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Interrogating Racialized Discourses in Educator-Focused Study Abroad: An Ecological Approach

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Abstract

I use an ecological approach to analyze a presentation in which four teacher candidates used racialized discourses to describe the indigenous students with whom they worked while studying abroad. I discuss this event and a subsequent interview with two faculty members present at the event, triangulating these data points with program artifacts, interviews with school administrators in the host country, and journal and assignment data from one of the candidates who presented at the event. Findings highlight the importance of viewing racialized discourse as contextualized social practices, as candidate perceptions of their indigenous students were reflected in interviews with school directors, promotional materials from the host university, and host family members. I argue that interlocutors in positions of power, such as teacher educators, must combat their own perceptions of racialized discourses as “ingrained” in white individuals from the United States and pay closer attention to the ideologies and practices these individuals might face while in culturally diverse environments.

Abstract in Spanish

Utilizo un enfoque ecológico para analizar una presentación en la que cuatro candidatos a docentes utilizaron discursos racializados para describir a los estudiantes indígenas con quienes trabajaron mientras estudiaban en el extranjero. Hablo de este evento y de una entrevista posterior con dos miembros

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del profesorado presentes en el evento, triangulando estos datos con artefactos del programa, entrevistas con administradores escolares en el país anfitrión y datos de diarios y tareas de uno de los candidatos que se presentaron en el evento. Los hallazgos resaltan la importancia de ver el discurso racializado como prácticas sociales contextualizadas, ya que las percepciones de los candidatos sobre sus estudiantes indígenas se reflejaron en entrevistas con directores de escuelas del país anfitrión, materiales promocionales de la universidad anfitriona y miembros de la familia anfitriona. Sostengo que los interlocutores en posiciones de poder, como los formadores de docentes, deben combatir sus propias percepciones de los discursos racializados como “arraigados” en individuos blancos de los Estados Unidos y prestar más atención a las ideologías y prácticas que estos individuos podrían enfrentar en ambientes culturalmente diversos.

Keywords:

Discourse, ecological framework, Global South, Peru, pre-service teacher education, racialization, study abroad

Introduction

Study abroad for teachers and teacher candidates (TCs) has been positioned as a powerful tool for challenging biases and fostering anti-racist pedagogies. Sharma (2020) noted that “study abroad has become part of ‘best practices’ in teacher education aimed at preparing predominantly white teachers with the knowledge, competencies, and dispositions for teaching students who are culturally and linguistically diverse” (p. 311). Yet this experience can also come with episodes of discomfort, which can lead to regression in intercultural growth (Santoro & Major, 2012). Considering these difficulties, Sharma’s strategic use of quotation marks around “best practices” can accurately be interpreted as challenging the assumption that experiences abroad in and of themselves will automatically result in anti-racist teachers. These encounters are even more delicate in study abroad experiences involving individuals of the Global North traveling to the Global South, where interactions around race, ethnicity, and power are extremely salient, yet frequently conceptualized differently from similar interactions in the sending countries.

Recent works on teacher-focused study abroad have called attention to conceptual approaches in the field as lacking criticality, particularly regarding the asymmetrical relations and perceptions of power among sending and host countries (Sharma, 2020; Major, 2020). Moreover, methodological approaches to

study abroad have relied heavily on self-reported data (Hauerwas et al., 2017) and interview approaches that could lead participants to increased stereotypical perspectives of the target culture (Tusting et al., 2002). Furthermore, as Kinginger (2009) noted, much of the extant study abroad literature is written by faculty program directors of these programs and therefore could contain significant bias vis-à-vis their effects. Given these issues, an ecological approach to language and discourse, such as that proposed by Van Lier (1997) and Kramsch (2002, 2008) could enable a study abroad researcher to examine “the totality of the relationships that a learner, as a living organism, entertains with all aspects of his/her environment.” This approach is “a relational ‘way of seeing’ that enables researchers and practitioners to account for phenomena that would otherwise go unnoticed or be unaccounted for” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 22).

Therefore, in this article I take an ecological approach to analyzing a study abroad-related event that occurred during a presentation by four TCs from the United States who studied abroad in Peru. During the presentation, candidates used racialized discourses to describe the indigenous students with whom they worked. I analyze data from this event and a subsequent interview with two faculty members who were present at the event, triangulating these data points with program materials, interviews with school administrators in the host country, and journal and assignment data from one of the TCs who presented at the event. Research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How were racialized discourses used, received, and interpreted by teacher candidates and other interactants in a post-study abroad context?
2. What factors related to the experience itself could have contributed to the use of racialized discourses in this context?

Findings indicate TCs used racialized discourses about their students, while members of the audience, themselves TCs, challenged these discourses, drawing connections between the discourses about the Peruvian students and those they had witnessed in the US towards students of color. Although the interviewed faculty positioned these TCs as having “ingrained” deficit perspectives due to their upbringings, evidence from interview data with school administrators, program materials, and journal data suggest that these discourses may have emerged from the experience abroad itself. In other words, racialized discourses are not fixed within the US white TC (or study abroad

participant) identity, but ebb and flow in a complex, context-dependent web of exposure to interactions at home and abroad.

