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Community of practice as community of learners: How foreign language teachers understand professional and language identities

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Community of Practice as Community of Learners: How Foreign Language Teachers
Understand Professional and Language Identities

by

Ruth Ban

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Language Teachers Understand Professional And Language Identities

Ruth Ban

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the transmogrification of four Mexican foreign language teachers as they participate in a teaching exchange in American schools throughout the United States. Previous research into development of competent membership in given communities of practice points to the need for mutual engagement with other community members, an understanding of the community activity, and a shared repertoire among community members. Framed within an activity theory perspective, the present study examined how the teachers's socio-historical background, cultural tools and artifacts, along with other pedagogical activities, community rules, and division of labor mediated the teachers' understanding of their professional identity within their exchange communities.

Situated within a cohort of thirteen exchange teachers, these four teachers employed an electronic discussion board, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), and instant messaging to narrate their experiences as well as create a global support community. Data collected from these electronic medium were employed as research texts to evidence shared construction of teacher identity within the teachers' local communities. The research texts, in turn, served as data for the development of narrative accounts of these teachers' activities and experiences as mediational factors in community participation.

Findings from this study uncover the importance of pedagogical activity as a mediational factor in the transmogrification of teacher identity for these exchange

teachers. In addition, it is suggested that culturally shared repertoire, family participation, and social interaction are essential factors in mediating competent community membership in local communities. Finally, this study points to the fluid nature of teacher identity; it proposes that this conceptualization of self-as-teacher is constantly transforming due to mediation by pedagogic activity and participation in local communities of practice.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background.

Although I am not a Mexican, I have lived in Mexico for over two decades. During that time I have worked as an educator in varying roles. Most recently, my work has focused on teacher education. At Aguascalientes State university (*Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes*, henceforth UAA), I am a professor in the language department that houses a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT). I have also been involved in projects not directly related to my teaching at the university. For the last seven years, I have participated in a course for Mexican in-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers who are about to embark on a teaching exchange to the United States to teach Spanish. This teaching exchange is sponsored by the Fulbright Commission and administrated by *Comisión México-Estados Unidos para el Intercambio Educativo y Cultural* (COMEXUS).

The teaching exchange is designed to serve public school EFL teachers. Most of the participants teach at the public secondary school level, grades 7 – 9. These teachers are native speakers of Spanish, who define themselves as English teachers; they have never taught Spanish as a foreign language. For some of them, it is the first time they have ever lived in another town or city. For a majority of them, it is the first time they will venture out of Mexico; they have never lived in a foreign country.

In 1999 COMEXUS determined that the participants in this program needed initial support and information to make their teaching exchange more successful. This project is different than other Fulbright-Garcia Robles supported programs

because the participants do not always have the academic skills or the cultural savvy to always be successful. COMEXUS proposed an intensive course *in situ*, therefore allowing the teachers to focus on preparing for the teaching exchange.

The course is described to the participants as content-based; in other words, they expect to learn facts and teaching methodologies that will help them on their teacher exchange. However, another unspoken, yet consistent, by-product of the course is the formation of a support community. This support group has included the exchange participants, course teachers, and at times the COMEXUS administrators. Via telephone, email, and most recently through an electronic discussion board (Yahoo! Group) the previous groups have maintained communication throughout the teaching exchange and even for years following the exchange.

Justification for the Research

As a result of direct contact with the participants throughout and after the teaching exchange, I have been able to observe changes in their professional identity. For years, I have asked myself what happens to these teachers as they negotiate meanings of their professional and language identities as they make their way through their teaching exchanges, and how these transformations affect them when they return to their home schools in Mexico. As a result, throughout my experiences with this program, I have become interested in these teachers' stories. In addition, I have wondered how their recently acquired knowledge of technology can serve as a tool to permit them to mediate their understanding of the teaching exchange. Their knowledge of technology is two pronged. On one hand, as a result of the orientation course, they have learned to make use of possible applications of technology in their foreign language classes. On the other hand, they use technology to co-construct and develop a community of learners as a result of mutual engagement, joint engagement and a shared repertoire regarding their teaching exchange. Consequently, these concepts have led me to want to gain more

knowledge about how the participants on this teaching exchange mediate their professional and language identities.

Statement of the Problem

As are most learning experiences, the problems and issues facing the teachers who participate in the COMEXUS teaching exchange are contextually situated, intriguing, complex and multi-faceted. Although each participant had multiple realities within their teaching exchange, they brought with them similar socio-historical experiences which contributed to their shared understanding of the meaning of foreign language teaching, as well as their professional and language identities. The upcoming section addresses problems that faced the participants on the COMEXUS exchange.

First of all, being a teacher in the United States is unlike working in any other profession. On a daily basis, there are questions raised in the media regarding the meaning of teaching and what teachers need to know to be able to prepare today's students (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Additional questions are raised constantly regarding why students do not learn as much as the previous generation did. This open interrogation into the quality of teachers and the profession lead to questions about whether teaching is, in fact, a profession or not. Many view teaching merely as an extension of mothering or nurturing (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Although similar controversies exist in the Mexican school system, the media, and parents are not as aggressive in demanding quality education.

In addition, certain subjects, levels or areas are deemed more important or prestigious within the school curriculum. For example, it is uncommon to hear a parent tell their child not to study for mathematics, because they will never need it in their future, but foreign languages do not hold this prestigious position in the curriculum. Nor does society express negative views surrounding learning to read or write in one's native language. However, foreign language is often seen as an

unnecessary graduation requirement that will never be of any use in the future. As a result, foreign language courses do not hold a highly prestigious position in the high school curriculum in the United States. Therefore, the COMEXUS participant enters a system fraught with controversies regarding economies of meaning (Wenger, 1998) regarding their status in the educational community.

Exchange participants come to this experience with bilingual proficiencies in at least English and Spanish; however, their language proficiency is different in each of the two languages. Although some of the teachers may have native-like proficiency in English, the majority of the exchange participants are native speakers of a regional dialect of Mexican Spanish with non-native like proficiency in American English (Freed, 1995). Another linguistic difference that may set some of the Mexican teachers apart is their mild British accent. For many of the exchange teachers, their language learning process was carried out using course materials produced in the UK, and with teachers who taught "British English"; at times they use both lexical items and intonation more similar to the British variety of English. In other words, these teachers define themselves as speakers of Spanish who are in the process of learning English. Having to negotiate their understandings of their language identities in a professional setting that includes school principals, co-workers, school support personnel and students in a foreign or second language will impact their language identity formation and transformation.

Furthermore, the exchange teachers may be expected to teach a variety of Spanish that is unfamiliar to them that includes both phonological and lexical items that do not exist in the Mexican variety of Spanish they speak. These factors can potentially lead to the use of intonation and vocabulary that contrast with those in the course textbook and audio/video materials. These issues will also impact the teachers' language identity by positioning their language in a less/more prestigious position with respect to the variety being taught (Kachru, 1996). Within the school

context, the exchange teachers will be expected to possess certain skills that they do not necessarily need in Mexico. An example of this is the use of technology both to support the teaching process, such as in storing and calculating grades, as well as using technology to enhance their lessons. Although one aspect of the orientation course deals with the use of technology, proficiency in the use of technology is not usually acquired without interest and motivation to learn combined with continued practice (Warschauer, 2004). In general, these teachers bring concerns regarding their abilities to apply technology to teaching and as a tool in their professional role. Tasks such as reading and responding to email prove daunting for some of the participants (personal communication with previous COMEXUS participants, September – December, 2004).

Anecdotal evidence from participation in previous orientation courses pointed to the fact that prospective participants in the COMEXUS teaching exchange imagine an idealized view of teaching and schooling in the US. Within their idyllic conceptions, they envision classrooms that depict American schools and schooling as having unlimited material resources and students that are anxiously waiting to learn Spanish from a native speaker of the language. As a result of these ideas, these teachers begin their experience with high hopes of being able to work as equals with their co-workers, take advantage of resources available in the American school system, and learn to become better teachers from their teaching exchange. These preconceived views of the US educational system will mediate their negotiation of their professional identities within their exchange schools.

Finally, the COMEXUS teachers hold views about American culture that have been propagated by the media, particularly movies and television. On one hand, television depicts a world where huge homes with lush green lawns and expensive foreign cars in the driveway can be had for a song. Everyone has a good job that pays good money. Children are blonde and intelligent. On the other hand the media

also depicts, urban areas that are battlegrounds for gang wars and homeless people sleeping in the street. Between the news media and television programming, a description of American society made up of child molesters, serial killers, children who shoot at each other in schools and sexually promiscuous men, women and children is offered. In my previous experience with participants in the COMEXUS teaching exchange, teachers have posed questions that suggest that they are coming to the United States slightly apprehensive of what their experience with American culture will be.

From their socio-historical background the teachers bring a cultural understanding that is indigenous to Mexico. The arrival of Hernán Cortéz to colonize Mexico in 1519 (<http://www.answers.com/topic/hern-n-cort-s>) brought with it the concept of *La Malinche*. To date, this idea, known as *malinchismo*, refers to the idea that everything that originates outside of Mexico is good or of higher quality than that which comes from Mexico. (<http://www.espaciosdigital.com/articulos/verarticulo.asp?ID=83>). As a result, this commonly held belief leads to the desire to purchase higher priced American goods because of their brand name and /or fashion statement. Consequently, the Mexican teachers hope to be able to survive on their stipend, support their families and still be able to acquire some of the *American dream* to take back to Mexico with them when the exchange is over.

The above-mentioned issues intertwine to create a socio-historical portraiture that the Mexican exchange teacher bring with them as they began their teaching exchange. As the exchange progresses the multiple realities of their individual settings and contexts impact both the teacher's professional and language identity. As a result, the exchange teachers' learning process within their exchange schools is negotiated by the tools and artifacts available to them to enhance the sociocultural development of their professional and language identities.

Description of the Study

The present study offered the opportunity to hear these teachers' stories as they are co-constructed with the researcher. The mediation of the teachers' stories will be framed by the belief that learning is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978, Wenger, 1998). It will also be viewed through the notion that cultural tools and artifacts, signs, symbols and activities mediate the teachers' learning process about themselves as it begins interpersonally and moves to intrapersonal development (Vygotsky, 1978). As the teachers mediate each others' understanding of their new identities through the use of an electronic discussion board, they will write and post their stories. These stories will then become the basis for the stories that will contribute to our knowledge about how these exchange foreign language teachers negotiate their understandings of their professional and language identities through the use of activities and of technology as a tool to participate in and reify a community of practice.

Research Questions

One overarching issue guided this study:

What are the mediational factors in the transmogrification of professional and language identity for Mexican foreign language exchange teachers?

To better unpack the above concepts, the following questions were also posed:

1. How does participation in an online community of learners mediate Mexican Foreign Language teachers' community membership?
2. How does participation in pedagogical activity within the community of practice mediate professional and language identity?
3. How does socio-historical pedagogical knowledge mediate community membership?
4. What are factors that mediate community participation or non-participation in the electronic community?

5. What are the [most important] factors that mediate the exchange teachers' trajectories toward competent community membership?

Definition of Terms

The present study examined how activities within a community of learners mediate the professional and language identity of Mexican foreign language teachers. The following terms were employed throughout to explicate the study.

English as a foreign language (EFL): Teaching of English in a country where English is not an official language. Under these circumstances, English is used as a tool to communicate for business, science, research or educational purposes. The teacher-participants in this study are EFL teachers in Mexico; therefore have certain socio-historical concepts of the foreign language teaching process.

Community of practice: Wenger's (1998) definition of community of practice entails individual participation through three aspects: joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement. These characteristics work together to form a community.

Wenger (1998) describes a community of practice as an environment for learning to take place through social interaction. This theory will be the basis for the formation of an electronic community of learners by the participants in this study as well as one mediational aspect of their social learning process.

Activity theory: Beginning with A. N. Leont'ev's (Lantolf & Appel, 1994) initial conceptualization of activity theory, it has focused on the activity the individual (or subject) is doing in a particular setting. Leont'ev's (Engeström, 1987, 2001) first generation conceptualization of activity theory was based on Vygotsky's notion of social learning mediated by tools and signs. Leont'ev's second generation addition was formulated on the addition of three units of analysis: activity, action and operation. Engeström's (1987) third generational model added three aspects that further mediate an activity in a given context: community, rules and division of

labor. The mediational activities within the participants' exchange schools provided a framework for this study.

Tools and signs: Vygotsy (1978) defined tools and signs as being the primary mediational aspects that account for the development of higher order thinking skills. These tools are created by individuals within their cultural and historical conditions. Both tools and signs are used to solve problems; their use in society changes both the tools and the individual that uses them, therefore they are transformational in nature (Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

Mediation: Mediation is a central construct to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of how humans learn and develop higher order thinking skills. Vygotsky's (1978) posited that all human mental activity is constructed through the application of signs and symbols; these tools are managed through the use of language. In other words, Vygotsky's view of psychological development (1978) is dependent on our use of external signs and symbols to mediate our learning and development. This interaction of signs and symbols intertwines with our cultural and socio-historical backgrounds to give rise to mental functions such as, "attention, rational thinking, emotion, learning and development" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Electronic discussion board: This electronic forum provides group members an opportunity to discuss issues or interests that group members share (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum).

Limitations and Delimitations

The proposed study employed a community of practice context within an activity theory framework to examine how Mexican foreign language teachers mediated their professional and language identity transformation throughout their COMEXUS teaching exchange. As the researcher, I recognized that there is more than one theoretical framework that could be applied to the same phenomenon. I also recognized that the contexts of each of the participants' school was different,

therefore the mediational tools and activities were intrinsically different. In addition, the use of the narrative lens to report the teachers' stories did not represent one truth but the multiple voices of the participants in the study.

My work as the researcher made me a participant in the study as a result of my relationship with the teacher-participants as their teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend. My narrative portrayal of the teachers' transformation was my understanding of their experiences as mediated by both their writing and explanation of their learning and development.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of the proposed research. It presented the research problem and offered a justification for the study. Research questions that guide the study were posed along with key terms that conceptualize the theoretical framework. The upcoming chapter addresses literature and research pertinent to the present study.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Background

This first section of Chapter 2 describes the socio-historical context from which the participants in the COMEXUS teaching exchange originated. After an explanation of the Mexican school system, a description of how teachers become qualified to teach English offers a view of the intricacies of teacher development and learning in Mexico. This chapter also includes a description of the teaching exchange including requirements for participation, and historical contextualization for the orientation course.

The sections on the Mexican school system, English language teacher education in Mexico and the COMEXUS teaching exchange provide a socio-historical background that helps the reader understand how these factors are integral to the formation of a community of learners during their initial interaction in the orientation course. It is in this context that the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) are first negotiated to create a meaningful support community. The present study looked at exchange teachers' professional learning and identity transformation through a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Engeström, 1999) as situated within the context of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). As a result, it was of utmost importance that these socio-historical aspects of the teachers' histories be considered.

Also within this chapter, after elucidating the teachers' socio-historical backgrounds, a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) framework as a theoretical basis for the present study is explained. In addition, due to the nature of this study,

an explanation of Activity Theory is provided. This concept provided the theoretical insight into how specifically designed tasks that the teachers conducted provided tools to mediate their understanding of their individual identities within the context of their exchange schools.

In order to provide socio-historical foundations for the environments within which the exchange teachers will be working, an explication of teacher knowledge within the context of the American schools system will be offered. Following this, foreign language teacher knowledge will be examined as a background for the educational context of foreign language teaching.

Mexican Education System

Curricular Organization

The Mexican education system is divided into two major levels *Educación Básica* and *Educación Superior* (see Table 1). *Educación Básica* consists of kindergarten through the ninth grade. This level is divided into pre-school, primary school and secondary school. In general, the students' ages range 5 to 16 or 17 years old. Grades one through nine is compulsory; some states also require pre-school. Although this research study focused on secondary and university teachers in the public school system, all of the participants have been students in the Mexican school system. As a result, this is the context from which they make meaning about schools and schooling; therefore the socio-historical context of Mexican schools played an integral part in understanding the participants in this study.

Table 1

Mexican Educational System

Mexican educational system		
<i>Educación básica</i>	Pre-school	Grades K
	Primary school	1 – 6
	Secondary school	7 – 9
<i>Educación superior</i>	Preparatory school	10 -12
	University	13 – 16/17
	<i>Escuelas Normales: básica y superior</i>	

Federal / State Areas of Authority

Until 1994, the Federal Education Ministry (*Secretaría de Educación Pública – SEP*) held full responsibility for all aspects of education from pre-kindergarten to preparatory school. Policy decisions were made, curriculum was developed, teachers were hired and fired, and textbooks were published under the control of the federal office of the SEP. In 1994, the National Agreement for the Modernization of Elementary School (*Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica*) dictated that the state Ministries of Education were to be re-defined and become responsible for pre-school, primary and secondary education in their respective states. This reform shifted accountability for some policy decisions and teacher hiring to the state level. Curriculum was still to be developed and regulated by the federal SEP. Textbook printing still was carried out at the federal level, but now the states could develop and publish books for their for subject areas that required special content such as history or geography that is unique to each state.

As a result of their new-found autonomy, individual states began to develop and implement special projects to meet the needs of their local populations. Some states began to install computer laboratories, others initiated special projects for teaching specific subjects, such as EFL or science or mathematics. Aguascalientes became the first Mexican state to borrow from the International Monetary Fund to

carry out a special project in Education. *Proyecto Umbral*, (1992) as it was called, implemented a comprehensive program to install both computer laboratories and adapted self-access centers for English as a Foreign Language (ELF). Both projects included teacher training and technical support programs to accompany the new technology. Other states began EFL programs at the primary school level.

Another aspect of state autonomy was the local hiring of teachers. Although this brought more power to the local delegations of the Teachers' Union, SEP at the federal level was still able to exert control by determining the number of permanent class hour contracts (*plaza*) that could be assigned. In other words, although there are teachers for every group in every school, some teachers do not have the *plaza* or permanent tenure positions. These teacher who do not have a *plaza* can be moved or re-located or may lose their jobs after a semester or school year.

In 1988, with the election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari as president of Mexico, the national education policy regarding the teaching of EFL became a curricular concern at all levels. Governmental interest in learning and teaching English was directly related to the trade-focused economic policy (<http://www-tech.mit.edu/Bulletins/nafta.html>) of the North American Foreign Trade Agreement (NAFTA). One aspect of this agreement brought transnational industry to different areas of Mexico. English was seen as a tool to carry out global business. As a result, programs that focused on teaching EFL were supported by the government.

Secondary school has a nationally dictated curriculum designed for teaching English in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. At the preparatory level, grades 10 - 12, schools prepare students for their university studies or professional studies at either a university or technological institute. As a result, these schools are accredited by the type of school that their students will eventually attend upon graduation. Consequently, EFL curriculum is dictated by the accrediting institution; depending on the programs offered by the school, and the disciplinary areas covered, policy

making and curricular control, English teaching curriculum is different for each preparatory school.

Qualifications for Teaching EFL

In Mexico, teacher education is the sole responsibility of the *Normal* or teacher preparation schools. *Normal Básica* prepares primary school teachers; a Bachelors degree is required to teach at the primary school level. Language teaching or teaching EFL is not a curricular consideration in the preparation of primary school teachers, because there is no language curriculum established by either the state or federal Ministry of Education for primary school students.

Secondary School

Teacher preparation for EFL for secondary school level is carried out at *Normal Superior*. There are two routes to *Normal Superior*. A primary school teacher can return to school after having completed the *Normal Básica* to become a secondary school teacher. In this case, he or she must declare a subject area of interest and subsequently studies pedagogy related to this subject area. The second option is to enroll directly in *Normal Superior* upon completion of preparatory school. The selection of a teaching subject area also applies in this case. Although qualifications may differ slightly from state to state, most secondary school teachers who would participate in the teaching exchange probably would have attended a Normal school.

Normal school curriculum for preparing EFL teachers is developed at the Federal level; it includes primarily pedagogical aspects of language teaching. In other words, a student who attends a Normal school to become an English teacher is not usually taught English; they are taught how to teach English (Tutto & Vélez, 1997). Many times, the instruction in Normal school regarding best practices for teaching English class is carried out in Spanish. Instructors at the Normal school are

considered experts in pedagogy; they do not necessarily have a high proficiency in English (Tutto & Vélez, 1997).

A final option for a person considering teacher education is a Bachelors degree (*Licenciatura*) in the teaching of English as a foreign language. This course of study is offered at the university level. The mission of these university programs is to prepare EFL teachers for university level instruction; however, it is common in Mexico for teachers to hold more than one job, at more than one grade level. Therefore, there are instances when secondary school teachers hold a *licenciatura* from a university in teaching EFL. There are two reasons why the number of teachers with a *licenciatura* is limited in the secondary system. First of all, the university setting is perceived as a more favorable environment in terms of teaching prestige and salary. University teachers tend to earn more per hour, so teachers prefer to work at the university level if they can get a job. In addition, it is believed that teaching university students who are more academically motivated is easier than teaching secondary school students who may have more discipline problems. Secondly, there are some unwritten rules about who is hired into the public school system (Tutto & Vélez, 1997). The local or state teachers' union tends to support the hiring of graduates from the Normal schools. This is not only an informal way to guarantee like-mindedness in the teaching population; it establishes political ties and shared interests within the system. In the public system, or *Educación Básica*, there are also built-in advantages. Whereas university teachers earn more per hour, once a teacher is granted "hours" in the public system, it is more likely that this will grow into a full-time job with benefits, including paid summer vacation. In addition, programs such as the COMEXUS teaching exchange are exclusively for public school teachers.

Preparatory School

Preparatory schools are accredited by individual universities or technological institutes, depending on the disciplinary areas the school curriculum includes. Although this is not always the case, preparatory schools are known for separating the curriculum into either a science and mathematics strand or a humanities strand. Depending on school policies, EFL may be seen as more or less important depending on the discipline. These curricular differences will determine if the preparatory school is accredited by a university or a technical school. This accreditation process allows individual schools more leeway for teacher hiring. Each school is responsible for making sure that its teachers meet the teacher qualifications they establish and as a result, the students learn English to the school's satisfaction. There is supervision of the school by representatives of the accreditation agency in all content areas; they are the ones that must determine if the teachers meet the requirements or not. Consequently, there is a wide disparity between the proficiency levels of English teachers at the preparatory level. Some private schools may have teachers that have a native-like proficiency, whereas many rural schools must hire teachers at any proficiency level. In addition to language proficiency, pedagogical skills are also an issue in the public school system. At the preparatory school level, it is possible that the school could hire a person to teach that has a high proficiency in English, but has never taught before. As a result, teachers at the *Educación Superior* level can vary in terms of both language proficiency and pedagogical skills. Similar to the secondary school level, there are *plazas* for teachers, but not all teachers who work at the preparatory schools have a *plaza*.

University

EFL teachers at the university level can also be varied in their knowledge both of the language and pedagogy. This distinction is sometimes based on what the teacher is expected to teach. Technological institutes tend to see English as a tool for reading

comprehension of academic texts or English for Specific / Academic Purposes (ESP / EAP). If this is the case, the teacher is expected to be able to teach the students to read and understand texts in English. Some universities have a more communicative focus and expect their teachers to speak English and enable the students to be fluent in the language. If the university has a Bachelor's (*licenciatura*) program in English language teaching (ELT), their teachers are expected to be proficient in the four macro (reading, writing listening, speaking) skills and have a good understanding of language pedagogy. It is also possible that within the English department, teachers have different qualifications, and are assigned to courses according to their degrees, experience or language proficiency. Only recently have universities in Mexico made it a requirement that teacher at the university level hold a degree that is one level above that of the students they are teaching (www.uaa.mx). In other words, in certain cases, it was possible for a teacher without a BA to be teaching students studying for a BA degree, provided they were proficient in English. This exemplifies the academic reasoning of the institutions of higher education. They see English as a skill, and treat its learning as only skill acquisition. Therefore, anyone who has the skill can transmit it to the students.

General Comments

On the whole, the majority of EFL teachers have graduated from a teacher education program for teaching EFL. However, there are still some teachers who obtained their *plaza* because they hold a *licenciatura* in another subject area and are able to speak English. Most commonly, these teachers learned English from living in the United States. They usually do not have pedagogical training for the teaching of EFL (Ana Maria Bátis García, personal communication, March 30, 2005).

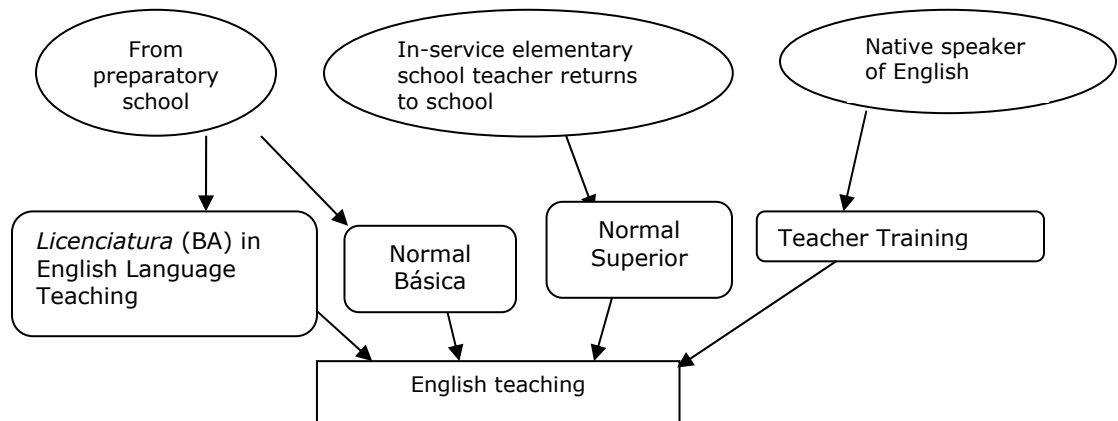
Once the teacher is hired into the system, there are on-going teacher training opportunities either in schools, conferences or special courses. Both the British Council and the American Embassy are interested in offering teacher training for EFL

teachers. The British Council is the education arm of the British Embassy throughout the world. It has provided teacher training in teaching EFL in Mexico as one aspect of their activities since 1943 (personal communication, Dr. Simon Harris, British Council, Mexico City, April, 2005). The American embassy also offers training in teaching EFL either through its English Language Officer, American-oriented cultural centers or language institutes or Fulbright Teaching Fellow programs. Teacher training courses that are offered by these two institutions are similar; usually they focus on one specific aspect of language teaching and are taught by specialists in that area. It is possible for the one specialist to offer training for both the British Council and the American Embassy, on different occasions. Many times, teachers receive a certificate of participation in the training course but it usually does not count toward academic points for advancement or salary increase.

There are also some private institutions, such as language centers, that offer teacher training. At present, two nation-wide language schools are very prominent; Harmon Hall and Interlingua. These schools are focused on the economic end of language teaching and offer a guarantee to their students that they will learn English within a given time period. They usually hire people with high language proficiency and train them to use their own teaching materials. Many times these new hires are not teachers; they are only proficient in English. These private language schools do not necessarily want their teachers to participate in other kinds of teacher training or work at other schools. However, they do not usually offer full time employment for their teachers and are known to only schedule classes in the early morning and in the late evening. As a result, the teachers are obliged to find more work in other educational institutions, such as in the public school system.

In conclusion, there are different ways to become a teacher in the public school system (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. How to become an EFL teacher



In part, these differences are attributable to the level of the educational institution, expectations of that institution, degree of freedom the institution has in making their own decisions about teachers and teacher hiring. On the other hand, some institutions have firmly placed guidelines about teacher qualification for EFL teachers. These differences in teacher preparation eventually mediate the both the institution's and the teachers' understandings of foreign language teacher qualifications. Furthermore, the exchange teachers' preparation experiences within the Mexican school system will have played a part in their understanding of their individual professional and language identities that they bring to the teacher exchange.

COMEXUS

Comision México Estados Unidos para el Intercambio Educative y Cultural (COMEXUS) was founded in 1990 to administrate Fulbright Scholarships in Mexico. The Fulbright scholarship program offers scholarships and grants to people around the world to promote educational exchange. Grantees' activities include lecturing at the university level, research, graduate study, and teaching at both the elementary and the secondary level (http://www.cies.org/about_fulb.htm). COMEXUS is dedicated to improving and expanding possibilities for education on both sides of the

Mexico – United States border as well as offer support to grantees (<http://www.comexus.org.mx/Nosotros/QueEsComexus.htm>). More specifically, COMEXUS cites its mission as, “Promoting bilateral understanding through educational exchange” (<http://www.comexus.org.mx/Nosotros/MisionEnglish.htm>). Due to the bilateral nature of the scholarships or grants that are awarded, it shares names of two prominent diplomats, Senator William Fulbright, sponsor of legislation that founded the Fulbright foundation and Alfonso García-Robles, Mexican recipient of the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize.

Teacher Exchange Program

One Fulbright program is a one-to-one teacher exchange for elementary, secondary, and university teachers. The COMEXUS teacher exchange program includes only EFL teachers at the secondary or post-secondary public school level from Mexico. American participants in this exchange can be Spanish teachers at elementary or secondary level. American Spanish teachers and Mexican English teachers exchange one-to-one teaching responsibilities for one semester. On previous occasions, the teachers have also exchanged living arrangements and automobiles with their counterparts.

Application Procedure

Qualifications for participation in the COMEXUS teaching exchange are as follows:

1. *Licenciatura* in English as a foreign language teaching, or equivalent
2. Grade point average in university level course of 8.5 out of 10 points.
3. Experience in teaching EFL
4. Letter of permission from local Ministry of Education
5. TOEFL score of 500 (173 on computer based test)

The application process begins by handing in the required documents along with the application form. An initial review of the documents is conducted by the selection committee and potential participants are invited to a face-to-face interview. After the interviews, the selection committee chooses between 10 and 20 teachers for the upcoming school year's exchange. If there is a candidate that meets all of the requirements, but is not sufficiently fluent in English, he or she could be sent to the University of South Carolina for a one semester English as a Second Language (ESL) course. Candidates who attend the English course spend Spring semester in South Carolina, return home and then come back to the United States to complete their teaching exchange in the following school year beginning in August.

Orientation Course

Due to the nature of the teaching exchange and the teachers who participate, in 1998 COMEXUS determined that an orientation course would favorably impact the attrition and success rate of the teaching exchange. The first course was carried out at the *Universidad de Tamulipas* by a Fulbright scholar as part of her teaching assignment. The course left Tamulipas because the first coordinator completed her Fulbright scholarship and returned to the United States. The following year, the course moved to Aguascalientes. It moved to Aguascalientes due to the relationship the local Ministry of Education had with SEP – Mexico City, and its central geographic location. The first two years (1999 – 2000) the course took place at the local Ministry of Education in the *Instituto de Educación de Aguascalientes (IEA)*. The following two years (2001- 2002) it took place at the *Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes (UAA)*. It was hosted in two different institutions because the coordinator worked at both schools and she relocated the course to take advantage of optimal conditions for the students. In 2003, the course was moved to Messiah College in Grantham, PA. This site was chosen because both course teachers now resided in the US; the course coordinator is a Spanish professor at Messiah College.

Course Design

When COMEXUS requested that a course be developed for the participants on this one-to-one teaching exchange it was because they believed that the teachers who participated in this particular program had fewer life, academic and cultural resources than the people who participated in their other programs (personal communication, Fay Henderson, May 1999). They realized that because of the nature of a one-to-one exchange, if one teacher did not succeed, two teachers and two schools were deprived of the experience. This was worrisome for COMEXUS, due to the nature of the bilateral governmental involvement in the program. Recruitment of successful participants in this teaching exchange is done by word of mouth; as a result, successful teaching exchanges will make the program stronger in the long run. Initial decisions regarding course curriculum was based on what COMEXUS saw the needs of the teacher-participants to be when the course began in 1999.

Since 1999, the orientation course has covered four major areas: (a) foreign language teaching methods, (b) American culture and cultural adaptation, (c) technology in foreign language, and (d) American school system organization. This overall program was designed to offer theoretical and practical content and experiences for the teachers who would soon participate in the teaching exchange. Initially, the weakest aspect of the course was the American schools segment. While the course was located in Mexico, there was little expertise among the course instructors, although all had been students in the American school system. As a result, two American instructors who had been Fulbright scholars to local Mexican programs were recruited to teach the segment on the American school system. Driven by the concern to improve the course, every year there have been modifications to the original program.

Course Coordination

The course has had three coordinators since its inception. The first – pre-Aguascalientes – course was developed and coordinated by a Fulbright scholar as part of her assigned work. The second coordinator was the researcher in the present study. The third coordinator is also an ex-Fulbright recipient who was assigned to the *Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes* as a Fulbright scholar. She began to coordinate the program when the course moved from Aguascalientes to Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania where she is tenured faculty. Course coordinator’s responsibilities include provision of room and board for attending teachers and instructors, planning and implementing cultural events, and scheduling a visit to a local high school along with facilitation of the planned teaching sessions.

Course Instructors

Over the last six sessions, the course has had seven instructors, although not all at the same time. All of the course instructors were foreign language teachers. Two instructors held positions at *UAA* and taught in the Bachelor’s degree in English language teaching at the university. One instructor was an elementary school and EFL teacher; she also had experience in the Ministry of Education volunteer department. Three instructors had been Fulbright scholars and worked on the course after their exchange had finished. The fifth instructor was a recent graduate from the BA program at the *UAA*. Four of the seven instructors hold Master’s or degrees in TESOL, one holds an Ed.D in Education in Spanish, the remaining two hold Bachelors degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Only one of the seven instructors has been a Normal School graduate.

All seven instructors have been bilingual, but with differing proficiencies in Spanish and English. Three were native speakers of Spanish who learned English at school in Mexico to become English teachers. One of these three has had vast experience in the United States as a tourist. Two have been native speakers of

English who learned Spanish at school; they have improved their Spanish proficiency through living in Mexico. The last two instructors were native born Americans who lived in Mexico and married Mexican nationals.

Theories of Social Learning

Community of Practice

In 1991, Lave and Wenger proposed a new model of learning as a social endeavor which can effectively come about through social interaction (http://www.ofenhandwerk.com/oklc/pdf_files/E-4_cox.pdf). This new model was based on an apprenticeship style of learning applicable to both business and education. Studies on teacher education applied this model to the study of both student teaching and novice teachers' professional development. Lave and Wenger's (1991) apprenticeship model fit well within educators' views of how teachers learn to become professionals (Darling-Hammond, 1996). In their application of this perspective, researchers looked at how novice teachers begin as peripheral participants in their communities of practice only to establish themselves through trajectories toward becoming full members of their communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Around the same time, Brown and Duguid (http://www.ofenhandwerk.com/oklc/pdf_files/E-4_cox.pdf) applied the concept of communities of practice to workers who created original problem solving practices when managerial guidelines did not offer adequate solutions.

In explaining how speech communities are defined within ethnography of communication framework, Saville-Troike (2002) stated that social science research defines community as "shared knowledge or possessions, or behaviors, derived from Latin *communitae*, 'held in common' " (p. 17). Within this theory, language is the factor that divides or unifies the speech community; each community is divided and sub-divided depending upon the level of community being studied. Community members participate in a number of speech communities in different social contexts;

this participation means that community members have a repertoire of social identities, each appropriate for different social settings. To that end, the common mode of communication is the determining factor in defining community participation and identity (Saville-Troike, 2002).

