



Rehearsing Change in Ecuador

North to South student mobility and manifestations of decolonial education

Presentation at CRIE Conference - Internationalizing Higher Education: Past Practices and Future Possibilities

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Two key reflections to share based on my research:

- ❖ (1) How we imagine the learning community and the 'international' within a 'Study Abroad' context.
- ❖ (2) The potential for relationships of solidarity across borders through the exploration of shared experiences of coloniality.



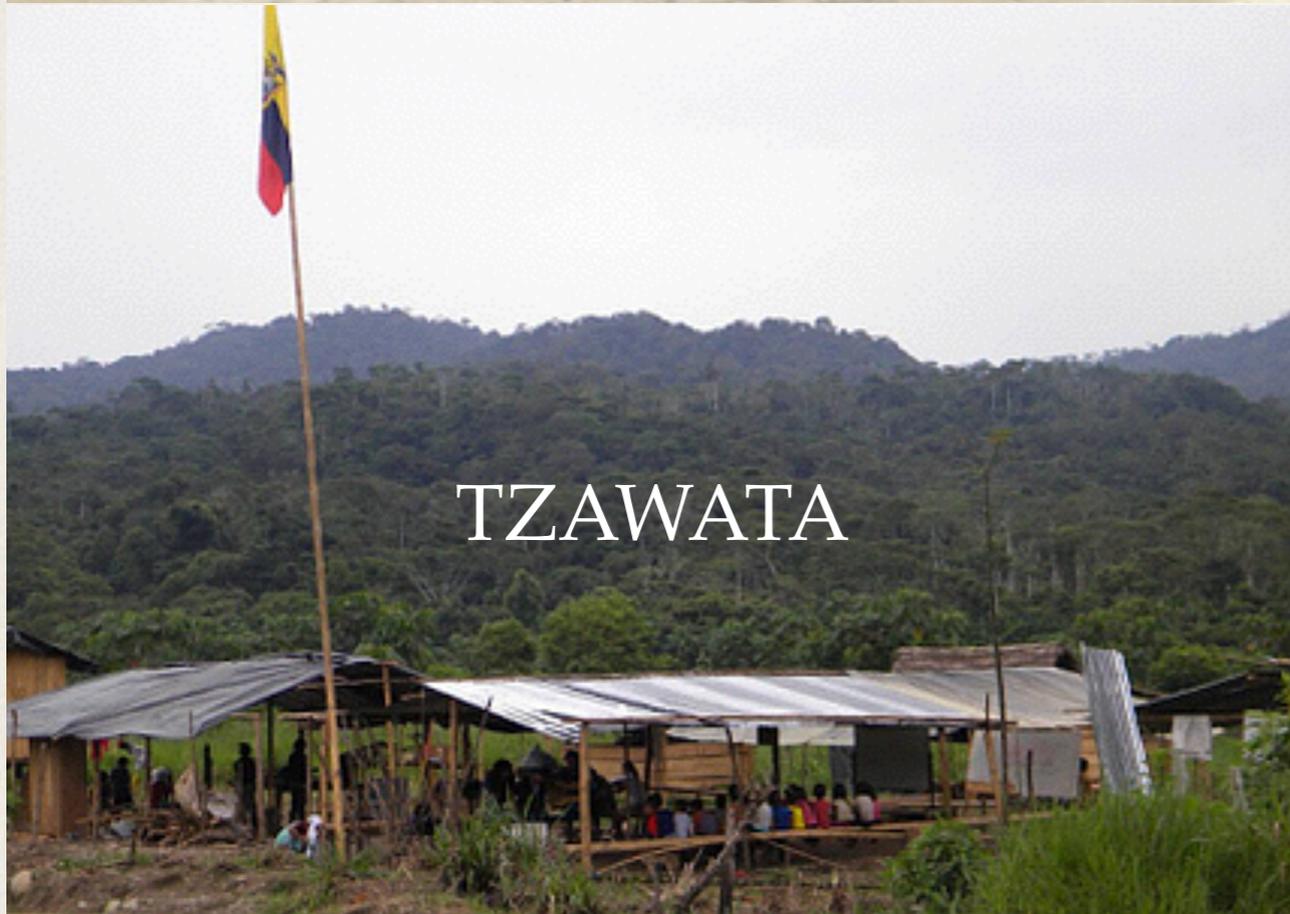
Model: Fair-Trade Study Abroad

- ❖ Rehearsing Change Study Abroad program developed by the **Pachaysana Institute** in Ecuador.
- ❖ Tuition costs of each fee-paying North American student covers the participation costs of at least 1 local participant (*in practice all courses are formed by a majority of local learners - Spanish language requirement*).
- ❖ Full Semester program taught entirely in partner communities (not in traditional university classroom setting).
- ❖ 3 local partner communities - **Nina Shunku** (Artist Collective & Community Centre in Quito, Andean region), **Marsical Sucre** (rural colono/migrant community in Amazon), **Tzawata** (Kichwa Indigenous rural community in Amazon).