These findings give rise to actions that teacher educators and other interlocutors in positions of power, such as study abroad administrators, language instructors, and faculty directors, can take to better understand how learners orient to cultural difference during experiences with diverse cultures. In particular, recognition of the researcher's own biases is essential. With this in mind, I highlight my own missteps in my initial analysis of this event and discuss how expanding my analytical reach allowed me to describe with greater clarity the context, experiences, and emotions of the actors involved. Findings also demonstrate how the need to analyze racialized discourse events within the context of racialized practices, rather than at the individual level, highlights the benefits of an ecological approach for interrogating these events.

Literature Review: The Role of Race in Study Abroad

Given that white participants still constitute 68% of all study abroad participants in US higher education (Open Doors, 2022), the critical approach to study abroad urged by Sharma (2020), Kinginger (2009), and others necessarily includes a need for analyzing the role of race in this experience. A growing body of literature examines how minoritized students experience study abroad (e.g., Anya, 2017; Chang, 2017; Hughes & Popoola, 2022; Quan, 2018; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). This research not only emphasizes the lack of representation of students of color, but also offers insights into why minoritized students might either withdraw from or embrace target cultures while abroad. Reasons for this behavior include important disconnects, or what Chang (2017) termed "cultural dissonance," between study abroad participants of color and white participants. For example, Talburt and Stewart's (1999) work on study abroad participants in Spain included an analysis of interactions between Misheila, an African American student, and her white counterparts. The authors noted that the white participants' reactions to Misheila's experience of sexual harassment deracialized this experience and challenged Misheila's interpretation of the event. Similarly, Chang's (2017) analysis of Latina participant "counterstories" (Delgado, 1989) regarding their study abroad experience in Guatemala contained several reports of white counterparts being disrespectful towards their indigenous hosts. These findings document white participants in study

abroad programs who exhibit racialized behaviors and discourses with respect to the host culture during this experience, and how these are readily picked up on and critiqued by their counterparts of color.

Preservice and in-service teachers who identify as white are also a majority in the United States (IES, 2020); thus, research on study abroad programs catering to these groups also rightfully discusses participant negotiations of race and power. These findings note similar racialized discourses to the studies cited previously; for example, Marx and Pray (2011) reported how two of their five white participants in a study abroad program in Mexico for preservice teachers showed a deficit orientation to Mexican culture in their final journal entries, describing the culture as “filthy,” “corrupt” and having obtained “little progress in the last thirty years” (p. 517). The authors stated that these participants “brought their own biases with them to Mexico and [...] failed to deconstruct their own positionalities as privileged White Americans” (p. 518). However, some white participants in Marx and Pray’s study were able to move beyond these biases after their time abroad. Moreover, several other studies reported that study abroad, despite presenting uncomfortable experiences of difference for many white TCs, eventually enabled them to productively question their white privilege and challenge previous deficit-oriented perspectives (e.g., Addleman et al., 2014; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Still other researchers (Pennington, 2020; Sah, 2019) recommend scaffolding tools such as autoethnography to process study abroad experiences and help “focus white teachers on their own racial identity” (Pennington, 2020, p. 291).

This brief review suggests that, although study abroad has the potential to challenge previously held biases and foster anti-racist practices, study abroad participants of color and researchers alike continue to report racialized practices and discourses among white participants. For the purposes of this paper, I explore the notion of these biases and practices being “previously held,” rather than possibly shaped during the study abroad experience itself. Before examining this question, however, I will describe the conceptual frameworks I use to frame this analysis.

Conceptual Frameworks

Racialization and Racialized Discourse

White people raised in Western society *are conditioned into a white supremacist worldview because it is the bedrock of our society and its institutions* (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 129, my emphasis).

The good news is that racist and antiracist are *not fixed identities*. We can be a racist one minute and an antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment, *determines what -- not who -- we are* (Kendi, 2019, p. 10, my emphasis).

These quotes, taken from two popular books on racism in the US, highlight distinct ideas about racialized discourses. While DiAngelo (2018) acknowledged that racist ideologies are societal products, she also asserted that white people are inevitably socialized into these ideologies as a result of being raised white in the Global North. Meanwhile, Kendi (2019), although his work also discussed the societal and institutional origins of racist thought, took a more context-dependent approach to racism, arguing that these ideologies can change.

Kendi's (2019) perspective closely parallels approaches to discourse and racialization taken by discursive psychology (Augoustinos & Every, 2007), linguistic anthropology (Bucholtz, 2010; Chun & Lo, 2016), and applied linguistics (Anya, 2017). These approaches utilize terms such as "racialized" and "racialization" to emphasize the contingent, malleable nature of ideas about race and racial categorization (Chun & Lo, 2016; Anya, 2017; Zavala & Back, 2020). García (2003) explained this terminology noting that, while "race" is something one supposedly has, "racialization is something that is done to a group, by some social agent, at a certain time, for a given period, in and through various processes, and relative to a particular social context" (p. 285). This process can be applied to not only to groups and individuals, but also social structures and a range of cultural phenomena, such as hairstyle, types of dress or ways of speaking (Hochman, 2018). As these ideas are usually expressed through language, Chun and Lo defined linguistic racialization as "the sociocultural processes through which race –as an ideological dimension of human differentiation – comes to be imagined, produced and reified through language practices" (p. 220).

