful efforts within school districts, such as the one Lambson (2010) describes, in which a book study group started in a school with the express goal of supporting novice teachers. Experienced teachers were also an integral part of the group, and Lambson documented how the novice teachers were at first reluctant to speak, but as the year went on, they gained confidence and contributed to the discussions. At the end of the year, the new teachers reported that the book study group had positively impacted their confidence and sense of belonging within the school community.

Summary

Research relating to identity theory, self-efficacy and CoP have contributed to the understanding of how teachers learn and grow, and all three constructs play powerful roles in how teachers understand themselves and their practice. Evidence indicates that identity, self-efficacy, and CoP are intertwined and thus constantly overlap. Teachers who have higher self-
eficacy are more likely to seek out CoP (Moore & Esselman, 1994). Lave and Wenger (1991) indicate how participation in CoP can influence identity, and teacher identity subsequently can impact self-efficacy (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). These three constructs highlight different aspects of pedagogy, which are interdependent and complementary, as seen in this study of the Ecuadoran teachers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter presented a review of the relevant literature supporting the research questions, design, and analysis of data for this study. This chapter commences with a restatement of the research questions that drove the study and an explanation of the study’s design. I provide a rationale for using a case study to address the research questions and outline the procedures for data collection and analysis. An overview of the type of information sought as well as demographic and contextual information follows. Subsequently, the mechanisms for collecting and analyzing the findings are described. Finally, a discussion of limitations concludes the chapter.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of Ecuadoran English teachers who participated in the ¡Aprenda! (pseudonym) program.

The overarching question of the study is “What are the Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives regarding their experience in the ¡Aprenda! program?”

The supporting questions are

1. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their identity as teachers?
2. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their self-efficacy as teachers?

3. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have been a community of practice?

Research Design

Because this study relies on the personal and subjective perspectives of the Ecuadoran teacher participants, a case study approach, rooted in a social constructivist paradigm, was singularly appropriate (Gruba, 2004). Social constructivism differentiates itself from a positivist approach because it assumes that truth is a mutual construction based on perspectives of individuals rather than an empirical construct waiting to be discovered (Adams, 2006). Researchers with this world view bring an assumption to the study that an individual’s experience and relationships, where she has lived and traveled, influence how she interprets the world and constructs truth (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). The researcher’s background as well as the history of the participants is key in understanding how meaning is created. Thus, from a constructivist approach, the purpose of research serves to investigate patterns of meaning that emerge through engagement with the participants (Butin, 2003).

Qualitative research, particularly when focused through a constructivist stance, seeks to clarify meaning for individuals and their situations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As Merriam (2001) points out, such research is engaged in learning how people make sense of what they experience within their own worlds. The importance of understanding context, which is unique and requires detailed description, is another essential feature that distinguishes qualitative research from other approaches. Furthermore, Maxwell (2012) proposes that qualitative research
is eminently suited to contribute understanding to processes because it is able to address questions about how factors play out their roles in real life settings.

Case studies are widely used in educational research (Creswell, 2013). Although understandings of case studies varies (Yazan, 2015), researchers agree that a case study consists of a bounded unit with a finite time for observation and has a limit to the number of participants (Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). This unit is not limited to one person; a case study can utilize one or multiple persons, or it can involve an investigation of a system, such as a school program.

Boundedness is conducive to research that calls for thick, rich descriptions, which Flyvberg (2011) points out is necessary to achieve expertise in an area of study. There are other aspects associated with case study research that make it well-suited for the educational setting. One is that case studies tend to be intense and well-detailed, allowing for deeper understanding of the topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Case studies also make use of and incorporate developments that evolve over time as the researcher/participant relationship grows and develops (Maxwell, 2012). Finally, case studies draw heavily on context, and it is this concrete context-dependent knowledge that uniquely guides a case study (Maxwell, 1992).

In a qualitative case study, the personal involvement of the researcher takes on an important role. Merriam (2001) points out that the effective researcher must have a tolerance for ambiguity, be sensitive to the participant and the situation, and exhibit effective communication skills. Similarly, Stake (1995) claims that researchers act as interpreters, who then report their own constructed reality, contending that there are a multiplicity of possible realities rather than a superior truth.
These attributes are necessary because researchers must weave themselves into the study, capitalizing on their skills and attributes, while at the same time remaining aware of their own privilege and potential bias. This personal awareness can enhance the rich context of the case study, as seen in Behar’s (2003) investigation of attitudes on dying. At the time of her study, Behar’s grandfather was terminally ill, so while she was interacting with participants and documenting their experiences, she could empathize as a person anticipating loss of a loved one. By including this subjectivity in her writing, Behar asserts that she provided a richer emotional context than if she had attempted to remain neutral.

**Researcher Positionality**

A qualitative case study represents a shared space that the researcher and participants shape together (Bourke, 2014). Therefore, it is vital for researchers to share aspects of their identity and experiences that may impact the study (England, 1994). In this section, I explain briefly some of my background and how I became connected with the ¡Aprenda! program.

Twenty-four years ago, I moved to Ecuador and took a job at the American School of Quito teaching high school English. My teaching degree was in German, not English, but since I was a native English-speaker, the principal thought my skills would suffice. My original goal was to perfect my Spanish, return to the US and become a Spanish teacher (German teaching positions were scarce). My Spanish did improve, but instead of becoming a Spanish teacher, I realized that working with English learners was my calling.

Fast forward 21 years. By then a high school ESL teacher working on my doctorate, I accepted a part-time instructor position in the ¡Aprenda! program teaching a linguistics course. I was delighted to be with Ecuadorans again, and as the course progressed, I began to envision a
research project in which the Ecuadoran teachers could share their retrospective perspectives regarding the impact of the ¡Aprenda! program. Thus, this dissertation was conceived.

As I engaged with the Ecuadoran teachers in this study, I was aware of how my personality and background shaped the research. As a tall, white, middle-aged American and a native English-speaker, I carry a certain amount of privilege when I enter a Latin American country. Moreover, having been an instructor in the ¡Aprenda! program, the Ecuadorans initially positioned me in a teacher role. However, as we spent time together, I noted a shift in their manner toward me – less deferential and more collegial.

There are other roles I embody – woman, wife, mother – that also played some part in this research. I used aspects of who I am to enhance the context of the study to shed light on these five Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives.

**Sampling**

This study incorporated a combination of criterion and convenience sampling. Criterion sampling is selecting participants based on specified attributes (Palinkas et al., 2015). For the purpose of this research, the main criterion was that the participants were all Ecuadoran English teachers who had been part of the same ¡Aprenda! program cohort. Based on the available time, I decided that five teachers would be the maximum number to include. Five different teachers afforded an examination of varying perspectives but also allowed time for in-depth interviews and classroom observations.

Once I had determined the study needed five teacher participants, I studied the locations in Ecuador of all 37 teachers. Although Ecuador is slightly smaller than the state of Colorado, it is much more difficult to traverse. The mountains that run through Ecuador are part of the
challenge; also, earthquakes, even minor ones, result in frequent mudslides and avalanches that block the roads. Thus, I looked for teachers who lived in or near major cities with public transportation. I noted that three teachers from the program taught in the city of Cuenca, and two others lived in cities accessible by bus. This influenced me to focus on the teachers in that area of the country. By including these teachers, I minimized the time spent in transit and instead utilized this time for more contact with the participants. In this manner, the convenience element overlapped criterion by the fact that I selected these teachers on the basis of how I could access them.

Setting and Participants

The settings were cities in southern Ecuador, South America. I chose these cities because this was where the majority of the teacher participants lived and worked. One teacher lived in Riobamba, three lived in or near Cuenca, and one lived in a small village south of Cuenca.

The participants were public school English teachers in Ecuador who had been part of the ¡Aprenda! program cohort. These teachers traveled to a Midwestern university to study second language pedagogy and culture as well as English language skills. During the seven months, the teachers shared dormitory style rooms on campus and spent most of their days together in classes and activities.

Education in Ecuador

In a study on US schools, a description of the demographics would be listed, including a breakdown of school enrollment by race, language, and socioeconomic status as well as data regarding proficiency on academic achievement tests. However, an extensive web search,
including the Ecuadorian government’s official site on population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo, 2010), the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2017) website, and the Center for Indigenous Groups in Ecuador (CONAIE, 2017) revealed very little data. According to numerous sources, data on school-age children are rarely collected (Isch, 2015; Jarrin, 2008; Novo, 2014; Torres, 2005; Ureña Moreno, 2014; Vos & Ponce, 2004). While in Ecuador, I met with administrators of each school and inquired about more specific demographics; however, the administrators confirmed that such data are not available. In lieu of site specific data, I provide an overview of the educational demographics regarding Ecuador, including a brief description of the educational system.

Information about Ecuador

Ecuador is a relatively small country, with an estimated population of 16.5 million people. According to official Ecuadorian census data (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo, 2010), 72% of the population identify as mestizo, with the rest of the population divided between indigenous, white, and African. However, other groups contend that the proportion of indigenous people is much higher with numbers ranging from 25-35% (CONAIE, 2017). The largest indigenous group is the Kichwa, who primarily inhabit the mountains (Becker, 2011).

In 2008, Ecuador ratified a new constitution (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2017). While only Spanish was granted official recognition as the national language, the right to a bilingual education was guaranteed in Article 29 (Becker, 2011). A further clarification of the article stipulates that ancestral language must be included in curricula throughout the country, although the use of the word ancestral is offensive to many groups as it carries a connotation of obsoleteness (Novo, 2014). How bilingual education is carried out and under what circumstances
is not clearly delineated, and reports of ethnic and racial discrimination are widespread. De la Torre (2000) described an incident in which a principal in a rural school instituted a policy that the male students cut their hair before they could participate in school events. This constituted a violation of their cultural practice, and several mothers traveled to the capital of the province to petition the regional governor director of schools to overrule this requirement. Fortunately, in this instance, the mothers won, and the children were not forced to cut their hair.

Funding for education increased for a time under President Correa, particularly in English education (Ureña Moreno, 2014). However, President Moreno, who took office in 2017, has instituted budget cuts for school systems across Ecuador (Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2018). According to the 2010 census data (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2017), the literacy rate for ages 7-15 is 98%, with more than 94.4% of eligible children enrolled in school. However, there are sources that contradict this information. A study by UNESCO (Torres, 2005) listed total enrollment as 72%. Furthermore, a report on the state of education in Ecuador described the quality of education in the primary levels as low and noted that many students do not continue their studies to secondary education (Vos & Ponce, 2004).

The system of education is divided into three phases: grades 1-5 primary, grades 6-9 secondary, and grades 10-12 bachillerato. There are two different calendars for attendance. Schools in the mountains attend from September to June, while coastal and Amazon basin schools start in April and end in December (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2017).

The following is a list of the participants (using pseudonyms) and their years of experience in public schools, the grade levels they instructed, and the approximate enrollment of the schools where they taught in Ecuador. All schools are K-12.
Table 1
Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Approximate School Population</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>Riobamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paloma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Cuenca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>10 miles west of Cuenca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Cuenca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Cuenca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

This section describes each type of method for data collection used in this study. I first provide a description of the classroom observations with each teacher participant. An explanation of the interview process follows, including a list of preliminary questions that initially helped focus the interviews. Finally, a review of the data coding concludes this section.
Observations

Observation is a valuable tool for collecting data because of the nuances that the researcher can potentially detect, of which the participants may not necessarily be cognizant, including aspects such as body language and facial expression (Creswell, 2013). Being in a classroom also allows the researcher to assess group dynamics as well as different roles taken by the teacher and students and how they position themselves (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). The purpose of the observations in this study was to generate discussion during interviews regarding teachers’ perspectives about the impact the ¡Aprenda! program had on their classroom practices.

I shadowed each teacher for one full week during the school day and observed all of their classes. To be able to record these descriptions, I attempted to act primarily as an observer, sitting in the back and taking notes. However, there were times the teachers invited me to engage in some class activities, and so I also acted as a participant observer. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) pointed out that when researchers take on a participant-observer role, they tend to gain some insider status, which can contribute to more natural behaviors by the participants. Whenever I took on a participant role, I wrote notes as soon as possible after the observation.

While in the classroom, I chose not to adopt a specific observational protocol because, as Johnson and Christensen (2014) pointed out, researchers engaged in observations need to be looking “for anything and everything” (p. 238) related to the research. The occurrences in the classroom were noted on the left-hand side of notebook pages, along with details about who was involved, what they did, when it happened, where it took place, how different elements were related, and why it seemed to occur (Merriam, 2001). On the right-hand side of the page, I used memos to record my thoughts and reactions as well as questions regarding everything I observed.
The following is an example of notes and memos I took during a classroom observation.

Because I was writing for my own understanding, these notes are full of abbreviations, run on sentences, and sentence fragments.

Table 2

Sample of Observations/Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Memos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P. writes peer pressure on board, asks sts in Eng to write associations –</td>
<td>Is p.p.- opresión social -in her book, or is it her word? What skill does she want them to know? Do students always choose own groups? Is this as significant in Ecuadoran society as US? How did P. decide this activity – Aprenda? It seems like they’ve done this before – how often does P do this type of activity? Will they hand in papers or keep for reference? Will P give them points – does participation factor in the grade? Are grades from the tchr more import, or end of year grades on standardized test?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repeats in Sp. Sts move to form groups of 4, one group of 3, open notebooks,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sts speaking in Spanish, sts copying board, one group in back explaining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peer pressure, “like you know, to do drugs, or drink, or do things our</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents don’t like,” other students laugh, and write down drug/drink,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student in front calls P. over and asks, “can peer pressure include</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive things?” P – “if you think so.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

Interviews are utilized extensively in qualitative research as a method for data collection (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Charmaz (2014) states that interviews are powerful because they develop a space between the researcher and participant for open interaction. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) also maintain that interviews complement observations because they often reveal what cannot be observed.

In this study, I employed a modified version of stimulated recall, utilizing my observation notes and reflective memos in the interviews with the participants (Stough, 2001). In each interview, I used my notes and memos to describe what I had observed in their classrooms – student behavior, student/teacher and student/student interactions, as well as their pedagogical techniques - and I asked the participants to share what they had been thinking and feeling during those times. Stimulated recall is the practice of facilitating participants’ mental processing of specific events by providing them with an aid for recalling the experiences (Lyle, 2003). Stimulated recall can utilize videotaping (Stough, 2001), audiotaping (Dempsey, 2010), participant generated artifacts, or researcher memos (Gass & Mackey, 2013) to tap into participants’ memories in the interview process.

I interviewed each of the five Ecuadoran teachers two to three times, and each interview lasted two to three hours. Multiple interviews allowed for richness and depth (Polkinghorne, 2005). I had sent the Ecuadoran teacher participants a list of preliminary questions for the interview two weeks before I arrived in Ecuador, suggesting that reading the questions might help them feel comfortable in the interviews (see Appendix for preliminary interview questions). However, none of the participants read the questions. “I wanted to wait until I saw you,” each of
them said. Although the teacher participants were deeply invested in the process of the study and the interviews, reading the questions in isolation lacked meaning for them. Instead they waited until we were together. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabree (2006) also describe experiences in which researchers found that subjects did not wish to engage with interview questions unless the interviewer was present.

The questions offered a starting place for the interviews but were not strictly limited to those queries. Generally in qualitative research, there is an open aspect to questioning embedded in the interview process (Morrow, 2005). The interviewer must maintain a delicate balance of keeping the interview focused and relevant while at the same time allowing participants to explore new directions within the conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Instead of relying solely on predetermined questions, Stake (1995) affirms that interviewer should progressively focus questions based on participants’ ongoing responses because their perspectives may shift within interviews.

The interviews took place in a variety of locations – mainly at small coffee shops and occasionally at my temporary residence. In addition to the interviews, we frequently engaged in spontaneous conversations during the school day and during time together outside of school in which the teacher participants elaborated on previous ideas. These informal interactions also offered rich insights on the Ecuadorans’ perspectives, and I documented them each day as soon as I was able.

Memos

Memos were an integral part of all phases of data collection. (See Table 2) The practice of memo writing is the taking of reflective notes about what the researcher is noticing and
learning, which offers opportunities for researchers to understand how their own experiences impact the research process (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

During observations and interviews I constantly engaged in memo writing. These memos guided me in writing thick descriptions of the teachers’ and students’ behaviors. Thick descriptions provide rich details of people and events that could enhance verisimilitude when documenting experiences (Creswell, 2013; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). I also used memo writing as a means of reflecting on the data as I analyzed and compared. In this manner, I uncovered themes and ideas that were illuminating and worthy of perusal in subsequent discussions with the participants (Merriam, 2001).

Data Analysis

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. In addition to the audiotape, all handwritten notes were typed and added to the body of data. This was accomplished expediently to facilitate constant comparison. The constant comparative method was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their work on grounded theory. However, Merriam (2001) points out that the inductive nature of constant comparison makes it compatible for other types of qualitative research, such as case study. She makes a compelling argument for this approach of engaging with the data immediately; in fact, Merriam states that to wait until data collection is complete may undermine a research project by “drowning” (p.161) the researcher in data. I began to look at the data as soon as it was generated and made comparisons as the corpus of data grew; thus, I simultaneously generated and collected data. Identity theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991), self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) served as the lenses for analysis.
Coding

To facilitate coding, the data were segmented into meaningful units (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). A unit can consist of a single word, a sentence, or a group of sentences that in some way are instructive and illuminating and can convey meaning independently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of coding is assigning a designation to an aspect of data so that it is easily retrievable (Merriam, 2001). Thus, each time there is a meaningful unit, this section of text was bracketed and assigned a code name. Although time-consuming, this method allowed me to interact deeply with the data (Charmaz, 2014). The code name was descriptive enough to indicate meaning, but not so narrow that it was entirely specific to that unit (Yin, 2003). A master list of 71 codes was developed in to maintain organization as data accumulated. The category names were derived inductively from the data based largely on emic terms, i.e., terms used by the research participants.

Through the use of comparative methods, analytic distinctions should emerge (Kolb, 2012), because at every stage, I reviewed and compared data. As I engaged in analysis, I continued to use reflexive memos taken during observations as well as data from the interview transcripts. I regularly reviewed these memos to see if my reflections showed patterns that I could be otherwise be missing. In the initial stages of the research, I compared data to look for similarities and differences. I did this sequentially, comparing early data with later data, as well as categorically looking at data collected from different participants and by different methods, always seeking to understand what the participants were saying and what might be left unsaid (Charmaz, 2014).
Table 3
Sample of Coded Interview Transcript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Interview Transcript</th>
<th>Coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gail: Tell me about your students.</td>
<td>Almost all of the students speak Spanish. Spanish dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto: Almost all of the students speak Spanish. There are a few Kichwa speakers, but I don’t speak with them because I think they would be embarrassed and I don’t know how well my colleagues would receive it</td>
<td>There are a few Kichwa speakers, Kichwa students but I don’t speak choice to not speak with them Kichwa Kichwa language because I think opinion they would be assumption embarrassed embarrassment and I don’t know unknown insecurity how well value my colleagues would receive it negative colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As I coded data line by line, I laid the foundation for the second level of coding, or axial coding, which was to look for relationships between categories based on the themes that emerged (Yin, 2003). As I explored connections, new overarching categories evolved, forming nodes around which I could organize subcategories. I used axial coding to develop and refine the categories and connect them, creating intersections of codes (Gibbs, 2012). This allowed me to reassemble the data in a novel fashion (Merriam, 2001). For example, funds of knowledge became an overarching category as teachers discussed their perspectives on students.

I organized and reorganized the codes in multiple ways (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). I looked at each teacher and all the codes generated from that teacher participant. I also examined each code as a separate unit to find out if that code only appeared in one, a few, or all the teacher participants. For example, when I studied the code “Kichwa language,” Roberto featured prominently. However, Carmen and Paloma also discussed Kichwa language, and there were some important connections. This technique clarified iterations of the findings and facilitated the understanding of the data and formed a case study database (Yin, 2003). As I analyzed the codes in these varying manners, I looked for emerging patterns and relationships and how they related to the research questions regarding identity, self-efficacy, and CoP.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity traditionally has proposed that researchers disclose those experiences or aspects of a study that may impact a study (England, 1994). Furthermore, a study can offer transparency through notes and memos and/or sharing with other members of a project (Bourke, 2014). Wickens, Cohen, and Walther (2017) offer the idea that reflexivity can play an even
larger role in research. In their article, they personify Reflexivity, thus the capital R, which seems to whisper provocatively, “How,” and “Why?” and “What does it mean?” in the background of the research, challenging them to look deeper.

