

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



*Social Work in a
Global Setting*

Volume 13, Number 4

Fall 2007

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NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Special Issue on Social Work in a Global Setting

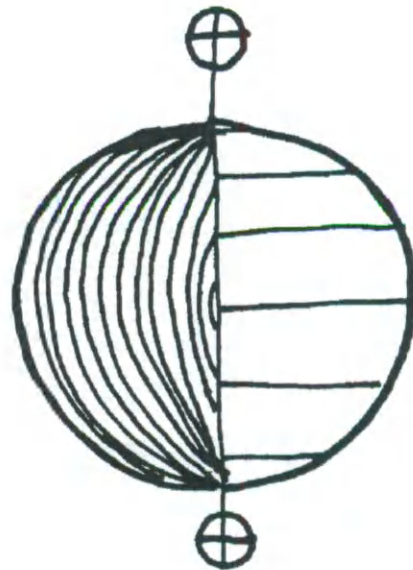
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

The global economy is increasingly controversial among progressives who wonder if the reduction of trade barriers benefits only privileged corporate interests across the globe and diminishes the well being of ordinary people. The increased inequality that many argue is a consequence of globalization has led some to paint the result as a global class war. This issue of *Reflections* reminds us that before the global economy there was a global community. Here, we celebrate the work of social workers and other helping professionals in developed and developing countries across the globe. The narratives remind us that the alternative to the global economy as presently conceived is not isolation, but real connections among people who seek transformation and social justice. In the midst of the unregulated global market, social workers are creating innovative links among people and programs that transcend the politics of greed and exploitation. In spite of the new American imperialism masquerading as globalization, the struggle for social justice in developing countries has not dimmed, but has been enriched by the work of those who, like the authors in this issue of *Reflections*, understand the commonality of human experience across the world. I am grateful to Karen Smith Rotabi and Denise Gammonley for conceiving this issue and for bringing us the voices of those engaged in social work in global settings.



INTRODUCTION FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

Karen Smith Rotabi, Ph.D. and Denise Gammonley, Ph.D.

International study abroad is now a common activity in many schools of social work. However, little has been published about the transformative nature of working in global settings. In this special issue of *Reflections*, we set forth to explore how study abroad is carried out in a culturally competent manner and what faculty, our students, and host country facilitators have to say about study abroad as a transformative experience. We focus on post-conflict and post-colonial countries with a hope that we will encourage knowledge building to take study abroad far beyond typical travel destinations into these regions of the world that challenge and expand existing paradigms of social development and social work education.

This issue takes us on a journey around the world. We hear from host country facilitators in South Africa, Romania, Belize, and Guatemala as they share their insight about the interactive nature of a study abroad experience. We hear from Rich Furman as he shares a creative approach to documenting a Latin American journey with poetry. From South Africa we hear from a student, Emily Sanford, who shares her insight about being paralyzed by language and yet transcending this barrier towards a meaningful experience. Another student, Kim Bauer, pulls back the curtain on military social work in Germany during a time of war. Her account of a military field practicum is an important look at the many forms of global practice and reminds all of us of the importance of training social workers to assist our veterans. Then, on another continent, Khadija Khaja recounts embarking on her doctoral research, which required relocating from Canada to the U.S. to study female circumcision of African-Muslim women. Her own journey into the world of Somalian women living in the West clearly was a global study abroad experience that transcended many boundaries.

We hear from several different authors about Ghana, a study abroad location that is very popular for schools of social work. Randi Buerlein's approach to study abroad, focusing heavily on service learning in Ghana, reminds us that we can do far more than just observe and that social work students are highly motivated to roll up their sleeves and work. Also, she poses the question, "What happens after service is over?" This is an important question for any study-abroad effort.

Rose Penzerro shares her experience taking Mexican-American students deep into Mexico, including learning activities with a *curandero* (healer), a midwife, and a women's cooperative. Her discussion of student journals gives us new insight into how our students digest and reflect on differences and similarities.

Intae Yoon, Jim Ward, and Sunjung Lee present their insight into hosting a short-term visiting program of Korean social workers. They walk us through a model of engagement, assessment, and planning. Strategies for success are discussed, as well as issues of empowerment. Their experience in hosting others is important as U.S. schools of social work are increasingly involved in such endeavors.

We close with Jane Birkbeck and Shawna Bava's discussion of e-supervision of a field practicum in India. We chose this article as the last in the series because it leaves us with ideas for strengthening study-abroad approaches with technology. This particular article impresses upon us the importance of clear and consistent communication between faculty and student during extended or long-term study abroad experiences like field practicum.

This particular manuscript touches upon a subject that has not yet been fully addressed by our professional educators. That is, how are we really supervising students in their trans-

global experiences—especially field placements—that meet curriculum requirements? We fear that there is a real gap here, and there may actually be a failing in this particular area when one overlays the general field practice expectations in an international context—settings that are often unpredictable and far less structured than a U.S.-based agency experience. However, Birkbeck and Bava demonstrate how promising email is as a tool, and that leads us to other ideas like discussion forums, instant messaging, and video technology.

Social work is truly a global profession and this special issue has been an adventure that illustrates the many different activities taking place around the world. From these articles we can begin to glean some commonalities, such as the challenges and even barriers of language. Also, the importance of reflection through journaling and poetry is clearly a theme. Additionally, intercultural competence—whether in a U.S. military setting in Germany, engaging in a U.S.-based research project with Somalian women, or hearing from and communicating with a Belizean poet—is critical not only to success, but in building bridges of mutual understanding.

As social work educators, we have only just begun to build systems of global learning. We must come together to define exactly “What is study abroad?” and “How is it ethically carried out?” The reflections compiled in this volume are a start to answering those questions.



TOWARD RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM HOST COUNTRY FACILITATORS IN SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD

Karen Smith Rotabi, Ph.D., Virginia Commonwealth University, Denise Gammonley, Ph.D., University of Central Florida, and Dorothy N. Gamble, M.S.W., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Efforts to increase cross-cultural learning, while promoting understanding of social and political forces in particular country and regional contexts, has increased opportunities for short-term study abroad. Effective dialogue among faculty, students, and host-country nationals during study abroad is possible through skillful preparation and facilitation to maximize global understanding. Inter-country collaboration requires building relationships to negotiate reasonable expectations. Describing study abroad courses that were conducted in Romania, Guatemala, Belize, and South Africa, we collaborate with our host country facilitators. Their reflections focus on cross-cultural learning, language, and respect for cultural differences and provide important considerations for planning study-abroad courses.

Social work education in all countries is affected by globalization (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Cox & Pawar, 2006; Estes, 2005; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997; Link & Healy, 2005; Nagy & Falk, 2000; Powell & Geoghegan, 2005). Issues of particular concern for social work are cross-border migration and the potential stress and volatility of cross-cultural-values conflict. Efforts to increase the cross-cultural knowledge and skills of social workers, and to help social workers understand the social and political forces in a particular country or region that often contribute to migration, have led to opening the curriculum to include study abroad courses (Boyle, Nackerud & Kilpatrick, 1999; Healy, 1988; Rotabi, Weil, & Gamble, 2004). Askeland and Payne (2001) caution that most cross-national social work activities are focused on cultural differences while neglecting other structural, knowledge, and process factors that must be included in any comprehensive analysis of their value. The educational benefits of short-term study abroad are beginning to be evaluated critically in the social work education literature (Poole & Davis, 2006).

The aim of this narrative is to examine what levels of student and faculty preparation are needed for effective study abroad. We present narrative reflections from in-country

host facilitators who share their perspectives on preparation for respectful engagement in study abroad so that future course planning and evaluation efforts are careful to consider these important considerations.

Opportunities for short-term overseas study experiences are expanding in U.S. schools of social work, especially with recent Council on Social Work Education requirements for curriculum integration of international content (CSWE, 2003). Effective exchange among faculty, students, and host-country nationals require skillful planning and facilitation to maximize cross-national learning and understanding (Gammonley, Rotabi & Gamble, in press; Ramanathan & Link, 1999; Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble, 2006). Productive inter-country collaboration benefits from relationships built upon respecting culture and customs and negotiating mutual expectations. Feedback from host country facilitators results in both concrete recommendations important for ongoing relationship maintenance and future program development.

The three primary authors have more than ten years of experience facilitating short-term summer-school study abroad courses for graduate and undergraduate students and professionals receiving continuing education credit. Short-term study abroad, in this context

tours abroad of less than one month, are distinguished from longer term semester-abroad immersion programs. As is the case for many social work faculty conducting study abroad tours, selection of host countries was influenced by: (a) Personal contacts established through our involvement in international social work activities, and (b) efforts to be responsive to the influx of migrants and refugees in the region served by our campus community. Our study-abroad tours were focused primarily in Mexico, Central America, Romania, and South Africa. We have had the opportunity to build an effective curriculum for experiential learning in an international setting. In addition we have built relationships with social work colleagues and indigenous facilitators in these countries who have helped coordinate logistics, but, more importantly, served as powerful guides for cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

Respectful engagement requires openness to learning local wisdom, appreciating host-country perspectives and balancing the knowledge one brings to the experience with the knowledge one acquires in the field (Healy, 2001, 2003; Razack, 2002). Evaluating field experiences during study abroad relies on traditional course evaluation in addition to dialogue with host-country nationals who can provide important insight. Lessons derived from collaborative experiences in study abroad relate to (a) adequate pre-trip preparation and negotiating expectations, (b) respectful engagement in host-country communities and agencies, (c) hearing the realities of indigenous peoples, and (d) managing language and cultural interpretation.

This paper focuses on how international learning activities were structured and improved through the collaborative reflections with host-country colleagues and indigenous facilitators. Reflective discourse is used to ensure that a holistic view is considered, ensuring that the voices of *all* actors in the study abroad process are heard. Tsang (2007) points out that this reflective dialogue ensures "a broadened view [that] can limit the misuse of professional authority and enable the social worker to give fuller expression to core values such as respect, justice, and equality" (p. 681).

Gray (2005) calls this approach *indigenisation* and defines it as "an effort to bring out multiple voices and ways of knowing situated in particular *socio-historical and cultural locations* so as to establish a solid foundation for meaningful cross-cultural communication in international encounters" (p. 232).

The country experiences we will describe are from Romania, Guatemala, Belize, and South Africa. We asked five host-country collaborators to respond to a variety of themes in order to incorporate their perspectives and their "voices" in this paper. Their insights and realities on the following topics underlie the lessons learned through our international study-abroad partnerships:

- Examples of participants' demonstrating respect for cultural differences.
- Examples of participants' failure to demonstrate respect for cultural differences.
- Kinds of learning they hope participants will take home.
- Techniques for teaching foreigners about their country.
- The role of participant language ability in affecting the learning potential of study abroad groups.
- Positive and negative outcomes for them to be collaborators in teaching/facilitating study abroad groups.



**Short Term Study Abroad as a
Collaborative Experience:
Lessons Learned**

*Adequate Pre-trip Preparation and
Negotiating Expectations*

What should we expect students to bring to a study abroad and what can we expect them to learn from this type of cultural immersion activity? In our experience, students enter study abroad with a broad range of sophistication as international travelers, appreciation for global social issues, and skills for inter-cultural competence. Diversity of experience within the study-abroad group enhances opportunities for learning. The amount of travel abroad, types of experiences, and involvement in global initiatives at home or while abroad should all be assessed as part of the student pre-trip selection and orientation process.

Dr. James Ellis, a host country facilitator from South Africa, describes the most important learning student participants can take from South Africa as rooted in the concept of *ubuntu* which is the spirit of "commonality and concern for one another." He particularly cites the following issues as arenas for learning through short-term study abroad:

- reconciliation, peace, and restorative justice,
- care for each other in family and community contexts,
- dealing with race relations after apartheid,
- gender issues within the context of the particular apartheid mix of oppression of blacks and women, and cultural notions about the place and role of women and children,
- distinguishing between integration and transformation,
- linking transformation to national development needs, and
- consolidating democracy and comparing it with democracy understood from other contexts.

The set of understandings proposed by James Ellis are particularly reflective of the South African reality. Starting with a coherent set of learning objectives that can be tailored to highlight these kind of specific social conditions within host countries allows a social-work study-abroad program to appeal to students with both micro and macro practice interests. Clear learning objectives set initial expectations for the structure of a study tour. For all of our study tours, our learning objectives have taken a comparative approach to understanding contrasting social problems and policies, methods of social intervention, and specific social work practice techniques.

An additional objective addresses the ability to demonstrate understanding of how issues of social justice and diversity help frame social issues and social interventions in the host country (Gammonley, Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007). Underlying these objectives must be an ethical foundation to guide the development of inter-cultural competence. This ethical foundation, which leads to respectful engagement in context, is achieved with careful selection of site visits, lectures, and opportunities for U.S. student-to-host-country student interactions. Reflective dialogue among participants and between host country contacts and participants is central to this effort (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006).

Reflections from our host country facilitators in Romania, Guatemala, and South Africa give us insight into the importance of advance preparation and negotiating expectations. A country in transition provides excellent opportunities for learning. A trip to Romania was planned and led by a young faculty member who had traveled there the year before through another university project. Romania was a good choice because of its recent independent status, which created a dynamic learning environment for the development of civil society. In that year he met several people in human services who could help plan the group course the following year. Having host-country collaborators is an especially important asset in planning. One way to establish such contacts is for faculty to go

themselves on an earlier visit to explore the possibilities.

Dr. Ovidiu Gavrilovici helped our university plan the short-term (two-week) study course to Romania in 1997. He also studied for his Ph.D. at the Mandel School in the U.S. Consequently he had perspectives on dealing with his own cultural immersion in our country. According to Ovidiu Gavrilovici, "...short term study offers culture shock as a trigger for faster, deeper insight into diversity...including the diversity of culture, of history and of manners." When the experience is good, he continues, "...it is like a spring shower in terms of knowledge. . .wet in a warmy, soaking manner." On the other hand, it can also be like a "cold shower when it gives you the sudden realization of realities you weren't used to before." Gavrilovici likens a short term abroad experience to "tattooing," an imprint that never goes away in the way that one looks at the world. Exploring the ways people are alike and different can provide "a strange feeling of global citizenship, relocating our attitudes and convictions through new ways of being," he continues.

Being open to such an experience requires some preparedness so that one can experience the new culture, history, and manners "without too many false impressions and stereotypes." Without the preparation, Gavrilovici suggests, much more than "short term study" would be required. To be successful in short-term experiences, he suggests you should have "a long term study of your insides and your own world."

Gavrilovici suggests that the country-specific guide books we prepared as part of the class syllabus were valuable in two ways: to prepare the student for some basic understanding of the new social, cultural, historic and political perspectives they would experience; and, to give the host-country partner a "double reflection" of his/her own culture through U.S. eyes. "It is true that a visit can open your closed eyes, but a good guidebook, stories from an experienced friend, or contact with a person from the country you will visit is worth a thousand hours of being by yourself in a different land."

In Guatemalan host Srta. Maria Elena Yoc Chin's reflection on what she offers to an incoming group in the pre-trip preparation phase, she highlights the limitations of language differences. These must be anticipated in the planning stages in order to be effectively overcome during a study abroad encounter:

In order for me to organize student visits to Guatemala, I have the advantage of knowing the situation of Guatemala, knowing the tourist areas, and awareness of the expectations of foreigners. I am especially aware of the time and organization necessary for sharing knowledge of this country. One of the difficulties I face in organizing visits is that I don't know very much English, so if the visitors don't speak Spanish, we have a bit of a communication problem.

Awareness of the expectations of foreigners is an especially important area to explore with a prospective host-country facilitator to ensure expectations are mutual. This is essential in terms of logistics, financing, joint and individual responsibility for activities, and skills and abilities brought to the study-abroad encounter by students and faculty. Sharing a bit about the group members, their social work interests, and prior experiences with the host country through email exchange or the preparation of an orientation book for the host country facilitator will help achieve this important aim of advance preparation.

Drs. James Ellis and David Nghatsane, South Africans affiliated with the University of North Carolina who came to our university in the late 1970's through the Council of International Programs (C.I.P.), now provide leadership to universities, nonprofit social and economic development organizations, and government at all levels in South Africa's new "rainbow nation." As such, they were outstanding host-country facilitators. David Nghatsane recommends a careful and thorough orientation of student participants in order for them to be prepared for the cultural,

historical, and different living conditions they will encounter. He feels groups are best prepared for learning when they can demonstrate a sense of inquiry, both in body language and in words, that is respectful and avoids sounding critical.

Some participants who are easily impatient with the pace of the schedule or outcome expectations show that frustration in body language that is hard to miss, turning away or actually walking away from presenters and forming small cliques to reinforce their frustration in discussion. David Nghatsane suggests that a good pre-travel orientation, while it cannot cover all the aspects of the travel schedule and new cultural experiences, will help to break down stereotypes and build the capacity for mutual respect and acceptance.

Negotiating expectations, including planning for future collaboration with mutual benefit, with partners in host countries is of particular importance to James Ellis. While financial rewards may influence the cooperation of host-country partners, unless some mutually beneficial rewards are negotiated in advance, these short-term exchanges are too time consuming to be worth the effort. The kinds of mutually beneficial rewards he speaks of are:

- clear understanding of expectations on the part of partner hosts so that they know what to expect and how to plan their workload
- clear understanding on the part of participating students so that they know what to expect in the experience and will be so satisfied with their experience that they become "cultural ambassadors" for the country
- the potential for students and faculty participants to establish linkages that go beyond the initial programs
- the possibility that the host country partners can build their own networks of colleagues/associates/friends that may provide more personal opportunities

- the possibility to extend program and faculty cooperation with formal linkage agreements



David Nghatsane adds additional topics specific to the South African experience that are critical for pre-trip negotiations:

- South Africa offers a great opportunity to be part of the post apartheid historical process. It is an excellent location for deep learning in social, political and cultural development.
- External group visitors can have the effect of breaking down barriers among a variety of South African communities.
- The expectation should be that there would be a mutual sharing of information with the goal of assisting each other to understand different perspectives through respectful questions and dialogue.
- Participation with different groups should be guided by dispelling ignorance and prejudice as part of the effort toward nation building.
- Networks should be developed that focus on the transformation people are experiencing as they build a new democracy.
- There should be an expectation for a final report that provides some comparison and feedback on the development of the collaborative experience over time.
- While the collaborative experience should be done in the spirit of "ubuntu" (commonality and concern for one another), the actual financial constraints, honoraria and reimbursement of expenses must be handled

appropriately if the collaboration is expected to continue.

Respectful Engagement in Host Country Communities and Agencies

Our groups of U.S. participants represent a range of ages, interests, and levels of international experience. Having undergraduates on trips along with other faculty and seasoned professionals has not been a problem. As is true in any classroom, people learn as much from each other as they do from their individual experiences. Even though our overseas courses always include pre-travel guidance for cross-cultural and sensitive learning, certain responses and behaviors cue us when additional introspection is needed to promote accurate cultural interpretations.

In Romania, students and instructors had several discussions about why it would not be prudent for participants to walk about with large cameras hanging from their necks, with little American flags sticking out of their backpacks, or dressed so casually that they would be quickly identified as American tourists. Periodically, participants need help to understand the arrogance of ignoring local customs in dress and behavior and the dangers involved in flaunting cameras, expensive jewelry, and symbols of a country not necessarily appreciated by everyone (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006).

No matter how much we prepare course participants for learning *from* and *with* our host-country presenters, it is often necessary to remind them that U.S.-based solutions are not necessarily the right answer for social problems in a new context. In dialogues with host-country human-services workers, some of the U.S. participants quickly interpret the presentation as an opportunity to tell host-country human-services colleagues how we have solved that problem in the U.S. Generally the host human-services presenter interprets such a response as, "They don't really want to hear about how that situation presents itself in our country" or, "They have come only to tell us how to do rather than to learn how we do." Pre-trip discussions and during-trip group-process-reflection sessions about how

to stay open to learning about difference rather than thinking only from one's perspective are important techniques to promote learning from difference while avoiding misattribution to 'cultural' difference, in an international encounter (Askeland & Payne, 2001).

Host Myrna Manzanares, Belizean educator, folklorist, musician, actress, and expert in the kriol language, shared that students demonstrate respect for cultural differences by "...asking questions for clarification when they do not understand and participation in cultural activities that may seem a little strange." She prefers to see students "laugh with people and not at them." Also, she likes to see students sharing "information about themselves and their own culture and finding commonalities in which to build friendships."

In regards to failure to appropriately discuss cultural differences, Myrna Manzanares shared that:

Students sometimes exhibit the attitude that they have the blue print on information because they are from an industrialized country. Sometimes this takes the form of talking down to individuals or treating them like children who do not understand. Also, sometimes students disregard a cultural practice as unimportant because it is not recognized in one's own country.

Myrna Manzanares also shared that although not a problem with our group, she has experienced outsiders "talking negatively about a practice or aspects of the culture and laughing about it even though members of that culture may be near by." This kind of barrier clearly impedes mutual understanding—especially Belizeans being open to cross-cultural dialogue.

In terms of the kind of learning that she hopes students take back to the United States from Belize, she listed the following:

- Respect, and enjoy positive aspects from another culture

- That our cultures are dynamic, and that even though they are different they have an underlying thread that unites us which enables us to live in harmony and peace
- To be observant and tolerant of the variety of inconsistencies that may seem to dictate life in the place they are visiting, and to understand that though a practice may not have meaning to the outsider it is meaningful to the native of that community.

In Romania, home stays taught especially valuable lessons about respectful engagement because they afforded each student to learn more directly about the day-to-day lives of our hosts. We learned where they worked, where and how they shopped for groceries, where they were when the revolution against Ceausescu began, and how it evolved. Students experienced first hand how the dissolution of a centrally controlled economy, and with it enforced social norms, cause families to struggle with sorting out livelihoods, property ownership, educational opportunities, and discrimination.

Home stays can sometimes bring cultural and comfort differences more sharply into focus. They can provide the intimacy and companionship for deep and appreciative learning, but they also sometimes result in cultural and behavioral arrogance on the part of a visiting student participant who is not prepared for the loss of comfort and familiarity.