Another example of communities of practice in an educational context was Toohey's (1996) study of a Punjabi kindergarten classroom. In this study (1996, 2000) she looked at how community factors apply to second language learners; where she found the community activities to be less teacher-centered. Likewise, Toohey, Waterstone, & Julé-Lemke (2000) found more equal teacher participation in what they termed a "community of practice event". In both studies, findings indicated that a community of practice perspective creates a less teacher-centered classroom.

In 2000 (Wenger & Snyder) and 2002, (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder) posited that the use of communities of practice as a methodology in business or managerial situations can offer ways to increase worker productivity, therefore making the enterprise more successful. Lemesianou, and Gutierrez (2003) also reported on their experiences in forming communities of practice to meet faculty members needs for shared resources. Their community of practice perspective fits within the managerial stance taken toward using community as a tool within companies. Wenger's work, (1991, 2000, 2002) all describe communities of practice that offer a more managerial perspective of how communities work within specific businesses.

Wenger's (1998) work offers the strongest theoretical framework and offers a description of the components of a community of practice that was most applicable to the present study. In addition, this explanation of learning as socially constructed practice mediated by tools and community artifacts provides a theoretical framework complementary to Engeström's Activity Theory.

Wenger's (1998) perspective of communities of practice was chosen because it provides a clear theoretical portrayal of the situation faced by the Mexican teachers as they struggle to learn about their new teaching and language identities throughout their teaching exchange. Wenger's (1998) focus on identity development as an outcome of learning, (i.e., learning about oneself or becoming) not only addressed identity transformation, but also considered the dynamic nature of identity formation.

The forthcoming section examines Wenger's (1998) concept of community of practice as a theory of learning; along with this explanation of communities of practice are the terms and definitions that facilitated the understanding of this framework. Furthermore, learning as identity formation and transformation as learning are discussed. In keeping with the community of practice perspective, Wenger (1998) described his concept as a product of his work with other theorists, especially that of Jean Lave (Lave & Wenger, 1991). He credited the academic community in which he works – or his community of practice -- as the enabling factor for his work on developing this framework.

Definition of Community of Practice

Wenger's (1998) explanation of the relationship between communities and learning is based on a definition of his premises regarding social learning, which entail the following points.

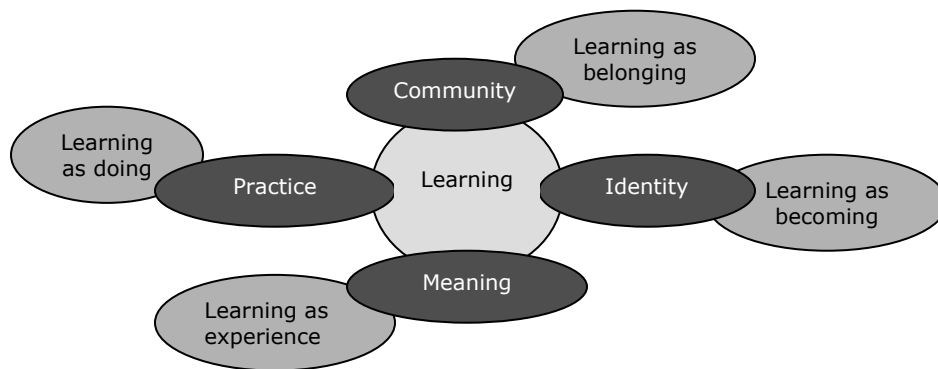
1. Humans are social beings. Learning is also a social endeavor.
2. Knowledge within a social setting means being competent at activities which are valued within the community.
3. Knowing is developed through active engagement in the community (or world) through participation in the community's enterprises or activities to which it is dedicated.

4. The goal of learning is to produce meaning or understanding of the world and our engagement within it. (p. 4)

This social theory of learning focuses on two aspects of social participation; being active participants in social communities and constructing an identity in relation to this community.

Wenger (1998) posits that a social theory of learning is characterized by four components of social participation: meaning, practice, community and identity. He (Wenger, 1998, p. 5) depicts the relationship between these elements graphically in the following manner (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Components of a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998)



Wenger (1998) readily observes that no one aspect is more important than another or holds any dominant position within the framework; these elements are interchangeable with respect to their arrangement. Communities of practice as Wenger (1998) depicts them are everywhere in our lives; they include schools, churches, families, singing groups, sports teams, etc. Due to the all-inclusive nature of the components, Wenger (1998) posits that learning, in turn, is part of everything we do in our lives. In addition, he reminds us that the way we conceptualize learning depends on the way we see the world, and the way we look at learning will impact how we believe teaching and learning should be carried out. More specifically, if we see the learning as the transfer of content from the “knower” to the “learner” then

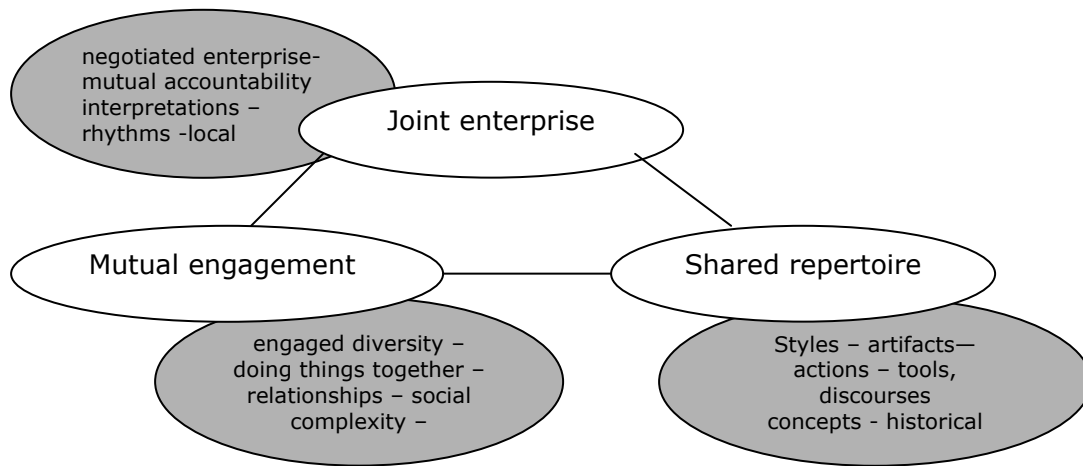
we will want to organize our learning context in a way that facilitates this type of transmission of knowledge. In turn, if we see learning as a social practice, we will want to organize communities that facilitate social learning. Wenger's work (1998) is directly concerned with the organization of communities of practice and social theories of practice and learning.

Wenger (1998) describes social practice as "doing... in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do.practice is always social practice" (p. 47). Including both explicit and implicit aspects of social practice, this theory includes "language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations" (p. 47) as well as other explicit aspects of practice. Unspoken elements of practice include "implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views" (p. 47). Wenger's (1998) notion does not characterize practice as having an inverse relationship with knowing or theory. In his conceptualization, practice encompasses both knowing or thinking and theory.

Membership in a Community of Practice

Community membership is not determined by institutional structuring of group membership or joining a club or other organization. For example, a classroom or school cohort is not necessarily a community of practice just because they have been arranged and labeled as a group; the definition of a community of practice encompasses joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement to create this environment. Wenger's (1998) graphic depiction of the relationship between the three factors is as follows (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Membership in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998)



Competent Membership

Competent membership in a community of practice implies full participation in the enterprise of that community. More specifically, competent membership (Wenger, 1998) in a community of practice is comprised of the following elements:

1. Mutuality of engagement – the ability to establish relationships with other community members through responding to their actions and establishing an identity of participation.
2. Accountability to the enterprise –the ability to take responsibility for ones’ contribution to the community. It also includes possessing a shared understanding of and participating in the negotiation of community identity.
3. Negotiability of the repertoire – the ability to understand and make use of the repertoire of the community practice. This implies a degree of participation (personal or vicarious) in the history of practice to be able to recognize the elements of its repertoire. (p. 137)

Despite these specifically defined criteria for membership in a community, each individual community defines who and what it means to be a member of that

community (Wenger, 1998). In other words, although communities share characteristics of membership, it is the locally negotiated contexts that define competent participation in practice. For example, in the present research study, competent practice was not only defined by the participants' understanding of their personal socio-historical definitions of school and learning in Mexico, but it was also mediated by the American school community and its rules regarding competent membership.

In addition to the above-mentioned concepts, there are other components of practice that lead to learning. More specifically, for learning to take place, a meaningful experience must interact with competence. Although Wenger (1998) states that both experience and competence constitute learning, he also points out that they may interrelate in different ways depending on the socio-historical context of both the community and the participants. For example, participants with less experience, (novices) work within the community to transform their experience so that it fits within the community's definition of competence. On the other hand, participants with experience that is outside of the community's definition of competence may work to transform the community's regime of competence so that it includes the experience they possess. This interrelation between experience of meaning and competence was of significance in this research study because it was through their understanding of their experience and competence that these particular teachers defined themselves. Within their new communities of practice, other definitions of competence and meanings of experience existed or were revealed, thereby, transforming the Mexican teacher's identity within the community of practice.

Wenger (1998) highlights different paths or trajectories to engagement in a particular community. These routes will eventually determine the role of the participants within the community. Pointing to the fact that all participation does not

lead to community membership, Wenger (1998) proposed the following possibilities for participation:

1. Peripheral trajectories – these do not lead to full participation, although there is some access to the community. Peripheral participants may choose to not become members of a given community, but may need to interact with it in a particular way.
2. Inbound trajectories – newcomers who are interested in joining the community. Their present or initial participation may be peripheral and become inbound when the individual decides they would like to be a part of the community.
3. Insider trajectories – these individuals represent competent members of the community but full membership is not the end of identity formation. They participate in the evolution of practice, which leads to renegotiation of one's identity.
4. Boundary trajectories – sustaining an identity across communities of practice, which includes spanning of and linking communities and maintaining competent membership in various communities.
5. Outbound trajectories – paths leading out of the community, for example, children growing up. (p. 154)

These trajectories played a part in the Mexican teachers' negotiation of identity within their new community of practice, as the research participants opted for participation or non-participation in their communities. However, the individual communities also had rules regarding boundary crossing into both new communities and multi-membership in various communities.

Participation and Reification

Fundamental concepts to defining the negotiation of meaning within the community are participation and reification as Wenger (1998) sees these as the duality present in our everyday understanding of meaning. Participation (Wenger, 1998) is defined as the "social aspect of living in the world in terms of membership in a community and active involvement in social enterprise" (p. 55). Reification is defined as the participant's or community's way of making concepts real or transforming them into reality. Examples of reification include journal writing, movie making, or even our own conceptualization of good and evil. Reification is both a product -- referring to what we think -- and a process -- making what we think real. Reification points to the tip of the iceberg, below it are other significances; they are indications of human meaning.

A community of practice frame explains how we project our meanings of the world onto the world; then we perceive them as having a reality of their own. This research study examined the reification of the teachers' experiences through carrying out or participation in certain activities during their teaching exchange. Their meanings, in turn, contributed to the development of their identities within this context. Participation and reification do not exist as opposites of each other; they co-exist as we negotiate continuously meaning in our communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Through our participation in a given community, we see ourselves in each other as shared characteristics; in the reification process we project ourselves onto the world, without recognizing that we are seeing our own view of reality. Participation and reification are "woven seamlessly into our practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 63); as a result we are not able to detect our reification process; we attribute the meanings we create to other causes within the community. Participation and reification are acts of remembering and forgetting; reification calls on the memories

of the past and renegotiates them to produce forms that persist and change according to laws of our community of practice.

Wenger (1998) proposes that the use of tools to perform an activity will shape our meaning-making experience. "Practices evolve as shared histories of learning; History is a combination of participation and reification intertwined over time" (Wenger, 1998, p. 87). In this research study, the use of activities within the Activity Theory framework will change the exchange teachers' negotiation of meaning within their experience.

The focus of participation impacts how we think about learning (Wenger, 1998). For individuals learning is related to their participation in their communities of practice, for communities, learning implies the redefinition of their practice and the insurance of new generations of members and for organizations learning is the maintenance of interconnected communities of practice.

Identity

This section will delve more specifically into Wenger's (1998) view of identity formation and transformation that result within a community of practice. As we have seen, developing a practice requires the formation of communities whose members interact with each other and acknowledge one another as members. Our practices in communities involve knowing how to be a human being. As a result, engaging in community practice is the negotiation of identity or, as Wenger (1998) put forth, "The experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world." (p. 151). Engagement in practice provides the experience, but what the community pays attention to reifies us as participants – or creates our identity (Wenger, 1998).

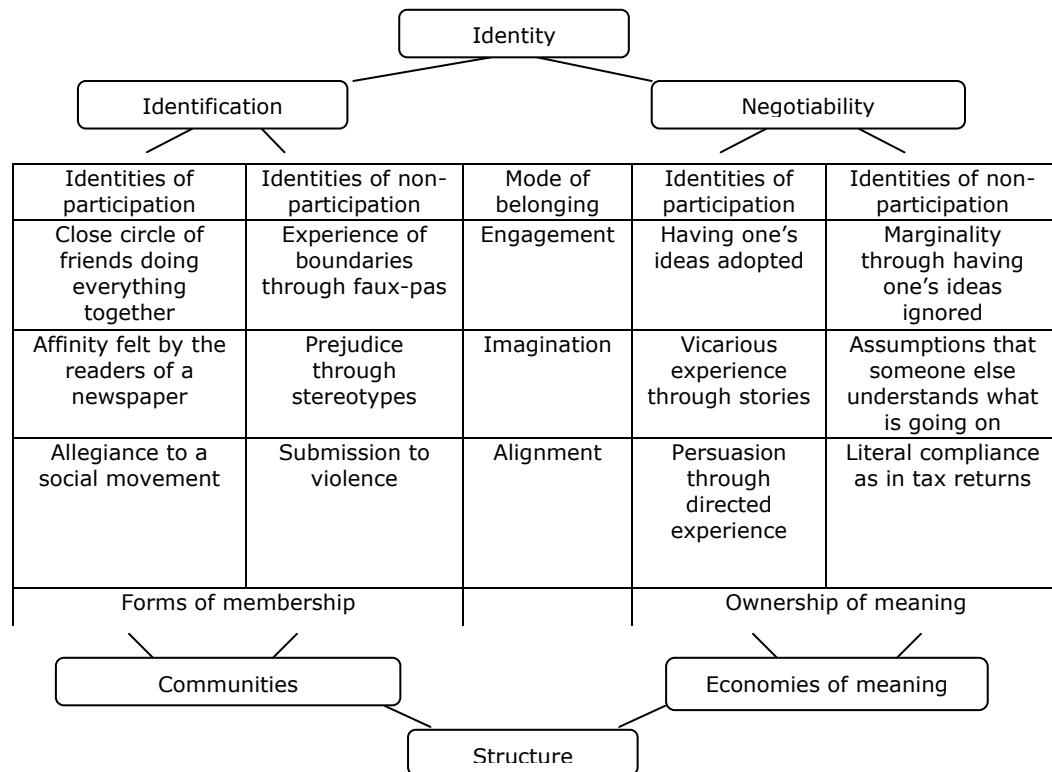
Our identities are not just words that are used to describe ourselves, they are the lived experiences of engagement of practice; 'an identity is made up of the layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (Wenger, 1998, p. 151). The way we affect

the world and our relationships with others form layers that build upon each other to form an interweaving of participation and reification. We construct who we are by engaging in the processes of participation and reification through the negotiation of meaning. Identity is a constant process of negotiating the meaning of the self. Through the interplay of participation and reification our experience of life becomes our identity or human existence and consciousness.

We become full members of a community when we exhibit competency in the enterprise of our community; so doing, we are also recognized by others as competent members of the community. Therefore, Wenger's (1998) dimensions of competence (as described in figure 4 of this section) -- mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire – become definitions of identity. Consequently, it can be said that we define ourselves in terms of what is familiar or unfamiliar, what we understand or do not understand, or what is negotiable or non-negotiable.

To further illustrate, Wenger (1998) offers a graphic explanation (see figure 4) of how identity is made up of the interaction of varying aspects of participation and non-participation. In his view, identity is made up of two components; identification and negotiability, and within these two components are aspects related to participation and non-participation. His categorization of these possibilities according to his proposed modes of belonging – engagement, imagination and alignment offers examples that demonstrate differing aspects of participation and non-participation within identification and negotiability. Moreover, it is the participatory elements of identification that lead to forms of membership and thus, forms of membership relate to how communities are formed. The degrees of participation within negotiability relate to forms of ownership of meaning and ownership of meaning creates economies of meaning (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Wenger's (1998) depiction of identity



Communities of Practice as Learning Communities

Communities of practice provide opportunities for newcomers to learn as well as to gain new insights that transform into community knowledge. For newcomers, communities of practice provide spaces for the acquisition of knowledge. For already competent members of a community, mutual engagement in joint enterprise results in the constant negotiation and re-defining of competence within that same community (Wenger, 1998).

As stated earlier, in order for learning to take place, the interaction between competence and experience within the community must be in tension. In other words, learning in a community of practice is not only part of the history of its practice, but at the core of its existence.

Learning and Identity in Practice

Wenger (1998) posits that learning is the fundamental function of communities of practice. His theory views learning as an experience of identity. In other words, learning is both a process and a place. In this manner, learning involves both the transformation of knowledge into practice and the learning about the context in which the identity of participation takes place. Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning integrates the concept of acquisition of knowledge with the place (or community) where the new ways of knowing can be transformed into an identity of participation. As a result, learning transforms who we are and what we can do into an experience of identity (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, when we learn, we do not only accumulate skills and information, we become or avoid becoming a certain person. Wenger (1998) summarized these thoughts by stating, "...the transformative practice of a community of learners offers context for developing new understandings because the community sustains change as part of the identity of participation" (p. 215). This social perspective of learning is based on the following 12 premises:

1. Learning is inherent in human nature: Learning is an ongoing and integral part of our lives; it cannot be separated from other parts of our lives.
2. Learning is first and foremost the ability to negotiate new meanings:
Learning involves the whole person through participation and reification in the community of practice. Learning is not the "mechanics" of learning or the how to of doing things.
3. Learning creates emergent structures: Learning requires both stability and instability to provide an environment to continually renegotiate meaning.
As a result, due to their dynamic nature, communities of practice make up fundamental social learning structures.

4. Learning is fundamentally experiential and social: Learning involves participation and reification as well as competence as defined by our communities. Learning can be defined as the reorganization of experience and/or competence, depending on which aspect impacts the other more. Learning is impaired when the two are too distant or too closely congruent to produce generative tension.
5. Learning transforms our identities: Learning transforms our ability to participate in the world by changing who we are, and our practices our communities. These changes will result in changes in our identities.
6. Learning constitutes trajectories of participation: Learning builds personal histories in relation to the histories of our communities; it connects our past and our future in a process of individual and collective becoming.
7. Learning means dealing with boundaries: Learning creates and bridges boundaries; it involves multi-membership in the constitution of our identities. As a result, learning connects --- through the work of reconciliation -- our multiple forms of participation as well as our various communities.
8. Learning is a matter of social energy and power: Learning thrives on identification and depends on negotiability; it shapes and is shaped by evolving forms of membership and of ownership of meaning. Community membership and economies of meaning are results of structural relationships that include participation and non-participation in the community of practice.
9. Learning is a matter of engagement: Learning depends on opportunities to contribute actively to the practices of communities that we value and that value us. It also allows us to integrate the enterprises of our communities

of practice into our understanding of the world, to make creative use of their respective repertoires.

10. Learning is a matter of imagination: Learning depends on the processes of orientation, reflection, and exploration as processes that place our identities and practices in a broader context.
11. Learning is a matter of alignment: Learning depends on our connections to frameworks of convergence, coordination, and conflict resolution that determine the social effectiveness of our actions.
12. Learning involves interplay between the local and the global: Learning takes place in practice, but it defines a larger or global context for its own locality. "The creation of learning communities thus depends on a dynamic combination of engagement, imagination, and alignment to make this interplay between the local and global an engine of new learning".
(Wenger, 1998, p. 227)

Design for Learning

In summation of his social learning theory, Wenger (1998) proposed various aspects of learning as milieus for identity formation and transformation. His overarching premise is that learning cannot be designed; it belongs to experience and practice. In other words, within Wenger's (1998) theory, there is no innate correlation between teaching and learning; learning occurs, but not always by design (teaching). As members of multiple communities of practice, it is our participation that results in our identity; identity is defined as how people learn to *be* within their communities.

To that end, what people learn first is the practices of a specific, easily identifiable community (Wenger, 1998). The history of that community is a response to the explicit demands of the institution / time / culture in which it exists. For example, in the present research study, the teachers learned about the school

community, even though some parts of the boundaries and rules are less explicit to them as newcomers within this community of practice. The Mexican teachers came to the teaching exchange with conflicting expectations surrounding the school community in the United States. In some ways, they expected it to be similar to the school community in Mexico; in other aspects they expected it to be different or foreign.

Learning – no matter what kind of learning – changes who we are and determines our ability to participate, to belong and to negotiate meanings within a community. This ability is socially configured with respect to practices, communities and economies of meaning (Wenger, 1998). In keeping with this, learning within the community of practice or teachers' respective exchange schools formed and transformed the teachers' identities. Throughout this process, their individual identities were also mediated by the various activities assigned to them in their schools.

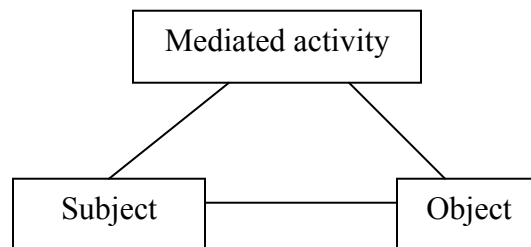
In the present study, within the community of practice framework, Activity Theory was drawn on as a means of looking at tools and artifacts that mediated the teachers' learning about themselves. The upcoming section discusses the historical development of Activity Theory leading up to Engeström's third generation model. Application of this third generation model provided the basis for the assignment of specific activities for the exchange teachers to carry out within their exchange schools; these activities thereby facilitated their understanding of their identity transformation during the teaching exchange.

Activity Theory

Since its theoretical inception, activity theory has grown and developed to be applied in a variety of contexts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Historically, Engeström (2001) refers to activity theory as evolving over three generations. The first generation of cultural-historical activity theory refers to Vygotsky (1978) and his

conceptualization of mediated development through sign systems (language, writing, number systems) as well as tools. According to Vygotsky (1978) these tools are created by societies throughout history and change with the form of society and the level of its cultural development. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about transformations and bridges earlier and later forms of development. For Vygotsky, “the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture” (p. 7). Vygotsky’s work was furthered by A. N. Leont’ev, his close disciple and colleague. This first generation of Activity Theory viewed Vygotsky’s (1978) conceptualization of cultural mediation of action in this commonly expressed triangular form (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Vygotsky’s view of mediated learning (Engström, 2001)



These revolutionary thoughts were significant because they linked the individual to his or her socio-cultural surroundings. “The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artifacts” (Engeström, 2001, p. 134). Although the first generation’s work signified great changes in how human activity plays a part in learning and development, Engeström (2001) saw it as limited by its focus on the individual.

A. N Leont’ev’s own work on activity theory signified a second generation of thought (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006); this new school of psychology shifted from Vygotsky’s idealistic and symbolic use of signs and tools in human development to

tools being a more materialistic force (Johnson, 2004). In his work, Leont'ev explained the difference between individual action and collective action (Engeström, 2001). In part, this change of focus is attributed to historical factors of Stalin's Soviet Union at that time (Johnson, 2004). Although Leont'ev's model of activity theory was based on the analysis of three units: activity, actions and operations, he never added to Vygotsky's previously mentioned triad.

Leont'ev's three units are explained in the following manner. An activity is motivated by a biological or cultural need, or motive. Motive is the distinguishing factor that determines one activity from another. Two activities can look the same in terms of action, but the motive for the activities can be different, therefore, making the activity different. Aside from being a major force for engaging in an activity, motive also is a factor in the outcome of the activity (Johnson, 2004). The following chart from Lantolf and Thorne (2006) provides further explanation of the three units of analysis as they interact in Leont'ev's concept (see Table 2).

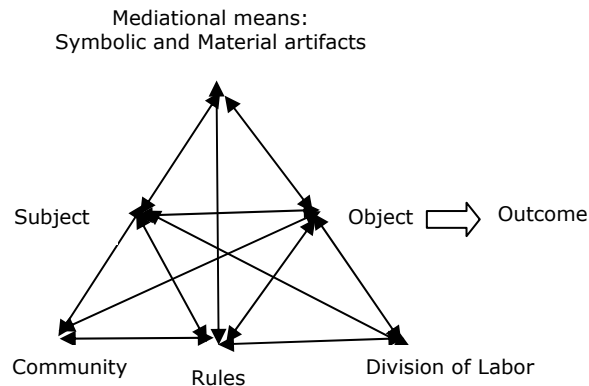
Table 2

Leont'ev's units of analysis (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006)

Everyday description	AT unit of analysis	Example	Oriented toward	Carried out by	Time frame
Why something is taking place?	Activity	A person may ride a bicycle to become physically fit.	Motive, transformation of object	Community and/or society	Recurrent, cyclic, iterative
What is being done?	Action	Riding a bicycle can be either play or transportation.	Goal	Individual or group	Linear, finite
The actual doing?	Operation	Bike riding will be different depending on the road, the temperature, etc.	Condition	Individual	Present moment, process ontology

By the end of the second generation, Engeström (1999) had graphically depicted activity theory as a larger triangular figure that included new elements such as community, rules and division of labor as mediating factors in human development (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Activity system (Engeström, 1999, 2001)

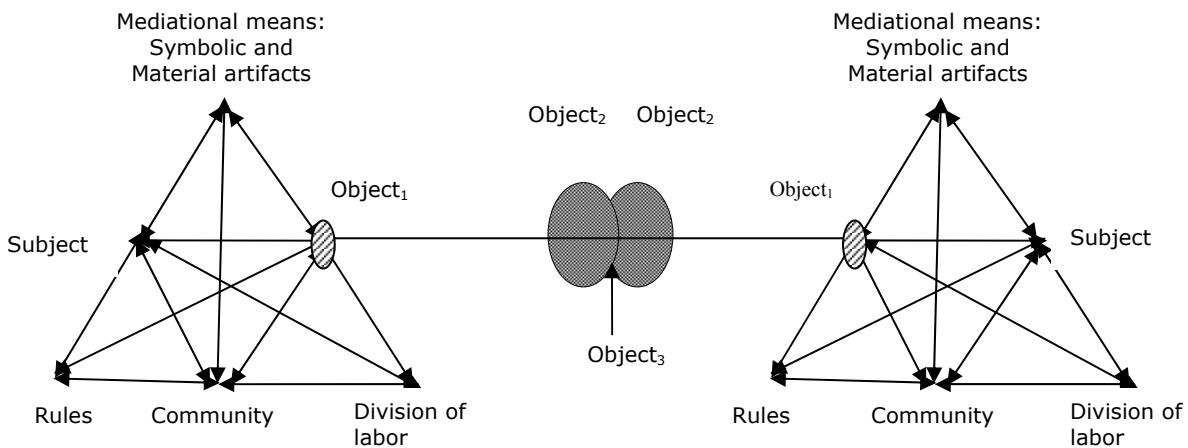


The portrayal of human activity within the Engeström’s model also included the idea of “internal contradictions as the driving force of change and development in activity systems” (Engeström, 2001). In other words, within the mediational process, contradictions arise that lead to learning and development. These contradiction have been common in research involving teachers and teaching practice (Kuuti, 1996; Nelson & Kim, 2001; Grossman, Smagorinsky, et. al. 1999)

At present, activity theory is a “work in progress” referring to the idea that it has become a framework for analysis of human consciousness in a multitude of disciplines (Engeström, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Engeström (2001) suggests that the present day third generation of activity theorists “need to develop conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems” (p. 135). Engeström (2001) continues to propose a third generation framework conceptualized as the intersection of his two triangular shapes (see figure 9), therefore allowing a space where different activity systems can be co-constructed. In this case he (Engeström, 2001) describes the activity as a

system that he calls, “a collectively meaningful object constructed by the activity system”. He explains that Object 1 represents “raw material” or one individual’s motive that guides the activity. Object 2 is the collectively meaningful object constructed by the activity system. In turn, Object 3 is the shared or jointly constructed object. Therefore, this representation depicts the fluid nature of the activity as a co-constructed entity (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Engeström’s third generation model, (Engeström, 2001)



In addition to his re-conceptualization of the visualization of the activity system, he also puts forth five principles that could help to further understand activity theory. These include:

1. The prime unit of analysis is a “collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system”; in relation to other activity systems.
2. The activity system is always multi-voiced or is a community comprised of multiple points of view, traditions and interests; this multi-voicedness is a “source of trouble and source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation”.
3. Activity systems are formed and transformed over time. They can only be fully understood through looking at their history. The history of the activity

system also needs to be situated within its local history and the history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity.

4. Contradictions play a central role in the change and development of activity systems. Contradictions exist within and between activity systems; they create disturbances and conflicts which result in potential changes or transformations of the system.
5. Activity systems move through "long cycles of qualitative transformation". As contradictions become increasingly conflictive, individual participants question the original motives and outcomes of the activity system's established norms. This may become a collective effort to change the object and motive of the system, thereby resulting in re-conceptualized outcomes. This principle is termed an "expansive transformation" or can be viewed as "a collective journey through the *zone of proximal development*" (Engeström, 2001, p.136)

More recently, Activity Theory has come to be conceptualized as the way humans carry out problem-solving activities in a given social context developed through historical-cultural actions (Grossman, Smagorinsky, et. al., 1999). Specifically, Kuuti (1996) explained that, "Activity Theory is a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different forms of human practices as development processes, both individual and social levels are interlinked at the same time." Kuuti's (1996) observation is particularly important, in hindsight, because at present Activity Theory is, in fact, applied to wide ranging areas (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Lantolf and Thorne (2006) posit that Activity Theory offers an alternative perspective on the learning process by focusing on the activity itself as the fundamental unit of analysis. They describe activity as "a powerful dialectic rooted in contradictions such as thinking and doing, knowing and performing, individual and

society, idealism and materialism, use-value and exchange value, internalization and externalization, and others” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This description coincides with other researchers’ explanations of the contradictions that arise during the learning process as essential in the development of human consciousness or learning (Kuuti, 1996; Nelson & Kim, 2001). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) summarize their ideas regarding the use of Activity Theory in research and practice within by offering the following basic aspects: (p. 25).

1. Within activity theory (and cultural historical approach more broadly), issues of mediation, the internalization-externalization dialectic, and object-orientedness (treating social and cultural properties as objective and meaningful) are foundational elements.
2. The transformation of an object (a material object / artifact, a plan, shared goal, and idea) into an outcome motivates an activity.
3. Activity systems are not static or purely descriptive, rather they imply transformation and innovation
4. All activity systems are heterogeneous and multi-voiced and may include conflict and resistance as readily as cooperation and collaboration.
5. Contradictions within and between activity systems drive development.
6. There is no ‘student-’ or ‘teacher-’ or ‘technology-’ centered pedagogy from an activity theory perspective.
7. Activity systems do not operate independently. Multiple activity systems are always relevant, to varying degrees and part of the analyst’s obligation is to understand how exogenous systems influence the focus system(s) under investigation.

In conclusion, in the present study, cultural-historical activity theory provided a framework for research into how humans learn about themselves through

mediated activity. Engeström's (2001) third generation conceptualization was particularly pertinent to research in the area of identity, due to the consideration of multiple voices, multiple communities, and the intersection of multiple activity systems.

In the present research study, these concepts were exemplified by the socio-historical backgrounds the Mexican teachers coming to the United States bring to the study as well as the impact of the new school context on the understanding and development of their new identities. Consequently, the next section unpacks the notions of professional knowledge that apply to American schools and schooling and foreign language teaching.

Teacher Knowledge Base

Historical Factors

The following discussion of teacher knowledge is an attempt to offer understanding of one aspect of the American educational system in which the exchange teacher mediated their understanding of identity formation and transformation. After examining socio-historical factors that negotiated our understanding of general teacher knowledge, parallel factors in foreign language teacher education are examined.

From the inception of public schooling, there has been concern on the part of administrators, policy makers, teachers, parents and students as to what knowledge a teacher must possess. As early as 1875, states such as Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Colorado, and California had tests that were designed to measure teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Shulman's (1986) description of the teacher knowledge tests of that era (1875) indicates that subject matter knowledge was the primordial aspect of teacher knowledge. Items relating pedagogical practice comprised only 50 out of 1000 questions (Shulman, 1986).

By the 1980s, the definition of what a teacher should know was driven by educational research on teacher effectiveness. It was not focused on subject matter content, but how to make the teacher more effective. The underlying assumption of this research was that there was one effective practice that would lead to quality teaching. This practice, in turn, would lead to student learning. Teacher licensing tests were defined by the individual states; many used ETS National Teacher Examination – although critics argue that these tests do not address the teachers' knowledge base (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 49).

Policy makers often believe that teaching is learned through an apprenticeship; therefore, is not a professional career (Darling-Hammond, 1996). One defining characteristic of a profession is that its members form boards that regulate and define specific characteristics for an expert in the area. In education, exceptional teachers are sometimes recognized by the administration, the parents, students or even the community, but this does not make them more professional. This lack of professional definition is further exaggerated by the fact that different states certify teachers with different qualifications, and teacher shortages that force certification requirements to be waived or the development of an alternative certification procedure. Other factors have contributed to this difficulty in defining teaching. Traditionally, it has been defined as women's work, the participants work alone, and, as a result, develop an expertise within their classroom – an expertise that is not recognized outside the classroom (Moore & Johnson, 2000).

Due to the public nature of teaching as an occupation, people of all ages hold beliefs about what makes good teaching and a good teacher. By the time a person graduates from high school, they have probably spent at least 12 years observing, and making decisions about the nature of teaching. These concepts are discussed both in the private and public arena, therefore creating public beliefs systems about teaching and teachers. Others express commonsense views on teaching, such as,

“anyone can teach or if you know your subject, you can teach it or you can learn about teaching on the job” (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1996) also point out that long before a prospective teacher enters into a teacher education program he or she is surrounded by teachers (Shulman, 1986).

Defining Teacher Knowledge

Up until the early 1980s, teacher knowledge was determined by a strict separation between matter content and pedagogy. A good teacher was one who was well versed in his or her subject, and pedagogy was a secondary consideration. In his 1986 address to the AERA, Shulman pointed to a need to better define teacher knowledge. He proposed three categories of content knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curricular knowledge.

Content Knowledge

Content knowledge refers to the facts of the subject; it represents the truths of an area or domain and it must be able to explain the relationships of these truths or facts within and outside the domain. Knowledge of this area allows the teacher to be able to explain why one aspect or characteristic of the area is more valuable than another. Also, teachers who possess content knowledge must be able to explain how controversies within the field are resolved, not only that it is so, the teacher must know why it is so, on what grounds it exists. Teacher must know why one premise is more central or important to an area, and why another is less important (Shulman, 1986).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

This knowledge consists of ways of representing, illustrating, demonstrating the subject content in a way that it is understandable, comprehensible, and learnable to others. It includes knowing which of the aspects that are difficult or easy for the students to learn as well as the conceptions or misconceptions students will share around topics or content area (Shulman, 1986).

