

# From Tourist Teachers to Place Rooted Educators

## Road Blocks on the Journey

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Tourist Teacher

Place Rooted Teacher Education

*This self-study, rooted in New Mexican conceptions of place, explores a continuum from what we describe as “tourist teachers” to “place-rooted teachers.” We define tourist teachers as those who accumulate and appropriate teaching experiences without regard for communities and focus on their own professional and personal goals. This is often done with good intentions, but their short tenure in communities with great needs exacerbates long standing issues. We explore the distinctions between “tourist teachers” and teachers who are authentically rooted to communities and places. We draw on our experiences, as tourist teachers ourselves, and as teacher educators also committed to place rooted practices. We identify two themes regarding the importance of attending to place in more nuanced ways: 1) the transactional nature of tourist teaching; and 2) examples of conditional engagement. Finally, we discuss findings from the analysis of our own teacher education practices, and explore ways to resist the tourist trap.*

### Context of the Study

The self-study described in this chapter details our ongoing efforts to teach in “place-rooted” ways (Haniford & Sánchez, 2022) in an institution that pays lip service to place but is driven by neoliberal aims of efficiency and standardization. We work from New Mexican conceptions of place in order to better understand a continuum from what we describe as “tourist teachers” to “place-rooted teachers.” Multiple events have happened at our institution over the past year, underscoring the ways in which a tourist approach is privileged in higher education. By privileging work that is “novel, efficient, and safe” (Dialogue Transcript, September, 26th, 2022), institutions of higher education make it challenging for teachers and teacher educators to engage in authentic, place-rooted experiences. In this inquiry, we aim to uncover the ways in which our current programs limit our abilities to engage in place rooted work. In a recent journal, Laura articulated the shift in focus in the following way, “In this chapter, we are highlighting in more detail the ways the institution makes our choices for us—or maybe it’s more accurate to say the institution circumscribes our choices” (September 27th, 2022). In understanding the constraints we attempt to then begin to collectively imagine alternatives and possibilities to avoid the tourist trap.

Drawing on the theoretical frames of *querencia* (Arellano, 2007; Romero, 2020), and a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenwald, 2003), we engaged in a co/auto-ethnography (Taylor & Coia, 2006, 2020) to articulate the particular challenges that divert our attention from rootedness in place and position us and those we work with in a tourist trap.

Author one is a white woman, originally from the midwestern United States. She has made New Mexico her home for over 15 years. The second author is a Chicana social studies educator from New Mexico. Both authors are faculty within a teacher education department at a university in New Mexico.

### **Literature**

We define tourist teachers as those who accumulate and appropriate teaching experiences without regard for local communities, instead focusing on their own professional and personal goals and needs (Haniford & Sánchez, 2022). Often, the teacher is positioned as an adventurer, seeking to fulfill other aspirations of their own in these unique contexts.

Current schooling practices, with a focus on standardization and reliance on market discourses, remove learners from place. Gruenwald (2003) describes that “In place of actual experience with the phenomenal world, educators are handed, and largely accept, the mandates of a standardized, ‘placeless’ curriculum and settle for the abstractions and simulations of classroom learning” (p. 8). A critical pedagogy of place requires that educators work toward reinhabitation and decolonization, “for the purpose of linking school and place-based experience to the larger landscape of cultural and ecological politics (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). Other scholars urge critical place-based educators to move beyond the local, in order to recognize and remedy systemic issues that distance people from place and make it difficult to create meaningful change. “While each act of reinhabitation contributes to a more just and sustainable world, systemic issues require sweeping policy changes that are beyond the scope of localized approaches to change” (Thacker & Bodle, 2022, p. 423).

We also integrate New Mexican critical place-based orientations of homeland and *querencia*, that seek to reassert local wisdom in colonized spaces. New Mexico, with its own legacy of layered colonization and isolation, has a storied relationship with land, culture, and experience. *Querencia* refers to a deep love of place, “which anchors us to the land, that which makes us unique people” (Arellano, 2007, p. 50). *Querencia*, as a place orientation, highlights connections between language, culture, and history (Anaya, 2020). *Querencia* further calls on individuals to commit to place, conceptualized as a homeland, by stewarding resources—both natural and cultural—and resisting colonization. An ethics of homeland must “move toward ‘reclamation’ of those other sources of values and ideals delegitimated by the hegemonic colonialist ideologies that have developed by exclusion of indigenous knowledge and lifeways” (Garcia, 1998, p. 93). In preserving a homeland, García cautions against tourist tendencies, “Unintentionally, tourists and environmentalist newcomers often intrude upon people whose relationships with places may be invisible and inaudible to them at first, so delicately have they been inscribed- within the flesh and not merely upon the body (1998, p. 108).