James Ellis suggested that participants demonstrated respect for cultural differences when they showed interest in and were willing to engage with hosts around religion, food, language, and music. Respecting property and privacy of hosts was an important issue, demonstrating that no matter how humble or different the surroundings, people have placed value on their belongings and ways of being.

In a few unfortunate instances, some student participants demonstrated intolerance with time frames and punctuality, were impatient when their accustomed way of life was not matched by local conditions, or placed demands on hosts that could not be met. Host-country partners describe this as "typical American arrogance." A particularly

destructive form of this arrogance presents itself when disinterested student participants engage in loud, private conversations during presentations by host guides or lecturers.

Hearing the Realities of Indigenous Peoples

The focus on indigenous realities has taken on special meaning in our study-abroad trips to the multi-racial country of South Africa. Seeing this new democracy that had made a relatively bloodless transition from a brutal apartheid state to a modern democracy, a democracy that incorporates even more than the basic civil guarantees outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their new constitution, is an important experience for all people who love peace and freedom.

Our group of students was very keen to revel in the hopefulness in this ongoing transition, but also to see the potential trouble spots. We engaged with public and private HIV/AIDS treatment and action organizations that were actively pushing the government to take a responsible stand with regard to antiretroviral drugs. During the visit to Parliament, we were afforded the opportunity to listen to dialogue and debate relating to everyday problems of crime, health care, symbols of diversity, and women's rights. We had several cross-cultural experiences that included participation in two very different African religious services, as well as more informal opportunities where we were invited as a group to the homes of two of our host-country colleagues. The graciousness of these invitations provided an exceptional experience for students to have informal discussions with South African families.

On the last day, we visited the prison on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years of his life. Our guides were two ex-prisoners, one of whom had spent fifteen years of his life in the same compound with Mandela. This was, for many of us, one of the most moving experiences of the two week journey through the new South Africa. For the most part, people from the U.S. cannot appreciate the meaning of political prisoners without such an experience. Freedom has a

new meaning for most people who have taken the trip to Robben Island.

In Guatemala, we were hosted by Maria Elena Yoc Chin, a young indigenous woman from San Juan, Sacatapequez, a small municipality approximately one hour outside of Guatemala City. Our connection with Maria Elena Yoc Chin was because of her friendship with one of our two instructors, a former Peace Corps volunteer. Because she and our co-instructor were trusted community organizers, their social networks into the rural community promoted our acceptance as outsiders.

For our initial community entry, Maria Elena invited us to celebrate our arrival at her family home. A memorable experience was attempting to make our own tortillas and trying on colorful indigenous clothes. Our hostesses encouraged our students to try on the clothes, learning how to make the complicated folds of the skirts. This activity represents an important bridge into indigenous culture because the colorful clothes are held as one of the most treasured customs of the Indians in Guatemala. When tourists attempt to wear the clothes, they are often viewed as insulting to the people by wearing them incorrectly (Menchu, 1984). However, in this case we were invited to try on their personal apparel; many of the shirts that we were loaned were special-occasion costumes for weddings or other important events. It was a short and highly symbolic activity that resulted in a deeper personal connection.

This activity in a family home also provided our group with an understanding of living conditions in Guatemala. Arguably, Maria Elena Yoc Chin's family has more resources than many families as they live in a cinder-block home that was modestly furnished, including a television. And even with running water from a spigot, the family still had a toilet that drained into a running stream behind the compound. This served as a powerful example of the limitations of the physical infrastructure related to many of the health problems in Guatemala. Our personal connection with the family enabled our students to gracefully experience these living conditions, and instead of looking at it as distanced outsiders, we

shared in the environment and honored the home as guests.

Our success in Guatemala was directly related to Maria Elena Yoc Chin's introduction of our group to her family, friends, and coworkers. We started building rapport with our host-country facilitator and her community by sharing food and costume, both integral components of indigenous culture. She led us further into her community and helped us make connections with people engaged in economic development, health promotion, and child welfare initiatives who shared social problems and solutions as they defined them. Making those connections through Maria Elena deeply enriched our ability to connect and build rapport with otherwise strangers, transcending language and the obvious differences of culture and socio-economic status.

Managing Language and Cultural Interpretation

Because Maria Elena spoke with our group only in Spanish, the immersion into language occurred quickly. We relied on several Spanish speakers in the group to translate, but often our students followed along by being attentive and attempting to try their rudimentary Spanish. There were inevitable frustrations and occasional miscommunications, but listening and translating were a part of the relationship building and ultimately enhanced our language learning objective.

Maria Elena Yoc Chin shared that one of the things that she has "...observed is that foreign students and volunteers who come to Guatemala arrive with a great desire to share their knowledge with the people in rural areas." In this discussion, she shared that:

"many of the students that immerse themselves rurally learn to speak the basics of our languages—one of Guatemala's 22 indigenous languages in addition to Spanish." In terms of communication, "students become even more immersed in their community if they learn its specific language, especially salutations, vocabulary for food and health, and other topics related to the culture."

When it comes to language, Belize is an interesting example because of the *Kriol*

which is a local usage of English mixed with other languages. Myrna Manzanares shared that:

Language and [cross-cultural learning] is not a great problem as English is the official language. However, there are four other major languages which are considered national languages, and of the four one is the local vernacular called *Kriol*. This is the primary language of communication among Belizeans. I am fluent in both English and the local vernacular Kriol, and therefore I tend to shift back and forth between the two languages as is sometimes customary of the Belizeans. This puts students at a disadvantage, since they do not know the vernacular. Because of its similarities to English it is easy for students to miss concepts and here you have to go back and teach the concept again and make sure they understand the underlying difference.



Managing language, however, is only one aspect of effectively partnering with host country facilitators to promote accurate cultural interpretations. Maria Elena Chin highlighted a key limitation of short-term study abroad: "In order for a student to understand the situation in Guatemala, he or she needs to have quite a bit of information; in addition, I think you need at least two years to really get to know my country." Guatemala, being a country of great diversity of people and natural resources, is a place celebrated by tourists. Much of the diversity is captured in the "typical clothing worn by the indigenous people and, each region has its own costume in a variety of bright colors." These costumes offer opportunities for students to explore the arts and crafts of Guatemala in addition to gain insight in the symbols of Guatemala.

Maria Elena further shared that:

It is important for visiting students to learn about the education Guatemala provides for its children. Visiting hospitals and organizations which help Guatemalans, in addition to attending cultural and social events, are activities which expand the experience of students who come to learn in Guatemala. These activities illustrate our social service systems, both the strengths and limitations.

Visiting a neighboring country during a single study-abroad trip can strengthen opportunities for cultural interpretation. Our trip to Belize was a one-week immersion that served as a comparison for our group that traveled through Guatemala. Our host country facilitator was Myrna Manzanares, who had previously worked with one of the course instructors on several projects related to Peace Corps.

The economy and social service systems in Belize are far more advanced than in neighboring Guatemala. Stark contrasts are abundant, not just from a formalized social service perspective, but also culturally. There are many opportunities in Belize to highlight differences in culture, language, and perspectives.

One of our main foci in Belize was the study of village life. We undertook an immersion in a local village where our group stayed in a local guest house cooperative. Activities were planned in advance with our co-facilitator, who grew up in the village. Prior to arrival, our facilitator organized for our group to interact with a local youth group to do a quick participatory appraisal (Participatory Rural Appraisal: See Chambers, 1997). This activity included community mapping, where the children were able to educate us about their village and the local characteristics that are not necessarily readily apparent.

Another activity that was important for our community entry was a walk through the village on the only road and footpath. Our

student group and facilitator stopped to talk with village residents who were selling ice cream and cold drinks. Also, students were able to talk with many youth who joined in the walk. These youth spoke of their experiences in the United States, where many of their family members had immigrated. The local artists, especially the *Kriol* drummers, celebrated our arrival that evening with a traditional drum and dance ceremony. The entire village gathered and danced around the fire with our students.

After our intense village-immersion experience, we continued on to Belize City where we were able to interact with several directors and staff of non-governmental organizations, including the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse. We had an opportunity to share a meal with the staff and hear about their programs, challenges, and opportunities. Students and staff were able to share perspectives about the problem of child abuse, but mostly our students listened intently, recognizing that U.S. interventions were not particularly relevant to the context.

One of our trip objectives was learning about economic development initiatives. As a result, we visited one of the smaller islands in the country where tourism is the major source of income. Students were able to visit a national marine reserve and also debate the benefits and limitations of ecotourism and its management with local residents. The student group observed two different villages that had identified their community as a refuge for wildlife—one for birds and a second for howler monkeys. We had an opportunity to walk with local guides through the villages and learn about the balance between the community and protected animals.

Conclusions

No matter where they practice, all social workers need knowledge and skills to help them appreciate and engage with cultures and peoples different from themselves. Our goal has been to plan short-term study abroad courses that will provide the best experiences for cross-cultural learning. Experiential cross-cultural learning requires respectful

engagement. Planning for respectful engagement requires careful listening to the voices of our host country colleagues and indigenous partners. In the earlier sections of the paper we have described the kinds of experiences we planned for participants in a number of countries. We have incorporated the perspectives of host country partners from Guatemala, Belize, Romania and South Africa. From our collaborative experience, we have identified the following five important considerations:

- Pre-trip planning and preparation (instructor experience, participant assessment and preparation, logistics, course ethical philosophy, and learning objectives).
- Negotiating expectations (with students/participants; with host country colleagues).
- In-country engagement and relationship building (listening and speaking with respect; less focus on physical comfort and more focus on different realities).
- Cross-cultural enrichment (respectful in-country behavior; finding opportunities to deepen understanding and mutual appreciation).
- Language barriers (responsive to interpretation; patient with accents; open to learn).

All of our studies abroad have been planned with in-country partners with whom we had some earlier relationship. When that was not the case, as in Mexico and Nicaragua, we contracted with the Center for Global Education at Augsburg College, which have extensive experience in short term international learning and whose philosophy of engagement is very similar to ours. Assistance in planning study abroad from graduates of our social work program who were previous partners in Peace Corps programs gave us the opportunity to quickly develop an understanding of the expectations and opportunities.

Marketing, recruiting, selecting, and orientating the participants requires significant

attention. A specific number of paid participants must be recruited for the trip to be viable, but identifying appropriate participants cannot be overly emphasized. A diversity of participants adds to the experience. Participants need to be very clear that the course is not a foreign holiday. The course requires the same focus on learning social work skills that demonstrate respectful and responsible engagement as any other field course. As was identified by several host-country partners, no participant should enter a new culture without some awareness of its history and culture and some understanding of socioeconomic and demographic issues.

Relationship building can be an important part of developing group norms even before travel has begun. If a diverse group of participants begins to gain the value of learning from each other through both structured presentations and informal sessions, that sense of learning will carry over to engagement with host-country people. Anderson and Carter (2003) have outlined a number of competencies for diversity that could be applied to building norms for these kinds of international learning experiences, especially the following three:

- Being more comfortable and less anxious or defensive with diversity
- Developing critical consciousness in order to understand the causes, consequences and dynamics of all forms of oppression,
- Letting others teach about the differences that make a difference for them (p. 250).

Our host-country facilitators have offered some of their own impressions of what they perceive as benefits of study abroad. Maria Elena Yoc Chin shared that:

Study abroad is such a wonderful opportunity for me because I am able to share my perspective as an indigenous woman. In my country, that is not usually the case.

For Myrna Manzanares the benefits of working with study-abroad groups:

Working with students from abroad has given me an opportunity to interact with individuals from different countries and disciplines. It encourages me to keep abreast of current global issues in order to respond to questions and queries about differences and similarities. It has also heightened my interest in international and cross cultural relations. I have also found that I employ a variety of methods quite easily. I have also become more cognizant of the need to understand the generation gap and employ techniques which addresses it.

David Nghatsane has felt the warmth of good experiences on the part of participating students who experience through real engagement the transformation taking place among the peoples of South Africa. His goal is that these kinds of students will play an international leadership role in the future. For him, personal growth is also definitely a part of the benefit he receives from these collaborations.

It is our experience that countries in transition, such as Guatemala, Romania, and South Africa, provide special opportunities for learning because of the excitement and energy of the people who are building and transforming the country. Cross-cultural learning is sometimes magical when the new realities of a host facilitator come together with the new knowledge of a course participant. It is these kinds of experiences that become the permanent tattoos described earlier and that are particularly satisfying to an instructor. We are hopeful that future efforts to evaluate student learning outcomes associated with study abroad will include the recommendations and participation of host-country colleagues who so generously share their friendship and expertise to promote international learning.

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This paper was written in collaboration with Ovidiu Gavrilovici, Ph.D., Maria Elena Yoc Chin, Myrna Manzanares, James Ellis, Ph.D., and David Nghatsane, Ph.D.

Karen Smith Rotabi, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Social Work, Virginia Commonwealth University. Denise Gammonley, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Social Work, University of Central Florida. Dorothy Gamble, M.S.W. is Clinical Professor Emerita of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: ksrotabi@vcu.edu.



FACULTY SELF-REFLECTION AND STUDY ABROAD: AN EXPRESSIVE APPROACH TO AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Rich Furman, Ph.D., University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Numerous differences exist between faculty and their social work students that sometimes create misunderstandings during study-abroad experiences. Faculty engaged in study-abroad programs must develop means of developing an understanding not only of their students' reactions to cross-cultural and international events, but of their own. One valuable means of helping faculty come to grips with their own thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes is through creative and reflective writing. This narrative details a type of reflective process that faculty can utilize to enhance their own international and cross-cultural teaching. It serves as an autoethnographic account of one teacher's journey, while demonstrating a self-reflective method that faculty engaged in study-abroad experiences can use themselves or with their students.

Introduction

Social work faculty who take students on international educational programs may be in a special position to witness students' personal and professional development. Through travel and study-abroad, students are immersed in social conditions that they are normally not able to experience (Johnson, 1996) and must learn to respond to these conditions in a self-reflective manner (Lindsey, 2005). Faculty accompanying students on these programs encourage students to engage and be challenged by cultural differences and cross-cultural encounters. Removed from their own cultural context, students' normal defenses are often less rigid; if engaged well, students can become more sensitive to different cultures (Black & Duhon, 2006). Not only do students learn more about others, but study-abroad programs afford them the opportunity to learn about their own sense of self and identity (Dolby, 2004). Students are helped to explore and understand how to use one of the most important social work tools: their own professional use of self (Goldstein, 1990; Ringel, 2003; Schon, 1983).

Along with this openness comes vulnerability. Engaging with differences and norms that challenge their own beliefs often elicits strong feelings including guilt, fear, sadness, and anger. While social work faculty who take students on study-abroad courses must not place themselves in the role of

clinicians, they are still responsible for helping students explore, express, and come to terms with challenges that students encounter. Faculty do provide support, comfort, caring, validation, and personal-growth opportunities; this educational process is far more psychoeducational than didactic (Bowman, 1987).

This is not an easy role for faculty. As much as faculty may hope to understand the experience of their students, numerous differences exist between faculty and their social work students that sometimes create misunderstandings. In a very real sense, students and faculty are often as different from each other as both groups are from the people they come across during study-abroad courses. For instance, students and faculty are typically one or more generations apart, have different experiences as helpers, and often come from different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

The development of empathy demands work for students and faculty alike. Faculty engaged in study-abroad programs must develop mechanisms for developing an understanding not only of their students' reactions to cross-cultural and international events but of their own. One valuable means of helping faculty come to grips with their own thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes is through creative and reflective writing. Poetic and narrative reflections can help faculty understand their own biases and may help

them become more sensitive to the issues that students struggle with. Further, faculty who become comfortable using creative writing and reflective exercises themselves may be better able to utilize these approaches with their students (Furman, 2003/2004). A previous article has explored the value of engaging students in reflective writing exercises during study-abroad courses (Furman, Coyne, & Negi, *in press*).

This article serves as an example of one type of reflective process that faculty can utilize to enhance their own teaching in study-abroad and other social work courses. It serves as an autoethnographic account of one teacher's journey, while demonstrating a self-reflective method. This paper presents two sets of data: 1) poems written from journal notes taken while the author lived in Central America; and 2) narrative reflections based upon reading these poems. I engaged in this process as a means of helping me understand how my current views and beliefs may impact my ability to understand young travelers and learners. In this instance, the traveler was I, as a twenty-one-year-old volunteering and studying Spanish for ten months in Guatemala and Nicaragua. The process of writing narrative reflections allowed me to further understand my own cultural and personal biases and lenses and add additional layers and levels of meaning, thereby creating multilayered, longitudinal data. The poetry and narratives, therefore, serve as self-reflective methods, data, and data analyses. The goal of this process was to demonstrate how the use of narrative reflections can facilitate faculty self-reflection in regard to international experiences and to show this process through autoethnographic methods.

Autoethnographic Poetry and Narrative as Inquiry

Autoethnography has been defined in various ways. Behar (1996) posits that autoethnography attempts "to map an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (p. 174). Pelias (2003) asserts that autoethnography "lets you

use yourself to see culture" (p. 372). For the purpose of this study, autoethnography is the exploration of the self as a vehicle for understanding important cultural and psychosocial realities.

Autoethnography has several advantages over other types of qualitative research. First, it allows for the gathering of data about issues which are often difficult to explore, such as personal impressions about lived experiences and social processes (Philaretou & Allen, 2006.) It allows for exploring sensitive emotional content about subjects which are private or taboo (Gelles, 1978; Ronai, 1992), for instance in this study personal responses to cultural differences. While relatively new to social work and social work education, many researchers have begun to recognize the need for data that presents highly subjective, personal experiences. In her seminal article, Heineman (1981) asserted that social workers need research paradigms and methods that allow us delve into personal impressions and lived experiences. She and other researchers have noted that positivistic, quantitative methods are valuable for validating and testing social programs, yet are limited in their ability to sensitize social workers to the realities of an individual's personal and social life (Arnd-Caddigan & Pozzuto, 2006; Furman, 2006a; Heineman, 1981; Kondrat, 1992).

As with autoethnography, expressive and creative arts have become increasingly important in qualitative research as a method of presenting highly personal and subjective data. Eisner (1995) notes that research and art often share the same aim, helping to transform human experience into a form that reveals its most salient aspects. Willis (2002) describes research of this nature as expressive, contrasted to analytical research. Expressive researchers seek to expand and contextualize data while analytical researchers seek to reduce data. Expressive researchers value the subjective experience of each individual and situation. Paradox, discrepancies, and conflicts are viewed as part of the richness of human life and are actively encouraged in expressive studies. Intuition, emotional sensitivity, and subjectivity are viewed as important tools of the expressive researcher. Expressive

researchers are both artists and scientists; clear distinctions between the two are seen as arbitrary.

Numerous studies have used poetry and narrative in the exploration of social phenomenon. Furman (2004a) used the writing of prose poems to explore his own experiences of male friendships. Concerned with the embodiment of cultural norms regarding male relationships, these poems are autoethnographic in nature. Moving from poetry alone to poetry in conjunction with narrative, Furman (2006b) utilized a similar method to the one used in this current research in his exploration of the death of his companion animal. Starting with poetry written prior to the death of his dog, he writes narratives that illuminate, expand, and contextualize the meaning of this dog's life and death. A similar methodology was used in his study of his experiences coping with his father's cancer (Furman, 2004b). Shapiro (2004) notes that in so doing, the author became an archeologist into his own experience.

Butler-Kisber (2002) asserts that poetry is the perfect medium for capturing the fullness of complex, emotionally laden experiences. Characterized by compression of words, metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, poetry has the capacity of meeting many of the representational needs of qualitative research. Through the use of poetry and other forms of expressive writing in research, the research seeks to "grasp an objective [rather than] to analyze and subdue it. It attempts to hold it in consciousness, to allow its reality and texture to become etched on the mind" (Willis, 2002, p.4).

Oiler (1983) used poetry to explore the experiences of nurses and their professional development. Powerfully describing poetry, she claims that the...

...art form itself gives the expression a structure, calling on experience on its own terms. Images and symbols in poetry speak to us about experience. Since it is vision that gives us the best understanding of experience, the words used in

poetry to express reality give us a clearer image than the precise language of science (p.81).

In his seminal work on post-positivistic qualitative research, Denzin (1997) encourages the use of alternative forms of data representation as a means of evoking emotional and empathic responses in research consumers. While a poem usually starts with one person's experience, it attempts to move beyond the "N" of one to the "N" of many.

Methodology

Each day for two weeks, I read each of the poems presented and wrote narrative reflections about them. The narratives serve the dual purpose of data and data analysis. They are data in the sense that they provide an additional layer regarding my understanding of the subject, an understanding that is more distanced and reflexive. The narratives were written with an eye towards analysis; I attempt to explore the cultural and personal themes embedded in the poetry and provide insights based upon my perspective as an "insider" into the poetry and an "outsider" regarding the social context in which they were written. Post-modern researchers respect the value of writing itself as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1992). Through reflective writing, we are able to add additional layers of meaning to text. Data analysis from this tradition is meant to expand, not constrict, meanings.

A selection of narratives is presented in their original form, save for the most basic editing. I want to present them in their most raw form possible to allow readers to have as close access to my actual thought processes as possible. The narratives that are presented are the ones that are most autoethnographically rich, those that best explore the relationships between self and culture and add an additional layer of meaning to the poetry. The original poems were written over the course of several years, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The poems are presented in plain text, the reflections are in italics.



Poems and Narrative Reflections

The Border

When you cross that mile stretch
of brown sterile earth
lifeless save for yucca and anorexic dogs

when your mind flips between visions
of Mayan mystical gurus
that might heal your sickest seeds
and the desolation that shifts under your feet
the desolation of everything you left behind

between photographs of the death squad
disappeared
black bars over cigarette burnt eyes
and eternal volcanic cones
reaching towards a point of pureness
that doesn't seem to exist below

and each step brings you further
from what you imagined was you
and closer to what you prayed wasn't

your passport clutched
like a life vest to your chest
your shots, visas, travelers checks
don't prepare you
for confronting emptiness
as you approach the hill

towards the border
Mexican blues becoming Guatemalan vapor

the dirt covers your shoes
your shoes are your heart
you clutch your travelers checks
it doesn't seem to help

As with many of these poems, my naivete
and youth are clear to me. In this poem, I
grapple more with the relationship between
Guatemala's history and myself than to the

people that it actually impacts. It is important
to remember how self-absorbed young people
can be, and how important it is for faculty to
be patient and understanding. This seems to
be a developmentally common theme:
international exploration as a means of
understanding self and identity. The border and
its shifting rules and regulations, with its quality
of being neither here nor there, becomes
metaphorical for the movement into young
adulthood.