Curricular Knowledge

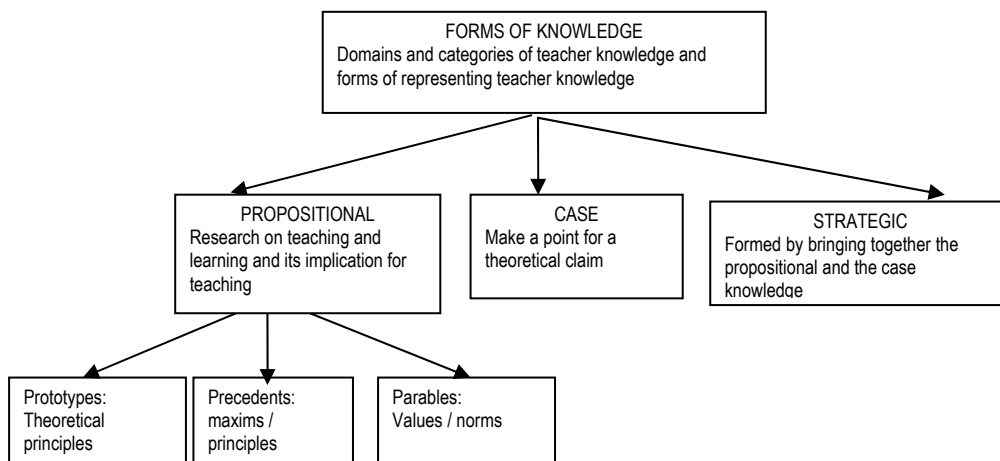
Curricular knowledge is the understanding of how the content fits within the curriculum. More specifically, it means knowing how to teach a given aspect of a content area to a certain age, grade or level. It also means understanding how to deal with the integration of other subjects to content areas that the students are studying at the same time.

Relationship of Subject Matter to Pedagogy

Shulman (1986) represented these different forms of knowledge within the concept of teacher knowledge. He suggested three domains and categories of teacher knowledge and forms of representing that knowledge: propositional, case and strategic knowledge (Figure 8). These forms of knowledge can be arranged into the previous content area knowledge domains.

Propositional knowledge includes research on teaching and learning and its implications for practice, e.g. active learning, reading comprehension, effective schools, classroom methods and recommendations (never smile before Christmas). The three types of propositional knowledge are (a) prototypes that exemplify theoretical principles: (b) precedents that capture and communicate the principles or maxims and (c) parables that convey norms or values.

Figure 8. Shulman's forms of knowledge, (Shulman, 1986)



Around the same time, Zahorik (1986) proposed a heuristic to examine teaching skills comprised of three categories: science-research, theory-philosophy and art-craft conceptions. The science research skills are made up of doing what effective teachers do, following a tested model of good teaching and operationalizing learning principles; theory – philosophy are made up of implementing a theoretical model and a philosophical model of good teaching, and art-craft is comprised of performing in resourceful, creative ways (p. 21). Zahorik (1986) then questioned how teacher education should meet the challenge of helping teachers learn these skills. His conclusions pointed to the need for teacher education to focus on certain teaching skills at different times in a teacher’s career for teachers to become “more skillful and thoughtful in their work” (Zahorik, 1986, p. 24).

In his more recent work, Shulman (2002) proposes a cyclical table of learning for teachers that includes: (a) engagement and motivation; (b) knowledge and understanding; (c) performance and action; (d) reflection and critique; (e) judgment and design; and (f) commitment and identity. He explains the relationship between the components like this:

Learning comes with student engagement, which in turn leads to knowledge and understanding. Once someone understands, he or she becomes capable of performance or action. Critical reflection on one’s practice and understanding leads to higher order thinking in the form of a capacity to exercise judgment in the face of uncertainty and to create designs in the presence of constraints and unpredictability. Ultimately, the exercise of judgment makes possible the development of commitment. In commitment, we become capable of professing our understandings and our values, or faith and our love, our skepticism and our doubts, internalizing those attributes and making them

integral to our identities. These commitments, in turn, make new engagements possible – and even necessary. [Shulman, 2002, p.38]

The previous section addressed the socio-historical definition of teacher knowledge base within the American educational system. This understanding of what a teacher needs to know mediated the exchange teachers' understanding of their identity within their schools and schooling. In addition, participants in the present study had to negotiate their understanding of their identity within a foreign language context. More pertinent to the exchange teachers will be their understanding of foreign language teacher knowledge base.

Foreign Language Teacher Knowledge

Expectations of what foreign language teachers needed to know in the late 1980s paralleled Schulman's (1986) types of knowledge. However, as early as 1990, Larsen Freeman questioned the role of the student in the process of language learning. Similarly, Freeman (1998) pointed to confusion surrounding what comprised good foreign language teaching due to a lack of research into second language teacher education.

Language teaching theorists (Bartlett, 1990; Larsen Freeman, 1990; Richard-Amato, 1996; Richards & Nunan, 1990) addressed concerns that language teachers needed to be more aware of the importance of reflective practices, to carry out research in their classrooms and to consider the relationship between teaching and learning. In addition, there was a call for more research into foreign language teacher education, specifically on methods and techniques (Richards & Nunan, 1990). At this time, foreign language teaching was looked on as the acquisition of technical skills made up of competencies that could be easily defined and observed. It was also concerned with examining how teacher beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and thinking inform teacher practice (Richards & Nunan, 1990).

At the onset of the 21st century, Richards, 2000 restated the need to focus more on teacher education than on teacher training. This view was implicit in Richards' (2000) proposal of six domains of foreign language teaching knowledge.

These domains of teacher knowledge included:

1. Theories of teaching or how teachers understand classroom practices,
2. Teaching skills or the similarity between teaching a foreign language and other subjects. More specifically the teacher knowledge surrounding how to achieve a balance of fluency and accuracy, organization and facilitation of communicative interaction, errors and error treatment,
3. Communication skills including pedagogical reasoning, decision-making, contextual knowledge, ability to communicate and language skills that foreign language teachers need. This domain questioned which is more important for foreign language teachers: pedagogy or language skills,
4. Subject matter knowledge which refers to concepts and theories of SLA, disciplinary knowledge such as: phonetics and phonology, English syntax, curriculum and syllabus design, sociolinguistics, TESOL methods, testing and evaluation. Subject matter knowledge referred to the content that is shared between areas, but is only characteristic to foreign language teaching,
5. Pedagogical skills and reasoning that are comprised of the cognitive skills that underlie teaching skills and techniques. The applications of these skills include: preparation, representation, selection of texts and materials and making of instructional decisions,
6. Conceptual knowledge refers to the understanding of the role of context in the teaching and learning process.

These interrelated domains were part of the basis for a shift in understanding regarding what foreign language teachers need to know. Richards' (2000) conceptualization of teacher knowledge rested on two aspects: understanding of teaching, and the teacher's personal philosophy or implicit theory of teaching. In this way, his description of foreign language teaching as a dynamic entity led to change in how foreign language teacher knowledge is viewed.

Concurring with Shulman's (2002) proposal that teacher knowledge was made up of more than prescriptive practices and should include engagement and motivation, knowledge and understanding, performance and action, reflection and critique, judgment and design, and commitment and identity, Freeman and Johnson (1998, 2005) proposed a re-conceptualization of the existing foreign language teacher knowledge base. Freeman and Johnson (1998) stated that teacher education was at the heart of teacher knowledge. At the same time, they called for the inclusion of teacher context as an element in defining what a foreign language teacher should know. In addition, they (Freeman and Johnson, 1998) proposed that the relationship between teacher thinking and learning need be included in the formation of teacher knowledge. Although this rethinking of foreign language teacher knowledge base has been both lauded and criticized (Allwright and Tarone, 2005), it not only represented a shift in focus from product to process, it was also inclusive of teacher perspective in the process.

In keeping with Freeman and Johnson's (1998) proposal that teacher thinking and learning need to a part of teacher knowledge, Allwright (<http://www.ling.lanacs.ac.uk/groups/crile/epcentre/newsletterjuly2001.htm>) put forth the notion of exploratory practice. This concept suggests that teachers need to "bring work to life" (<http://www.ling.lanacs.ac.uk/groups/crile/epcentre/newsletterjuly2001.htm>) by attending to a logical progression of (a) noticing what happens around us; (b) relate noticing to understanding; (c)

thinking about or reflecting on how we go about noticing and understanding; (d) realization of how our understanding may lead us to want to change things; (e) knowing that not everyone will be interested in noticing and understanding. These initial components are essential to Exploratory Practice, a concept intended to offer a way of developing our understanding of our practice with a minimum of intrusion and maximum of practical and personal benefit. The goal of Exploratory Practice is not necessarily change, but it provides a forum where professional understanding can help practitioners decide if change is necessary or not and what change could be made. The most fundamental concepts to Exploratory Practice are understanding and integration. Understanding practice, in turn, involves (a) focusing on sustainable effort; (b) working for mutual development; (c) making your work relevant to ensure maximum benefit for all concerned; (d) working in a collegial manner. Allwright

(<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/crile/epcentre/newsletterjuly2001.htm>)

concludes that the adoption of Exploratory Practice as an approach to work in the language teaching classroom will foster bringing work "to life".

The previously described call for a re-conceptualization of foreign language teaching knowledge base parallels a shift in thinking about appropriate teacher knowledge in general in the United States (Shulman, 2002). Both Shulman's (2002) and Freeman and Johnson (1998) emphasize teacher learning as the foremost aspect in teacher knowledge. In other words, these educational researchers proposed that knowledge gained within the socio-historical context of teacher practice is an important aspect of teacher knowledge. Although neither Shulman (2002), Allwright (<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/crile/epcentre/newsletterjuly2001.htm>) nor Freeman and Johnson (1998) specifically mention the negotiation of identity within the teaching context, it was my belief that individual teachers' understanding of their own identity within the educational context was part of teacher knowledge worthy of

investigation. Equally important was the understanding of identity formation and transformation for the teacher-participants in the COMEXUS teaching exchange.

Online Communities of Practice

This section deals with applications of Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice to research in diverse contexts. As we have seen, our personal conceptualization of learning mediate our understanding of how learning should be carried out, contexts in which learning takes place and how we learn about ourselves. As a result, research surrounding notions of community and learning are diverse. In addition, available research into online communities, how they are formed, how they work and how learning takes place within them also includes varied contexts. In continuation, research into communities and online or electronic media will be discussed.

Learning Communities

Studies related to learners in communities has included elementary student science learning (Crawford, et. al, 1999), adult learners of Japanese as a foreign language (Haneda, 1997), kindergarteners (Toohey, 1996; Toohey, et. al., 2000), university student learning through simulated communities (Carr, et. al., 2004), and graduate students (Dysthe, 2002; Pothoff, et. al, 2001). Other work has focused on teachers' use of electronic tools for professional development. Examples include beginning, pre-service and in-service teachers in elementary or secondary school (Casey, 1997; DeWert, Babinski & Jones, 2003; Grove, & Strudler, 2004; Klecka, et.al.; 2004; Selwyn, 2000; Stevens & Hartmann, 2004; Whipp, 2003), university faculty members (Kristensen, 2003; Lemesianou & Gutierrez, 2003; Sherer, et. al., 2003) examinations of the ways teachers implement or foster technology use (Hung, et.al, 2005; Reynolds, et. al., 2001; Selwyn, 2000) and technology use as reflexive professional development (Salmon, 2002; Stephens & Hartmann, 2004; Whipp, 2003). Throughout these studies, the notion of community ranges from Wenger's

(1998) definition to anecdotal understandings of community as groups of people. In all of the previously mentioned research, learning is defined as a socially constructed activity that comes about as a result of interaction within the community. In other words, community, albeit strictly or informally defined, is the environment where learning takes place. Some of the above-mentioned studies seek only to explain community learning in a face-to-face setting (Haneda, 1997; Pothoff, et al. 2001; Toohey, 1996; Toohey, et.al., 2000) as a result, they will not be discussed in this section. The upcoming section will deal specifically with studies related to teachers' use of online communities.

Teachers and Online Communities

Studies concerned with mathematics and science teachers' use of technology to support their professional practices offered differing results. Whereas Stephens & Hartmann (2004) report on an unsuccessful attempt at providing web-based discussions as a follow-up to a two-week professional development course dealing with the use of technology in teaching math, Moore & Barab (2002) and Reynolds, et. al., (2001) provide a different account of their experience. Both Moore & Barab (2002) and Reynolds, et. al. (2002) defined their work with the same group of math and science teachers as an effort to form an online community of practice. One anticipated aspect of their efforts was to meet the needs of the teachers by developing a web space that provided teaching resources, video of best practices and collaborative opportunities for sharing between the teacher-participants.

Research focused on the development of faculty learning spaces (Kristensen, 2004; Sherer, et al. 2003) for statistics professors from different disciplines came about as a result of trying to meet the needs of instructors whose time and workload are such that they deal with overwhelming amounts of information as part of their daily responsibilities. In this instance, faculty used both online and face-to-face communication as a means for sharing information. Specific suggestions regarding

the creation of such support groups included technological aspects as well as education for faculty participants. No mention was made regarding community building or formation within the research, nor was identity formation through use of this community a factor. Likewise, Lemesianou & Gutierrez, (2003) discussed development of web-based space for posting and sharing information for teachers who taught the same subject within a given university. In this case, efforts to standardize course content were primordial in the development of the web resource. Although reference (Lemesianou & Gutierrez, 2003) is made to communities of practice, no specific effort was focused on creating the sense of community described by Wenger (1998).

For beginning or pre-service teachers, electronic mentoring or support to facilitate development of communities has been used to support development of teachings skills. In 1996, Casey described TeacherNet, a forum for teacher reflection regarding student teaching. This research pointed to the importance of technology to increase reflexivity, feelings of support, self-esteem, knowledge of information systems, and technology use in other contexts. Similarly, Grove & Strudler (2004) examined the use of technology for mentoring student teachers regarding technology use. Their conclusions point to the importance of cooperating teachers' attitude toward technology use in the classroom as well as one-to-one tutoring, modeling, discussion and reflections and helping student teachers understand the possible use of technology in their classrooms.

Formation of collaborative consultation through the use of an electronic discussion board for beginning teachers (DeWert, et. al, 2003) to provide social, emotional, and practical professional support indicated favorable outcomes as a result of online participation. In their study (DeWert, et. al, 2003) participants reported that the online support group provided insight into problem solving, and future teaching, and emotional support when needed, it also served to develop

broader perspectives and construct alternative solutions for these beginning teachers. However, not all research into online discussion spaces offer similarly encouraging results. Selwyn's (2000) study of teachers in the UK who subscribed to an online discussion forum reported that participation was dominated by a core group of teachers. On the other hand, Selwyn (2000) noted that group participation in said discussion board was motivated by identity formation by the participants. Other concerns (Selwyn, 2000) included the lack of camaraderie experienced in staff rooms and other areas where teacher interact and share professional concerns.

Other research concerning online reflective practices for novice teachers (Casey, 1997) suggested that pre-service teachers felt supported and less isolated, and experienced increased self esteem as a result of online communication. In addition, other studies point to the possibility of pre-service teachers becoming more critical within their reflective practices when online discussion is guided and expectations of higher levels of critical thinking are explained (Whipp, 2003). Implications for future use of electronic communication (Whipp, 2003) suggested that open forums such as discussion boards offer more possibilities for establishment of an expert-novice continuum, as compared to other electronic sharing such as email.

In research that conceptualized the electronic discussion board as a community of practice (Klecka, et.al., 2004) found that pre-service and in-service teachers tend toward different types of participation. Their results pointed to pre-service teachers' peripheral participation in the ongoing electronic discussions. However, they (Klecka, et.al, 2004) attributed this seeming lack of participation to be a way to negotiate meaning within the community and eventually move toward fuller participation. As a result, conclusions from this study are in line with Wenger's (1998) remarks regarding community participation. Klecka, et.al (2004) stated that participation in distributed communities of practice is not achieved simply by

assigning mentors and creating a discussion board. In addition this study concluded that the role of peripheral participation that the novice teachers played in this community must be respected as a way of learning the socio-cultural norms of the community and move toward fuller participation.

CMC in Foreign Language Learning

In contrast with the above-mentioned research on the formation of electronic communities, foreign language research has focused on computer mediated communication (CMC) and how the use of electronic media can be used to enhance language learning (Beauvois, 1992; Kelm, 1992; Chun, 1994; Kern, 1992). These studies found that students used a wider range of discourse structures (Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996), had greater peer interaction (Kelm, 1992), and increased the amount of student talk (Kern, 1994). Other research has pointed to the fact that CMC provides for more opportunities for language input (Ortega, 1997; Warschauer, 1998) as well as offer more opportunities for learners to provide output (Blake, 2000; Erben, 1999; Warschauer and Healy, 1998) All of the above mentioned factors are believed to facilitate language learning by theorists that see language learning as an individual process where knowledge is exchanged from one participant to another through interaction (Long, 1980, Krashen, 1981). The present study differs from the previous studies in two ways. First, it is designed to examine how the use of an electronic discussion board serves as tool for professional and identity transformation, not development of specific language skills. Secondly, this study fits within a socio-cultural perspective of learning; it originates from the notion that all learning is socially situated and is not based on the transfer of information from one individual to another. As a result, the present study attempted to address questions unrelated to previous studies of foreign language learning using CMC.

Filling the Gaps

In summation, we have seen that electronic tools have been used in research focused on both language learning and professional development for teachers of varying disciplines. In addition, teachers at differing points in their professional development have interacted in online communities, therefore offering insight into the use of electronic tools to form a trajectory for novice teachers to become full members of the teaching community. However, there is a dearth of research that has examined how experienced or expert teachers transform their teaching identities through the use of activities designed to help them negotiate meaning in a new community of practice. In keeping with foreign language theorists' call for more research into teacher knowledge, this research study offered insight into how teacher context, activities and the development of an electronic community of practice helped teachers mediate their understanding of their professional and language identity.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the methods, procedures and techniques used in this study of Mexican teachers on a teaching exchange. My personal experience within the Mexican educational system has led me to look for a deeper understanding of how people become teachers. In other words, I have always wondered how the context a teacher works in forms and transforms how teachers learn to think about themselves. In this particular study, I was concerned not only with the teachers' identity as a professional; I was also interested in how the teachers' first and second languages transform their understanding of self in this context. Within the chapter, I explain how co-constructed teacher narratives situated within both specific activities and an electronic learning community provided a framework for understanding teacher professional and language identity. In short, this chapter describes the research procedures that led to an in-depth understanding of the following research questions.

Overarching Question

Overarching question: How is the COMEXUS teachers' professional identity transmogrified by mediational factors through engagement in pedagogical activities within their communities of practice?

The overarching question seeks to uncover factors that mediate the exchange teachers' transformation of their professional identities. This question helped to guide my inquiry into the following more specific aspects of the relationship between

pedagogic activity, community membership and professional identity. As alluded to by Richards (2000) in his third domain of second language teaching, of one aspect of professional identity is professional language proficiency, therefore, this study of professional identity will include professional language identity.

The following questions addressed specific aspects of transmogrification:

1. How does socio-historical pedagogical knowledge mediate their community memberships?
2. How does participation in an online community of learners mediate Mexican Foreign Language teachers' community membership?
3. How does participation in pedagogical activity within the community of practice mediate professional identity?

These three questions served to examine online participation, pedagogical activity and socio-historical pedagogical knowledge as factors that mediate transformation of the teachers' professional identities.

4. What are factors that mediate community participation or non-participation in the electronic community?

This question seeks to uncover the motives for participation or non-participation in the electronic community. In addition, it will examine the importance of electronic participation as a force in the teachers' understanding of their membership in the COMEXUS community.

5. What are the (most important) factors that mediate the exchange teachers' trajectories toward competent community membership?

This final question inquires into the factors for the exchange teachers trajectories into competent community membership.

Myself as a Researcher

My experiences in life and as a teacher have helped me to view learning as a socially constructed activity. I believe that there is no one way to learn, but that through social engagement, individuals' participation in social communities results in learning. This study gave me the opportunity to discover how teachers learned about themselves as they participated in an electronic community throughout their teaching exchange. I did not believe that I would find one answer to my questions, but many stories will highlight the journey that these teachers take to understanding themselves, each offering insight into how professional and language identity was mediated by participation in a community of learners.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research studies a given social situation to better understand its meaning as perceived by the participants (Janesick, 2003). The researcher begins by posing question(s) regarding what he or she wants to know in the study. These questions then drive the selection of the most appropriate methodology for the study. To carry out this research study, I took a qualitative approach using narrative inquiry as both the method and tool that guide this study. This decision came about because, as other qualitative researchers have proposed, (Janesick, 2003; Lincoln, 1985) I believe that the difference between quantitative and qualitative research is not as much the evidence, but the philosophical beliefs of the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

Stake (1995) defined the difference between quantitative and qualitative research as (a) the distinction between explanation and understanding the purpose of inquiry; (b) the distinction between a personal and impersonal role for the researcher; and (c) a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed. Stake (1995) views qualitative researchers as those who seek out the understanding of a phenomenon and represent the happenings (i.e., narratives or

stories) through their own interpretation. Janesick (2003) further explained that within qualitative research, the researcher is expected to identify "his or her own biases and articulates the ideology or conceptual framework for the study" (p. 56). In addition, (Janesick, 2003) the researcher is the research tool in qualitative research. As a result, in this research study, my role was interpretive. Whereas the teachers produced their own narratives within their contexts, they had to believe that I would report their identities as they described them (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998). It was through my reading, understanding and reporting of their meanings through narrative in the online community that the participants' voices were heard.

In reporting participants' understanding of their realities, one real concern was keeping the narrative in the participants' voice which sometimes came in conflict with the researcher's voice (Cottle, 2002). "Voice" is a term that refers to the participants' understanding or explanation of a phenomenon or experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study looked at identity formation and transformation of teachers who were carrying out a teaching exchange. At the same time, the researcher also had to deal with identity formation and transformation of herself as a researcher, and teacher in relation to the participants in the study. Although we may begin to do research to discover and represent the meanings of the *Other* (Said, 2005) when we are finished we are also telling about ourselves (Warren & Fassett, 2002).

Ethics

Because this research focused on the lives of teachers and how they understood their experiences, special care had to be taken regarding informed consent (Punch, 1998), as well as the participants' right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Other issues surrounded the degree of involvement of the researcher in the participants' lives (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Jorgenson (2002) spoke to these issues when she describes her research into

families and what it means to belong to a family. Specifically, she explained how the co-construction of the interviewer's identity ultimately impacts the research study. In other words, when I became part of my participants' lives and shared their experiences as a researcher, I shaped their lives as I engaged with them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Many times, in reading qualitative research,

it is unclear for you, whether we, as researchers are mere voyeurs of a life drama we have been privileged to record or whether the drama takes place within the context of our own story, whether as researchers created who have created a research setting in which the text was generated or whether the story takes place within the context of our own larger life story, in which case we, as researchers, are observing ourselves in participation with the participants (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998)

Therefore, I had a certain responsibility to my participants in this study not only in how I interacted with them, how we treat the data they contributed and how I portrayed them in my research findings as well. In the present research study, the participants were aware of the purpose of the research and my relationship to them as both teacher and researcher. They also read and responded to my textual representations of them.

Narrative Inquiry

In this section, I explain how narrative inquiry was the appropriate methodology for this study into foreign language exchange teacher professional and language identity. Narrative inquiry has been described as both "phenomenon and method" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998) or a way of finding out about yourself and your topic (Richardson, 1998). In keeping with this concept, Johnson and Golombek (2002) stated that, "narrative inquiry allows individuals to look at themselves and their activities as socially and historically situated". St. Pierre (Richardson & St.

Pierre, 2005) explains that for her, "writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery" (author emphasis). Likewise, Steier (1991) describes a similar process of "constructivist inquiry" (p. 163) that includes reflexivity a way we, "contextually recognize the various mutual relationships in which our knowing activities are embedded (p. 163)". He points to the relationship of language and experience as ways of permitting us to see how our "individual experiences" are socially constructed. Patton (2002) cites the fundamental questions relating to narrative analysis as: "What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?" Clandinin and Connelly (1998) agree with Patton, when they refer to the narrative as the "structured quality of experience", or the expression of the experience as described by the participant. However, a distinction in terminology is made between "story", as the description of the phenomenon or happening and "narrative" as the method of inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998).

Other examples of rhetoric that highlight social life and culture include family stories, personal narratives, suicide notes, graffiti, and autobiographies (Patton, 2002); all of these can serve as data for inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) call "journal entries, field notes, photographs, etc" field texts. They point out that some of these texts were written prior to the inquiry; they became part of the inquiry because of their relevance to the understanding social life. They agree that any or all of the above-mentioned texts can be used for narrative inquiry.

Because of the responsibility that faces the researcher as interpreter of narratives, participant meaning is paramount in the telling of the story. Within "postmodern qualitative research" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) it is no longer possible to look for absolute meaning; inquiry cannot be considered "getting to the bottom of" an issue or problem. It is necessary to ask how the context within which

the narrative is situated mediates the participants' construction of reality. Finally, St. Pierre highlights how Richardson (1998, 2005) depicts writing as a "field of play" or a means of allowing us to "produce different knowledge and producing knowledge differently" (p. 969). This theory is particularly relevant to this research study due to the use of an electronic community to make meaning both collectively and individually through the teachers' participation.

Richardson is blunt in explaining how she became concerned with qualitative writing while reading the reports of research studies in scientific publications (1998, 2005). She accurately pointed out that the process of writing about ourselves "should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers" (1998) and more recently (2005) reported that "all kinds of qualitative writing have flourished" (p. 960) as a result of focusing on writing to better understand social life. The strength of qualitative research is in the story; it focuses on offering meaning to the phenomenon being studied (Richardson, 1998).

Richardson (2005) describes writing as Creative Analytic Process (CAP) ethnography or as essential portrayal of the social aspects of life. This type of ethnographic project, she explains is "humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and perceptions, and bearing both the limitations and strengths of human feelings" (p. 962). However, this portrayal is not without specific criteria. Richardson (2005) proposes the following as means of assessing qualitative writing worthy of publication:

1. Substantive contribution. Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does this piece seem "true"—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or command a sense of the "real"?

2. Aesthetic merit. Rather than reducing standards, another standard is added. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. Reflexivity. How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold himself or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of people he or she has studied?
4. Impact. Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try to new research practices or move me to action?

Pursuant to my study of these Mexican teachers and the subsequent writing of their stories, I kept these criteria in mind throughout the research process.

Foreign Language Teacher Narrative

It was appropriate to use narrative inquiry in this research study due to recent changes in the way foreign language teacher educators view teacher knowledge and learning (Freeman, 1998; Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Richards, 2000). As mentioned in Chapter two, foreign language teacher educators have begun to look at how teacher learning is socially constructed through their experiences and classrooms where they work (Johnson and Golombeck, 2002). These conceptualizations of teacher learning as socio-historically based parallels Vygotskian thought on learning (1978). In addition, these theories fit within the view that processes of learning are socially negotiated, constructed through experiences in and with social practices associated with particular activities, and in particular social contexts (Wenger, 1998). As well, within this view, teachers are seen as possessing knowledge as well as creating it. The manner in which teachers

apply their knowledge to their practice depends on "knowledge of self, students, curricula and setting" (Johnson and Golombeck, 2002, p. 2). Regarding the need for narrative inquiry into foreign language teaching, Johnson and Golombeck (2002) state,

It follows, then, that in order to recognize and document the activity of teacher learning and language teaching through the perspective of teachers, it is necessary to gather descriptive accounts of how teachers come to know their knowledge, how they use that knowledge within the context where they teach, and how they make sense of and reconfigure their classroom practices in and over time. (p. 2)

In this research study, the foreign language exchange teachers produced narratives that speak to the above-mentioned descriptions of their knowledge and how they used it within the context of their teaching exchange. These teachers existed in a multi-faceted context that included the electronic community of learners formed by their participation in the electronic community, their exchange schools, foreign language schooling and teaching in the United States.

Design

Participants

This study was carried out with Mexican Fulbright / Garcia-Robles teachers who were participating in a one semester teaching exchange; depending on their individual school systems they were in the U. S. from August 2005 to January 2006. The initial group of teachers was made up of seven women and six men that ranged in age between 22 and 45 years of age. They had between three and twenty-one years of teaching experience. Eleven of the thirteen have had formal teacher preparation, although not all of the eleven hold Bachelor's degrees in English language teaching. All of the participants had met the language requirement for participation in the program, which is a TOEFL score of 500 or the equivalent. Of

these thirteen, two had spent one semester (January – May 2005) in the English language program at the University of South Carolina in Colombia in order to meet the language requirement. Two teachers have had teacher preparation in the British system. One holds the Cambridge Certificate of Overseas Teaching of English (COTE) and the other had spent 4 months in England on a teacher's course. Three teachers hold undergraduate degrees in other areas; one in Business Administration, one in Agronomy and one in Communications.

In Mexico, all participants are EFL teachers; however, in addition, one also teaches Biology and another also teaches Ecology. Four teach University level, within their university assignments two teach general EFL and the other two teach English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to specific disciplines – Psychology and Business. Five teachers work in the secondary school system in different states, therefore these five follow the national curriculum for EFL and have participated in in-service teacher courses within their local systems. Only two of the participants teach at the preparatory level, one at the *Colegio de Bachilleres*, which is a general preparatory school, the other at a technological school that focuses on agriculture and food processing. Two teach in CECATI or in adult vocational schools that offer different technical training for adults.

The participants came from differing backgrounds in terms of demographic makeup. Two teachers lived and worked in Mexico City, which presently has a population of more than 20 million; it is believed to be the largest city in the world. Four others lived and worked within an hour by car to Mexico City, which means that they are located within the metropolitan sprawl of the city and are accustomed to living in an urban setting. Five teachers lived in urban areas in the largest city in their states; four of the five lived in state capitals. The remaining two teachers come from small towns, the larger having a population of 15,000, the smaller a population of 2500. When these teachers were matched to their American counterparts, the

characteristics of both their hometowns and home schools were considered in making the assignments.

Although this year's teachers were, in general, more technologically skilled than in previous years, there was still one teacher who had never worked with PowerPoint. This is significant because during the orientation course the teachers produced a PowerPoint presentation to take and use while on the exchange. During the course, teachers were introduced to Excel for storing and calculating grades, Nicenet and Yahoo! Groups as course management tools. All participants were able to create Word documents, and send and receive attachments, access email, create a new email account and print documents without any instruction.

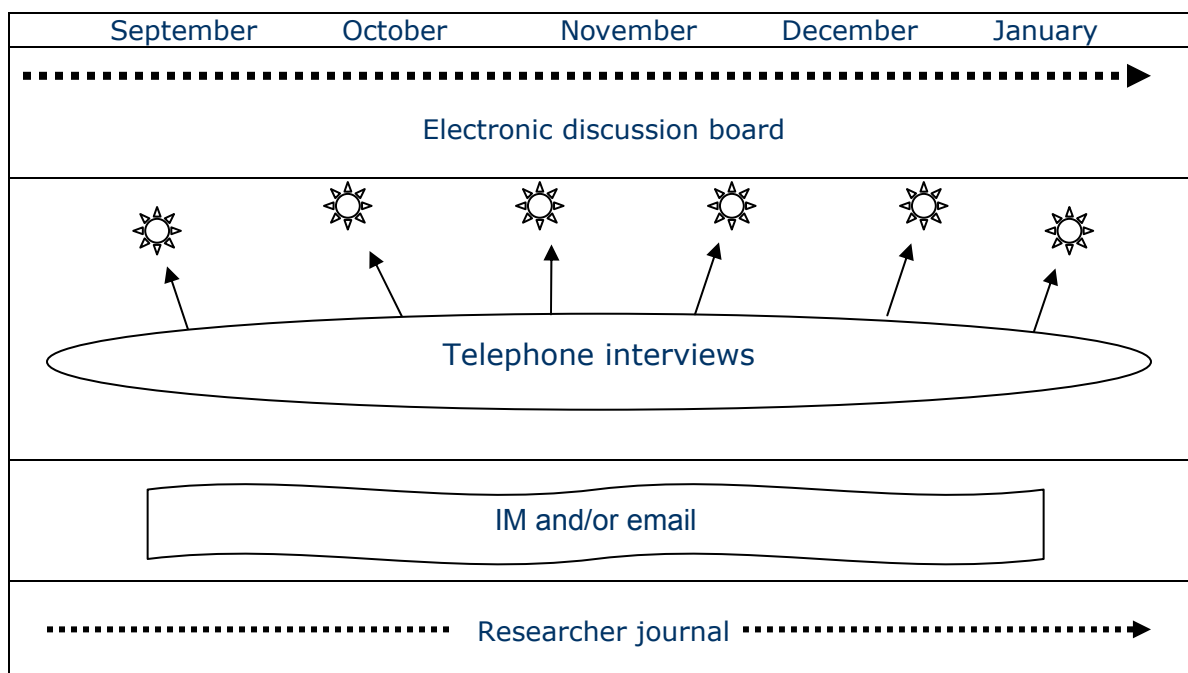
These exchange teachers chose to participate in the exchange for a myriad of both personal and academic reasons; almost all reported anecdotally to me that they wished to improve both their language skills and teaching methods. However, they did not fit in a preconceived pattern or even hold universally shared characteristics of a "Mexican EFL teacher". They had wide ranging professional experiences and skills (see appendix 2); they had varied English and Spanish language skills. In short, the thing that held these teachers together in the community of learners was their desire to be successful in their teaching exchange. They expressed a desire to participate in the online learning community because it offered them an opportunity to learn more about themselves professionally and linguistically, therefore to be successful in the teaching exchange. The narratives they wrote were in English, Spanish or both.

Method

Within a Vygotskian perspective, human learning is mediated through cultural tools and artifacts (1978). The present study was carried out throughout the participants' teaching exchange; data was collected for 13 weeks through an electronic discussion board, electronic group and /or individual interviews, and follow-up telephone interviews where necessary to clarify meaning between myself

and the teacher-participant. A researcher journal was kept to address issues of memory and organization as well as reflection on the process (see Figure 9). The upcoming section discusses how this data was used to provide evidence of how the teacher-participants mediated their understanding of their professional and language identities within their new socio-cultural contexts.

Figure 9. Research timeline



The participants' use of language as a tool (Vygotsky, 1978) within these electronic media served as both a tool to understanding their professional identities and as a tool for the researcher to understand how the mediational processes came about.

Yahoo! Group

A Yahoo! Group was used to collect data throughout the teaching exchange. A Yahoo! group is an asynchronous web-based tool similar to a discussion board in a classroom management system (see Figure 11). The features offered through this tool included asynchronous messaging, synchronous chat, photo and file sharing, a

database that holds information about the participants such as name, address, phone number, etc., a list of members by email address, and a calendar. These are listed in the left hand column of the home screen. The group must be created by a moderator; an email invitation was required to join the group. In other words, any unknown participant was not able to join the group without being invited. This particular tool was chosen because it is free and can be accessed from any part of the world through the Internet. In my work with other teachers on this exchange, we have been able to successfully create an electronic support community that has functioned throughout their exchange experience.

