

STATEMENT OF PROPOSED STUDY OR RESEARCH

Elizabeth Cobacho, Brazil, Teaching English As A Foreign Language|5120
English Teaching Assistantship

If awarded a Fulbright Teaching Award, I will teach English in Brazil and use community theater as a mechanism to inspire students. I want to teach English in Brazil because it would unite my passions for the arts, education, and social justice and prepare me to enact change in our society's underprivileged communities. At the bi-national center (BNC), I imagine working with a diverse group of students ranging in age and backgrounds and learning about each other's lives and cultures. I would incorporate the various important lessons I have learned as a theater artist in high school and as a veteran activist-educator in my community and college. When I am not actively engaging students in the classroom, I plan to devote a significant amount of time to volunteering at a community center that uses the arts as a vehicle to reach marginalized youth. I envision facilitating theater workshops focused on students' lived experiences; we will then produce and perform theatrical pieces that explore issues relevant to the surrounding community. These experiences would further shape my intellectual framework as an activist-educator and inspire me to apply what I learn in Brazil to my academic and professional career when I return home.

Since high school, community-based theater has been a crucial part of my life. As a young Latina growing up in working-class Chicago, the theater provided the only space where I and several of my fellow youth artists were able to challenge ourselves intellectually. During my sophomore year in college, I used the skills I had honed as a high-school student to enhance my work as an ESL instructor for Spanish-speaking, immigrant day-laborers. In these classes, I also employed a pedagogical method espoused by the Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire, which centers learning on the lives of students and provides them the analytical tools with which to empower themselves. For example, we used role-plays, such as one which involved a *patrón* (boss) and *jornalero* (day laborer) who needed to bargain with each other using the English phrases we created. As a class we would then critically analyze what was going on between the two men and what they could say in English to get a better wage. I also facilitated theater workshops where we discussed (in Spanish) issues that affected immigrants. Afterwards, the day-laborers would improvise scenes for their fellow workers as they waited for an employer. In my experiences as an ESL instructor and as a teaching assistant for elementary school kids, I learned that including various learning mediums, such as film, acting, and visual arts, into the classroom enabled students to become active learners at their skill level and in a manner appropriate to their learning style. I would structure lessons so that Brazilian students engage in similar activities, thereby easing their comprehension of English, further developing critical minds, and establishing a sense of community.

I would love to share the various cultures and experiences I have encountered in my working-class, immigrant neighborhood of Albany Park in Chicago with students from Latin America. I plan to make presentations in English about my multicultural neighborhood to demonstrate the vast diversity of the US. I would also encourage Brazilian students to present on their communities or *bairros* so that I can learn about

their backgrounds and interests and structure class lessons and activities accordingly. In the English classroom, I would employ some of the activities I organized as a teaching high-school students in a *Social Justice Studies* class. If students show interest in American music, we can listen to intellectual hip-hop and analyze its lyrics in relation to students' lives. Also, I would ask students to bring in their favorite Brazilian music, so that we could work together in translating it into English and grasp some of the similarities between English and Portuguese language structure and grammar. These kinds of activities would not only strengthen our understanding and use of English and Portuguese, but it will also foster an exchange of our languages and cultures.

In my study abroad experiences in Brazil during my junior year, I witnessed how marginalized communities used the arts in a Freireian approach to educate and empower. In a visit to a camp of the *Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement), I was awed by the theatrical portrayal of their struggle to attain a sustainable living against acts of violence and death. I conversed with *favela*-dwelling young artists in the dance company EDISCA about how their experiences with dance-theater afforded them the analytical tools and motivation to lead dance classes in their impoverished community. For my independent field study with an Afro-Bahian folkloric dance troupe, I interviewed young adult dancers and learned about traditional dances venerating their history and religious practices of Candomblé. Through this work they expressed how they learned about their social and cultural oppression which moved them to educate their communities. The subjects I have explored during college are clearly relevant and useful in contemporary Brazilian society. Education and community-building by means of engaging in the arts would be central in my role as an English-language teaching assistant. In today's highly-globalized society, not only would I be providing an invaluable tool—English—but I would also help build skills necessary for both student and teacher to be responsible global citizens in continual cultural exchange.

I look forward to having the opportunity to continue integrating community-based theatre and education in a Brazilian context. As an English instructor and cultural ambassador, I will facilitate theater workshops for children and/or adolescents at a local community center or at the BNC. I will help children, youth, and community members create and produce plays that deal with issues that affect their everyday lives. In exchange, I will teach my students about the diversity of cultures in the United States. I plan to contribute to a process of community-building that will take place locally and across borders by creating an online blog space and media project that will unite students at the BNC and teen artists from my high-school theater group in Albany Park. On the blog, I envision these two groups sharing their favorite movies, music, and art, learning English and Portuguese colloquialisms, and discussing important issues affecting their respective communities and countries, thereby creating a transnational community of young urban students and artists. Lastly, I plan to keep a journal of my experiences to use in my life's work as an educator and advocate for social justice.

My experiences as a teaching assistant in Brazil, instructing English classes and engaging students in thinking critically and building community amongst themselves and others, will afford me the skills and vision to continue that work as a future teacher in an

underprivileged Chicago neighborhood, as a community-charter school organizer in Albany Park, and as an education policy-maker in Washington.