* * *

El Tule

Hitched ride in half packed hippy van
shoved between stoned lip pierced teen,
and bags of woven wonders to be hawked.
Through dusty roads green north Guatemala,
across machine gun guarded border,
kid soldiers with eyes of black flashed wide
for Yaqui smiles passing innocent and free.
We cross the border into Mexico,
suspicious brown hands explore with care.
Tired from months of travel we seek
el Notre fast. Stop by roadside stands
for grilled meat tacos and local sugar filled
fruit punch, a few words and wondering
stares.

Night falls to find myself driving
young hippy girl her hair and breast
soft against my shoulder asleep,
fighting off tired eyes to stay alive,
fighting off the lust of her form to stay fit.
The morning breaks like a found lost
memento,
breakfast of beans tortillas and rice, spicy
pepper
sauce in southern Oaxaca market, piles of
peppers and mangos,
big city bustle as eat in awe.
The owner asks if we have seen *El Tule*,
the world's largest tree. The words sting
echo call to
some place unknown. A wanting place
needing of some sense. *El Tule* surely would
so teach.

Only two hours north, barely off our path,
we head in silence towards visions of *El
Tule*

that grip the mind like spiked cleats on grass.
We arrive, met by peddlers of key chains,
mugs, ashtrays.
My bowels forbid exit, my feet override.
Pass more venders, soda pop, hot dogs,
hamburgers.
Littered ground like after new years parade.
In front, *El Tule* surrounded by chain linked
fence,
carved in graffiti, lovers' names immortal.
Photographers snap Polaroid's for tourist
who barely look
into the huge twisted branches, or the lonely
magnificent girth untouched
protected from those who seek to conquer,
who will
ride to the next star on their map,
capture a photo and continue on equally
untouched.

This poem that can be looked at in many
ways. It clearly is written from the perspective
of an outsider who expects something
metaphysical. It is a disappointment when my
own internal expectations of the mystical are
unmet. In this poem, I seem to judge others
who do not seek this type of mystical
experience, but who have commoditized the
tree. As I stated in another poem, this is an
easy perspective for someone who has
privilege and power, who can leave this
situation anytime they want. To the venders,
the context represents their work, their
survival. Our relationships are fiscal in nature;
there is nothing metaphysical possible, perhaps.

* * *

Lying in Wait

I sit on this bench, filth,
outside the hotel, more filth
rent by the night, if I am paid.
Wait for men to want, not me,
but the skin, the flesh, the folds
they lie into, but do not touch,
my eyes to the ceiling and
mind other places. My body open,
things they never will force out, mine.
I will lie there and wait. They will finish.

They will dress quickly, our eyes will not
meet.

They think about their wives,
or wonder about my health. I will wash.
I will scrub many times. I read in a
magazine,
that if one touches you, their cells stay
with you for years. No matter, I will
scrape with rough soap and rinse. They will
be gone, almost.
But not from my mind. Memories last
longer than sweet first kisses
I can hardly remember.
But for now, I will wait, and worse if they
do not come, do not tell me what they want,
do not pay me for what will sadden us both.
Worse to sit here painted, starched to the
bench,
hours pass the bones ache and muscles
sore.

The boredom, is nearly as bad as the act.
Here comes one now. Asks me to use my
mouth.
I will promise him this, but will only use my
hand.
He may hit me, he may not. This one looks
timid.
He will be scared of my distant gaze and
wide-eyed smile, teeth.
He will leave quickly, like most of the rest.
He will not hit me. Christmas, only five
months away.

I never spoke to this person. How can I
get inside her head? What does it mean to
write this poem? I am not a woman, I am not
a prostitute; I have no experiences that can
approximate this. What I draw upon is my
history of social work. What I draw upon is
my sense of the emotional issues involved,
based upon my work. I have had people
respond strongly to this poem, that it is
"beautiful" and "evocative." But, is it
"accurate"? Does it even matter? I find myself
asking questions here as a way of pointing out
the limits of the work. Perhaps this is one of
the most valuable parts of writing responsive
narratives such as this.

* * *

I read this poem and I think of an article that I read in the *Chronicle for Higher Education* recently. The short account discussed study abroad, and looked at the ethical challenges of taking people to foreign countries to view the lives of the poor. The article argued that faculty who bring students on trips such as this must help students move from a place of emotional overwhelmedness and pity, to action. Easier said than done, I think. Looking back, I was able to understand the pain of others on an emotional level, but how does this help in terms of action? In social work, of course, it is valuable to build one's capacity for empathy, for working individually with people. But I am not sure if such experiences help with more systematic type of change.

* * *

Mummies

The museum is behind the hill, from where they
pulled the dead that now rest not so gently,
or sold in image
in trinkets and toys to be treasure chest lost
or in delectable

syrupe brown sugar candies, texture like
cobwebs,
molded into delicious mummies,
sombros, wrapped in serapes, the colors of
the

Mexican flag. Covered in plastic, gripped in
pleading hands,
the hawkers fight for our attention, dismiss
each other
nearly come to blows for the dollars few.

These vendors soon, buried in the fields
where the mummies grow.
If they rot ever so gently, the perfect one out
of twenty,
they will rest in glass cases naked to photo
snapping masses.

Six mummies for 30 pesos, the best mummy

candy in town. The Chinaman, the doctor,
for free the fat baby and the pregnant
women.

Mummy skull bottle openers,
a mug that reads: I am dying for a drink and
a women.

fetus skull t-shirt, the name of the town
underneath.

What of the souls of the dead, we ask.
What do we care of souls, they laugh hard,
what good are souls when it is food and
drink we need?

Maslow was right. It is far easier to be
concerned with spiritual and existential truths
when your belly is full. This is why, in some
ways, the generalist perspective is so valuable
in social work; it recognizes that people have
multiple needs that are resolved on multiple
levels. So many of us want to see problems
clinically, personally; this is just the way many
of us were brought up. Even when I adopt a
clinical frame that is transformational, inclusive,
it still often neglects the larger social issues.
Yet, I also find myself dissatisfied with believing
that the poor and disempowered cannot be
helped to face the most central existential
issues.

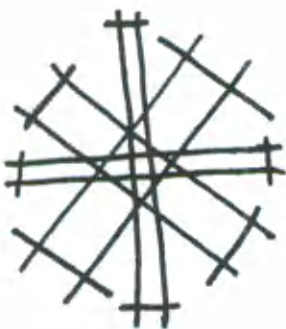
* * *

This passage reminds me of the multitude
of ethical dilemmas that social workers
working in an international context face. In
fact, it is not merely international context, but
when social workers are working with those
who are culturally different, and especially with
those who are members of traditionally
oppressed groups.

* * *

We Supply the Dead

"They supply the weapons,
we supply the dead."
Salvadorian archbishop Rivera y Damas



Rusty crow bars pry
marble smooth tires

recycling rubber each time
to the less fortunate,

but still more so
than some.

The death squads hold our hands
and walk us across the road

to freedom. Lack of beans do not bother
the rotting lips of traitors

and the less stomachs to be fed
the less angry mouths to scream.

Summers have become peaceful
here in the hillsides.

I read this and I experience pangs of guilt.
I have spent the morning in my office poring
over files, writing memos. Important, yes, but
vital? Am I making a difference? These are
good feelings for me to experience from time
to time, a reality check as the years pass by.
Guilt is also a strong feeling that students
experience when they are in international
contexts, when they see and feel the lives of
those less fortunate than themselves. Guilt is
a feeling that seems to demand almost
immediate attention; we feel it, and then we
want to immediately spring into action (or
defensively push it away). Perhaps it is
important to allow ourselves to engage the
feeling for a bit longer than usual, to question
it, to ask ourselves what it is connected to,
and what we wish to do about it.

* * *

Teguchigalpa, Honduras

Is a bus cutting through the night,
rumble and exhaust spent and disregarded,

graffiti painted wall pleading and begging
and raging
for Gringos to leave with their assassins and
AIDS,

secluded airfield for cocaine and *Contras*
for slaving import and murdering exports,

Comeaguela sex tour drunken madness for
Marine advisors
the smell from the river and markets
squabble shooting desperation,

dollar sign whore or a skinny dog limbless in
the gutter squalor,
an abused child that wants no more,

the hopeless screams in the night echoed
through walls in homeless hotels
and a stabbing that goes bad for both and a
desert mirage flesh smelling.

Kafka without angst, Hemmingway with
simple lines,
ice cream cone fallen to dirt with a bitter
cherry dripping,

a deaf god in the face of desperate
supplication,
a banana child with failure to thrive in
bondingless distance,
a scream of vocal cords cut, wavering
through moonless night.

I wonder how much I have been true to
the feelings I felt when writing this poem?
Perhaps what is important is that they helped
me become the person I am today, and
hopefully I am able to make some impact.

* * *

There is so much context for students to
learn, in order to understand social problems,
and how they are played out on the individual
level.

* * *

Alone



What do you do but beg?
 Abandoned beneath the doorway,
 face like the moon, beaten, alone?
 The pastel colonial elegance.
 The sway of lovely ignoring skirts.
 The blistering sting. The shrapnel cuts. We
 are all alone.

We are all alone. This poem attempts to look at poverty from an existential perspective, looking to the commonality of all experience. Two divergent trains of thought come to mind. One, how true it is that we are all really alone, and how deeply powerful this realization can be. That through this realization we can really push ourselves toward connection, given the sameness of existential dilemmas for all of us. This person in the doorway and I struggle with the same problems of being. We both must contend with the notion of aloneness, with dread, with the fact that we will die. On the other hand, my power and privilege make us so very different, our contexts so very different, our possibilities so very different. My power is the power to choose to leave that situation, to go to my warm hotel room, return to my home, my office, sit in front of a computer and reflect upon this poem.

* * *

Nicaragua Libre

Remember sleeping on a wooden plank
 they called a bed
 each morning stiffer than death

my days in *Nicaragua Libre*
 wandering the countryside
 more hope than I ever dared have
 more dreams than ever allowed

And it was good, quiet enough
 to hear my heart
 being just past twenty alone
 sad but so alive so desperate
 to find something real.

Holding other's triumphs so close
 that I forgot they were not mine
 singing songs I barely understood

borrowing heroes for the heat
 the blistering swollen head
 walking miles under revolution's sky
 in truck rumbles on potholed roads
 soldiers passing me as I marched from
 town to town they waved
 sang danced shouted triumphs

they seemed so much
 younger, or maybe older
 than I.

And at night when the parrots sang
 teasing me with olive goddesses
 igniting my world aflame
 it seemed eternal
 time stood still

for us to laugh
 in the face of never
 to cry from merely
 looking into the wind.

This poem is a good reminder of what it feels like to be twenty one, idealistic, and confronting a new country, a new world. I remember lying alone in my bare hotel rooms, fantasizing and scheming about how to be involved in their revolution, how to be of service. I remember oftentimes feeling extremely excited and overwhelmed, so utterly hopeful, yet so utterly unaware of what to do. I think this is often how students feel when they travel abroad. It is also how I feel when I travel abroad, still, after twenty years.

* * *

It has been a year and a half since I have been back to Nicaragua, since I missed last year's course. I feel sad and unworthy, that somehow I have let down my friends. So easy for me, to choose to go down or not. For them, they are locked in, stuck, with so few options. Social work faculty in Nicaragua make \$300 a month, and they pay more for gas than I do. I move through each day: student advising, articles to revise, grants to write, classes, family. So little time for those that are not here.

Yes, perhaps globalization has made the world
smaller, but I feel very far away.

* * *

84 Days

84 days
from hell to hell
from death squads'
black hand neverness

to liberty's branding cattle prods
blue suits and steel
safeguard the indelible line
between us and them

between our separate
forms of misery

84 days
form Huehuetenango

its streets of indigenous brightness
the markets of peppers screaming
campesinos working Shangra-La
emerald hillsides of coffee

to Los Angeles
pools filled with rocky dreams
air thick enough
to roller skate on
shattered hopes
stuffed into working sacks of denial

84 days
to walk they said
across the frontier
of the disappeared
greening genitals
stuffed into mouths
that could not confess
fast enough by roadside's rotting heat

across the Sierra Madres
where Guatemalan bones
turn to Mexican earth

to Tijuana's human coyote
rivers polluted death
children with no arms

drinking in next generation's
children with no arms
or worse

it took you five days
and with your plastic freedom
six hours back

now in front of silicon
wondering how
you will rationalize this one

This is the poem that I read when I want someone to most feel the distance, the disparities, the paradoxes between our privileged western lives and those of people in the developing world. It is perhaps the poem that I have written that is hardest to write a narrative in response to, as it is the one that feels most complete to me, yet most tragic. The phrase "plastic freedom" rings in my ear. North Americans complain (and rightfully so) about our debt, but what so many would give to be able to have credit, or merely to feel like you have enough to be able to stay in your homeland, to live where your family has been for generations. This also brings me to the current immigration debate, and how many North Americans seems to think that migration is an easy option, that those who come are somehow too lazy to make it on their own in their own country.

* * *

Discussion

As previously mentioned, this narrative served two purposes: to present poetry and narratives as an autoethnographic study, and to demonstrate a method of self-reflection that faculty can utilize when teaching international social work courses. While many faculty may not have their own poems to serve as prompts for self reflection, faculty can utilize this method in response to student writings or may choose to write multiple levels of self reflective narratives. That is, they can write narratives of their own experiences during study-abroad courses and retrospectively write response narratives as a means of self-reflection and inquiry. This method may also be used by

faculty in response to their own classroom teaching, thereby allowing faculty to develop insight into the relationship between their teaching objectives and their own professional use of self.

In a future study, I hope to work with students on co-constructed narratives about our experiences with study-abroad. In such a study, students and faculty would be encouraged to explore their own lived experiences and meanings about the events they experience. Taken a step further, students can be encouraged to be full participants in the construction of the study, making such an inquiry congruent with action-oriented approaches to qualitative design (James, 1999).

Readers of autoethnographic accounts such as this are encouraged to view these data as personal and subjective. The purpose is not to present generalizable truths, but to present multiple levels of one teacher's journey over the course of two decades engaging in experiences abroad. The aim of work such as this is to stimulate understanding, empathy, and analysis. That is, poetry seeks to be what has been termed metaphorically, generalizability (Stein, 2004). Not generalizable in the statistical sense of the word, but generalizable in that it helps stimulate an empathic understanding in the readers; they are able to locate themselves in the poem. When there is discordance between their perceived and lived experiences they are able to transcend the poem and create that which is their own. The author of this article encourages the reader to write his/her own self-reflective narratives in response to this work, thereby continuing this inquiry as a co-constructed collaboration of a community of social work scholars, teachers, and practitioners.

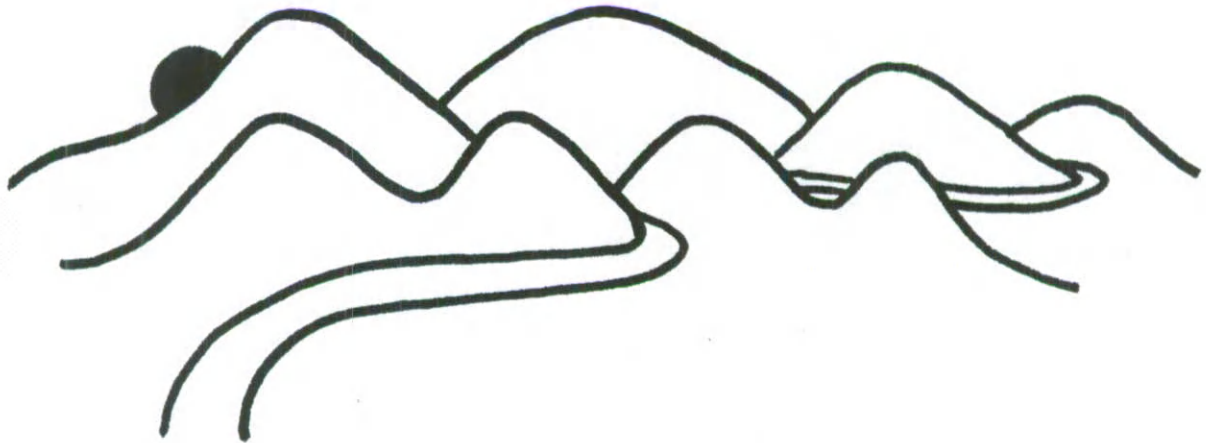
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Rich Furman, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and B.S.W. Program Coordinator in the Department of Social Work at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: rcfurman@email.uncc.edu.



Call for Papers:

SPECIAL ISSUE ON HUMAN-COMPANION ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Fall 2008 issue of *Reflections* will be devoted to narratives about human-companion animal relationships. We are interested in articles about the importance of animals in our and our clients' lives: the nursing home cat who comforts dying residents, the woman who would not leave a domestic violence situation due to worry about her dog's care, services designed to enable older and/or chronically ill people to maintain their pet(s), the dog who lives in the emergency shelter for abused children, a horse riding program for developmentally disabled adults, a vocational program on dog grooming for incarcerated men, the special pet who helps you cope with challenging client or personal situations, and many more. Articles describing cruelty to animals will not be reviewed.

The deadline for submissions is June 30, 2008.

Please send submissions to:

Marilyn Potts
Department of Social Work
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90814

Questions may be addressed to: mpotts@csulb.edu

This special issue will be dedicated to all animals described by the authors and to Bobby, Goldie, Diana, Susan, Jerry, Tippy, Skipper, Buttons, Penelope, Clara, Marley, Amelia, Ezekiel, Johnny Cougar, Janice Joplin, Buster, Sparkle, Sushi, Kiko, Snookie, Pookie, Rosie, Sweet Pea, Missy, ChiChi, Ishi, Jack, Crackers, Bull, Bulldozer, Maurice, Oliver, Fluffy, Bear, Cosmo, and Inyo.

INTEGRATING DUAL-DISCIPLINARY LEARNING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL SETTING: REFLECTIONS ON FIELD EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Emily Sanford, B.S., Student, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University

In this personal narrative, a dual degree student in divinity and social work explores how her understanding of the integration of Christian ministry and social work practice were enriched by a summer field education placement in South Africa. Encounters with language barriers highlighted the importance of building relationships based upon establishing rapport and listening with empathy. The lessons from this cross-cultural experience have implications for interdisciplinary education.



My experience in South Africa consisted of a ten-week field education placement, plus a two-week "Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope" through Duke Divinity School. I was hosted by a Methodist church in Durban, South Africa, that supports and partners with agencies like an AIDS orphanage, an AIDS hospice, a preschool, and a homeless shelter. During my final two weeks in South Africa, I participated in the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope program with other students and alumni from Duke Divinity School. We visited agencies, historic sites, and Christian churches to learn about the impact of apartheid and contemporary issues facing the church and society in South Africa.

Throughout the summer, I heard a wide range of "voices." As the name of the pilgrimage implies, some voices were exuberant songs of joy, whereas others resembled more of a groaning or cry of lament. At times, it was overwhelming to navigate and live in the tension of those two extremes. My conversation partners on this journey represented a diversity of ages, races, nationalities, social classes, and living situations. The resulting conversation was filled with

questions, feelings, and poignant insights as I sought to share several encounters with a broader community. Sharing personal narratives is an important dimension of social work and Christian ministry, because within daily, mundane experiences are moments of realization and transformation. Reflecting on these experiences provides the space for transformation—to view the world differently and change attitudes and behaviors. I hope to illustrate through narrative the ways that my understanding of Christian ministry and social work practice have been enriched by my time in South Africa.

The people whom I met in South Africa welcomed me with amazing hospitality as a student, a pilgrim, and a stranger in their land. I arrived with two large suitcases and serious misconceptions about what I was "bringing" to South Africa. I had attended a field education orientation and lectures and even read Desmond Tutu's *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, and Peter Storey's *With God in the Crucible* in an attempt to prepare for the experience.

Though I did hope to learn much from South African people and culture, I was naively enthusiastic about my ability to make a difference in the lives of people living in extreme poverty or dying from HIV/AIDS. With the same generosity that my South African hosts smiled and helped me with my heavy luggage, they helped me unpack my misconceived view of service and the inflated regard for my ability to help others in the cross-

cultural setting. Over the course of three months, I realized that building rapport and relationships were much needed prerequisites for my understanding of service for both social work and Christian ministry.

Even while experiencing warm hospitality, I was painfully aware in particular situations that other persons might not have been welcomed in the same way due to their nationality, race, class, HIV status, or access to resources. On many occasions, I was overwhelmed by the ways that persons who were marginalized by society warmly welcomed me into their lives. The theme of hospitality was especially poignant with regard to refugee populations. My experiences with refugees at various faith-based and non-profit organizations in Johannesburg, Capetown, and Durban opened my eyes to the conditions of displaced persons in South Africa. The persons in exile from Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were among the most hospitable and gracious people I met during my entire time in South Africa. Each of their stories and situations was unique, but all had fled their native countries due to genocide or governmental oppression. Their stories from their homelands of pain and violence were distressing, but the xenophobia and living conditions experienced by refugees in South Africa were shocking as well.

As the pilgrimage group toured the facilities of the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, we passed through crowded hallways and rooms where men, women, and children were sleeping, playing, and even cooking meals on hot plates. Over 800 refugees from Zimbabwe were living in the church, and the bishop received criticism for this radical form of hospitality. While the general response of the government and society was to deny Zimbabweans refugee status or access to resources, this Methodist church opened up its sanctuary to fellow brothers and sisters.

My most difficult times on this journey were moments of helplessness and hopelessness as I became more aware of my own vulnerability and humanity. Because of the intense suffering and hardship present around me, I often had to depend on others to offer me hope. My visits to AIDS hospices

were bittersweet with moments of connection with patients but also feelings of uselessness and inability to effect change. It was extremely difficult to see people suffering and not be able to communicate with words because I knew only a handful of phrases in isiZulu, which is one of eleven official languages. I struggled to see hope at AIDS hospices for persons who were waiting to be put on anti-retroviral drugs and who have no family to care for them.