Figure 10. Yahoo! Group screen



When I began this study, I based my decision to use the Yahoo! Group on my previous personal anecdotal experience using this tool to create an online support for the exchange teachers. In past experiences, the participation by the teachers had been varied. Some teachers had posted comments several times a day, being careful to respond to all teachers who ask or answer questions. Other teachers had been more hesitant to comment on every exchange, sometimes offering personal opinions or comments to me individually. Still other participants had had technology problems

and were unable to participate as perhaps they would like to. Access to the Yahoo! Group is usually limited in the schools, and teachers had to request a special password to access Yahoo! Therefore, if a teacher did not have a personal computer at home, it was sometimes difficult for participants to contribute to the discussion. In addition, if the school was on vacation or had free days, that also limited involvement because the teacher could not get into the school.

During the orientation course the teachers established their email accounts and used the Yahoo! group as a classroom tool to discuss their understanding of social and cultural life in the United States based on course assignments. During these activities, they became familiar with the technology and became aware of its offerings in terms of community building.

After obtaining informed consent from the participants, the data collection from the electronic discussion board was organized in the following manner:

1. An activity was posted to the Yahoo! Group; these activities were short scenarios based on Richards' (2000) domains of foreign language teaching. There were no "how to" instructions provided; each teacher were requested to carry out the activity as was most appropriate to their teaching / school context. For a list of activities, see Appendix A.
2. Teachers were asked to work with one or two of their COMEXUS colleagues to discuss the activity and how to best carry it out. The teachers had already chosen partners with which to work during the orientation course.
3. After completing the activity, the teacher posted a narrative about the experience and process on the electronic discussion board. The teachers made decisions about what to include and how to tell their stories. These postings were read and reflected on by other members of the community.

4. Finally, any comments, shared experiences or insights about the stories were posted from the other community members.

These electronic postings were one aspect for my telling the teachers' stories of how they mediated their understanding of their professional and language identities within the context of the activities, the electronic community of learners and the teaching exchange. In short, I used the data from the electronic discussion board to tell the teachers' stories of learning about themselves as teachers.

As was previously discussed in Chapter 2, activity theory provided a framework to analyze how cultural tools and artifacts mediate a certain outcome. In this study, teachers were asked to carry out specific activities within their new contexts to better understand their professional and language identities (see Appendix A). In addition, the teachers made postings regarding other aspects of their pedagogic activities and experiences within the school context. This study focused on narratives produced by the teachers as they carried out specific activities and then wrote about these experiences as well as their other pedagogic activities. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narrative inquiry can be carried out by using field texts, such as these online discussions, electronic individual interviews, instant messaging and emails, but these must be converted to research texts that were analyzed and coded. The themes resulting from this analysis were then used to create the teachers' stories in narrative form. It was the researcher's responsibility to re-construct the participants' narratives to make meaning of how their learning processes were mediated through their engagement in and development of an electronic community of practice.

Individual Interviews

In addition to the postings on the electronic discussion board, periodic interviews were conducted with the participants. The purpose of the interviews was to offer the opportunity for the participants to discuss their understandings of their

new identities within the context of their new schools. It also provided real time contact between the researcher and the participants allowing the possibility to discuss postings that are unclear or confusing. This interview process offered a real time interaction that the online discussion board cannot provide. These interviews were either individual or conference telephone interviews; using Skype (VoIP) or regular telephone service as the telephone media. The telephone interviews were conducted in a manner that facilitated participation by the teachers. If the participant was unable to access Skype for any reason, an individual telephone interview was carried out in lieu of the Skype interview.

Researcher Journal

Throughout the research study, I kept an electronic journal of my understanding of the teachers' experiences throughout the teaching exchange. In addition, I used the journal as a tool to construct both my understanding of my role as the researcher and of the research process. Because the journal was also used to record my view of the teachers' worlds, I was also able to use it to triangulate data through the above-mentioned telephone interviews.

Data Analysis

In carrying out a qualitative study, researchers from different disciplines agree that the researcher must:

1. Look for meaning, the perspectives of the participants in the study.
2. Look for relationships between the structure, occurrence, and distribution over time.
3. Look for points of tension: What does not fit? What are the conflicting points of evidence in the case? (Janesick, 2003)
4. Whereas it is generally agreed that there is no one best system for analysis, the researcher is responsible for making decisions about how to

analyze data and to tell the story in a manner that convinces the audience (Janesick, 2003; Patton, 2002).

In the present study data analysis began by following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) suggestions regarding the transformation of field texts to research texts. They distinguish between the two by pointing out that research texts evolve from continuous "asking of questions concerning meaning and significance...an inquirer composing a research texts looks for the patterns, themes, narrative threads, tensions and themes appear" (p. 132). Analysis of the research texts will be conducted primarily inductively or as they emerge from the data (Patton, 2002), however, due to my experience with similar groups of teachers in previous years and my theoretical beliefs regarding how the teachers will use the electronic discussion board to construct their identity transformation, I had to be conscious of my own expectations of mediational concepts, language and strategies. As a result, in the early stages of analysis, I worked to focus specifically on patterns and themes that emerged from the data as meaningful to the participants. When patterns, themes and categories had been established, I went about examining data that does not fit within my categories (Patton, 2002). To facilitate the transformation of field texts to research texts, I employed Miles and Huberman's (1994) definition of data analysis as "data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 10).

Data reduction is an ongoing process within any qualitative study that begins as the researcher makes decisions about his or her conceptual framework, research questions and data collection techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Initially, data reduction was carried out through a process of pattern or theme recognition (Patton, 2002). Patton's notion of theme recognition refers to the process of sense-making (Patton, 2002) of the volume of field texts described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Core meanings are referred to as themes or patterns (Patton, 2002). Other data reduction techniques that were carried out throughout the data

collection process included coding for emerging themes, making clusters, and writing memos (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This initial process was carried out by reading the field texts (discussion board text, interview transcripts and researcher journal) and subsequently identifying, coding, coding, categorizing, classifying (Patton, 2002) the patterns that express emerging themes that answer questions about communities, community participation, and pedagogic activities. To search for emerging themes I saved the texts to the software program NVIVO. This aspect of data reduction was carried out by using NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2002) to highlight emerging themes and display their relationship through the creation of free nodes.

Upon reading and re-reading the texts, themes were recognized and named or labeled; these names then help to identify patterns throughout the texts. Their initial relationship was highlighted through the use of NVIVO and the creation of trees – an aspect offered within the program to identify themes or patterns within a larger theme. The initial themes and patterns with their respective trees will then be displayed in graphic form to allow for visualization of their relationship. This data display as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) took the form of a chart that displayed the emergent themes from the teacher narratives. The representation of the themes and sub-themes to answer the questions was developed through different sources including: (1) a socio-cultural lens or perspective of mediational behavior, and (2.) narratives employed on the electronic discussion board, periodic ongoing interviews, and researcher journal.

The final step of conclusion drawing and verification was two-fold. As the researcher, I examined the themes that indicated how the participants used electronic means to develop a community of learners that mediated their professional and language identity in their new school contexts. As Miles and

Huberman (1994) posited this final conclusion drawing and verification phase was ongoing throughout the data collection process.

The process of conclusion drawing and verification is described by Patton (2002, p. 467) points to four aspects that can be used to judge the substantive significance of the findings:

1. Is the evidence in support of the findings solid, coherent, and consist?
2. Does the evidence found serve to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon being studied?
3. Is the knowledge consistent with other knowledge?
4. Are the findings relevant to the purpose of the study, or in other words, do the findings answer the proposed questions?

More specifically, I made use of the themes and patterns and their relationships to answer to my overarching question about how these teachers use the online discussion board to mediate their understanding of their professional and language identities. Specifically, I looked at how these teachers use language to mediate the development of their professional and language identities through electronic media.

After having formed my final conclusions, I then shared my narratives with the participants and requested their perspectives regarding the stories I had written about their experiences on the teaching exchange. This narrative form resulted in my findings concerning the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Nested in their concerns that naturalistic or qualitative inquiry be scientifically trustworthy empirical social science research Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four terms to ascertain the quality and rigor of qualitative research. These terms are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These terms were first

proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to replace terms such as "internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity". Janesick (2003) reinforces these concepts by stating, "So, rather than take terms for the quantitative paradigm, qualitative researchers have correctly offered alternative ways to think about descriptive validity and the unique qualities of case study work".

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility depends on the explanation and description presented by the researcher of the phenomenon. In other words, the audience will find the research credible if the description and explanation are credible. In the present study, credibility was established through interaction with the participants and their participation in the creation of the final narrative.

Prolonged engagement as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) refers to sufficient time for the researcher to be immersed in the context where the study takes place and development of an understanding of the context that is similar to the participant's. When the present study began, I had had experience with Fulbright teachers since 1999 – this was the seventh group of teachers. I had maintained communication with the teachers throughout their exchanges; therefore, I possessed a working knowledge of the teaching contexts in which they lived on the exchange. Prolonged involvement was also carried out electronically throughout the teaching exchange. Therefore, in this study, prolonged engagement refers to both experiences with other Fulbright groups and electronic engagement throughout the exchange.

Peer debriefing via telephone was carried out with my co-teacher on the Orientation course. Whereas I had been teaching on this course since 1999, she had been involved since 2002 and was knowledgeable about the present group of teachers. She was able to provide insight due to her understanding of Mexican teachers and their culture through her work as a Fulbrighter in Mexico.

Triangulation

Triangulation "has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (Stake, 2003). In 1978, Denzin proposed the separation of four central kinds of triangulation (Janesick, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton: 2002; Stake 1995):

1. Data triangulation, the use of different sources
2. Investigator triangulation, the use of different researchers
3. Theory triangulation, the use of multiple perspectives to study one set of data
4. Methodological triangulation, the use of multiple methods to study one program.

Other researchers have used metaphors to describe the process of triangulation (Janesick, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) likens triangulation to the use of a sextant to find one's position in navigating a ship. Stake's metaphor is similar to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) image of radio broadcasting, where radio towers were portrayed in a triangular figure to depict reception of the strongest signal. Both pictures view the data as being observed from the researcher's position.

Janesick (2003) proposes the use of Richardson's (1994) term "crystallization". Here, the image of a crystal as representing innumerable, multidimensional shapes provides a clear analogy to the process of "seeing" research data. This metaphor is particularly appropriate in the use of teacher narratives; it will be applied when the researcher writes the narrative description of the teachers' learning process. In this case, the "crystal" will be the multi-faceted contexts and the socio-historical aspects of the teachers' professional and language identity.

In addition to focusing on the diverse contexts and the socio-historical background of the teachers, in this study, the use of different data collection techniques along with the use of another researcher also provided triangulation. Throughout the study, data analysis was triangulated through the co-teacher on the orientation course as investigator. Although my co-teacher is not participating in this research study as such, her prolonged involvement in the teacher exchange Orientation course makes her a participant; therefore, she was a valuable source of triangulation. In addition, because of socio-historical development and resulting ideological differences held by my co-teacher and myself, it was understood that we viewed aspects of the course differently, therefore enriching the data and providing another type of triangulation.

Member Checking

Another way the data was verified to confirm understanding was through the use of member checks. In the present study, through the use of the participants' narratives and the resulting production of the teachers' stories, member checking was carried out through the exchange of my narrative understanding of their writing and their comments on the final text.

Conclusion

This chapter described my study as of Mexican foreign language teachers as they participate in a Fulbright teaching exchange. It delineated the research questions, design, and method. It outlined narrative inquiry as both a tool and method to examine the teachers' learning of both their professional and language identities. It included definitions and explanations of the concepts, and data collection and analysis procedures. It also addressed steps that will be taken to ensure rigor throughout the study. The upcoming chapters discuss the results of the data analysis procedure and the research findings.

Chapter 4

Introduction

Qualitative research is a collaborative process through which the researcher and the study participants seek to create meaning and subsequently understand a lived experience. In the present study, this research process sought to understand the transmogrification of COMEXUS foreign language teachers' knowledge of self as mediated by their activities in different communities of practice. Data collected and analyzed throughout this study will form the basis of narrative testimony of how the COMEXUS exchange teachers understood their transmogrification during the teaching exchange. This account will, in turn, form the basis for a narrative depiction of the individual exchange teachers' stories.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection

This section describes how the research process was operationalized to answer the questions put forth in Chapter 3. As discussed in Chapter 2, the pre-exchange orientation course has been offered for COMEXUS recipients for the past seven years. Since the first iteration of this course in 1999, electronic communication has been used to provide ongoing communication for the exchange teachers; in more recent courses an electronic discussion board has been used as a medium for communication and support for the exchange teachers throughout their time in the US. As in previous courses, the Yahoo! Group was established for the COMEXUS group participants in the present study, and was meant to provide opportunities for reflection on topics discussed in the culture segment of the pre-exchange orientation course. The electronic discussion board offered opportunities for the exchange

teachers to use writing as a means of reflecting on their learning about the American school system and culture, as well as provided a model of how technology can be used to enhance learning in a teacher development course. During the pre-orientation course the teachers were assigned tasks that invited them to inquire into the nature of American culture by having them interview people they met on the college campus. They then shared their findings and thoughts with the group by posting their experiences on the electronic discussion board. The use of the electronic discussion board in the orientation allowed the teachers to practice using the technology while they had their instructor's support in learning how to use it. The data collection process did not begin until after the research proposal was presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and institutional approval was obtained.

In this study, the COMEXUS exchange teachers used the discussion board to post narratives about their activities throughout the teaching exchange. They were encouraged to use this tool to support other community members by sharing their thoughts and feelings. In turn, the teachers interacted with their colleagues by responding and offering opinions, advice and/or comments that they felt would help their colleague better understand their experiences in their school or other personal communities. Concurrently, during the research process, pedagogically-oriented activities were posted on this discussion board to trigger teacher reflection into their exchange experiences. These activities were designed by the researcher based on Richards' (2000) teaching domains. Therefore, the functions of the electronic discussion board in the present study were to provide a forum for the exchange teachers to discuss and reflect on specific teaching activities and to construct an electronic community where their experiences throughout the teaching exchange could be shared and collectively understood.

The electronic discussion represented not only a dialogue among the exchange teachers. In this research study, I consider myself a participant; this is

readily observable through examination of the data where I participated in the postings throughout the teaching exchange. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that the narrative researcher is never disconnected from the occurrences; they, too, are having a dual experience – as the inquirer into the experience and as a living part of the experience. For example, throughout the orientation course, I was a participant; I was their teacher/tutor and the mediator of the discussion board. Likewise, I had an apartment in the same building where the exchange teachers lived; I ate my meals with them; I went on field trips as part of the orientation course; and I engaged in long discussions with them about the United States and the experience on which they were about to embark. They were aware that their postings on the discussion board would be considered data for this study and they agreed to participate in this research study. In addition, some of the postings are directed specifically to me or have a question for me. As a result, it is understood that the researcher's presence is a factor in the social construction of the electronic exchange community.

To provide increased rigor, individual and group telephone calls either through normal telephone service or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or Skype were included in the data collection process. Due to the expense of regular telephone service, telephone communication was limited to 'free nights and weekends' on the researcher's cellular telephone or VoIP. Conference calls were used to allow the participants an opportunity to hear each others' voices, as well as mediate each others' ideas and understandings of their experiences. Although these telephone calls appeared to be mere conversations, they were what Kvale (1996) describes as interaction between two unequal participants. In other words, these telephone conversations were not conversations between two equal interlocutors. There was a purpose for the conversation, and that purpose was for the researcher to gain information. The participants in the conversation were not equals; the researcher

had a motive for engaging with the participant. These interviews served specifically to address information about the exchange teachers' experience that was not commented on in the discussion board postings. In addition, another type of electronic communication was used by the researcher to interview the study participants. Instant messaging (IM) or synchronous chat was used if the participant was familiar with the technology and had an established account available for this purpose. This was the least favored means of communication by the study participants primarily because most of them were not accustomed to using this technology.

In addition to the above-mentioned data collection techniques, a reflective journal was kept by the researcher. This journal served two purposes: first of all, it served as a reflective tool through which I could engage with the happenings and record my thoughts about the events. Secondly, it was a means to support my memories of particular events, times, dates and other pertinent details and to allow me to look back on the history of the teaching exchange.

Thus, data was collected from an electronic discussion board, telephone calls, emails and instant messaging, depending on the availability of the technology to the study participant. Each exchange teacher participated on the electronic discussion board according to his or her individual beliefs about publicly sharing their teaching activities and community engagement throughout the teaching exchange. For some teachers, teaching activities in the local context were considered to be their own private experiences.

Data organization

The organization of the data began with the "archival task" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). When all of the participants had left the field, data were retrieved from the electronic discussion board and imported into electronic files. These files were separated into two groups: (a) tasks carried out as part of the pre-

exchange orientation course and (b) individual posting by the exchange teachers throughout their COMEXUS exchange. The teachers' postings on the pre-exchange orientation course were not considered data, because they were posted before the research process began. Any additional data obtained through telephone calls were transcribed into text files; data from instant messenger (IM) communication or personal email were retrieved and converted to electronic files. All data were then organized by individual exchange participant; any overlapping data were assigned to both teachers.

Once the electronic text files were organized by individual participant, all texts were coded for emerging themes for each exchange teacher. This procedure was begun by a reading all of the text files to become familiar with the data. All data were examined both by data collection tool (Yahoo! Group, telephone conversation, email or IM) and globally. All documents were then imported into NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2002) and coded for emerging themes for each participant. This process began with the postings on the electronic discussion board, then the text files of the telephone conversations and finally any email or IM texts. This analysis resulted in a list of emergent themes for each participant. These themes were concepts, happenings or experiences that the exchange teacher discussed on the electronic discussion board. From the participants' discussion of these occurrences, I identified categories or topics that were important to their understanding of their experiences. Based on Patton's (2002) discussion of themes, the topics to which the participants assigned more meaning in their discussion were categorized as themes.

How participants were chosen

After initial analysis of the data for all of the COMEXUS exchange teachers, it was noticed that some participants' electronic posting and telephone interviews offered thicker, richer data that afforded deeper understanding of how the process of

competent community membership was mediated by actions and activities within different communities of practice. I therefore decided to select four teachers from the original thirteen COMEXUS participants. My first criterion for choosing the participants was their participation in the electronic discussion board. I examined the discussion board data to see which of the exchange teachers had contributed regular and meaningful postings. The chosen teachers' postings represented 109 of the 397 post-orientation course postings by the entire COMEXUS teacher group (see Table 3). A chronology of the four teachers' postings offered a visual picture of the chosen teachers' postings (see Appendix C). A meaningful posting is defined as one that: (a) responded to a

Table 3

Postings by chosen teachers

	Victor	Miriam	Carlos	Sandra	Total chosen teacher postings	Total postings
Number of postings	41	32	21	15	109	397

colleague who had a question, in distress or with a problem or (b) shared a new experience of an activity within the teacher's community of practice. A meaningful posting was not comprised of comments that merely agreed with what others had posted.

In addition, the chosen participants spoke directly to the individuals in the COMEXUS group as well as to the group as a whole. Finally, the exchange teachers that were chosen showed an interest in participating in the project. They were all were concerned with their participation in the research in that they all reflected on the assigned activities and integrated their reflection into the discussion board postings.

My second criterion for choosing the study participants was a search for a balance among the exchange teachers. I chose both women and men teachers who worked in public schools in the U.S., at elementary, middle and high school levels.

Because the teacher preparation process in Mexico is quite diverse (see Table 1, p. 23) I also chose both teachers who had studied in the Normal Superior and professionals from other areas who had participated in alternative education courses to become teachers as well as or in addition to the Normal Superior. I also chose teachers who exhibited a belief that teaching is a life-long learning experience. They demonstrated this belief by talking about the teacher education courses they had taken and specifically stating both during the pre-exchange orientation course and in subsequent postings on the electronic discussion board that they were doing the teacher exchange to learn more about teaching and about themselves as teachers. In addition, the teacher participants had differing levels of knowledge of the content area they were teaching. Their knowledge of English varied; one teacher grew up speaking and studying in English, one has an undergraduate degree in languages and is proficient in more than one foreign language. Three of the teachers had previously lived in English speaking environments.

Due to the nature of the COMEXUS exchange, there is no age limit on the participants; teachers with many years of teaching experience are encouraged to apply for the program. As a result, the teachers chosen are older, more mature teachers; all teachers chosen for the present study were over 40 years old.

Because the use of technology was a factor in the formation of the electronic support community, the participants exhibited a balance of technology knowledge. Two of the chosen teachers began the pre-exchange orientation course with strong technology skills; two did not. The two that were considered more technologically knowledgeable had taken courses in computer use and both had taught the subject at their Mexican schools. In spite of the varied technology skills at the beginning of

the orientation course, all participants used a variety of electronic communication tools throughout the study.

As the teaching exchange progressed, the teachers' different activities mediated their opinions about the COMEXUS program. Two chosen teacher participants described their exchange experience as very favorable, and were very happy throughout their teaching exchange; the other two chosen teachers suffered from both homesickness and loneliness throughout the teaching exchange. These feelings, in turn, also mediated their participation in their school communities as well as other communities.

The four participants were chosen also because they came from different demographic areas in Mexico and were assigned to demographic areas similar to their Mexican settings for their COMEXUS exchange. One teacher came from a very small town, two came from medium-sized cities and one came from a very large, diverse metropolitan area.

In short, the participants for this study were chosen based on their participation in the electronic community, their interest in participating in the study and other individual characteristics (see Table 3). For purposes of this study, the four teachers will be called Victor, Miriam, Carlos and Sandra; their narratives will be presented in this order.

Table 4

Overview of chosen participants

Name	Gender age	Professional education	Teacher education	School assignment	Locality	English language studies
Victor	M 40	Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Humanities – Languages ▪ BA in Pedagogy ▪ MA in Higher Education 	High school	Small city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University degree in languages ▪ Fluency in French as well as English.

Name	Gender age	Professional education	Teacher education	School assignment	Locality	English language studies
Miriam	F 46	Tourism administrati on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher training in U.S. 	Middle school	One of 5 largest cities in U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Previous Fulbright language course, two months ▪ Travel to English speaking environment with volleyball team
Carlos	M 40	Agronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Normal Superior – incomplete ▪ Teacher preparation course in Canada 	High school	Small town, rural setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Language institute ▪ Five months in US previously
Sandra	F 43	Teacher	Normal Superior --MA	Elementary school	Mid-size city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary, secondary, preparatory school education in part in English ▪ Previous participation in non-Fulbright exchange program

Triangulation

To establish and maintain rigor as well as to strive for the participants' voices to be accurately portrayed in the narrative accounts, both data and researcher triangulation techniques were employed. On the Yahoo! Group, the exchange teachers shared their ongoing experiences with the COMEXUS community. The discussion board allowed for a temporal understanding of the exchange teachers' participation in their exchange communities. For data triangulation, further verification of the participants' meanings was carried out through the use of telephone interviews and other electronic communication. Researcher triangulation was effectuated through cross-researcher coding of the data and shared construction of the understanding of the emerging themes. This researcher triangulation was achieved by shared coding between the researcher and a second researcher who is both an experienced foreign language teacher as well as expert in the concepts of teacher education. This second researcher coded all of the data and her findings

were compared to and integrated into the coding book created by the primary researcher. In addition, to ensure understanding of the exchange teachers' meanings in both their electronic discussion board postings and telephone conversations, member-checking was carried with the individual exchange teachers via email or through Skype or IM.

Narrative Representations of Community Participation

In seeking to better understand the exchange teachers' participation in their communities, this study used narrative "as the best way to understand experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). It is recognized that "a community of practice acts as a locally negotiated regime of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 137). For this study, the exchange participants' communities of practice are defined by their local communities of practice. Consequently, the topics or themes the exchange teachers discussed on the electronic board are viewed as narrative expressions of the experiences that mediated their participation in their local communities of practice. As a result, experiences of very similar activities within the different contexts may or may not be recognized as movement toward competent membership in a given community of practice. Wenger (1998) argues that to participate even as a peripheral member, one must engage with other members and respond appropriately to their actions (mutuality of engagement), understand the community enterprise sufficiently to take some responsibility for it and contribute to its pursuit (accountability to the enterprise) and be able to use the repertoire of the practice, and recognize the elements of its repertoire (negotiability of repertoire). As a result, the data was analyzed based on Wenger's (1998) definition of community involvement.

The themes that were discussed by the exchange teachers in their electronic participation were ideas or concepts that negotiated that teacher's engagement in a given community of practice. In other words, the emergent themes were examined

for evidence of (a) mutuality of engagement, (b) accountability to the enterprise and (c) negotiability of repertoire. These factors mediated the exchange teachers' trajectory within the community and therefore his or her identity. Wenger (1998) explained that identity creation is a result of negotiating the meaning of experiences and activities of membership within a given community. He referred to the "lived experience of identity while recognizing its social character – it is the social, the cultural, the historical with a human face" (p. 145). As a basis for understanding the exchange teachers' meaning throughout the teaching exchange, identity of self is conceptualized as Wenger (1998) defined it, "as a point of departure" (p. 145). This definition is particularly appropriate for the COMEXUS teachers because of the varied socio-historical backgrounds they brought with them to the teaching exchange as well as the diverse communities in which they participated during the exchange. In other words, whereas the exchange teachers identified similar themes as being important to them, these themes represented activities in their local communities. Their understanding of the themes is socially mediated through their participation in these local communities of practice. Wenger (1998) expressed a similar notion by reminding us that neither the individual nor community should be the unit of analysis for identity. This focal point is the mutual construction of identity within the local context of the teacher's activity within his or her community context. Viewed within Engeström's (1987) activity theory framework, the themes represented mediating factors in the teacher's local community of practice.

The exchange teachers' narratives regarding their activities within their communities of practice will serve as a basis for the narrative descriptions of their *vistas* or how they understood and viewed their community participation throughout the teaching exchange. In order to fully understand the teacher narratives, the shared themes discussed by the exchange teachers on the electronic discussion board and in other

electronic communication were displayed both comparatively and individually (see Table 5).

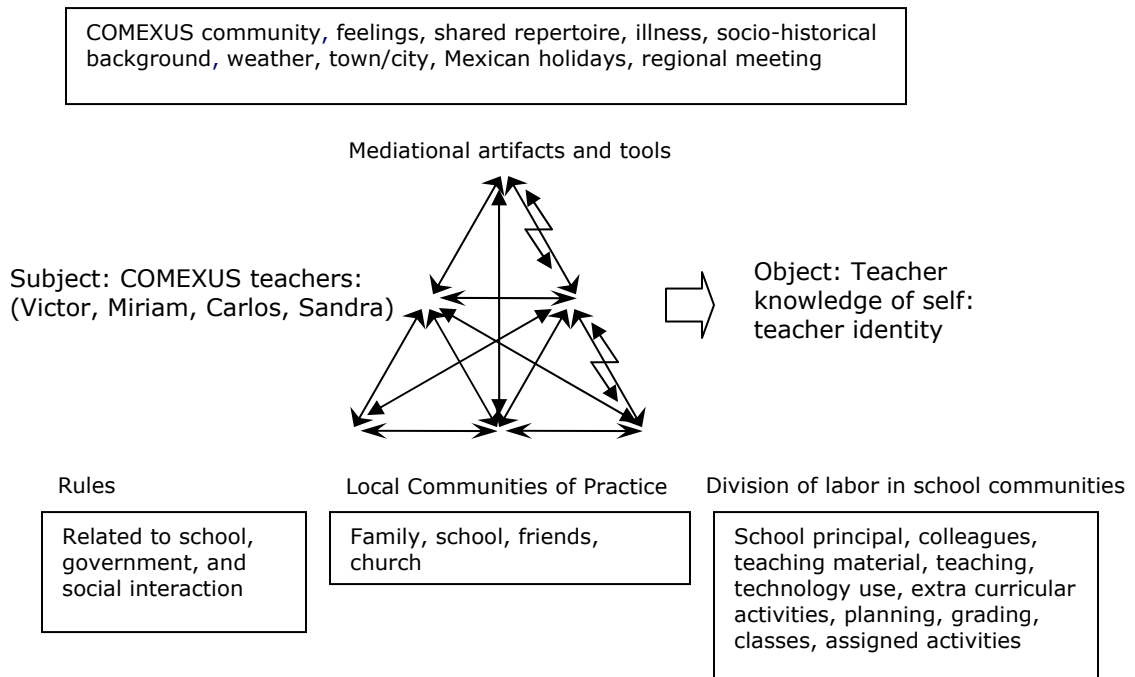
Table 5

Themes by teacher

Victor	Miriam	Carlos	Sandra
Assigned activities	Assigned activities	Assigned activities	Assigned activities
Church	Church		
Classes		Classes	Classes
Colleagues	Colleagues / teachers		
Communication with COMEXUS teachers	Communication with COMEXUS teachers	Communication with COMEXUS teachers	Communication with COMEXUS teachers
Extracurricular activities	Extracurricular activities	Extracurricular activities	
Host family	Family on the exchange	Family on the exchange	Family on the exchange
Friends	Friends	Friends	
Getting around	Getting around	Getting around	Getting around
		Grading	
		Government and rules	Government and rules
Feelings	Feelings	Feelings	Feelings
	Illness		Illness
Mexican holiday	Mexican holiday		
	Parents	Parents/guardians	
		Planning	
Principal	Principal	Principal	Principal
Regional meeting	Regional meeting	Regional meeting	Regional meeting
			Relating it to Mexican context
School	School / other schools	School	School / other schools
Shared repertoire	Shared repertoire	Shared repertoire	Shared repertoire
Social activities		Social activities	
Students	Students	Students	Students
			Suggestions
Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching
Teaching material	Teaching material	Teaching material	Teaching material
Technology use	Technology use	Technology use	
	Town / city		
	Weather	Weather	

To envision the exchange teachers' understandings of their activities (Engeström, 1987), the themes were viewed through an activity theory framework (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Mediational themes



This visualization of the themes as one activity system is a theoretical conceptualization which helps to place a boundary around the teachers' transmogrification. Each exchange teachers' narrative portrays the teachers' living experience of these themes in their local communities of practice.

Interpretation of Themes

Identification, organization and categorization of the shared and individual themes were only the first steps to being able to create narrative interpretations of the COMEXUS teachers' transmogrification throughout the teaching exchange. Narrative inquiry faces concerns regarding 'interpretive ambiguity' (King & Stahl, 2004) or the "ethical, rhetorical and linguistic choices" (King & Stahl, 2004) a researcher must make to transform "field texts into research texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and subsequently the research texts into narrative depictions of the

participants' experience. This final consideration brought to the fore by both King (2004) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is the narrative form the participants' voice will take in providing an account of their experiences. This study seeks to provide a semi-biographical, narrative recounting of the exchange teachers' journeys through their teaching exchange. To that end, the exchange teachers' words from their electronic communications are used, both in Spanish and in English; direct quotes in Spanish are translated into English by the researcher.

Narrative representations of the participants' experience

Although the participants' postings on the electronic discussion board and other electronic means of communication demonstrate shared concerns, interests, patterns or concepts, these themes do not necessarily represent the same ideas for each participant within their local community of practice. Therefore, the themes that emerged from the electronic communication along with the individual participant's understanding of these concepts will be used to interpretively construct the stories of the exchange teachers' experience on the COMEXUS exchange. In the present study, the teacher stories will be constructed through various portraits called *vistas*. In the present study, *vista* boundaries are seen as porous and overlapping, encompassing the interrelationship between the teachers' socio-historical backgrounds including their experiences that made up their journeys to the teaching exchange as well as those on the pre-exchange orientation course at Messiah College. As a result, these stories seek to recount how the exchange teachers understood their socio-historical development before the teaching exchange (*vistas formativas* or foundational views), their communities of practice during the exchange experience (*vistas de comunidades en desarrollo* or developing communities) and their personal transmutation throughout this occurrence (*vistas transformativas* or transmutational views). The upcoming sections comprise the *vistas* of each teacher in turn.

Vistas de Victor

Vista formativa: from Mexico to the U.S.

Victor began his journey to the COMEXUS teaching exchange in 1985 when he began an undergraduate degree in foreign language. He attributed his choice to his dislike of what he termed "exact sciences". He wanted to study languages to offer him the opportunity to travel around the world, and as a hobby. At that time, he did not have teaching in mind. The year he started studying English, French and Italian was the year that some of the games of the World Cup soccer tournament were held in his home town, a medium-sized Mexican city. As a result, he was able to practice his new language skills in a real life setting, in his home town; this motivated him to continue studying languages.

The following year, he began teaching English to elementary school students (grades k – 9). He claimed he was not hired because of his teaching abilities, but because of a shortage of teachers. His first teaching experience was self-defined as negative, but he asserted that this was the beginning of his vocation as a teacher. His second experience teaching was at a private school that taught computer skills. This proved to be more favorable, he had two hours for each session which allowed him to use a variety of teaching activities and the groups were not as numerous as they had been in the previous school. His third year of teaching took him to a vocational *preparatoria*.

Victor attributed his final decision about taking up a teaching career to experiences he had while working at a large transnational paper company. Victor's home city is located in one of the industrial basins located north of Mexico City. It is the home of many transnational industries whose employees are in need of English language skills. The year that Victor worked at this company gave him the opportunity to travel on business to the U.S., Germany and Finland, as well as realize other professional goals. It was in this position that his respected boss said to

him, "maestro tiene usted madera para enseñar [*Professor, you have the makings of a true teacher*]."

In 1990, Victor obtained a *plaza* (a tenure-like appointment) in a public vocational school system for adults, where he has taught English ever since. He recognizes this step in his professional development as being fundamental to his development as an English teacher. Here, he explained, he had to use a variety of teaching activities that focused on the four language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking -- as well as grammar. Because his students were adults, who were interested in learning to improve their economic status in life, suddenly he was faced with students who were not only motivated, but had some knowledge of the language as well as high expectations of their learning process. As a result, he felt the need to become a better language teacher.

Two years later, he undertook an undergraduate degree in Technological Pedagogy at the *Centro de Actualización del Magisterio* [Center for Teacher Training]. He obtained his undergraduate degree by attending classes on Saturdays and during summer break for four years. He spent another year writing his final thesis to complete these studies. Concurrently, he continued his studies by taking the Cambridge COTE (Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English) course that was offered at his local university in conjunction with the British Council. It was this course that taught him to use the communicative methodology that he claims to have given him favorable results ever since with students at all levels.

Four years later, he began to teach both English and French at a local university. It was at this university that he also began to work on a Master's degree in higher education. The next year he was promoted on the public school evaluation system—*Carrera Magisterial*. Promotion in this system implies advanced teaching skills as well as continuing education in one's field. It also includes an economic

incentive to continue advancing in the system. One area in which Victor has continued his studies has been the integration of technology in language teaching.