I confess that Reflexivity may have been lurking about at times, particularly when I was searching for the words to analyze and explain the data. “How do I represent the teacher participants?” I asked myself. “Do I call Roberto ‘a Kichwa?’ Or should I write, ‘a person of Kichwa descent?’ Or ‘an indigenous person’ – is that pejorative?” I went around and around with terms for the other participants as well. Is Paloma ‘a single woman?’ or ‘an unmarried woman?’ Both of these seemed to position her against an assumption that marriage is the normal status, which was not a direction in which I wanted to go.

Ultimately, I relied on reflective memos to provide testimony to my inner struggles and thought processes as I worked through the data. For example, in several memos I noted questions about how Roberto’s perspective as a male may have been a factor in some of his interactions. However, the thread between these notations seemed to be weak, and I did not see data around which to organize these ideas.

Finally, as I sought to discover relationships between my research questions and the data, I endeavored to remain open to the possibility that answers to entirely different questions might emerge. Charmaz (2014) stresses that researchers should resist the temptation to limit their perspectives as they consider the data because the findings may be key in other queries. Kendall (1998) discussed this mindset in a study on the perceptions of well-being of families with special-needs children. The original research question could not be answered because none of the participating families reported a sense of well-being. Instead Kendall noticed that the data pointed at disruptions in the lives of the families; thus, her research provided important
information regarding the lives of the children and their families, albeit not the information the researcher was expecting. In this same vein, I attempted to address the teacher participants’ perspectives with an open mind as to potential results.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The overarching question of this study is: What are the Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives regarding their experience in the ¡Aprenda! program? The first two supporting questions guiding this chapter are:

1. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their identity as teachers?

2. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their self-efficacy as teachers?

In this chapter, I examine the perspectives of the five Ecuadoran English teachers in this study who spent seven months learning language, culture, and pedagogy at a Midwestern university in the ¡Aprenda! program. I first describe an overview of the Ecuadoran educational system. After this, I narrate each teacher’s story, weaving findings from interviews with classroom observations. I conclude each teacher participant section with a short personal reflection to segue into the following narrative.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the third question, which deals with communities of practice. I made the decision to situate the third question separately because the findings lend themselves to a more evaluative discussion of the program rather than a narrative of the individual teacher participants.
As early as 6:00 a.m., sleepy-eyed students make their way to the morning school sessions that start at 7:00 a.m. Primary students in sweat suits with school colors, older girls with plaid skirts, boys in dark pants and white shirts that will need to be tucked in before the first bell rings. The Ecuadoran government is supposed to provide uniforms, but in some schools, the students must pay for these clothes. If students fail to wear the uniforms, they are sent home; in other schools they may receive a *multa* (a small fine) or be scolded in front of the class by the principal.

Shortly before 7:00 a.m., an armed guard opens the massive iron school gates, and the scene becomes one of cheerful chaos as groups of Ecuadoran students and teachers swarm in. At 1:30 p.m. the siren sounds, signaling the end of the first session and the beginning of the afternoon classes. Many students bolt for home, backpacks flapping wildly, while others linger to buy slices of fresh papaya and mango sprinkled with chili and lime, or *llapingachos* (a local dish made of potatoes and cheese, fried to a crispy brown patty).

When classes let out at 8:00 p.m., it has already been dark for two hours. The mountain air is cold at night, and everyone who has a sweater or jacket fastens it closely and sets off briskly, trying not to trip on the uneven sidewalks. If it happens to be raining, the students use their bookbags as umbrellas and run. There is no transportation provided – students walk or get their own rides. Some students live within walking distance, while others take a city bus. Students who live in rural areas often must depend on rides if there are no public buses.

Inside the building, the industrial white walls in classrooms and corridors are bare – teachers are not permitted to display posters or students’ work. Classrooms are identically
furnished with simple desks and blue plastic chairs for students. A whiteboard and a dais with a teacher’s desk complete the furniture. Class size ranges from 35 to 45 students, but some classes can be as large as 50. There are very limited janitorial services provided in Ecuadoran public schools. Instead students are expected to clean their classroom under the supervision of the teacher. After the last class of each session, a frenzy of activity ensues. First, all the students pick up their chairs and dump out the trash from the build-in wastebaskets onto the floor, after which they sweep, mop and wipe the room with varying degrees of accuracy and efficiency.

**Ecuadoran Teachers**

Ecuadoran teachers spend their days on the move. While the same group of students remains in one classroom all day, the teachers change rooms every hour. Before a teacher can leave a classroom, she must write a brief description of the lesson in the classroom record book. When the siren wails to signal the end of class, teachers jot a few short phrases in the tiny space on the daily page while muttering to themselves about the next lesson. Then they gather piles of books and papers and rush to get to their class.

Teachers are also required to keep enormous binders with lesson templates and standards provided by the Ministry of Education as well as copies of all tests and quizzes and how the questions relate to the standards. Many of the teachers find this to be burdensome rather than useful. “The templates aren’t very accurate –the pacing is way off, but a government official could visit any day and I have to have my binder with my materials with me,” explained one of the teachers. “It’s never happened, but just in case.” Teachers show signs of frustration and resignation when they discuss this practice. Supplementary materials are virtually non-existent, and schools rarely provide photocopies of tests or other materials. If teachers need to copy
materials for students, they must either collect five cents per page from each student or cover the cost themselves.

Nombramiento

To understand the perspectives of teachers in Ecuador, it is necessary to discuss nombramiento, which determines teachers’ job security and where they can work. There is no direct translation of nombramiento. While it is sometimes compared with tenure, it is quite different. Ecuadoran schools are directed by the central government through the Ecuadoran Ministry of Education. Each year, as many títulos (teaching certificates) are awarded as there are anticipated available jobs. Unlike US schools, which are locally administered, once teachers have their certificate, they are not hired directly by schools; instead teachers are placed by the government in a school within the province in which they live. Teachers with nombramiento have almost total job security and the right to remain at their school, while a teacher without nombramiento can be moved to another school within the province, which can encompass several hundred miles, any time - even during the school year. If teachers are not able to move to their assigned school for personal reasons, they forfeit their teaching position and their certificate becomes invalid.

There is no set time or process for receiving nombramiento. Teachers can submit evidence of continuing education courses with the hope of expediting it, but this is no guarantee. The average wait to receive nombramiento seems to be five to six years, but many people told me that individuals with contacts in the government may receive nombramiento immediately, while others may never receive it. When teachers receive nombramiento, they can choose to stay at their present school or they can petition to be placed in a different school. At the time of this
study, two of the five participants, Carmen and Paloma, had nombramiento, while Esperanza, Monica, and Roberto did not.

Figure 1: Ecuadoran teachers.
Teacher Participants

The Ecuadoran teacher participants are presented in the order in which I visited them in Ecuador: Roberto, Paloma, Esperanza, Carmen, and Monica (all pseudonyms).

Roberto
“I am Kichwa.”

The snow-capped peak of the volcano Chimborazo dominated the landscape of Riobamba, a city of approximately 175,000 in the heart of the Andes mountains. Roberto’s school sat on outskirts of the city on the edge of a ravine. With a kindergarten through 12th grade student population of almost 4,000, it was the largest school in this study. Massive brick walls with broken glass bottles embedded in the top – typical in Latin America - surrounded the grounds, which included several buildings, but the heavy metal gate remained open during the day. In a small room by the entrance, a few uniformed guards sat drinking coffee and playing cards while dogs of indistinguishable breeds slept on the steps. Outside in the street, vendors selling sodas and ice cream bars, as well as patitas de pollo (deep fried chicken feet), corviche (plantain dumplings), and morocho (corn pudding), stationed themselves strategically at the beginning and end of the school sessions.

Inside the gates, the sounds of machinery and tools permeated the atmosphere as students in vocational classes wielded blowtorches and power drills. Nearby, stood the three-story brick secondary building built around an internal courtyard in which untended rose bushes attempted to bloom among the thistles and tall grass. The first floor contained workrooms for the academic departments. Worn stone stairs without railings led to the rooms with gaps in the floor boards large enough to afford a view of the classes below. In every room, approximately forty blue
plastic chairs faced the white board, and stacks of broken chairs rested against the back wall. Wads of paper and food remnants such as candy wrappers, and in one room a fried chicken foot, littered the floor. Graffiti decorated every classroom. Most contained the usual declarations of undying love - *Angelika te quiero; Manuel eres mi amor por siempre*. However, there were also obscenities and drawings more appropriate for the stalls of a public restroom than a school.

The director of this school had a large office in a separate administrative building at the back of campus overlooking the valley. Over the next few days, Roberto mentioned several times, “I should introduce you to the director,” but then began to talk about something else. Finally, he confessed that he was extremely uncomfortable with administrators. “I get so nervous in front of him. I hate to call attention to myself.” Later during the week, one of Roberto’s colleagues, Lionel, offered to introduce me.

When we entered, the director was sitting behind an elegant mahogany desk drinking coffee. He invited us to move to a sitting area with leather couches and expensive looking rugs. After speaking briefly with Lionel, the director looked at my letter of introduction, asked me a few questions, indicated his approbation with a wave of his hand and said we could leave. I did not see him at any other time during my stay, and the teachers indicated that he never made an appearance unless there was a public event.

**Life History**

Roberto was approximately five feet two inches tall, with dark skin and thick black hair that fell in his eyes. Soft-spoken and gentle, he described himself as Kichwa, an indigenous person of the Andes Mountains with a language by that same name. Roberto’s connection to the indigenous community was central to his life, and during one of the interviews, he offered to
show me where he lived. We set off in his small battered truck with his six-year-old son, Ayar, between us. Roberto’s wife died when Ayar was a baby, and Roberto lived together with his parents on a small farm that had been in his family for many years.

After a 30-minute drive up a mountain, we turned into a narrow lane and parked. “It’s too muddy to continue. We have to walk from here,” Roberto said apologetically. Ayar was sound asleep on the truck seat, and Roberto carried him up the hill toward the three small brick buildings, each about 20 square feet. Roberto’s father appeared from behind one of the buildings carrying a scythe and a bundle of tall grass. He wore the traditional white pants, dark blue wool poncho and bowler-like hat and greeted me cheerfully, “hola hermanita” (hello little sister).

While Roberto put Ayar in his bed, Roberto’s father led me into the largest building which served as the kitchen, living, and dining room. A wooden bench rested on the dirt floor by the open fireplace, and as soon as I sat down Roberto’s father handed me a plate of roasted cuy (guinea pig) and homemade cheese. While we ate, I learned about the care and raising of cuy and some of the history of Roberto’s family and of the community.

When Roberto was young, he attended school in the village with other Kichwa-speaking children; however, at that time the use of Kichwa was prohibited by the teachers. Roberto related how difficult his school years were. “The teacher did not know Kichwa, and if he heard any of us speak it, the punishment was duro – very harsh.” Many of Roberto’s schoolmates tried to distance themselves from their native language as they progressed through the system. In contrast, Roberto said that his Kichwa heritage had always been at the core of his identity and that the power imbalance between Spanish and Kichwa made him more determined not to lose sight of who he was.
Because Roberto’s family suffered economic hardship as he was growing up, Roberto could not attend a traditional high school. Instead he worked all week on the farm and then commuted every Saturday to the nearest large city to attend the classes to allow him to earn a high school diploma. After being accepted at the university, Roberto continued to work long hours to support himself at school and help his family. He believed that these experiences contributed to his serious nature. “I have always had to work hard to meet my goals. If I am not serious, I will lose sight of what is important.”

Over the years, Ecuador developed a more progressive policy regarding native language literacy which included bilingual education in some schools. Before attending the ¡Aprenda! program, Roberto taught English for two years in a small indigenous village in which Kichwa was the primary mode of instruction for half of the day. After he returned from the ¡Aprenda! program, Roberto was surprised to be placed in a large Spanish-only high school. “I am a Kichwa speaker, and I expected to return to a Kichwa school.” Roberto did not yet have nombramiento, which would give him the security of remaining at one school permanently, and so he did not know where he will be working next year. Roberto hoped to be transferred to a Kichwa-speaking bilingual school, but there was no process for him to express this preference.

Teaching Identity

In the classroom, Roberto maintained a serious and focused demeanor. He gave students instructions in English, then repeated them in Spanish. When his students became noisy, he did not raise his voice; rather he stepped onto the dais and waited for the talking to diminish before continuing with instruction. Roberto went from one student to the next, checking homework and
making comments in a quiet voice. When students tried to crowd around him, he stopped and said, “I will come to you. Please wait.”

Although the students seemed calm and at ease, Roberto did not appear to know much about his students’ lives and interests outside of school or have many personal connections with them. He circulated and answered questions but did not engage in any conversations unrelated to the task. After assigning students to write out a list of vocabulary words, Roberto focused on the students asking for help. While most of the students worked either silently or in pairs, in each class three or four students remained sitting passively on the periphery. These students did not have books or other materials; they quietly doodled, stared into space or slept, and Roberto did not make any attempt to interact with them.

Later when we discussed the students on the fringe, Roberto visibly wilted. “Oh,” he said in a soft voice, lowering his eyes, “there are always some students who don’t bring the materials. I pay attention to the students who want to learn. There is no other way to manage.” His tone was resigned as he sighed, “I want to do what is right, I try, but I teach six classes and there are 35 students in most of them.” Roberto looked apologetic as he spoke, and his demeanor implied that he felt somewhat helpless to change the situation.

Throughout the week, Roberto periodically returned to the topic of the disconnected students, to whom he referred as “not motivated” or “not wanting to learn.” However, Roberto also expressed internal conflict regarding his management of these students. “I know this is not the best way, but what can I do?” Roberto said that he did not have non-participatory students in his classes in the school in the Kichwa community where he taught before the ¡Aprenda! program because Kichwa students did not isolate themselves when they were in school. He emphatically shook his head, “No, no, no, this does not happen. If a Kichwa student forgot the
material, he would sit with someone and follow along. To be alone on the side of the group, that is something I cannot imagine. It is not how things work in our culture.” Roberto seemed to be at a loss of how to respond to students who did not participate because this was alien to his understanding of behavior based on his Kichwa culture.

Despite his identity as a Kichwa speaker, Roberto did not ever use his home language at school, even with students who might have spoken Kichwa. “No,” he said, “I would not speak Kichwa in the classroom, not here. It could embarrass the students, or even make them a target for being bullied. In a bilingual Kichwa school, yes, but here it is not worth the risk.” He described his childhood and how it was forbidden to speak Kichwa in school. Roberto’s teachers saw Kichwa as a deficit, and students were punished severely, even beaten, for using it. Although Roberto acknowledged that using the home language could have been beneficial for students, he was not prepared to utilize Kichwa in the school.

Roberto considered the question of whether he felt uncomfortable being the only Kichwa faculty at his school. “The students, they never say anything to me, but sometimes they look at me, and I wonder if they are thinking, ‘Why is this indigena talking to me?’ And I feel that some of the other teachers think this too, but they never say it.” While the term indigena means “indigenous person,” Roberto explained that the word is frequently used as an insult, implying that a person is uncultured or unsophisticated, similar to the word redneck or hick in English. Roberto said if any students wore one of the colorful hand-woven jackets or ponchos like the ones displayed in the artisan markets, they would be teased relentlessly regardless of their heritage. Any style of clothing, hair, or speech that was suggestive of Kichwa culture was scrupulously avoided by students. “I am Kichwa. I am proud to be indigenous,” Roberto stated, “but many people do not feel this way.” While Roberto reported that no one had ever made a
derogatory remark to him in his present school regarding his heritage, he believed at times that he was looked down on due to his status as an indigenous person.

Despite the prejudicial attitudes Roberto perceived in his current school, he said he felt more empowered since participating in the ¡Aprenda! program. While in the program, Roberto explained he gained a greater understanding of what it means to be an indigenous person from a global perspective. Roberto described the readings and discussions in the program, many of which centered on how language minority groups in the US often lack access to power. This resonated with his experience as a Kichwa speaker and led Roberto to question how indigenous groups other than the Kichwa fare in terms of access to rights and resources. Growing up in a Kichwa community, Roberto was always acutely aware of the distinction between Kichwa and non-Kichwa Ecuadorans and the oppression the Kichwa often face; however, he was not cognizant of the numerous indigenous groups in Ecuador and other areas of the world and the similar discrimination they also encounter. As part of a project in one of his ¡Aprenda! classes, Roberto researched the history and culture of indigenous groups in Ecuador and was astounded by the breadth of diversity as well as the commonalities.

Growing up in my community, there were Kichwa speakers and Spanish speakers, and the Spanish speakers ran the schools and the government – that’s all I knew. When I was in the US, I studied about other groups that struggle to have power. For example, there are people in Ecuador in the selva (jungle), the Shuar, and they have their own language, but their children are sometimes afraid to speak it because of discrimination. Now I see the connection between indigenous peoples and the struggles for the right to speak our language and to have opportunities in our country. I feel part of something bigger than just my community.

Before participating in ¡Aprenda!, Roberto saw the imbalance of power as a uniquely Kichwa problem. However, in the program, he became aware that other minority language speakers around the world are frequently at a disadvantage in terms of access to power and resources.
Self-Efficacy

In the classroom, Roberto gave all routine instructions in English, such as “open your books,” “take out your paper,” and “use your dictionary.” This was clearly as established routine, and the students did not seem to have any trouble understanding him. When students began an activity that was new, Roberto said the directions in English, but then repeated in Spanish as most of the students gave him quizzical looks.

At the start of a new lesson, Roberto stood on the dais and presented the new vocabulary, pronouncing each word and asking students to repeat. The lesson of the day in the textbook was on the rules for pronouncing the “ed” in past tense. Some students seemed to have difficulty hearing the differences in the variation between the “t” sound of “walked” and the “d” sound of “rained.” Roberto repeated the words several times to help students develop a feeling for the sound and also has them put their hands on their throats to detect the voiced versus unvoiced consonants, a strategy he learned in ¡Aprenda! The students frowned in concentration as they struggled to produce the correct sounds. One student repeated the entire list of verbs correctly with Roberto and broke into a grin as Roberto and several other students applauded.

Later, sitting in an empty classroom, Roberto talked about how much his skill in English increased through the ¡Aprenda! program. He said that when he taught English previously, he only utilized grammar. This was in part because it was how Roberto had learned English himself. As echoed by the other teacher-participants in the study, Roberto stated that all his English classes had used grammar translation. Roberto nodded vigorously and then pushed his hair out of his eyes,

Yes, it is hard to believe, I could really not even speak one word. I had almost never heard English. We had no television or movies in my communities, so I didn’t really
know how English sounded. I knew very little vocabulary too. We could not have talked in English like this before I was in the program. This really changed for me because I use English in the classroom for my students every day.

Previous to his participation in ¡Aprenda!, Roberto lacked basic English skills, making it difficult for him to read or understand spoken English. His improved skill was clearly a point of pride and something he believed added value to his teaching.

The halls were generally silent in Roberto’s school during the afternoon session, and a walk around the school revealed students sitting quietly copying notes from the whiteboards. The only sounds came from classrooms in which teachers were lecturing; student voices were conspicuously absent – except in Roberto’s classroom. Here, many of the students conversed with Roberto or with each other while they worked creating personal vocabulary dictionaries. Roberto said that allowing students to speak in class was a radical departure from his educational training and experience.

In all my time in school, I never spoke unless the teacher called on me to recite. But in the ¡Aprenda! program, I observed students having debates and discussions, and at first this seemed crazy, but after some time watching this in the public schools and in the ¡Aprenda! classes, I could see that this is a better way to learn because the students are much more interested and connected with the material.

Roberto offered students opportunities to speak during his classes. They interacted and many approached Roberto to ask questions during the lesson. Roberto saw this style of teaching as being inherently more interesting and engaging for students.

Another facet of the ¡Aprenda! program that Roberto discussed was the shift to incorporate of a variety of strategies and activities. He encouraged students to work cooperatively in pairs when reading and writing and made use of student generated visuals. During a lesson with the 12th graders, Roberto handed out paper and instructed the students to make a small picture to represent each vocabulary word. The vocabulary related to the reading
on the history of women’s voting rights and included challenging words such as “suffrage,” “strike,” and “amendment.” Roberto then asked the students to fold and tear the paper so that the pictures were separated. Students then used the pictures to create a rebus style story, in which pictures took the place of the vocabulary words. This activity expanded into the next day, and when the students finished, they shared their vocabulary stories in pairs. Roberto was pleased with the students’ work and smiled as he looked through the finished papers after class.

This kind of activity really makes a difference in the learning. See? (He points to a paper) they are really understanding the words, like suffrage. When I taught this lesson from the book before I was in the ¡Aprenda! program, I don’t think the students really got the idea because I was just writing notes on the board and they were copying, but now with them doing the activities, I see them develop.