On one particular visit, I walked into a room where a woman was in the process of dying and her caregivers were gathering around her and singing in a cultural ritual. Her biological family had abandoned her, yet she was surrounded by women who had cared for her physical, medical, and emotional needs. These same women were her caregivers even as she died. I was present in the situation simply as an observer of this tender moment—unable to speak their language, unable to alleviate her suffering, and even unable to cry. Perhaps it was best that I was not able to intrude upon the caregivers' ability to be fully present to this woman in her final moments of life.

One of my tasks as a field education student was to plan and co-lead an exposure and service program for young adults in Durban, South Africa. During the "Give a Week of Your Life" program, some of the conversations revealed ways that different persons cope with the realities of growing up in the new South Africa. As I was guiding these young people through the process of recognizing bias, responding to social need, and seeing their surroundings in fresh ways, I became painfully aware of the overlooked areas in my own life and context. I realized my lack of knowledge and involvement with displaced persons and immigrants to the United States. Participating in Christian worship services in isiZulu and Xhosa, struggling to communicate with non-English speakers in our Sunday evening small group and at Greyville Methodist Mission, and hearing painful stories of xenophobia from refugees at a Managing Diversity retreat and Union for Refugee Women opened my eyes and exposed some of my biases with regard to language barriers and immigration issues. Exploring contemporary issues in South Africa kindled a

desire to further explore similar issues in the United States.

My language deficiencies became evident soon after I arrived in South Africa. I was shadowing seminary students from John Wesley College in Kilnerton on their field education placements at a local hospital and feeling extremely self-conscious because I was unable to speak to the patients in their preferred language. Hospital visits have always been difficult for me because I want so desperately to bring hope and ease a person's pain, and so it was even more frustrating when I was unable to communicate with words. I asked the students to let the patients know that I was sorry that I could not speak their language but that I was thankful to be able to visit with them. Each of the patients was incredibly gracious about my inability to speak their language, but I felt useless and was ready to move on to a task where I could really "do" something.

In that moment of frustration and inadequacy, one of the patients responded to my apology for not being able to speak to her by teaching me a valuable lesson. In her own native language, she thanked me for my presence and said that she could hear me speaking with my eyes, my laugh, and my smile. She had watched me as I visited with every patient in the room and was thankful that I had come to see her. Her kind words were a wonderful reminder that in social work and Christian ministry "being present" is much more important than having the right words to say. In fact, a caring presence can often speak more boldly than words or in the absence of words.

Although her comment gave me some comfort at the time, I knew that I wanted to learn how to speak at least a few phrases in isiZulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans as a sign of hospitality. Co-leading a Sunday evening small group meeting for homeless men and women gave me the opportunity to learn some isiZulu. It was one of the most rewarding and challenging tasks of my time in South Africa. Some in the group, like me, only spoke English whereas others spoke only isiZulu. A few were able to communicate in both languages, and even fewer were able to read. For the first

several weeks, we had a regular interpreter, but for the rest of the time we had to rely on whoever was willing to translate for us. It was humbling to try to learn some words and phrases in isiZulu and facilitate discussion in such a diverse group. As I was struggling with the pronunciation of some words in isiZulu, one woman shared with me that she appreciated my effort because there are people who were born in South Africa who would not even try to learn a few words.

Though her words were some encouragement to my feeble attempts, I knew that I could not be haughty, especially since I have spent years learning Latin and New Testament Greek in high school, college, and graduate school, but have never tried to learn a contemporary, spoken language. Indeed, the language barriers that I experienced during my field placement in South Africa have made me realize the value of learning Spanish as I return to the United States. Hearing the stories of isolation and distress from refugees offered me a different perspective of the situation of immigrants in the United States.

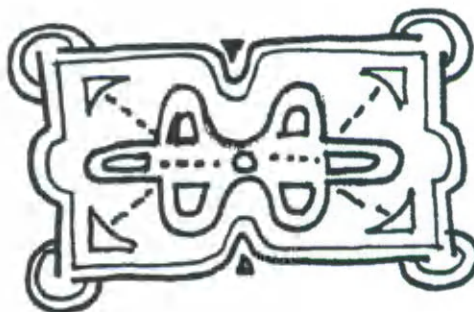
Voices from South Africa are still lingering in my ears, and if I am truly honest, it will take more time and space to fully process my experiences. Still, my encounters with suffering and hope have led to reflection and considerable growth in my life. Over the summer I realized that both social work and Christian ministry happen in the context of conversations, although not simply in monologues or necessarily in words. As in clinical social work practice, cross-cultural interactions involve empathic listening, meaningful pauses, and nonverbal communications. Social work is as dynamic as a conversation, which also makes adjustment for cultural contexts and translation. One question that lingered in my mind this summer was, "How can I best serve people in this context?" However, the helping relationships that I entered in this cross-cultural experience were not merely one-sided but had the mutuality of a conversation. I certainly learned the truth of being helped by those whom I sought to help.

As I have had an opportunity to reflect on some of the lessons that I learned from my

gracious hosts, I have realized that the most teachable moments were when I was aware of my own humanity and inadequacies. In hindsight, I was most shaped by the moments when I was literally rendered speechless, either for lack of words or comprehension of another language. My field experiences in South Africa taught me the importance of self-awareness and building relationships. In order to practice culturally competent social work, we must allow the context to inform our understandings of service and learn to observe and listen to the wisdom of our clients. Engaging with persons and social issues in a cross-cultural context can profoundly illuminate and reframe concerns in one's own context—professional or personal. Above all, we must learn from the people whom we seek to help. Only after building rapport and listening with empathy may we truly enter into a cross-cultural conversation.

As I continue to reflect upon the richness of my experiences in South Africa, I am finding that cross-cultural dialogue provides an excellent metaphor for interdisciplinary education. Various disciplines employ distinctive values, use particular language, and draw upon different worldviews. In my dual degree program, I am seeking to integrate social work and Christian ministry, which at times has felt much like an English speaker trying to teach in isiZulu. While struggling to become proficient in professional jargon and communicate to “native” speakers of each discipline, I am recognizing common language and values. My experiences in South Africa are helping me to recognize points of resonance in social work and Christian ministry as I am discovering that concepts of listening, empathy, service, caring presence, relationship building, community, and social justice are common to both disciplines. Certainly, an understanding of the skills needed for culturally competent practice can also inform interdisciplinary education in helping professions. These lessons from South Africa will guide me as I continue to pursue my graduate education in divinity and social work.

Emliy Sanford, B.S., will graduate with dual Masters' degrees in 2008: M.S.W. in Social Work from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and M. Div. from Duke Divinity School, Duke University. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: sanforde@email.unc.edu.



WAR: A STUDENT'S INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH SOLDIERS RETURNING FROM COMBAT

Kimberly Bauer, M.S.W. Student, Marywood University

In an effort to incorporate an international field placement into my M.S.W. education, I found myself working with United States soldiers in Germany in the summer of 2006. I applied social work principles in my work with soldiers returning from combat and I was profoundly affected by my time there. In reflecting on my experiences, I have many emotions, but mostly I am grateful, empowered, and humbled.

Having lived and worked in both Australia and England, I entered a Master's in Social Work program with a global mentality. As I began to study and analyze the concepts of social work, I found myself always wanting to apply them to larger, global-scale issues. I began to wonder if I might incorporate my international interest and love of travel into my social work curriculum. Through a series of events, I was presented with the opportunity to study under a seasoned social work practitioner who currently works with military personnel. My Independent Study was approved and off to Germany I went to look critically at crisis intervention, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the role of social work practitioners during a time of war.

My international experience is one that has included many cultures and a variety of experiences. My experience encompassed several continents, diverse nations and languages, and numerous cultures, but when I stepped inside those enormous military gates, for the first time I encountered the unique culture of overseas military personnel. James Daley (1999) states:

The United States military is a large and complex organization. Its history, traditions, and culture distinguish it in ways that significantly affect the lifestyle of its members and families. The institutional military is further differentiated from other bureaucracies and exerts normative

pressure on its members to conform to its unique institutional culture, a culture characterized by unconditional commitment to the mission, service before self, uncertainty and unpredictability in lifestyle, sometimes dangerous missions, frequent separations from family, and acceptance of a way of life without some of the constitutional protections commonly expected by American citizens. (p. 168)

Inside the hospital, I found a culture of the sick and suffering and overwhelming sights, sounds, and smells. However, once outside of the "tiny America," the culture was of Germany and Europe—World Cup, summer tourists, and the Tour de France. Nevertheless, despite these pleasant distractions, what never escaped me was the military culture in the context of war and the meaning of social work.

My field placement took place in the Psychiatric Unit of the United States Army Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. This particular hospital serves as the first stop on the trip back home for any troops stationed in Europe, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and many other locales. Some 300,000 troops fall under its care. The medical center is the only American hospital in Europe and is said to be "America's beacon of health care for its sons and daughters abroad" (Blankenship, 2003, p. 1). Although my

previous social work experiences were in mental health, nothing could have truly prepared me for all I would encounter on a daily basis within this culture. I was assaulted by the daily sights that often brought tears to my eyes, yet I was eventually able to see beyond the horrors of war and focus on what lessons awaited me regarding humanity in general and the true essence of social work.

Frequent emails and phone calls kept friends and family abreast of my weekend travels and daily adventures. However, I sent only three emails describing what I was encountering at the hospital. In looking back on these messages, I realize they express my true experiences as they were written directly in the moment and straight from my heart. I began my first correspondence by saying,

In less than one week I have learned more than last year altogether. I have struggled to know how to update you all as I am speechless when hearing the brutal facts of life "down range," which currently means in Iraq or Afghanistan. Our patients come to us directly from the field but, in all honesty, I would not want to be anywhere else working with any other population as they are in dire need of assistance and I feel I am living the epitome of social work practice. There are few instances in life that will forever be etched in my memory and today is one of them. I sought the outside for fresh air and the closest exit was the emergency room entrance. Once outside I noticed a multitude of stretchers, gurneys and medical personnel in what looked like a setup for a movie filming. I thought it might be a drill of some sort but, much to my surprise, they were awaiting the ambulance buses – yes, buses – to arrive from the Air Force base with patients just medevaced in from Iraq. The buses were overflowing and I watched,

completely frozen in my place, as they lowered stretcher after stretcher after stretcher. The buses kept coming and after some time I tried to peel myself from the situation, but found I could not. I saw the terror in the soldiers' or airmen's eyes and I just could not leave them. I was uncertain if I was there for them or for me. It didn't matter in the end; all I knew was that I wanted a kind face to greet them and I was there.

A couple of weeks later I wrote:

The hospital continues to be a mecca of difficult sights. The blue medic buses are arriving on a daily basis, sometimes twice a day now. A number of our patients have had to spend over a week in our unit awaiting available space on flights headed to the United States. The flights have been too full of the critically injured that need treatment only offered on American soil. We treated a young man this week with the worst Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.) symptoms the doctors had ever treated. Amazingly, the patients are such a blessing to me. Often in social work the patients teach me much more than I teach them. We've had some "successes," but overall our treatment is only a short stop on a long, long road.

Finally:

In the last week alone our unit treated a soldier who lost his two best friends in an ambush and our severe P.T.S.D. patient made a very serious suicide attempt after leaving the hospital and he is still in the I.C.U. Social work itself can be entirely overwhelming here as we are quite



literally these soldiers' only advocates. They are stuck in a system that is dysfunctional at best presently. I say that because there are zero exceptions to rules of any kind, no matter the situation or state of the soldier. I am also only one worker, in one unit, and service a relatively small population compared to the thousands of other soldiers I see wandering the hospital hallways. The blue medic buses are transporting the injured up to three or four times daily now. I have started avoiding that entrance. Amazingly, as my time here draws to a close, I find myself feeling many emotions, but mostly I am grateful, empowered, and humbled.

In reflecting on my time in Germany, I am able to describe what contributed to my gratefulness. I am thankful to those who have taught me lifelong lessons just by being human enough to expose me to our universal frailties. I am profoundly affected every time I travel in general, and in this experience in particular, as I am reminded of the commonality among all of our needs as humans. When a smile or a tear means the same thing globally, how can one not feel a part of something profoundly greater than ourselves?

Despite these profound lessons, I discovered that military social workers must also bear an additional skill set in their complex work. There is a difficult side to working with victims of trauma and these practitioners must be able to identify and acknowledge signs of secondary trauma. In this setting, clients share traumatic experiences that can evoke emotional responses in the practitioners themselves (Geller, Madsen & Ohrenstein, 2004). Motta & Joseph (1997) define secondary trauma as "a phenomenon which hypothesizes that previously non-traumatized persons acquire characteristic trauma-like responses by having continuous contact with those who have endured highly stressful events" (p. 895). Interestingly, secondary trauma has also been termed "compassion

fatigue" (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Adams, Bosarino, & Figley (2006) contend secondary trauma can reduce the quality of care provided by social work practitioners and may be responsible for driving individuals from the profession overall. After my experience, I can easily understand the concerns regarding secondary trauma for military social workers. I believe many of the stories I heard are permanently engrained in my memory and I am often reminded of individual soldiers while watching the evening news or reading articles on the current situation overseas. However, it is worth noting that I worked for a relatively short time compared to my supervisor who has worked at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center for twelve years. When I reflect on how many individuals I treated, I shudder to think of the exponential number of soldiers' experiences she has heard recounted. I believe strongly that this is an aspect of social work practice that must be understood and addressed should we expect the practitioners to remain effective and healthy.

I saw that in social work practice, no matter the setting, the worker-client relationship was paramount and the strengths perspective key. I was constantly reminded to first seek to understand and then be understood. The assessment, the interventions, the communication, the critical thinking knew no bounds. It didn't matter from what background or culture the person on the other side of that table came. My inexperience in military lingo didn't matter either. Social work was social work was social work. The population I served, were ironically engaged as liberation forces, but were themselves oppressed by the systems at hand and thus the connection between social worker and client proved all the more essential as a balance to the system's inflexibility.

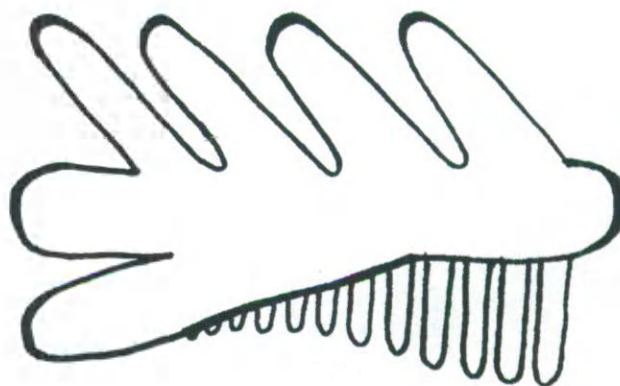
In the end, the most profound moments came to me in the form of the soldiers' goodbyes. Those who, just seventy-two hours prior, were standing on the ground fighting a war were giving me hugs saying, "Thank you for treating me like a human being." It is embedded in my heart, mind, and soul now and forever more that humans are profoundly inter-connected; that same human component,

ever present, must remain the focus of our work.

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Kimberly Bauer is an M.S.W. student at Marywood University School of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: bauer.kimberly@gmail.com.



TEACHING LESSONS LEARNED BY ENTERING THE WORLD OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Khadija Khaja, Ph.D., Indiana University

In this narrative, the author reflects on how and why she became interested in female circumcision and the valuable cross-cultural teaching lessons learned.

Introduction

This narrative is about my work on female circumcision, a cultural rite of passage primarily practiced in Africa where part or all of the female genitals are removed by midwives or female elders without medical justification. In the late 1990s I became interested in the practice when I was attending a cultural competency training workshop given by a gynecologist in Toronto, Canada. She showed a slide presentation with pictures of what a circumcised woman would look like and referred to the practice as female genital mutilation. The practice was justified as a way to protect a woman's virginity, which helped to ensure the honor of a woman. I was horrified when I saw the pictures of circumcised vaginas and remember that day like it was yesterday. The ages of girls and women that experienced the procedure varied depending on their tribal affiliation.

There are three forms of female genital mutilation. In the first and most frequent type, known as "sunna circumcision," the hood of the clitoris is removed. The second type of circumcision, known as "excision or clitoridectomy," involves the complete amputation of the clitoris with partial or total cutting of the labia majora. The third type is "infibulations/pharonic" circumcision, where all of the internal and external genitalia are sliced off, the vaginal opening sealed shut, leaving only a small opening the width of a pencil for urine and menses secretion. The procedure is often performed without any form of anesthesia. Additionally, in rural areas the tools

used to perform the procedure are usually not sanitized. Crude instruments such as razors, knives, or sharp stones can be used, and it is not unusual to stitch up circumcised genitalia with thorns.

After the slide presentation, I came home and started to read just about everything I could get my hands on that described the practice. I learned that 130 million people around the world have been affected by this practice (Toubia, 1999). Two million females are circumcised each year, with six thousand circumcised each day (Khaja, 2004). Though I was born in Africa, I had no idea that females who experienced circumcision primarily lived there, where it is still practiced in half the countries of the region (African Development Bank, 1998). "Nine out of ten females in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and northern Sudan undergo the procedure. More than half of the females in Burkino Faso, Kenya, Benin, Chad, Egypt, and Gambia about a quarter of Ghanaians have experienced female circumcision" (Khaja, 2004, p.2). The practice also occurs in Malaysia and Yemen. Civil conflicts in Africa have led to migration of families to North America and Europe from countries that practice female circumcision, which has led to a growing interest and concern about the practice.

I became very vocal against the practice because girls and women were not given informed consent about the possible health consequences. Girls and women have died from the practice, and others have suffered long-term health issues such as hemorrhagic

shock, infection, leaking of urine and feces, urine retention that can last for days, formation of cysts as large as a grapefruit, severe pain and difficulty in sexual intercourse, and life-threatening complications with pregnancy or child birth (Toubia, 1999). I became even more involved with international women's groups, human rights activists, child welfare, and medical groups expressing global outrage about the practice due to its serious physical and sexual consequences. However, one day something profound happened.

Talk With Me, Not At Me

In 1997 I was giving my usual female genital mutilation presentation at the annual Canadian Council of Muslim Women, calling the practice barbaric, uncivilized, a grave atrocity, and a violation against bodily human rights. After my speech, a beautiful African-Somalian woman named Khadiga approached me and tapped me on the arm. I thought she was going to thank me for voicing my concerns about female genital mutilation. Instead she said, "Have you ever bothered or even tried to sit down and talk with a circumcised woman? You are talking at us, about us. When you are ready to actually hear what we have to say call me." She was right. I had never spoken with a circumcised woman.

The Phone Call

Shortly after, I phoned Khadiga and informed her that I wanted to do a doctorate in social work. My dissertation would focus on female circumcision. Within a few days I made a phone call to a university in the United States, and a kind woman picked up the phone. At the time I did not know who she was, but I remember she was compassionate, genuine, and cared deeply about the welfare of women around the world, particularly those from the war-torn continent of Africa. She told me that if I could study circumcised women living in the United States and Canada, that it would be a rich, cultural, learning experience. I would be giving a forum to women from developing countries. She added that I needed to be prepared to enter perhaps the greatest cross-cultural learning experience of my life. She was right! That woman's name was Kathy

Briar-Lawson who, at the time, was Associate Dean and Director of the Doctoral Program at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Utah. Within six months I quit my job in Canada and there I was, sitting at a desk accepted into the doctoral program of the University of Utah with a full scholarship. My dream was about to start in Utah of all places. I was about to do a study on circumcised women, actually speaking with them and not at them.

Entry

Given that female genital mutilation is a traditional cultural practice, an ethnographic method appeared best suited for my doctoral study. It would allow me to get into the natural setting of circumcised women where I could gain a wide-angle view by mixing and mingling with them. It would give me the opportunity to eventually do semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions on circumcision to get a more holistic perspective of the practice. Ethnographic research methods would also provide me with an alternative discursive format so I could get inside the world of circumcised women, viewing the practice from their perspective and their frame of reference. I targeted a purposive sample of Somali women because 98% of them experience infibulation, the most drastic and severe form of circumcision. With the help of Khadiga in Canada and another Somali woman, Habiba in Utah, I immersed myself into the culture of circumcised Somali women.

Getting to Know Each Other

I attended family gatherings, weddings, and parties that often lasted to the early hours of the morning. I shared in traditional Somali music and dance festivities that often involved chanting. One evening, even I danced till about 4:00 a.m. in the morning, and was so tired that I tripped and lost my voice from chanting. I was even scolded once because I ate with a fork instead of joining other Somali women on the floor. They had expected me to eat with my hand on their large single plate. I realized later that I was probably being tested. Looking back, what I experienced was a privilege and a truly dynamic learning moment. It was also

my rite of passage. My African circumcised sisters were getting to know me. If I expected women to share their experiences of circumcision, the underlying message was that I would need to be with them until they were ready to trust me.

This process went on for three years. At times I had no idea if circumcised women would ever start to share their lives with me. Upon reflection, they were already sharing their lives with me by introducing me to their families, customs, and culture. I remember one special moment when a woman said she would trust me based on my eyes and not on the consent form I had spent weeks developing (Khaja, 2004). Many communities from developing countries have been deceived by documents and treaties; understandably hesitant to believe anything written. Consent forms can often mean little to other cultures while they mean everything to us. Understanding cultures different from our own means that we have to invest spending time with them on their terms. Frankly, word of mouth cannot ever be taken lightly.



Translation and Time Differences

All the women I interviewed were Somali and had experienced a wide variety of circumcisions. Some forms were mild, and other forms were severe. I was not prepared for this, and had erroneously assumed that most of the women I interviewed were missing large parts of their vaginas. This was probably because I had become a victim of the way Western media has sensationalized the more drastic forms of circumcision. I also needed translators who spoke Arabic, Somali, and Italian. Translation was a very difficult,

frustrating, and time consuming process. Even though I taped the interviews, I had to replay the tapes numerous times as it was very difficult to understand the heavy African accents.