In addition to teaching at the public school for the last thirteen years, Victor has had his own language school. Beginning with teaching only English in 1992, he presently offers other language classes such as French, Italian, German and Otomí (the local indigenous language) in his home town. He described the school as having a highly trained team of teachers that offer a variety of languages to his home community. His description of his language school evidences Victor's view of important characteristics of a successful school, teachers are highly trained, a variety of languages are taught, and one of the languages taught is indigenous to the local community.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: school community

Victor was assigned to a high school in a small Midwestern city. His high school had 400 students. He was the only COMEXUS exchange teacher assigned to teach more than one language. Unlike most of his COMEXUS colleagues, he did not have an American exchange partner. He was assigned to serve as a teacher's aide or co-teacher with the other language teachers at his high school; he co-taught French I and II and Spanish II, IV and V. The negotiation of his role in the language department of his exchange school was dependent on Victor's successful execution of his teaching activities with his co-teachers. Because he did not have his own classroom, Victor's activity in the school community would be assigned by his co-teachers. Victor described (Telephone interview, November 11) his responsibilities as providing native speaker pronunciation, focusing on Mexican culture and preparing PowerPoint presentations about Mexican holidays and other cultural events. He felt strongly about the use of technology in his foreign language classrooms. He reported (Telephone interview, November 11) that he had ample access to technology, although the computer was not up to date. Victor's teaching activities, therefore,

were carried out in another teacher's classroom with a group he did not consider to be his students. In his postings (September 10, 17, November 2, 16 & 22), he discussed not the classroom teaching, but the teaching material he had created, primarily using PowerPoint. Likewise, he did not discuss his relationship with his co-teachers. It was not until December 11 (telephone interview) when he fully explained his teaching role in the language department. Victor was perceived as and understood himself to be a competent member of the language department as is evidenced by his explanation of the relationship he had with his co-teachers. He stated,

...ahora si que trabajo en conjunto con las maestras de aquí de español con las dos y tambien con la maestra de Frances asi que..... la carga de trabajo se comparte... esta muy interesante porque afortunadamente.... tienen la mentalidad muy ... abierta en cuanto a que yo les apporto ideas y las aceptan muy bien incluso a nivel.... de corregir alumnos de detalles de pronunciacion o de cosas que a veces se usan este mas en en España que en Mexico.... entonces les hago la aclaración de cómo lo usamos en México....y tambien ellas.....me han aportado ideas para aplicarlas aquí en los grupos y tambien pues me voy a llevar a Mexicoentonces es un una muy buena relacion de que les apporto ideas y ellas tambien me estan aportando...

[...I am working with the Spanish teachers—with both of them and also with the French teacher....that way we share the work....it is very interesting because fortunately they have an open mind to my offering ideas and they accept them very well.... including my correcting students' pronunciation or about things sometimes that are used more in Spain than in Mexico.....then I offer an explanation about how we use it in Mexico.... they have also given me ideas to use here

with the groups and I will also take them to Mexicoso it is a very good relationship that I give them ideas and they also are giving me ideas]

Victor viewed his teaching activities as equally important as his co-teachers' activities.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: his host family

He lived with one of his foreign language co-teachers and her husband during his teaching exchange. In an early posting (Yahoo! Group, August 19) he described his American family as "caring". Throughout the exchange Victor was involved in a variety of activities in the local community with his host family. In an early posting (August 13) he expressed his surprise at attending a church that was very different than his own. He stated,

I've been to church and I'll be going every Sunday, I like it because there is a band and people sing, I can see the lyrics on the screen and participate, it's like a rock concert! It lasts two hours but it's fun.

He went on to describe other activities that mediated his participation in this community. These activities included visiting his church friends, eating sweet corn and deer, nice conversation and going fishing. He also wrote about the Pastor's coming to have dinner with his host family. As time progressed, Victor became a competent member of his host family community. He participated amply in all of their activities, including attending the ... college football games; both of his hosts were alumni of ... After only three weeks with his host family, on August 25, Victor stated (Yahoo! Group) that he was so involved with his host family that he almost forgot to attend the first meeting at his high school. His activities within his host family mediated Victor's participation in his social community.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: COMEXUS community

When Victor arrived at his exchange home he felt alone, in spite of the fact that he lived with another teacher from the high school and her husband. His initial posting to the electronic discussion board afforded him an open line of communication with his COMEXUS colleagues. He stated, "I'm happy here [*sic*] this is the first time i'm by myself [*sic*] and keep in touch with somebody I know makes me feel comfortable. We keep in touch (Yahoo! Group, August 7)". Although his activities within his host family and their local community increased, he offered support to his COMEXUS colleagues who were having complications in their teaching exchange. When Carlos posted his experience regarding his need for a temporary teaching license, Victor responded (Yahoo! Group, August 30),

Keep your spirit strong, think that this is not going to be forever, this only shows that our cuntry [*sic*] is not so bad after all, at least [*sic*] we have freedom to do what we want and work free of threatening situations.

In response to another of his colleague's postings, he stated, "Hechele ganas mi querido! no se me quiebre a las primeras de cambio. Viva Mexico! [*Work hard, my dear don't break down at the first change. Viva Mexico!*]" (Yahoo! Group, August 24). Likewise, he offered to share his PowerPoint presentations and asked his colleagues to share with him. Throughout the exchange, Victor shared his photos and newspaper articles about his exchange process from both his exchange town and his Mexican city. Victor's participation in the COMEXUS community was evidenced by his ample participation through postings that were directed to both to the entire group and to individual members of the community. Like some of his other COMEXUS colleagues, Victor created the COMEXUS community in his imagination, but competent membership was represented through his mutuality of his postings, shared repertoire and the manner in which he took responsibility for the electronic

community. At the end of the teaching exchange (Yahoo! Group, January 16) he had already engaged in planning a face-to-face meeting to share experiences and understandings of the teaching exchange.

Vistas de Miriam

Vista formativa: from Mexico to the U.S.

Miriam's first experience of teaching was immediately after she graduated from the university with a degree in Tourist Administration. She taught "*Patrimonio Turistico* [Tourist Heritage]" at university level, which she described as her first experience in what would become her vocation. After this initial experience teaching, Miriam worked in the area of tourism in Guadalajara and Mexico City. Her second experience was at a large, well-known hotel in southern Mexico City. Here, she had the opportunity to meet many famous people, including actors, athletes, and writers.

However, this job interfered with her passion in life: playing volleyball. In 2005, she said she had been playing volleyball for 26 years. While studying her undergraduate degree, her volleyball team participated in a tournament that included English speaking, American university teams. She was the only one on her team that was able to communicate in English; she explained that at that time she knew that she had to continue her language studies.

Upon graduation in 1981, she felt she knew enough English to be able to teach it, but it was not until 1989 that she began teaching in the public school system. Her first teaching assignment was teaching groups of 60 students, 19 hours a week.

She describes her seventeen years of teaching as a rewarding experience, one that has allowed her to awaken young minds to information new to them. She refers to teaching as a vocation, as a means of guiding young people. She said that her work as a teacher has been satisfying for her and that as she learns more English, this will benefit her students. She stated, (Yahoo! Group, July 24) "A foreign

language is a mind-opener, it introduces [sic] you in a world, with different culture and sensibility". She describes the COMEXUS exchange as a means of breaking her teaching routine; she knows she will learn from the experience.

When she began her teaching career, her daughter was two years old. As she began the COMEXUS exchange her daughter was in her last year of *preparatoria*. She had very few remaining subjects to complete her studies, so she was able to accompany Miriam on the teaching exchange and still return for the second semester of the school year (January – June, 2006) to graduate from preparatory school.

Her teaching assignment in her home school in the largest metropolitan area in the world, Miriam teaches both the morning and afternoon shifts at her secondary school (grades 7 – 9). She was used to beginning her school day at 7 am and she concluded her day at 6 pm. She taught English as a Foreign Language to adolescents in *secundaria* (grades 7 – 9).

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: local community – her surroundings

When Miriam arrived at her exchange apartment on August 7, she was accompanied by her American exchange teacher. She was assigned to an affluent middle school in a suburban setting ; her school was on the outskirts of one of the largest cities in the U.S. Arrangements had been made for her daughter to attend the local high school as an ESL student. Before her daughter arrived, she had an opportunity to explore both her suburban area and the big city on her bike and by subway (Yahoo! Group, August 12). These explorations allowed her to see that her new environment was a friendly space for Latinos (Yahoo! Group, August 23, September 15, and November 2) and discover activities that focused on Latino cultures. During her exchange she went to a parade celebrating Mexican Independence (September 15) and a museum dedicated to Mexican art and culture. In her posting regarding the Day of the Dead holiday, she told us that her Spanish classes visited this local museum in the Mexican community where some of her

uncle's original engravings were displayed (Yahoo! Group, November 2). She immediately got in touch with her family in Mexico so they could make copies of her uncle's work that they had so they could send the copies to her. For Miriam, these meaningful activities allowed her to link her Mexican home community to her new Latin/Mexican exchange community.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: COMEXUS community

Wenger's (1998) discussion of community formation includes the conceptualization of global communities formed by the participant's imagination, which in turn reifies community participation. Miriam's participation on the electronic discussion board was her way of reifying the COMEXUS community of practice. Miriam's reification of the COMEXUS community was evident in her electronic postings. From the initial posting (August 7) she invited the community to keep in touch and reminded them how they needed to dial the phone should they want to call her in her new home. Her postings concluded with textual reminders that she was thinking of them and that she knew they would be successful in their teaching exchanges (Yahoo! Group, August– January). She expressed her feelings (Yahoo! Group, September 29) by stating, "Estoy segura que todo saldrá bien [*I am sure everything will be fine.*]" On another occasion (August 12) she said, "I am pretty sure that everyone's [*sic*] are doing well."

During the teaching exchange there were two Mexican holidays. On September 15, Mexican Independence from Spain is celebrated and on November 2, Day of the Dead is observed as a cultural holiday. Before and during these days, Miriam expressed strong shared Mexican cultural beliefs in her postings. On September 15 she said, "Viva Mexico Companeros, Que tengan un feliz dia y que en el lugar donde estes puedan recordar este aniversario de nuestra libertad [*Long live Mexico, Colleagues, have a happy day and wherever you are, remember this anniversary of our liberty*]. Her cry, "Viva Mexico" is the cry for independence

shouted in 1810 by the fathers of Mexican Independence, Miguel Hidalgo and José Maria Morelos y Pávon. Today, it is shouted three times in celebrations of Mexican Independence from the balcony of the National Palace by the Mexican president on the eve of this holiday. "Viva México!" is the shared rhetoric of her COMEXUS colleagues on this important Mexican holiday. While her postings linked the shared culture and history of Mexico, she prepared activities for her students to connect this occurrence to her teaching. These classroom activities mediated her participation in the electronic community, as well as in her Mexican community of practice. This community is another example of a community of practice as understood through the participant's imagination.

The second holiday, although it is based on the combination of ancient pre-Hispanic Aztec celebrations of their dead at harvest-time and the Christian celebration of All Soul's Day, it is celebrated nationally as a cultural holiday. On Day of the Dead Mexicans celebrate and honor their ancestors by creating an altar to their memory. Along with the creation of this cultural artifact, family traditions are observed by consumption of special food and drink. Altars are decorated with a particular flower (*cempazuchitl*) and brightly cut tissue paper along with any other artifacts that celebrate the person's life. Miriam wrote, "Vieron ayer una película sobre las festividades en Janitzio, contestaron cuestionarios, crucigramas, El día de hoy ellos recortaron papel picado, y unas calacas [*Yesterday they watched a movie about the festivities in Janitzio, they answered questions, and crossword puzzles. Today they cut tissue paper decorations and some skeletons*]" (Yahoo! Group, November 2). Her discussion of her integration of this holiday into her teaching, along with other postings by the exchange teachers, served to evidence their shared membership in both the COMEXUS and electronic community. In other words, the electronic narration was a representation of the shared Mexican and COMEXUS community.

Miriam expressed her strong religious beliefs by expressing her desire for God to bless us in our journeys wherever we were. She said (August 12), "I think of you. God bless you a lot." Another posting (August 25) concluded with, "Cuidense y que dios les guarde. [*Take care and may God keep you.*]" Mid-exchange she offered support to one of her colleagues when she stated, "asi que debemos pedir a Dios por el grupo para seguir hasta e final del proyecto [*we need to ask God (to support) the group to continue to the end of the project*]." She attended her church regularly and her friends from the church offered her support when she needed it (Yahoo! Group, September 22). She evidenced her feelings by stating,

Tienes razon sobre los obstaculos, los he tenido que superar, sin mencionarlos, para sentirme mejor, quizas es el caracter de cada persona,

pero efectivamente te levantas con mejores opciones, y la verdad desde que asisto a la iglesia de aqui, me siento consolada, apoyada, hay

muchas personas que nos apoyan y oran por nosotras...

[*You are right about the obstacles, I have had overcome them, without mentioning them, to feel better, maybe it is the character of each person, but really, you wake up with better options, the truth, since I have been attending the church here, I feel consoled, supported, there are many people who support us and pray for us...*]

In this conversation with one of her COMEXUS colleagues she reminded her that all of the exchange teachers had obstacles to overcome, and that perhaps there were people in the local community that could offer support, as she had found help in her church community.

In early January (Yahoo! Group) she became concerned with the future of her COMEXUS community of practice. She hoped they would be able to stay in contact to

maintain the community. She said "espero que podamos seguir en contacto para consolidar este grupo de profesores, que cada dia tendran diferentes experiencias que compartir. [*I hope we can stay in touch to fortify this group of teachers, every day we will have different experiences to share*]". Just before she returned to Mexico (Yahoo! Group, January 17), she pointed out that she felt that the writing activity kept the community linked. She expressed this when she stated, "Espero que no se olviden del grupo, y que sigan escribiendo. [*I hope you don't forget the group, and that you continue to write.*]"

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: the school community

Miriam's school is a large, urban, middle school located in an affluent community. There are 850 students. The school has four language labs with 36 computers in each lab and two mobile labs. School resources also include a theater and a library. On August 25, the entire school staff assembled for the school picture. Miriam was excited when she wrote about the school personnel, "Es grandioso convivir con personas de diferentes nacionalidades, pero trabajando para un solo fin. [*It is great to interact with people of different nationalities, but working for one goal.*]" She reflected (Telephone interview, November 6) on her relationship with the other teachers at the school by saying that some of them would greet her, some would not. One of her colleagues took her to Sam's to buy groceries, whereas others would "me medio sonrian [*they halfway smile at me*]". Miriam did not express a need to be a competent member in the whole school community.

In August (Yahoo! Group, August 25), upon visiting the school, she described her feelings about having both an overhead projector and a computer in her classroom. She stated, "Para mi es como un sueno tener tantos recursos didacticos, se dan el lijo[sic] de regresar material de otros anos que no pudieron utilizar. [*For me it is like a dream to have so many teaching resources, they have the luxury of returning material from other years that they could not use*]".

However, once she began the school year, she had second thoughts about how the teaching materials were used in the school. Her first confusion was that although the students had the textbook, it was not used by other teachers for classroom teaching (Telephone interview, November 16). She explained that they used primarily oral work and games. When she suggested using the video that accompanied the textbook, her colleagues told her that the video was too old. Her colleagues created new teaching material as the school year progressed. She felt this was unnecessary, because she had been given teaching material that her American counterpart had created, but not used, before she left for Mexico. To Miriam, it did not make sense for her to create new material when she already had material appropriate for the teaching points. She commented that her colleagues created video worksheets that they had produced over the last year and a half. She discussed how her use of the teaching materials had evolved as the exchange progressed (Telephone interview, November 16). When she first arrived, she tried making all of her own material (as her colleagues did). She found this to be difficult. She stated that she did not understand why each teacher had to do something different to teach the same linguistic item. As time passed in the exchange, she developed a different tactic. She would confer with her colleagues and offer them the materials she had. At the same time, she would ask to see what they had produced. She stated that if she liked what they had created, she would use it, if not she would develop or find something she liked better. This method of sharing materials with her colleagues proved more to her liking than each teacher making up their own materials for a given linguistic, or cultural objective. This tactic allowed Miriam to be a competent member of the community formed by her fellow Spanish teachers. She shared the joint enterprise and engaged in the process of creating teaching materials. She was also able to share their negotiated repertoire by offering her materials.

Miriam was favorably impressed by teaching methods she observed her fellow language teachers employing in the classroom. She described them (Telephone interview, November 16) as interactive, which fit within her belief in communicative language teaching. In addition, she admired her colleagues' teaching style. She saw it as active, including the use of gestures to support the use of the target language, just as she has been encouraged to do in Mexico.

In her initial postings about the students she described them as "respectful and nice" (Yahoo! Group, September 2). She remarked that they said 'funny' things in Spanish. As the exchange progressed, she did not experience major classroom management problems, in part because she was supported by one of her colleagues. When she had difficulties with one of the students, she reported him to another teacher. This resulted in the student apologizing for his actions and completing his late homework assignment. She agreed (Yahoo! Group, October 12) with an idea that initiated from a discussion on classroom management put forth at her regional meeting: the teachers concluded that although some things may be different, students were generally the same, no matter where they came from. She explained that she thought that the students did not think of her as a regular teacher, or part of the school (Yahoo!Group, Oct 21). She saw the discipline situation as different in this school from her Mexican school. She stated, "En Mexico, es diferente y se resuelve de otra manera. [*In Mexico, it is different, (problems) are solved in a different way.*]" She reflected that from reading the electronic postings, she had detected that some of her COMEXUS colleagues had had problems with discipline. These postings reflect how Miriam mediated her participation in her local community, her activities served to distance her from her problems by explaining that she thought that the students did not think she was a regular teacher.

At the beginning of her exchange experience, Miriam co-taught with a young teacher that had been hired to replace a veteran teacher who was going to leave her

post. When the veteran teacher decided not leave, the school had an extra teacher. As a result, Miriam and this teacher spent the first weeks of the school year working together until this teacher was given her own classroom. She described their developing relationship by saying,

Entonces al principio le fue difícil a ella y después ya nos acostumbramos a trabajar juntas y finalmente creo que lo hicimos bien porque ella daba una parte de la clase y yo daba otra parte y estábamos siempre ayudando a los niños entonces yo siento que funciona bien

[At the beginning it was difficult for her and later we got used to working together and finally I think we did a good job because she taught part of the class and I taught the other and we were always helping the children, so I think it worked well]

This positive experience helped Miriam understand and participate in the system, teaching and how to work with a colleague; on the other hand, it allowed another community member to reify Miriam's competent engagement in the community's joint enterprise.

In a conference call (November 20) with Carlos, Miriam reflected on how the students' behavior was different with her than it was with the other language teachers. Both COMEXUS teachers expressed their beliefs that the American schools wanted the students to be too quiet in the classroom. They claimed, "when you are in an American school, you do not hear a sound" (Telephone interview, November 20). Miriam reported that students that did not raise their hands in other classes did so in her class. She observed that the students felt intimidated by the other teachers. Her explanation of this experience showed that she did not align her beliefs with what she considered to be overly strict classroom management, nor did she

follow the local community rules regarding maintaining complete silence in her classroom.

One repeated observation on Miriam's part regarding the students that attended this school was the excessive economic resources they had available to them. She said (Telephone interview, November 6) that she found their lunch tickets on the floor, the students' belongings were always left behind; they did not care if they lost them. She explained that they had too much, and did not care about their things. Likewise, she was impressed about the school resources available to form the orchestra. She described how the school would make expensive instruments available to the students, and how less expensive instruments could be purchased by the orchestra members.

She also spoke favorably about the school principal (Telephone interview, November 20). Although she had not been a teacher at the school the previous school year, she adopted the community's name for him: "the new principal". She described him as an energetic, friendly, interactive man that spent a lot of time in the halls seeing what was going on in his school. During the time she was there, he held early morning assemblies to energize the students for their school day. These were short gatherings, but she described them as perfectly organized. She noted that on the day he was congratulating the sports team, he had the orchestra play music in the background. Her final comment (Telephone interview, January 8) about the principal was that he observed her class but did not offer any feedback, either at the moment or afterwards. This was an unsettling situation for her; she felt she deserved to hear what he thought about her teaching and it was incongruous with her beliefs about the activities of a school principal.

In general, Miriam became a competent member of the language teaching community and a lateral participant in the community as a whole. However, something happened that rocked the entire school community while Miriam was on

her teaching exchange. On December 18, (Telephone interview) she reported that the week after Thanksgiving she had felt sick and the school nurse sent her home and told her to stay there until she felt better. During the time she had been ill, one of her colleagues – a math teacher – was arrested for having child pornography on both his home and school computers. She anecdotally explained that his arrest was part of a larger investigation of a Russian child pornography ring; approximately 1,200 people from all over the U.S. were arrested in the same operation. To further complicate matters, he was the son of another teacher who had worked at the school for years. She reported the community's distress at learning that the father had put up his house as collateral for this teacher's release. The day it happened, news media were outside the school with their cameras, which caused the both students and teachers to feel intimidated and distressed. The school community's reaction to this incident was to be supportive of both the arrested teacher and his father. Within the school building, no one spoke of what had happened, but she described the feelings that hung over the school as ones of sadness, support and concern for the both teachers. Miriam reported that in the course of discussing this with one of her colleagues, it was explained to her that this teacher would never get another teaching job. Miriam's reaction to the experience was one of sadness, but she did not take part in the feelings for this teacher. She exhibited peripheral participation in her understanding of what was happening, but she did not engage in the shared repertoire or enterprise of defending him. She reacted as she would for any teacher, not for a member of her community.

Miriam held two parent-teacher conferences during her experience on the teaching exchange. She reported (Yahoo! Group, September 22 & November 16) that although she was nervous on both occasions, they seemed to go well. She was most impressed by the November meeting. For this session, students did not attend school; teachers set up desks in the gymnasium and spoke with each parent for five

minutes only. Only parents who had made an appointment would be received for these conferences. These rules regarding interaction with her students' parents were unfamiliar to Miriam in her teaching experience. Within her Mexican school, parents were allowed to approach the teacher individually whenever they wanted information about their children.

In Miriam's school, use of technology was defined by use of the language labs, videos in the classroom, the overhead projector and posting grades electronically. Miriam had the most difficulty with posting the student grades. Another expectation was that the homework should be posted on Internet; she said (Yahoo! Group, November 6) she sometimes forgot to do so; however she did not seem concerned with this eventuality; she did not actively engage with technology use.

Vista transformativa: suggestions for future COMEXUS exchange teachers

As early as October (Yahoo! Group, October 21), Miriam began to offer suggestions that would make the experience fruitful for upcoming exchange teachers. She explicitly stated that having family accompany them on the exchange would help to make the exchange successful. In addition, she encouraged the future exchange teachers to, "se integren a varias actividades en la comunidad, y en la escuela" [*integrate themselves into activities both in the community and in the school*]." This reflection offers evidence of her understanding of the importance of her activities to mediate her competent membership in her local communities, therefore making her exchange experience successful in her eyes.

In contemplating her transmogrification as a teacher throughout the teaching exchange, she stated (Yahoo! Group, October 21),

Con respecto a la enseñanza creo que me falta mucho para realmente sentir que todo lo que hago esta bien, espero que al final lo haga

mejor todavía, he aprendido infinidad de estrategias y también el apoyo para crear más trabajo para las clases, es muy valioso [With respect to teaching, I think that I still do not do everything well, but I hope that at the end (of the teaching exchange), I will do it better, I have learned an infinite number of strategies and also the support to create teaching materials for my classroom, this is very valuable.]

These reflections point to how Miriam's activities throughout the teaching exchange mediated her development of her teacher knowledge of herself and her growth as a teacher.

Vistas de Carlos

Vista formativa: from México to the U.S.

Carlos began the journey that led to this teaching exchange more than a decade ago although at that time he did not realize where he was headed. He began teaching in 1992 when a position became available in the *preparatoria* (grades 10 - 12, roughly equivalent to those years of U.S. high school) where his brother was teaching. The *preparatoria* school curriculum focuses on preparing students either for university study or for a technical career. He was assigned to teach *Cultivos Básicos y Propagación de Plantas* [Basic Agriculture and Plant Growth] courses that fit within his subject area of agronomy. Additionally, he was in charge of the school greenhouse that produced decorative plants and flowers for sale to the public. When he began teaching he did not know if he would like it as a career, but he liked the town and the climate, so he decided to try it out (personal communication, email, Mar. 28, 2006).

He proved to be flexible regarding his teaching assignment. In 1993, he was called upon to teach Computer Science; he had been taking computer classes since he began to work at the school. Once again in 1996 he was assigned a new subject:

English as a Foreign Language. He was called upon to teach English because no one in his school wanted the responsibility. Carlos recounted this experience by saying, "I started to teach English because I enjoy doing it and no one else in my school wanted to teach this subject" (Yahoo! Group, July 25).

When Carlos began his English teaching career, he had studied English in secondary school, preparatory school and at university and had lived in the United States for about five months. His academic studies at that time perhaps represented as little as 500 class hours over ten years of his academic study. After he was assigned to teach English, he began an English language certificate course offered by a language school in a large city close to his home. He traveled three hours by bus every Saturday to study English; he had only finished that course a month and a half before the teaching exchange began in July 2005. He described his experience with English by saying, "Before I started to teach English I took an English course for a shot [*sic*] period of time, son [*sic*] when I began to teach English I decided to continue studying English on Saturdays in....." (Yahoo! Group, July 25).

While studying English, Carlos began to feel that he needed teacher preparation to become a better teacher. As a result, he enrolled in the Normal Superior where he began a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching. He completed two and a half years of a six year program when he decided that this course of study would not lead him to become a better teacher (personal communication, email, March 2006). Carlos was one of the most prepared teachers on the exchange in terms of technology and technology use. In the two year course (personal communication, email, March 2006) he learned how to use Word, Excel and PowerPoint and on previous occasions either for school or personal communication had used email and MSN chat. He was unfamiliar with Nicenet, but due to its intuitive nature and his technological abilities he had no problem in understanding how to use it as a student or as a teacher.

Carlos' interest in ongoing professional development (Yahoo! Group, researcher journal, August 2005) as well as in his English language ability mediated his concern with becoming a part of his school community of practice during the teaching exchange. He voiced these intentions when he stated,

First I want to do a good job in the High School where I will be working. I will use my knowledge and the knowledge that I have already acquired during this course this [sic] achieve this goal. I want to learn about the American school system and teaching methods. I have learned already something about it and I think interacting with my new colleagues I will learn much more. I want to learn the culture of this country by experiencing it. With this opportunity of spending a significant amount of time in this country, I am sure I will improve my skills in those areas that just the daily practice in the native language could be learned [sic] (Yahoo! Group, July 25, 2005).

As the days before beginning the teaching exchange grew short, Carlos looked forward not only to the teaching exchange, but also to his eventual return to his home school in Mexico. He explained, "When I return to my school I will apply these experiences in my classes to improve my teaching methods, to improve my school and to be a better teacher" (Yahoo Group, July 25).

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: local community

Carlos' assignment was to a small high school in the northwestern part of the United States. The town has a population of about 3,500; the high school has about 300 students. When Carlos came to the town, his exchange teacher put an ad in the newspaper inviting the town to come and meet Carlos. This experience was the first of many experiences that made Carlos nervous and confused (Yahoo! Group, August, 2005), about the rules of social engagement in the US. As his exchange continued, he still experienced people speaking to him in public, and knowing that he was the

Mexican exchange teacher without his knowing who they were (Yahoo! Group, September, 8).

Although Carlos also lives in a small town in Mexico, his small town in the United States had one major difference. In the US, people from this small town traveled by car to other surrounding areas. Carlos did not like to drive and although he had a Mexican driver's license he rarely drove at home; when he traveled either within his city or to the city close to his home, he got a ride or took the public bus. His American counterpart offered him her car, but he had many reasons based on local rules for not using her car. They included: not being able to obtain an appointment for the driving test until September; his Mexican driver's license would not be covered by the insurance; and conclusively, he called on common knowledge, pointing to a Mexican proverb to explain his reasons for not driving during his teaching exchange. He said, "*Ya vez que dice el dicho que el diablo se estrena con las cosas prestadas* [You see, the devil rears his ugly face when you use borrowed things.]" This left Carlos on foot for the duration of his teaching exchange. He did the ten-minute walk back and forth between home and school easily (Yahoo! Group, September 2) once or twice a day, as needed. However, this meant that the only way to leave this small town was to depend on co-workers or friends to take him.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: family on the teaching exchange

Depending on the personal situation of each teacher, some exchange teachers are accompanied by their families for the teaching exchange. Carlos planned to have his adopted 18 year old son live with him throughout the teaching exchange. Carlos reported how his life in the teaching exchange was changed by the decision of one American Immigration officer. He said, "I am ok, but a little [*sic*] bit sad. The immigration officer at Portland sent my son back home and take out [*sic*] his visa. I will be living by myself" (Yahoo! Group, August 6, 2005). Although the words report Carlos to be a *little* sad, his posting to the Yahoo! Group made us feel his sadness

due to the absence of words and feelings. His cold statement of being a *little sad* could not be compared to the imagery he used to express the sadness of leaving his new COMEXUS colleagues when he wrote his final reflection to the Yahoo! Group (July 29), "Ya siento un vacío en mi Corazón que lleva el nombre de cada uno de ustedes [*I already feel an emptiness in my heart that carries the name of each of you*]". In days following the initial posting about his son, Carlos began to express his empty feelings about being alone. Shortly thereafter he commented to the Yahoo! Group (August 11, 2005), "Vivo solitario en un departamento y en un pueblito" [*I live alone in an apartment and in a small town*]. In the same posting he reflected his permanence by stating, "Estoy tan plantado en el pueblo como un árbol [*I am planted like a tree in this town*.]". These feelings of solitude stayed with Carlos throughout the exchange experience.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: the school community

Another event mediated Carlos' participation in the high school community. He felt he had received mixed messages from his colleagues and the school principal. On August 30, there was a meeting for the new staff members. Carlos already had visited the school and met some of his students and colleagues informally through a small reception organized by his exchange counterpart. He had been in town almost a month by the time school started.

In the first staff meeting the superintendent of schools called him aside to tell him that he needed to apply for a Restricted Transitional Teaching License (Yahoo! Group, August 30). Carlos had come prepared for this eventuality and believed he had the necessary papers in a document he had been given in Washington, DC by the Fulbright Commission people that stated that all of the COMEXUS exchange teachers were qualified to teach in the US. Carlos felt dismissed by the superintendent's negative reaction to the Fulbright paper when he responded by

showing him an email supporting his demands that Carlos fill out the papers for the temporary teaching license.

Later in the day, Carlos was called to the office to fill out the second part of the application for the temporary teaching certificate. This form was entitled, "Finger print-based criminal history", so Carlos was fingerprinted. The fingerprint form was accompanied by another form that inquired into the applicant's criminal past. Included in these questions were three asking if the applicant practiced sodomy. That day (Yahoo! Group, August 30) Carlos reported his feelings of powerlessness when confronted by the realities of rules that govern the American school system. He described his feelings of discrimination and offered evidence by saying, "Fui el unico del nuevo personal que tuve que llenar ese formato y al unico que me tomaron huellas de las dos manos. [*I was the only new teacher who had to fill out this form and the only one who was fingerprinted on both hands*]" (Yahoo! Group, August 30).

Carlos's offense at what he described as discriminatory practice was mediated by postings by his COMEXUS community. Although he later reflected that he would probably do something similar if he were in a position of authority in the school system (Yahoo! Group, September 4) and that this type of precautions were taken to avoid problems in schools, he continued to feel he was the victim of unfair treatment. However, two days later, in his posting to the group he reflected on more positive occurrences. He was introduced by the principal to the entire school body in a general assembly, he had his first day with his students and he received his temporary teaching certificate. These experiences were in keeping with Carlos's socio-historical understanding of how a school community interacts.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: feelings about being there

Carlos had strong feelings about being where he was assigned for the teaching exchange; he expressed his ongoing feelings of homesickness, solitude and general despondency until the exchange was almost over. When he encountered one

of his COMEXUS colleagues on the street of a larger city where she was doing the exchange, he wrote, "me lleno de emocion verla saludos a todos los extraño [*I was filled with emotion upon seeing her, greetings to all, I miss you*]" (Yahoo! Group, August 16). In early September (Yahoo! Group), he explained how one of the activities that mediated his feelings of sadness was running in the morning. He stated that he ran, not because he was sports-minded, but to "calmar la desesperacion de estar encerrado en este pueblo y para alejarme un poco de el [*to calm the desperate feelings of being trapped in this town, and to get away from it a little*]".

Almost a month later (Yahoo!Group, September 4 and 6), he said his homesickness was not getting any better. Specifically, on September 6 he described his feelings of physical exhaustion when he said, "[I feel].... agotado, amanecí cansado [*I feel.... exhausted, I woke up tired*]" . He attributed his feelings of tiredness to the fact that he could not sleep. He would habitually wake up during the night, worried about his classes (Yahoo! Group, September 9). Ironically, in the same posting he reflected that he was glad to be in a town where there was nothing to do, that way he had time to prepare for his classes. A week later, he used the repertoire he shared with his COMEXUS colleagues to illustrate how he felt. He questioned, "Que como me ha ido – como en feria de todo un poco [*How has it gone for me? Like at the fair, a little of everything*]" (Yahoo! Group, September 17). Within the same posting, he described his experiences by analogizing them to "la grafica de la tasa de cambio del peso respecto al dólar [*the exchange rate of the peso to the dollar*]" (Yahoo! Group, September 17). By this he meant that for him, things were constantly up and down, and one would never know which it would be from day to day. At this point he also attributed his tiredness to overwork. He told the COMEXUS community that the school principal, "me explota pero que un esclavo [*exploits him*

worse than a slave]" (Yahoo! Group, September 17). Carlos felt that the work required of him to teach his classes was much too demanding.

Carlos's feelings did not change during the first two months of the teaching exchange. On October 1 (Yahoo! Group) he stated that the exchange, "ya me tiene harto [*I am fed up*]" . He agreed with one of his COMEXUS colleagues who suggested that age was a factor in the way he felt. He figuratively offers "su pésame"(his condolences) to the members of the COMEXUS community that were feeling bad about the exchange, because they were in the same "condition". In the same posting he recounted his experience of walking down the street on his second day in his small town with tears of sadness running down his face, caused by "soledad total [*total solitude*]" . He stated that many times he "creo que hay instantes en que daría todo lo de la beca y mas por regresar [*I think there were times he would give everything related to the exchange and more to return*]" . After one month of active participation in the school community, he was still balancing the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching exchange. He did not feel he was a competent member of the local community of practice.

In the October 1 posting, he reflected on how he viewed the people who lived in the small town where he was living. He saw them as unhappy, which he attributed to unwanted pregnancies, drug use, unmotivated youth without goals, employment that is more like slavery than a job, and ten different churches, but that none of them were able to provide the spiritual guidance that the town population needed to be fulfilled in their lives. He concluded his narrative by remarking on the Homecoming celebration. He stated,

El viernes para cerrar el evento hubo juego de football y baile, pero no fui no se quien invento el juego de football americano que no le encuentro ninguna gracia y el otro día salio un muchacho fractura de

un hombro en el juego. Al baile no quise ir dije finalmente viernes mi día favorito para descansar y no quiero saber nada de la escuela.

[On Friday the closing event was a football game and dance, but I did not go. I don't know who invented football, but I do not like it and the other day a young man fractured his shoulder in a game. I did not want to go to the dance finally Friday is my favorite day to rest and I did want to have anything to do with the school.]

In a conference telephone interview (Skype, October 16), both he and one of his COMEXUS colleagues exclaimed in English in unison, "We are in jail." when asked how they were feeling. They explained that the amount of work they were responsible for in their exchange schools did not allow for any personal time. He explained that he felt much more responsible for the students' learning as represented by their grades in this school than he did in his Mexican school. He did not like this feeling; he felt stressed by this responsibility.