Roberto recognized that he taught in an entirely different manner than before he was in the ¡Aprenda! program and noted the improvement in how students comprehended the material through the use of pair work and drawing pictures related to the text.

Personal Reflection

At 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, I climbed on a bus headed out of Riobamba. Even at such an early hour, the terminal was crowded. In front of the bus, a young couple embraced tearfully, while a few feet away an extended family was bidding farewell to a middle-aged woman. She tottered up the steps in stiletto heels, wiping her eyes and carrying bags of presents.

When we pulled out of the station only 30 minutes late, the bus was half full. However, once we left the city and headed over the mountain pass, we stopped every ten or fifteen minutes to pick up Kichwa passengers, most of them lugging bundles of handwoven or leather goods for sale in the market. As more and more indigenous people boarded the bus, they recognized friends and began to laugh and joke among themselves, and I was treated to the sounds of
Kichwa conversation. At 10 am, we reached the colorful town of St. Peter, with brightly tiled roofs and houses painted in all the hues of the rainbow. Many of the passengers gathered their wares and hurried toward the marketplace, and I wished that I had time to stay and visit this place that drew so many visitors.

As the much emptier bus resumed, I found myself thinking about Roberto. I wished he had been there, interacting with the other Kichwa on the bus. During the short time I spent with him at his family’s house, I had gotten a small glimpse of a more confident, comfortable part of his personality that did not come out in observations or interviews at school. The night before, we had met for coffee to say farewell. Roberto told me, “You must come again when I’m in a Kichwa school, then I will show you more about my people, more about me.”

Paloma
“I learned the vocabulary to express my ideas.”

Paloma’s school lay in a densely populated neighborhood near the center of Cuenca, a city of approximately 300,000 in southern Ecuador. There were roughly 700 students total, with Kindergarten through sixth grade sessions in the morning and classes for the upper grades in the afternoon. The two-story building was shaped like a U around a large open cement area used for physical education. Beyond the tall wall containing this area, the surrounding mountains of the southern Andes were visible.

Next to the white painted iron gates, amidst groups of chatting girls clad in navy blue and green plaid skirts and boys hastily tucking in white shirttails, a teacher approached and offered to help me. Upon learning my identity, she broke into a beaming smile, kissed me in typical
Ecuadoran fashion, and took me by the arm. “Oh, yes, we heard about you,” she exclaimed as we moved toward the office.

The principal’s office was behind the teachers’ workroom, simply furnished with a battered wooden desk, a few chairs and a file cabinet. “I have been expecting you,” the principal said as she rose. “Paloma is already in the classroom, but I will take you to her. Please feel welcome and at home.” As we passed the entrance again, an armed guard with a large padlock secured the front gate. “No one can enter unless they have a reason. I check that every visitor has a right to be here,” the principal stated. The gate remained locked until 8:00 p.m., by which time students were bouncing around like puppies eager to quickly get home for the late evening meal.

The siren had not yet sounded to signal the beginning of classes, and the students were milling about the room chatting while Paloma looked through papers on the desk. As soon as we entered, students scrambled to line up by their desks. “Buenas tardes,” the principal said, and the students responded in unison, “¡Buenas tardes, directora!” There was sufficient room for the 38 ninth graders, but not an excess of space. Two broken chairs were stacked in the back of the room. The wall were stark white, bare but clean, and the floor was clear of debris.

The windows were are closed, and the air was stuffy. “I would like to open the windows for a breeze,” Paloma explained, but then there is too much noise from the sports.” As if on cue, the physical education classes began their games. “Ready, serve!” shouted the teacher. “Get it!” “No – it’s mine!” screamed students. The classroom reverberated with the yells of the players and the occasional errant ball that rattled the windows, - the games were literally happening within a few feet of the classroom. Tennis shoes scuffled and smacked the pavement as the students dashed to serve and volley. Paloma and her students proceeded with the lesson, apparently accustomed to the din.
Life History

At five feet seven inches, Paloma was tall by Ecuadoran standards. Originally from the coast, Paloma was a Manaba, or a person from the province of Manabí, near the city of Manta. This area is known for its beaches and excellent cuisine but also for its grinding poverty. Paloma explained there were few opportunities for her in her hometown, and she knew in high school she would have to get a scholarship if she wanted to study at the university. “My parents didn’t have the money to support me, so I focused on being the best student I could.” After she graduated from the University of Cuenca with a teaching degree, she decided to remain and live on her own. This was unconventional in Ecuador, as most people, especially women, remained with their parents until marriage. She said that most of her childhood friends did not even consider pursuing an education. “They only thought they could do what their families were doing, so they didn’t dream very big.” Paloma related that her life experiences taught her that obstacles can be overcome. “I am not a native speaker of English, but I have learned because I worked hard. I tell my students to work hard at what they want, and they will be able to do it.”

On Saturday morning, Paloma met me in the main square of the city. It was the beginning of Corpus Christi, a regional holiday, and vendors selling mountains of candy sat behind hundreds of tables set up around the perimeter of the plaza. People waved away bees as they filled baskets with all manner of sweets made with fruits, coconut, peanuts, and chocolate. Several tables even had tiny white chocolate guinea pigs, modeled after the roasted cuy that was so popular in the mountains.

Paloma stopped to buy candy from a vendor from the coast. He was a fellow Manaba, and they discussed the problems of life in Manabi for a few minutes. Paloma walked away from
the stand looking dejected. “Life is so difficult on the coast. So many buildings have been
destroyed by natural disasters; there is little work – that’s why people from the coast are coming
here to sell candy.”

Paloma led me past the 500-year-old cathedral of Cuenca. The enormous structure cast a
shadow that pleasantly blocked the intense equatorial sun. We rested on a bench in the park
facing the cathedral, and Paloma talked about her life. “I didn’t do things I was expected to. My
parents are not academic, so everyone was surprised when I wanted to study, especially when I
decided to go so far away. The mountains are like another country for coastal people. And then I
stayed here!” Paloma chuckled softly but looked slightly defiant. “I am a very independent
person,” she explained. “I love my family, but I want to live my life, and I can do that here on
my own.” Paloma said that being single and independent allowed her to pursue her passion for
travel. “If I lived with my parents, I would not be able to go to so many places because I know
that every time I started planning, they would have 1,000 reasons why I should not – ‘it’s too
dangerous’ or ‘it’s too expensive’ – but because I’m on my own, I just go ahead and do it.”

Paloma described how important exploring the world is for her. “When I travel, I learn so much
– about myself, about other people and places. I feel so happy when I’m traveling, or even just
planning travel.”

To further her opportunities, Paloma worked from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. every day
teaching Spanish to adults in a private language school in the center of the historic district. As
soon as she finished her last lesson, she boarded a public bus, which took her to her school on the
other side of the city by 1:00. There she bought lunch in the school canteen and was ready to
teach her first class at 1:30. School ended 8:30 p.m., but it took her at least an hour to get to her
apartment. On the weekends, she taught linguistics at the city university. It was a hectic schedule
that necessitated tremendous energy and planning but allowed Paloma to earn the money she needs to pursue her passion for travel.

Teaching Identity

In her English classes, Paloma gave the instructions in English and then waited to see if students asked for clarification in Spanish. Her presence in the classroom was commanding yet elegant; she spoke with authority but did not raise her voice. When she was not explaining material or giving instructions, she circulated continuously among the groups of students.

In one of Paloma’s classes, she began by drawing an example of a graphic organizer of a circle within a circle on the board. She asked the students to first copy the image and then work in small groups to come up with words relating to peer pressure, which she said to put in the middle circle. Paloma told them to put consequences of peer pressure in the outer circle, which students then connected to the inner circle. Later they expanded the connections into topics and phrases and wrote short essays based on the ideas they generated.

Paloma explained that she designed this lesson to tap into her students’ knowledge and experience, and she referenced the term funds of knowledge as an important concept she had learned in ¡Aprenda!

I always try to use students’ funds of knowledge. When I learned this term, something clicked into place. I felt like this was the piece I had been missing. What I did before was very traditional. I was very organized and I always knew the material. But many students did not connect and did not really learn because I had not considered who they were – what they brought with them.

Paloma consciously implemented a funds of knowledge perspective. Since the program, she did not subscribe to the ideology of students as empty vessels waiting to be filled; instead she saw the value of the students’ experiences in learning English. Paloma pointed out, “I never used to
consider what my students already know as an academic tool, but now I help them use what they know to connect to the content.” Paloma actively remembered and utilized the term deficit versus funds of knowledge because it expressed a concept she had suspected was key in learning but had not understood how to put it into practice until participating in ¡Aprenda!

The next day, as she downed a quick espresso during a break in her morning job, Paloma explained how the experience in ¡Aprenda! led to improved relationships with her students.

One day I had a student who was sleeping in class. Before I would have said, “pay attention!” but instead I asked her how she feels, and she told me her little sister has been sick, and she is helping her mother in the night with the baby. And I just say ‘I hope the baby feels better soon.’ And then she smiles and sits up and really tries hard. And we have a good relationship now, and her schoolwork is better than it was. I think it took some of her stress away, and she now learns better.

Because Paloma exhibited compassion and a desire to understand rather than blame the student for circumstances beyond her control, the student felt more motivated because she perceived that Paloma valued her on a socioemotional level rather than only academically.

During a short break between classes, Paloma pulled out a stack of research articles on education that she found on the internet. Paloma explained that she wanted to read as much research as possible to learn more about theories of second language acquisition. As she packed up her materials for the next class, Paloma described her desire to add to her understanding of both learning styles and teaching strategies.

In the ¡Aprenda! program I learned so many ways to vary my instruction. But there are many more things now I want to know, and I think this is never going to stop. I see that a teacher always needs to be learning. When I finished my master’s degree, I thought, “Now I’m done with school!” ¡Aprenda! made me see it is a beginning.

Paloma indicated that her teacher identity changed through her desire to develop new skills and understanding. This shift in identity also impacted how Paloma used English in the
classroom. Although she already had a high level of English when she started the ¡Aprenda! program, Paloma had previously not made a practice of using much English during instruction.

Because my students are relative beginners in English, I didn’t really speak too much with them. I thought that they had to have a base before exposing them to oral language. Then I noticed the ESL teachers in the US schools speaking a lot with their students, and the students weren’t always speaking, but they were understanding, and I started to think that, yes, my students can learn a lot more if I speak to them.

Paloma’s hesitation to use English in her classes before ¡Aprenda! seems to have stemmed from two misconceptions. The first was that students needed to learn grammar before they could communicate in English. The second was the idea that she should not allow herself or her students to utter incorrect English. Paloma described how an incident in one of the ¡Aprenda! classes altered her perception that she needed to be infallible.

I learned to laugh at my mistakes, and this was a big thing for me. In the linguistics class, I was trying to say “minimize,” but the teacher thought I said, “mini-mice,” and then she looked so confused and drew a picture of a mouse on the board, and we all laughed so hard when we figured out the misunderstanding, and in this moment, I could see that language is about trying to make connections, not about getting it perfect every time.

Paloma’s recounting of trying to say a word and then laughing when the mistake was discovered showed a shift in Paloma’s perception of teaching.

Self-Efficacy

Paloma said that in the ¡Aprenda! program she realized the importance of empowering students in her classroom. To do this, she began to pay attention to the dynamics of power conferred through language and her place in the hierarchy of English speakers. Paloma recalled hearing the term Englishes for the first time and described how the concept of the inner, outer and expanding circles of English impacted her thinking.
I have studied English, and that gives me some privilege, but I don’t have the same status as a native speaker from England or the US. And a person from India doesn’t have as much status speaking English as someone from those countries. I never knew this word [Engli(s)hes] existed, but as soon as I heard it, I knew I would be able to talk about certain issues that I hadn’t been able to express before. I learned the vocabulary to express my ideas in this way.

Paloma felt that the ¡Aprenda! program classes have enabled her to more fully conceptualize and articulate her perspectives regarding language and power.

While in the ¡Aprenda! program, the Ecuadoran teachers also read about the impact of status on learning outcomes. Paloma said she was given the message growing up that success was purely a result of personal perseverance, guaranteed to anyone willing to work. While a strong work ethic can certainly contribute to success, Paloma said that the discussion made her more fully aware of something that she felt unconsciously: that access to power is unequally distributed and can greatly affect individuals’ achievements. She explained how she saw this situation involving indigenous people in Ecuador.

A Kichwa speaker doesn’t have the status that a Spanish speaker has, and it makes a difference how people are perceived. The indigenous people, the Kichwa speakers get treated in a very demeaning way sometimes. Once on a bus, the driver got out all our luggage and handed it to us except for the indigenous woman. Her son had to crawl into the luggage compartment and get it. This was before I was in the program, but I remember it, and now I would say something. I would challenge the driver. And I told my students about this and this has led to some class discussions about injustice in our country and what we can do about it.

Paloma conceptualized herself as being part of an intentional step to make students aware of power dynamics and to try to understand their place within this system. In addition, she integrated conversations related to language and power into her English classes to further this goal.

Paloma also felt more effective in her English classes due to the strategies she learned while in the ¡Aprenda! program. One strategy Paloma made extensive use of is cooperative
learning through both pair and small group activities. Paloma explained that cooperative learning provided an opportunity for students to have a voice in the classroom. She explained that she wanted her students to be able to talk about the academic tasks to deepen their learning. “My students in their groups talk as they do their tasks, and this helps them to process the information. I used to think that talking was bad, but now I require them to talk.”

At the beginning of many classes, Paloma utilized a think-pair-share activity. One afternoon she started the class by asking her 12th graders to reflect on the word *punishment*. “Just think of everything you can associate with this word,” Paloma instructed. After a few minutes, she directed students to share their associations with their partner. Next, Paloma gave them a question to reflect on – *What is the purpose of punishment?* Again, the students discussed their ideas in pairs. Paloma used the think-pair-share to build up to the story the group was going to read, *Thank You Ma’am*, by Langston Hughes (1958), in which a woman takes a young man who tries to steal her purse home and feeds him instead of taking him to the police to be punished.

In the past, I just assigned the story and the students would read silently, then answer questions. The advanced students could do a good job, but a lot of the students didn’t really get what the story was about. Now, I ask them to talk about the concepts before they read, and this gets them thinking, and when they read they are able to grasp the deeper meaning.

Paloma believed that the cooperative activity set her students up for success by activating their knowledge through reflection and discussion.

In another class, Paloma utilized a jigsaw activity with cooperative groups. The 10th graders were required to read an article on factors related to global warming. Paloma broke the reading into four sections. She assigned each student one section, and all the students with the same reading met in small groups. After 20 minutes of group reading and discussion, the students formed new groups of four with students responsible for explaining the section they
studied in their expert group. Paloma explained that by using this activity, students practiced not only reading, but the skills of explaining and asking for clarification. “They have to depend on each other because all of them are responsible for all of the material, so at each stage they have to clarify what they know. They learn that if they can explain something, they understand it. If they can’t explain it, then they need to go back and study more.”

Another strategy that Paloma used in her English classes was making students aware of linguistic similarities between languages through cognates. Because English and Spanish are closely related, there are many cognates. Paloma used cognates instinctively for many years in her own approach to learning English, but it had not occurred to her to formalize the use of cognates into a pedagogical strategy because she had assumed it was too simplistic.

There are so many words that are almost exactly the same, but they sound different, like corpulent and corpulento. I thought ‘students must already see this.’ But then I read an article while I was in ¡Aprenda! which studied groups of Spanish speakers learning English. They found that by teaching students to look for cognates, the students can score higher than native speakers on vocabulary and reading comprehension! But this was only the case when the students were instructed on how to search for the cognates, so I realized I can’t assume my students see this – I have to teach them.

Paloma said her students had learned the procedure of searching for cognates between English and Spanish. She described how she infused this practice into her teaching. “When we have a reading, I first have the students go through and list the words that they think are cognates between English and Spanish, and then they realize that almost half of the words in the readings are cognates.” Paloma found that this strategy also had a positive impact on her students’ ability to apply English outside the classroom. Paloma said, “Sometimes the students tell me about things they read or hear in English when they’re in the town or on the city bus, and often they can understand a lot of it because they recognize the cognates.”
However, Paloma said sometimes there were cognates the students did not recognize because they did not know the equivalent word in Spanish. She described how the word enigma came up in an article in the 12th grade English class. None of the students were familiar with this word, which is exactly the same in Spanish. “I told my students, today you get a special deal – two new words for the price of one. It’s our class joke, but what is really great is that this improves their Spanish vocabulary, too.” Paloma believed that not only did the study of cognates help her students understand and use English in the classroom, it also empowered them to apply their knowledge of English in other situations.

**Personal Reflection**

When I was not with Paloma, I roamed the streets of Cuenca, sometimes referred to as the jewel of Ecuador because of the elegant colonial architecture. Whereas in Riobamba, I was the only “gringa,” the downtown of Cuenca was full of North American and European tourists. Consequently, many of the restaurants and businesses displayed signs in English, French, and German, catering to the tastes and desires of tourists. I strolled by a Belgium brewery, a French bakery, an Australian night club, and a vegetarian sandwich shop run by Canadians just in the span of a few blocks. While searching for a place to type my notes, I wandered into a tiny café that advertised free wifi and homemade brownies and met Bill, from New York. He had just opened the place a few weeks earlier but had lived and worked in Ecuador for several years and was full of interesting tidbits of information. Since my hostel did not have internet, Bill’s became my substitute office for the next few weeks.
Esperanza

“I think that the most important thing that I learned is to be a human being with my students. To be more humble and tolerant and patient so that I can change the education in my country.”

The deep ruts gave the dirt road the look of a washboard. “The rains have been very bad this year, it makes the streets just terrible,” the driver said apologetically as he slowed down to a crawl, the taxi bumping up and down like a rowboat in rough water. We drove so slowly that an elderly woman on foot carrying a basket of laundry on her head passed us. Finally, we pulled up in front of a gate with the word Escuela (school) - in large faded blue letters.

Esperanza’s school was only 10 miles from Cuenca, a city of over 300,000, but had a distinctly rural feel. A cow calmly peered from a yard across the street and chickens wandered leisurely in front of the school gate. A tethered goat near the entrance munched thistles while a few dogs dozed under a tree.

The school gate stood partly open to admit the entering students. There was no sign indicating the direction of the office, but a small group of middle school aged students on a bench leaped up to guide me. They peppered me with questions as we maneuvered across the courtyard between clusters of children kicking around soccer balls, wanting to know where I was from, what it was like in the US, and why I was visiting their school. The students brought me to a large room on the second floor filled with small mismatched tables facing the center of the room. The principal immediately jumped up from her desk, took my hand, and announced to everyone in the room, “This is the teacher from the US, the one we’ve been waiting for.”

Esperanza appeared in the doorway moments later, slightly out of breath. She had arrived later than normal due to problems with the public bus, she explained as she gathered her materials for her first class of 35 sixth graders. Similar to Paloma’s school, the classrooms
surrounded a cement area used for physical education. However, the room on the second floor where Esperanza started the day was high enough that shouts of students and teachers in the physical education classes below were only faintly audible. The second-floor classroom windows looked out over a neighborhood of small cinderblock houses, with tiny yards and abundant vegetable gardens brimming with corn, beans, squash, and tomatoes.

At 4:00 p.m., classes halted while students and teachers took a 20-minute break. Back in the office, a teacher names Dolores handed me a *humita* – a warm steamed corn muffin wrapped in a banana leaf – and a cup of hot chocolate. “We each take turns with the snacks every day,” Esperanza told me. “This school has a wonderful community of teachers – I’m going to miss them so much,” she sighed. The following year Esperanza was going to be moved to a different school - not her choice nor the choice of the principal. Esperanza explained that her placement could be significantly farther from her house, and she dreaded a long and difficult commute on public busses. Esperanza said that if she could not tolerate the commute or did not like the school, her only option was to quit and leave public school teaching altogether, as the system did not allow teachers to choose their schools.

**Life History**

Being a teacher was Esperanza’s goal since she was eight years old. Ironically, she was inspired by the teachers in her school who were harsh, and she told her father, “I will be a teacher, but I will be different. I will be kind.” In contrast to many of the severe teachers, Esperanza recalled that her high school English teacher was very sweet, and this gave her the idea of studying English.
Although her family was poor, Esperanza reported that her parents, particularly her father, supported and encouraged her to study. However, instead of going directly to the university, Esperanza married young and started a family. Unlike many traditional marriages in Ecuador, her husband encouraged her to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher, and she began taking classes soon after her son was born twelve years ago.