### **Methods**

Our coming to know in this work is grounded in relationship—our relationship to one another, our relationship to knowing, and our relationship to place. We utilized co/autoethnography (Taylor & Coia, 2006, 2020) to work together to build our understanding of the impact of place on our teaching and on our relationships with the communities within which we work. As the work unfolded, we also began to articulate initiatives coming from our institution that worked against our efforts.

We began by revisiting our manuscript (2022), looking for the key ideas we established regarding tourist teachers and teacher educators. We created a shared online journal where we wrote to prompts we had defined through dialogue and where we individually recorded experiences that felt either place rooted or tourist in nature.

Over the course of this project, we met via online video conferencing eight times to further unpack these ideas and to ground our ideas in concrete examples of practice. During these meetings, we raised questions about ideas in our shared journals and pushed one another to clearly articulate how what we were experiencing was or was not reflective of our growing understanding of place-rootedness. Utilizing dialogue as “a way for developing understanding or insight that can guide or determine practice” (Guilfoyle et al., 2004, p. 1112), we sought not to uncover “truth,” but to explore meaning.

Through our analysis, we identified two themes regarding the importance of attending to place in more nuanced ways: 1) the transactional nature of tourist teaching; and, 2) examples of conditional engagement. Over the course of the year we have been working on data collection and analysis for this chapter, our institution has repeatedly made choices that constrain our ability to emphasize place rooted approaches to teaching and teacher education. We documented and analyzed each of these instances, looking carefully at the institutional systems, structures, and priorities that position us as tourists in our own communities and that model for our teacher education students the efficiency and ease of adopting tourist teaching identities.

### Outcomes

Below we contrast two teacher education pathways that have been developed at our institution. In our descriptions, we highlight the ways in which a tourist approach is privileged by the institution. We end with a discussion of our current thinking regarding ways to resist the tourist trap.

#### A Tale of Two Pathways

Before describing these approaches, we must clarify that we are not critiquing the models of teacher education per se. We are simply highlighting how higher education, when given choices, chooses again and again to support and foreground approaches that are efficient, standardized, and that provide the capital that counts to the institution. We both responded to a prompt where we addressed our understanding of the history of these two pathways and include our journal entries describing these two initiatives in their entirety.

#### *Community Centered Teacher Education*

As teacher educators, both authors have worked to bolster our teacher education programs to address the needs of local communities and integrate the knowledge of stakeholders into the programs. Rebecca worked to establish a pathway for elementary education licensure students focusing on funds of knowledge and addressing the needs of a distinct local neighborhood. In a long journal entry, she detailed features of the program.

*Approximately five years ago, a group of faculty from three departments and two colleges united to create a teacher education initiative to better serve students seeking bilingual and TESOL endorsements, two high need teaching credentials in our state. One of the colleagues worked in the Art Education program and because as a group we all had connections to the arts either personally, professionally or both, we decided to focus on utilizing art integration as a way to support language learning. Several of us had a longstanding relationship with a local school so after much planning and major departmental resistance, we received permission to place a cohort of teacher candidates at the school. (Journal from Rebecca).*

Faculty revamped methods courses, shifted the focus of the student teaching seminar to include arts integration and language learning strategies, and over time, developed a robust curriculum to do site-based, community centered teacher education. As part of the initiative, we have hosted school-wide arts events where our teacher candidates and their classroom mentor teachers work to develop thematic units around themes and issues that are central to the school. For example, one year the theme was migration because many children in the school were experiencing or had experienced some sort of migration.

This initiative has always faced resistance in our college and has not received much institutional support, despite receiving external foundation funding and substantive private gift donations. With the change in leadership at all levels (program, department, college), the initiative became the target of further cuts even though there was outside funding to work with the existing students in the project to at least get them finished with their program. College-level administration suggested that there were no measurable outcomes despite the fact that numerous reports had been provided. Ultimately, the administration decided to cancel the initiative. This initiative, working at two high-needs local schools had operated as a generative space to consider and apply place centered understandings of both curriculum and community engagement. Canceling the initiative without a meaningful explanation, positioned the faculty members participating in the initiative as tourists. This despite the fact that the vision of the initiative was to work in meaningful and connected ways with communities in specific parts of town (July 20, 2022).

In a later dialogue, Laura and Rebecca discussed how to avoid being tourists when there is not institutional support for place rooted work. Rebecca concluded, "Yeah. And if things we try are canceled, then we start another thing where we try not to be a tourist." (Dialogue Transcript, September 26, 2022). In processing the forced closure of this particular initiative, we came to realize through dialogue the ways in which we ourselves are forced into tourist positions due to lack of institutional support.