In contrast to his feelings of being alone, on two occasions he was recognized as a necessary element in local civic groups; he was invited to translate for Spanish speakers who had some business with the groups. Although institutional groups do not necessarily constitute communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), participation in these two groups represented community membership for Carlos in the Spanish speaking community. He became a regular participant in the local Habitat for Humanity group and another civic organization (Telephone interview, November 6). In the same interview, Carlos reflected that he now felt "okay in this place", in spite of what happened with his son early in the exchange. He continued to be conflicted about his participation in the local social community. He reported

he had lots of friends, but that early in the exchange he would not have accepted their invitations because he had too much schoolwork.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: social community

Although Carlos reported his unhappiness, and homesickness, he also recounted his activities that resulted in the development of a social community during his teaching exchange. Even before school started, he had met some of his colleagues and other people from the town. His exchange teacher published his arrival in the local paper and held a reception in his honor before classes began. On the same day he was informed that he needed the temporary teaching certificate and was fingerprinted, he received a phone call from the the local librarian. She invited him to visit the library to look at the Spanish materials and get a library card, which he did. Along with his account of discriminatory practices regarding the fingerprinting incident (Yahoo! Group, August 30), he stated, "Now I have my library card and two more friends. This was the best part of my day. This was my day." Throughout the exchange, Carlos continued to develop a social community, although he did not initially recognize his participation in that community. On September 4 (Yahoo! Group), he told us that he had gone to the State Fair with some of his colleagues from school and that another of his colleagues had invited him to dinner at his house. In the posting that referred to his ups and downs in the teaching exchange, he told the COMEXUS community of seeing *The Lion King* live on stage. He had never seen a live musical production and was impressed by its grandeur (Yahoo! Group, September 17). By engaging with other members of the community, and taking responsibility for its pursuits, Carlos was actively engaging with his local community, but he did not see it at that time.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: the school community

Carlos's school activities included planning and teaching his classes, extracurricular activities, grading and interacting with his colleagues, students,

parents and the school principal. During his teaching exchange, Carlos taught six groups. He had two Spanish I, two Spanish II and two Culture Studies courses. He felt most challenged by the Culture Studies courses. These were taught in English, at the beginning of the teaching exchange he described his use of technology as a tool in these courses,

Hoy mi primera clase de Estudios culturales di toda una conferencia de 50 minutos sobre las culturas de MesoAmérica (Toltecas, Teotihuacan, Cholula, Monte Alban y la región Maya.) Por supuesto que apoyado por mi laptop y mi proyector que adquirí, (no se que haria sin ellos). El grupo de 28 alumnos me estuvo escuchando atento durante todo el tiempo y cuando termine y pregunte: alguna pregunta o comentario seguían callados y uno dijo "That's breath taking".

[Today in my first day of Culture Studies class I gave a 50 minute conference on the Mesoamerican cultures (Toltecas, Teotihuacan, Cholula, Monte Alban and the Mayan region). Of course, I was supported by my laptop and projector that I acquired (I don't know what I would do without them). The group of 28 students was paying attention the whole time and when I finished, I asked, 'Any questions or comments?' All were still quiet when one of them said, 'That's breathtaking.']

While teaching Culture Studies, he continued to be concerned with his use of language. In his September 8 posting he stated that he never thought he would be able to teach a class that lasted 53 minutes (in English), but here he was in his third day of teaching. However, on October 1 he still was concerned; he stated, "Si tuviera que enseñar únicamente español la situación seria más sencilla pero esa materia de estudios culturales donde enseño 5 horas a la semana de historia de México es la que me quita el sueño." *[If I taught only Spanish the situation would be easier, my*

Cultural Studies class where I teach Mexican History class five hours a week leaves me sleepless.] In a telephone interview on November 16, he explained that his reaction time in English was improving. He explained that it did not take him as long to respond to the students when there was a question or when he needed to use English in the classroom. Only a week later (Telephone interview, November 13), he said he felt more confident using both languages; he explained that when he gave instructions in Spanish in his classes, he could also give the instructions in English to make sure the students understood what they needed to do.

Carlos described an incident (Yahoo! Group, October 1) when the school principal suddenly appeared in his last period class. He recounted that this made him more nervous than it did the students; he was surprised when she shouted, "Shut your mouths". She also told them that she would be in his class every day, if that was what was needed to keep them quiet. Carlos's observed that the rules for student conduct were different in his exchange school than they were in his Mexican school; he did not think it was necessary for the students to be completely quiet at all times. He later repeated the same comment in a conference call with one of his COMEXUS colleagues. Both exchange teachers felt that American classrooms focused more on keeping the students quiet than anything else (Telephone interview, November 6).

Carlos reported three experiences regarding students. The first occurred when a female student asked him if she could eat lunch in his classroom. He allowed her to do so, but the school principal later told him not to permit this to happen again (Yahoo! Group, September 17). The second occurrence involved students he did not teach. Because he had a full kitchen in his classroom, other teachers used the space when he was not teaching. He recounted (Yahoo! Group, September 30) a day when a class of special needs students used his kitchen to prepare food. He expressed the uncertainty of his

situation when he stated, "a veces pienso que necesito unas clases de ese tipo...de que me expliquen y repiten el porque de las cosas [*sometimes I think I need some of these kind of classes, where they explain and repeat the 'why' of things*]". The third incident occurred when one of the students assaulted one of his colleagues at the school. This teacher ended up in the hospital and was not expected to return to school that year. When he was informed of this by the school principal, he became so upset she asked him if he needed a substitute. Carlos talked about the incident with me and once again became very upset. In a follow-up email, he explained that he was upset by the thought of this teacher ending her teaching career in this manner.

Within his school community, Carlos viewed the activities of the school principal as incongruent with his expectations within the school community. Throughout the teaching exchange he felt that she was watching him. Upon arrival he felt that the principal spoke to him as if he was not prepared for the initial staff meeting (Yahoo! Group, September 4). As the teaching exchange progressed, the principal observed Carlos frequently. At times she would tell him she was coming, other times she would leave a note in his mailbox. She would also make unannounced visits or would stand in the hall, seemingly occupied with another activity, such as checking the fire alarm. There were three occasions when Carlos and his school principal shared activities. One day she invited him to accompany her to a Future Farmers of America (FFA) event where there was a plant judging contest. He was pleased to report that they won the contest; the principal was also happy about winning. In a November 13 telephone interview he stated that the principal asked him if he wanted to observe classes or visit other schools, to have a break from his teaching schedule. He responded that he was fine; he did not need a break. As part of the Fulbright agreement, the school administrator must attend a mid-

exchange meeting with the exchange teacher. So, Carlos and his school principal went to the three day regional meeting together. These shared activities did not convince Carlos; he felt that the principal had been watching him, or that she sent others to check on him throughout his exchange experience.

Vista transformativa: I am in the right place

In spite of the experiences that mediated his participation in his social community, Carlos did not recognize his membership in this community until early November (Telephone interview, November 6) when he reported that "my friends invited me shopping, to dinner, and to a turkey dinner in a small town". His friend from the library invited him to "a salsa party and a beer after". He concluded his explanation by stating, "I think I am in the right place". By November 20 (Telephone interview), he reported he had various offers for Thanksgiving dinner, including turkey dinners on days other than Thanksgiving. In the same interview, he reflected on his activities with his colleagues. He stated that they had done a lot for him throughout the teaching exchange.

By the beginning of December, Carlos's activities had mediated his participation in various communities of practice. He had become a competent member of a social group whose activities included social events. Within the school community, he had also become a member of the community. He realized this membership when it was time for him to leave. In his final activity in the school community, he received a photo album signed by all members of the school. His groups made him going away posters; he said he felt sad enough to cry, but he did not.

Carlos's initial activities during the teaching exchange pointed repeatedly to his lack of community participation. His expectations, although unvoiced, were to find communities of practice similar to those he had experienced throughout his

teaching experience in Mexico. His unrealized expectation that his son would live with him during the teaching exchange also contributed to his feelings of loneliness, homesickness and frustration with his teaching exchange. As he became more engaged with the students, his teaching and the school community, he began to feel better. However, as he began to become a competent member of the community, he became more concerned with the joint enterprise of this community – teaching the students. This concern caused him further problems, such as sleeplessness or confusion about the activities of students within the community.

Carlos's final thoughts (IM, December 11) on the teaching exchange were reflective; he stated, "Life is interesting, you never know what you have waiting for you". When asked about transmogrification in his teaching experiences, he stated he would use all that he learned throughout the teaching exchange. He was able to reflect on his membership in the school community by explaining that whereas he knew as much as some about teaching and learning, he had a lot to learn from others. While he was still in his exchange school (IM, December 11), he reported he felt that he had become a part of his local community.

Vistas de Sandra

Vista formativa: Mexico to the U.S.

Sandra began her journey to the teaching exchange as a child when her family moved to a state in north-central Mexico. Her family had just moved there when she was enrolled in the local American school; she saw this as an advantage because she had no other friends aside from an American girl at school. Sandra explained, "[through].... this companionship I had the best window to American Culture ever and the best friendship as well" (Yahoo! Group, July 25). Her activities with this family mediated her ideas of what it was like to live in an American family; their schedules, what they ate, and how they interacted with each other. She maintained this and other friendships at school until 1974 when the ranches the

Americans worked on were nationalized by the current Mexican government. She fondly remembered her English classes at that school; she described them as more fun, and her Spanish classes as rigid, where the teachers never praised the students.

When Sandra was in the tenth grade, her family moved once again to a large city on the border between Mexico and the U. S. This move gave her the opportunity to attend a technical school on the American side to become an office clerk; at the same time she studied for her General Education Degree (GED). While she studied at the technical school on the American side, she also worked for a bank on the Mexican side of the border.

A year later, in 1979, she got married and returned to her home state in north-central Mexico. Between 1982 and 1984 she taught English for a semester, and did some free-lance translation jobs. By 1984, she had gotten a job teaching at a public secondary school, but she was faced with the realization that she needed to get teacher preparation. In 1989, she began to study at the Normal Superior in a neighboring state. To complete her undergraduate degree, she would study in summer sessions and complete coursework throughout the school year. She completed her first degree in 1993 in English, and then, she continued on to complete a Master's degree in Pedagogy.

When Sandra's teaching exchange began, she had had more experience with American culture than any of the other COMEXUS exchange teachers. She had studied at an American School as a child, and attended school in the U.S. to get her GED, and had previously participated in a cultural exchange sponsored by a different agency. She saw the teaching exchange as an excellent opportunity. She concluded the description of her journey to the teaching exchange (Yahoo! Group, July 25) by stating, "I'm really pleased to be here. I hope and try to do my best here on [sic]." *Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: her teaching assignment*

Sandra was a highly experienced teacher by the time she began the COMEXUS teaching exchange. Just before she began the teaching exchange she taught at a public secondary school (grades 7 -9). Her assignment for the COMEXUS exchange was to teach Spanish at three different elementary schools that were located in the same school district. All of these schools were private, religious-based schools; they had 'share-time' teachers that rotated from school to school. The share-time teachers taught Music, Art, Physical Education, Foreign Language and Science Lab. Her teaching schedule was arranged so that she went to a different school each day, but did not have to go to more than one school a day; however, she had to go to the three schools every week. During the pre-exchange orientation course, one of the class-based assignments was to look for their host school online and find out as much as possible about their assignment. Sandra did not fully understand that she was assigned to three schools when she was participating in the orientation course. She was the only teacher who did not have sufficient information or did not understand the information she was given. We were never able to find her assigned location online. It was not until her September 20 (Yahoo! Group) posting that she told us, "Tengo 15 grupos que atender en tres escuelas [*I have 15 groups to teach in three schools*]".

The second issue for Sandra was her assignment to teach elementary school. She described her students as, "los ninos de primaria son bellos, pero exigen mucho trabajo, atencion y son muy demandantes [*primary school children are beautiful, but they demand a lot of work, attention and they are very demanding*]". In the same posting she described her teaching materials, "Hice dibujos, bingos, realia, los pongo a que me traigan el objeto o lo apunten con su dedo, a dibujarlos, a recortarlos y pegarlos en papel [*I made drawings, bingo, realia, I have them bring me things, point to it, draw it, cut it and paste it to paper*]. In spite of preparing for her classes she still felt stressed. She stated, "Me imagino que no voy a hacer bien mi trabajo, a

veces pienso/ siento que lo que hago no les gusta mucho a los niños y me dan los nervios [*I imagine I am not going to do my job well, sometimes I think/feel that what I do will not please the children and it makes me nervous*]. Sandra was nervous about the quality of her teaching activity, she did not feel that her previous teacher knowledge prepared her for this teaching experience.

In addition to the challenges of teaching children, Sandra's classes were multi-leveled in terms of age and cognitive abilities. She explained, "In two of the schools I had from first to sixth grades, but at the other two I had groups 1/2, 3/4 and 5/6th graders. This was also challenging because I had to plan activities for different grades together." This further complicated her work and planning for her classes. She had never experienced this type of teaching assignment; she felt the teaching exchange demanded too much from her as a teacher.

Sandra's activities in her schools did not provide an opportunity for her to become part of the school(s) community. She was not a permanent member of the community; she never referred to any of her colleagues other than the school principals. She did not have any foreign language teaching colleagues; the three schools she taught at had only one foreign language teacher – Sandra and, therefore she did not have any colleagues with whom she could share her teaching experiences or activities. As a result, she could not construct her understanding of the teaching exchange.

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: being there

Sandra traveled to her exchange city with her exchange partner. She expected a furnished apartment to be waiting for her, and was surprised to find it without furniture (Yahoo! Group, August 7). She was not pleased with this eventuality; she wanted to be in her own place upon arrival. Her first posting on August 7 spoke about her uncomfortable feelings about having to be a houseguest in her American counterpart's home. She stated that she would be in contact with the

COMEXUS group when she could use her counterpart's computer. As a result her first experiences were a stark contrast to the expectations she brought to the teaching exchange from her socio-historical experiences with Americans and in the U.S.

By August 13, Sandra was in her own apartment, but she expressed (Yahoo! Group) her feelings by stating that she had neither a phone nor a car. She had been walking in the neighborhood to get an idea of where things were. She said she would have a car by the next week, and then she hoped to feel better. Three days later, she wrote that she had been feeling very lonely for the past two days; she hoped she could survive until her daughter arrived on August 27th. Her participation on the electronic discussion board was dictated by her access to a computer with an Internet connection. She would be absent for periods of 10 days or more. In her September 20 posting, she talked about her difficulties with transport, worries about selling the car at the end of the exchange; she described the constant feelings of anxiety she was experiencing as a result of her exchange activities. In her posting to the group she explained,

Amanezco con ganas de vomitar y ni he desayunado, me duele todo y no hay razon para ello, me siento triste pues compre un carro el cual no puedo manejar aun porque necesito una serie de pendejaditas que arreglar y me enojo y digo groserias pero pues todo tiene que pasar.
[I awaken wanting to vomit and I haven't had breakfast, everything hurts and there is no reason for it to hurt, I am sad because I bought a car that I cannot drive because I need to fix a lot of stupid little things and I get mad and I curse but this has to pass.]

The week previous to this posting, she had missed school. When she began to feel poorly, she decided she needed to see a doctor. The doctor prescribed anti-depressants; she reported that when she took the first pill she felt, "fatal [horrible]". Her school principal suggested she try to treat her problem naturally, with herbal

medicines. Sandra decided that she would follow her principal's suggestion. This posting represented one of only two postings that referenced interaction with a colleague at her school(s).

In spite of her feelings of being an outsider, she tried to be supportive of her COMEXUS community when she wrote (Yahoo! Group, August 7), "Have a nice stay. Remember: Whatever that has to happen, it's going to do so and at the end of everything: NOTHING HAPPENS!!!!!!!!!! [*sic*]" This speaks to a common Mexican proverb that states, "Lo que pasa, pasa y no pasa nada", which means, even though things happen, things will be okay. Throughout the teaching exchange, Sandra both reached out to and supported her COMEXUS community. Like her exchange colleagues, this community was formed in her imagination, and her competent membership depended on her being able to post her messages on the electronic discussion board. Throughout her experience, she felt restricted in her ability to post on the discussion board, as a result, she felt she was a lateral participant in the local communities, including the COMEXUS community. When she arrived, she had to use her counterpart's computer and after she moved she would go to a hospital close to her home to use an open access computer they had (Yahoo! Group, August 16).

Vista de comunidad en desarrollo: family and school

By November 20 (Telephone interview), Sandra began to understand her exchange experience differently. She saw that although the exchange experience had not developed her understanding of herself as a teacher, it had been good for her daughter academically, and that her daughter was happy living in the U.S. and attending English classes at the local community college. In addition, she recognized the role her daughter had played in mediating her activities on the teaching exchange.

At this time (Telephone interview, November 20), Sandra also saw a difference in her students' attitude; she reflected that they were becoming

accustomed to her teaching style. However, as one of her teaching activities, she had also cooked tacos for them, which they liked very much. She had begun to tell them that she was leaving in December and some of the students expressed sadness that she would leave.

When we spoke, Sandra also began to reflect on her school colleagues who had supported her while on the exchange. She said that all three of her school principals had called her when she was feeling very depressed. She also had the opportunity to talk at length with one of the principals as they drove to the COMEXUS regional meeting. At that time, in mid-October, Sandra was still feeling poorly. On the way to the meeting, the principal told her that she had had five operations and cancer in one year, and she was still surviving. Sandra expressed admiration that the woman was able to survive these health problems. She compared her illnesses on the teaching exchange with what the woman had suffered; she did not understand how her school principal had carried on throughout the ordeal.

Vista transformativa: her family

Throughout the teaching exchange Sandra discussed the importance of her daughter in her teaching exchange. In her August 30 posting (Yahoo! Group) she announced, "Estoy muy feliz pues mi hija ya esta conmigo!!! [*I am so happy my daughter is with me*]". Via email, in her final report she described her daughter's role, "she would cook for me, padded [*sic*] me everytime I felt down, sad or mad at something, besides making our lives fun here with her good sense of humor, warmthness [*sic*] and love"

When Sandra attended her regional meeting in mid-October, some of the attendees were exchange teachers from previous years. She said (Telephone interview, November 20) that they told her that she would feel better when she had returned to Mexico, that things would be back to the way they were before she came

on the teaching exchange. As we spoke of this possibility, Sandra did not understand how this could happen. Nor did Sandra realize that her non-participation mediated her becoming a competent member of her local communities.

In the same conversation, she talked about her brother's visit. She marveled that he took them out, and made her promise that she would not stay in her apartment, but venture out. Sandra's activities with her brother mediated her participation in her Mexican family community as she conceptualized them in her imagination. This participation took Sandra yet another step away from competent membership in her local communities.

Vista transformativa: back home

Upon finishing the teaching exchange, Sandra shared her final report via email (December 18). Sandra talked about her experiences and how they mediated her Mexican community of practice. She said that her teaching exchange experience made her realize that the Mexican government must invest more money in the public school system. She based this on information given to her about how much her exchange state spent per student to educate them.

More specifically, she stated, "What I learned is to appreciate a lot more my job and my country. I work at one school. I also realized my students with less [sic], much more less [sic] than the ones here in the US are way more [sic] better persons. They are more realistic, know and appreciate their teachers, are much more respectful and also their way of being and attitude is much more sincere and willing to learn another language, because they know that they can have better opportunities being bilingual." Sandra's view of her students mediated her understanding of her Mexican students. She created an imaginary community of students that represented an ideal language learning student. She linked these imaginary students' belief that being bilingual is economically advantageous with her views of the advantages of being bilingual.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research decisions carried out to conduct the present study. The chapter began with an explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures used to uncover themes and concepts expressed by the exchange teachers in their postings on the electronic discussion board and other electronic communication. It also discussed how the participants were chosen from a larger sample of teachers and provides an ample description of the selection process. Finally, the chapter concludes with the narratives of four of the COMEXUS exchange teachers. These narratives seek to reveal the activities and experiences that mediated the exchange teachers' trajectories within their communities of practice.

The following chapter will begin by answering the research questions posed in Chapter two. In addition, it will discuss implications of the present study on theory, practice and institutional policy. Chapter five concludes with suggestions for further research into the development of teacher knowledge of self within communities of practice.

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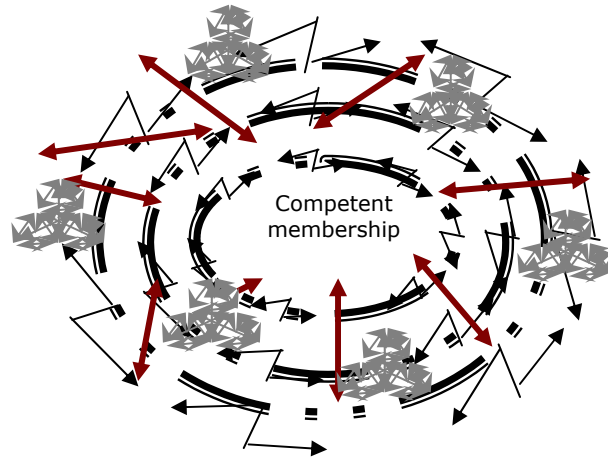
Chapter 5

Introduction

This chapter offers an integrated theory of how four COMEXUS exchange teachers socially construct their teacher identity within their local communities of practice as well as a global electronic community. Based on teacher narratives resulting from the data collection process, the present study told the story of Mexican exchange teachers and their experiences throughout the teaching exchange.

Chapter 2 discussed existing theoretical perspectives of activity theory and community of practice as they provide different but similar perspectives on human learning and development. In 2001, Engeström's third generation model of activity theory suggested that human activity needed to be examined within a co-constructed entity of multiple activity systems. Engeström's (2001) two-triangle model conceptualized the interaction of two activity systems as the mediating factor(s) in the social construction of the object or motive of the multiple systems. In the present study, the framework for a co-constructed entity is provided by Wenger's (1998) notion of communities of practice. It is theorized that humans participate in multiple communities of practice (Wenger, 1998); the study puts forth the idea that within these communities of practice, humans engage in multiple activity systems (see Figure 12). Mediated by our activities some communities become more important to us than others, and as a result we seek to become more competent members in those communities.

Figure 12. Activity systems as mediating factors in competent membership



The focus of this study was to examine how COMEXUS exchange teachers constructed their teacher identity or knowledge of teacher-self as they engage in human activity within the communities of practice they consider important. The COMEXUS teacher exchange provided a unique instance of teacher learning within which pedagogical activities of a group of teachers could be examined. The forum for discussion of these teachers' pedagogical activities was an electronic discussion board. It was expected that the teachers would employ the discussion board to create an imaginary, global community through their interaction on the electronic discussion board. As a result, these teachers' narratives would serve as a reflective tool for their pedagogical activities, as well as create a global support community in the electronic discussion board.

Chapter 3 outlined the design and organization of the methodology for the present study. It detailed the rationale for the use of narrative inquiry as a method and explained the techniques to be employed in conducting the study. In addition, it conceptualized the use of an electronic medium as a data collection tool. It also put forth the procedures for completing the study. Chapter 3 also introduced and explained the research questions that guided the study.

Chapter 4 described the data collection and analysis process and put forth the emergent themes resulting from data collection instruments. These themes were drawn on to answer the questions posed in chapter 3 from an activity theory/community of practice theoretical perspective.

Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of implications for theory as well as practical applications in future teacher development contexts. In addition, further research directions will be discussed. Finally, reflections on how this study could inform policy decisions within the COMEXUS teacher exchange as well as other teacher education contexts courses will be offered.

Discussion of answers to research questions

The research questions that guided the present study were framed from of my experience with previous groups of COMEXUS teachers over the past seven years. During that time, it came to my attention that each teacher developed their professional identity as a result of interaction within groups (communities) either locally, or from their experience as foreign language teachers in Mexico. In my search for further understanding of these teachers' professional development, the present study was conceptualized. In my own learning and developmental process, I began to understand how human activity mediates development. I also found a contextual framework, communities of practice which provides an appropriate lens for this study. The questions that arose are pertinent to the teachers, their professional development and the contexts in which they negotiate their understanding of the experience and activities of the teaching exchange. Although the questions are expressed individually as discrete units, they in fact overlap. The questions that intersect will be discussed individually and globally.

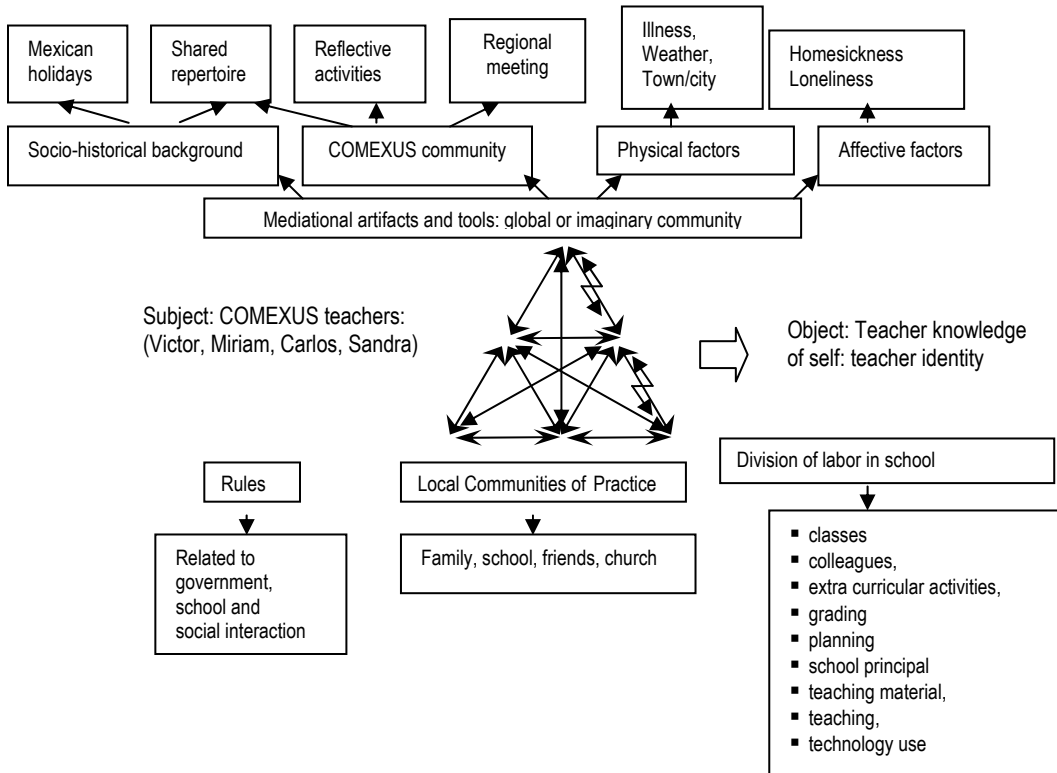
Overarching question: What are the mediational factors in the transmogrification of professional and language identity for Mexican foreign language exchange teachers?

As illustrated below (Figure 14), the factors that mediated the exchange teachers' activities were their local and global communities, community rules, local communities and division of labor in their school communities. In his discussion of modes of belonging, Wenger (1998) refers to the concept of an imagination as a "way of expanding our self by transcending time and space" (p. 176). His explanation of an imaginary community is the ability see an object and visualize its existence in another place or time. An example of Wenger's (1998) concept would be the ability of a teacher to see a lesson plan, and visualize its use in his or her own teaching context. In this study, the electronic community is not an imaginary community per se and therefore I will use the term bona fide or legitimate community. The development of this community was reified by the teachers' shared socio-historical background, their shared activities on the pre-exchange orientation course and the narrative co-construction on the electronic discussion board.

Each of the teachers experienced their COMEXUS exchange differently. The teachers each brought cultural artifacts and tools with them that mediated their understanding of their exchange activities. Some aspects of these cultural artifacts were created during the pre-exchange orientation course; others were part of an existing socio-historical understanding of teaching and life in the US. Their socio-historical background interacted with the legitimate electronic COMEXUS community, and physical and affective factors (see Figure 13). In keeping with Engeström's notion of human activity, these mediational factors interacted with community rules, local community and division of labor in the COMEXUS teachers' school communities.

This portrayal of the teachers' activity systems represents a global picture of all of the chosen exchange teachers' mediational factors; these are discussed below.

Figure 13. Mediational factors



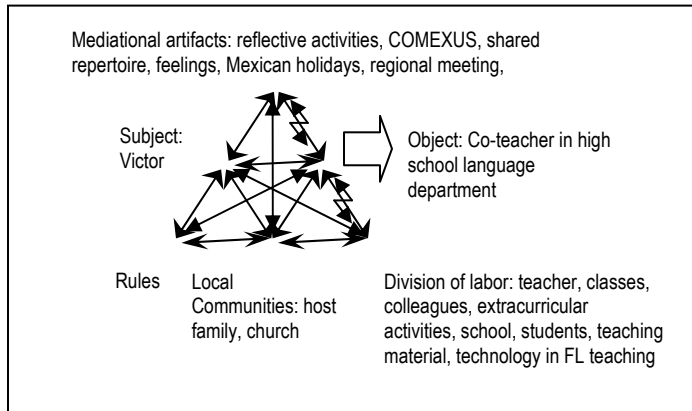
Through their postings on the electronic discussion board, the exchange teachers discussed different aspects of their activity systems that mediated their competent participation in their local communities of practice. Their postings as field texts were employed as research texts to understand their mediational factors.

The individual teachers' mediational factors are illustrated in the following four figures (Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18). These figures are diagrammatic representations of the activities that mediated the teachers' participation in different communities. As depicted in the mediational factors figure, the teachers' activity system is comprised of mediational tools and cultural artifacts, rules, community and division of labor that mediated the subject (COMEXUS teacher) toward an object or goal of that activity system. These individual figures (Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18) portray the individual teachers' narrative representations of the themes that

emerged from their discussion on the electronic board, email and telephone communication.

Victor

Figure 14. Victor's activity system



Victor's narrative postings highlighted the importance of two local communities in his teaching activity system: a) his host family and b) their church. In his August 7 posting on the discussion board, it seemed that he felt alone even though he was living in a house with one of his colleagues and her husband. Throughout the exchange, Victor mediated his loneliness with participation in his host family and their existing communities, such as their church group. He described his activities in church and with the church members as very different from his church in Mexico, but as a good experience. In this case, the contradictions that arose from participation in this community were mediated by his favorable experience with community members. As the exchange progressed, he became a competent member of the church community through his activities with them.

In the transmogrification of his teacher identity, he was also mediated by cultural tools and artifacts that were part of his socio-historical background. During the pre-orientation course, the COMEXUS community was initiated through their mutual engagement in the task of preparing themselves for the upcoming exchange. During the course, the teachers began the process of co-construction of their

electronic community. As the exchange progressed, Victor actively participated in the electronic discussion board, this engagement pointed to his competent membership in the electronic community. Within the discussion board he used shared repertoire to demonstrate his competent membership in this community. Frequently (Yahoo! Group, August 24, September 17 & 22, January 5) he used Mexican proverbs or sayings to create understanding of the topic he was discussing. The use of shared repertoire linked his socio-historical understanding of the teaching experience with his developing electronic community.

Within the co-construction of the COMEXUS community, Victor focused on three aspects of the shared enterprise of this community. He reflected on the pedagogical activities posted on the Yahoo! Group, the regional COMEXUS meeting and Mexican holidays and their application to the foreign language teaching process.

Victor was the only teacher who discussed the reflective questions with one of his COMEXUS colleagues and subsequently posted their thoughts, as was requested of the participants. Although the attempts were made by Victor and his colleague to co-construct their activities, their report was more informative than it was reflective. Their narrative that recounted the experience at the regional meeting was more reflective; he collaborated with the same colleague to consider the differences between how the COMEXUS teachers understood the teaching exchange and how teachers from other countries interpreted their experiences.

Victor participated most with his discussion of the PowerPoint presentations he had created for teaching his Spanish classes. He offered to share, and requested that his colleagues share their projects with him. It seems that there was little tension between Victor's teaching activities and teaching material creation and his involvement in his global community.

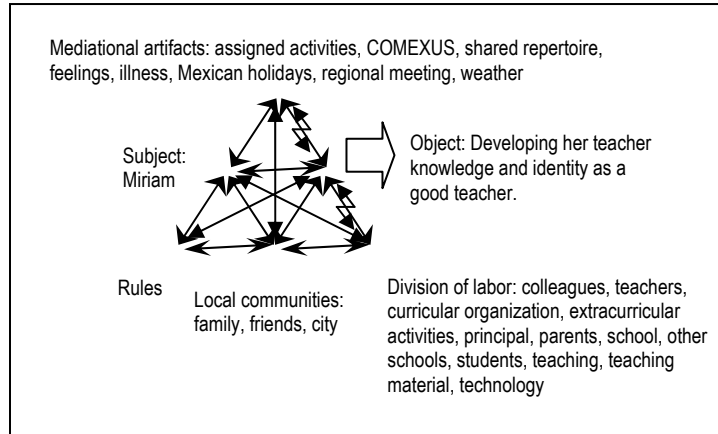
Victor's school experiences were evidenced in his discussion of the division of labor related to his pedagogical activities. When Victor began his teaching exchange,

he was the only teacher who did not have his teaching assignment clearly defined. He did not have an American teacher that he exchanged places with; he was assigned to the language department of the high school. He could have been a co-teacher or a teacher's aide, depending on his initial activities with the members of the foreign language community in his exchange school. His development of teaching material through the use of technology along with his expert status in the Spanish class as a native speaker afforded him the status of competent member in the foreign language teaching community; therefore he spent the teaching exchange being viewed as a co-teacher in the foreign language department not as a teacher's aide. In this activity of identity formation within the language department, it appears that Victor and his colleagues co-constructed his role of member in the community of practice. In this case, Victor's participation in his construction of his competent membership in this community of practice cannot be ignored.

Throughout the teaching exchange, Victor sought to become a competent member of the foreign language teaching community in his high school. He came to the teaching exchange with a socio-historical perception of himself as a competent teacher. His contribution to the joint enterprise of the community – teaching foreign language – was technology infused teaching material. This involvement also mediated his competent membership in the community. In short, Victor's participation in the local communities, along with his engagement in the language department's enterprise of teaching guided his trajectory toward full participation in this community.

Miriam

Figure 15. Miriam's activity system



Miriam's local communities were her family, friends and her city. Her family community consisted of her daughter, who lived with her and attended a local high school for the period of the teaching exchange. However, in addition to her daughter, Miriam formed a family-like relationship with her American counterpart's parents. In response to their daughter's request that the American family help Miriam and her daughter, they acted as experts when she was faced with a situation or problem she could not solve by herself. This was evidenced when she purchased a computer that came with a printer. When unable to connect the equipment, she called her counterpart's father to help her. Participation in a family community that was not her own did not cause tensions or contradictions for Miriam; in fact she welcomed the support this community offered.

Miriam was the only exchange teacher assigned to a city that had a large population of Mexicans and other Latinos. In August (Yahoo! Group) she reported that she would explore the city to see how Latinos lived; it seemed important to her that the city was welcoming to Latin Americans. Although she did not create community with other Latin Americans in this city, she felt the city to be accepting of her. She expressed pride when she found her uncle's artwork in a local museum and

was able to take her students to view his exhibit. Her feelings of acceptance mediated her feelings of competent membership in the imaginary community of her U.S. city.