Similarly, recent scholarship on raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017) conceives of language racialization as an encounter between a listening subject (Inoue, 2006) and a speaking subject. Through these encounters, the ideologies of listening subjects (for example, a white person interacting with a Peruvian indigenous person) help to position racialized bodies as having linguistic (and other) deficiencies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). In fact, the link between race and language is so strong that racialization does not only occur when people speak in face-to-face situations, but also when racialized persons are imagined or remembered, such as in Vich and Zavala (2019) and the event discussed in this article.

Because racialized discourse can change over time and from moment to moment, it is often characterized by being indirect; that is, that racial categories are not explicitly referred to when racialized discourse is taking place. For example, and in the specific case of discourses against indigenous Peruvians, Huayhua (2014) observed mestizo bus riders describing their indigenous counterparts as “animals” and “disobedient,” while Vich and Zavala’s (2019) interviews with middle-class Peruvians from Lima highlighted descriptions of indigenous Peruvians as uneducated and unhygienic. Findings such as these suggest a more context-dependent approach to racialization, one that, in the words of Zavala and Back (2020), “views race and racism as social practices in which language takes on a central role” (p. 537). This approach removes the focus from the racist individual and places it on “discursive and rhetorical resources available in any society where inequality is reproduced” (p. 537). In other words, “researchers should cease analyzing racist ideology as a fixed system of ideas, instead observing how these ideas function in a particular context” (p. 528). This ties in with an ecological approach to language and discourse, which I outline in the following section.

Ecological Approaches to Language and Discourse

An ecological approach to language learning, as described by Van Lier (1997), embodies the conception of “the learning environment as a complex adaptive system, of the mind as the totality of relationships between a developing person and the surrounding world, and of learning as the result of meaningful activity in an accessible environment” (p. 783). This conceptual framework calls for an analysis of linguistic data in relation to “the complex totality of the speakers’ situational positioning and the sociocultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the speech communities” (Kramsch &

Steffenson, 2008, p. 18). Thus, discourse is seen as “the enactment, re-enactment, or even stylized enactment of past language practices, the replay of cultural memory, and the rehearsal of potential identities” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 400).

Ecological approaches have been proposed and utilized in the areas of second language acquisition and socialization (Kramsch, 2008; Kramsch & Steffenson, 2008), in which the focus is on “complex relationships that exist between learners and their environments, as opposed to the isolated, internal workings of individuals’ minds or the simple cause-effect relationships of external forces” (Bird et al., 2021, p. 20). Four of Kramsch’s (2008) major aspects of an ecological theory of language acquisition and use include relativity, or how learners use language to present themselves to others; timescales, or how verbal exchanges represent “multiple and contradictory temporalities;” emergentism, or how a learner connects new knowledge to their prior experiences; and fractals, or how speech acts index larger social relationships and contexts (p. 392). In sum, an ecological framework views language not only as negotiation of meaning or information transmission, “but as the enactment, re-enactment, or even stylized enactment of past language practices, the replay of cultural memory, and the rehearsal of potential identities” (p. 400). Such an approach requires not only a close examination of these past practices and identities, but also an analysis of how these identities are performed in certain contexts.

In the context of study abroad, Badwan and Simpson (2019) used an ecological orientation to examine the role of mobility in the value of linguistic repertoires, while Kashiwa and Benson (2018) explored the integrated relationship of in-class and out-of-class learning among study abroad participants. Bird et al.’s (2021) comprehensive review of study abroad research from an ecological perspective described the role of these frameworks in analyzing the interactions of abroad and prior environments, perceived affordances in the study abroad environment, and the negotiation of difference, among other themes. Yet despite the frameworks’ usage in these contexts, and despite the existence of similar ecological frameworks to explore non discourse-oriented race and racialization topics (e.g., Friend et al., 2011; Ung et al., 2012), ecological linguistic frameworks have not been used in analyzing racialized discourse *per se*. Indeed, Bird et al. (2021) note that research exploring “value-based views” and the “moral ecology of study abroad” are high priorities for the field. Bird et al. state that “[f]uture research could deeply explore the tensions and balances that sojourners maintain while abroad, providing insights relating

to the negotiation of difference and sojourner identity” (p. 29). It is this area, particularly concerning the use and origin of racialized discourses, that I explore in this article.

Methods

Participants

The main participants in this study were TCs in their fourth and fifth years of a certification program in the Northeast region of the United States. The four fifth-year candidates had just returned from a semester-long study abroad program in Peru. These candidates were studying to become certified in elementary education; part of their program included an internship at Peruvian primary schools. Nearly 20 fourth-year TCs from various content areas constituted the audience for a presentation given by the fifth-year candidates. For reasons of confidentiality, only one of the fifth-year TCs is named (though pseudonymously as all places and persons in this article) as she is the protagonist of the case story I discuss further on.

Other participants include two professors and colleagues (Rebecca and Jeff), who were also present at the event, and Luzmila and Janeth, who were former and current school administrators, respectively, for one of the schools in Peru where the fifth-year TCs worked during their study abroad experience. The indigenous Peruvian students, although their voices are not heard in this study, are also participants as the racialized subjects in this event. Finally, I include myself as a participant, as I was the director for the study abroad program in Peru as well as an observer of the event. Figure (1) shows a map in which the overlapping circles indicate relationships or interactions among participants.