After finishing her English degree in Ecuador, Esperanza worked in a private school for two years before applying for the ¡Aprenda! program. Before traveling to the US, she had never been in a public school. “My family didn’t have much money growing up, but we still went to a school run by the church – very strict. So, I was really scared about teaching in public school. I think the ¡Aprenda! program gave me some courage to try this.”

Teaching Identity

Outside the classroom, Esperanza gave the impression of a sweet but somewhat timid person. However, upon entering the classroom, her presence became more serious and commanding. Although she did not raise her voice, she gave directions with a quiet seriousness her students respected. Throughout the day, Esperanza carried her portable projector and laptop with her and began each class by playing a few videos of simple action songs in English. The students, regardless of age, sang and went through the motions of “head, shoulders, knees and toes,” and “the ants to marching” without complaint. After the musical warm-up, Esperanza presented the content and language objectives on the board by using her LCD projector. “Class, please read” she instructed the students to read the objectives chorally.

Esperanza explained that before participating in the program, she had accepted as normal the traditional teaching style she learned in her training in Ecuador. She had believed that
memorization was a cornerstone for learning and the teacher’s job was to ensure that students learned facts by heart.

The students memorize, recite, memorize, recite. This is how I learned – sometimes I didn’t learn, but I thought it was my fault. I never thought to question the way the teacher does it. I see now this is not the best way to learn. That was my understanding, and that is how I wanted to be. Now I see I am not that way, I cannot be that way.

However, in the ¡Aprenda! program, Esperanza said she began to examine at her role as a teacher with a more critical lens. Esperanza repeated the phrase “I cannot be that way,” several times during interviews and conversations whenever she mentioned the topic of traditional teaching. Each time she uttered this phrase, she punctuated “cannot” forcefully and shook her head and reiterated her conviction that the role of a traditional teacher was not right for her.

Esperanza often spoke about a shift in her identity. Before participating in ¡Aprenda!, she believed her only role was to impart information. In contrast, when she returned to Ecuador, she perceived herself as someone who was a force for positive change in education in her country. Esperanza believed that the change was most likely to occur when teachers valued students as individuals and treated them with respect. She pointed out that one way she worked to fulfill this goal was to acknowledge in front of students when she made mistakes.

I think that the most important thing that I learned is to be a human being with my students. To be more humble and tolerant and patient, and so I learned that I can change the education in my country. To show that teachers don’t have to see themselves as above the students. I want my students to know I admit my mistakes and I am a still a good teacher. I think this gives the students confidence in me because I am human with them. I think when the teacher treats the students in this way, it will affect how those students treat others and they will have children who will go to school or maybe some of them will become teachers. It is very slow, but I think it is in a good direction.

Esperanza subscribed to the idea that teachers should be willing to admit mistakes and even use them as teachable moments. She expressed hope that by modeling respectful behavior, her
students would emulate this example in how they raised their own children or how they would behave if they entered the educational profession.

In interviews, Esperanza frequently referred to the fact that she perceived her students differently after participation in the ¡Aprenda! program. She said that it had never occurred to her to consider the impact of her students’ experiences outside of school on their success in school. Esperanza related how she felt when she first began to pay attention to the lives of her students and became aware that several of the families were struggling with serious problems at home such as drug and alcohol abuse and depression. During the interview, Esperanza had to stop several times while talking to take a deep breath and a drink of water before she could continue.

At first, I thought that it was too much – I can’t solve these problems. I thought maybe I should quit teaching – there is just too much wrong and what can I do? But then I start thinking back to conversations we had with our teachers [in the ¡Aprenda program], and I remember how they encouraged us to just keep trying to make a difference that even if we just help one student, that can change the world in a good way.

Upon her return from the ¡Aprenda! program, Esperanza explained she wanted to advocate for her students. However, she felt that many of them needed support beyond what a teacher could provide, so she decided to involve her husband, Patricio, who was a psychologist. Although he had only done individual therapy in private practice, Patricio also had a desire to work with marginalized youth on a larger scale, and he became caught up in Esperanza’s vision to support her students. One evening after school over locro con aguacate (potato soup with avocado), Esperanza and Patricio discussed the evolution of their collaboration, and Esperanza related how she had the idea to start a support group for students.

I decided to see if Patricio could work with a few students once a week. I asked the principal and she said OK, and then I gave a short announcement in my classes that anyone who wanted to join in a weekly support group about how to get through difficult time, they should talk to me outside of class. I thought maybe it would be three or four students, but by the end of the day, forty students had asked to join the group.
When the principal, whom Esperanza described as a dedicated and supportive leader, saw the degree of student interest, she used some of her budget to pay Patricio to continue this project. Patricio explained that he had been running four groups a week at the school ever since. “There are so many students in some really difficult home situations and the students need a way to process. I can’t fix their home lives, but I can help them understand that this is not their fault and help them learn some coping strategies.” Esperanza described the positive changes she had noted and one student in particular.

Julio is very often angry. He disrupts the class by bothering other students until the teacher has to send him to the principal. And then the principal sends him home, which of course does no good, because the adults in his life are not responsible people. But a few weeks ago, instead of acting out, Julio came up to me quietly while the class was working and said, ‘can I just go outside for a few minutes, I need to calm down,’ and when he came back in he was quiet and able to work.

Patricio nodded as Esperanza related this and added, “Yes, we had spent a lot of time in group problem-solving about ways to deal with anger, and Julio really internalized this. He talked about this when we met the next time and got a lot of positive feedback from the group.”

Esperanza and Patricio said they hoped more such groups could be offered in public schools. Patricio explained that he and some fellow psychologists were planning to make a petition to the regional superintendent of education to propose a program for offering support groups for students in the entire province. “I would be so happy if this could happen,” Esperanza stated quietly but firmly. “I think it is one of the ways to change education for the better in our country.” Esperanza believed she became more aware of the needs of her students, which led her to implement supports that contributed to her students’ success.
Self-Efficacy

Esperanza perceived her efficacy as a teacher was positively impacted in ¡Aprenda! because she learned the benefit of continuous professional growth. In general, the opportunities for professional development for teachers in Ecuador are extremely limited. Esperanza told me public school teachers were neither required nor encouraged to further their education and that school districts did not often provide these opportunities. Esperanza described how participating in the ¡Aprenda! program increased her desire to learn more about pedagogy as well as other subjects related to education. Because she did not have money to pay for a higher degree program or study outside of Ecuador, Esperanza found resources for professional development on her own. She told me how she used the internet extensively to further her learning.

I am reading about social interactions and ways to help students. My husband was surprised that there are so many good research papers, but he doesn’t read English very well, so I read the papers and translate for him and then we talk. I also am searching every day for new ideas and new strategies for teaching language.

Esperanza explained that she began the practice of seeking information on the internet while attending the ¡Aprenda! program. “Sometimes I remember we would have a question that our [¡Aprenda!] teachers didn’t know the answer to, and then they would say ‘I’ll do a search,’ and also sometimes they would share things that were relevant and explain how they had found them on the internet.” Esperanza noted her ¡Aprenda! instructors’ practice of using the internet as a tool for professional learning was a useful example of modeling that she emulated when she returned to Ecuador.

The topic of using the internet as a tool also emerged when Esperanza discussed some of the communicative activities she used to help students with listening and speaking skills in
English. During one class, Esperanza created a structured speaking activity using idioms such as “easy as pie,” and “piece of cake.”

The book only gives sentences for students to fill in the blanks. I want the students to actually practice communicating, so I searched for activity ideas on the internet. I found a video on how to teach Spanish idioms, so I just adapted it. I told my students to prepare a short conversation using these expressions, and they will present it to the class. This practice helps them use these expressions and understand in context.

In the classroom, the students appeared nervous as the first pair presented a short conversation with idioms. However, they became more animated as the presentations progressed and appeared to enjoy themselves as they went through the presentations.

Esperanza attributed another aspect of her improved efficacy to the activities and strategies she learned in ¡Aprenda! When she was training to be a traditional teacher, Esperanza stated that she was taught that teachers should lecture, assign work, and grade. In contrast, the concept of incorporating engaging activities became an integral part of Esperanza’s teaching practice when she returned to Ecuador. As she examined the stack of mini-books one class had made, she became quite animated in her enthusiasm. Esperanza emphasized that the students needed the visuals to learn and when they created these books themselves, they processed the ideas better. “They also take a pride in making them. They really know what the words mean, and even from last year the students still have their mini-books and they tell me ‘teacher, I’m still studying, I don’t want to forget.’” Esperanza believed that the students’ engagement and ongoing use of the materials they made in her classes were evidence that the strategies she was implementing were effective.

Esperanza also believed the strategies she learned in ¡Aprenda! helped her to activate students’ background knowledge. These strategies included using music and drawing in the classroom, another aspect that strengthened her identity as a non-traditional teacher. Esperanza
described how she adapted activities to her students’ interests, which allowed her to learn about them while they processed the material. “Sometimes I use some music. I have one student who hates to read aloud, but he will rap! And when I invite him to rap in English, he tries! Sometimes the principal says, “Esperanza, you have to use the textbook, don’t forget.” But I shut my door and I do what I know will help my students.” By varying her instruction and incorporating personalized instruction, Esperanza leveraged the students’ strengths so that they learned more effectively.

Another notable aspect of Esperanza’s class was her use of content and language objectives for the lessons. At the beginning of each class she used her projector to present them on the board and read them chorally with the students. She was the only teacher-participant in this study to share the objectives with students in class, although all the teachers had been instructed to do so in ¡Aprenda! Esperanza explained, “I think this really helps my students know what I expect them to do. I never saw anyone do it until I was in the US. And then I thought, how will I do this? Because you know, we move every hour. But then I decided to buy my own projector, and that makes it possible.” In addition to this, because the teachers did not have a secure location to lock up valuables, Esperanza had to carry all her technology to and from school each day. Despite this significant inconvenience, she planned to continue this practice for the benefit of her students.

Personal Reflection

Although Esperanza’s school was miles from the town, I managed to get there every day on time. The first day I took a taxi, but after that I figured out how to get within a half mile of the school by public bus and walked the remaining distance. Having grown up on a farm, I felt at
home walking down the dirt road, listening to the country melody of roosters, cows, and goats.
Although I did not choose farming as a profession, I felt an affinity with the women tending their
gardens, and a few times I felt tempted to join them weeding the rows of corn and beans.

I did not have the same pastoral experience my first time trying to find Carmen’s school, which was located on the north side of Cuenca. I had looked up the address on my computer while at Bill’s café and made what I thought was a reasonable map. However, it was apparently insufficiently detailed. The driver went up one street and down another, stopped a pedestrian who shook his head, waved down a fellow taxi driver who shrugged and said he did not know, and even called his brother-in-law for advice. The driver and I had set a price before setting out, so I knew he was not trying to overcharge me – he simply did not know how to find the school. Finally, we stopped at a bakery, and the young woman at the counter said her cousin attended the school and gave us confident directions. Back in the car, we zoomed up and down several impossibly narrow streets, and voila! We arrived only five minutes late. As I got out of the car, the driver beamed and wished me an excellent stay in Ecuador, hoping that everyone would treat me with great care and respect.

Carmen
“I think teachers should never be staying the same. I see that this is the exciting part of being a teacher.”

The afternoon session at Carmen’s school started at 1:30 p.m. At 1:35 p.m. the gate was locked tight with no one in sight and polite knocking produced no result. Across the street, an elderly woman with long gray braids wrapped around her head stopped mopping her steps and yelled, “You have to bang really hard, and keep doing it until they come.” She nodded vigorously and continued smiling and pointing at the gate until I started pounding.
After a minute, the principal appeared with a huge ring of keys and unlocked the enormous padlock. She took me by the hand and greeted me warmly, “We are so glad you are here. I am the director, please make the school your home.” As she led the way across the grounds, children in blue and gray sweat suits cavorted around the concrete play area. A teacher blew a whistle, and they scampered to stand along the blue line at the edge of the court. In many ways, the scene was typical of the other schools in the study. However, an obvious contrast was the many black Afro-Ecuadoran students among the various hues of tan and brown skin. As we moved toward Carmen’s class, the principal discussed the changing demographics in the neighborhood that were reflected in the school population. Afro-Ecuadorans from the coast of Ecuador were moving to Cuenca, drawn by jobs in the factories near the school. Many of these Ecuadorans traced their ancestors back to 1533 when a slave ship heading to Peru ran aground on the Ecuadoran coast near what is now the city of Esmeraldas. The slaves escaped and established a settlement, which became a haven for other escaped slaves. Since then, the city of Esmeraldas has remained a predominantly Afro-Ecuadoran community.

Carmen was writing a list of vocabulary words on the whiteboard when we entered. The children rose and stood by their seats as Carmen embraced me and presented me with a handwoven Ecuadoran scarf in rainbow colors. “Children,” she said, “please greet our guest!” “Good morning, teacher!” the students chanted in unison.

Carmen took my arm and said, “Let me show you our school!” She saw me hesitate and laughed, “It is no problem. This is their classroom – we teachers are the ones who move.” Carmen stood in front of the class and addressed her sixth graders, “Please copy the vocabulary words and write a definition, a picture, and a sentence for each one. If you have questions, work
together and help each other.” The students started pulling out notebooks as we walked out of the classroom.

A petite person with long brown hair and dark eyes, Carmen resembled a high school student. As she led the way across the grounds, she explained that instead of having primary grades in the morning session and secondary grades in the afternoon, her school had two separate clusters of buildings, each with its own central courtyard for physical education. Bubbling with energy and enthusiasm, she introduced me to all the classes, kindergarten to fifth grade, and each time she followed the introduction by saying, “Let’s sing now!” Without fail, the students jumped up and bellowed a rousing chorus of “This Old Man, He Played One,” along with the classroom teachers, who did not appear to mind the interruption.

As we continued to walk, a small sturdy woman with gray hair and a cheerful smile trotted up behind us. “This is Luz, the other English teacher; we are a team!” Carmen beamed. Luz joined the school at the same time that Carmen returned from the ¡Aprenda! program. In contrast with Carmen’s effervescent energy, Luz radiated calm. They were aware that their styles were very different and saw this as a strength. “Carmen is like a little whirlwind,” explained Luz. “She gets the students really excited about the subject.” Carmen added, “and Luz, she reassures them – they are so relaxed and confident with her!”

Originally, Luz was officially the teacher of the primary grades in the morning and Carmen was in charge of English in the afternoon in the upper grades. However, Carmen and Luz developed a schedule of team teaching, working a mixture of mornings and afternoons. This schedule was not typical in public schools, but they said their principal was an open-minded person who liked to give teachers the freedom to be creative. Carmen explained, “Luz really likes to do speaking activities, and I prefer to do reading activities. I also do the music with the
younger students, so this way all the students get to see us both.” With the secondary students, Carmen made use of the official textbook, particularly for vocabulary. “The students need to know this vocabulary for the government tests at the end of their senior year.” She explained that the scores on their senior exams determined what university they entered, what they studied, and if they received a government scholarship. Carmen also guided them in reading stories that she incorporated into speaking and listening activities with Luz. Carmen and Luz had both received nombramiento and were happy they would be able to continue as a team.

**Life History**

“I always wanted to be a teacher, even when I was small because I always loved children,” Carmen explained. “But I didn’t have the idea to teach English until I was 11 years old and met an Australian.” Carmen stated that this traveler became friends with her father, who could speak a little English. Carmen loved to listen to the Australian talk, but the fact that she could not speak with him herself was so irritating that she vowed to learn English, not just well enough to speak, but at a level that she could teach English to others.

Carmen shared that English turned out to be difficult for her. “Some people have a talent, a gift for languages, but not me. English was my hardest subject.” Carmen said she needed to study more than many of her school friends to comprehend the material. “I was not the smartest student,” she relates, “but I think maybe I was the most determined. If I got a bad mark, I went over and over until I understood.”

Carmen’s family was very traditional, and it was difficult to convince her parents to let her study at the university, especially because it meant that she would have to move out of her parents’ house. She said, “I talked a long time to my father and mother, and they finally could
see that I was determined.” Because her family did not have money, Carmen needed to win a scholarship to study, which she was able to do with much effort and dedication.

In Ecuador, Carmen lived in a modest house about seven blocks from the school with her husband, eight-year-old daughter and ten-year-old son. This was Carmen’s fifth year teaching at her school. While she loved her workplace, she was not happy with the neighborhood. Looking uncharacteristically solemn, Carmen shared that her house was broken into a few weeks ago. “Someone just pulled out the hinges! My children and I were at school, my husband at work – fortunately I had my laptop with me, but they took my husband’s computer and many other things.” Carmen said the police had not found the thief and did not expect to since such burglaries were common in her neighborhood. While she would have preferred to live in a safer area, it was not financially feasible for her family.

Teaching Identity

Before participating in the ¡Aprenda! program, Carmen believed that individual student circumstances were irrelevant to the teaching process. She said if a student had a serious behavior problem in school, the teachers could inform the principal, but generally whatever happened with students outside of school “wasn’t our problem.” However, in the ¡Aprenda! program Carmen discovered the value of understanding the background knowledge and experience of students. Carmen recounted how she decided to give her students a questionnaire to try to get to know them. She had never done this before and was not sure that the students wanted to share information, but she found that students were eager to tell about their lives.

I was amazed! I learned about some of my students struggling with some really big problems, but I also learned wonderful things about my students. One of the girls cooks in her uncle’s small restaurant, and she loves it, and she says her goal is to become a chef
and have her own restaurant! Now I can relate some information in the vocabulary to things that she knows!

Carmen spoke passionately of how she used knowledge about her students’ backgrounds to validate them culturally and linguistically. In the questionnaire, Carmen found out that some of her students spoke a language other than Spanish at home and began to invite them to share their home language in the classroom. Carmen described how one Kichwa-speaking student responded.

At first, she was very shy, but the students were really interested, and now she does not hesitate. And when we did a presentation in front of the school, she decided to wear her indigenous clothes! And I think this was a really big step for her, to acknowledge her culture, and it is wonderful for the other students to know this! She used to be so quiet, and now she is sharing a lot of things about her family, and she seems to feel so comfortable in the class, and now she is learning English so well!

By asking her to connect her Kichwa vocabulary to English, Carmen modeled respectful behavior for the other students, who in turn became interested in Kichwa. After taking this step, the student shared her Kichwa identity more publicly.

Carmen also discussed ways that she connected academic materials to students’ lives through activities the students personalized. She explained this was a radical departure from her previous understanding of teaching. During class, Carmen’s students made mini vocabulary dictionaries, and she explained why this was significant.

I think students also need more variety, and we can make the dictionaries or other visual aids different shapes and colors, and they love this, and it helps them make different associations with different sets of vocabulary words. And the other really important thing is that they are very personal. Each student’s dictionary, whatever shape it takes, contains personal connections for that student, things they associate with the vocabulary or the story.

Carmen felt that this personal aspect of instruction was essential in her teaching style because it helped students take ownership in the classroom.
Another aspect of her teaching identity that Carmen perceived as having been impacted by the ¡Aprenda! program was the way she viewed herself as a leader within her school community. After she came back from the program, Carmen held several informal discussion groups at the school about how to tap into students’ knowledge. Carmen talked about how some aspects of her school changed for the better through her influence. “There are some teachers, not all of course, but some who are really excited about this way of teaching. They tell me that the students are learning better and are more interested, and this makes everyone more happy to be in the classroom.” Carmen also spoke about how other teachers were interested in the activities and strategies she learned in the ¡Aprenda! program and asked her to demonstrate what she learned. “I showed them how I do personalized vocabulary activities, and I emphasize that you can use the information to build on the students’ knowledge, and they seemed really surprised to be thinking about what students already know.” Carmen explained that several teachers were using some of these activities in math, science, and language arts.

Carmen shared that one of the math teachers put one of the strategies into practice in a geometry lesson. Instead of just giving the students formulas for finding area, she first asked students if they had ever made anything and if so, how they had they figured out how much material they needed. Carmen sat on the edge of her seat as she described the story enthusiastically, “And she was amazed! The students had so much experience and really good ideas! They had built furniture and made clothes, and they had lots of ideas about how to figure out what they needed.” Carmen laughed as she said that some students just made things until they ran out of materials, while others said they formed estimates, and there were even several in the class who figured out the math to calculate exactly what they needed. Realizing that her
students already possessed a wealth of information, the math teacher decided to change the approach to the unit to make use of her students’ knowledge.

Helping other teachers value students’ backgrounds was particularly important because of the changed demographics of the neighborhood. Carmen pointed out that the traditions and habits of Afro-Ecuadoran students from coastal Ecuador were often different than the students whose families were from the mountains. Linguistically, the Spanish of the coast contains words and grammar from African languages spoken by the slaves brought to Ecuador by the Spaniards, while the Spanish spoken in the Andes is more likely to have words borrowed from Kichwa. Some of the teachers in Carmen’s school at first tried to discourage the Afro-Ecuadoran students from speaking their dialect in favor of what these teachers perceived to be more correct Spanish.