Another curve in the research process was that my subjects did not usually stick to interview times. For example, in many cases I would arrive for the interview, and dinner would already be prepared for me. I had to eat so as not to offend anyone. Sometimes women would want me to cook dinner with them, and in one case an interview that was supposed to take place at 7:00 p.m. took place at 3:00 a.m. because of all the dishes we were cooking together. The cooking I did with these women was something I never would have expected. However, looking back it was one thing we shared: we were all women and loved to cook. So we started off on a common ground, which was food. Sometimes the best part of international education is the wonderful food you eat. I still remember the fragrances of saffron, basmati rice, lamb, and spicy tea.

Your Culture is not Superior

One of the participants in my study told me I should not assume that her ancestors were mutilators just because she was circumcised. She told me that my use of the term "female genital mutilation" suggested that I was superior to her because I had all my genital organs, and that she came from a generation of mutilators. I apologized and quickly learned that if you don't use language sensitively you will shut people from other cultures out. From there on I made sure to consult Somali women as to terms I should and should not use. Then I made another mistake. I also assumed that all participants in my study had experienced some type of sexual health consequence because they were all circumcised. Wrong again. I was quickly reminded that most had healthy sex lives.

Agendas

I was lucky that participants in my study were still willing to speak with me given my early field mistakes. While my agenda was to understand the practice of female circumcision, circumcised women also had an agenda. They

wanted me to know that they did not come from an uncivilized culture just because their cultures supported female circumcision. They wanted me to know they were loving mothers who had migrated to North America because of the civil conflicts in Somalia. They all despised war and many lost family members in the civil war in Somalia. Many women told me they spoke with me because they wanted the world to know they were human, not inferior to Western women because they had circumcised vaginas. They wanted to be appreciated and not seen as barbaric. They wanted acknowledgement that their own communities in Somalia had been speaking out against female circumcision since the 1970s and that there were movements supporting milder versions back home. However, they were furious that international women's organizations were not acknowledging that Africans themselves had been lobbying to stop the practice for a long time. Looking back, I realize that the danger of examining other cultures is that inadvertently we can patronize them by not acknowledging the great work they are already doing to ensure social justice and equality.

Teaching From a Diverse Pedagogy

This brief glimpse of my journey into the lives of circumcised women leaves me humble and has ensured that I teach students how important it is to get into the world of other cultures. This is perhaps the best way to understand cultures (Sheets, 2005). Today in my diversity classes I instruct from a diverse pedagogy. I expect students to do more than read diversity textbooks. I share my sacred journey of entering the lives of circumcised women, admitting the mistakes that I made and also the valuable lessons I learned. I do this so that students realize that studying diverse cultures is complex, not easy, and takes a long time. At the beginning of each new semester I ask all my students to write down what practice, group, culture, or foreign country they fear the most or do not understand. They do interviews, attend diverse celebrations, take part in lectures, and learn to cook diverse foods. By going inside a different culture, they learn how to speak sensitively about that

culture. Students have told me that this journey has opened their eyes to their own fears, prejudices, and biases, towards other cultures. They also report that their journeys have led them to realize that they have more commonalities with those they initially considered so different from them. Perhaps that is the ultimate lesson or goal of a diverse teaching pedagogy (Ramírez de Langer, 2006).

Conclusion

With globalization, many countries around the world are used for their mineral resources, referred to as Third World as though they are third-rate citizens, or sometimes used for research then forgotten about after publications are made. Studies of diverse cultures should not be seen as a "marginal adjunct to regular curriculum" and "personal enrichment opportunity" for faculty or students (Lyons, 1999, p.175). Upon reflection, my own study of circumcised women taught me that studying and getting into the worlds of diverse cultures is only the beginning. Communication and dialogue that allows one to speak more sensitively about traditions we may not agree with (Ramanathan & Link, 1999) leads to greater understanding and respect between cultures.

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Khadija Khaja, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University School of Social Work. Comments about this article can be addressed to: kkhaja@iupui.edu.

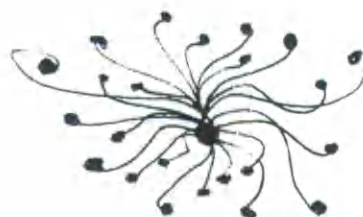


INTERNATIONAL SERVICE WORK: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE SERVICE IS OVER?

Randi Buerlein, M.S.W., Virginia Commonwealth University

International service work provides social work students with hands-on experience to learn about the global issues of poverty, social justice, and social services in the context of participation in community-service projects. The benefits of such experiences to the students' academic, personal, and professional development are the focus of the integration and reflection process for most students. As a group leader of international service programs, the author reflects on the challenges of facilitating learning experiences that transcend the personal gains and encourage long-term community building.

I looked across the table at my young friend, Charles, who has served as the unofficial guide for the student groups I bring to Ghana each year during the semester break. We're sitting at the table of a favorite local hangout, freshly showered after a day of service work, bottles of assorted beverages covering the table before us. "Please have dinner with us, Charles," several students plead. Charles and I exchange glances and he smiles shyly. I have known Charles for several years, and have come to rely on him as my unofficial travel assistant to help my groups with important needs such as identifying the best street food vendors for local cuisine, navigating the market place of aggressive vendors, and getting the best currency exchange rates. I have come to know that Charles lives a life of daily survival. I know that whether or not he eats each day depends on what kind of day he had at the market. At our dinner table I sense that he is fascinated and impressed with the comfort and easy chatter that accompanies the process of ordering drinks and contemplating menu choices. I know that he has anticipated our visit for months, excited to make new friends with these Americans who travel with ease with passports that allow them access and freedom to experience and explore other worlds. To alleviate an awkward moment for Charles, I say that we would like to buy him dinner to thank him for spending the day helping students shop at the market, exchange money, and negotiate cab fares.



The meal is a delightful experience of sampling spicy jollof rice, kellee-wellee plantains, foo-foo, and other delicious foods mixed with laughter and loud music from the street. When we're finished eating, the plates are taken away; many still containing food that will be thrown away because someone was too full to finish or because someone just wanted to sample a dish while planning to order something else. Such wastefulness is unknown in a country where children die in the streets every day from malnutrition and starvation, and I worry that our behavior makes us seem ignorant and insensitive. Under other circumstances I am sure that Charles would have gathered the discarded food and taken it home to his mother and younger brother, but for now he is acting polite and grateful around his new foreign friends. They don't know that Charles' family is often hungry, that his six-year-old "adopted" brother is alive because he was discovered by Charles' mother when she heard his infant cries at the bottom of a cliff on a beach area known as a common dumping ground for unwanted babies. We pay our checks and discuss plans for after dinner – figuring out who is going to the Internet Café, who needs to change money, who wants to go out to hear music. By the end of the meal the

disparity between the African and the American students' worlds seems painfully obvious, but I fear it is lost on most of the students.

Our group of American students has come to Ghana to participate in a service project that represents an ongoing partnership between the School of Social Work and Sovereign Global Mission (SGM), an NGO for street children in Accra. Prior to the trip, the group met several times to prepare for this experience by studying the culture, participating in team building exercises, and learning about cultural sensitivity. In reality, nothing can quite prepare the students for immersion into community work with the world's poorest and most vulnerable children who are struggling to survive in unimaginable poverty. Each day we are exposed to conditions of severe human suffering and endless need. Students participate in outreach work in the slum community of C.M.B., named for Cocoa Marketing Board, a former trade area in the center of the capital that has become a community to hundreds of homeless children who have migrated there from their rural villages. C.M.B. is home to children who work as shoe-shine boys, porters, water sellers, and beggars among other efforts to survive. Some children are second generation street children, born to mothers who gave birth as street children themselves. The prevalence of street children in Ghana is a relatively new social issue. In 2003 C.A.S. notes that "street children were a new phenomenon in Ghanaian society [in 1993]" (p. 7). Among many reasons for the large increase in street children is a shift in Ghanaian culture and social structure. Pride in extended family has been "one of the cornerstones of African culture and traditions, and it has served as Africa's social net for the young, elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged" (C.A.S., 2003, p.20).

However, in recent years this vital element of culture has been lost due to urbanization, individualism, socio-economic distress, and influences from the Western World. This devaluing of the extended family has resulted in an increase of children with no caretakers who are at risk for illness, exploitation by adults, human trafficking, prostitution and lives of

poverty. Although many feel the state should provide a security net for these children, there are not adequate resources to meet this demand (CAS, 2003). Social services as we know them in the U.S. do not exist for street children in Ghana. In traditional African culture, "social services" usually means one's extended family; and when you no longer have parents, you must struggle to survive any way that you can.

During our stay in Ghana we will assist our N.G.O. partner with several projects that represent the goals of this organization. Some of the programs receive grant funding, such as the micro-credit lending program that helps small groups of street mothers start up bread-baking businesses in an effort to empower these women to become financially self-sufficient. An apprenticeship program receives a small grant from the Ghana Aids Commission to educate and train young street girls in entrepreneurial skill development by placing them in apprenticeships throughout the greater Accra region. Another program aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention trains at-risk youth to be peer educators within their communities to provide information and health education to other youth. A major long-term project is the building of a Child Development Center in the rural village of Adoteiman that will someday serve as a school and shelter for orphaned children. This project is funded solely through donations, and has become a shared dream of S.G.M. and every student volunteer group that has worked to clear ground, mix concrete, make bricks, and contribute all kinds of sweat labor toward this construction.

Among all of S.G.M.'s programs, their field outreach work in CMB is the most raw, unsettling service work our students do. It involves making contacts with homeless children and adults to provide basic first aid and counseling, and to identify the most dire situations that need some kind of immediate attention. As we accompany the field director on her rounds, our presence provides some children with their first exposure to *obrunis* (white foreigners) and for some it may be a frightening experience. Some children cry and run and hide when they see us, the color of our skin representing something foreign,

unknown, and perhaps dangerous. After a while the children warm up to us and follow us around, the numbers growing as the word gets out that we will take their picture or give them a band aid or a piggy-back ride. The first time this group set foot in C.M.B., we encountered a young woman with a severely burned leg as a result of a coal fire that had fallen on her. The burn covered most of her thigh and showed signs of early gangrene. The woman and others in the community had been trying to raise the 180,000 cedis (equivalent to \$20.00 U.S.) to cover the cost of a visit to the health clinic, but they were unable to raise this amount of money. Our group collected \$50.00 to cover the cost of the visit and follow-up care. The young woman and her husband cried with gratitude for our help. This was a particularly difficult day for our group, as the students tried to contemplate the reality that this \$20.00 contribution most likely saved a woman's leg, and perhaps her life. Later that evening we spent some time discussing this incident and students expressed a variety of feeling responses including guilt, shame, sadness, and anger. How is it possible that we could save someone's life with the amount of money we might spend on a dinner or a new CD in the States? Throughout the rest of the week the reality of life in C.M.B. begins to wrap around us as we interact with children with severe illnesses, some of whom will die for what I consider stupid reasons like untreated diarrhea, cuts that have become infected, and malaria. No one can escape the thought that we each packed enough malaria pills for personal use that could be used to save a few lives in this community. In fact, the contents of most of our backpacks contain more first aid medicines and supplies than anyone in the community possesses.

We are working in a country that is stable and peaceful but, like most African nations, faces serious economic and social challenges. The Gross National Income for the average Ghanaian is the equivalent of \$350 per year; less than a dollar a day (Oppong & Oppong, 2003). Six million people in Ghana live in extreme poverty, unable to obtain basic food and other needs. This number equals one-third of the entire population. (Tengey & Oguuah,

2001). Poverty in Ghana directly contributes to the growing problem of street children in the capital of Accra. We have met hundreds of children, desperate to survive, who have migrated from rural villages to the city in search of opportunities for work, an education, and money to send back home. The city has become a breeding ground for homelessness, disease, human trafficking, prostitution, and the endless cycle of poverty. We work with a small N.G.O. that seeks to help the growing number of street children emerge from this cycle of poverty, but the number of children in need is staggering. This is the world we enter when we engage in service work with street children in Ghana.

At various times during these years of leading student service trips to Ghana, questions and thoughts have entered my mind about the motivation and purpose of conducting these learning opportunities for students. The long-range benefits to students who immerse themselves in study, service, and learning in foreign countries are well documented. Many students return from these trips and reflect on how they were impacted by the experience – they often use terms like “life changing” and “transformative.” They talk mostly about what they saw and how it affected them, about how much they learned about themselves, and about how much they came to appreciate what they have. These reactions are usually very emotional and self-focused. I have witnessed these changes and heard the testimonies many times. As I've observed the ways in which students' learning has been enriched by service work, I have wondered how to facilitate the kind of learning that will transcend the personal and strengthen the partnership of community building. I have asked myself questions that have become my guide for encouraging the kind of learning that integrates the internal with the global and ultimately leads to a commitment to action. These questions include: What happens in the community after yet another group of wealthy American students finishes a service project undertaken as a means of learning about social problems in a developing country? Can the students appreciate the fact that the amount of money spent on the group's airfares and travel could have paid for the

completion of the Child Development Center, and how does this fact justify the trip? Does the experience raise their awareness of the inherent privilege afforded by their nationality that enables them to travel freely, to receive priority medical attention at a clinic where locals have walked up to eight hours to receive services, to buy meals among people who don't know when they will eat again?

In the process of addressing these questions, I have come to appreciate the power of each group experience to meet the highest purpose of the service experience with ripple effects that continue this support in the most unexpected ways. In the four years since our first group came to Ghana and cleared the ground for the orphanage and child development center, the relationship between the School of Social Work and S.G.M. has grown as a partnership of mutual learning and service. For students who have engaged in the service projects, the work has had an undeniable impact on their development as social workers and as global citizens. Most students have come to see the world and their place in it in a profoundly different way—one that calls for personal commitment to address issues of global poverty and injustice.

But it has been the relationships between students, volunteers, N.G.O. staff, children, and villagers that have had the most profound effect on continuing the work of our partnership in Ghana. As each group has returned, its members have been compelled to tell the story and to work actively for the programs in Ghana. Students have come to understand the lives and problems of the people they meet and engage in their struggles—not as rescuers of desperate people, but as equals working for change. The image of poverty as a miserable state has been challenged by the expressions of hope and joy from the children for whom survival is a daily challenge.

In the four years since the beginning of this partnership, enough funds have been raised to finance the completion of the main building of the Child Development Center. Students have developed a website for S.G.M. that describes its mission and programs, with information on how to sponsor a child to attend school. Over thirty children have been

sponsored by U.S. donors with the \$130 annual fee to buy books, uniforms, and school supplies required for a child to attend school. In March, a medical team from another state that heard about this partnership will go to provide a two-week primary health clinic in one of the rural villages. An American elementary school has adopted the study of Ghana as a yearly project, and is involved in a pen pal exchange program each year between students. A V.C.U.-sponsored dance performance benefit is being planned for next fall, a community undertaking involving professional dancers, elementary school performers, university service learning classes, community sponsors, and a host of former students who have participated in the service projects in Ghana in the past. A highlight of the performance will be two important guests from Ghana—the Director of the N.G.O. and Charles.

So the next time I see Charles, we will have dinner at an American restaurant and we will celebrate all that is possible through service performed in the partnership of a School of Social Work and an NGO working together to change the future of the children of Ghana.

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Randi Buerlein, M.S.W., is the Assistant Director of Field Education at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: rwbuerle@vcu.edu.



CULTURAL IMMERSION FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: REFLECTIONS ON STUDYING ABROAD IN GHANA

**Cheryl D. Dozier, Ph.D., University of Georgia, Alice Boateng, Ph.D., University of Nevada, Reno, and
Rabbiatou Halidou Jibrilla, M.S.W.**

This narrative focuses on the Ghana Study Abroad program at the University of Georgia from 2002- 2006. The real reward of this international journey can be heard in the voices of the students, who continued to gain from such a rich educational and culturally enriched experience. This narrative is organized along the following themes: experiential, emotional, educational, empowerment and the Sankofa connection.

Introduction

As a social work faculty member who taught a Cultural Diversity course for many years, I know that it takes more than a semester for most students to grasp and internalize the concept of "true diversity." However, being together with other faculty and students for three short weeks 24/7 and becoming immersed in the culture, the people, and each other made the transformation amazing. There were so many teachable moments as I watched the students adjust to being in an underdeveloped country and wrestle with their understanding of diversity, their privileged status, and their "just being American." The real reward about this international journey can be heard in the voices of the students, who continued to gain from such a rich educational and culturally enriched experience. This article is organized along the following themes:

- Experiential—cultural and historical aspects of the experience
- Emotional—conflicts, both painful and joyful
- Educational—service learning, faculty interactions, and social work experiences
- Empowerment—issues in Ghana particular to women and children.

- The *Sankofa*—the "roots" connection to one's ancestral past.

As an African-American, I have always yearned to connect to my African roots, so traveling to the Motherland (the continent of Africa) began to fulfill that mystery of connecting to my ancestral roots and to unlock centuries of "lost years" to my family's and "my people's" past. This journey has been transformative, emotional, and very enlightening. Even though I have traveled to West Africa nine times and have visited four countries—Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, and Ghana—I continue to be moved by the history, culture, and topography each year I return. Eight of my visits to the continent have included Ghana, which I now claim as my African home.

I continue to teach and direct this study abroad in Ghana even though I am now a part of senior administration at a Research I university. It fulfills that drive, that passion, and reminds me why I became a social worker—an agent of change. In 2001-2002, I joined the African Studies Institute where a study abroad program to Ghana was being developed. I was able to recruit social work students and incorporate visits to social service agencies in our itinerary. In 2002, I traveled to Ghana with the U.G.A. study abroad with seven social work students as part of a larger group composed of five faculty members and a total of twenty-

one students. Traveling with such a diverse group added a new dimension not just to my experience but to the trip as a whole. Race and nationality became central in how we viewed and interpreted almost everything, even though we rarely discussed this overarching element that at times caused major tensions among the students and faculty. It was frustrating and challenging to experience the many different lenses through which we viewed "difference." For this reason, we have added more discussions and readings that focus on race, class, ethnicity, and gender in the pre-departure orientations and the class discussions while abroad.

This dynamic and exciting program offers classroom time along with travel to different regions and cultures in the country. It includes interaction with Ghanaian university students, cultural immersion, and, perhaps most importantly, direct involvement. This program provides accredited course instruction in the required areas of West African History, Society and Culture, and the social work course Social Service Delivery Systems. It also seeks to involve Ghanaians and U.S. students in a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and practical projects.

This study-abroad program is very dependent on the partnerships that have been developed and that are critical to the success of the program. Two of the faculty members who participated were African, one from Ghana and the other from Benin, and their presence and global perspective also enhanced the students' experiences. Forming collaborations at host universities, government and non-government agencies, and schools was a long tedious process that I would not have been able to accomplish without the relationships I formed with Ghanaian students like Rabbiatou, Alice, and other social workers in Ghana. As Cornelius and Greif (2005) observed, it takes time and effort on an individual level to sustain collaborations between schools of social work in the United States and host countries. Nevertheless, the benefits of international partnership, including the acquisition of social work knowledge and life-transforming experiences, outweigh the costs.

Rabbiatou Halidou and Alice Boateng (co-authors) are from different regions (Northern and Ashanti, respectively) in Ghana. Both came to the United States as students and participated in the Ghana study abroad program initially as students and later as student workers and graduate assistants. Their roles were invaluable as they knew a lot about the country, spoke various languages, and understood the cultural nuances as well as the political and social issues that surfaced while we were on this journey. Their voices will be shared and infused throughout this article.

This narrative shares some of the students' reflections of these experiences from their papers and journal entries over the past five years. Race and majors are identified to highlight some of the perceptive differences based on that person's "lense." It by no means makes one reflection better or worse or right or wrong, just a different perspective. The students' voices are in italics, while those by the co-authors are dispersed narrative.

- Dr. Cheryl Dozier



The Experiential - Reflections of Ghana the Country and the Overall Experience

"Studying abroad in Ghana has impacted me in so many ways, many of which I have yet to fully comprehend," said a White M.S.W. student. "One of the most important things I learned has to do with the different value systems that exist and how happiness and contentment is always relative to the value that one places on certain things.... Traveling in Ghana, however, made me realize that the world does not revolve around the United States. The people I witnessed in Ghana were productive and content relative to their own

value system, which, I am certain, is a universal phenomenon."

"For so long, I have been influenced by the media and printed illustrations on how undeveloped Ghana and other surrounding countries are reflected," an African-American M.S.W. student said, "This is not what I observed at all. I saw a country filled with talented and skillful people. These people were hardworking and kind-spirited. They treated everyone with respect and as if they were family. I saw a country striving to maintain, to regain strength. Ghana has so much potential. Granted, if they are given back what was taken from them, things may be better."

"I did not fully understand how privileged I am on a global scale. As an African-American woman from a working income family, I thought I knew a lot about poverty and being marginalized. However, this trip exposed me to levels of poverty and types of discrimination that I have overlooked in the past," an African-American M.S.W. student reflected.

"One highlight from Accra was a visit to Ashesi University," states a White graduate student in education. "We heard the president and founder of the university talk for a while, and then we got to speak to some students. The president's name is Patrick. He told us about his background and how and why he founded Ashesi. It was so uplifting to hear him talk about it. He wants to develop the best leaders in Ghana to run the country and change the problems that occur there. Ashesi is the first liberal arts institution in Ghana, which is an amazing stride for the educational system in the nation. They are developing great leaders, and currently have the brightest and most amazing students in Ghana attending the university. One of the students that we got to speak to was named J-; he was a second year student from Kumasi. He had a lot of great questions and answers for us. I get such a wonderful feeling from having conversations like this one with

people from all different cultures and parts of the world. J- talked to us about how he wants to work to wipe malaria and AIDS out of Ghana and then eventually Africa, and he wants to make Africa as big a superpower as the United States and China. He was such an idealist, as most of the students at Ashesi seem to be. They are full of hope and potential. Spending time on the Ashesi campus gives me a feeling of hope as well."

"I believe that I found passion in Ghana that seems to be disappearing here in the states," reflected a White B.S.W. student. "In Ghana, I saw people really caring about what they do and devoting their lives to it. I find so much inspiration in that, and I find the people of Ghana to be so giving and unselfish. Before traveling to Africa I felt that I had some idea of what it was like, how the people lived, and a grasp on the poverty issues. During the trip to Ghana I began to focus more on the people, their lives, and how they live. I kept thinking how poverty stricken the whole continent was and how these people do without the things that I take so easily for granted...."

