TEACHING TO DISCERN
FORMING CONNECTIONS, DECOLONIZING PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

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1 Hernando A. Estévez is a philosopher from Purdue University, Magister in Liberal Studies at Indiana University and PhD in Philosophy from DePaul University. Currently, he is the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities at Universidad de La Salle.
The issue of academic environments involves both research and practice. It gathers theoretical and practical pieces of knowledge for a permanent analysis and evaluation of pedagogy, content, and accomplishments in the educational field. Moreover, educational practices no longer occur within the boundaries of a specific field; in a globalized world, those practices must overcome their traditional boundaries in order to expand to different disciplines and to different ways of understanding pedagogy. In our time, knowledge travels; ideas and experiences are shared in educational platforms worldwide, while educators and students create novel ways to collectively participate in research projects that contribute to a greater understanding of the universe.

As a field, educational research faces growing challenges for dealing with the requirements of globalization; nowadays, education is not simply synonymous with pedagogical theories that provide frameworks for developing academic programs. The academic environment must be designed to introduce students to different social, political and economic phenomena and to connect them with knowledge of a broader reality. Researchers in the educational field must also examine historical and social dynamics that influence the development of education while considering their implications for different cultures.

On the other hand, one of the key issues researchers face is the extent to which a globalized education is possible; that means they need to be aware of current social, political ideologies and policies that are not necessarily in accordance with this educational project. Understanding education implies understanding the context in which pedagogical practices are taking place; at the same time, in this field, novel political paradigms and ideas of equality, equity and human rights should be confronted.

In summary, nowadays pedagogical practices have two main challenges: first, to introduce local and traditional experiences of teaching to broader perspectives; second, to understand what a globalized education implies and to participate in the transition towards new paradigms that make a global education possible.

The anthology presented herein aims to provide a novel context for academic dialogue on globalized pedagogical practices. Specifically, it focuses on what it means to teach abroad, which means discussing methodologies, pedagogies and contents used by educators who have had the opportunity of teaching in a foreign country. This book is a dialogue that engages academic experiences in a theoretically expansive and encompassing, methodological and content-driven framework around the topic of teaching abroad.
Universidad de La Salle in Bogotá, Colombia, is the context in which all those practices took place. This anthology presents the experiences of different foreign educators who have taught at the University under the Summer Academy program, which was created, organized and implemented by the International Office (ORII). It also presents the experience of the staff members in Bogotá who have had the important duty of organizing the event in two different occasions.

The anthology has three parts: In the first part, it presents the experience of two organizational members at Universidad de La Salle; they provide the perspective of experts in the academic field who have had the challenge of integrating local and foreign educational practices. In the second and third part, this anthology provides the experiences of educators from around the world who participated in the Summer Academy on two separate occasions: 2016 and 2017.

This book is not restricted to discussing methodological problems or accomplishments of the Summer Academy. Instead, they gather the subjective experiences of each partaker, which allows the reader to understand, in different levels, the value of participating in these experiences.

This anthology has two goals: first, to contribute to current dialogues between academic institutions and to foster the creation of novel pedagogical methods by describing the ideas and problems that arose in the context of the Summer Academy at Universidad de La Salle; and second, to provide a space for participants of the Summer Academy, both professors and students, to share their learning experiences and explorations in the context of a study-abroad program.

The first part, “Experience of the Summer Academy from an organizational perspective,” is composed of chapters by two staff members at Universidad de La Salle who participated in the organization of the Summer Academy:

Giovanni Anzola’s essay, “Grappling with the Challenges of Social Development through In-House International Training,” recognizes the academic and administrative challenges that come with implementing an in-house study abroad program. This program requires an institutional commitment that derives from recognizing the emergence of a new generation of students that think, act and communicate in a global perspective. For Anzola, the Summer Academy has become an academic tradition at the university that has focused on several topics: Latin American thought, leadership and global understanding, alternatives to socio-economic growth, peacebuilding, innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development have been some of the umbrella themes that have been used to invite people from all over the globe to teach local students in Colombia.
This essay brings into consideration a notion of education that goes beyond a mere interaction between individuals, seeing it as a common production of knowledge that can go from the classroom to the solution of real-life problems.