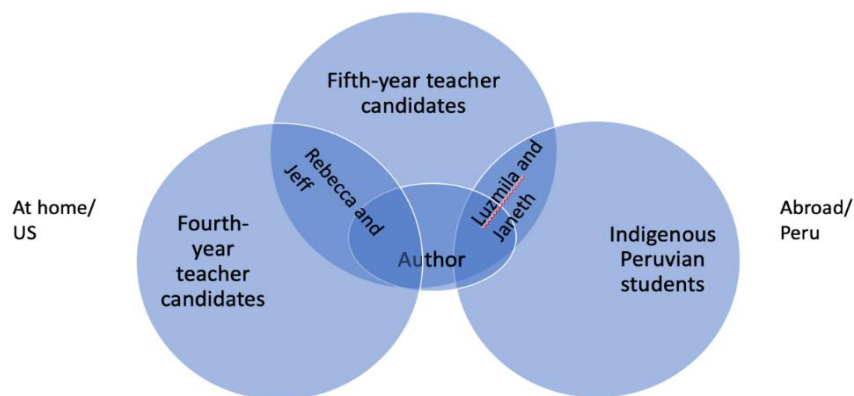


FIGURE (1): MAP OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PARTICIPANTS (OVERLAP INDICATES RELATIONSHIP)

Data Collection and Analysis

I take an ecological approach to the focal event through a critical thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017) of several data points, each of which highlight an ideology, context, or individual with whom study abroad participants might have come into contact. These data points include a narrative of the event based on my field notes; the transcription of an interview with Rebecca and Jeff and transcriptions of interviews with Luzmila and Janeth (see Appendix for the interview prompts); and a promotional brochure from the host institution. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each and were audio recorded, then transcribed. I also employed a case story approach to provide an in-depth exploration of one of the TCs' (Evelyn)'s experiences. I construct Evelyn's case story using a combination of email correspondence, reports from her internship supervisors, three journal entries written at three different points during her stay, and a blog assignment completed during the first few weeks of her time abroad. Table (1) details the data and dates collected, illustrating how an ecological approach takes into account various data points before and well after the event under study.

Data	Date Collected
Email correspondence with Evelyn	May 2018
Promotional brochure from host institution	August 2018
Journal and assignment data from Evelyn	September-November, 2018
Email correspondence from host institution regarding Evelyn	October & November, 2018
Field notes from event	December 2018
Interview with Rebecca and Jeff	January 2018
Interviews with Luzmila and Janeth	January 2021
WhatsApp correspondence with Evelyn	April 2022

TABLE (1): DATA COLLECTED

Field notes and interview transcriptions were analyzed for common and divergent themes, following Terry et al.'s (2017) call to "interrogate dominant patterns of meaning and theoretically understand language as creating, rather than reflecting, reality" (p. 20). This corresponds with the theories of race and racialized discourse described previously, and also parallels the context-sensitive nature of an ecological approach to data analysis. Maps emerging from this coding were written into analytic memos, and manuscript drafts were sent to faculty members and the focal TC for member checking. A semiotic analysis of the promotional brochure was undertaken based on Caton and Santos' (2009) analysis of Semester at Sea promotional materials. This semiotic analysis treated individual pictures in the brochure "as a totality" but also connected their

content to “parallel and contrasting structures in other pictures, and relating both to the written narratives that accompany them” (p. 197). Within this analysis I also include my reflections and errors as a researcher and teacher educator.

The case story method “draws on individual stories of practice by blending aspects of the classic case study method with the tradition, artistry, and imagination of storytelling” (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2006, p. 107). Within the context of teacher education, Aveling (2006) described the power of story in its ability to be used “as a springboard to explore a myriad of issues related to identity and belonging, as well as curricular matters and teaching in ways that are explicitly antiracist” (pp. 266–67). Thus, the combination of the case story with a thematic analysis of other data points offers a more complete contextual description of the event, which I outline in the following section.

Findings and Discussion

The Event

The event took place approximately four days after the fifth-year TCs had returned from their semester in Peru. Three of the four candidates who participated in this event had worked at “Yuyay Wasi,” a rural elementary school located 35 minutes away from where candidates lived while abroad. Yuyay Wasi’s students were indigenous Quechua speakers learning Spanish as a second language while also maintaining their home language through the school’s bilingual program. Student families worked primarily in agriculture and generated a modest income, and students were given a free breakfast daily at the school. Yuyay Wasi also had issues of declining enrollment, as parents with any extra income tended to send their children to school in the nearby city, where facilities were considerably more modern.