Carmen said she explained to her colleagues what she had learned in the ¡Aprenda! program regarding the status of language variations and discussed the racism – sometimes inadvertent, other times more blatant – that accompanies the subjugation of one variation of language over another. “I told them, we cannot take away these children’s language – it keeps them connected to their families. And I said that it is a racist thing to do – and this is very strong language for me!” Carmen described how she tried to make this personally relevant to the teachers at her school.

I pointed out how our Ecuadoran Spanish is different than Spanish spoken in Spain or Mexico. For example, in this part of Ecuador, we call our babies “gua guas,” which is from Kichwa, and this is normal for us. That made an impression because we Ecuadorans are very proud of our Spanish and our vocabulary. And now, I think the other teachers look at the different dialects of the students as an advantage for our school instead of a negative.

By engaging in conversations regarding the Afro-Ecuadorans’ linguistic variations, Carmen helped the other teachers in her school consider the students’ perspectives.
Self-Efficacy

One of the results of Carmen’s time in ¡Aprenda! was her perception that the amount of English she uses in class increased. She attributed this not only to her improved ability in English, but also to her changed understanding of the role of communication in the language classroom. Traditionally, language teachers in Ecuador have relied almost exclusively on grammar translation as a method of teaching. Carmen stated that communication was not a goal in the language class when she was a student; instead students were expected to be able to conjugate verbs and diagram sentences. She told me that this has led to many students completing degrees in languages such as English or French without being able to hold even a simple conversation.

In contrast, Carmen utilized English throughout lessons, sometimes repeating instructions in Spanish, and then again in English. There were established routines in Carmen’s class in which English was utilized, such as the morning greeting or the instructions for activities. Because they practiced certain phrases on a daily basis, the students developed a comfort level with English. The students formed and responded to simple questions in English, such as “What are your hobbies?” “Who are the people in your family?” and “What do you think of the president of the US?” Carmen related that this communicative approach had not always been the standard in her class.

Before the program, I never spoke English! Can you believe that? It was all grammar, grammar, grammar! This is the traditional way of teaching, but also I was not confident in my English speaking. In my grammar - yes, but I would not have had the courage to try to talk to a class in English. Now I see that speaking is essential because the language class should focus on communication.
Carmen’s experience of teaching English only through grammar in her earlier language education was the model she had used prior to attending the ¡Aprenda! program, but she changed the way she structured the language use in her classes.

When she first began teaching, Carmen believed that she knew everything she needed to know – this is what Carmen had been taught in her education program, and she saw it as the dominant mindset in the educational community in Ecuador. Carmen told me that many teachers in Ecuador used the same lecture notes for years without changing or varying the information or the delivery, even if the information was obsolete. She shook her head as she gave an example, “In one geography class in my high school, the teacher used quotes about population that were 30 years old! But he had his lecture that was the same every year since he had started, and he didn’t want to do anything different.” In contrast, Carmen constantly learned and perfected her craft. She explained that this perspective kept her fresh and excited about teaching.

I think teachers should never be staying the same. I see that this is the exciting part of being a teacher, I can always be learning something new, not being bored always doing the same thing. And this makes me a much better teacher! I think one of the worst things about teaching is seeing teachers who don’t have joy. They become negative about the students, and then they are just waiting to retire or die.

Carmen indicated that an intrinsic part of her effectiveness was in her openness to change.

While in the ¡Aprenda! program, Carmen encountered many different types of classroom activities, both in the classes in which she was a student as well as the classes she observed in public schools. Carmen said using hands-on activities and small group work to teach concepts was a new revelation for her. “I don’t think I could have imagined this if I had not experienced it,” Carmen related, “I thought you just always tell the students what they must know.” However, through her experiences in ¡Aprenda!, Carmen realized the limitless possibilities for teaching content.
In the beginning Spanish class I observed at the high school in the US, I saw the teacher using a song to teach the days of the week, and I thought it was so useful and interesting, but then I saw another teacher using mind maps, and it was different! And then we did think-pair-share in our methods class, and it was so much more interesting than a lecture! I started to see that you can make an activity for any concept if you just take the time. Through exposure to a variety of activities, Carmen said she learned how valuable hands-on learning and group work were in education.

One way Carmen varied her instruction was by utilizing music in her classes. “I’ve always loved music and singing, but it never occurred to me that I could use this in the classroom!” Carmen used songs to teach vocabulary and sentence structure with her younger students. For example, one day in her sixth-grade class, Carmen wrote the lyrics to the children’s song *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. She clarified the new vocabulary words and then put students in small groups. Carmen directed the students, “Please invent motions to go along with each of the vocabulary words in the song.” After ten minutes, each group of students presented a unique version of the song in front of the class. The students invented a surprising number of ways to act out the monkeys bonking their heads, and the results were hilarious. Everyone was wiping away tears of laughter as the last group finished and the class ended.

Carmen described why using songs made her feel like a more effective teacher. “I like activities like singing with movements because it gives them energy and helps them learn better. And they remember the words in the songs, like ‘little’ and ‘jumping’ because they know them from the context of the song.” Carmen believed that her teacher efficacy improved by better understanding how to use activities to engage her students.

Activities also helped students make connections between the lessons that Carmen and Luz taught. In one 11th grade class, Carmen worked on point of view with students. She asked them to read *A True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989), a short story that is a
variation on the traditional three little pigs fairy tale. In the variation, the wolf tells a different version of what happened. As the students read, Carmen asked them to circle key phrases that showed the point of view of the different characters, which they compared with their partner’s. One student explained, “See here, the wolf says that he had a cold, and he sneezed by accident.” Carmen told me that Luz planned to expand by using a paired speaking activity in which students acted out the part of the pigs or the wolf. Carmen perceived her repertoire of activities as a valuable asset that made her more effective both in her ability to instruct and coordinate instruction with her teaching partner.

**Personal Reflection**

*On my final day at Carmen’s school, the students presented me with handmade cards containing good wishes such as “Have a very fine journey,” “Thank you for coming to Ecuador,” and “I think you are happy to see your home again, but we will miss you.” I told them I would miss them as well and promised to tell my ESL students in the US all about them. “Tell them that Ecuador is beautiful, don’t forget,” said a sixth-grade girl with long black braids solemnly.*

*That evening, I walked downtown, taking my usual route past the university and crossing the bridge over the Tomebamba River before climbing the steep hill that led to the central plaza by the cathedral. As usual, the square was full of activity – on one corner a guitarist strummed flamenco music while on the opposite corner two violins played duets, and in the center a dance group was performing to the music of flutes and panpipes. The moon was bright, and I could see the faint outline of the mountains on the horizon as I headed to my favorite cafe one last time. In*
the morning, I would leave Cuenca, my home for the last three weeks, and travel southwest to
Monica’s city.

Monica

“I see myself now as a person who can impact how my students understand their choices
in the world.”

The small town of 20,000 in which Monica’s school was situated was nestled halfway
between the Andes Mountains and coast. There were two public schools in the town – right next
to each other on the main street. Monica’s grandmother related that there had been a
disagreement between some of the administrators 20 years ago, and so they divided the school
into two separate units. Students were randomly assigned to one school or the other, and Monica
believed that the quality was essentially the same. “It does seem strange,” she admitted, “but I
never thought about it until you asked me because it is just part of this town’s personality.”

The school of 800 students K-12, like everything else in the town, was built on the side of
the mountain. The grounds offered a panoramic view of the terrace style plots of corn and quinoa
which dotted the slopes descending to the valley. Instead of enclosing a courtyard, all the
buildings faced east in straight line along the slope up the hill with steps between every few
rooms. The teacher workroom and school office sat in the middle directly across from the front
gate. Next to this was an area for PE with raised cement seats used during presentations.

There were still 20 minutes before the second sessions started, and Monica stood in front
of the gate chatting with two other teachers. In her late twenties, she was slightly built with
shoulder-length light brown hair and freckles. In some ways she looked delicate; however, the
determined set of her chin and the serious expression on her face indicated her intense nature.
“You’re here, excellent, come see the office and meet the students,” she said as soon as we all
exchanged greetings. The other teachers laughed as we walked across the courtyard, “Monica is all business,” said one. Monica smiled at this, “Yes, I know, there is always so much to do!”

We entered the teacher workroom and Monica began showing me the lessons for the day. Just then the principal appeared in the doorway. “Thank you for coming – it is a wonderful opportunity for our students to meet someone from another country,” she said. After the principal left, Monica said thoughtfully, “I have so much respect for her. She always emphasizes that everything we do has to be for the best of the students, and she encourages us always to find new ways to help and motivate them.”

Later, Monica announced a light meal was being served for all the teachers during snack break. At 4:30 p.m., 30 or so teachers sat at long tables in the meeting room while aproned women served roasted chicken and plantains. She explained that the principal often organized special events for the staff to show her appreciation of their work.

Life History

Monica’s mother taught at a large public high school 30 miles away, and her father had just retired as a science teacher from the same school. Growing up with teachers, Monica said, made her not want to pursue education at first. “My parents never seemed to like their jobs. They complained a lot about the students, and now my mother is just waiting until she can retire. It was not very inspiring.”

Later at her parents’ house, Monica’s mother talked about teaching. “If I could be young again,” she stated, “this is not the profession I would choose. The students are not interested in the material. The administrators only care about test scores. My principal says all the time, ‘assign more homework,’ but he doesn’t say how to get the students to do the homework.”
Monica’s mother’s comments reflected the traditional teaching that many of the teachers in this study described as the dominant model in Ecuador.

Monica told me that it was her grandmother who encouraged her to study English and to consider teaching. Although her grandmother was not a teacher and did not speak English, she offered to pay for an English course in a larger nearby city after Monica graduated from high school. The course was through a private language school run by Canadians, and Monica described how the teachers seemed to enjoy instructing the classes. “They were all so passionate about helping their students. I had never experienced learning as fun and interesting, and I thought ‘I could do this,’ and so I decided to become an English teacher.”

Monica lived with her grandmother in a small village not far from her school. At 90 years old, 4 feet 11-inch-tall Abuelita (grandma) Rosa was the beloved matron and undisputed boss of the family. On the weekend, the family gathered at her house to make panela (brown sugar blocks) and Rosa directed the entire process from her rocking chair on the porch. Monica’s father and uncles cut the eight-foot stalks of sugar cane and put them through the press to extract the juice, while Monica’s cousins tended to the syrup boiling in enormous shallow pans on the fire pit. Monica and her mother poured the thickened syrup into molds to harden into blocks that were sold by local businesses.

Rosa explained that she thought learning English would open new opportunities for Monica, which is why she had encouraged her to pursue language study. “When I was a little girl, we didn’t have much communication with anyone beyond our village, but now people are traveling on planes and using computers, and I think that our Ecuadorian young people need to keep up with this.” When Monica had the opportunity to participate in the ¡Aprenda! program, Rosa again encouraged her to expand her knowledge through study and travel.
Before participating in ¡Aprenda!, Monica had taught for two years in another public school in the region. Upon her return she was placed in her current assignment. Monica hoped to stay in the same school next year, but since she did not have nombramiento, she did not know what would happen. “They can put me anywhere, up to like an hour and a half, and I don’t have a car, so this is bad. I can only hope to stay.”

Teaching Identity

By the time Monica graduated from the university in Ecuador, she had a solid grasp of English grammar but felt limited in her ability to communicate. Part of this was a lack of practice in speaking English. Monica said she never had a professor who spoke English in the classroom; the classes were only about grammar. She related a tale about an Ecuadoran professor of English at her university who Monica said had practically run out of the classroom when a fluent English speaker had tried to converse with him.

It was not only limited exposure to English that had held Monica back, but her concept of what an English teacher should be. As an Ecuadoran, Monica had assumed that she would teach grammar and translation because that was the model with which she had grown up. However, Monica continued to think about her experience in the private language school that had been so positive. Although this was the type of teacher she wanted to be, Monica explained that she had believed it was not possible to be an engaging and communicative teacher because she was not a native English speaker. She was dissatisfied as a teacher before participating in the ¡Aprenda! program because she felt no connection to the students and they were disengaged in the classroom.
When I first was teaching in the traditional way, I thought, maybe I can’t do this so long. It’s so boring. The teaching was not really about the students, just, here is the book, do your lecture, assign the work, and the students learn, or they don’t. I used to feel like I am teaching a room full of plants in pots, because they are sitting and sleeping, and me too!

Comparing her students to plants shows how strongly Monica perceived her students’ lack of interest in the class. It also illustrated the limited scope in which she saw her students. She was aware that her students were bored, but she did not have a mechanism to change this as a traditional teacher.

Monica had assumed that a large part of the reason her private course instructors had been successful in making English enjoyable and understandable was their status as native English speakers. Monica could not initially visualize herself as being an equally successful English teacher. “I wanted to use English, but I was afraid of making mistakes, and I thought this would be a disaster for my students. And in a way, I thought, ‘Do I even have the right to speak a language that isn’t mine?’ At this point, Monica believed that the key to teaching was to be a native speaker, and since this was not a role she could assume, Monica saw herself as having a lower status than any native speaking teacher of English.

In the ¡Aprenda! program, Monica practiced English skills and became comfortable with the idea of making mistakes and described a life-changing realization that she did not have to be a native speaker to be an effective teacher. This came about through her observations of high school teachers giving lessons in Spanish.

In all the levels of the Spanish classes the teachers were speaking Spanish with the students. None of these teachers were native speakers, but they did not seem embarrassed, and they spoke to me in Spanish in front of their students! When we were talking later, I asked, ‘What if you make a mistake,’ and they said, ‘No big deal, just fix it and move on.’ This was the beginning of a new mentality for me, because I realized that I can identify myself as an English speaker even if I make mistakes. Every day now I speak in English so they [the students] have real skills to communicate.
With this new understanding, Monica began to visualize a new identity for herself as an effective Ecuadorian English teacher.

Another facet of change in Monica’s identity was how she learned to see herself as a teacher who empowered her students. Monica said most families with any money to spare generally sent their children to private schools, so students in public school were likely to come from extremely poor families. These students often perceived their options in life as very limited, but Monica wanted to change this.

I see myself now as a person who can impact how my students understand their choices in the world. I recognize more now the privilege that money and education give you. My students, their families have no idea how the system works. They don’t know that there are scholarships and opportunities for grants and education. And sometimes they don’t see that they deserve help. This I can help change.

Monica supported and encouraged her students to feel entitled to have the same rights to an education and a career of their choice as any child coming from a background of privilege.

Because Monica was determined to empower students, she paid particular attention to students with disabilities, whose privilege was by definition even more limited. The school had no special education services, and it was up to each individual teacher whether to modify instruction. One of her eighth graders, Bryan, was deaf, and this posed challenges for lesson instruction. However, instead of looking at Bryan as a deficit, Monica chose to value him as someone with experiences that could be used to facilitate his education.

One afternoon in Bryan’s class, Monica presented the vocabulary for the lesson, which related to health concepts. She drew pictures on the whiteboard with every vocabulary word and before proceeding, she waited for a subtle nod from Bryan indicating that he understood. Things were moving along smoothly until the word “cholesterol.” Monica’s stick people had worked well for the words ‘heart,” “fat,” and “thin,” and although she tried to add clogged arteries to her
drawing, the effect did not quite work, at least for Bryan. Monica preferred to keep the


descriptions of vocabulary in English, but when students had difficulty understanding, she


supported with Spanish. However, writing and saying the Spanish word, “cholesterol” did not


appear to succeed in helping Bryan understand the concept. Undaunted, Monica addressed the
class. “Let’s talk more about this word. Everyone please take a paper from your notebook, draw
or write for three minutes everything related to cholesterol – what you know and your questions
too.” Although Bryan did not yet understand what cholesterol is, he understood it had something
to do with the heart, and that is what he drew.


After they finished writing, Monica asked students to work in pairs to share and explain
what they had written. Bryan read lips in Spanish and shared his work by pointing and writing.
Students switched partners two more times and Monica glanced at Bryan. This time he nodded
and held up a picture that included a brief explanation of the concept. Through interaction with
his peers, facilitated by Monica, Bryan had mastered the concept.


Later that night over a glass of sugar cane juice, Monica talked more about Bryan,


gesturing expansively with both hands. “He knows many things, I have learned that he is a very

interesting person! If I just tell him to read and fill in the answers in the workbook, I never see

this side of him, but when he can answer open-ended questions, he can write or draw responses
that illustrate a lot about himself.” Monica showed me a vocabulary quilt the class made the
week before. Bryan had created an impressive list of tools in Spanish and English, along with
detailed pictures. Through this activity, Monica learned that Bryan’s father was a mechanic and
that Bryan liked to do repair work as well.


Knowing this information not only allowed Monica to relate content to a topic with
which Bryan was familiar, it also made Monica aware of a skill of which Bryan was proud.
Whereas during class, Bryan was usually somewhat timid and unsure about academics, when working with his hands Bryan demonstrated self-confidence. Monica told me about how a few weeks earlier a spring mechanism in the blinds in the teacher workroom had broken. None of the teachers thought it could be fixed, but Monica took the blinds to Bryan, who took the spring apart and repaired it during the break. Monica related how the teachers thanked and complimented Bryan and started to refer to him as the boy who fixed things instead of the deaf boy. By reinforcing Bryan’s ability rather than his disability, Monica helped empower Bryan to feel successful in the school setting.

Self-Efficacy

Monica believed that she was a more effective teacher since participating in the ¡Aprenda! program because she made it a practice to understand students’ backgrounds used this information to illustrate points in the lesson. Monica explained that before ¡Aprenda! she had not considered or recognized her students’ knowledge as a resource. “In a way, the students were irrelevant. Now when I consider what strategy or activity to use, I consider how my students will respond. Students are more motivated using different strategies and activities and this makes teaching fun - this is essential.” To illustrate how she tailored the lessons, Monica described how she taught students to apply the word, “afford.” “I ask them, ‘If the price of sugar cane goes up, can you afford to buy it? Can you afford to make panela?’ This always gets their interest because in this area many people support themselves by making panela.” By using examples that students understood, Monica made the concept relevant and allowed students to apply the vocabulary to their own situations, creating a positive environment in which her students thrived.
In addition to background knowledge, Monica said she also considered students’ perspectives about school. Because of this, students often shared ideas with her regarding activities. Monica described a situation involving students who wanted to initiate a garden project.

Two students came to me, very timidly, and wanted to know if we could have a little garden at school to make the environment more beautiful. I think they were expecting that I would say no, but I said ‘ok’ and now we have this little bed of flowers. Since then, these girls are really acting like leaders in the class, and they talk to me about ideas for the school and their dreams for the future, and I think this helps them feel really good about school and about themselves.

While working on this garden, Monica said she discovered that one of the girl’s parents owned a small green house, so she already knew quite a lot about plants. The other girl explained that she loved to have beautiful things around her and flowers in the school made her happy. Monica stated that creating this small garden energized her students and helped them to feel a sense of connection and leadership.

Monica noted that the methods she learned in the ¡Aprenda! program also helped transform her into a more effective teacher. She acquired many strategies, such as cooperative learning, and a large repertoire of activities that she continued to augment. As an example, in one class of 11th graders Monica utilized group work to practice the lesson of comparatives and superlatives. First, she showed students a picture of three houses, with the words, “big, bigger, biggest” underneath. Monica then put her students in groups of three and asked them to come up with five comparisons of their own. After the groups presented their ideas, Monica expanded this by having the students formulate compound sentences and she wrote a sentence frame on the board to guide them. “_____ is tall, _____ is taller, _____ is the tallest.” Monica explained that the students incorporated the conjunctions (and, or, but) that they had worked on earlier. The
next day Monica began with a variation on this activity, using _____ runs _____. _____ runs_____, but _____ runs the _____, as a sentence frame. However, she required students to incorporate other verbs from previous lessons and encouraged the students to use real life examples and illustrations. By building their skills sequentially and utilizing the support of group work, Monica ensured that her students had a feeling of success as they mastered English. Monica believed that this approach of actively engaging the student in learning was a force behind her effectiveness.