### ***Standardized Teacher Education***

Our university has been involved in developing teacher residency programs for the past five years. According to our college website, a teacher residency is "a paid year-long rigorous guided apprenticeship with an experienced co-teacher. Residencies occur in partner Districts or Charter Schools that intend to employ the resident for three years post-residency." Different from the traditional model of teacher preparation classes linked to practica in schools, culminating with full-time student teaching, teacher residents are in schools full-time from the very beginning. School districts request the particular residents they want in any given year (i.e., elementary, secondary math, etc.).

*Several years ago a faculty member at our institution received a grant to implement a residency model teacher preparation program. The residency program was created as a separate track for graduate students to receive their teaching license and a Master's degree as quickly as possible. This residency model was a joint project between a few faculty members and the local school district. Changes were made to the program course sequence (i.e., moving some courses to the summer) without the consultation of most program faculty, but that made the program doable for students (Journal from Laura).*

While program faculty were not involved in the design of this pathway, the grant money and external accolades resulted in a high level of support for this approach by our College leadership (under two different Deans). During the most recent legislative session, our state budgeted money to support the expansion of residency models throughout the state's teacher education programs. The budget was approved in February of 2022, providing funds for our college to add residencies in four new school districts and two local charter schools. We do not know how these districts and schools were chosen. We also do not know who was involved in designing the programs for the new partners. But these residency programs had to be planned and ready to go before the start of the fall semester in order for students to be placed and paid.

Unlike the original residency program, these new partnerships were simply laid over our existing programs with no changes to course schedules or expectations. One of the districts chosen is in a nearby community which is known for its commitment to scripted curricula and strict fidelity to scope and sequence. The disconnect between the vision of teaching and learning in this district and in our individual courses has highlighted for us how tourist approaches can be appealing in the short term. Place rooted epistemologies take time and position teachers as capable professionals and curriculum builders (Gruenwald, 2003).

While to a certain extent, this disconnect has always been true; the cognitive dissonance currently experienced by our students is greater than we have ever seen before. On the first day of classes this fall, when I described the assignments for my class (all of which emphasize the particular, the local, and the micro), students told me they have no control over what they teach. While they would like to teach in culturally responsive ways, they have no authority to alter the curriculum in any way. The two main assignments (a student study and a community cultural wealth mapping) each require students to "be able to learn about their students' linguistic, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, academic backgrounds, and use this information in planning appropriate curriculum and instruction" (Student Study learning objective). The message our students receive from the current residency approach is that all that matters in learning to teach is more time spent in schools.

Currently, our classes are about half residency students and half "traditional" students. The residency students are less likely to have completed course readings and assignments and are the most overwhelmed by course expectations. In our conversation yesterday, we said that initiatives that are touristy are 1. Novel, 2. Efficient, and 3. Safe. But institutionally these touristy initiatives get laid on what already exists, like barnacles on a sunken ship. So this year all

the money the legislature gave to higher ed to implement residencies has resulted in a bunch of fast (efficient), novel, and in a lot of ways safe teacher preparation. When we place students in a district that doesn't believe teachers can and should build their own curriculum, when they are in a district that doesn't ask them to be change agents in any way, our students feel safer (September 27th, 2022).

### Unpacking the Transactional Nature

In an early dialogue, we discussed the transactional nature of being a tourist teacher (October 11, 2021). The work with communities is about garnering prestige, credibility, or even bragging rights. A tourist teacher does offer time, talent, and knowledge, but the exchange is ultimately self-serving and about the experiences of the teacher. This echoes Garcia's (1998) reflection:

*Truly, knowledge is power, but there are different kinds of knowledge and power. There is the cyclical knowledge generated and sustained within communities and ecosystems, but there is also the narcissistic knowledge generated by isolated individuals who use it to manipulate others instead of enhancing their mutual survival (p. 106).*

In the standardized approach described above, both the faculty member put in charge of the residencies and College leadership have received numerous public accolades while we are left struggling to make an impact on teacher candidate learning. These new residencies do fill particular needs of the state. There are teacher shortages and the university can say that it worked to address this need. But how we engage communities matters. As Laura wrote in her journal "It is a veneer of relationships and community. People are able to say, 'We've engaged the stakeholders'" (June 29, 2022). But engaging stakeholders is different from building community and a shared purpose.

### Unpacking the Conditional Engagement

Often tourist teachers enter teaching situations with conditions: time, quantity of interactions, research goals, directions of the learning, clear definitions of the type of expertise to share, etc. This characteristic of tourist teachers has been difficult to tease out, and in early reflections, it emerged when we described how tourist teachers want to impart very particular types of knowledge or share certain expertise, regardless of community need. These conditions create a set of externally imposed parameters that result in few opportunities for sustained and reciprocal engagement.