Upon the fifth-year candidates’ return to the US, Rebecca and Jeff invited them to speak to the fourth-year TCs; I was also invited to attend. A brief summary and reflection upon what took place follows, based on my field notes:

I arrived late to their presentation and stood in the back of the classroom, eager to hear what I assumed would be positive comments on this transformative experience. Instead, the fifth-year candidates used their time to describe how “badly behaved” and “wild” the children were at the local elementary school. One candidate went so far as to comment disparagingly on her students’

poor hygiene, miming visible disgust and discomfort with the children's frequent requests for hugs. Although the fifth-year candidates had mentioned their struggles with classroom management during their time abroad, I had no idea of the extent to which they had perceived their indigenous students as unruly and unhygienic, and even less that they were comfortable enough to speak publicly about them using these terms. As the presentation descended into an awkward silence, four or five of the fourth-year candidates spoke up against how the presenters had portrayed their Peruvian students, noting that they had heard similar complaints about students in the urban schools where they taught. Students of color were especially vocal in contesting the broad brush of disobedience and dirt with which the fifth-year candidates, who were all white, had painted the indigenous children. "These are beautiful children of color," said one student. However, the fifth-year candidates held firm to their evaluations, implying that the fourth-year candidates could not possibly know the situation, as they had never been to Peru. I finally managed to utter some heartfelt thank you's to the fourth-year candidates for their comments and bravery, noting that study abroad experiences such as this required substantial processing and reflection. Upon leaving the classroom, I reeled from a sense of failure as a professor, advisor, and facilitator in preparing my candidates to navigate the cultural differences they had clearly been unprepared to confront. How had I managed to ignore the warning signs over the course of the semester? More importantly, what could I do to ensure that these candidates reflected critically upon their portrayal of these students?

The fifth-year candidates' use of terms such as "wild" and "dirty" to describe their Peruvian indigenous students illustrated how racialized discourses do not necessarily draw upon explicit racial categories, similar to findings by Huayhua (2014), Marx and Pray (2011), and Vich and Zavala (2019). Meanwhile, the fourth-year candidates in the audience told important counterstories (Delgado, 1989), drawing connections between the fifth-years' statements and racialized language against minoritized students in the United States. Thus, while the fifth-year TCs used their own experiences as justification for these discourses, the fourth-year TCs built upon a different series of experiences with race to point out the harm of this discourse.

While the extant literature demonstrated similar discourses about Peruvian indigenous people among Peruvians, it was unclear how the returnees

might have been exposed to these discourses. I present some possibilities below, after an analysis of an interview with Rebecca and Jeff, which revealed their perceptions of which personal experiences may have contributed to these discourses.

Institutional Contexts in the US and Peru

Shortly after the event, I scheduled an interview with Rebecca and Jeff to hear their perspectives on what happened, as well as recommendations for how to continue working with the fifth-year TCs for the rest of the semester. Both professors agreed with my initial impressions that racialized discourses had taken place; while the candidate who had referred to the Peruvian students as “dirty” was the most egregious example, the other candidates’ use of terminology such as “wild” had reinforced the nature of this discourse. The professors also brought up something I had not noticed, most likely because I had arrived late to the event; the TCs’ discussion of the area’s crime and poverty as a point of pride, and a discourse of “transforming” an impoverished school that further highlighted a deficit perspective with respect to their indigenous students and the community. Jeff spoke at length about how, given the predominant racial and socioeconomic makeup of TCs at our institution (White, middle class, and suburban), there was a certain inevitability to this deficit perspective and the racialized discourse that indexed it:

What happened is not unheard of, and probably is *more common than not*, these deficit perspectives *build over years and years, it’s ingrained* [...] when they come back and hold these perspectives, which is *almost inevitable*, at least for some of them, then we work afterward [...] I think it’s the *default position* for a lot of kids (interview, 02/19/2019, my emphasis).

Jeff’s use of words such as “common,” “ingrained,” and “default” spoke to his perception of the inevitability of a deficit perspective by most of the program’s TCs, similar to the inevitable racism of white people in the US espoused by DiAngelo (2018). Rebecca agreed with Jeff’s comments on the inevitability of this initial mindset, adding that “A lot of them are *from the suburbs, they don’t have the lived experience*” to move on from this type of perspective (interview, 02/19/2019, my emphasis). Thus, candidate lived experiences and identity categories prior to study abroad were positioned as essential in contributing to these discourses. These observations also closely

paralleled Marx and Pray's (2011) observation that their participants had "brought" their biases with them to their study abroad experience.

Perhaps due to the heat of the moment of mutual commiseration, I took the perspectives of my colleagues as objective truths and began to construct my own analytical narrative around the inevitability of racialized discourses among white TCs. However, a review of a conference presentation of this study took my thinking in a new direction. The reviewer expressed concern that I had taken the evaluations of my colleagues at face value, noting that Rebecca and Jeff may have failed to acknowledge my fifth-year candidates' own lived experiences. The reviewer concluded that they wished I had consulted with others outside of my own university setting. Taking this critique to heart, I began to look beyond the event for further context and, perhaps, discover some other possible sources of racialized discourses beyond the white, middle-class identity of the TCs.

I first re-examined interview data that I had gathered for a different study about education in Peru during the COVID-19 pandemic, which included interviews with Luzmila and Janeth, past and present directors of Yuyay Wasi. I noted that the directors had used similarly racialized discourses about students and community members in their interviews. Observations by these individuals pointed to a perceived lack of motivation or even neglect on the part of indigenous students' parents; for example, Luzmila stated, "*No se le va a motivar a sus padres*" [you are not going to motivate the parents] because "*siempre la prioridad para ellos es su chacra*" [their priority is always their farm]¹. Similarly, Janeth opined that the abandonment of school during the pandemic was part of an ongoing issue; in her words: "*falta bastante la concientización de los papás* [there is a lack of consciousness-raising of the parents]" and "*no apoyan, los dejan así, y con la cuarentena peor* [they don't support [their children], they just leave them alone like that, and it's worse with the quarantine]". Luzmila also noted a lack of what she perceived as "respect" on the part of the community members because they did not greet each other when passing in the street ("*las personas no saben saludar* [people don't know how to say hello]"). Taken together, these statements from middle-class school directors were characteristic of a perception of rural, indigenous parents as disengaged, neglectful, and rude, mirroring the ambiguous, yet still racialized,

¹ All translations from Spanish are my own.

perception of indigenous Peruvians seen in studies by Huayhua (2014), Vich and Zavala (2019), and others.