Miriam's postings on the electronic discussion board also created her legitimate global COMEXUS community. Miriam closed most of her postings with shared repertoire that offered the COMEXUS community an understanding for the need for God's blessing for all of the teachers on the exchange. Her narrative postings created a real community through her use of common closings to interactions. She would say how she missed her colleagues, and how she thought of them, or she would offer suggestions for them. Toward the end of her exchange experience she and Victor were the protagonists in arranging a meeting in Mexico City for teachers who were geographically close enough to attend. She was the only teacher who pointed specifically to "writing" as a mediational factor in the formation of the COMEXUS community (Yahoo! Group, January 4).

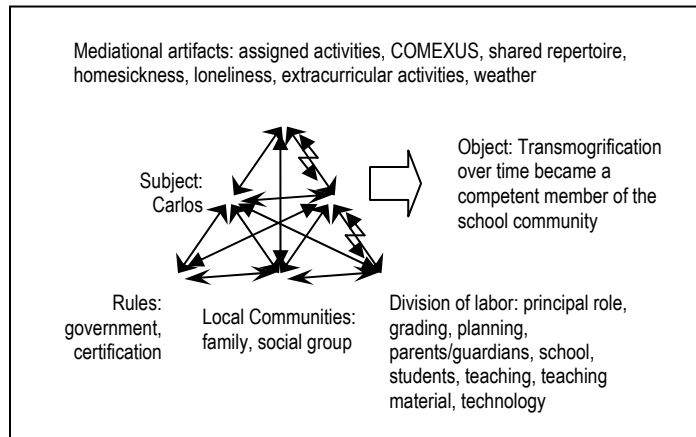
Miriam also addressed the reflective activities that were posted on the discussion board. She read the proposed activities, but did not co-construct the experience with one of her colleagues, nor were her postings specific to the activities. She addressed different aspects of the activities within her postings throughout and in her telephone interviews. When she did report on her experience at the regional meeting, she was also more informative than reflective in; she shared conclusions with the teachers from different parts of the world about American schools being overly strict in their classroom management. Twice in her postings (Yahoo! Group, August 25 & September 9), she referred to the need to complete the activities, as her participation was important in conducting the present study. Her responsibility in my project points to her engagement in my community of practice: academics in Mexico. She verbally expressed her understanding that participation in

this type of activity would mediate her development as a teacher (Yahoo! Group, October 21).

Within her narratives regarding her school community, she discussed her colleagues, teaching and teaching materials, students, extracurricular activities, school principal, parents and technology use in the school. One of the mediating factors in her school community that caused tensions or contradictions for Miriam was her students. She reported that she thought that the students did not think she was part of *their* teaching community; she felt they saw her as different from the other teachers. She offered evidence of this when she explained that she saw student participation different in her classroom than in other classrooms (Telephone interview, November 20). Miriam was also perplexed by the creation and use of teaching material by her colleagues. She perceived the school resources as excessive; she did not understand why her colleagues created new materials when there were existing materials that addressed the linguistic needs of the students. She participated in creating understanding with her colleagues when she told them she would like to see their teaching materials and she would share hers with them. To me she confessed that she would evaluate the materials and use them only if she deemed they were appropriate. These contradictions kept Miriam on the periphery of this community.

Throughout her teaching narrative, Miriam did not seem to be desirous of becoming a competent member of all of her local communities. Although she suffered contradictions and tensions with her colleagues, she did want to be a competent member of her foreign language department community. On one occasion she evidenced this when she explained that she and her co-teacher worked well together (Telephone interview, November 16), and again when she explained that the students were more relaxed with her than with other teachers (Telephone interview, November 20).

Figure 16. Carlos's activity system



Carlos was also an active participant in the electronic discussion that created the legitimate COMEXUS community. In his postings, Carlos expressed himself in a direct, clear manner. His postings were similar to Victor's in that he commonly used Mexican proverbs or sayings to illustrate the points he was making. Carlos's postings tended to be longer, and more purposeful in nature. Carlos was open in discussing his feelings throughout the teaching exchange.

In the first week of August several incidents mediated Carlos' participation as a competent member of the community; Carlos' son was refused entry into the U.S. at airport when he arrived. This event mediated Carlos's feelings about life throughout the exchange. His lack of family to accompany him caused feelings of homesickness and loneliness for almost four of the five months he lived in his exchange town.

Carlos's understanding of the educational system in the U.S. was further mediated by the state requirement that he obtain a temporary teaching certificate. He felt discriminated against, and humiliated by the manner in which the school superintendent told him he was not qualified to teach in this state. He was further

offended by the questions posed on the FBI criminal record questionnaire. This second experience caused contradictions between Carlos and his understanding of the school system rules even though he said he understood their reasoning. Carlos stated on several occasions (Yahoo! Group, August – October) that he would like to return to Mexico. In addition, Carlos fervently criticized the extracurricular activities such as Homecoming and sports events. He planned his lessons and created technology infused teaching material to become a good teacher, and still he expressed his feelings of being “in jail” (Telephone interview, October 16) when he described the teaching exchange. These narrative expressions point to the contradictions and tensions existent in Carlos’ experience on the teaching exchange. These factors mediated his desire to remain an outsider; he did not engage with his social community as a result of these feelings.

Another tension mediated Carlos’s relationship with his school principal. During the entire exchange, Carlos felt that she was spying on him, trying to observe him as a teacher without him knowing. When Carlos was back in his Mexican home, I asked him if he still felt that he had been watched. At that time, he was still absolutely sure that the principal had been watching him or had sent others to watch him. However, he also explained, “By the end of the exchange, I got used to it.” (Personal communication, IM, March, 2006).

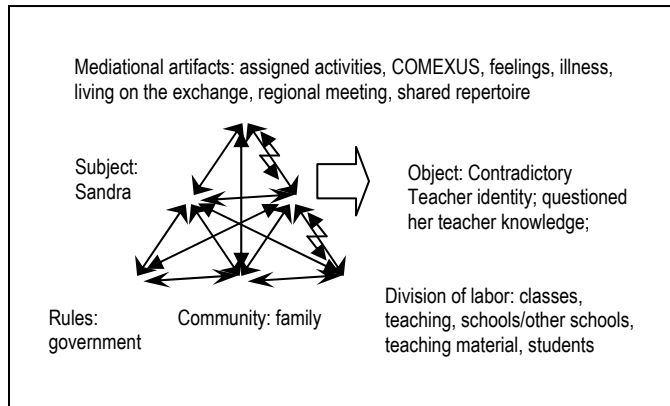
In one posting, in response to one of the reflective activities, he discussed his deception regarding American society and its problems. He insisted throughout the exchange that he would like to return to his Mexican home immediately. The contradiction between Carlos’s participation in the electronic community and his socio-historical background, and his antipathy toward of the local context was clear in his narratives about the experience.

Carlos’ participation in his local communities was mediated by his understanding of good teaching. At the beginning of the exchange, three experiences

produced tensions that interfered with him engaging with community members and sharing in their enterprise. As a result, Carlos did not want to be a competent member of his local communities; nor did he view himself as belonging to those communities.

Sandra

Figure 17. Sandra's activity system



Sandra came to the teaching exchange with a strong socio-historical understanding of American culture. It seems that her belief that she completely understood her upcoming experience was one factor that mediated her lack of competent participation in her local communities. The tensions and contradictions that arose for Sandra as a result of her socio-historical understanding of her exchange activities constantly mediated her peripheral participation in any community of practice. Throughout the exchange, however, these contradictions also mediated her participation in another legitimate global community: her Mexican teaching community including her Mexican students. Like Miriam, Sandra saw her U.S. school resources as excessive as compared to her Mexican school. However, she did not see that her American students liked to study Spanish, or were interested in learning. The contradiction provoked strong feelings of rejection of her American students and identification with her Mexican students. Sandra's assignment on the

exchange was to three different schools; as a result she did not have school colleagues or co-workers with whom she could share her pedagogical activities or help to mediate her community participation. These tensions caused Sandra to reject participation in any local community of practice. As a result, she attempted to participate in the electronic COMEXUS community.

Sandra's posting to the electronic discussion board were infrequent compared to those of the other participants in the present study. Her first posting to the discussion board explained that she did not have a computer, so she did not have Internet access. She promised that when she could, she would post messages. When she was able to access a computer with Internet, she would post several messages addressed directly to different people, as if sending individual letters or postcards. Based on Sandra's narratives posted on the electronic discussion board, it seems that she did not view this as community mediating device, but as a communication tool. Sandra was concerned with completing the reflective activities but she did not understand the interactive nature of conducting and reflecting electronically on the activities. She treated the activities as questions with answers. The ones she responded to, she sent to me via email, therefore eliminating any possible co-construction of meaning with her COMEXUS colleagues. Due to the nature of her participation on the electronic discussion board, and her lack of understanding of participation as a mediator of membership, Sandra never became a competent member of this community. As a result, Sandra had a hard time understanding her teacher identity during the majority of teacher exchange. It was only on the occasions when Sandra distanced herself from the exchange that she began to reflect on her participation in her academic community. This happened when she went to her regional meeting, when her brother visited her, and upon returning to Mexico. This suggests that there are different degrees of transmogrification, and that transmogrification can come about as a result of reflection into community

participation as well as actual participation. In some ways, Sandra better understood her teacher identity during the exchange when she legitimized her community participation through reflection after the teaching exchange had finished.

A factor that mediated Sandra's non-participation in any of the communities was her depressed feelings throughout the exchange. She sought help; she spoke to one of her school principals, discussed her physical feelings on the electronic forum, talked to previous exchange teachers and consulted a doctor about her illness. This factor was possibly the strongest in mediating Sandra's lack of participation in any community aside from her family.

Shared factors

All teachers expressed a need to be good teachers and positively represent Mexico, Mexican education and the Mexican educational system. These socio-historical understandings of the teaching exchange were articulated during the pre-exchange orientation course, in the electronic COMEXUS community, and personally, and individually on multiple occasions to me. It was their understanding that participation in the electronic community bonded the group and mediated teacher learning and development. However, this belief was expressed by the teachers who participated in the electronic community throughout the exchange, and more specifically, the teachers chosen for the present study. Their need for the community during the exchange, but not after, is evidenced by the fact that the electronic community has fallen into disuse now that the teaching exchange has ended. Because this is not the first occasion where an electronic discussion board has been used throughout a COMEXUS exchange, anecdotal evidence from previous groups has pointed to the fact that the electronic community co-constructed throughout the exchange can continue to serve a purpose after the teaching exchange has terminated.

Other evidence that the electronic community was not reified by all of the COMEXUS teachers was the fact that from thirteen teachers who participated in the teaching exchange, there was total non-participation in the electronic community by three teachers. This suggests that they did not share the community view that participation and competent membership would favorably mediate their exchange experience.

Research Questions

I now turn to answering the individual questions of this research study.

Question 1: How does Socio-Historical Pedagogical Knowledge Mediate Community Membership?

This question seeks to examine factors that the exchange teachers brought with them to the teaching exchange that mediated their understanding of their exchange experience. As research decisions were made regarding how to choose the teacher narratives to include in the present study, I included teachers that seemed to have personal similarities, but contextual differences. All of the chosen teachers were over 40 years old, had had experiences in other professions, and had lived in or visited the US previously. All of these teachers had participated in the pre-exchange orientation course which was planned to mediate their knowledge of the American school system as well as provide reflection on American culture. However, each of these teachers came from different demographic areas of Mexico; it is recognized that the role of the teacher is different in different contexts: it is not the same to be a teacher in a small town as it is to be a teacher in the largest city in the world. Although it has never been expressed to me, I understand that COMEXUS seeks to place teachers in demographic locations similar to the ones they come from in Mexico. For example, teachers from large metropolitan areas are placed in similar settings for their exchange cities.

Socio-historical factors mediated creation of a legitimate global community from which the exchange teachers understood their activities and experiences on the teaching exchange. As the teachers begin to interact within different communities on the teaching exchange, they were faced with tensions and contradictions within their communities and their socio-historical background.

Although each of the participating teachers took different paths to the teaching exchange, none of the chosen teachers began their professional lives as teachers. As a result, they brought with them their experiences from their personal education, just as Darling-Hammond (1995) posited. These different views of arriving at being a teacher, mediated their beliefs about teaching and teachers.

All of the participants provided evidence of what they thought was good teaching. Victor (Yahoo! Group, March 28) reflected on how the communicative approach is the method he uses successfully to date with his students. His use of this approach fit well within his co-constructed responsibilities of creating technology infused teaching materials. Victor's understanding of his theory of teaching and pedagogical skills (Richards, 2000) mediated his competent memberships in the foreign language community; his American foreign language colleagues saw that he shared their understanding of teaching and pedagogy. As a result, Victor did not experience the same tensions his colleagues did with their local communities; his trajectory toward competent membership was seamless. His lack of perceived contradictions could suggest that he was less open to transmogrification of his teaching identity. His self-explained socio-historical background suggested that he thought of himself of a completely formed successful teacher; he was not receptive to transformations of his teacher identity.

Miriam (Yahoo! Group, November 16) described her colleagues' use of visuals and gestures as appropriate, just as she was taught in Mexico. On this occasion, Miriam did not feel contradictions between her socio-historical knowledge of

pedagogical skills and what she saw on the teaching exchange. Carlos and Miriam, however, saw tensions between their understandings of how students should behave in a classroom and the rules in the American classrooms. Their socio-historical knowledge of teaching skills (Richards, 2000) contradicted what they were instructed to do and what they saw on in their exchange schools. They agreed that students need not be totally quiet in a classroom to provide a learning experience (Telephone communication, November 20). Sandra was mediated by her socio-historical understanding of the type of teaching materials that were needed to be effective in the elementary school classroom; her socio-historical teaching skills had mediated her teaching activity therefore, she had created extensive classroom materials based on this understanding.

Throughout the teaching exchange, Carlos described contradictions in his understanding of role of school principal, government rules, the certification process, and his relationship with students. An example of Carlos' tension arose when his conceptual knowledge (Richards, 2000) or understanding the institutional context, came in conflict with the local community's understanding. On one occasion a student requested Carlos' permission to stay in his classroom during lunch. When the school principal told him not to allow this to happen again, he followed her instructions, without fully understanding the pedagogical reasoning behind the principal's instructions. However, the principal's point was exemplified later in the semester when one of his colleagues was assaulted by one of her students in her classroom. Carlos' activities based on his socio-historical understanding of schools and school systems caused constant contradictions and tensions that, in turn, mediated his lateral participation in the school community.

Sandra had previous experience in living closely with Americans and what she viewed as American culture. As a child, she had attended the American school and had American friends. When she came to the teaching exchange, she was mediated

by this understanding of American culture. In addition, because Sandra believed that being bilingual was an advantage, she assumed this was a shared belief among her students. She experienced contradictions when she tried to discuss these advantages with her exchange students (Email, November 3). These tensions are evidence of how Sandra viewed her language teaching as important for the economic success of her students; this view is commonly shared in the Mexican EFL community. Sandra's socio-historical conceptual knowledge (Richards, 2000) conflicted with her students' understanding of foreign language learning. Likewise, Sandra's socio-historical understanding of the advantages of being bilingual developed out of her personal experience as a bilingual learner and her learned teaching theory. She tried to explain these advantages to her students and urge them to take advantage of the opportunity they were being afforded to study Spanish in elementary school. These understandings were not shared by her students and they evidenced this by being unresponsive to her teaching. This, then, provoked tensions between Sandra and her students. She attributed this experience to her dissimilarity with her American exchange teacher and his teaching methods. However, in her postings to the discussion board, it was evident that Sandra's identification of herself as an accomplished teacher was in direct conflict with her experiences on the teaching exchange. When she pointed to the students' lack of motivation to learn a foreign language as the cause for her unsuccessful teaching, her socio-historical pedagogical reasoning did not allow her to question her teacher identity.

Although Sandra was an experienced teacher, her pedagogical and communication skills were developed in a *secundaria* context. This meant that when Sandra tried to apply her socio-historical teacher knowledge, she was mediated by the conceptual knowledge as well as a lack of pedagogical knowledge of teaching elementary school students. Her theories of teaching and communication skills also applied to older students. In addition, it can be suggested that although students

share commonalities throughout the world, tensions between her teacher knowledge of students in Mexico did not apply to her experience in the teaching exchange. These tensions, along with her logistic barriers in the schools, provoked Sandra's unwillingness to become part of her local teacher community.

Question 2: How does Participation in an Online Community of Learners Mediate Mexican Foreign Language Teachers' Community Membership?

Participation in the electronic discussion board offered the COMEXUS teachers the possibility to create a global community (Wenger, 1998). As a result of their shared repertoire, and experience of meaning within this discourse (Gee, 2005), the exchange teachers were able to discuss their teaching activities outside of their local school communities. This community was reified for the teachers who participated by their mutual electronic engagement with the other members of the COMEXUS community. All four of the teachers explained that their narrative participation on the electronic discussion board contributed to their understanding of their responsibility for this community; they needed this community throughout the teaching exchange. Their mutual engagement with the community via the electronic discussion forum diminished as the exchange progressed, even as community members returned to their homes in Mexico (Victor, January 16, Miriam, January 13, Carlos, December 3) the remaining members planned a meeting in Mexico City for those teachers who could attend.

One of the requisites for competent membership in the electronic COMEXUS community was an understanding of Mexican proverbs or sayings. For example, one of the teachers (Carlos, September 7, Yahoo! Group) described his ups and downs as "la grafica de la tasa de cambio del peso respecto al dólar" [*the ups and downs of the Mexican peso with respect to the American dollar*]. Only an insider to the fluctuations of the peso with respect to the US dollar would understand this commonly used Mexican phrase. But the expression was additionally appropriate,

because it referred to the ups and downs of the Mexican teacher with respect to the American school system.

The electronic community was also reified through perceived community membership through a shared referential system of socio-cultural experiences. The COMEXUS exchange teachers came to the community with a shared understanding of what it means to be a teacher in Mexico, although the teachers came from very different socio-historical backgrounds. Their understanding of the Mexican school system is such that they would be able to recognize something that would or would not happen in Mexican schools. As a result, when a teacher would post his or her experiences, their membership in the community would immediately recognize activities foreign to their experience as members of the global community of Mexican teachers.

Finally, the present study was only able to understand the experiences of teachers who participated in the electronic discussion board. The argument can be made that the COMEXUS exchange teachers who did not participate in the electronic discussion but read the postings also belonged to the community (lurkers). This concept is not completely foreign to this study; however, there is no evidence to point to the idea that there are levels of participation that result in competent membership in given communities.

Question 3: What are Factors that Mediate Community Participation or Non-Participation in the Electronic Community?

For the present study, four teachers that participated in the electronic discussion board were chosen. However, not all of the teachers participated equally in number of postings, length of postings or textual similarity in postings. The teachers that participated perceived that the COMEXUS community mediated their success in their pedagogical activities in their local communities. It also provided a

forum where their shared experiences in their local communities could be understood.

Sandra was the chosen exchange teacher who participated least on the discussion board. Throughout the exchange she put forth her reasons for non-participation. She explained initially that she did not have Internet access at home, so she visited a neighboring hospital to make use of their computer. When I inquired why she did not make use of the school computers, she stated that the computers were locked out of Internet sites such as Yahoo! during school hours, which limited her access to the discussion board. In an email (November 3) she stated that she had had Internet access at home for a month; this had not increased her participation in the electronic community. She was an example of a teacher who said she wanted to participate in the discussion board but did not. It seems that she recognized a responsibility to the group and the study but was unable to understand how participation could mediate her pedagogical activity and resulting community participation.

Data collected in this research study point to factors that mediate participation or non-participation in the electronic community. During the pre-exchange orientation course, participation in the electronic discussion board was part of the course; participation was obligatory. This encouraged the exchange teachers to become familiar with the discussion board and the co-construction of meaning through teacher narratives. As the teachers began to use the discussion board, it was suggested that the electronic discussion board could mediate their understanding of their experience throughout the teaching exchange. When the exchange teachers left the orientation course, they agreed to maintain their novice community through the electronic forum. As they began to engage in their local communities, participation in the online community fluctuated. The teachers most commonly mentioned lack of resources – either computer or Internet—as the factor

for non-participation. There were three COMEXUS teachers who did not participate in the electronic discussion after the pre-exchange course finished. One of these teachers communicated with me via IM three times during the exchange. He stated that he did not want the other teachers to know his "business" during the teaching exchange. This explanation had played out throughout the orientation course, so it did not surprise me when he expressed his beliefs. Similarly, there was another teacher who would only communicate via telephone because he did not want other teachers to read his postings. He also had displayed introverted behavior during the orientation course. Although there is no data supporting my idea, I attribute these feelings to personal characteristics as well as these teachers' socio-historical understanding of what it had meant to participate in other teacher communities in the past.

Competent membership in the electronic community was mediated by mutual engagement through electronic postings. However, there were some conditions for engagement in this community. It seems that the teachers' participation reified the co-construction of a group which mediated the teachers' understanding of their teaching exchange. In addition, competent membership was mediated by the ability to "*speak the language*" or understand the shared repertoire of this particular group of Mexican exchange teachers.

Question 4: How does Participation in Pedagogical Activity within the Community of Practice Mediate Professional and Language Identity?

Pedagogical activity was the framework (Richards, 2000) through which the COMEXUS teachers' understood their participation within their local school community. This was evidenced by the emergent themes relating to their pedagogical activities on the electronic discussion. These themes pointed to their concern with their classes, schools, planning, grading, teaching materials and students. Carlos and Sandra discussed their concern for competent community

membership when they referred to loss of sleep, stress, nervousness and even depression as a result of their feelings of incompetence in their school related activities. Victor was also concerned with his competent participation in his language teaching community; he worked to be a co-teacher, not a teachers' aide within that community.

Miriam, Carlos and Sandra all viewed the disparity in the division of labor regarding their pedagogical responsibilities in their exchange schools as compared to their socio-historical background in their Mexican school communities.

Carlos addressed his language use and abilities most frequently in his narratives. He was the only teacher who was assigned to teach a content course – History of Mexico -- during the exchange. Before the semester began, he said he did not have enough words in English to speak for an hour about the History of Mexico (Personal communication, July, 2005). For his initial classes he prepared extensive PowerPoint presentations and lectured, not allowing the students to ask questions. He said (Yahoo! Group, September 9) he did not know what he would have done without his technology support. As time progressed, he began to elicit student participation. He reported his experience when he talked about the ancient civilizations of Mexico and used his computer and projector to bring the images to his students. He reported that when he was finished, his students were speechless with admiration. By the end of the teaching exchange, he no longer felt stressed about teaching his course in English. It seems that the pedagogical activity itself mediated his self-development as a teacher of a course in English.

Although the reflective activities were designed to mediate their reflections on their real life pedagogical activities through shared construction of their understanding, the resulting participation was not a socially constructed understanding by the COMEXUS teachers. Whereas the teachers' reflections were prompted by the activities, they posted the results individually (Carlos, Sandra,

Miriam), or individually by one member of a pair of teachers (Victor). It seems that the activities represented too much work on an already stressed teacher (Miriam, August 25; Sandra, August 30) or were addressed as part of their other postings.

Question 5: What are the [Most Important] Factors that Mediate the Exchange Teachers' Trajectories toward Competent Community Membership?

Due to the nature of this research, the participating teachers provided most abundant narratives regarding their pedagogical activities. This does not necessarily mean that the pedagogical activities were the most important factors that mediated competent community membership. All of the chosen teachers were strongly mediated by their socio-historical backgrounds. Any tension or contradiction, pedagogical or otherwise, with what they knew to be a fact mediated peripheral participation for the COMEXUS teachers.

As the teaching exchange progressed, three of the chosen teachers reported that they had become different teachers as a result of the COMEXUS exchange. Victor did not report similar transformations in his teaching identity. His socio-historical background mediated his belief that he would be a competent member of his teaching community; he *knew* he was a competent member of his home community. Although Victor did not anticipate participation in local communities so unlike his own home community, he was still not sensitive to mediation of his identity by these social communities.

Throughout the teaching exchange, Miriam expressed that she was developing as a teacher; she specifically stated that she was not perfect as a teacher, but she knew that she was changing (Yahoo! Group, October 21). Miriam's transmogrification was related to her competent participation in her foreign language community. The factors that seemed to mediate her community membership were the contradictions she experienced regarding her teaching materials and student participation in her classroom. She recognized that her socio-historical perspectives

about teaching were flexible enough to be adapted to a new context. The contradictions did not scare her; they seemed to make her stronger. Miriam's ability to mediate the contradictions did not push her to recognize herself as a member of the entire school community, however. When one of her colleagues was accused of child pornography, she reported that the other teachers at the school felt bad for him; she did not offer her opinion regarding how she felt for this teacher. It seemed that any trajectory toward competent school community membership was derailed as a result of this incident. Miriam did not align her joint enterprise with this teacher, although her school community in general did support him.

Carlos was mediated by three instances where he felt discriminated against by an authority figure. The first was when his son was denied entry into the U.S. by the local immigration officers. Secondly, he felt he was singled out by the school superintendent and unduly harassed when he was fingerprinted and had to fill out the FBI criminal report. Finally, he felt the school principal was watching him throughout the exchange, in spite of two outings he shared with her. These three experiences, along with Carlos's self-imposed need for excessive planning to teach his classes, mediated his initial non-participation in the local community. As the exchange progressed, Carlos's interaction with his colleagues, and other local community members and social groups mediated his trajectory toward competent membership in these communities. Carlos began the exchange wanting to remain a peripheral participant in these communities. His successful teaching activities mediated his identity as a competent member of the academic community and as a result, he was willing to participate in local social communities.

Sandra began her teaching exchange with socio-historical beliefs that she was a competent member of the American community. This factor, along with her perceived unsuccessful teaching, mediated her teacher identity throughout the teaching exchange. Her activities mediated her negative identity; her identity

mediated her community participation. A concern regarding Sandra's community membership and identity development rests on her depression during the teaching exchange. It seems that these factors co-constructed a downward cycle for Sandra on her teaching exchange.

Implications for Theory

Activity Theory

Because activity theory is a "work in progress" (Engeström, 2001) it is important to consider how the theoretical aspects of activity theory played out as contextualized in this study. Findings from the data in this study point to the fact that the teachers were primarily concerned with their pedagogical activities throughout the exchange. This concern seems appropriate, because the activity that brings them to this experience is teaching. However, their activity is mediated by both their socio-historical understanding of teaching and the co-construction of the activity on the legitimized electronic community; the activity is then situated within the new context in which they carry out the activity. As a result, the present study suggests the importance of contextualizing the activity system to permit further understanding of its mediational workings.

As noted in the individual activity systems of each teacher, although they shared the conceptualization of the activity system, the resulting object was different for each teacher. In other words, each teacher was mediated by different factors, and had different resulting objects, although their systems appear similar. While the objects appear fixed, the fluidity of the system actually results in the object of the system changing continuously. This research also proposes that activity systems are not necessarily totally understood by participants; it is the membership in communities outside the system that mediate understanding of the system. For example, Carlos was unable to grasp how his excessive planning mediated his lack of participation in any other community. Likewise, Sandra never thought that if she

sought more community participation, this would favorably mediate her teacher knowledge.

Finally, activity systems exist in a reciprocal relationship with the communities that frame them. Within the activity system, communities mediate the subject's development, and therefore, mediate the object of the system. However, this activity system in turn exists in either actual or legitimized communities. As a result, the teachers' communities existed within their activity systems; and the activity system mediated their competent membership within different local communities. This mutual creation of meaning is explained by Wenger (1998) as our way of reifying our communities. He stated, "we see ourselves in each other as shared characteristics; in the reification process we project ourselves onto the world, without recognizing that we are seeing our own view of reality. Participation and reification are "woven seamlessly into our practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 63). In the present study, teachers participated through activities in their local communities, this participation reified their transmutation. Those activities, mediated by community then constructed the teacher's trajectory toward competent membership in the school community. This suggests that certain local communities participated in each teacher's activity system to transmute the teacher's identity. This activity system and the community membership together reify each other through their practice. The inner activity systems are legitimized or canonized by the participation within the teachers' own frame of reality. This reification had a washback effect on the other communities that are co-occurring in the participants experience; this effect then framed their participation and the trajectory they took toward competent membership in their communities.

Community of Practice

The findings from this study are in keeping with Wenger's (1998) notion of global communities that transcend our time and space. The teachers' narratives on

the electronic discussion board in this research co-constructed a community that existed because the teachers legitimized its reality. However, the term imaginary or imagination as Wenger (1998) proposes seems inappropriately fantastic for the COMEXUS teachers' community. They legitimized the community through their narrative participation, and this narrative participation was one aspect that mediated the transmogrification of their understanding of themselves as teachers. In other words, the transforming of their teacher identities came about in part because of their reification of the electronic community.

Based on evidence offered in the present study, human activity is a given in life; however, competent community membership is not. Whereas activity systems are constantly transforming, they do not cease to exist as community membership can. Activity systems transform into new systems as their multidimensional nature shifts into new systems, or systems that exist concurrently. It seems that human activity that is not mediated by community involvement as expected by the subject results in poor development of the object of the activity system. In other words, if there is poor or null mediation by communities within the activity system, the object becomes constantly more unreachable and transmogrification is also non-existent. The lack of transmogrification, in turn, mediates competent membership in the local communities. The existence of mediation and mediational tools does not guarantee self regulation; good mediational activity, such as transmogrification, depends on mediational sensitivity, and the ability to manage mediational means by both the experienced and novice community members (Erben, 2001, 2006). There is a time factor in competent membership in a given community. Competent membership will only be continued as long as the participant is mediated by the need to join that community. As soon as the participant does not perceive a need for a given community, participation in that community will cease. However, because human activity is multidimensional and never ceasing, this community participation will be

replaced by membership in another community; a community in which the participant's most vital activities take place.

Transmogrification and Identity

In the present study, *identity* means knowledge of oneself as a teacher. A theoretical frame for foreign language teacher knowledge was put forth in by Richards (2000) as teaching domains. Previously theorists have described identity as progressive states which move from one to another. From the data presented here, I am now coining the term *transmogrification* to refer to fluid transformations in teacher knowledge that mediate a teacher's professional identity.

The data collected evidenced that all of the participants were transmogrified by their activity systems, although to different degrees and in different ways. The pedagogical activities mediated this transmogrification as a result of the division of labor within the school community. However, the transmogrification of how the teachers knew themselves did not always produce trajectories toward competent membership in the community of practice. In keeping with results put forth by Erben (2001, 2006), this study suggests that transmogrification does not automatically promote competent community membership; community engagement is also contingent on the subject's mediational sensitivity, mediational receptivity and the ability to manage mediational means.

It is also the responsibility of teachers and teacher educators to recognize that tensions and contradictions that surge from human activity are essential to mediation of community membership. In addition, competent membership in one community does not exclude membership in another community. In other words, competent community membership is not an either-or circumstance, although participation in various communities invariably leads to expectations by community members to declare allegiances to one community or another. Finally, it is expected that teachers will participate in more than one community of practice; combined, this

multidimensional participation produces an array of complex tensions and contradictions in teacher transmogrification.

Implications for Practice

Community of Practice

The present study highlights the importance of inquiry into pedagogic activity as it mediates teacher practice. In addition, this research suggests that teacher education and professional development should afford opportunities for human activity that mediates participation within communities of practice to afford the mediation of teacher identity. Therefore, it is suggested that teacher development instances should provide for opportunities of community development.

In keeping with the assumptions of the present study, learning is a social event mediated by human activity and competent community membership. As a result, curriculum development for teacher education should address issues of teaching methods and approaches that foment social learning. Possible instances of social learning include the seamless infusion of technology, particularly electronic sharing of experiences and activities to offer community formation and development.

The assumption that teachers participate in more than one community of practice and that this participation may mediate tensions and contradictions in their pedagogic activities, instances of teacher development should abstain from demanding competent membership in only one community. Foreign language teachers should be encouraged to collaborate with colleagues from other departments or subject areas at all levels of schooling. Social interactions between teachers in a given learning context should provide for community development and resulting shared membership in a social community.

This study also evidences the need for the infusion of electronic medium as a means for community development and maintenance in conjunction with any teacher education program. Teacher identity is an integrated aspect of teacher development,

but it is not static. Due to the ever-changing nature of teacher identity, the need for the understanding of this aspect of teacher identity can be mediated as it develops through instances such as electronic teacher narratives. If resources restrict the use of electronic media other accommodations should be made to permit the community development through the use of other types of narrative.

Institutional Implications

COMEXUS

For the past seven years, teacher assignments have been based on the perceived skills and knowledge of the exchange teacher, the demographic context from which the teachers comes, and the existence of American counterparts with whom to exchange school assignments. The findings from this study suggest that the COMEXUS teacher be assigned to a context which will hold manageable contradictions and tensions for the exchange teacher. Whereas it is recognized that all of the placements involve contradictions that foster teacher development, however, COMEXUS should seriously consider the discrepancy between pedagogical activities involved in the home and in the exchange school. If the decision is made to place a teacher in a school that is dissimilar to his or her accustomed pedagogical activities, the exchange teacher should be aware of the upcoming experience.

The experience this group of teachers had in the COMEXUS teacher exchange was documented through the teacher narratives on the electronic discussion board. The findings evidence the process through which the exchange teacher understood the transmogrification of their teacher identity. It was noticed that as time progressed, contradictions and tensions within their school activities decreased, allowing the exchange teacher more time to participate in their local communities. As the exchange teachers became more competent members in their communities, they began to be more comfortable in their new teacher identities. Therefore, this study suggests that the teacher exchange be extended to one academic year.

Teacher Training in Mexico

When a teacher is awarded the honor of participating in a teaching exchange, anecdotal evidence puts forth the concept that he or she will be a better teacher when he or she returns from his or her experience. This study suggests that pedagogical activity does, in fact, mediate teacher transmogrification, but it also points to the fact that this process can be painful for some teachers and does not necessarily guarantee more effective teaching upon returning home. The purpose of this study was to illustrate the constantly changing nature of teacher identity. As a result, teacher education in Mexico should be designed to provide similar socio-culturally developmental aspects within all teacher learning experiences, whether they take place within Mexico or on a teaching exchange.

Implications for research

Based on the exploratory nature of this research, there are boundless related further research possibilities within foreign language teacher education. As a result, I have chosen three areas of potential interest: the use of other electronic medium in teacher education, how electronic conceptualization of self manifests itself in teacher learning, and other instances of narrative inquiry through discourse analysis into different instances of teacher education.

Research into the inclusion of electronic medium in teacher education could potentially include community development in undergraduate and graduate foreign language teacher education programs. Whereas the use of an electronic discussion board was appropriate for the present study, the use of other medium such as podcasting, blogging or digital storytelling to relate the experiences of teachers in unique developmental contexts could enlighten issues surrounding the infusion of technology into teacher education.

Further research into the creation of social identities within electronic media that examines the negotiation of power relationships and identity formation would

offer insights into both teacher education as well as new research into electronic discourse. In addition, this type of research could provide insight into phases of identity transmogrification through pedagogical activities and teaching context changes in electronic media. This research would be most insightful if it were designed to examine the longitudinal transformation of either in-service or pre-service teachers. Other alternatives to international teacher exchanges, such as in-country exchanges or experiences, could potentially offer instances of teacher development in another context.