**Personal Reflection**

*Monica’s small town had one restaurant. A wall in the back contained an enormous stone brazier filled with white hot coals over which 15 or 20 rotisserie chickens rotated. The owner, Fernando, and his son were constantly in motion removing the crispy brown chickens, chopping them into sections with giant carving knives, serving plates of chicken potatoes to waiting customers, and then adding new birds to the spits.*

*One evening toward the end of the week, as I was finishing my meal, a group of teenagers came in, laughing and joking, and they reminded me of my ESL students back in the US; I reflected on the young people I had met in the various schools. Although I had been in Ecuador for five weeks, it still startled me a little when the students all rose as I entered a classroom. In some ways the Ecuadoran teenagers seemed more adult-like than their US counterparts – they had ownership of their own classrooms, in which they had a sense of ownership. But they were also more like children, in a positive sense. Few of them had cell phones, and I enjoyed seeing them pass their free time chatting and giggling rather than surfing the net.*
I also thought about the teachers and what we had shared in the past weeks. They had been unconditionally kind and welcoming, sharing their classrooms and time with unbounded generosity. While these Ecuadoran teachers had different strengths and weaknesses, they all displayed a passion for teaching despite some challenging circumstances. They inspired me, and although I was looking forward to returning to home, I felt sad about my impending departure.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the Ecuadoran teachers and their stories, as well as the findings of the first two guiding questions. In the next chapter, I present the third supporting research question.
Chapter 4 described the five Ecuadoran teacher participants and their schools as well as data related to the first two supporting research questions regarding identity and efficacy. This chapter discusses the third supporting research question: How did the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have been a community of practice?

The decision to situate the discussion of this research question in a separate chapter came about because of the similarities of the responses of the teacher participants collectively. These participants believed that the ¡Aprenda! program as a whole was not a community of practice (CoP). However, four of the teachers described how they created small CoP, which were significant for them, both during and after their completion of the program. The fifth participant, Roberto, did not believe he was part of any CoP, collectively or informally, during his time in the ¡Aprenda! program or since.

¡Aprenda! Community

The teacher participants in the study perceived themselves to have a goal of studying hard and learning as much as much as possible from the ¡Aprenda! program. However, they did not believe many of the other Ecuadoran teachers in the program shared this goal and reported disparities in the both the academic standards and overall attitudes among the other Ecuadoran teachers.
Academic Standards

Much of the disconnect that the teacher participants perceived existed between themselves and the other teachers in the program centered around their academic expectations. The ¡Aprenda! program included formal classes in English and educational methods that entailed graduate level reading and writing. The teacher participants said that the work was challenging, and they had to dedicate considerable time and effort to produce high quality assignments for each deadline. This aligned with the expectations they had when they applied to be part of the ¡Aprenda! program; as Esperanza recalled, “I told myself, Esperanza, you are here to work. And so, I studied so hard every day.” However, the teacher participants believed that many of the other Ecuadoran teachers were not interested in studying. Instead, they reported that many teachers avoided completing assignments by copying from others or pretending that they did not understand the material. These teacher-participants found this stressful because they worried it would reflect poorly on all the Ecuadorans as well as have a negative impact on the class environment for learning.

Esperanza discussed a major project she had worked on for weeks, carefully composing and editing. Despite the fact that this project required time to complete, one classmate did not start it until the night before it was due. “I felt mortificada because I think this makes all of us look bad and our professor will think all Ecuadorans are lazy. I wanted to say to the instructors, this is not what Ecuadorans are really like!” Esperanza did not want to be seen as lacking in work ethic, which is how she perceived some of the other Ecuadoran teachers.

Roberto also expressed concern about some of the other teachers. He explained that the assignments were very difficult for him, and sometimes he had trouble completing the work
correctly or understanding a concept. Because of this, Roberto was afraid that the ¡Aprenda! instructors might have thought that he was not putting forth effort. He shook his head when he explained how this affected him.

There were often times that other Ecuadorans didn’t complete assignments, and then they would say that they hadn’t understood, but I knew that they had been in the bar until late, so it was a lie. So, when I didn’t understand something, I felt that I appeared to be like those people – but that was never the case. I always did my work. But how to show this?

Roberto was concerned that the instructors might have thought he was making excuses similar to some of the other Ecuadorans when in reality he struggled with the material.

Impact on Instruction

Another point the participants noted was the impact of the less-motivated Ecuadoran teachers on the classroom instruction. Paloma said that when the other Ecuadorans did not do their work, it slowed down the class and was detrimental to her learning experience.

In the classes they [other participants] were not prepared, or they came late to class, or they didn’t come to class, and this was embarrassing for me and some others, and it made the classes difficult sometimes because the teacher had to stop and explain things for the students who didn’t complete their work. I just was, so…so angry and irritated, but I didn’t say anything because that would have just caused problems.

Like Esperanza and Roberto, Paloma felt distressed by the behavior of some of the other teachers. In addition, Paloma was angry that the ¡Aprenda! program instructor had to take class time to explain concepts to some of the teachers who had not competed the work. Despite feeling strongly about this, Paloma also reported that she kept her opinions to herself.

The teacher participants also stated that many of the other teachers copied assignments instead of doing their own work. Esperanza also believed these teachers were a drain on the group as a whole as well as on her personally. When a fellow Ecuadoran asked to “look at her
work,” Esperanza says she felt obligated out of politeness to comply, but she was unhappy with the situation.

In class sometimes the other Ecuadorans say, ‘oh, are you done with your project? Could I just look at it, not to copy, but just to see?’ And I say yes, but I know they are copying, and this is frustrating for me. They are not learning, they are wasting the money the government spends on us.

Esperanza recalled that the other teachers were not working toward the same goal as she was; she was also bothered that these teachers wanted to copy the assignments that she had worked hard to finish.

**Attitude**

Before attending the ¡Aprenda! program, the expectation of the teacher participants in this study was that all the Ecuadoran teachers would support each other. However, the teacher participants believed that many of the other Ecuadorans displayed negative attitudes through frequent complains and a lack of interest in collaboration.

**Complaints**

Carmen also agreed that many of the Ecuadoran teachers did not seem to be focused on working together to become better teachers, and she was unhappy with their dispositions.

Carmen wrinkled her forehead into a deep frown as she described the impact of her classmates on her.

Many of the teachers complained a lot…about the food and weather, and this constant complaining made everyone feel discouraged. They didn’t like the dorm, they didn’t like the classes, it was just all the time talking about these things. I was homesick, and this negative attitude was really hard for me because I was trying hard to be focused and be positive. And when I tried to encourage everyone to be positive and work like a team, people would just respond negatively, so I stopped reaching out.
Since Carmen wanted to succeed in the ¡Aprenda! program, she was willing to endure homesickness and other discomforts. However, she perceived many of the other teachers were intent on focusing on problems in the program. These negative attitudes had a profound impact on her because many of the other teachers were not responsive to her efforts to be positive.

**Lack of Collaboration**

Monica expressed a sense of regret that there was a lack of collaboration among the majority of the teachers. While Esperanza and Paloma were angry and embarrassed, Monica sighed wistfully about the lack of mutual support.

It made me really sad sometimes because I was disappointed in the experience. I thought, “Wow, all these teachers, I’m gonna learn so much from them,” and then they were just playing all the time. There were times when I tried to talk about my school, or I asked about their schools, but they weren’t interested in that conversation. If everyone had been there to learn, we could have done much more, studied together and helped each other, and so I think we all missed something.

Monica’s perception of the lack of a CoP was disappointing for her because she thought that the ¡Aprenda! participants would be people she would learn from. Instead she perceived many of the Ecuadoran teachers were not invested in mutual learning.

**Togetherness**

Throughout their time in the ¡Aprenda! program, the Ecuadoran teachers lived in the same dormitory in shared rooms and ate their meals and attended classes together. On a typical day, they would have ESL in the morning together with other international students from the university. This was followed by classes in culture, pedagogy and linguistics in the afternoon and evening that were designed and taught specifically for the ¡Aprenda! program participants.
During the time the teachers were not in class, they were bussed to local public schools to observe and work with middle and high school students.

Despite the fact the 37 Ecuadoran teachers spent the majority of their time together, the participants in this study did not feel that the program fostered a sense of community. Ironically, one of the factors may have been the quantity of time the teachers were with one another. The participants described the amount of time together as “overwhelming and limiting” and perceived that there were few opportunities to build relationships outside the program.

The teacher participants acknowledged that the ¡Aprenda! faculty made significant efforts to encourage community building; excursions and parties were organized for the Ecuadoran teachers. However, Paloma stated that the amount of time the Ecuadorans spent together built tensions among them. “Anytime I think you are only with one group, it is not healthy. Most of our time was scheduled together, and I think this built resentment, not just from me.” Paloma also said the ¡Aprenda! schedule curtailed exposure to cultural events at the university and in the community.

Sometimes I saw advertisements for concerts and lectures and I thought it would be fun and interesting, but I couldn’t go because I had to go to class, or I had to study. Our classes were very important, of course, but sometimes it was too much and I even thought ‘why am I even in the US? We could be doing these classes in Ecuador because there is no time for anything else.’

Paloma felt her options to do anything outside the group were very limited, and this reduced her opportunities to learn. This was paralleled in similar remarks by the five teacher participants: they wished they had had more time to explore areas of interest.

Roberto also lamented in interviews that he did not have opportunities to meet people outside the ¡Aprenda! program. Theoretically, the Ecuadoran teachers had been free to attend events in the community and on campus, but Roberto and the others felt that the reality of the
¡Aprenda! program was not conducive to developing outside relationships. Roberto hung his head and sighed as he described this.

That is my biggest regret – that I didn’t get to meet American people because this was a goal for me. And this happened because there was just no time. If I could have lived with an American that would have helped so much because then at least we could have some conversations. Or if we could have had classes with American teachers instead of Ecuadorans because when we did projects, we always had to be working with each other.

Roberto had the goal of meeting Americans, but the schedule and the living arrangements hampered this possibility. The result of this was a deep sense of regret that Roberto verbalized and that was also evident in his downcast demeanor when he spoke of this fact.

**Ecuadoran Context**

The teacher participants believed that the ¡Aprenda! program lacked specificity to the Ecuadoran educational system and that this impacted the sense of community negatively. During interviews, it was difficult at first for the Ecuadoran teachers to give any negative feedback regarding the classes in the ¡Aprenda! program as they clearly did not want to hurt my feelings. However, after much conversation, the teachers shared that they wished the classes had addressed their needs as Ecuadoran teachers more accurately.

Although the methods classes only included the Ecuadoran teachers, there was little contextualization for Ecuadoran schools; none of the ¡Aprenda! program instructors had ever been in a public school in Ecuador, nor had they been given an orientation on the Ecuadoran educational system. Carmen expressed the opinion if the instructors of the ¡Aprenda! program had known more about the Ecuadoran educational system, they would have been more helpful. She said, “Sometimes the teachers would talk about putting things on the wall, and we would look at each other because all the Ecuadorans knew that you can’t do this in Ecuadoran schools.”
Carmen stated that she also wished that there had been opportunities to talk about solutions for Ecuadoran problems, which the teachers perceived to be in many ways different than the challenges faced in US schools.

Monica reiterated this idea with regard to the content and language objectives that the Ecuadoran teachers were instructed to utilize.

I don’t think the instructors had really the idea of how our schools are. When I was in the US, every class started with our teachers showing the objectives for the day on the smartboard, and they always said that we should do this also. But that is not possible for me. I don’t have a smartboard, or a projector or anything like that. I teach in six different rooms every day, so if I write all of this down on the board, it takes the time from the material.

Monica said that she literally runs between classes not to lose instructional time, which meant that the practice of writing goals and objectives would compromise her lessons. Thus, many of the practices that were modeled for the Ecuadoran teachers were not feasible in most Ecuadoran schools.

Monica also pointed out that Ecuadoran public school teachers do not have the same access to supplies as US teachers. For example, teachers are not provided with computers or electronic smart boards. Even paper is a precious commodity that teachers either have to provide themselves or charge their students for. Monica recalled, “There were a lot of cool activities we learned, but we have to do them differently because the school doesn’t make copies for us – we have to pay for them, or make the students pay.”

The teacher participants also noted the ¡Aprenda! program textbooks were designed for teaching English as a second language (ESL) to English learners in US public schools rather than English as a foreign language (EFL) and that the examples in the book were set in US schools. In contrast, the Ecuadoran Ministry of Education requires teachers to use an Ecuadoran produced
text that is standard throughout the country. The teachers pointed out that it would have been helpful to make use of this textbook. Carmen stated, “Maybe we could have figured out some activities, and then we could have practiced these activities and seen how they could look in Ecuador.” Additionally, the participants felt that the textbooks advocated too much use of the student’s native language; in fact, the textbook warned against the danger of students losing their native language if not allowed to practice in the classroom. Recalling this during an interview, Esperanza raised her eyebrows and said dryly, “I don’t think anyone in Ecuador is worried about students here losing their Spanish.” This emphasis on native language was not applicable to the context of Spanish speakers in Ecuador learning English.

**Emergence of Smaller Communities of Practice**

While the Ecuadoran teachers did not feel that the program constituted a large-scale CoP, four of the teachers felt that they developed their own small CoP. These teachers – Carmen, Esperanza, Monica, and Paloma - perceived that the smaller self-initiated CoP in ¡Aprenda! provided them with vital academic and personal support during their time in the program.

**Beginnings**

The CoP began for these teachers with their roommates, none of whom were part of this study. Each of them perceived their roommates shared a common goal with them: to work hard and learn as much as possible from the ¡Aprenda! experience. To facilitate learning, the participants and their roommates worked together on academic assignments. Esperanza smiled as she recounted their efforts. “We made a study schedule, and we used to put a lot of things all over our room to help us learn, like the international alphabet, and also many vocabulary words –
it looked so crazy!” Esperanza produced photos of a dorm room with walls completely covered in vocabulary words and charts. “Here,” she said as she scrolled ahead to more photos. “This was our section on new expressions to learn.” With every new unit, they had redone the walls, adding and rearranging as they acquired new information.

The support that these roommates offered each other on a personal level was also significant in the teachers’ success in the program. This ranged from daily encouragement to direct assistance, which eventually evolved into a small CoP. Monica described how she became quite sick with the flu in the early weeks of the program. Her roommate helped her through this time by bringing her food and medicine and helping her keep up with assignments.

I had never lived away from home before, so I was really stressed. But my roommate, she was so comforting! She brought me food and medicine and helped me keep up with homework. And later we would go together to English-speaking events with some other teachers because we all wanted to practice our English and learn as much as we could. So, we supported each other to try new things.

Monica pointed out how her roommate cared for her during this stressful time when she was sick by supplying her with food and medicine and supporting her academically.

**Expansion**

The mutually beneficial relationship between the roommates eventually expanded to include two to three other teachers, forming four slightly larger CoP. Paloma described the interactions in her CoP.

The five of us met almost every day to talk about the lessons and the strategies. I think this was some of the best learning for me because these teachers had different experiences and we could talk about how to modify lessons. Oh, and a lot of times we had “English only” times at meals, or we got together to watch a movie in English. I think this really helped me too, and I could sometimes help others with some English words.
Paloma perceived that her CoP also offered her opportunities to expand her knowledge as well as share her expertise. Because Paloma had more English fluency than some of the other group members, she was able to assist with English assignments. Similarly, Esperanza felt that her CoP contributed to her success in the program. She recounted how the group members helped each other stay motivated. “We encouraged each other. Sometimes when one of us didn’t feel like working, the others would say, ‘Come on, you can do it,’” and then we would all feel more animated.” Esperanza also discussed her appreciation of the diverse teaching experiences she was exposed to in the group.

The other teachers had been working in the public schools, and I never had, and they shared lots of stories with me, and we discussed the differences between Ecuador and the US schools and how to adapt the methodologies and strategies we were learning. I know this helped me a lot when I came back to Ecuador and started my new job here.

This sharing of stories was particularly important for Esperanza. Because the other teachers had more experience, Esperanza felt she benefited by gaining a better understanding of how to apply what she learned in the program in her teaching practice. In this way, they provided their own Ecuadoran context and filled in some of the gaps in the program.

Without the support of her CoP, Carmen believed that she would have quit the program. Carmen described the night after she spoke with her young son who had cried and asked her to come home.

I thought I was such a bad mother. So, I got my suitcase out and started to pack my bag. My roommate hugged me, and then we both cried together, both of us missing our babies. But then she talked to me and said we must finish this, for the sake of our children, because we will be able to give them a better future. And so, I calmed down. And that night, some of the other teachers who were also feeling sad, we met together and talked and had a little support group, and it really helped me. Without this, I would have just taken a taxi to the airport and gotten on a plane!
Carmen’s example shows how powerful even a small CoP can be. Her roommate and the other teachers not only supported her emotionally, but also helped her remember her vision for why she had wanted to participate in ¡Aprenda!

CoP in Ecuador

Since experiencing a CoP in the program, albeit a small one, the teachers wished to establish this type of community in their Ecuadoran schools.

With Colleagues

Before participating in the ¡Aprenda! program, Carmen had not considered her fellow teachers in her Ecuadoran school as professional resources. However, since her return, Carmen intentionally worked to maintain a CoP with the other English instructor as well as with teachers of other subjects. Carmen perceived the CoP to have served as a model for a professional CoP in her Ecuadoran school with her fellow teachers.

Before the program I had good relationships with all the people, but we never collaborated. This never occurred to me because it is not a part of normal traditional teaching. But when I got back from the US, I was excited, and I was used to being in my little group, and I said to the other English teacher, “can we work together?” And she was really excited, and so we are meeting and working as a team. I think if I didn’t have this teamwork, my job would be so much more difficult, because I need to talk through my ideas to see how they will work, and sometimes she has really good suggestions that make the activities even better.

Although this is not the norm in Ecuadoran schools, the other English teacher was willing to work together. Carmen believed that both benefited from this interaction and noted that the activities she used were even better due to this collaboration.
Monica also said the experience with the CoP in the ¡Aprenda! program impacted how she interacted with her colleagues at her Ecuadoran school. After completing the ¡Aprenda! program, Monica returned to the English teaching position in the school where she had previously worked. She initiated a study group with the other teachers and suggested that they read a novel in English and meet weekly to discuss the book and practice their language skills. To her surprise, teachers from content areas other than English asked to be included. Monica said the group continued for the two years since she returned from the ¡Aprenda! program. Sometimes they read books in English, sometimes in Spanish, and Monica reported it brought the teachers together and gave them a common theme as a faculty.

I never would have thought of interacting with my colleagues this way before I was in the US. Normally teachers go right home after school, but now we are staying later and working on projects together and talking about many subjects related to school. When I work with my colleagues this way, it makes me excited about teaching because I get ideas when I’m discussing with other people that I wouldn’t have on my own.

Monica felt like the CoP with her Ecuadoran colleagues enriched her teaching experience, which helped her bond with the other teachers in her current school.

In the Ecuadoran Classrooms

In addition to strengthening relationships with colleagues, the teacher participants noted a positive change among their students due to the formation of CoP in their classrooms. Paloma said she saw a CoP develop in her current classes because of the changes she has made in her teaching style. Paloma discussed how the CoP she developed with the four other Ecuadoran teachers in ¡Aprenda! facilitated her learning and because of this experience, she was determined to establish a community in her classes to support them academically and emotionally.
I am much more aware of how students are functioning. I put groups together to work, and I want to see how they do together, what they accomplish and how they support each other. I also try to move people around so that the same students are not always working together. And then we also have whole group discussions about how we are doing as a class. We function like a little family.

Paloma pointed out that she intentionally grouped students to optimize their interactions and ensure that everyone was able to work and participate fully.

Esperanza also wanted to create the experience of being part of a CoP for her students and endeavored to support this in her own classrooms. Esperanza encouraged her students to write and produce a dramatic play in the homeroom class as a way of bringing them together. Esperanza said some of the students were nervous at first. “They told me, ‘let’s make drawings like we always do,’ but I told them, ‘here is a chance to work together and do something really different,’ and in the end, they all agreed.”

On the day the school presented the projects, Esperanza and her students gathered in the cafeteria. At first, the students huddled nervously in a corner. Finally, they climbed onto the stage, the lights dimmed, and the room grew quieter. It was a little difficult to hear because there is no sound system, but a few of the students managed to project their voices, especially the narrator, who spoke in clear, ringing tones that he accentuated with facial expressions and hand gestures. That evening after the play, Esperanza talked about how important the experience had been for her students.

You know - the boy who played the narrator? He has a serious speech impediment - it’s really hard to understand him. But in the play, he spoke perfectly! And also, he has had many difficulties with behavior, but that seems better. I think for the first time he feels like he has a group, that he belongs somewhere.

Although the student struggled with speech and behavior problems, the CoP that formed in the theater group offered support for him to have a successful school experience.
Monica also said that the support she experienced in her small CoP in the ¡Aprenda! program helped her understand how vital it is to have a community. Monica described how she established a respectful inclusive classroom environment for the benefit of her students.