"In my head I am still digesting my thoughts but I do feel that I have an idea of how to deal with the differences between the African culture and my own. Although there was poverty in Ghana, I began to realize that this is the way of life for the people of Ghana. What seemed to be poverty to me was home to them and their family and their food. They were some of the happiest people I have ever seen, and they, the people of Ghana, were without a tenth of what I have. Personally I have come to terms that the world of Africa is very different from my own. What I consider to be horrible conditions do not seem so horrible to the people of Ghana. There are a million things that I believe that I learned from this trip to Ghana; however, realizing that culture is everything and where you are from no matter poor or wealthy is what really matters has helped me come to terms with the true beauty of the world."

One of the misconceptions that we often find when people refer to Africa or a country within the continent is the assumption that Ghana, for example, is Africa. The media and most educators refer to Africa as the place the person is from versus referring generically to Africa. There is much generalization when referring to the continent as we can see in some of the students' reflections. Africa the continent is made up of fifty-two countries, most of which gained independence in the 1950s to the 1970s. It is one of the most ethnically diverse continents, composed of hundreds of different ethnic groups speaking many different languages even within the same country and throughout the continent. One should say that the person is Nigerian or Egyptian, not just African.

For most African-American students, other than vacationing in the Caribbean, this was their first international experience. However, many of the White students have traveled internationally, primarily to Europe. Few of the students had traveled to the African continent. Most students, Black and White, have been influenced by media portrayals of the ongoing hunger, civil wars, violence, and poverty. Additionally, grouping together all of Africa as third world countries automatically gives it a "less than" or uncivilized identity. Charlayne Hunter-Gault (2006), in her new book *New News out of Africa*, references an article that she wrote in 1972: "One criticism I encounter from Africans is that Americans present themselves to Africans as all-knowing, when, in fact, their perspectives are influenced by the oft-distorted views of Africa in textbooks and the media" (p.111). Ghana is a very independent, civilized, and safe redeveloping nation that has not received much press—positive or negative—over the past couple of decades.

"So far Ghana is far more civilized than I expected," said a graduate education major. *"The upper class houses are beautiful, like something you'd see in California and there are some really nice cars and the Ghana International School is very nice. But the most striking thing is that right next to these really nice areas is complete poverty."*

"Ghana, the country of hospitality, received the study abroad group with a smile and open arms," stated Alice. *"Ghanaians saw African-American students as their 'prodigal sons' and treated them as such. On the other hand, the African colonial experience, coupled with the perception that every American is rich, made the students (especially Whites) very vulnerable, as Ghanaian children and youth in tour towns and villages pestered them for money and requests to write to them or take them abroad to the United States."*

Rabbiatou Reflects on her Experience as an Assistant in the Study Abroad Program

I was invited to be one of the assistants of the program in 2002. The group was large composed of African-American, White-American, and African students. My expectation of the program was to assist with the interpretation of some Ghanaian languages as well as some cultural aspects of the Ghanaian society. Ghanaians are very friendly. Once Ghanaians recognize a foreign visitor, they accord to the foreigner the warmth and friendship that would support them during the course of the visit. During our study visits, Ghanaians interacted with African-American and White students very well and cordially. In most cases African American students were sometimes mistaken as Ghanaians if they happened to move around individually/independently. I remember V-, an African American student who fitted well with the Ashanti people. She had physical features of an Ashanti and people would speak Twi to her only to realize she could not communicate in Twi. This is to explain how very similar we are as Africans irrespective of the country of domicile.

The history of slavery makes us a people to welcome our brothers and sisters who have strived to make this holy pilgrimage to the motherland. My first encounter with an African American was with an American Peace Corps worker who had come to my high school to teach mathematics. This was very overwhelming. As a Ghanaian social work student studying in the States, I thought it was an opportunity for me to take

advantage of our visits to the Department of Social Welfare, Children's Homes, and the Osu School of Social Work and learn from both students and social workers some of the issues facing them, i.e., their achievements and hindrances. My interaction with street children led to my interest in a master's research on Child Trafficking in West Africa. My visit to the slave castle in 2002 was my second time to the castle, and I can say it has always been very emotional. I think the idea of debriefing after visits to the slave castles helps in the emotional and psychological healing of both White and Black students on the program.



The Emotional – Historical Realities of the Slave Trade

"Seeing the slave castles probably affected me the most during my stay in Ghana," stated an African-American M.S.W. student reflecting on her visit to the slave castle. *"Walking through the castle was one thing, but hearing the history was the most painful. When the history was explained, I could not imagine that he was talking about human beings. The way the tour guide described the way the Africans were treated sounded like he was talking about animals. I could not believe the things he said about the beatings, disciplinary actions, and raping that took place.... It was so weird because walking through the slave castles, I could hear the mothers screaming for their children, and could feel the heat of the bodies. I felt so many emotions at one time that I could not describe the way I felt."*

"I had been anticipating visiting the slave castles since the start of the trip," said a graduate African-American student. *"This morning, I woke feeling anxious, like something big was going to happen. It was similar to the feeling that you get (intuition) when something is wrong. Cape Coast is such a beautiful place, and to think about the travesty that is connected with this place is just astounding. I did not know what to expect upon visiting the slave castles, but the overwhelming feelings that came about were unexplainable. I remembered walking into the museum and observing the shackles on the walls and going up to touch them and assess the weight. I could not imagine having a metal object of this caliber around my neck and ankles. This is what started the feelings of anger and frustration.... I experienced grief just thinking about my close relatives being in those dungeons, going through those experiences. The tears seemed endless; I could not control the wave of emotions stirring deep within me. I was angry and saddened by this travesty. All that these people, my people, went through, and yet they still are being enslaved in other ways. How can humans be so cruel? In that moment I thought of my great-grandmother, and the stories that she told of her struggle and parents' and grandparents' struggles. Then I thought about what I have done to tell their story and this story. I thought about how African-American history is only emphasized during Black History Month and how much of it is available to us; I thought of my lack of making time to learn and appreciate what my ancestors have conquered for me."*

"The tears were overwhelming; in that moment, it was like a light bulb went off. I got it; I understood what my purpose is and why I was in Ghana. I realized that I had a great responsibility to educate others and to empower others to continue to pass the history on. After leaving the slave castles, I was emotionally drained, but I felt like I had transformed into this new person, one who appreciated life more and learned from the errors of my ways. I realized that I had taken much for granted, something that I

would now work at not doing. I contemplated what it would be like to have my freedom taken away from me and being separated from my family. This experience inspired me to tie up loose ends and embark on a journey of forgiveness of those who have wronged me. Life is too short, and we have to make the most of it."

"I have been thinking long and hard about the perfect way to describe the ambiance of Elmina Castle, and I think the word sorrow does it best," said an African-American doctoral student in history. "As we toured the castle, the guide painted vivid pictures of the history of the place. We saw the female slave yard where there sat a cannon ball that used to be connected to a chain. Guards chained women who resisted the advances of the Governor to that ball. Day and night, rain or shine, the resistor stood until her spirit broke. What is even worse is the ladder that led from the female slave dungeons to a trap door within the Governor's quarters. He would come out to the veranda, search for the woman of his desires, point her (or them) out to the guards, and then wait for them to present her to him. The guards would bathe her, dress her up, and send her up to be raped. Yes, sorrow."

"Just imagining how humiliating it must have been for those women hurts me deeply. Then, as we walked into the dungeon, I grew angrier as I observed the contrast between the bright, airy castle's exterior and the dark, damp dungeons reserved for black cargo. Now a greenish film covers some walls, and an unrecognizable stench hangs in the air. According to [the tour guide], the dungeons were still filled with four feet of human waste when excavations began in the late 1980s. In this room, the sorrow became so real that I could not hold in the tears that had threatened to fall the moment the castle came into view. It hit hard, and was a feeling of utter disbelief. How on earth could men and women justify their horrid actions? How do you treat men and women worse than animals?"

"One of the most emotional and life changing experiences on this trip has been the visit to the slave castles," reflected a White graduate education student. "This was a part of the trip that I was anticipating the most, mainly because I knew that it would be difficult to see, but I didn't know how I would react to it.... Our guide was amazing; he was very intelligent and did a great job of explaining the castle to us. First we saw the female dungeons which were big stone rooms around a central courtyard where they fit hundreds of women. Then we walked through some other areas at the castle. I was fine until we got into this room called the Room of No Return. It was tiny, and we had to duck our heads to get in. We all stood there, and the guide told us that this was the last room the slaves were in before being shipped to America. There was just a little opening to the ocean from the room that they had to go through to get to the boats. We had a minute of silence for all of the men and women who died there and then said 'Never again' all together to pledge not to let something that terrible happen again. I found myself getting teary eyed and upset but then feeling like I did not have a right to be upset. I felt ashamed of my ancestors who were possibly the ones doing these terrible things to the Africans, and I wished there was something I could do to make it better. I also felt like I needed to not show my feelings because it was the African Americans' time to connect to their roots, and I didn't feel justified to have those feelings. I wanted to be able to relate to something there because I was experiencing such strong emotions, but I couldn't relate to the African experience, and I couldn't relate to the European experience. I couldn't understand what made the Europeans do all of the things that they did. Along with all of these remorseful and terrible feelings, the "Never Again" uplifted me because I felt like having seen this will give me a chance to make a difference and not let something like that happen again."

"When we left the castle we went to a ceremony called a libation. We all stood in a

circle holding hands on the land over the ocean on a hill. A man dressed in traditional African dress said a prayer and poured Schnapps on the ground to remember the people who died there and symbolize forgiveness for others. It was a very poignant ceremony for me. We were a racially mixed group having just been through the slave dungeons, and we were all holding hands making the same promise to not let something like that happen again. We were also in one of the most beautiful places I have ever been with the sunset on one side of us, and the ocean and the slave castle with such a dark history on the other side. It was a moment that I feel might change my life forever.

"After we got back to the hotel, the entire group joined together to discuss our experiences. It was interesting to hear everyone's reactions to the slave castles. Some people cried, and others didn't. It was hard to know exactly what to say or what to feel. I had a hard time articulating my feelings about the castles. It was such a mix of emotions of sadness and shame coupled with hope and a feeling that I should try to make a difference. I feel like changing people's attitudes back home will be so hard. I don't know exactly how I can make a difference. I don't know what the next step is. I hope that by sharing my experience here with people at home, people at home will understand what I experienced in Ghana."

The visits to the slave castles are probably the most difficult, emotionally painful and challenging part of the trip. As faculty we try to prepare the students by showing the video "*Sankofa*" to them before they travel and by discussing the slave trade through selected readings. After the visits to both slave castles, I had invited a linguist from a local village to pour libations in a closing ceremony circle that in some way is like a memorial service in front of the Atlantic Ocean—the same waters where the slave ships were awaiting the captured Ghanaians centuries ago. This ceremony is symbolic of the "never again" concept that the students participated in while touring the Elmina castle. The drive back from the slave dungeons is usually the most somber

ride of the entire trip while students reflect on the horrendous experiences that they heard about and witnessed that day.

Alice Boateng Reflects on her Experience

The summer 2003 Ghana Study Abroad was an exciting and educational experience. Both program professors and students developed a more global awareness of the social needs of Ghanaian children and their families. Issues of poverty, child labor, homelessness, and unemployment stared us in the face as we moved along the country. Though I am a Ghanaian from the Ashanti region, lived in Ghana the first thirty-five years of my life, and was aware that the country had many problems, this trip exposed me to the reality of problems in Africa, especially the plight of children.

The trip and tour from Accra to Tamale opened my eyes to the reality of issues that confront Ghana, including poverty, unequal distribution of resources, and exodus of the youth from remote areas to the cities for jobs and survival. These have resulted into street children, teen pregnancies, and abandoned children. The lucky ones were being housed in children's homes. As I reflect on the difference between Kumasi Children's Home (public) and the Tema Children's Home (private), I wonder why all children in the public orphanages could not be housed in the Tema Children's Home. It's a huge disparity, which boils down to the scanty economic resources available to the government of Ghana. The 2003 trip to Ghana was my first time visiting places such as the Larabanga mosque, the Mole game park in the Northern Region, and the slave castles in the Central region of Ghana. These field trips were an important enhancement to the classroom. At the Cape Coast castle, as the linguist poetically recounted the history of slavery and all the activities that took place in the castle, I felt some kind of chill all over my body; it felt bitter and painful; it felt very shocking, as he opened the gate into the Land of No Return. It was a life transforming experience! I am glad it is now history, and we are moving on.

The Educational

Alice introduced the Liberian Refugee Camp in Ghana to the study-abroad program. It became a regular visit for the social work course for several years and was the topic of Alice's dissertation. Here, she describes the group's experience in 2003:

"The U.G.A. 2003 study abroad trip to the Buduburam-Liberian refugee camp really helped us to understand a continent in turmoil. The camp was established in August 1990 in response to the Liberian civil war and housed over 30,000 residents in 2003 with over half being children. The camp is adjacent to a Ghanaian village near the coast on the road from Accra to Cape Coast. Over time, the refugees have spread beyond the camp to live in the village and surrounding areas. While the war in Liberia continued, more refugees traveled from Liberia into the camp. However, in 2006, the numbers decreased drastically, as many Liberians were able to return home as the new President and government brought an end to the years of violence, torture, and destruction from the war.

"Looking back at my journal, we had been in Africa for three days when we were told we were going to visit a Liberian refugee camp, said a white MSW student. It had rained the day before, and I felt that as the rain poured, my emotions were pouring out from inside me. I was already flooded with emotions, and then we went to the camp. In my job as a case manager for the elderly, I have had many refugees as clients, and I have seen how hard it is for them to acclimate to (become comfortable in) a new place with a new culture. At least my clients had a roof over their heads and some type of income. The Liberian refugee camp was very overwhelming for me, especially when I found out that the social worker had been there for two years. She had graduated from a social work school, been placed at this site, and had stayed there day and night for two solid years. I felt bad about complaining in the past of my client to case manager ratio of one to 200, when hers was one to 42,000. I cannot imagine having

no or little down time to regroup and assess."

An African-American M.S.W. student reflected on her experience visiting the Kumasi Children's Home:

"I was amazed to learn about the large number of children who reside within the home and the various reasons as to why the children are there, ranging from mothers being HIV positive or dying from AIDS to mothers serving prison sentences. It was very positive to hear that some of the children were in contact with their families, and some receive some visitation from them. This is very similar to some of the children in foster care in the U.S."

An African-American M.S.W. student described her experience visiting the government-operated and the privately-operated "children's orphanages":

"I was struck by the similarities in the child welfare systems in Ghana and the United States. In both countries the state run facilities are overburdened in comparison to private agencies, and both are reluctant to remove children from their homes if it can be avoided. Lastly, in terms of budgeting, child welfare needs are largely under funded in both countries. When we visited the Kumasi Children's Home, the level of inefficiency I witnessed left me feeling totally dismayed. The smells, filth, and indifference shown to children were unbelievable. The worker to child ratio was unsafe. When we got ready to leave, the toddlers tried to come down the stairs to follow us, and none of the workers attempted to make sure the children were safe. A [professor] had to go up to try to secure the children. The workers did not interact with us, and they did not stop the children from eating paint chippings off the wall. I was also frustrated by the director's barely concealed impatience with our questions. It was one of the saddest things that I have ever seen. Later we had an opportunity to visit a private agency called the Anfaani Children's Home in Tamale. The word Anfaani means blessed, and the



children are fortunate to be living there. The difference between the two agencies was extreme. The Anfaani Children's Home was as clean as the other home was dirty. They asked us to take our shoes off upon entering. The facility was impeccable, and the staff was friendly. The worker-to-children ratios were in line with the highest childcare standards, and they seemed genuinely concerned about the children's welfare. They also had two student volunteers living on site, and when the children soiled themselves, the workers quickly came to clean them up. At the end of each visit, we presented the agencies with donations. At the Kumasi home we wondered if the children would ever see the supplies or if they would go home with the staff. Such thoughts never occurred to us at the Anfaani home. It was apparent that the children living at the private agency had a better chance for a good start. Currently, there are three government run children's homes in Ghana. The burden they face is overwhelming, and children's homes in the United States have similar problems. It is interesting that the same situation is occurring in a developing nation and a world superpower."

Empowerment - A Focus on Rural Women

Sugashee, a traditional West African village in the northern region, ranked among the students' favorite places. They enjoyed the interactions with the families and children, and they were invited into their homes. One student was overheard saying, "They were so willing to invite us into their homes and proud of their wares." This has to be considered in the context of the visible signs of poverty—no running water, thatched roof homes with dirt floors, limited number of literate persons.

"Today was definitely my favorite day of this trip so far. I don't know if I have the words to describe it but I will try," said a White M.S.W. student. "After breakfast this morning, we went out to Sugashee village, where shea butter is made. The moment the bus pulled into the village, I realized that

this was what I was hoping to see in Ghana. There were the animals, the thatched-roof houses, the babies—everything I had envisioned about Africa—all in one village. The experience in Sugashee was distinctly different from what we have done so far in that there was no pressure to buy anything from the people but was more of a friendly exchange and opportunity to interact with and learn from the villagers. Upon our arrival, we had to meet with the village chief so that we could greet him and be greeted. This was a fascinating custom. The native language of the village is Dagbani, so I didn't understand much of what was said during this greeting process, but I did gather that some of the village's current challenges are lack of water and toilets.

"After our formal introduction, we watched and participated in a demonstration of the shea butter making process and had a chance to communicate (through gesturing and other means!) with the people. For example, one of the women brought me over to see a pot with something simmering in it (it had something to do with the making of shea butter) and kept pointing at it and pushing me towards it, so I thought she wanted me to reach into the pot to touch it. As I reached down, however, she slapped my hand, indicating through some gesturing that the contents were hot. Once I realized this, she started laughing at me and then I started laughing at myself, and it felt like we had just bridged our communication differences. I also got to carry a baby on my back for a while, which was amazing. I couldn't believe how content the baby was on my back, even though I felt totally awkward and afraid I would drop it! There were lots of children around, and it was interesting to witness how childrearing is accomplished by the entire community—for the first time in my life, I totally understood the meaning of the phrase 'it takes a village to raise a child.'"

"The visit to Sugashee Village was one of the highlights of the study abroad trip for me. The villagers were so welcoming," reflected an African-American M.S.W.

student. *"They embraced us and made us feel right at home. Even though we purchased shea butter, the whole experience lacked the consumer element that characterized some of the trip. Instead of having a financial exchange, there was more of a meaningful cultural exchange. Although there were language barriers and unfamiliar cultural protocols to follow, I felt like a part of the community. The villagers seemed to take pleasure in sharing their knowledge and experiences with our group."*

"This visit was an enlightening experience for me in a number of ways. It brought home the fact that different does not mean better or worse. The villagers do not have much material wealth yet there is such richness in their interactions and sense of community. They have an abundance of cultural and human capital in their children and traditional method of making shea butter. More importantly, their willingness to open their lives to us with such warmth and generosity was humbling and endearing. Before coming to Ghana, I heard so much about the welcoming spirit of Ghanaians, and that village exemplifies their hospitality."

Rabbiatou's knowledge of the country, particularly her knowledge of the Northern Region, the social service issues impacting women and children, and her ability to speak most of the major Ghanaian languages made her an invaluable member of this program. She introduced us to a special rural village and the issues facing women in small villages like Sugashee. Sugashee is located six miles north of Tamale, the regional capital of the Northern Region, with a population of a little over 2,000.

Women constitute a little more than half the population of Ghana. Most rural women live on either subsistence farming or petty trading to help supplement their household budgets. There are a few, however, who do not engage in any farming activity or petty trading. These women solely depend on their husbands who are subsistence farmers. Despite the presence of the women's ministry and the National Council on Women and Development, rural women are yet to have their voices heard. Women living in rural

communities face many challenges in their struggle for existence. Though very vulnerable in Ghanaian society, rural women tend to be the backbone of most households. They are the caretakers of their children, husbands, parents, and also extended family members, yet with little or no economic base. Currently, Sugashee Village is benefiting from both faculty and students in the funding of a community shea butter project and sponsoring school children to have access to formal education.

"On June 19, 2003, I [Rabbiatou] got the best working definition of empowerment I could have ever asked for in the form of a visit with the Adugyama Mothers Group in Kumasi, Ghana. I had the wonderful opportunity of seeing empowerment in progress and hearing about the struggles, offsets, victories, and challenges of seeing a vision of empowerment through to fruition. Working with a group of young mothers, Dr. Eva Tagoe-Darko of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) lectured and led a visit to a women's empowerment farm."

Dr. Tagoe-Darko shared stories of these struggles while working with the Adugyama Mothers' Group. These same helping challenges are evident in the United States. Certain apprehensions and issues can be evident when the helping professionals and clients are from groups distinguished as markedly different within that culture and society. In Ghana, the marked differences are ethnic distinctions. In the United States, the marked difference is often race. Empowering women is the single most effective way to reduce world poverty and encourage child health (Amos, 2000). Women hold the key to poverty eradication and issues of health that are directly linked to poverty. Investing in the empowerment of women is an investment in the future of the world. Encouraging women to be more self-reliant via economic interventions and integrated rural development focuses on the satisfaction of basic needs (Garba, 1999). Among those basic needs is the right of every child to be healthy.

While it is obvious that empowering women has far-reaching benefits, it is at times a difficult issue for which to gather support. This proved to be the case for Dr. Tagoe-Darko. In Ghana, women's empowerment may not generate much interest, but child health does. As such, it can be used as the vehicle to get to women's empowerment. As practitioners we must continue to think of ways to push empowerment for women to the forefront.

"I [Rabbiatou] feel very fortunate to have gotten this lesson in empowerment at such an early point in my professional education and career. The visit to the Women's Empowerment Farm touched my life in both a professional and personal way. My experience on that day allowed me to see empowerment optimized. Being witness to this process initiated the empowerment cycle within me as I took my first step toward awareness. I have begun my life journey and will continue to live each day seeing empowerment for myself and for my Black sisters around the world."

