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The cultural impacts of 'international' teaching methods: Curricular design and implementation in Costa Rica

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Original abstract and title:

Trisha Bogar

***The cultural impacts of 'international' teaching methods:
Curricular design and implementation in Costa Rica***

What is the purpose of education? How does the definition of this purpose determine the curriculum in schools? How is the curriculum designed and implemented in Costa Rican schools? Is it governmentally regimented? Does it vary by district? Or by school? Or perhaps by classroom? Are the schools run using traditional ideology, theory, and pedagogy? Or has Paulo Freire's critical theory begun to infiltrate other countries and schools in Latin America? To what extent has the United States influenced the ideas behind what constitutes a "quality education"? With these questions and more in mind, I am spending the month of January 2011 in Playa Samara, Costa Rica researching the teaching methodologies and driving ideologies of Costa Rican schools, with a focus on language classrooms (both English as a Foreign Language and Spanish). My background in educational theory will help me to tease out the implications of the various perspectives that determine and run the educational systems in Costa Rica that I come in contact with throughout my stay. This research will be conducted in conjunction with EDU 305 Curricular Theory and Design in Content Area, a course for the Spring 2011 semester instructed by Dana Wright. I will be conducting this research under the supervision and guidance of Frank Graziano in the Hispanic and Latin American Studies Department. Professor Graziano was chosen as my supervising faculty due to his Spanish language fluency and cultural expertise pertinent to my research.

Modified Abstract and title:

***The cultural impacts of 'international' teaching methods:
Teaching English as a Foreign Language Programs***

What is the purpose of education? Are the schools run using traditional ideology, theory, and pedagogy? Or has Paulo Freire's critical theory begun to infiltrate other countries and schools in Latin America? To what extent has the United States influenced the ideas behind what constitutes a "quality education"? With these questions and more in mind, I am spending the month of January 2011 in Playa Samara, Costa Rica researching the teaching methodologies and driving ideologies of two Costa Rican schools, with a focus on language classrooms (both English as a Foreign Language and Spanish). My background in educational theory will help me to tease out the implications of the various perspectives that determine and run the educational systems in Costa Rica that I come in contact with throughout my stay. This research will be conducted in conjunction with EDU 305 Curricular Theory and Design in Content Area, a course for the Spring 2011 semester instructed by Dana Wright. I will be conducting this research under the supervision and guidance of Frank Graziano in the Hispanic and Latin American Studies Department. Professor Graziano was chosen as my supervising faculty due to his Spanish language fluency and cultural expertise pertinent to my research.

Education in Costa Rica has been approached through a variety of lenses throughout history. As evidenced in the presence of educational policies since the late 1940's, education takes the forefront of importance. "In Costa Rica legislation in educational matter exists that dates before 1949. The most evident case is the Code of Education, which contains the values, the principles and the philosophical-juridical order."¹ Under this code, one can see that "specifically, the Costa Rican educational system reproduces the values of the representative democracy, the division of the political powers, the guarantee of the individual, social and political rights; the universal and secret vote; and the respect to the human dignity, among others."²

Originally I had proposed to explore the curriculum and methodologies in contemporary schools in Costa Rica. However, upon arriving in Playa Samara at the start of January, I soon was drawn to two international schools. One was a school (Intercultural) that held Spanish classes for tourists and also offered English classes for locals and another (Costa Rica TEFL) that was a training certification program for native English speakers to become teachers of English as a foreign language. A focus of my study shifted dramatically when I enrolled in Costa Rica TEFL. I was curious to see how this program approached teaching English to the locals as well as training native English speakers to teach English. The potential implications for curriculum design and implementation as an extension of U.S. capitalism and Western ideals were a main concern of mine as I explored the lessons others taught and as I planned my own lessons.

¹ http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE47/English/Natreps/reports/costarica_en.pdf

² *Ibid*

When examining the cultural impacts of programs such as TEFL it is imperative to keep in consideration the characteristics of Playa Samara. Playa Samara is a primarily tourist beach town, therefore, there is a constant influx of different languages, cultures, and points of view. Interestingly enough, the supposed universal language in restaurants, hotels, hostels, and tour companies, is English. With that being said, learning English is an instrumental motivation for many of the locals as they wish to find better jobs working in the tourist field. Throughout the month, I was informally interviewing the local Costa Rican students who attended the English classes. My questions focused on the reasons they were taking English classes, what their future goals (short and long term) were, how long they had been taking English classes, had they taken the classes at other schools, if so what were they like, had they traveled outside of Costa Rica, if so where, if not where would they like to travel and why, and many more.

In conclusion, as I continue exploring curricular theory and design throughout this semester in my EDU 305 class, I will reflect upon how 'international' teaching programs can either perpetuate or break the cycle of dominant cultures, languages, and ideologies. My final project for this semester will revolve around designing a critical curricular unit that questions the structures and dominance of the language that is taught in our classrooms, be it Castilian vs. Latin American Spanish in the United States or whether British vs. American English is taught in Latin America and the implications for whose language we are teaching, to whom, and who we are silencing

(whether consciously or unconsciously) by continuing to conform to the traditional language taught in schools without questioning the origins of this tradition.