It’s really important to me that the students are kind to each other, help each other. At the beginning of the year sometimes students would laugh at mispronunciations, and I say “No! We will help each other, we will not embarrass others.” And this has developed well, and students really do help each other and work together.

The caring atmosphere was evident in Monica’s classroom. One of her students had only one leg due to cancer surgery, and the other students assisted her to maneuver around the school on crutches. This was not easy, as there were numerous staircases. Monica explained how this supportive environment developed.

At first, this girl was so shy and scared, but I put her in a group with some very kind girls, and I tell all the groups that they are responsible to help each other - not just her group - and these girls all work together, and they help her and carry her books and bring the homework to her house when she can’t come to school, and she helps them, too, because she is very smart and loves to learn.

Monica said that, based on her time in the program she knew a community can make the difference between a good and bad experience, and she wanted her students to have this good experience.

Roberto’s Barriers

Throughout the program, Roberto did not feel a sense of community with the other Ecuadoran teachers in the program. He stated several times that he felt profoundly lonely and homesick much of the time in the program, and he felt this impacted his ability to connect with other people. Roberto also attributed this sense of isolation to the fact that it was the first time he had left his province. “I had never even been to the capital,” he stated, “and then suddenly I was
in another country, and it was like being on a different planet.” In contrast to the other four teachers, who developed positive relationships with their roommates, Roberto did not make any lasting friendships, nor could he recall the name of his roommate. “I think he was from the south,” he said, looking unsure. Although Roberto emphasized that he got along well with the other Ecuadoran teachers, he explained, “I didn’t connect with anyone. I’m not in contact with anyone anymore.”

At first, Roberto had difficulty articulating why he did not feel part of any academic community; however, eventually he shared more of the challenges that made forming a CoP difficult for him. Roberto believed that the indigenous way of thinking and communicating was different and not well-understood by the non-indigenous Ecuadoran teachers. He explained that this had to do with how people interact in a Kichwa context.

The way we think is different. We listen and consider for a long time before we speak, and sometimes it is too long for people to wait, so they think we have nothing to say. I learned this when I studied at the university in Ecuador. There were very few indigenous people, but when we met together, I felt they understood me, even if we didn’t know each other.

Roberto perceived the other Ecuadoran teachers in the ¡Aprenda! program lacked understanding of how he communicated, which made him feel “lost at times while in the US.”

Roberto believed that linguistic and cultural barriers between him and the other Ecuadoran teachers made it difficult for him to function in the program. He described the daily group work in class as well as the larger group projects that the Ecuadoran teachers had to complete outside of class as uncomfortable experiences.

I have trouble expressing myself quickly – I need time to think, so sometimes I felt stupid because I wanted to say some things, but I couldn’t think of how to say them, and by the time I organized my thoughts, the others had gone on to another topic. Then I would feel upset because they [the other teachers] were probably thinking “Why doesn’t he contribute anything?”
Roberto found that not being able to interact with people from his cultural background or speak the Kichwa language with anyone during the program was stressful. Roberto explained that among Kichwa speakers, he felt understood and accepted in a way that he did not experience with Spanish-speaking Ecuadorans. “I know Spanish. I’ve spoken it since I went to school, but it doesn’t feel the same as Kichwa.” Roberto said that he sometimes felt frustrated that all Kichwa-speakers must speak Spanish, but Spanish-speakers very rarely learn any Kichwa. He related that in Ecuador this had not bothered him because he always had his family and community, but in the US, he felt at a disadvantage among the non-indigenous Ecuadorans.

Roberto’s Ecuadoran School

Just as Roberto did not feel part of a CoP in ¡Aprenda!, he did not appear to be part of a CoP in his English department at his Ecuadoran school. While the other four participants perceived that a CoP had emerged in their Ecuadoran schools upon returning home, at Roberto’s school there did not appear to be any collaboration among teachers, although there were two teachers, Lionel and Fermy (pseudonyms) who had been part of different ¡Aprenda! program cohorts in other states.

All the English teachers in Roberto’s school had separate materials and activities; they did not seem interested in sharing them or discussing aspects of teaching. The two other ¡Aprenda! graduates were friendly and invited me to visit their classes, and in classroom observations, it was clear there was no collaboration across the English department. Although the teachers were teaching many of the same grade-level students, the classroom experiences were entirely disparate. Lionel’s students read short novels he purchased with a grant, while Fermy used activities to supplement the textbook that were different from the activities Roberto used.
When asked if they would be interested in collaborating, all three teachers said they would be open to the idea, but they did not want to be the one to initiate. “If you present a new idea, then you are responsible to make it happen, and then if it doesn’t work, you get the blame,” Lionel explained. Fermy echoed this sentiment, “I don’t want it to be my fault if we try something and no one likes it.” Roberto also expressed the same concern regarding collaborative activities.

Roberto’s Ecuadoran Classroom

Along with not perceiving a CoP in his department, Roberto did not feel there was a sense of community among students in his classes. Although students spent the entire day together while the teachers traveled, Roberto stated that some students seemed isolated. He explained, “Many students sit alone and don’t talk to anyone. There are a few students who like to talk to each other, but I see many more who don’t interact much.” Roberto attributed some of this behavior to the widespread attendance area of his school. “These students come from many different neighborhoods, so they don’t know each other when they come to school, and at school they only get to talk during break, so they don’t always make a lot of friends. I guess they have their friends in their communities.” Roberto presumed the lack of community in the classes was inevitable due to the lack of familiarity among students.

Because Roberto had disliked the group projects and activities in ¡Aprenda!, he said he chose not to implement structured group work in his classes, although he encouraged students to help each other in pairs. Thus, while many of the students in his classes worked together, there were several who chose to work alone. In each of his classes, there were also a few students who appeared entirely disengaged – sleeping, doodling, or staring off into space. Roberto explained that he preferred to focus on students who had questions and wanted to use class time to work.
I don’t like to see students not doing anything because it is not a good atmosphere, but I think it is better to give my attention to the students who want to work, who have questions. If I try to work with the students who are not motivated, who choose not to work, then it would take time away from those students who really want to work, and I don’t think this is fair.

Roberto recognized that the presence of students not engaged in the class activities had a negative effect on the class atmosphere. However, he believed his responsibility was to respond to the students whom he perceived were motivated to learn.

Overview

In this chapter, the perspectives of the Ecuadoran teachers regarding the ¡Aprenda! program as a CoP were presented. Teachers’ efforts to foster CoP in their Ecuadoran schools were discussed. The following chapter will offer a summary and implications for practice and further research.
In this study, I sought to develop a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Ecuadoran teachers who participated in a seven-month professional development program in the US. The overarching question guiding this study was: What are the Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives regarding the ¡Aprenda! program? The supporting questions were:

1. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their identity as teachers?
2. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have impacted their self-efficacy as teachers?
3. How do the Ecuadoran teachers perceive the ¡Aprenda! program to have been a community of practice?

First, I present a discussion of the research based on Chapters 4 and 5 findings. Implications for pedagogy and research follow the discussion, and I conclude with final thoughts on the study.

Research Questions 1 and 2

In the following section, I present a discussion of research questions 1 and 2, which focus on teacher identity and self-efficacy. In the first question: How do the Ecuadoran teachers believe that the ¡Aprenda! program impacted their identity as teachers, I use positioning theory
(Davies & Harré, 1990) as the lens through which to discuss the teachers’ changed understanding of themselves. Positioning theory concerns itself with perceived rights and duties and how individuals position themselves in relation to their understanding of these concepts (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991) as well as the value afforded to their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In addition to positioning themselves, participants position each other through their interactions (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Individuals can accept or reject these positions as part of the process of negotiating their identity (Morgan, 2004).

I then follow with the themes that emerged from question 2: How do the Ecuadoran teachers believe that the ¡Aprenda! program impacted their self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is two-faceted. The first aspect is the strength of belief on the part of individuals that they can accomplish a designated task. The second is whether they accept that the task has the potential to achieve the specified outcome. Originally Bandura developed the model of self-efficacy to study social learning, but researchers have since adapted and applied it to educational settings (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Klassen et al., 2009; Pajares, 1997; Ross, 1994).

Identity theory and self-efficacy are highly intertwined and play powerful roles in how teachers understand themselves and their practice. Experiences which positively impact teachers’ identity are likely to promote higher self-efficacy (Moore & Esselman, 1994). Lave and Wenger (1991) indicate how participation in CoP can influence identity. Likewise, teacher self-efficacy subsequently can impact identity (Canrinus et al., 2012).

Identity as EFL Teachers

Through their participation in the ¡Aprenda! program, all the teacher participants positioned themselves as more legitimate English speakers. Additionally, these participants
positioned themselves as understanding and valuing their students’ knowledge and experience in ways they had not considered previously. As a result, most of the teachers found that their understanding of the importance of having a positive relationship with their students increased significantly. In contrast, Roberto felt that he was positioned as an indigenous person in ways that limited his potential for professional growth in his public-school job; however, he also indicated that his understanding of what it meant to be an indigenous person expanded.

**Legitimate English Speakers**

It is not surprising that after seven months of language instruction while living in the US, all of the teacher participants believed that their English skills improved. However, what is at least, if not more, impactful is the transformation in the way in which the teachers perceived themselves as legitimate speakers of English. Before the ¡Aprenda! program, Paloma reported she could read and speak with considerable fluency. Similarly, Monica, Carmen, and Esperanza believed that their level of English was adequate for their perceived purposes at the time. Although Roberto stated that he struggled with English at times, he felt he knew enough to have a basic conversation. However, there was little or no correlation with any of the teachers’ English skill and their use of English in their classrooms before the ¡Aprenda! program; none of the teachers used English to communicate with their students regardless of their English proficiency.

A large part of what appeared to have held the Ecuadorian teachers back from using English in their classrooms was their reluctance to position themselves as legitimate speakers of English. This phenomenon is paralleled in the literature on ESL and EFL teachers throughout the world. Despite the fact that an estimated 80% of English teachers globally are non-native
speakers, these teachers often feel inferior to native-speaking teachers regardless of their own or the native-speakers’ experience and expertise (Braine, 2013). Celik’s (2006) study found that non-native university level English instructors in Turkey were reluctant to use English with their students even when their mastery of English was considered native-speaker-like. Similarly, Sayer (2012) conducted in-depth interviews and observations with English teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, who had studied intensely to acquire communicative skills in English. He found that the teachers believed their non-native English speaker identity was a permanent barrier to achieving the status of a native speaker. Based on their self-positioning, the teachers in his study avoided communicating in English in the classes they taught although their proficiency in English was rated high by colleagues and former professors.

Through the ¡Aprenda! program, the teacher participants believed they gained an understanding of language and status that allowed them to reflect on how they positioned themselves both as English and Spanish speakers. They were particularly affected by the concept of Englishes, a term used to describe the degree to which varieties of English are valued (Kachru, 1990). The inner circle of English, perceived by many as the most legitimate, is dominated by Great Britain, Canada, and the US. Being outside the inner circle, the Ecuadoran teacher participants at first were not able to conceptualize themselves as having legitimate status as English speakers. However, through the curricular readings and related discussions, they began to view this as an artificial and unnecessary construct that they could resist. Similarly, Canagarajah (2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2016) and Parakrama (1995, 2012) have written extensively about the hegemony of native speakers and have documented how local peoples often succeed in appropriating English for their own purposes.
Since participating in the ¡Aprenda! program, the teachers positioned themselves as having the duty to establish meaningful relationships with students to aid in the learning process. This perspective, known as funds of knowledge, looks at students as having assets in the form of experiences rather than evaluating students in terms of what they lack (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). An illustration of this is how Carmen validated her students’ cultural and linguistic resources, particularly her indigenous Afro-Ecuadoran students, by encouraging them to use their home languages in school. Additionally, Carmen described how one Kichwa-speaking student became more comfortable sharing aspects of her culture in class and began to thrive academically. This behavior is consistent with studies that indicate if students are encouraged to draw upon experience from their own families and communities, they tend to show increased positive feelings toward school as well as improved academic progress (Moje & Speyer, 2014; Reyes, 2012; Sánchez, 2007; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005).

When teachers use a funds of knowledge perspective, it indicates to students that their teachers care for them. In her classroom practice, Paloma validated her students without being judgmental, as exemplified in her response to a student who had been sleeping in class. When Paloma expressed concern for the student and her situation, she was acknowledging the value of her student’s life experiences. Similarly, when Monica emphasized the mechanical ability of her deaf student, she encouraged the entire school staff to view him in terms of his ability rather than his limitation. The power of a funds of knowledge perspective is similarly reflected in a study of English learners in a US elementary school in which the researcher described how a fifth grade student, Jennifer, was embarrassed by the fact that she had to help her father, an unemployed
carpenter, clean houses for income (Cuero, 2010). Instead of viewing the situation as negative, the student’s teacher encouraged Jennifer to use her experiences as material in her writing assignments. Jennifer subsequently described cleaning houses in a rich narrative that she eventually shared with her classmates.

Esperanza employed a funds of knowledge perspective by acknowledging the struggles many of her students faced as she sought to support them. Since ¡Aprenda!, Esperanza believed that it was essential to connect with students’ authentic lived experiences. She positioned herself as a teacher who acknowledged the negative as well as positive experiences of her students, which led her to initiate a support group facilitated by her husband. Similarly, in his study of Australian public schools, Zipin (2009) found that students whose backgrounds included hardship or trauma found little to which they could connect in the school curriculum. Zipin documented how teachers tended to avoid difficult topics, which he referred to as dark lifeworld knowledge, or dark funds of knowledge. In her study of a third grade class, Dutro (2010) also found the prescribed curriculum gravitated toward neutral topics, in response to which students wrote very little. However, when the teacher gave her students an opportunity to write about their own hard times after reading a book about the Great Depression, they produced detailed and expressive narratives about their lives.

Indigenous Identity

Even after participation in ¡Aprenda!, which Roberto perceived to have raised his awareness of what it meant to be an indigenous person, he believed that there were barriers in his school related to his identity as a Kichwa person that limited his ability to connect to students. Although he acknowledged that some students may have benefited from speaking Kichwa,
Roberto was adamantly opposed to speaking Kichwa at school with his students because he believed it could have negative consequences for the students. Ironically, Carmen was the most involved with promoting Kichwa language and culture at her school. However, Carmen, as a non-indigenous person, had not experienced the discrimination Roberto suffered, nor was she in danger of being stigmatized. Similarly, Morgan (2004) found that as a white male professor in a Chinese university, he was positioned by students as having more authority than a native Chinese professor to challenge cultural perspectives without diminishing his professional status.

While Roberto said he recognized the importance of the teacher-student relationship, he appeared constricted in his ability to connect meaningfully to all students. Roberto discussed how he circulated in the class and interacted with students who sought out his attention, and he took this to be a sign that his relationships with his students were deeper than before he attended ¡Aprenda! However, Roberto also acknowledged that he ignored the students who chose to isolate themselves. He labeled those students as unmotivated or lazy, but his discomfort when discussing this was clear, indicated by his statements that he knew he should do more, but he did not know how to engage those students. As an indigenous person, Roberto did not feel a duty to reach out to students who did not respond to him. Instead, he positioned himself as being fair by working only with students who asked for his help. Gorski (2011) pointed out that teachers often label underachieving students negatively to avoid feelings of guilt. Dutro (2010) noted that even effective teachers sometimes negatively position students. She described the third-grade teacher in her study as a nurturing person concerned for her students’ well-being; however, this same teacher occasionally lapsed into racial and ethnic stereotyping, which Dutro attributed primarily to the stress of the teaching environment, including high-stakes testing and teacher evaluations.
Regardless, through the ¡Aprenda! program, Roberto did perceive himself to have expanded his view of what it meant to be an indigenous person through the readings and discussions embedded in the curriculum. He explained that the concept that indigenous people throughout the world often lack access to higher education opportunities and careers that offer upward economic mobility was novel for him. Skutnab-Kangas (2010) also pointed out indigenous people in most countries of the world are isolated or consigned to an obscure or invisible position in the overall national identity, making it difficult to form alliances. Similarly, Gordillo and Hirsch (2003) explored this topic in a study of the perceptions of Argentinians and the role of the indigenous in Latin America. The researchers found a consistent pattern of school age indigenous children wanting to distance themselves from their own culture. However, the study also documented groups in Argentina forming transnational connections with groups in other parts of Latin America to promote activism regarding indigenous rights throughout the countries. Similarly, Hirsch (2003) showed a connection between the transnational links of groups for the promotion of bilingual education programs and an increased sense of indigenous identity.

Roberto’s Ecuadoran school did not promote the development of a stronger teacher identity. The general disrepair as well as the disturbing sexual graffiti in the classrooms created a hostile physical environment that the school’s director did nothing to rectify. Not surprisingly, the teaching staff kept to themselves and made no effort to collaborate. In this setting, Roberto focused on daily survival. However, Roberto could potentially thrive in a more supportive school, particularly one conducive to the expression of his indigenous identity. This could naturally occur in a Kichwa bilingual school. However, if Roberto were in any school with an
inspired leader and energized teachers, he might feel comfortable putting more of what he learned in the ¡Aprenda! program into practice.

**Self-Efficacy**

All the teachers reported an increase in their confidence in their teaching skills and in their ability to learn new teaching methods on their own. They felt they instructed more effectively than before participation in the program, attributing this to improved strategies and activities for the classroom. They also described greater success in planning instruction and believed their students learned concepts and vocabulary more quickly via the personalized materials they created in class as well as pair and group work. This is consistent with numerous studies that have shown a correlation between pedagogical instruction and teachers’ sense of efficacy (Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, & Weiss, 2009; Cummins, 2000; Herrera, Holmes, & Kavimandan, 2012; Herrera, Perez, Kavimandan, Holmes, & Miller, 2011; Murry & Herrera, 2010).

**Objectives**

Esperanza perceived her efficacy increased through the use of content and language objectives in her classes, which she said she learned in the ¡Aprenda! program. To facilitate this, Esperanza purchased a projector with her own funds in the US. In her Ecuadoran school, she carried the projector throughout the day and started each class by having students read the content and language objectives chorally. Carrying the projector and setting it up six times daily was a substantial burden, but Esperanza believed that the results justified her efforts. She stated that when the students knew the content and language goals, they remained more focused and
motivated throughout the class, helping them to learn more effectively. This is consistent with a study of undergraduate university students’ dispositions toward classes, in which researchers found that students who reported not understanding the goals had high levels of anxiety and low motivation (Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001). The same study also indicated that clear performance goals were linked to student motivation. When students believed that the goals of the class were clear, they tended to rate themselves as more motivated and willing to work harder than when they did not perceive the goals to be clear.

**Vocabulary**

All the teacher participants particularly gravitated to vocabulary activities they learned in the ¡Aprenda! program. They believed the personal vocabulary dictionaries and minibooks helped students learn more effectively because the students made meaningful connections to language and enjoyed the process of creating them. The reflections of the teachers parallel research that indicates when students are able to make personal connections, they are more likely to retain the material (Herrera et al., 2012). Similarly, Carger (1996) described how making personal connections to vocabulary words impacted a second language learner’s reading comprehension. While tutoring an elementary school student, who was supposed to read and write about the fairy tale, *The Ugly Duckling* (Andersen, 1999), Carger was mystified why he had difficulty understanding the significance of the story even when it was translated into Spanish. When Carger realized that the student had never seen a swan, she arranged for a trip to the zoo. Subsequently, he was able to read the story with much greater comprehension.
Collaborative Activities

The Ecuadoran teachers also made use of pair and group work in class, which was a radical departure from traditional teaching, but which they felt facilitated student learning. They noted that students included more detail in their writing after participating in group discussions. The teacher participants also believed that students felt more comfortable to practice speaking and listening because the cooperative activities established a non-threatening environment for language acquisition. In her work on educational communities in Peru, Huaman (2013) noted that pair and group work was more in alignment with Latino communal culture than the western dominated individualistic work she observed in traditional Latin American pedagogy. Similarly, Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer (2004) found that teachers who used cooperative activities were more likely to report student academic gains than teachers who utilized a traditional mode of instruction such as lecture.

Self-Directed Learning

In Ecuador, there are generally few organized professional development opportunities for teachers. However, the teacher participants believed they could develop and add to their knowledge and skills independently, which they attributed to modeling in the ¡Aprenda! program. Because traditional Ecuadoran teachers are not expected to continue learning, the Ecuadoran teacher participants were surprised that the adjunct instructors and faculty in ¡Aprenda! read items related to education on their own. Paloma stated that when one of the instructors in the program shared an article on cognates with her, she had a revelation that she did not have to rely on formal classes to expand her knowledge. Similarly, Monica, Esperanza,
and Carmen stated that they started looking for materials to expand their knowledge while in the ¡Aprenda! program. This type of self-teaching is reflected in some studies of teachers with limited access to continuing education. In a survey of Nigerian schools, almost all of the teachers who felt comfortable using technology in the classroom also indicated they had never had any formal training using a computer (Yusuf, 2005). Similar results were found in a study of 26 schools in England that indicated that the majority of teachers had acquired most of their knowledge of computers independently (Madden, Ford, Miller, & Levy, 2005).