“Education, Pedagogy and Educational Content,” by Hernando A. Estévez suggests that education is always a political act that involves theories, methods and truth values; therefore, it is neither neutral nor impartial. To educate is to politically commit oneself to either reproducing what is already in place or to create new social and political paradigms. In that sense, the contents of an educational program become a tool for mediating between the classroom and reality, to understand its complexities as well as the role educations plays in its construction. Educators must be aware of their responsibility as they promote a specific relationship between teacher and student, which in many cases is reinforced by a content that reproduces a fixed way to understand reality and leaves no room for thinking new social and political paradigms. Thus, an educational program and, in this particular case, a program related to teaching abroad, can be improved by the study of alternative contents, which allow students know other ways of being that transcend the social, political and economic perspective already present in their society.

The second part gathers three experiences of educators enrolled in the Summer Academy:

Elizaveta S. Golousova’s contribution to the anthology, “Rewards and Challenges of Teaching Abroad,” reflects on what it means to teach overseas and how this experience can be a helpful testimony for others, as there are plenty of programs offered by various educational institutions for those who want to study abroad. Her writing describes what educators experience while they are away from their home countries. One of the key issues every visiting professor must deal with is the necessity to adapt to a local style of mentoring — e.g., the ability to develop intercultural competence. The author describes some of her experiences on cross-cultural communication and shares her ideas about certain techniques and methods that might be useful for visiting scholars.

“Making Relations: A Decolonizing Perspective on Teaching Abroad,” written by Janice Cindy Gaudet, highlights an Indigenous pedagogical approach and teaching philosophy based on “making relations” through notions of decolonization, indigeneity, and gender. Her experience of teaching abroad at Universidad de La Salle inspired a deeper reflection on what decoloniality evokes when one is teaching outside of a familiar context. In this chapter, Gaudet explores the problem of creating an academic environment grounded
in a decolonial framework; namely, an environment in which students and educators, together, deconstruct history, traditional identities and myths based on our colonial past. She proposes the creation of learning spaces grounded in Indigenous thought, which give voice to ancestral knowledge and allow us to rethink the meaning of our own culture and selves. She espouses a commitment to building relations between students and Indigenous peoples from Colombia that disrupts dominant models of pedagogy through co-creative learning. Collectively, yet also uniquely, the idea is to share in a process with the aim “to nourish the learning spirit” and to imagine a “good life (buen vivir)” for all of us.

In “Teaching Creativity and Innovation in an International Context,” Jordi Mass-Castella analyzes the relevant aspects involved in teaching creativity and innovation to an international group from his experience during the Summer Academy in 2016. Some aspects are related to the cultural distance between the teacher and the students and also to the multicultural nature of an international school. In such multicultural environments, it becomes critical that instructors develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adapted instruction. Other aspects depend on teaching creativity and innovative skills: In education, creativity has more to do with the process than with the final product and focuses on the development of thinking and cognitive skills. The text discusses a selection of different methodologies (business model canvas, design thinking, etc.) to foster creative thinking and innovative skills.

The third part of this anthology gathers the experiences of five educators who participated in the Summer Academy, which focused on the “Peacebuilding Generation”:

Donna Maria Maynard’s essay, “Teaching Abroad: Multidisciplinary Perspective,” outlines her experience as a lecturer from two different cultural contexts and reflects her experience of dealing with a new cultural context and a foreign language under her position as a visiting scholar in the Summer Academy at Universidad de La Salle. She shares her reflections and theoretical insights while teaching an undergraduate course in Counseling as a visiting scholar. She shares her teaching philosophy, inspired by Jean Piaget’s (1952) theory of constructivism, which supports the use of exercises to let students play an active role in their learning process, based on the idea that knowledge depends on action. She also describes what she thinks are the Colombian students’ needs, which includes altering the course syllabus and activities. In addition, she provides an overview of the Pre-service Emerging Reflective Teacher Training (PERTT) model, the theoretical framework that best articulates her experience of teaching abroad.
pedagogical methods that she used with the students in that course are presented as the interpersonal outcomes of the PERTTT model’s psychosocial system, as she shares the teaching-abroad experiences through the lens of that model.

“Reflections on Teaching and Technology Studies through Problem Solving Learning in Bogotá, Colombia,” by Jacqueline Gaybor Tobar, is a reflection on what it means to use Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a strategy to teach an introductory course in Science and Technology Studies (STS). She explores the importance of using PBL as a tool that helps students build critical thinking, reasoning skills and internalize learning by looking at real-world problems related to STS. PBL uses real-life problems as a starting point of learning, which differs from a more “traditional” approach of learning based on teaching theories. The problems were selected to enable the students to gain a global perspective and to reflect upon the complex realities happening in different parts of the world. The goal was not to solve the problem itself; rather, the problem was used to help students acquire knowledge but, most especially, to develop abilities like self-directed learning, critical thinking, and reasoning. The students noticed the difference between this approach to education and a traditional one. They found it challenging because it implies having more responsibility conducting individual research; but at the same time, they found the learning process valuable, particularly with respect to embracing their individual research and participating in group discussions based on their individual investigations. This chapter is also her personal story about teaching abroad in an international environment.