Finally, other research into teacher discourse through narrative could potentially highlight writing as a tool of both professional and language development.

Conclusion

For the past two decades, I have worked with foreign language teacher education programs. Throughout my experience, I have contemplated how teacher knowledge of self as a teacher is formed. My work with the COMEXUS foreign language teachers has caused me to ponder the relationship between the teacher, his or her pedagogical activity and teaching context. This research study has permitted me inquire into these interrelated aspects of teacher identity. As I have only begun my journey as a researcher into how foreign language teachers construct their professional identities as a result of socio-cultural interaction, I hope to be able to apply these findings to my understanding of my foreign language students in their quest for developing as teachers, as well as my own development of my identity as a researcher.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Proposed Activities

1. You are concerned about your first day at school. You want to make a good impression; you cannot remember all of the things we talked about in the course. Make a list of concerns and discuss them online with partner. Be sure to discuss “dos and don’ts”. After your first day of class, write a story about the first day of school and what you learned. Post the story on the discussion board. Read others’ stories and comment on them.
2. You need to find out about your school’s Foreign Language Department policies on classroom practice. With your partner brainstorm questions about any issues you want to discuss. Make a list of the important points. After having discussed these points online with your critical friend(s), then talk to the department chair or your mentor to find out what you need to know. After the activity, write a story about how you did and what you learned. Post the story on the discussion board. Read others’ stories and comment on them.
3. You want to implement technology in one or some of your lessons. You are worried about being able to prepare and implement all of the necessary steps. Discuss your concerns online with your partner, make suggestions, ask and answer questions. Implement the lesson using technology. Write a story about what you did and what you learned. Post your story for the whole group to read. Comment on each others’ stories.
4. You have had it with the teaching exchange. You have faced multiple problems that you do not experience as a teacher in Mexico. You wonder why you decided to participate in the teaching exchange in the first place. YOU WANT TO GO HOME. You need help because you are getting worried about yourself and your teaching. Write a short description of the problem(s), and post them to the small group discussion board. When you have read your colleague’s problems, make suggestions about how

they could possibly feel better. Read the suggestions directed to your problem, and carry them out. Write a story about this experience. Post your story. Read and comment on the other stories.

4. You have been having classroom management problems with one or more of your students. You need to resolve this situation, and need help from your critical friend(s). Write a clear description of the problems/issues. Post this on your small group discussion board. When you have read your colleagues' problems/issues, discuss possible solutions online. Carry out the suggestions. Make notes regarding the outcomes of the different suggestions. Write a story about how you dealt with this problem, and how it was resolved. Read each others' story on the discussion board and comment.

5. You want to celebrate *Dia de los Muertos*, you can not decide if you should build an altar or how you should help the school community to feel as you do regarding this special Mexican holiday. However, you want to be considerate of others' cultural beliefs. Discuss these issues online with your partner. Carry out your celebration. Write a story about the celebration. Post your story and comment on your colleagues' stories.

Appendix B: COMEXUS Participant Information

	Gender	Years teaching	Age	Degree	From	to	Home school	Teaches at home	Exchange school	Teach at exchange school
1	M	9	31	Normal Superior DF	DF	Phoenix, AZ	Comercio y Adm. – Politecnico Nacional, DF	EFL – EAP/ESP	High school	Spanish
2	M	15	37	MA in ED Normal Superior HGO	Atitalaguia, HGO	Buffalo, NY	EST #13 Atitalaguia, HGO	English / biology	High school	Spanish
3	F	5	22	BA in ELT HGO	Pachuca, HGO	VA	UAEH (ICOHU)	English-ESP/EAP	High school	Spanish
4	F	4	25	BA in Communication COTE FCE French	SLP, SLP	LA	UASLP	EFL- Psychology students	High school	Spanish
5	F	6	24	BA in ELT SON	Cd. Obregon, SON	Portland, OR	ITESCA, SON	EFL	University	Spanish
6	M	15	43	Normal Superior OAX	Silacayoapam OX	Sleepy Eye, MN	COBOA – Colegio de Bachilleres, OAX	EFL	High school	Spanish
7	F	21	43	MA Normal Superior DGO	Durango, DGO	Grand Rapids, MI	EST #1 DGO, DGO	EFL	Shared FLEX - elementary	Spanish

8	M	7.5	39	Engineering: food processing Teacher's Certificate CAMEM Italian Computer	Chalco, Edo. de MX	Portland,OR	ESG Nezahualcoy otl, Chalco, EDO de MX	EFL	High school	Spanish
9	M	20	38	Normal Básica MA in Higher Ed. French Italian	Sn. Juan del Rio, QRO	Findley, OH	CECATI # 122, QRO	EFL – ESP/EAP	High school	Spanish
1 0	F	17	45	IPN BA in Tourism	DF	Wilmette, IL	Sec. Diurna 293, DF	EFL	High school	Spanish
1 1	F	11	30	MA in Psychotherap y ITA de Tepic Computer systems	Tepic, NAY	Salt Lake City, UT	ES Revolución Méxicana, Sayulita, NAY	EFL/ Spanish	High school	Spanish, Theater, Interpretive Dance, Advising
1 2	F	3	29	BA in Bus. Adm. Normal Sup TAM	SLP, SPL	Atlanta, GA	CECATI	EFL	Middle school	ESOL
1 3	M	12.5	40	Agronomist Normal Superior de Jalisco	Sn José de Gracia, MICH	Sheridan, OR	C.B.T.A.	EFL/ Ecology	High school	Spanish, Culture/MX history

Appendix C: Yahoo! Postings by teacher

Date	Victor	Carlos	Miriam	Sandra
August 4		Leaving his COMEXUS community <i>Thanks for praying for us we will need it a lot</i>		
August 5				
August 6	He has arrived in his exchange town. His family is nice, like his family in Mexico. Best wishes. Keep in touch.	His son was returned to Mexico by immigration. One of his colleagues tells him: everything happens for a reason.		
August 7	<p>Don't worry Carlos. Everything happens for a reason. Take care and good luck. This is the first time he has been alone. Keeping in touch with someone he knows makes him feel comfortable.</p> <p>He talks about his American family.</p> <p>He had some guys drink a shot of very hot sauce. He went to church and found it very different from Mexico</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gives full address and phone; tells them how to dial from all parts of the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Today is Sunday. Arrived on Friday. She is anxious to get into her own place. It is not furnished as she expected it would be, so the landlady is trying to find her some furniture, as is her counterpart. Says she will write from her counterpart's computer. ▪ She responds to a COMEXUS colleague. Says she feels like an intruder into her counterpart's privacy. She is staying with him until her place is ready. ▪ She responds to Carlos's problem with immigration. She says she hopes her daughter does not have similar problems. ▪ "me dio mucha tristeza por ti y por el porque esta uno con toda la ilusion y luego te cortan ▪ Las alas y bueno tu vas a saber que hacer y

				<p>vas a ver que todo va a estar bien. Las cosas no son casuales sino causales. Ten fe en ti y en</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Que todo va a salirte muy bien".
				<p>She responds to a colleague wishing him the best and hopes that he will take advantage of the teaching exchange.</p>
				<p>Have a nice stay. Remember: Whatever that has to happen, it's going to do so and at the end of everything: NOTHING HAPPENS!!!!!!!!!!</p>
August 8	To Adrian, why didn't you say good-bye when you left (DC). Says he is relaxed and everything is "de maravilla"			
August 9	For Alfonso, thanks for writing.. hechale ganas...manda fotos		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reports that she is fine in ... ▪ Reports on first day conference. ▪ Plans to go to the beach on Sunday. ▪ Take care. I miss you. 	
August 10			<p>Me da gusto que esten en sus nuevas casas. I got the photos of the group that Raquel sent. Went to school, it seems nice but not as nice as Mechanicsburg High School. Take care. I miss you.</p>	
August 11		Reportandome: address, phone, etc, He mentions 'vivo solitario'.		
August			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am sure that everyone 	

12			is doing well. Easy to travel by subway, like in Mexico City. I will go to Ravinia today. Her daughter arrives next week. Will try to call, but she only has Carlos's phone number; asks for others' phones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I think of you. God bless you a lot.
August 13	<p>Talks about his experiences going to church. There is a band and people sing; you can see the lyrics on the screen. It lasts two hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The people at the church are nice; they lent him a bike to ride in the town. The pastor comes for dinner. ▪ All good fun. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She has been feeling homesick. She is in her apartment; she has neither a phone nor a car. She has been walking to get to know the city a little. "you really need a car if you want to go someplace." She hopes she will get a car next week and will then feel better. ▪ "I hug you all Parteners!!! Echenle ganas!!!"
August 14				
August 15				
August 16		<p>He ran into one of his COMEXUS colleagues on the street: <i>He said, "me lleno de emocion verla saludos a todos los extraño."</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She responds to me. She has been feeling very lonely the past few days. She says she has to survive until her daughter arrives on the 27th. She is writing from a hospital [that has an Internet connection] a block from her house.
August 17				
August 18				
August 19	<p>He likes his American family. He will teach Spanish and French. He got his school t-</p>		<p>Her daughter arrived today. They went to look around the neighborhood</p>	

	shirt. He sent his email address so we could see his pictures.		and to her new high school. Last Wednesday and Thursday she had conferences for new staff. She met people from the district. Each teacher gets a laptop from the district; lots of resources. Describes her junior high school and one of her colleagues she will work closely with.	
20				
21				
22				
23			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tomorrow is her first work day. ▪ <i>Esto ha sido mejor de lo que esperaba, estoy segura que todos tendremos la oportunidad de dar lo mejor de nosotros, no se desesperen mucho ya que en el momento menos esperado todo sucede.</i> ▪ Talks about X-City as being a city of Latinos, with music on the upcoming weekend. Says we will have a good time if we visit. ▪ <i>Los extraño. Cuidense</i> 	
August 24	<p>Hechele ganas mi querido Paquito! no se me quiebre a las primeras de cambio. Viva Mexico! Support for one of his colleagues.</p> <p>To Miriam about her city, that she will have fun there and eat Mexican food.</p> <p>"Hi Mr Beautiful" <i>Hay que hace tripas Corazon, con dicen en Chalco. Hechale ganas que esto apenas comienza. Creo</i></p>			

	<i>que te hace falta hacer unas compras para que te sientes feliz, just kidding! Saludos y un abrazo</i>			
August 25	He writes directly to me. He is so busy with his American family that he almost forgot a meeting at the school. He starts classes on September 6. He will teach Spanish and French. Informs me of his pictures.	<p>He responds to individual postings, describes classroom, teaching material.</p> <p>Asks me if Katrina hit us. Explains that he is in touch with an old student from his home town.</p> <p>Reports that he is not driving the counterpart's car. To his colleague, he tells her he cannot go on the trip along the coast with her.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparing for the work I will ask them to do, as well as the schoolwork they will have. She will have an assistant, a German teacher who went on a Fulbright grant 15 years ago. She thought it would be easy, but it wasn't. Her second time was easier. ▪ <i>Asi que companeros tomenlo con sabiduria, y aprendamos de los que tienen experiencia.</i> Today at school they took the staff photo, the school is huge. Monday will be "la locura". <i>Es grandioso convivir con personas de diferentes nacionalidades, pero trabajando para un solo fin.</i> ▪ Talks about computers per classroom, and OHP in each class. <i>Para mi es como un sueno tener tantos</i> ▪ <i>recursos didacticos, se dan el lijo[sic] de regresar material de otros anos que no pudieron utilizar.</i> ▪ Her daughter is also happy. ▪ <i>Companeros de la zona de Michigan y Minnesota nos veremos pronto. Cuidense y que dios les guarde.</i> 	

29			She writes a message for me, offering her cousin's phone if I need to run from the hurricane. Says she will call. Says her first day was easy. <i>"but only the first day"</i> .	
August 30	To Carlos regarding his certification story. <i>"Keep your spirit strong, think that this is not going to be forever, this only shows that our cuintry [sic] is not so bad after all, at leat we have freedom to do what we want and work free of threatening situations."</i> He sent a list of things about his state. He asked for a similar list from the other COMEXUS teachers.	First day at school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He needs temporary teaching license ▪ He is finger printed and must fill out FBI form for sex offenders. ▪ Reflected on forms of discrimination in the US ▪ The public librarian called to tell him there was material in Spanish at the library. He went, met her and got his library card. Reported he has two new friends in town. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She writes to Miriam asking if she will bring her daughter to the regional meeting. She does not have Internet and expresses worry about the assigned activities. ▪ "Estoy muy feliz pues mi hija ya esta conmigo!!!"
31			Message to Alfonsina about taking her daughter to the regional meeting. Says she is happy, with a lot of work. Has had a teacher's aide the first two weeks. <i>Felicidades de que Alfonsina este contigo.</i>	
1				
2		He goes out to run everyday, not because he is sports minded, but to calmar la desesperacion de estar encerrado en este pueblo y para alejarme un poco de el.	Hopes everything is going well. Says each exchange school is different, but that is also the case in México. School has a lot of resources; Mexican school has a quarter of what this school has. Kids are nice and respectful. Next week they will walk for the Katrina victims.	
3				
4		Thanks all for responses re fingerprinting and FBI		

		<p>format</p> <p>Philosophically he says if he were in their place (schools, etc) he would do something similar</p> <p>Comments on homesickness – everything is getting better but homesickness</p> <p>Talks about Barbara and Jeff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ took him to the State Fair on Thursday ▪ had dinner with them on Sunday ▪ another teacher invited him to dinner at his house 		
5				
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Got his temporary teaching license ▪ First day with students – got support from teacher aide ▪ Principal introduced him to the whole school in an assembly ▪ Describes number of classes and students, how students can change classes if they want ▪ Counterpart called to see how he was doing 		
7				
8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dear Diary ▪ Old man on the bridge ▪ Describes feelings of tiredness, agotado, amanecí cansado ▪ Third day of class, describes each period of his day ▪ Asked students for their personal goals for this school year ▪ Reflected on students – commonalities etc, 	<p>She Is so happy working with these kids, they are nice to her. They say funny things in Spanish. Would like to be with 'us' for September 15th.</p> <p>Met some Mex/Amer. at a party. Saw them with nice things, their own companies or jobs. Says she will go downtown to see how Mexicans live these days.</p>	
9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survived first week of school – "no se que haria 		

		<p>sin mi laptop y proyector”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>El grupo de 28 alumnos me estuvo escuchando atento durante todo el tiempo y cuando termine y pregunte: alguna pregunta o comentario seguían callados y uno dijo "That's breath taking"</i> ▪ He is going to his first football game says he is glad to be in a town where there is nothing to distract him from his work – preparing his classes rhetorically asks what he will do this weekend: study and prepare class.... He hopes he will have enough time. He can't sleep because he worries. 		
September 10	<p>He reports on his use of his PowerPoint presentation and asks his colleague for his presentation. <i>"Ya estoy preparando algo para el 16 de Septiembre, Que viva Mexico #\$\$%. me gustaria ver tu presentacion, suena interesante tambien quiero aprender de nuestras culturas prehispanicas."</i></p>			
11 12			<p>Happy birthday to PG and JG. She wishes them an American boyfriend so they can stay in the US.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She wishes me luck with the study, knows I will do a good job. She tells about talking about Mexican Independence. She celebrated with a shot of tequila. She will go to the big city for the parade on September 16. 	

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The weather changed; it is cold. 	
13				
14				
15			<p><i>Viva Mexico Compañeros!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very poetic posting, wishing them a happy day wherever they are, remembering the anniversary of their freedom. Told her students the story of Mexican Independence. Her students wanted to have a party. ▪ Hopes it doesn't rain (Mexican independence parade in her city) and have a tequila to her health. 	
16				
September 17	<p>He reports on his presentations. In Spanish 1 & 2, he did it in both languages, in Spanish 4 y 5 he did it in Spanish. In all they, "dieron el grito". He is already thinking about Día de los Muertos, la Revolución, Navidad y Reyes. <i>Viva Mexico! Viva Mexico! Viva Mexico!</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agrees to participate in research – have to celebrate in AGS ▪ Describes this week's classes ▪ Que como me ha ido – como en feria de todo un poco ▪ Analogy: la grafica de la tasa de cambio del peso respecto al dólar ▪ Compares two classes ▪ Describes experience w/ volleyball game ▪ Tuesday: the principal observed his classes, made a suggestion about classroom organization ▪ Weds: principal was outside of classroom and heard him scolding the students, told him to send the offenders to office 		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arrives at 7, "<i>me explota pero que un esclavo</i>" ▪ Thursday after school went to see Lion King with Barbara and Jeff (he loved it) Called it "todo un negocio" ▪ Friday worked with a group of 15 Ss to make a poster for Homecoming – only had two classes ▪ Commented on: ▪ Foster parents, explained his understanding of it ▪ A student (F) asked if she could eat lunch in his classroom, he said yes...principal told him not to allow this to happen again ▪ Commented on special needs students who use his classroom...."<i>a veces pienso que necesito unas clases de ese tipo...de que me expliquen y repiten el porque de las cosas.</i> ▪ Comments regarding football, how organized it is, the sheriff's presence, etc. 		
			<p>She says she is glad that my project was accepted agrees to participate. Hopes that their participation will inform the upcoming participants. She is ready and willing to participate and will be in contact with her colleagues. <i>Estoy segura que toda saldra bien.</i></p>	
18				

<p>September 20</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She responds to a colleague who has broken up with her boyfriend. She is supportive, tells her to remember how great she is, that she doesn't need the boyfriend. <i>No te aguites y piensa que no aprendemos de nuestros aciertos, sino de nuestras caidas y mientras mas gacho es el ...ingazo, con mas fuerza nos levantamos.</i> ▪ She tells her/us how she has felt. She feels like she wants to vomit in the morning although she has not eaten. She hurts all over and there is no reason for it. Her car is not working, she gets mad, and curses.....she says this has to pass. ▪ She has 15 groups in three schools. ▪ <i>Hay que tratar de querernos un poquito mas de lo normal para poder</i> ▪ <i>sobrellevar todo esto.</i> <p>To me she writes that she has not had a chance to write. She has had miserable days; she is not used to things in 'this country'. Everything is different: the schedule, the work and "<i>friega de todo el dia</i>".</p> <p>She and her daughter are fine. She bought a pick up. She says there is more bureaucracy here than in Mexico.</p>
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September 21	He talks about going back to DC for his regional meeting. He asks everyone when they are going to theirs.			
22			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A message to Victor. She had called and he was out. She asks when he will visit her school. She says she is ready for the regional meeting. Parents' night went well; at first she was a little nervous. She gives phone number. ▪ Message for Sandra. She agrees that she too has had obstacles on this exchange. She speculates that each person's personality plays a role. Her strength comes in part from the Baptist church, where the people have consoled and supported her. There people support and pray for her, perhaps 'we' should ask God's help to get us through the exchange. ▪ She cannot wait for the day when they can get together and talk about the pros and cons of the teaching exchange. ▪ With God's help, everything will be okay with the car. 	
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
September 28	He reports on his regional meeting. He says he met one of his COMEXUS colleagues			

	and they spent time with his school principal. He observes that it seems like the people he met at this meeting have known each other forever.			
September 29	He tells his colleague he posted the DC photos.		She writes a message to HX, reminds him they will work together for the research study. Asks for his telephone number. <i>Saludos a tu esposa.</i>	
September 30				
1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feels sad, he still has two months left ▪ Extends "pésame" to those who feel <i>mal</i>, says <i>estamos en las mismas condiciones</i> ▪ Agrees with Alfonsina that age is a factor in homesickness, comments that previously he lived 5 months in the US and never felt homesick. ▪ Dice que <i>ya me tiene harto</i> ▪ The second day, he cried from the soledad total, other times, walking down the street, tears flow from his eyes ▪ <i>Creo que hay instantes en que</i> ▪ <i>daría todo lo de la beca y mas por regresar</i> ▪ says he doesn't go to church, he stopped when he was very young and doesn't plan on returning 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She is responding to a colleague's email. She says, "pues las ausencias que una tiene por aca son duras y piensas y piensas y te echas porras y le echas ganas al asunto". ▪ She wants to know if Miriam's daughter will go to the regional meeting. ▪ She wants to see her, she says, "ahora que nos veamos nos demos muchos buenos deseos y que el tiempo que nos queda aqui sea agradable" ▪ She talks about her difficulties with transport, worries about selling the car at the end of the exchange. ▪ She says "we will be able to talk at the regional meeting".

		<p>just because he is lonely. The 10 churches in the town do not satisfy the [social] needs of the town proves it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continues with social commentary attributes it to the entire country: ▪ Many adolescent pregnancies ▪ <i>Jovenes sin motivacion o metas</i>, students take drugs any opportunity they get, gave example of students on a trip to Europe ▪ <i>La esclavitud se le cambia el nombre por empleo</i> ▪ Expenses are more that earnings ▪ Has had trouble sleeping, at least once a week takes a sleeping pill he brought from MX ▪ Gets up at 5:45, 7 am at school, returns at 4, eats and prepares class for the next day ▪ <i>Se siente vigilado por la directora</i> – principal wants them totally quiet add last period passed by, found them making too much noise, yelled at them, “<i>shut up your mouth [sic]</i>” ▪ Saturday and Sundays he goes to make copies ▪ Spent 7 hours putting grades on computer ▪ If I taught only Spanish, it would be much easier, my Mexican History class leaves me sleepless. ▪ A teacher told him that someone from another school [Opportunity House] congratulated him because the students 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She responds to one of her COMEXUS colleagues about teaching to the elementary students. She says they are “bellos” but very demanding and a lot of work. ▪ She tells her they are studying the same topic, classroom objects. She has them point, draw, and cut and paste the objects. She thanks her for praying for ‘us’. ▪ She says, “we are in a country that is not ours, we get support” she tells her she has been very anxious and depressed. ▪ She says she is worried about not doing a good job teaching or that the students do not like what she does. ▪ She says she would like to see one of the orientation course teachers at the regional meeting. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She responds to another colleague saying that she is glad that she feels better. ▪ She tells her she went to the doctor and he gave her anti-depressants. She took the first pill and felt awful. She went to the pharmacy and bought some natural medicine that her principal recommended. She
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		<p>were really learning Spanish [1].</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spanish II students he felt did not have the “bases” and they weren’t interested in learning ▪ <i>El viernes para cerrar el evento hubo juego de football y baile, pero no fui no se quien invento el juego de football americano que no le encuentro ninguna gracia y el otro día salio un muchacho fractura de un hombro en el juego. Al baile no quise ir dije finalmente viernes mi día favorito para descansar y no quiero saber nada de la escuela.</i> 		<p>says she still feels the anxiety and feels like vomiting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She says, “maybe it is the age or too much time away from home”. She does not want to feel like this.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She addresses another message to the same colleague. She says she stayed home last week and her principals called to see how she was. ▪ Responding to me, she says she wants to participate in the activities, but has problems with Internet access.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She tells me she feels very bad, that she went to the doctor and he gave her anti-depressives. ▪ Says, “mis nervios estan de punta” ▪ Directly she asks “Que hago para no sentirme tan angustiada?” She says there is something in her brain that is not right. ▪ She hopes the natural medicine will help her feel better.
2		Requests more information from Victor and his colleague about their mid-meeting		
3	<i>In response to Carlos’ October 1 posting he responds: PUES QUE PASO MI ESTIMADO? NO SE ME</i>			

	<p>QUIEBRE! COMO DECIMOS EN OHIO, A RAJARSE A SU PUEBLO! TU NO TE DESANIMES, NADA MAS ES COSA DE PENSAR QUE LAS HAMBURGESAS SABEN A GORDITAS, LOS HOT-DOGS A BARBACOA, LOS MAC DONALDS SON TAQUERIAS, EL FUTBOL AMERICANO SON CHINCHES AL AGUA Y YA ESTA! VES QUE FACIL? A MI TABIEN SE ME SALEN LAS LAGRIMAS PERO DE RISA, NO LE LO TOMES TAN A PECHO, AL FIN QUE PARA MORIR NACIMOS!JA,JA,JA [sic]</p>			
4	<p>October 5</p> <p>Assignment 1 – how the other teachers feel about the COMEXUS exchange. A report from their regional meeting. He reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ European teachers seemed to have more issues including: student discipline, teaching materials and lack of administrative support. ▪ Some people had serious problems on their exchanges, others (including these two teachers) had only good things to say. ▪ They were surprised how much the school board emphasizes passing all of the students. ▪ Some teachers try to do punish kids, but there are a lot of steps to punish a student or for a parent to come in. <i>Some teachers just put up with things they would not put up with at home.</i> ▪ Concluded that they were 			

	<p>overwhelmed by the job here. That having everything in the context different made things even harder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They tried to give advice about classroom management, size, school policies, etc. ▪ He observed that talking about the situation with others in the same situation helped right away. ▪ They did not have as many problems as the other teachers. They felt like the teachers had to spoon feed the students. The students call their guidance counselors, ask their parents to call so you don't call on their kids or drop your class. The students complain if you assign them a task they have to put effort into. Students here have it easy. They do not buy anything. <i>Things are very different from what a teacher does and has in Mexico.</i> ▪ "I know that french and german teachers have not had problems with racism or pregerism because of hteir blue eyes and fair skin, but we tan and dark eyed are a different story. The misconceptions that peole in general have about any mexican who crosses the border are very strong, they think we are all living in ranches were there is no electricity nor services, that we are here because we have do not have a job and can not afford living in a decent home in our country, 			
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	<p>and expect our spanish to be like the spanglish most hispanics speak in the USA, which to me has become an issue because I can hardly unesrtand it. So when you tell them where you come from and your living style and why you are here and what a Fulbright exchange program is, it is difficult for them to believe you. I found this very dissapointing because ven other teachers think that same way and it takes a lot of effort, a lot of working and showing them what you are capable of doing and a good example from yourself to tell them different. This is how we find ourselfs different from other teachers, and what has made a differene in our exchanges and the problems that we have encountered in this country.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The difference is that these two Mexican teachers found people in their COMEXUS home communities that have wanted to be friends with them, that has made the difference. 			
October 6	He reported briefly on the experiences he had at the regional meeting.			
12		Responds to request for telephone conversation via Skype. Sunday in pm is okay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reports on regional meeting, from a Mexican teacher point of view. ▪ Difficulties of first two weeks include learning to grade, plan classes, and about the American teachers. Some are nice and helpful. She would 	

			<p>have liked to learn more about the system before she came here. Would have liked to observe a classroom lesson.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you speak the language you will do fine. Sometimes the kids speak fast. ▪ Help from the teachers makes it easier to understand the system. ▪ The system is different, but the kids are the same. 	
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14			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Says she would like to participate [in Skype] but she only has a computer at school. 	
15			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Says her personal experience has been very good; she has had the privilege of being in a good school where the kids do not cause her problems. Has had only two detentions to date ▪ Reading the emails tells her that some people have had difficult situations, but they happen for a reason. ▪ Her counterpart is not happy at her school; she is having difficulties with the third year [secondary] school children. She felt bad for her, so she has asked Karina to go to the school to talk to the principal. Raquel says she needs the help. Elisa says that it is not too much work ▪ From the regional 	

			<p>meeting, she saw that Alfonsina and a teacher from Senegal have been assigned to difficult situations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comments that the ex-Fulbrighters encourage them to go out and see things, and not try to change things in their schools. Also they encouraged them to be professional, as they have been, reminded them that there is little time left, and to be positive about the exchange. ▪ <i>Les quiere y les extraña</i> 	
16				
October 17	He responds to the researcher's request that they meet on Skype. He says he will download the program.			
23		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reports on meeting—went with school principal. Describes each day – with details of conclusions re: problems and solutions derived from meeting. ▪ Changes to Spanish for "resumen" ▪ <i>En lo que respecta al trabajo en exceso y desgastante estoy de acuerdo, y mis mayores obstáculos a vencer es continuar haciendo mi trabajo bien como hasta ahora o mejor para seguir teniendo el apoyo de mi directora y personal.</i> 		
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October 27	This message is addressed to his colleague that went to the regional meeting with him. He explains he could not go to Chicago because of an unexpected problem.		<p>Response to Activity 3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation in the teaching exchange has been excellent. She has learned a lot that she will share with her colleagues in México. ▪ She is glad to see her daughter's progress with English in this short time. She [Elisa] is not sure she can learn all she needs to in these six months. ▪ She feels bored; she has made friends at church, where people have helped her. ▪ Regarding her teaching skills, she thinks she still has a lot to learn, although she has learned a lot of strategies and ways to create activities for her classes. At the end of the teaching exchange she expects to be a better teacher. ▪ Suggests that teachers that participate in the program bring their families, and that they participate in community and school activities. 	
October 28	He begins by reminding his colleagues that they are more than half way through the program. To the researcher, he says soon they will send the second task.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She talked to another Fulbright recipient about how to use Skype to call. ▪ She is looking for a way to communicate via telephone. 	
November 2	He describes his experiences talking to the Spanish classes about <i>Día de los Muertos</i> . He showed them pictures of a		<p><i>Día de los muertos</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Today is day of the dead. They are doing <i>papel picado, unas</i> 	

	<p>museum in Mexico. The students wrote a "reaction paper" about what they had learned. He said most students thought the custom to be strange [extraño]. The Spanish 5 students make an 'altar'. He said the only thing he missed was his mother's <i>tamales and atole</i>, but that he would have them when he returned to Mexico.</p>		<p><i>calacas, and other activities that surround these days.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tomorrow they will go to the Fine Arts Museum in X (Mexican neighborhood). She mentions Mexican artists that are exhibited there: Siqueiros, Jose Guadalupe Posada, Luis Arenal, Raul Anguiano. For more information she suggests Google.com. ▪ Tells the group that Leopoldo Mendez was her uncle and that he did <i>grabados</i> [prints] about governmental injustice, Nazi-ism, imperialism, fascism, etc. She told her family, students, and friends about her uncle's work being exhibited in the museum. She asked her family to send copies of the originals so she could show them to everyone. ▪ <i>Esta experiencia para mi ha sido muy bueno.</i> ▪ <i>Que tengan un feliz dia de los muertos.</i> ▪ <i>Desde la ciudad de</i> 	
November 4	<p>He talks about the pep rally for the track and field teams and that the next day he would go to an all-state meet where they would compete [and win!]. He says he now has his video and he will record the meet and that he has 1600 photos of his experience.</p>			

November 7	He reports on the Spanish Club meeting, where they showed three foreign films. One of the films was "Motorcycle Diaries", the story of Che Guevara.			
November 16	He thanks one of his colleagues for a congratulatory note.			
November 16	He is talking about his final project for the exchange. He is preparing a PowerPoint presentation. He says, " <i>de todo Mexico que me llena de orgullo de hablar de mi pais y despertar interes en los chavos de esta zona</i> ". His follow-up activity is a Jeopardy game.			
November 18	He congratulates his colleagues that were on the radio. He notes there is a large Hispanic community in that area.			
November 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Answers the assignment around technology use in the classroom. He does it with one of his colleagues, they discuss their answers. They observe: ▪ Both have used technology successfully in the teaching exchange. ▪ Both have online support from their textbooks, one of them has been more able to use it because of small class size and strict control of curriculum and activities. ▪ He has worked more with PowerPoint. ▪ They have had problems with; log on issues, power failure, and wrongly installed software. ▪ Technology use here is easier than in Mexico. 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used examples of authentic use of material, i.e. "leer el Universal sobre el grito en la ciudad de México" 			
December 3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No se despiden por favor Says we need to keep up communication on Yahoo! Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She wishes her colleagues who are about to return to Mexico the best for the holidays. <i>Que tengan salud, amor y mucho dinero para disfrutar con sus familias.</i> Says she is going to Orlando to Disney....."the Magic World of Disney" Offers her address and phone number in Mexico. <i>Fue un placer conocerlos y deseo que dios les guarde en su camino.</i> 	
4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response to Carlos; that she does not like good-byes. Reminds him that soon they will change cities, even for a vacation. Says they will stay in touch. Says that yesterday she went to see some friends play music, she videotaped them. 	
December 5	He tells us he posted some pictures; he has taken 1800 pictures.			
December 12			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To me: she tried to email me at my yahoo account [it is closed]. Asks how I am in Tampa, and says she would like to talk to Alfonsina on Sunday. 	

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She bought her computer and will buy the microphone so we can talk. 	
December 23	He wishes Merry Christmas to his COMEXUS colleagues, wherever they may be. God bless.			
December 31	Happy New Year – <i>alegria, salud y paz y que todos sus propositos se les hagan realidad</i>			
3		Reports from Mexico, talks about how he feels/felt when he arrived		
4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group message: Best wishes for 2006 ▪ Hopes they can stay in contact to maintain the community [<i>consolidar este grupo de profesores</i>] and share their experiences. ▪ She tells about her family problems, one brother is ill and another has personal problems. She wishes that the time passes quickly, but <i>todo proceso tiene su tiempo</i>. ▪ Her vacation to Orlando was good. ▪ Comments on the re-adaptation process, wishes everyone luck with this. Asks everyone to write with their news. 	
January 5	He hopes the Three Kings bring us <i>salud, felicidad, amor (y si se puede, un laptop) en 2006. Felicidades.</i>			
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12			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finally at home in her exchange city. She is excited that everyone finished this unforgettable experience [teaching exchange] successfully. ▪ Herminio visited her with his wife. ▪ Wants to keep in touch with everyone, mentions Pepe and Herminio by name. They are planning a meeting in Mexico City in April. Don't forget about the [Yahoo!] group, keep writing. 	
13				
January 16	He wishes us happy Martin Luther King day. He is leaving this upcoming Saturday. He says he is sad because he has made friends on the exchange. He is already talking about a meeting in Mexico city during spring break; he asks his colleagues what day and time is good for them. Signs off saying, "I can't wait."		Message to Victor regarding meeting in Mexico City – suggests spring break, instead of summer break.	
January 18	He has a snow day and there isn't school. He says he 'slept in' as they say where he is at. He says he has consulted the school calendar and proposes a day for the meeting in Mexico City.			
January 20			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Todo esta excelente inclusive el tiempo.</i> ▪ Says a meeting on Saturday the 8th is good. Best for 2006. 	
January 23	He says he has begun to write his final COMEXUS report. He			

	describes the format he used. This is in response to another of his colleagues asking how everyone did the report.			
February 6	He responds to one of his colleague's message where she describes the negative attitudes of her co-workers when she returned to her Mexican school. He tells her that she feels bad because she is young, but later she will understand what the system is about. He tells her to move on, and not let the negativity around her affect her.			
February 8	This is a message to me, that his return has been smooth; he posted his final report.			

About the Author

Ruth Ban holds a B. A. degree in Sociology from Western Illinois University and an M. A. in Education in TESOL from University of London.

Ruth began her professional journey into language learning when she moved to Mexico two decades ago. In Mexico, she taught EFL at elementary, secondary and university levels.

In the course of her Ph.D. studies, Ruth has developed and enriched her interest in qualitative research into phenomenological lived experiences of identity. While in the Ph.D. program Ruth was a teaching assistant in College of Education where she taught ESOL and Foreign Language methods, practicum and internship courses and in the College of Arts and Sciences where she taught Spanish.

She has participated in academic conferences such as MEXTESOL, TESOL, AERA and AAAL. Her publications include two book chapters on the application of technology to foreign language teaching and one article in Florida Foreign Language Journal.