In addition to finding literature to expand their theoretical base of knowledge, the teachers searched for practical activities they could utilize in their classroom instruction. For example, in one class, Esperanza led an activity in which students created short conversations. She related that she had encountered the idea in her internet research on foreign language teaching. The teachers’ habits of searching for lesson ideas parallels the research supporting the notion that teachers can effectively direct their own self-study (Borko, 2004; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Similarly, in her research on teachers in a variety of school settings, Darling-Hammond (2008) found that meaningful professional development led by teacher interest was one of the most powerful ways to improve achievement opportunities for students.

In the next section, I will discuss the finding from Chapter 5.

Research Question 3

The term community of practice (CoP) refers to a group of individuals with shared beliefs who work together for a mutually agreed purpose (Wenger, 1998). In their seminal study, Lave and Wenger (1991) investigated the CoP of tailors in Liberia. They noted how group members worked together for mutual benefit, with more proficient members of the community supporting
and mentoring the less experienced members in pursuit of the common goal. The CoP model has since been expanded to other contexts, particularly in education. As a result, multiple studies have supported the idea that a CoP is a significant factor in the success of teachers (Avery & Carlsen, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005; Heider, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The following discussion will include the teacher participants’ perspectives regarding impediments to the creation of a CoP in the ¡Aprenda! program and the formation of self-initiated CoP within the program as well as Roberto’s perceptions of his situation.

Based on the interviews and conversations with the teacher participants, there appeared to be two major impediments to the formation of a collective CoP in the ¡Aprenda! program. The first was the lack of a collective sense of purpose and common goals among the members. The second was that the teacher participants saw parts of the program as misaligned to their needs as Ecuadoran teachers. Despite the lack of a perceived collective CoP, four of the five teacher participants initiated small CoP, which they believed were instrumental in their successful experiences in ¡Aprenda! After completing the program, these teachers attempted to recreate different elements of a CoP in their Ecuadoran schools and classrooms.

When members of a group share common goals, working together is seen as a mutual benefit; however, if goals are misaligned, the relationships are likely to be perceived as one-sided, eroding any sense of common purpose (Wenger, 2000). The five teachers in this study had similar goals when they began the ¡Aprenda! program. They planned to dedicate a significant amount of time to academic study, and all of them said that they looked forward to learning more methods and pedagogical theories as well as improving their English skills. However, the perception of the teacher participants was that many of their fellow teachers considered the
seven-month program an opportunity for a paid holiday in the US rather than a time of focused learning. Hung and Chen (2001) discussed the idea that members within a community who do not embrace a common goal may choose to remain on the periphery of a group rather than fully participate or sever ties entirely, which often serves to limit the formation of a coherent CoP.

The teacher participants’ statements did not indicate a sense of mutual benefit in the ¡Aprenda! program collectively because they perceived that many of the other teachers’ goals were in conflict with their own. This is similar to the findings of Probst and Borzillo (2008) in their investigation of a CoP in one international firm. They described how managers attempted to forge a CoP; however, the goals of the employees were incongruent with those prescribed by the company, and a stable CoP failed to emerge. Similarly, Barab and Duffy (2000) examined student teacher reflections in public schools in Indiana. They noted that schools without common school-wide goals lacked cooperation and mutual learning. Student teachers in these schools reported that they did not perceive a sense of community and were less likely to thrive than student teachers placed in schools with clear goals and a strong feeling of mutual purpose.

The teacher participants also knew that there would be teachers in the program from all over Ecuador, and they believed their fellow educators would be a valuable resource for learning. This idea of learning from others’ experiences is a significant component of CoP (Wenger, 2000). Lambson (2010) described how experienced and novice teachers formed a CoP in a book discussion group. The members attributed much of the strength of the community to the fact that newer teachers drew upon the knowledge of the educators who had been in the field for some time. At the same time, these experienced teachers reported satisfaction at being able to share their expertise.
Although the teacher participants embraced much of what was modeled in the program, there were aspects of ¡Aprenda! they found difficult to implement in their Ecuadoran schools due to a lack of contextualization of the program to their students and working conditions. For example, visually sharing content and language objectives, which was emphasized in ¡Aprenda!, presented challenges that four of the five participants were not able to overcome because they did not own LCD projectors. Other studies have found that teacher professional development is often ineffective because it is not tailored to the school setting. In a study in Antioquia, Colombia, the researcher noted that teacher education and professional development did not make use of the conditions in which educators were working, limiting teachers’ ability to utilize the knowledge and skills they learned in their own classrooms (González Moncada, 2006). Similarly, a study of EFL university instructors in Saudi Arabia found that the teachers who had taken part in a course on English pedagogical practices were not able to implement what they learned in the program because of cultural factors in their schools that conflicted with some of the objectives in the program (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Butler, 2004).

The teacher participants also reported they were often frustrated with the materials they used in the ¡Aprenda! program, which were written for ESL teachers in the US. The textbooks were based on the assumption that students were immersed in an English-speaking environment and would need encouragement to continue using their home language. This incongruity of materials was also found in a study of EFL teachers in Thailand (De Segovia & Hardison, 2009). In this study, teachers reported that the school had purchased expensive textbooks without consulting the teachers. Although the materials were of a high quality, they were not appropriate for the level of their students, and the teachers found that they were not able to use the textbooks effectively.
A further perception of misalignment was that the pedagogical techniques were not accurately contextualized for Ecuador. The teacher participants recounted that they often knew they would not be able to implement aspects of the program due to obstacles in their working conditions in Ecuador and because the class textbooks and materials reflected the nature of ESL teaching in the US rather than that the context of teaching EFL in Latin America. The discrepancy between materials and perceived needs of teachers can also be seen in the study of four secondary schools in England (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). The researchers noted that fine arts teachers believed they lacked many of the necessary resources to run an effective program. Similarly, Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) found that schools often adopt materials without fully considering the needs of students and faculty; instead they noted that the criteria for the purchase of materials were frequently done without teacher input. This often resulted in teachers not being able to utilize the materials effectively.

Four of these teachers described smaller CoP that emerged naturally in response to some of the challenges they faced and were significant to their success in the program. Wenger (2002) described the process by which CoP are formed as occurring spontaneously through mutual necessity and emphasized that a collective sense of purpose cannot be forced. Furthermore, Roberts (2006) suggested that when members of a group have autonomy to collaborate in response to challenges, a CoP is likely to coalesce. This is consistent with self-initiated CoP that have been documented in a variety of school settings. In a study of university science faculty in several east coast universities, researchers documented an informal CoP that emerged from a core group of professors who wanted opportunities to collaborate with regard to content and pedagogy (Kezar & Gehrke, 2017). Over the course of several years, this group organically grew from its inception of a few dozen to several hundred professors. In another study,
researchers looked at CoP that arose from the professional development of K-5 teachers across a large district (Buysse et al., 2003). During the learning sessions, several teachers discovered they had common goals and two new CoP emerged and continued to meet and support each other after the professional development was over.

The four teacher participants who initiated CoP during the program later intentionally fostered CoP among their colleagues as well as in their classrooms when they returned to Ecuador. The participants believed that these CoP enhanced their own professional practice as well as the classroom environment and noted a sense of mutual engagement, as evidenced by Carmen’s description of how she and her fellow English teacher coordinated their instruction. Monica’s observation that the book group she initiated gave the faculty a common theme that connected content areas also reflected the cooperative nature of a CoP. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) also documented a self-initiated CoP in a case study of three art teachers in an English public secondary school. Despite opposition from staff members who felt that the art teachers spent too much time together and should be more involved with other departments, the three teachers formed a tight-knit group that was perceived as mutually supportive and facilitated their teaching practice.

The four teacher participants also saw changes in their classroom environments. They worked intentionally to foster a sense of cooperation and respect with their Ecuadoran students and frequently described their classes as a little family. Studies have indicated that CoP for teachers also impact students positively. For example, a multi-district study looked at first grade teachers who were part of a study group which focused on improving reading instruction and developed into a CoP (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Santoro, 2010). Students in these classes correspondingly outperformed students whose teachers were not part of a CoP. Similarly,
Avery and Carlsen (2001) conducted a case study of four secondary teachers who participated in an environmentally themed CoP with fellow teachers and science faculty from Cornell University. The researchers noted that although the teachers had classes that were considered remedial, the social learning environment was respectful and focused, yet dynamic. The teachers attributed their success primarily to the inspiration and support from the CoP.

Throughout the ¡Aprenda! program, Roberto did not feel that he fit in or was fully accepted. He believed that the other Ecuadoran teachers in the ¡Aprenda! program thought he did not contribute enough during group work and judged him negatively because of his style of interaction as an indigenous person. According to Wenger (2000), members must be able to envision their role and how they fit into the fabric of the community. This is essential because individuals shape their identities through the social context of the community. Through this self-constructed image, individuals orient themselves to others in the community as well as to the purpose of the group. This is supported by a study of an ESL/bilingual program in a California high school. Aldana and Martinez (2018) described how teachers’ diverse backgrounds were leveraged in the creation of a CoP among the program’s teachers. Many of the teachers themselves had gone through bilingual programs and were able to imagine how they could fit in the program because they felt a sense of connection to the students. To help the other teachers attain this understanding, the project focused on giving all the teachers time to share experiences collectively as well as fears, doubts and questions. For example, one of the teachers spoke some Spanish but worried that she might be looked down on for lacking fluency. With the reassurance from the group that native-like fluency was not a requirement, she was able to more confidently imagine her role and position herself as a valuable member of the team.
Despite the fact that his indigenous language was central to his identity, Roberto did not share this aspect of himself outside of the community in which he lived. He did not talk about the Kichwa language while he was in the program nor did he utilize Kichwa in his Ecuadoran school. Likewise, he did not encourage Kichwa-speaking students to share their language. Not being able to share such a fundamental part of his identity appeared to prevent Roberto from fully engaging with the other Ecuadorans in the program, as well as the teachers and students in his Ecuadoran school. Individuals who struggle to understand their place in the group may never truly become an integrated part of the CoP, as illustrated by Roberto’s situation. Probst and Borzillo (2008) pointed out that one reason CoP fail to emerge is that the members are not able to identify with the community. This can happen if they do not view the other members as peers who are willing to assist them in attaining knowledge and skills. They described the failure of a CoP to form in a business setting in which workers believed that no one was interested in their knowledge or sharing knowledge, so efforts by supervisors to increase cooperation did not succeed.

In contrast to the other four teacher participants, Roberto’s students did not appear to form a CoP. Since Roberto had not felt comfortable working with others in the program, he did not attempt to implement cooperative activities that might have helped form a sense of community in the Ecuadoran classroom. Moreover, there were always some students on the periphery not working, and Roberto did not attempt to engage them. Similarly, Roberto did not maintain separate practices and expressed a reluctance to initiate any collaboration with his Ecuadoran colleagues. This is consistent with Mutch’s (2003) study of apprentices from different social classes. He found that in work communities made up of individuals from diverse perspectives, members were generally open to new knowledge and ways of interacting, and
newcomers were able to meld into a CoP. However, Mutch noted when the majority of members shared a similar background, their familiar interactions constituted a code that non-members were often not able to interpret. In these settings, the common experiences created barriers, often unconsciously, to the entrance of members outside their community.

The findings suggest implications, which I discuss in the following section.

Implications for Professional Development

As the discussion illustrates, identity, self-efficacy, and CoP are separate constructs; however, they converged and complemented each other in the examination of the data. While one case study cannot justify sweeping recommendations, these findings suggest implications for professional development for EFL teachers as well as further research.

Professional Development Programs

According to the perspective of the Ecuadoran teachers, the ¡Aprenda! program significantly impacted their identity and self-efficacy. The five teacher participants noted their changed perspectives in terms of how they positioned themselves as legitimate English speakers as well as their effectiveness in the classroom. In addition to this, four of the five teachers believed that they initiated a CoP within the ¡Aprenda! program, which enhanced their successful experience. However, there were aspects of the program that the Ecuadoran teachers felt fell short of meeting their needs. The following recommendations for professional development (PD) draw from their experiences in the program and subsequent practices in their Ecuadoran schools.
• PD serving EFL teachers should recognize both the subtle and overt prejudice against non-native speakers and help teachers position themselves as legitimate speakers of English.

Although four of the five teachers had felt competent before participating in the ¡Aprenda! program, they had not used English to communicate in their Ecuadoran classrooms because they did not believe it was their right or duty. Through their positioning as having the right to speak English, the teacher participants noted a change in their identity.

Because rights and duties are fundamental to positioning (Wenger, 2000), professional development programs should intentionally foster EFL teachers’ belief in their rights and duties to communicate with students in the classroom in English. An ideal PD program should include readings on identity theory and positioning (Harré & Moghaddam, 1999), world Englishes (Kachru, 1990), as well as positions toward non-native English speakers (Phillipson, 1992). Furthermore, PD instructors must facilitate discussions regarding these topics and encourage teacher reflection.

• PD should emphasize a funds of knowledge perspective in the curriculum.

Through the program, the teacher participants learned about a funds of knowledge perspective. Rather than viewing their students in terms of deficits, they positioned their students as bringing valuable lived experiences to the school setting. Through this, the teachers also positioned themselves as educators who impact students positively.

A funds of knowledge perspective has the potential to improve educational outcomes significantly for students (Moll, 1992). Numerous studies have found that when teachers utilize a funds of knowledge perspective, students respond with increased engagement (Cuero, 2010; Dabach & Fones, 2016; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005; Zipin, 2009). PD providers need to
take a strong funds of knowledge stance in selecting materials, and PD instructors need to model a funds of knowledge perspective in their interactions with the EFL teachers in these programs.

- PD serving EFL teachers should contextualize curriculum and instruction.

The ¡Aprenda! program curriculum, although successful on many levels, did not always serve participants’ needs as Ecuadoran teachers. The curricular materials and practices were frequently misaligned with the realities of the Ecuadoran school system, a major example being pedagogical techniques that required smartboards or other technology they did not possess. Another difficulty was the fact that none of the ¡Aprenda! instructors were well-informed regarding the Ecuadoran educational system. For example, although I had lived in Ecuador, I had never been in an Ecuadoran public school, and I was unaware of the differences between the Ecuadoran and US school systems. Finally, the program did not take into account the varied linguistic backgrounds of Ecuadorans, assuming that that Ecuadoran teachers and students were Spanish-speakers.

In his study of educational settings, Guskey (2002), noted that teacher perspectives were essential for determining the usefulness of PD. When teachers believed the information they received was useful, they were likely to try to implement it in their classrooms. Similarly, a research study conducted in 30 schools indicated that professional development that focused on skills teachers could apply in their classes had a positive impact on the teachers as well as students (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). This parallels with a study by Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) that found PD needed to be consistent with teachers’ goals to be effective. Therefore, administrators and educators creating PD need to inform themselves about the situations of the EFL teachers in any program. This could involve research as well as intentional gathering of information from EFL teachers in the programs.
• PD should encourage the formation of CoP collectively as well as small self-initiated CoP.

Although a collective CoP did not occur in the ¡Aprenda! program, four of the five teacher participants initiated CoP that they believed were significant in their success in the program and in the formation of CoP in their Ecuadoran schools and classrooms. Roberto, who did not experience any CoP, reported that he often felt isolated and alone while in the program. Correspondingly, Roberto did not perceive a CoP in his Ecuadoran classroom or with the Ecuadoran teachers in his school.

The advantages of participating in a CoP have been documented in both business and educational settings (Au, 2002; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003; Little, 2002; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). There is also evidence to suggest that teachers in professional development programs, including study abroad programs, can benefit from participation in CoP (Diao, 2014). However, these types of programs often lack long-term stability (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003).

Despite this, organizers of professional development programs can support the spontaneous emergence of CoP by working to remove barriers. According to Chalmers and Keown (2006), an important step in fostering CoP is facilitating communication. They suggest that PD leaders must ensure that participants actively engage in discussions regarding not only content, but also issues relating to the effectiveness and dynamics of the group. Another way in which programs might encourage the emergence of CoP is to allow participants as much autonomy as possible to resolve challenges within the group (Barab & Duffy, 2000). Studies suggest that CoP are more likely to spontaneously occur when members feel empowered to negotiate outcomes (Au, 2002; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003; Rogers, 2000). Finally,
professional development programs should develop clear objectives that are shared by community members. As Wenger (2002) pointed out, unified goals are foundational in a CoP.

- PD serving EFL Teachers should include ongoing instruction and support.

All the teacher participants stated that they wished the program had included some follow-up. After their intensive seven months of instruction, they were essentially on their own. This was complicated by the fact that PD in general is difficult to access in Ecuador. Although four of the teachers tried to further their learning in a self-directed manner, they found it was challenging to progress consistently.

Multiple studies cite the lack of follow-up and ongoing support as one of the weakest areas of teacher professional development (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Hill, 2009; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). Teachers need time to digest new ideas and implement novel strategies, and continued support is essential to the success of this process (Birman et al., 2000). Thus, quality PD should include ongoing support, either face-to-face or online, to ensure that teachers are able to integrate what they learned into their teaching practice.

Further Research

A case study is by nature an in-depth investigation of the participants, limited in size and scope, and therefore opens opportunities for further research. This study focused on five out of 37 Ecuadoran teacher participants from one cohort of the ¡Aprenda! program. A study of the other 32 Ecuadoran teachers would no doubt reveal further insights regarding their perspectives. Furthermore, an investigation of teachers living in diverse areas of Ecuador could shed light on the impact of regional differences in their perspectives. Moreover, four of five of the teacher
participants in the study were female. A study including more males could lend additional data. Finally, the only indigenous person among the participants was Roberto. While comprising a significant portion of the population, indigenous people in Ecuador are seriously underrepresented in the teaching profession and consequently in the research.

- Based on statements of the five Ecuadoran teacher participants, researchers should continue to investigate the needs of EFL teachers and the ways in which EFL programs are similar yet distinct from ESL programs (Krieger, 2012). Studies should collect broader data on the context of specific EFL settings to develop appropriate and useful materials for PD.

- Because a funds of knowledge perspective is potentially the most transformative aspect of education (Moll, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005), researchers should investigate the impact of a funds of knowledge perspective in EFL settings. While there has been more research done in the last few years on funds of knowledge in ESL classrooms in the US, there is a paucity of studies regarding funds of knowledge in EFL classrooms worldwide.

- Further studies need to be done on the identity of EFL teachers and how they position themselves as legitimate speakers of English. The concept of legitimacy is significant because it is as or more foundational than mere mastery of grammar in the production of oral and written English (Norton, 2010a). This is particularly salient in that the majority of EFL teachers worldwide are non-native English speakers (Canagarajah, 2004b).

- Further research should focus on the conditions that foster or inhibit the formation of CoP. Although many studies focus on successful models of CoP, research also needs
to focus on why CoP fail to form. To date, most researchers investigating why CoP do not emerge are doing so from a business model perspective (Roberts, 2006). While this information is potentially relevant, the difference in contexts limits our understanding of why CoP often do not form in school settings.

Final Thoughts

As the number of English learners continues to rise worldwide, educators and researchers must consider the needs of different populations of teachers as well as students. When the Ecuadoran teachers in this study arrived in the US, they considered themselves traditional teachers. However, this research indicated that all of them experienced an enormous shift in perspective as a result of their participation in the ¡Aprenda! program; by sharing in their stories, I witnessed their metamorphoses. While the teachers’ perspectives differed, they all persevered in their quest to grow as educators. The phrase that they frequently and passionately repeated, “I am not a traditional teacher anymore,” continues to resonate with me because moving beyond the boundaries of staid methods involves much greater effort and risk than adhering to old ways. I am more likely now to examine my teaching practices, asking myself if I am working for the greatest benefit of students or if I am merely acting out of habit.

In this study, my goal was to add to the body of knowledge regarding Ecuadoran teachers’ perspectives about their professional development experience in the US and how they applied their knowledge in practice when they returned to Ecuador. This was a deeply personal topic for me, and I feel that as much as the Ecuadoran teachers were impacted in expanding their understanding, I was equally changed. It is my hope that in doing this study, I provide some
avenues for improved pedagogy and opportunities for research that might lead to expanded areas for consideration for teaching and learning in the field of EFL.
REFERENCES