"Dr. Eva Tagoe-Darko's lecture really inspired me," said an African-American M.S.W. student. "All over the world there are women and children living in poverty, dying from preventable diseases, and lacking basic resources that can drastically improve their quality of life. I want to be able to assist these women in some way. Dr. Eva's lecture discussed traditional rites and skills that are being lost by the younger generation of women in Ghana. She mentioned many of these women are leaving home in pursuit of perceived opportunities in the capitol. However, once they arrive they find that they lack basic skills and do not have an understanding of reproductive health and often end up pregnant. Many of the traditional methods of promoting women's health involve medically sound techniques but the younger women are unaware of them. Because there are many barriers to accessing healthcare in Ghana, especially in the rural areas, it is important that these young women gather reliable

information from their available resources."

Sankofa Experience...Back to my Roots

Most students of African ancestry travel to Africa somewhat aware of the historical and emotional connection for them. They are uncertain of what to expect or how they will be received, but they know that this continent has the keys to their "locked and mysterious past." For some the reality of this being their "ancestral home" is more than they are ready to handle. The similarities of how people look so much like them, their relatives, and their friends, is sometimes overwhelming. Feeling like a majority in an African country is strange, as is being called *oburoni*—white foreigner—which is also insulting to African-Americans who feel like they are coming home.



"This long awaited journey to the motherland brought much joy, pain, sadness, confusion, indifference, shame, and guilt," shared an African-American non-traditional M.S.W. student. "It became very difficult to decide whether to interpret this experience as a student or from my personal perspective.... Life for the past fifty years has prepared and taught me to perhaps limit my expectation of my journey home. I wanted to be able to accept any situation that may arise. However, I was too overwhelmed at times by the present state and conditions that my brothers and sisters who were left behind have been faced with, and why? I knew that I had to make peace with the possibility that, although I was returning to the general neighborhood of my family's birth, I may never find the actual location of my home.... After all, home is

where the heart is, and at the present, my heart is very much with Ghana!"

"Now that I have learned a significant amount about the history of Ghana, I feel compelled to dig a little deeper into my own family history," said an African-American M.S.W. student. "I felt ashamed that I was so eager to learn about the 'motherland,' where it all began, but realized that I had so much more to learn about my own family in the States.... I must tell the story, take advantage of the wealth of wisdom that the elders in my family have, for those who are deceased, keeping them alive by continuously telling their story. I am learning to cherish the simple things in life such as sitting on the porch and shelling peas with my great-grandma, living in the moment. As the symbol of Sankofa represents, going back and taking, I plan to do just that. Not only do I plan to go back and trace my family's roots to Africa, but I plan to trace the roots from where it all began in America as well."

"I have always dreamed of going to Africa, but never imagined it would be so soon," said an African-American fashion student. "Never in my wildest dream could I have created such an amazing place and people. Going to Ghana, West Africa, has been my most spiritually rewarding experience to date. I am still in disbelief sometimes that I ever went, but then I see my beautiful carvings and jewelry. As an artist and designer, I have such a great appreciation for the resourcefulness of our people. I have a heightened understanding of myself. Now I know why I am attracted to the materials I work with, my color sensibility, and sense of style. It's all written with the blood of my ancestors and reaffirmed in everything I create. I feel so blessed to have been a part of this group of awesome women. For me, this trip was even more worthwhile because of the people I met. Although we all were from different places and ages, there was a strong eagerness to evoke change in our own ways. I originally came to Africa expecting

to be making my own textiles alongside the local artisans. I had a good idea of what I wanted to find, and found so much more. The generosity and humility I observed inspired me to walk a little lighter in my own path."

"The opportunity to study abroad allowed me to complete a year long goal and fulfill a life long dream," reflected an African-American doctoral student. "This program meant more to me than merely traveling about 10,000 miles to Africa, using a new currency system, or sampling new foods. My experience in Ghana helped to enhance and complete my identity. As a result, I have an entirely new outlook on my life. 'I am the dream and the hope of the slave.' I am fulfilling the dreams and hope of my grandparents, parents, sister, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. Returning to Africa, Ghana [has] helped me get in touch with this aspect of my life. The dreams and the hopes of my ancestors are for me too: be free, love, help others, show honor, respect myself, value family, endure, and remember from whence I came."

"The journey to the mother continent was truly a moving experience," said an African-American M.S.W. student. "This was a trip that I needed to go on at whatever cost because I felt that this was my time to go. I needed to feel connected by returning to the place where my ancestors came from, as the term Sankofa means. I got so much out of this three week trip that will most likely stay with me for the rest of my life. Even if I don't ever return, I am proud of myself for making the commitment to go."

"After finally settling back into my life of relative solitude, a process that proved difficult after the three weeks of interacting with Ghanaians and the other program members, I am convinced that the trip represents only the first of many journeys back to Africa, especially to Ghana," reflects an African-American doctoral student. "When people ask me what I gained most from my participation in the program, I

hesitate because of my inability to articulate the feeling of wholesomeness I equate with the journey. Never have I felt so at home or so welcomed away from my parents' home. In every city we visited, our brothers and sisters greeted us favorably and really made the symbolic experience of traveling back to the "home" of our ancestors real. Hearing my family ask me to find out what they need to do to get to Ghana is one of the most rewarding of my post-study abroad experience.

"A problem I observed is that, in some circumstances, only vestiges of Ghanaian culture exist. I am afraid that globalization will lead to the de-acculturation of the whole world. All I thought about as we toured Accra, and to a lesser extent Kumasi, was all that has been forever lost in Africa because of European encroachment hundreds of years ago. I also consider the role we, as American tourists, have in the globalization of Western culture.

"Of course I will never forget my seeing the slave dungeons for the first time. Knowing these types of horrible things actually happened is one thing; actually viewing and touching these tools of torture provided me with an insight that I could not gain if I read every book written about the slave trade and its victims. And no matter how much I write, words could never capture the emotions that engulfed me as we explored both Elmina and Cape Coast Castle. Nor can they express the deep gratitude I feel for the opportunity to go 'home.'"

Summary

"As a Ghanaian social worker trained in the U.S., I see that studying abroad is very crucial," says Alice. "Living and learning in another culture not only provides the competitive edge that today's employers are looking for but also offers a life-changing experience. It helps faculty and students to explore; grow as individuals; learn about themselves; learn different perspectives; make new friends; and discover what is beyond their borders. Studying in another country, despite the cultural shocks, is a highly entertaining and

enriching experience. It breaks down stereotypes, fosters understanding, and builds tolerance and respect. As a social worker, I am amazed by the places and people of different values, beliefs, cultures and celebrations. I believe strongly that it is more important in our world of interdependence to embrace different cultures.

"The study abroad Ghana trip was a powerful experience. As a Ghanaian, the study abroad trip provided me with the opportunity of knowing my country better. As a social worker, it has heightened my cultural competence. As a teacher, it has equipped me with knowledge into some global policy issues that affect Ghana differently from the United States, as well as going back to fetch my past and passing it onto future generations, including my students."

Schools of social work should continue to include developing countries in Africa as destinations for study abroad programs. Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000) suggest that while we wait on virtual learning communities to be developed in Africa, schools of social work should employ approaches such as study abroad/exchange programs to enhance cultural experiences in Africa. Developing these programs takes time, financial resources, and consistent coordination with persons, usually through personal contacts. However, the hard work results in both students' and faculty members' increased knowledge about diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance, and this is priceless.

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Cheryl D. Dozier, Ph.D., is Associate Provost & Chief Diversity Officer at the Office of Institutional Diversity, University of Georgia. Alice Boateng, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor at University of Nevada, Reno, School of Social Work. Rabbiatou Halidou Jibrilla, M.S.W., is a social worker currently working in the U.K. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: cdozier@uga.edu.



REFLECTIONS ON SAN MIGUEL TZINACAPAN: "I AM NOT THE SAME PERSON"

Rose Penzerro, Ph.D., University of Texas-Pan American

Mexican American social work students from the University of Texas-Pan American spent two weeks in the state of Puebla, Mexico, including one week learning from the Nahua residents of the village of San Miguel, Tzinacapan. Students stayed in a small motel run by an indigenous women's co-op, and spent days visiting with the denizens of the village, including, the *curandero* (healer), mid-wife, radio station operators, bi-lingual (Spanish-Nahuatl) teachers, and families with sons in the U.S. Student writings conveyed themes of respect for our common humanity, acceptance of differences in cultural values and deepened understanding of the interaction of historical, political, and economic forces. The students suggest the life-altering nature of their experiences.

Twenty one social work undergraduate students and their professor traveled to the interior of Mexico for a summer class on Social Welfare in Mexico. Although the two-week trip was divided into an urban experience in the city of Puebla and rural experience in the rural area of Cuetzalan, this paper will focus on the rural experience. Social welfare services and issues are different in the city, where there are more governmental and non-governmental organizations providing services to at-risk populations, such as orphans, street children, battered women, AIDS patients, and law violators. In the rural area, services are more informal and the entire population of indigenous people can be seen as at-risk.

Our group was one of many groups of college students who had traveled to San Miguel Tzinacapan to learn about indigenous culture. However, unlike any other group that had come before us, we were from the Rio Grande Valley on the Texas-Mexico border. So, we were familiar with an item called a tortilla warmer: two pieces of round fabric about 10 inches in diameter sewn together with an opening. The first student who saw the warmers bought them all as souvenirs for family members. Others admired them and asked the women if they would come again with more of them. For the next three days, the village women visited our hotel with a few more warmers every day and we bought every one of them. It led to interesting exchanges

with the women who told us that we were not like most groups they had met because of the tortilla warmers. When we learned that many visitors take them to be little pillow covers, we shared laughter.

Indeed, our group was a bit different from their average college tourists. We hailed from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, an agricultural area known for citrus, onions and watermelon. The University of Texas-Pan American is located in Hidalgo County Texas on the U.S.-Mexico border, where 88% of the 600,000 residents reported Hispanic origin to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau. People on both sides walk and drive across the area's bridges daily: Mexicans come to shop at the U.S. malls and discount stores, while Americans cross to buy medications, visit dentists, get a haircut, and shop for traditional Mexican goods. Both English and Spanish are spoken on both sides of the border, although the Spanish on the U.S. side is often a dialect, called Tex-Mex. While many Mexicans may refer to most North Americans as *gringos*, those of Mexican descent are often called *pochos* and the dialectical mixture of English and Spanish is a herald of this identity. In stereotypical terms, the pocho doesn't know the culture, history, or language of Mexico (Richardson, 1999). Certainly, our students had not studied Mexican history and culture in the public schools of Texas. Only a generation ago, Texas public school students were punished for speaking

Spanish. Whatever the students knew about Mexico, they had learned from their families and others in the community.

The Study

So that we could write about our experiences, a formal study plan was presented to the university's I.R.B., asking the question, "What is the educational impact of a short term, study-abroad course on non-traditional social work students?" Research instruments included student daily journals, reflection papers after we returned and focus groups conducted one year later. Twenty-one Mexican-American students (four males and seventeen females with an average age of twenty-eight) signed up for the research study. Sixteen reported that they were the first in their family to attend college. Nine reported Spanish as the primary language in their home. Two thirds (14) of the students had never visited Mexico beyond the border cities, with only four having been south of Monterrey (about 100 miles south of the border). Early student journal entries expressed both eagerness and anxiety about the trip. They were eager to see new places and learn new things, but they were anxious about being away from their families for the extended period of time.

The students were excited at the possibility of visiting in the interior of Mexico, or "the real Mexico" as some phrased it. All of the students spoke Spanish, though ability ranged from some spoken Spanish to fluent and literate. Some had never traveled without family and only four had ever been away from family for two weeks. So it was not surprising that some students became homesick and many students called home every day. This was easy when we were in the Spanish Colonial City of Puebla, where we stayed in the middle-class historic district.

In Puebla, students were excited to stroll amidst cathedrals and buildings that were erected in the 1500s. But just as the architecture of the Puebla historic district was a pleasant surprise, the food was a surprise of a different sort. The regional cooking of Puebla is very different from the typical Tex-Mex fare the students identified as Mexican

food. The discovery of McDonald's and Domino's Pizza eased the transition for some. Spanish language ability facilitated communication with everyday Mexicans. Most students interacted with cab drivers, waiters, shopkeepers, restaurant patrons and hotel guests, and at their field sites with ease. Nevertheless, lectures conducted in Spanish proved difficult for all but a handful of fluent speakers. Most students' vocabularies were limited to everyday words rather than the complex vocabulary and syntax of professionals. Everyone took notes in English. The Puebla city experience provided a base from which to reflect on the very different culture we would experience next.



San Miguel Tzinacapan, Cuetzalan de Progreso

The second week was spent in Cuetzalan, a small central city surrounded by indigenous villages in the northeast of the state of Puebla. While the poverty rate for Mexico as a whole is 42%, the indigenous poverty rate is 90% (Hall & Patinos, 2005). The Nahuatl descendants of the Aztecs, represent 75% of the approximately 45,000 Cuetzalan area residents (INEGI, 2001). The local economy is based on coffee and two types of tourism: ethnic and eco. Ecotourists who come from the U.S., Europe, Canada, and urban areas of Mexico visit Cuetzalan to explore the extensive cave system, springs, waterfalls, and tropical flora (Butler & Hinch, 1996). Others, such as our group, come to experience indigenous culture. In San Miguel Tzinacapan, the Cuetzalan village that we visited, their mission is to preserve and provide education about the history and culture of the Nahuatl and the Nahuatl language (Baez, 2004). The schools are bilingual, therefore the Nahuatl language is preserved. Juanita was the woman who managed the little hotel owned by an

indigenous women's cooperative where our group stayed. The dining hall was the meeting place of the co-op board of directors. All of the women arrived for the meeting dressed in the tradition of their various groups representing several of the area villages. The co-op had turned a profit for the first time and the board voted to use the funds to assist battered women in the surrounding indigenous villages. In addition to providing physical and financial assistance to battered women, the co-op also provides community education on the topic via radio and through human rights organizations. Afterward, Juanita, who is also the co-op director, gave a history of the organization, including its Nahuatl name, *Taselotzin*, meaning "from the earth." Juanita provided a lecture-discussion with the students and noted that Spanish is the second language of most of the people in the area. Most of the women over forty do not speak Spanish because they were never sent to school. Girls are now sent to school, so the younger generation is more educated. However, traditional dress and customs continue to dictate a division of labor based on gender that affects immigration to the U.S. as well. It is only the young men who have left San Miguel for El Norte. As the manager of *Taselotzin*, Juanita is aware of her visibility as a role model for young women who aspire to non-traditional roles.

Juanita continued to be a most gracious hostess throughout our stay and at the end allowed the students to plan a party for our last night. Students invited musicians from one of the interviewed families to perform. The men came with their wives and other family members as did our guides and their families. To express his feelings to us, one of our waiters performed a very special dance, called El Negrito. The complex dance dates back to the colonial period when slaves were imported from Africa to Mexico. Our waiter performed the dance, a cross culture tribute, as a gift to us. This was the final event of the evening and our journey; we departed the next morning for the twelve-hour bus ride back to the border where a caravan of family members greeted the returning students.

Major themes

Two weeks after our return, students turned in final reflection papers. Students were asked to reflect on how the trip affected them personally and professionally. How did the trip impact their beliefs and stereotypes as well as their education as social workers? These papers, along with their daily journals, were reviewed for this narrative. The journal assignment was to write about their observations, what they did, and how they reacted to these experiences. Several themes emerged, beginning with changing stereotypes about Mexico. Journals documented the process of letting go of ethnocentrism, along with a growing appreciation of the power of geopolitical, historical, and economic forces as one explanation of the difference between the U.S. and Mexico. Students wrote about their growing awareness of the inequality among indigenous peoples, European descendants, and *Mestizos* (a mixture of Spanish and Indian) within Mexico. The students learned that most of them would be considered ethnically *Mestizo* if they lived in Mexico. Their ties to that country through family immigration clearly influenced their recognition of the relationship between personal life experiences and personal value systems for social work practice and the development of the self.

Breaking Down the Stereotypes of Mexico

Students had preconceived ideas of what Mexico was like, often because of stories from grandparents or parents or the local media. Student journals reflected awe at the beauty of Mexico, a surprise to most of the students who were only familiar with the flat gulf plain of Northeastern Mexico and South Texas. One student observed, "Before the trip I thought that if you've seen one Mexican town, you've seen them all." Another felt that, "Mexico is not at all what we see on the 6:00 o'clock news where all you hear are reports of kidnappings, violence, and drug cartel activities on the border." Many expressed fear and apprehension as they prepared for the trip, in part due to concerns that their parents or other family members expressed about dangers lurking in Mexico. Many of the

younger students who lived with parents would not have had permission to travel without the sponsorship of the University. Fears were allayed in part because in Puebla we stayed in the historic district, a middle class to affluent area so that everyone felt comfortable and safe going out in the evenings. Cuetzalan is a small town where everyone knows everyone else and thus feels safe. We stayed surrounded by the proverbial village.

A wonderful example of village child care was witnessed by about a dozen students walking to the village church with our Nahua guide, Miguel. A small child began choking on a piece of candy and his slightly older sister didn't know what to do; very quickly Miguel picked up the boy and turned him upside down causing the candy to be expelled. Away they ran to play again. We also came across an older man asleep on the side of the road, a bit hungover but in a safe place. Miguel murmured that his wife would soon be on her way to get him.

Geopolitical Social and Economic Inequality

The contrast between the poverty of San Miguel and our lives in the U.S. was so impressive to the students that every one of them commented on it. "We have so much and they have so little." Another stated, "I can never go back to living an unconscious life of privilege. I was born only twenty miles on the U.S. side of the border; I could just as easily have been born on the other side." Many noted that, "We are so spoiled." "Now, I really understand why my grandparents migrated to the U.S."

To the locals, San Miguel Tzinacapan is considered within walking distance of Cuetzalan, but a rather long walk. So, the students were inclined to take the bus or a cab. When they saw that several of the women who came to our motel to sell their crafts would walk the two miles barefooted, they were surprised. One student even gave bus fare that would take the woman most of the way home, which she graciously accepted and then walked home. Another lesson in values for the students: the ride was not worth forty cents to the average village resident. Students' comments

included, "How used to driving we are... how little forty cents means to us... how many pairs of shoes we have... wonder what she thinks of us wanting her to waste forty cents on a bus ride? She thinks we are fat, rich and lazy." Numerous students made resolutions to do more walking when they returned home.

Pairs of students visited with several village families who agreed to be interviewed on various topics, such as their culture and history and immigration to the U.S. In Cuetzalan and San Miguel, students wondered how people could have so little and be so hospitable. Many noted the grace and humility of the Nahua people. "How gracious they are when they have so little. Here they are living in houses with dirt floors and wood stoves, but they invite us in to share." Although the poverty in the rural area was clearly greater than that in the city, the sense of community and strong religious faith in the indigenous village was noted again and again in student journals. "We are so material; they are so spiritual." These factors, plus the lack of television, movies, department stores, and other trappings of wealth, suggested a different lifestyle to the students, not the same as the grinding poverty seen in the city of Puebla where poor migrants from rural areas, who had hoped to better themselves, perform the lowest paying jobs. The students felt that people in the village had dignity and wondered how that was impacted by the immigration experience where they would be called illegal aliens and *mojados* (wetbacks).

The pervasiveness of the poverty, combined with the obvious lack of opportunities to move out of poverty, gave students an up-close perspective on how large social systems impact people. For example, although the Mexican government provides some scholarship assistance to indigenous youth who finish high school, the competition for the funds is such that only one student out of every eighty applicants will receive one. There is no university or community college in Cuetzalan. Again, the grandparents who immigrated to the U.S. were mentioned by students as the ones who went through the hardship so that they could now have an opportunity to get a college education. Even those who had no

immigration experience could relate to this. Valley residents are aware of Texas history, which includes a dispute as to whether the border with Mexico would be the Nueces River or the Rio Grande. If it had been the former, the Valley would have been in Mexico. While students respected the Nahuatl, they didn't want to live that lifestyle.

Immigration

Immigration was a central theme in journals. A majority of students had families with immigrant roots as well as life experiences growing up in an area where they were members of an oppressed majority population. Most grew up hearing family stories of migrant farm work, discrimination, and lack of opportunity. They could identify with the immigrant experience.

Because of poverty and lack of opportunity in the rural areas, there is massive migration to the big cities, such as Puebla, and to the *maquiladora* factories on the U.S.-Mexican border. In fact, Reynosa, which is just across the border from Hidalgo County, contains numerous *maquiladora* factories owned by U.S. companies located in Mexico that hire Mexican workers. Even so, unemployment, low wages and proximity to the U.S. tempt many to hire "coyotes" (clandestine transporters of immigrants) to take them to the U.S.

Students interviewed indigenous families who had relatives in the U.S. and found differing views. Some families were happy for the financial support their sons sent home. That support gave the family the opportunity to have a little bit more so that children could go to school, houses could have electricity or indoor plumbing, or another room might be added to the family home. Others missed their children, worried that they would never return, and opined that family ties were more important than material goods. One student observed that after visiting the village and seeing the quiet, spiritual life, where no one drives a car or has a television, it was hard to imagine these young people in the U.S. where they would take the lowest paying jobs. One student wrote about how her mother had told her that she was homesick for Mexico and her family after she

had emigrated to Texas. Her friend, though, found it hard to understand parents who didn't want their children to better themselves. The discussion drew in many others with some students decrying the acceptance of undocumented immigrants from Mexico, but most expressed an understanding of the larger social forces that sent the young men in search of economic betterment. The fact that the young people left for the U.S. without documentation meant that they could not easily return. However, most send money home.

As one of the few college-educated residents in the area, our lead guide, Miguel, was conversant in three languages: Nahuatl, Spanish, and English. He was happy to be in San Miguel Tzinacapan teaching school and providing guide services in the summer. He had visited the U.S. to attend a conference of bilingual educators in San Antonio, Texas. He had to travel by bus for five hours to Mexico City to fill out paperwork, pay money, and wait six months before he was issued a legal visa to visit the U.S. Typically, poor people cannot get visas to visit the U.S. for any reason as the law requires a considerable amount of money in the bank or sponsorship in the U.S. (such as Miguel had since he had been invited to speak at a conference). The young men do not even consider applying for a visa to work legally in the U.S. because that is not seen as feasible without connections, money, or the patience to wait more than ten years with no certainty of ever being selected. After listening to Miguel and others, even students who did not like illegal immigration agreed that the immigration system needs reform.