Nour Alrabie’s chapter, “Toulouse–Bogotá: More than a Round Trip,” is a step-by-step account of an enriching experience; his chapter aims to motivate junior academics to teach abroad, in a new, unfamiliar international context. In particular, he argues to what extent an integrative pedagogy, which involves value co-creation with students, contributes to an overall positive experience. He also provides the reader with some examples from his experiences and educational practices, which have been proven to be effective during his quasi-experimental course.

Keith William Diener’s chapter provides reflections and suggestions on cultural adaptation and classroom pedagogy, from his experience in the Summer Academy at Universidad de La Salle. His essay, “Reflections on Teaching Social Justice in a Multicultural Environment,” includes reflections on the author’s experiences living in Bogotá and integrates these reflections with his experiences in the classroom. The chapter examines some relevant pedagogical literature and recommends resources for faculty members who teach in the global setting. It also identifies the challenges of dealing with the needs of both local and international students
engaged in a short-term study abroad program. In response to these challenges, the chapter provides strategies and resources for leveraging the particular facets of a global classroom and for enhancing the learning experience.

Mae Caralde’s chapter, “Reviving Social Imagination,” reflects on the dramatic social transformations brought about by new media and its technologies and the challenges that educators and learners have to critically face. New media is “new” because it has replaced our old cultural forms and value systems and, consequently, our understanding of the world. When old cultural forms and value systems have been eroded and replaced by a “me-centered” media culture, when information is transformed into a commodity, when news content becomes strongly driven by market demands, and when control and ownership of new media platforms restrict the plurality and quality of information available for the public, the situation becomes symptomatic of a digitally “colonized” society. This situation ushers an alarming devolution of the people's agency and the rise of illiberal governments who are hostile to genuine peace and development. To illustrate this phenomenon, the chapter shows examples and insights from the author’s experience teaching in the Philippines; thus, it compares and connects that teaching experience with the experience in Colombia. In her experience as a lecturer on Social Media and Peace in the Summer Academy, Caralde incorporates some ideas on education and active learner engagement. According to the author, putting the voice of the people first in our new media engagements is crucial for decolonizing perspectives and for promoting social cohesion, which favors justice and lasting peace.

Although the book shows that there are many differences among the educational strategies of participants, there are also commonalities: For instance, they recognize the contrast between their prejudices about the country before arriving (considering Colombia is seen as a very violent country) and the reality of the people with whom they interact, as well as between the differences in the educator-student relationship in their country of origin and in Colombia. Most of the educators recognize the challenge of teaching in English in a non-English speaking country, as well as the challenge of teaching four hours a day for two weeks to the same group of students. In general, they recognize that the Summer Academy is not only an opportunity for students to learn but an opportunity for foreign educators to develop novel pedagogical strategies, to identify problems in their way of teaching, and, in general, to be aware of the need of educational research for the challenges of our global village.
SECTION I

Teaching to Discern:
Experience of the Summer Academy from an Organizational Perspective
Grappling with the Challenges of Social Development through In-House International Training

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Introduction

In order to gain new ways of understanding the world, we need to rethink academic environments. In this sense, a commitment to provide new generations with practical, communicational and critical thinking skills necessary to face present challenges is imperative. This effort provides students with opportunities as members of the global village. Obviously, globalization implies, to some degree, the loss of individual and cultural identity, and academia has an important role in creating common scenarios for the convergence of experiences and knowledge.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are becoming important problem-solving environments in which researchers think about complex issues concerning contemporary societies. In this sense, several questions demand answers: how to move to new societies; how to achieve sustainable cities; how our contexts can be re-purposed, redesigned for healthier and more resilient settings with improved economic efficiency and less impact on the environment; and how HEIs can address these issues from a knowledge-based perspective.

In addition, the role that HEIs can play to help societies to grapple with their very complicated social limitations is a matter of examination, especially the way students can be agents of social transformation by applying knowledge to real life, and how faculty members can become mediators to tackle social challenges. It also seems that an open dialogue within the different branches of an educational institution must be encouraged in order to reach agreements on how to deal with those challenges.