The community centered teacher education initiative described above attempted to attend to the linguistic and cultural history of the children attending the school. In his work on place and homeland, Garcia describes, "Knowledge nourishes the good life when its complexity and richness are derived from its connections to networks of living communities (1998, p. 106). The community centered teacher education initiative was a working example of place rooted teaching, conceptualized and implemented as a joint project with the intentional inclusion and integration of the local knowledge of the community.

The residency model is currently funded by the state. While school districts have had an opportunity to express their needs regarding the teacher shortage, the conditions for the program have been predetermined based on the knowledge generated from outside of the communities being served. In a dialogue, Laura and Rebecca explored how conditional engagement was operating with the residencies in the following dialogue:

*Rebecca: But I guess when I think of the part, the layer that is the conditional engagement, I guess I could say like our colleague who conceptualized the residency, like it's like, this blanket residency approach.*

*Laura: And we go there to these districts and we say this is what we're doing.*

*Rebecca: This is not the best way to prepare teachers. Are you in? Are you out? And all of the conditions are set.*

*Laura: But then the colleague doing the programs does get to say I went and filled a need in New Mexico (Dialogue Transcript, September 26, 2022).*

While we currently have a Democratic governor, if we elect a Republican governor in the future, the residency money is likely to go away. There is no sustainability if the state government changes its priorities. A lack of sustainability inevitably becomes a tourist approach and damages our relationships with local communities when we engage with them only when we have state funding.

### **Avoiding the Tourist Teacher Trap**

As we have articulated elsewhere (Haniford & Sánchez, 2022), one way of breaking the tourist teacher cycle is to establish roots in a place. Learning the history of a place, adopting a sense of care about the environment and others, and listening to the stories of the people who call the place home can root us (Anaya, 2020; Arellano, 2012; Romero, 2020). The challenge we have identified through this chapter is that the institutions within which we work make it very difficult to choose place-rooted approaches. We are an underfunded institution of higher education in a low-income state. The needs are many and great and the allure of quick fixes is powerful.

In our previous manuscript (2022), we developed a descriptive framework contrasting place-rooted and tourist approaches. Through the work described here, we have found our framework helpful in explaining both macro and micro level issues within teacher preparation. The realization we have come to through the work described in this chapter is that our spheres of influence grow smaller and smaller with every passing year. One journal written by Rebecca articulated a list of things that get in the way of our efforts to create place rooted teacher preparation. The first item on the list reads “Leaders and Colleagues” and contains the following descriptors:

- “Who support regimentation
- Who are comfortable with the neoliberal agenda
- Who seek out efficiencies and quantity measures over quality experiences
- Who are afraid of or threatened by work that addresses diversity” (June 27th, 2022).

By contrasting the two licensure pathways above, we have highlighted the choices made that align with regimentation, standardization (and the neoliberal agenda), efficiency, and quantity over embedded, localized experiences. The community centered approach described above focused on a neighborhood in our city with a high population of students from low-income, immigrant backgrounds. The teacher education provided through this pathway helped prepare teachers not only capable of but committed to addressing issues of language inequity. As such, the privileging of the standardized pathway combined with the abrupt dismantling of the community centered pathway calls into question whether our institution is authentically concerned with social justice in our schools and communities. What seems to matter is that we appear to care, not that we actually care.

Our choices have become circumscribed by the initiatives backed by the administration in our college. We are currently left with the micro-level choices available to us behind the doors of our classrooms. But even those feel like they are growing smaller and harder to sustain. As Laura said in a meeting via Zoom, “The macro, institutional level is making it really difficult for us to even make the kinds of choices that we want and need to make at the micro level in order to avoid being a tourist” (Dialogue Transcript, September 26, 2022).

Over the course of this self-study, one significant finding is the need to balance our small acts of place-rooted approaches amidst a dominating culture and practice of tourist initiatives. In reviewing our reflective writing and transcripts of conversations from the last year, when we attempt to articulate what we are doing to work with and in community, we find ourselves returning to obstacles outside of our control. We are still learning how to best navigate this terrain, and welcome ideas from our colleagues in teacher education. In an early reflection, Laura commented, “How do you be a small light in a dimming environment?” (April 14th, 2021) This reflection exemplifies the tension between a desire to make a difference for our students and the communities they serve within the context of teacher education, even if it is not systemic.

To return to Thacker & Border (2022), ultimately our call is for leadership in colleges, universities, and local and regional governments to support teacher education efforts that reinhabit the particular places they are situated. We must

commit to long-term efforts to build true alliances across boundaries to provide the educational opportunities our children deserve.

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