MARISCAL SUCRE



TZAWATA



Courses/Curriculum

- ❖ **Arts-based methodologies, embodied learning and critical pedagogy** utilized throughout the program. Incorporation/centrality of **indigenous knowledges**, both local (*e.g. Llaktayuk workshop*) and more broadly.
- ❖ Group projects, individual reflections, and the overall curriculum **support students in the sharing of their stories and reflections of the world through various means of expression**: rapping about racism, exploring human greed through puppetry, narrating a creation story through dance, submitting a drawing as a reaction to a reading, improvising and role playing about gender, to name a few examples.
- ❖ 4 core courses:

Storytelling, Language and movement

Theatre for Social Action and Innovation

Identity and Place

Design and Evaluation of Sustainable Community Projects



Dance, Improv, Spoken Word,
Image Theatre
- Final project presentation



Theoretical Framework: Decolonial Education

- ❖ modernity / coloniality / decoloniality
- ❖ unlearning Euro-centric and Western epistemologies and ontologies - centring / recognizing those that have been devalued / marginalized
- ❖ 'Ecology of Knowledges' (Santos)
- ❖ Critical, ethical, decolonial pedagogies
- ❖ Praxis - place / space + who participates
- ❖ The context of 'North' to 'South' learning communities is unique and complex, often implying **cross-border** (social, political, etc) / **cross-cultural** / **inter-epistemic movement and engagement** as elements that are both explicitly and implicitly present. How these elements are both recognized and engaged with can limit or deepen the decolonial potential of 'North' to 'South' learning (**recognizing that these terms are highly problematic in themselves*).

Methodology & Research Project

- ❖ Research for Masters thesis (completed April 2015)
- ❖ Participant observation + 16 semi-structured interviews with practitioners (creators of the program and facilitators of courses) and learners (U.S. study abroad students and local participants).
- ❖ I spent 3 months with Rehearsing Change, participating in the courses, and observing and reflecting about what was unfolding during the program's first pilot semester.



(1) How we imagine the learning community and the 'international' within a 'Study Abroad' context.

- ❖ **Critiques of North to South mobility** and the underlying power dynamics at play - *colonial 'capital'/privilege required to even consider crossing nation-state borders that are heavily policed and regulated.*
- ❖ **Power relations, privilege, and imperial/colonial histories** are often hidden / disguised under the rhetoric of universality and innocence.
- ❖ How can a Study Abroad program re-imagine the inherent imbalance that exists between students from the Global South and North? (**including the Global South within the North*)

(1) How we imagine the learning community and the 'international' within a 'Study Abroad' context.

- ❖ Fair-Trade Study Abroad model facilitated the collaboration with **frontline communities** in Ecuador who are **directly affected by the continuation of coloniality in their everyday lives** (eg. land rights struggles against Canadian mining companies, cultural revitalization of indigenous knowledges, etc).
- ❖ Priorities of and benefits for ALL learners central (not just U.S. students).
- ❖ Although the local learners were not able to travel to the U.S. in what may be imagined as a 'reciprocal' exchange, they had the **opportunity to visit different cultural and ecological regions within Ecuador** and develop joint projects (in which the 'foreign' / U.S. students contributed) across regional divides (i.e. Andean and Amazonian regions). - *Thinking beyond just nation-state borders when we think 'international'*.



Murals painted by joint project between Nina Shunku in Quito with the community of Tzawata in the Amazon.





Members of Tzawata travelled to Quito to participate in performances that explored their community's struggle for cultural revitalization and place.



(2) The potential for relationships of solidarity across borders through the exploration of shared experiences of coloniality.

- ❖ This particular element was 100% **contingent on the participants** particular to this first pilot semester (*very diverse subjectivities not typically common to study abroad programming*).
- ❖ The learning environment itself considered and encouraged all as **creators and generators of culture and knowledge**, as well as being **deeply connected to one another in a shared space of respect**.
- ❖ This allowed for the **sharing of story** (personal and familial) which often blurred the colonial/imperial imposition of borders and difference (as U.S. American or Ecuador for example), **highlighting shared (hi)stories and experiences based on coloniality**.

(2) The potential for relationships of solidarity across borders through the exploration of shared experiences of coloniality.

Examples of stories shared through various means of expression:

- ❖ Nina Shunku participant who shared ways that he has witnessed **racism** within his own family due to colonial legacies that have devalued indigenous and afro-ecuadorian peoples in Ecuador.
- ❖ U.S. participant who shared a poem she described as “exploring the **forced migration of my ancestors** who were slaves in both the United States and Puerto Rico and remembering the women who fought for me to be alive, both afro-american and afro-borinqueña”.
- ❖ Both a U.S. student and participant from Mariscal Sucre shared personal/familial stories of migration from Latin America to the U.S and the challenges of **undocumented migration and ‘legality’**.



Sharing



Story



Story of Migration



Areas of future research:

- ❖ Connection between land-based knowledges and indigenous world views in a context premised on movement/mobility/migration (such as 'Study Abroad').
- ❖ Connections between 'internationalization' and 'indigenization'.
- ❖ Deeper analysis into the **challenges** involved in the formation of a 'decolonial' learning community with participants from such distinct positionalities/subjectivities.
- ❖ What the explicit targeting of students from the 'Global South' within the 'North' to participate in a program such as Rehearsing Change might look like/mean.
- ❖ How to ensure that participants entering Rehearsing Change are prepared prior to the start of the semester in an attempt to avoid spaces that allow a settling into universality, innocence and complicity within structures of coloniality (and what this means in particular for participants from dominant social groups).



Contact:

emma.wright@ryerson.ca

emmarachelwright@gmail.com

More information:

<http://www.pachaysana.org>

Thank you!

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