As members of the organizational staff, we have learnt that relationships strengthen by solving problems together and that knowledge is created through these efforts and in dealing with issues arising in real time. Wise institutions cultivate alliances and common efforts at problem solving. Consequently, institutions must seek international scenarios for cooperation. The ultimate goal is to bring together different innovative experiences and abilities in order to further societal goals.

It was back in 2011 when two faculty members from the University of Mississippi visited Universidad de La Salle to teach some courses on intercultural issues for students at the School of Education. This experience ignited a series of reflections on the possibilities of offering students an international and multicultural experience, especially for those who could not go abroad but had the skills to intermingle with people from other latitudes. This sparked the idea of instituting permanent interdisciplinary courses taught in the English language and under teaching and learning interactions based on a problem-solving approach.
The idea of having visiting scholars at La Salle was conceived as an “in-house-mobility-laboratory” on the premise that mobility means the interchange of knowledge and that individuals serve as “vehicles” to disseminate such knowledge. This concept is different from the traditional understanding of mobility programs in which, sometimes, the sheer number of students or faculty members that have travelled is seen as an indicator of the level of internationalization achieved. Our motivation, rather, was bringing the world to the students.

In order for this initiative to work, a new internal organization had to be devised, with new academic and administrative units. As a result, an international and intercultural campus came to life, not only for students, but also for the staff.

Our “Summer Academy” grew in scope and organization and became a tradition at the university. Every year, the courses have a different interdisciplinary thread: Latin American ideas, leadership and global understanding, alternatives to socio-economic growth, peacebuilding, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.

The reflections presented herein have to do with how to make interactions between individuals possible, but also with how to transfer knowledge in order to achieve solutions to real-life problems.

**Background: The Need for an Integrated Region**

Latin America is going through a strong economic recession, accompanied by great social and political challenges. This crisis is structural due to inefficient and uncompetitive social systems that have increased poverty and inequality, as well as public and private indebtedness. Latin American societies have the common challenge of creating a conscious, civic, efficient, but, above all, innovative and critical human capital that would allow raising international competitiveness while creating social conditions for a better distribution of wealth.

Latin American economies, in general, and the Colombian economy, in particular, all face the challenge of guaranteeing students’ access to and continuity in higher education. According to Izecson de Carvalho, Looi, Saad, and Sinatra (2013), only 40 out of every 100 students who start elementary education in Colombia will finish high school. Out of those, ten will go to college, and only five will graduate — a situation that is mainly due to economic distress. Such a worrying situation makes it imperative for higher education institutions to take a political stand and insist that education is decisive in achieving social development and not a luxury for the very few people who can afford it.
Therefore, Colombia faces a big challenge if educational institutions (both public and private) do not see themselves as a collective that must help society to achieve development and wealth. These institutions must be aware of their responsibility to change the historical path of the country instead of simply reacting to global trends in order to survive. It would be useful to approach a social constructionist perspective that considers that, among other things, educational institutions build the realities of the individuals as they interact with the outer world; that means that these institutions need to bring the world to the classrooms.

Development integrates human, cultural, environmental, social, productive, and welfare values; in order to achieve it, education must be connected to the specific needs of society. We believe that mobility facilitates the interchange of ideas that help our countries devise useful and autochthonous ways of reaching the desired development.

To ensure the flow of knowledge and ideas, mobility cannot be a privilege of the few; it should benefit all manner of students, especially those in need. With regard to international opportunities, Colombian HEIs should use their available resources to achieve the aim of knowledge exchange. The first step is to create institutional mechanisms to strengthen access to higher education. A weak higher education endangers democracy, the productive apparatus, as well as other social structures needed to overcome the systemic crisis.

However, access to higher education is not enough for social change: Universities must train professionals to imagine the best future for our country. They must promote critical thinking and minds that propose viable solutions for current challenges in order to create wellbeing for the majority of the population. In this sense, academia may build proposals to restructure societies — and educational systems — that currently evidence all types of failures and weaknesses; to that end, international ventures present different opportunities. Therefore, internationalizing activities in higher education should not be understood only as a way of achieving an international reputation or prestige.

In a democratic society, having a degree legitimatizes particular roles and social status; therefore, improved access to degrees fosters equality. In this sense, the social commitment of bringing higher education to underprivileged populations (poor, disabled and discriminated minorities) must materialize in a process based on principles of quality and equity.