I then examined the promotional materials that the local university sent to my fifth-year candidates in preparation for their time in Peru. These materials included a brochure that not only described the course offerings for international students, but also service-learning opportunities at Yuyay Wasi. Similar to findings by Caton and Santos (2009), the photos in this brochure essentialized the host culture as “fundamentally different” from the program participants through features such as ethnically distinct clothing, a lack of use of electronic technology, and racial distinctiveness between hosts and program participants. One page of the catalog stood out to me as a particularly salient example of perceptions towards the Yuyay Wasi community. As seen in Figure (2), the school and community were portrayed as in need of “help,” due to a host of societal problems shown in the infographics at the bottom of the page, including extreme poverty, illiteracy, and, curiously, “self-employment.”



FIGURE (2): A PAGE FROM THE COURSE CATALOG FROM THE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM’S HOST INSTITUTION.

The issues outlined in Figure (2) are indeed serious problems, making it disingenuous to suggest that a group of international volunteers coming for a few weeks could resolve them. Yet this is precisely the implication in Figure (2); “they” (the community) needs “our help” (from TCs, other volunteers, and the

partner university) due to their lack of money, iron, birth control, and social safety nets. The indigenous students' traditional hats, combined with the traditional clothing of the individuals in the background and the ethnic features different from the white individual on the seesaw, are further evidence of essentialization of the target culture and of a "pure, authentic, and unchanged" host site "eagerly waiting to welcome Western visitors" (Caton & Santos, 2009, p. 200).

These data points represent fractals of a larger context of perceptions towards both white TCs and indigenous Peruvians. While Rebecca and Jeff perceived racialized discourses as "inevitable" components of white TCs' lived experiences, discourses from Luzmila, Janeth, and promotional material from the host institution provided additional contexts where candidates might have taken up these discourses. Within these Peruvian discourses, indigenous community members were repeatedly racialized and portrayed as in need of Westernized "help," whether through raising the consciousness of parents about the importance of schooling or volunteer attempts to address deficits in other areas. Taken together, these fractals contribute to a larger context in which candidates may have felt justified in using racialized discourses.

As an additional layer of data and analysis, I offer the case story of Evelyn, one of the TCs who participated in the event. Through an exploration of Evelyn's story, I outline the complexities of her own experience while abroad and how those complexities might have contributed to the discourse used in the event.

Evelyn's Case Story

Evelyn was an elementary TC who was originally planning to study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa. However, due to a prolonged drought in that region of the country, she and some of her peers switched to the program in Peru. Unlike her peers, Evelyn had a relatively high proficiency in Spanish; she discussed her background in the language in an email to me:

I have a strong background in Spanish; I took it for 9 years up to my senior year in high school when I took AP Spanish Language & Culture. I unfortunately have not been able to use my Spanish in the past few years and have lost some of the proficiency that I had before (email correspondence, 05/05/2018).

While Evelyn was in Peru, her instructors commented favorably on her proficiency in Spanish, but noted "we believe that she could be more

communicative” (midterm internship evaluation, 10/10/2018). Evelyn’s reduced communicative skills may have been due to her initial difficulties adjusting to life in Peru. Having had no prior study abroad experience, Evelyn’s adjustment challenges included recognizing the new salience of her identity as a white person in the country. In her response to an assignment that asked candidates to discuss which aspects of their identities stood out, she responded:

In Peru I have found that there are many differences between the social groups I identify with and those of the people here and, therefore, some of my identities stand out significantly. One of these is the fact that I am white; I find it interesting that something I literally never think about at home in the US because it is so common is such a defining identity here because it is so outwardly obvious and different from most of the people that live here. Almost anywhere we go, the bus, stores, restaurants, etc., people tend to stare, ask “where are you from?”, or automatically begin speaking to me in English because just by looking at me it is clear I am not from the area (blog assignment, 09/01/2018).

Evelyn also felt that she was “targeted more by vendors because I have the appearance of a tourist,” contrasting this with her perception that in the United States “people can look so different and no one really gives it a second thought” (blog assignment, 09/01/2018). In her first journal entry, she also described finding some cultural differences between her and her host family “frustrating” and noted that she was “still adjusting” (Journal 1, 09/15/2018).

Evelyn’s perceptions of herself as a white person were reflections on her initial experiences in Peru; with time, she may have noticed that Peruvians and people of color were also heavily targeted by vendors, and perhaps reflected that a person of color in the United States would undoubtedly disagree with the observation that their visible differences do not evoke “second thoughts.” Still, Evelyn noted that, while frustrating, the cultural differences “can be really significant to your learning.” This statement pointed to how experiences such as these can create “multiple and contradictory temporalities” that lead to “communicative tensions” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 392).

In subsequent journal entries Evelyn spoke about the role of her host mother in helping her to process her experiences at Yuyay Wasi. Evelyn described her host mother as providing both important contextual information and emotional support for what was often a difficult experience:

After the first few weeks, our host mom became a different resource because she would provide knowledge about Quechua [...] It has also been reassuring to talk to her at times because *she can empathize with the difficulties we are experiencing, and it can help us make sense of the frustration and concerns we have*. For example, she has talked about the effects of socioeconomic status on education and *how poverty is deeply affecting the lives of the students at the school*. She has also talked about *the differences in teachers and parent involvement in students' education and how that can have a profound impact on learning* (Journal 2, 10/15/2018, my emphasis)

While Evelyn's description of her host mother's comments refers to the general topics, rather than how they were discussed, the host mother's empathy for Evelyn's difficult experiences at Yuyay Wasi, coupled with the discussions of poverty and parental involvement, suggest a deficit framing of this experience, as well as a reinforcement of the difficulties, rather than benefits, of working at the school; that is, that parental and teacher involvement is limited (particularly compared to Evelyn's host sister's school) and that poverty has negatively affected the students. Of course, these perceptions have elements of truth, particularly given the difficult work situation of rural, indigenous parents, low pay and support for Peruvian teachers, and limited resources of the school. They are also refractions of the discourses espoused by Luzmila, Janeth, and partner university, contributing to a larger context of racialization of Yuyay Wasi's community members.

Evelyn's capstone project in Peru could be considered another experience contributing to this context. The project, which she conducted with three of her peers, involved the implementation of a classroom management system (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS) that, in her internship evaluators' words, "aims to improve the behavior of the children and teachers of the [Yuyay Wasi] school" (final internship evaluation, 11/30/2018). Although PBIS is an established behavior management system in US schools (and is enthusiastically promoted by some faculty in Evelyn's teacher education program), it has been heavily critiqued for its assumptions of having "race-neutral principles" (Gadd & Butler, 2019) and as a system that perpetuates "a culture of White behavior" (Fraczek, 2010; see also Beyl, 2020 and Wilson, 2015 for additional critiques). The decision to implement PBIS at Yuyay Wasi (a decision that was fully supported by the school directors and teachers) may have continued to build on the context of deficit-based, racialized discourses about the students already constructed by school directors, the university partner, and, possibly, Evelyn's host mother. It may have also intensified the

feelings of difficulty experienced by Evelyn and her peers as they attempted to implement this system in a school so culturally different from their school placements in the US.

In her final journal entry Evelyn commented on her growth in orientation to cultural difference, as well as the limitations of her experiences in Peru. She noted that she still has “a fairly limited view of the education system in Peru” and that “there are still some aspects of culture that I haven’t accepted or adapted to and I don’t think I ever will be able to,” such as different notions of time. However, she concluded:

Culturally, I have learned how to better understand and adapt to/accept certain beliefs or practices different than my own, and this is an important skill when exposed to any sort of cultural diversity, either in the US or when traveling to other countries. I can also see myself using this as an educator to be more responsive to students of different cultural backgrounds than my own and developing strategies and relevant curricular content to engage these students and more effectively teach them (Journal 3, 11/15/2018).

At the end of her stay, her instructors also commented positively on Evelyn’s growth, noting that despite her initial “communication problems” at Yuyay Wasi, “she was able to overcome this problem” (final internship evaluation, 11/30/2018). Thus, Evelyn’s final reflections mirrored the improvements witnessed by her internship supervisors in Peru, and present important “counter-fractals” to the web of experiences, emotional responses, and discourses Evelyn and the other candidates encountered during their time abroad.

Evelyn’s case story narrates a possible evolution towards more cultural responsiveness. At the same time, her journal entries demonstrate how she processed these experiences with the help of her host mother, who served as a source of emotional support, but who, as a middle-class Peruvian woman, may represent an additional refraction of the deficit-based discourses surrounding the students and community of Yuyay Wasi. Moreover, Evelyn and her peers’ capstone project focusing on “improving” the behavior of Yuyay Wasi’s students added an additional layer to these discourses, possibly leading to the descriptions of these students as “wild” in the focal event.

This case story, taken together with the findings in the previous section, highlight the complexities present in study abroad programs for preservice teachers that, contrary to the best intentions of program directors, might wind up reinforcing or even adding to deficit-oriented beliefs about individuals in the host country, which could in turn contribute to racialized discourses about these experiences. In the following section I outline some implications for teacher educators and researchers to more effectively assess the evolution of their TCs towards anti-racist teacher practices. I also discuss how teacher educators might more effectively scaffold experiences such as study abroad in ways that critically examine the various discourses to which candidates might be exposed and enable candidates to critically challenge these discourses in ways that are productive to their own growth as teachers.

Implications

Studying race talk without ethnography runs the risk of treating the phenomenon with preconceived theories, pointing to speakers as “racists” without making sense of their viewpoints and overlooking the ways in which race talk is tied to the local context in which it is produced (Zavala & Back, 2020, p. 538).

The above quote points to the implications of studying racialized discourse at the individual level, as well as the need to examine this type of discourse from an ecological perspective, taking all elements and contexts of a particular experience into account. For the event itself, I return to Kramsch’s (2008) aspect of relativity; as she states, “More often than not, [people] say what they think others expect them to say, or what the situation requires [...] or they present themselves as they would like to be seen by others (p. 391).” Analyzing racialized discourse not as the ingrained ideologies of one or several individuals, but rather as a series of connections among several events, emotions, and experiences—and offering as complete an account as possible of these elements—can offer a deeper picture of where these discourses come from and how they might be addressed in a particular setting.

This leads to the pedagogical implications of this research. Teacher educators are, on the whole, committed to fighting racist and discriminatory practices in school settings. This includes educating our TCs to advocate for their students of color with asset-based perspectives and celebrate cultural differences. However, repeated exposure to deficit-oriented viewpoints from our white TCs might lead us to accept these perspectives as the inevitable

product of being white in the United States. An ecological approach can translate to teacher education and study abroad pedagogy by allowing us to view our participants as “whole people with whole lives” (Coleman, 2013). Teaching our candidates to acknowledge the complexity among those different from themselves requires that we also acknowledge, and encourage candidates to explore, their own complexity.

One of the ways to explore these complexities is through autoethnographic techniques suggested by Pennington (2020) and Sah (2019). These techniques can lead to what Ladson-Billings (2017) refers to as “cultural excavation,” in which TCs reflect upon the diverse cultural experiences in their own lives as a way to move beyond assumptions of white culture as default and invisible. We must also foster conversations about the types of racialized discourses that candidates might experience while studying abroad or in other culturally diverse environments, and we must interrogate those discourses and their significance for the actors involved. For example, a study abroad curriculum could incorporate a predeparture unit on how race is discussed in the host country, as well as a critical examination of predeparture and promotional materials distributed by the host institution. These could be compared to racialized discourses in the home country, with an emphasis on how racialized discourses are often not explicit, but instead couched in topics such as education, hygiene, and behavior. This subject could be revisited while students are in country to include real-life experiences that students may have during their time abroad, and discussed again once candidates return home.

Indeed, a strong reentry component of any study abroad or culturally diverse field experience is essential so that candidates might fully reflect upon all aspects of this experience and the applications to their lives at home. It also allows teacher educators to help process difficult experiences that candidates may not have felt safe speaking about while abroad. I would also like to highlight that the TCs in the event of this article were asked to present about their experiences only four days after their return from Peru; taking up Kramsch’s (2008) notion of relativity again, the racialized discourses they used may have been a way for them to process a difficult experience in what they assumed was a safe environment. When challenged by their audience, the candidates presented themselves “as they would like to be seen by others;” that is, as experts drawing upon their personal experiences of the country’s culture and norms (Tusting et al., 2002), rather than as young people recently returned from an emotionally and physically taxing experience abroad.

Thus, through cultural excavation and critical examination of discourses in predeparture, in-country, and reentry contexts, teacher educators can construct their own ecological approach to study abroad and other field experiences, foregrounding an exploration of TCs' whole lives in order to both scaffold experiences with cultural difference and understand where, when, and why racialized discourses might surface during these experiences

Conclusion and Epilogue

In this article I have discussed how racialized discourses among white teacher candidates studying abroad, rather than being “previously held” discourses “brought with” the candidates to their host countries, as suggested by previous literature, could instead be products of what these candidates experience in country. Through an ecological analysis of an event that took place immediately upon return from study abroad, I showed the complex array of racialized ideologies and discourses that were available to TCs during their time abroad, which may have been taken up by candidates. I also demonstrated the advantages of an ecological approach to exploring racialized discourses, as it complements conceptual frameworks that view racialized discourses as social practices, rather than fixed individual categories. The context of a TC—focused study abroad program has allowed me to highlight ecological approaches in study abroad research, as well as its benefits for teacher educators as they work to understand the contexts surrounding deficit perspectives among potential TCs and foster increased orientation to and celebration of cultural difference.

I would like to conclude with a brief epilogue about Evelyn. She currently teaches fourth grade at an elementary school in her home state, where she has 14 multilingual learners. She has also returned to Peru and is married to a Peruvian she met during her time studying abroad. In a recent message to me, Evelyn wrote, “I really do think back to our experience in [Yuyay Wasi] all the time [...] there are really so many similarities in how [my multilingual learners] learn as well as the challenges” (WhatsApp message, April 26, 2022). Stories such as this further point to the importance of ecological, longitudinal approaches to research in both study abroad and racialized discourses, as we cannot fully understand the impact of both without examining these phenomena from as many angles as possible.

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Appendix: Interview Prompts

Interview prompts for Rebecca and Jeff

- How did you feel about the presentation and what was going on?
- How did you feel about the dialogue that happened afterwards among all of the candidates?
- What recommendations do you have for working with these candidates and future candidates?
- Follow up questions

Interview prompts for Luzmila and Janeth

- Demographic information on teachers
 - What grade do you teach?
 - Experience in teaching [years]
- How do you see the development of the children's Spanish in your classes, and why do you think there are issues with it?
- How do you teach Spanish? Teaching philosophy ...
- What difficulties have you found teaching during the pandemic?
- Follow up questions