Critical Self Reflection

The fact that the students were primarily of Mexican ancestry led to much reflection on identity. If they were citizens of Mexico, they would be considered *Mestizo*, a term not used in the U.S. At home, many of the students and others often consider themselves to be Mexican, but in Mexico, they were U.S. citizens, a privileged group. Students evidenced their raised awareness by statements such as, "We are a different kind of Mexican...here, I'm the Gringa." Several students took note of the maids who cleaned our rooms and one

observed, "She could have been my grandmother; she looks just like her and she worked as a maid in the U.S. so that my mother, and now I, would have the life we have." Another simply said, "That young woman cleaning my room...that could have been me. If I had been born here, and had no chance to go to school, what choices would I have?"

As one young woman eloquently put it, "As a Mexican-American, I can never go back to leading a life of unconscious privilege." Others said, "I see life differently now...I have been strengthened through this experience...my eyes had been closed and now they are open...we are so spoiled...when I get home I won't take so much for granted. I hope my family still knows me when I return, because I am not the same person." More than half thanked me in their papers for the opportunity to get in touch with their roots or to see life from a different perspective. Many expressed an interest in visiting again with their families. All but two students opined that they now see immigrants differently and several stated a preference for working with this population when they returned. Others stated that they now have a better understanding of Mexican immigrants back home.



Discussion

Students who participated in the study tour cited the experience as having a major impact on them as student social work students, as Mexican-Americans, and as human beings. The success of the trip included the fact that it was planned with the input of non-traditional students unaccustomed to traveling without family, half of whom held jobs, many of whom were parents. Further, the interplay of classroom with volunteer service and the week in the indigenous culture gave students a broad

view of the social environment of the interior of Mexico.

As called upon by C.S.W.E. and others (Johnson, 1996; Reichert, 1998), undergraduate social work programs are strengthened by the addition of an experiential international component. Far away from home, interacting in a new environment, students moved from their ethnocentric perspective and began to view a different culture with more clarity and understanding. Citing the benefits of international experience but the small percentage of college students who study abroad, especially those who are minority or non-traditional students, numerous national agencies call on universities to increase opportunities (Bollag, 2003). As universities increase their numbers of non-traditional students (part time working full-time, married or parenting), fewer students are able to take advantage of the traditional international educational experience due to work, family, or financial obligations. However, there is evidence for the effectiveness of brief study (Festervand & Tillery, 2001). That so many of the participants of this study referred to a two-week experience as life changing adds further substantiation. The returning students provided the strongest voice in recommending that the program make this opportunity available to all students studying social work. One year later, fifteen of the twenty-one students attended focus group discussions and reflected once again on the lasting impact of the experience. Students shared memories as well as current experiences of working with immigrants from Mexico, their understanding of their clients' culture shock, their awareness of indigenous culture, and their common humanity. The consensus was that the educational impact of the trip was transformative: "I am not the same person."

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Rose Penzerro, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Social Work at University of Texas Pan American. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: rpenzerro@atpa.edu.

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- ◆ How do you interpret your personal "inside" vis-à-vis your professional "outside?"
- ◆ What experiences of "inside out" have you had that might inspire other professionals in similar circumstances?

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HOSTING A SHORT-TERM VISITING PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS: TIPS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Intae Yoon, Ph.D., East Carolina University, Jim Ward, M.S.W., University of South Carolina, and Sujung Lee, B.S.W., University of South Carolina

With this narrative, the authors have provided an empowering and culturally sensitive model for hosting a short-term visiting program in the U.S. for international social work students and practitioners by adopting the Generalist Intervention Model. Detailed guidelines for organizing such an event are delineated. Also reflected are what the authors learned as hosting coordinators for twelve visiting programs for Korean baccalaureate, masters, and post-masters level social work visitors.

As "the globalized and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century" becomes the locomotive power to internationalization in higher education (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p. 5), international social work is one of the emerging fields in the profession. To keep abreast with this trend, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates that international social work content be covered in social work education (2002). As of August 2007, we found that at least 22 social work programs offered various study abroad programs (CSWE, 2007). Most of the programs are short-term visiting programs. A handful of reports are currently available to share with organizers' or participants' learning experiences from the programs (Boyle & Cervantes, 2000; Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Cronin, 2005; Mirsky & Barasch, 2004; Rehr, Rosenberg, & Blumenfield, 1993). All of the experiences were outbound short-term exchange programs of American social work students or practitioners in foreign countries and designed to prepare the participants for more culturally diversified practice settings.

Yet, we found that it is not common knowledge among social work educators to know how to create and host international social work visitors in this country. This may be attributed to a relatively small number of social work programs that are currently involved in inbound visiting programs.

Therefore, there is a critical need to share information about hosting international short-term visiting programs. To help other educators host a successful visiting program, we would like to share our various experiences of hosting 12 short-term exchange programs in the United States during the past eight years.

The hosting institution, where we organized the 12 visiting programs, offers an M.S.W. degree program in Korea. Because of the presence in the country, our institution was frequently contacted by individuals or universities in Korea to establish short-term exchange programs. One of us has been the Director of Field Education for more than a decade at the institution and travels to Korea at least twice per year to facilitate field education for local Korean M.S.W. students. Another of us is a Korean native and was the Coordinator of Continuing Education for the university. Since we had strong working relationships with local communities and social service agencies and are familiar with Korean culture and language, it was a natural fit for us to organize and run the twelve programs. The third author of this paper is another Korean native and helped us run some of the program.

All of the visitors were from Korea and varied in educational levels from bachelors through post-masters. Age, gender, religion, financial capacity, language ability, academic concentrations, interests in cultural immersion, and, most of all, their educational needs were

also quite diverse. To guide various prospective exchange program organizers hosting diverse visitors, we applied the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) by Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2002) as a model for hosting a short-term visiting program. We chose GIM for the following advantages. First, since its introduction as one of the earliest teaching models of generalist social work practice (Landon, 1995, p. 1105), GIM is widely known to social work educators. Second, as the progenitors of GIM proudly emphasize, the model is very applicable, yet streamlined, to any practice setting (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002, p. 4). Third, its seven stages are based upon the assessment of client strengths (p. 28). We learned from 12 different hosting experiences that visitors should not be considered passive learners. They can be active learners and in actuality often made salient comments that provided insightful perspectives to the organizational personnel during the agency visits. To engender visitors' maximum capacities during a short visit, their strengths need to be identified and utilized. GIM's emphasis on strengths is very applicable to hosting a short-term visiting program. Its seven stages include engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up. Fourth, we believe its emphasis on working "with" not "at" clients is very appropriate to designing a visiting program. By following the seven stages, we will delineate what needs to be done in each stage as well as other practical issues that need to be considered.



Stage 1: Engagement

The first stage in GIM is to engage with clients. During this stage, establishing communication and a relationship are two major subtasks (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002, p. 31). Due to the institution's presence in Korea, it was relatively less challenging for us

to engage and establish relationships with the international visitors. The visiting institutions contacted us informally or the administrative decision makers at our institution formally to initiate discussion.

We learned that obtaining formal administrative support is the most important task of the relationship building process. If a visiting institution formally contacts administrative decision makers at a hosting university or there is a pre-established relationship between the two institutions, it is less challenging. However, when a visiting institution informally contacts a faculty member at the hosting university through a personal network, the visiting institution must be advised to formally contact administrative decision makers at the hosting institution to secure administrative approval. The approval can take the form of a formal letter to participate in assisting with the process or may involve a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the two partners. We learned that administrators are often concerned about legal, financial and workload issues of involved faculty or staff members. Formal letters and MOAs worked like contracts delineating responsibilities of each institution. If an MOA is needed, the hosting and visiting universities' legal departments may be required to be involved in the process. Therefore, securing the approval for the program may take longer.

During the engagement stage, we learned from early experiences that corresponding coordinators on behalf of the two institutions must be identified and their communication channels must be secured. Since the coordinators are very critical for a successful visiting program, they should have ease of communication with each other. Since at least one of us is fluent in Korean, it was less challenging for us to communicate with corresponding coordinators in Korea. We learned that it is a good idea to share cell phone numbers and personal email addresses of the coordinators, as well as office numbers and school email accounts. Since there is a 14-hour time difference between Korea and where we are located, using an office phone turned out to be very ineffective for both parties.

Stage 2: Assessment

After securing clear communication channels between the two parties, we assessed the visitors' educational needs, demographic composition, and financial arrangements. As assessment in professional social work practice is fundamental to a "focus or direction" for practitioners and their clients (Cournoyer, 2005, p. 267), understanding the visitors' educational needs was the most important guideline in establishing a hosting program. We realized from the twelve programs that demographically homogeneous groups can have very diversified educational needs. While some visitors desired greater cultural immersion in the U.S., others wanted to observe and learn how American social service agencies were handling the same issues that they had in common with Korea. Even within a group that wanted more visits to different social service agencies, interests of the group members were very diversified as there are various social work fields. Assessing the educational needs can be easily accomplished by directly asking what visitors would like to accomplish during their visits. Sometimes visiting teams inquired of us what educational opportunities they would be able to have during their visits because they lacked knowledge about the region they would be visiting in the U.S.

We also learned that knowing the financial limitations of visitors can guide the length of a visiting program and determine where they can stay during the visit. Some of them were financially affluent enough to stay in the U.S. for longer than a month, travel to different locations, and try various cultural immersion experiences, while less affluent visitors saved money for a long time to pay for their airplane tickets to the U.S. For those who were financially less affluent, having a complete cultural immersion experience, such as dining out or attending a cultural performance, was very challenging.

Interestingly, we noticed that all of the 12 groups without exception designated someone internally to function as the treasurer and collect travel expenditure fees from each member in addition to the official program fees. Then, the treasurer paid for common expenses

from the fees. The common expenses included drinking water, gifts for hosting agencies, film, batteries, stationery items, and even sometimes meals. Some groups purchased daily necessities and wore identical clothes, such as matching shirts for their members. Instead of individually purchasing those items, the treasurer always paid for them and equally distributed the cost of the purchase to each member so that there would be some equality among the visitors.

Learning from early groups, we realized, as we worked with the groups, how important it was to have demographic information about the visitors in advance. The information was needed to reserve a place to stay as early as possible and to ensure a smoother hosting program. For example, we noticed that some non-traditional students felt uncomfortable sharing their rooms with younger or more traditional students. In their eyes, younger students "did not think maturely and behaved in selfish ways." Also, younger and more traditional students expressed their uneasiness to us about being roommates with the older participants. We learned that, due to a cultural norm to respect older people, the younger participants felt pressure to show respect to the non-traditional students and were very reluctant to ask their non-traditional roommates to perform house keeping-type chores.

Regarding different cultural norms, we can never forget the unexpected tension within a team of practitioners because of different gender expectations. They were all in their forties or older. When they had a chance to fix a meal during their long visit, male participants expected female participants to cook and female participants became very indignant about the male practitioners' traditional gender expectations.

As we reflect back on our experiences from working with the past twelve programs, assessing the visitors' educational level was another critical step. Undergraduate, masters and post-masters visitors had quite different needs. Undergraduate students wanted to meet more frontline social workers and their clients and have cultural immersion experiences for a longer period. Masters level students or post-masters practitioners

expressed more desire to us to visit macro-oriented agencies such as the United Way and governmental agencies. This difference was due to the fact that the latter groups held supervisory or administrative positions in their fields.

We also learned that assessing the visitors' fluency in written or spoken English is another important subtask at this stage. All of the twelve groups were in need of interpreters. Even though some groups had a couple of fluent English communicators, the rest of the group members relied heavily upon interpreters for everything from ordering breakfast to paying for dinner. The interpreters were required to be knowledgeable of both American and Korean social-work systems.

Stage 3: Planning

Based upon the assessed educational and other personal needs of the visitors from the second stage, the planning process can begin. Because assessed needs are being translated to program goals and objectives to specific itinerary (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002), we think that the planning stage is the most critical for a successful visiting program. This stage includes deciding the length of a visiting program, choosing a season, setting up schedules, arranging agencies, estimating the budget, recruiting visitors, reserving hotels and classrooms, hiring interpreters and drivers, connecting the same ethnic immigrants, obtaining visas, advising on appropriate gifts, purchasing airplane tickets and travelers' insurance, and specifying the rendezvous location at the airport. When deciding the listed items above, GIM's principle of "working with" clients should be applied and visitors should be a part of the decision making process.

Length and Season

We recommend that the length of a program be determined by three main factors: visitors' educational needs, financial capability, and available time. The previous 12 programs varied from one week to one month. The one-week programs were mostly for Masters of Social Work (M.S.W.) students or post-M.S.W. practitioners. Since many of them had their jobs and duties in Korea, they were unable

to stay long in the U.S. Their schedules included cultural immersion experiences at a minimal level. In contrast, some groups of Bachelors of Social Work (B.S.W.) students stayed in the U.S. for a whole month. Their itineraries included not only social service agencies or programs, but also tourist sites and various cultural immersion experiences in different cities. Staying for such a long time in the U.S. requires financial resources and release from duties in Korea. Therefore, a one-month visiting program may be extremely challenging for non-traditional M.S.W.-level students or practitioners. Because one month is the most commonly allowed duration on entry visa stamps, any program longer than a month will require complicated legal attention and would appear more like a semester-long exchange program.

As the authors reflected back on the past twelve programs, while a week-long program was more feasible for many visitors, the one-week programs were always too short. With the 14-hour time difference between Korea and where we are located, we frequently observed the visitors' symptoms of jetlag and learned that they needed at least a couple of days for the adjustment of their body clocks. As soon as they became adjusted, they had to return to Korea.

Another important decision is the selection of the right season. In Korea, we knew that winter break is very long and lasts about three months, while summer break is relatively short and lasts about one and half months. There is no spring break. Therefore, we organized some of the early programs in the winter, but having visitors in the winter caused some difficulties. Even though our university is located in a relatively mild climate, airline connections were delayed in other cities in the U.S. When our university started the spring semester, we experienced some difficulty with hiring the necessary support staff to help the visitors. Another constraint of having the visiting program in the spring semester was the lack of availability of school dorms for visitors. This type of accommodation was often preferred by undergraduate visitors who wanted to experience American college life.

Therefore, we chose summer for many of the 12 visiting programs. Since summer break usually starts at the end of June and lasts until mid-August in Korea, July is a good month for the visitors. We found that the most significant benefit of hosting visitors in the summer was the fact that we were able to spend more time with the visitors, which was extremely difficult during early spring semesters. In addition to more flexibility in our schedules, there were more university resources available, such as classrooms, supporting staff, school dorms, and other facilities. We recall that fewer flight delays were another advantage of summer. Hosting visitors in July also added unexpected cultural immersion experiences to the visitors' itinerary: the Independence Day. Yet, we also realized that one downside of hosting visitors during the summer was the unavailability of observing what school social workers do in the secondary education system.

Developing Itinerary

When the length of a visiting program and the date are selected, a detailed itinerary must be developed. Due to language barriers and transportation issues, most of the twelve programs were a mixture of social service agency visits, cultural immersion experiences, and volunteer activities. One of the major lessons learned from our experiences was a result of the mistake that we made setting a schedule that was too busy for the first visiting program. When we established the schedule for the first group, both we and the visitors were very excited and shared many different ideas about what they could do in two weeks. As a result, at least three agency visits were arranged on a single day. The schedule turned out to be very overwhelming to us as well as to the visitors. Later, we realized that one visit per morning and one in the afternoon would be sufficient. Also, due to jetlag, it became obvious to us that we should avoid heavy scheduling at the beginning of a visiting program.

Another important lesson we learned was overemphasizing academic aspects of their visit. From the first program, we became aware that coming to the U.S. was a huge

financial investment for some visitors and got anxious about designing a less rigorous academic program. We placed more emphasis on ensuring that the visitors could get as much as possible for their investment. Therefore, we established an academically oriented schedule with little fun. When the tentative schedule was sent to the visitors, they also welcomed such an intensive and academically oriented schedule. As we have routinely reflected back on the schedules with the visitors during the formal evaluations, some visitors suggested a less rigorous academic orientation for future programs. Since the initial experience, we began to include cultural immersion experiences and volunteer activities in a single visiting program.

When social service agencies are contacted, the agencies should be informed of the goals of the visitors, the number of the visitors, and their educational backgrounds. Another tip for a visiting program organizer is to remind the agencies that an interpreter will be utilized. We learned that using an interpreter was an extremely rare occasion for most agency staff. Because of the lack of this type of experience, the staff did not know it would take twice as long to deliver the same message. Also, it seemed to be a challenge for some of the staff to frequently pause to give the interpreter time to translate.

We recommend that the first day's schedule include a brief orientation after check-in. After the brief orientation, dinner and going to bed early will be good for visitors so that they will be refreshed the next day. On the second day, a formal orientation explaining the entire schedule should be the first priority. During the orientation, information about the hosting university, community, and agencies can be explained. Another must during the orientation is to explain state-level governmental agencies and their roles in social welfare. We realized that many well-known acronyms and the like that are common knowledge to Americans were huge barriers to visitors' learning during agency visits. When the hosting agency staff used acronyms, we asked the representatives to explain what the acronyms meant to the visitors. However, the requests sometimes turned out to be a poor

idea because they interrupted the flow of the presentation. Our dilemma was the visitors had a difficult time understanding the presentation when the acronyms were explained after the presentation. Therefore, we explained in advance during the formal orientation what commonly used acronyms stood for and what was the focus of the agency work. Such a tactic turned out to be very effective.

Another important component of the second day is to let one of the hosting institution's staff formally greet the visitors. That gives the visitors a sense of being welcomed. Also, it may be a good idea to arrange a private meeting between a visiting faculty chaperone and the hosting institution's representative. Even though they might have communicated before the visit via phone calls or emails, the private meeting will be their first time to meet each other in person. By having the in-person meeting, they can build a mutually beneficial relationship and briefly discuss future visits.

Another common component of scheduling is to have an evaluation time the day before the visitors' departure. Celebrating the success of the visiting program is a good idea after the evaluation. Other important component is to remind the visitors of their departure schedule and explain the hotel checkout process.

Reservations

Speaking of reservations, a space for orientation, receptions, or lectures should be reserved as early as possible. A computer lab is another item on the reservation list. We learned various reasons for reserving a computer lab. First, Korea has a different semester schedule. Usually, student visitors came to the U.S. right after ending their semester in Korea, without any chance to check their grades. They were very anxious to know their final grades from the semester. Second, recent visiting teams used the Internet daily to share their activities with their non-visiting classmates in Korea. The teams sometimes received questions from their classmates in Korea and asked questions of us or hosting agencies. Third, they used web hard drives for data archival. We vividly

remember the first teams that stayed in the U.S. for a month had many boxes of documents, educational materials, and film cartridges. Today, web hard drives have replaced some of the boxes and film cartridges. Fourth, it was more economical for visitors. Internet connections at hotels are expensive. Therefore, the visitors consistently expressed their need for a computer lab at the hosting institution.

Another important stop for the visitors was a place where they could purchase souvenirs for family members, friends, and colleagues. Since many of the visitors were financially or emotionally supported by their friends and colleagues as well as their families, they wanted to express their gratitude to the supporters. We also learned that, in Korean culture, a traveler is expected to bring gifts to people within their networks after an international trip. So, time for shopping is considered a sign of thoughtfulness from the hosting coordinator.

Empowerment

We highly recommend that opportunities be provided to visitors with various interactions with clients and volunteer work to empower them. The first undergraduate visitors requested that the group have a chance to visit an alternative school in a rural area. The school was the last opportunity for its students to stay in the school system. The students were suspended at their original schools for various reasons and on probation after being adjudicated. Through multiple communications, we were cautioned by the point of contact at the school that the students could be very violent. As all of the visitors were female, we urged our visitors to take extra safety precautions. When the visitors arrived at the school, they received another orientation about the school and its students from a social worker there. It was apparent that the visitors became very anxious about meeting students at the school after multiple warnings. We also saw the school principal and resource officer in a classroom reminding their students of the code of conduct and the consequences of failure to follow the code during the meeting with the visiting students.

When both groups met together in a classroom, the school principal, resource officers, teachers, and even the superintendent of the rural community were also present. At the beginning, it was so serious that no one talked on either side. We could have heard a pin drop. But the silence did not last long. The alternative school students began asking questions, such as the geographic location of Korea. When questions about movies and music were asked, the hosting students were surprised to find that American and Korean students listen to the same music or watch the same movies. After identifying the commonalities, each side asked the other side to sing or dance together. Some of the hosting students wanted to see some Korean martial arts. Luckily one of the visiting students held a black belt in tae kwondo and performed some basic movements. All of a sudden, we realized that the visitors and hosting students mutually enjoyed the meeting without any incident.

After the meeting, to our surprise, the school principal expressed that some of the hosting students would like to have lunch with the visiting students and asked whether or not that would be possible. It was unplanned and unexpected. The principal added that many of the school's students were from low-income families and had never been outside of their rural hometowns. For some of the students, it was their first time to see Asians and hear a foreign language spoken from foreigners. When we translated the request to the visiting students, they also welcomed another opportunity to meet the students at the alternative school.

After the visit to the alternative school, the visiting students expressed that they felt empowered by contributing to the alternative school students' learning about the larger world. Some added that they were not just visitors, but social workers helping the school's students. Because of the feedback, we included different alternative schools in rural areas in other visiting groups' schedules. We heard constantly about the sense of empowerment that was gained from these experiences from all of the groups.

Similar feedback was expressed to us among visiting students after their visits to a local food bank. As mentioned earlier, language barriers and relatively short visiting periods made visiting students passive rather than active in various helping processes. Volunteering at the local food bank was a more proactive learning opportunity for undergraduate visitors. After learning how the food bank was operated, the visiting undergraduate students volunteered at the food bank. They salvaged various donated food and produce, and distributed them to persons in need. This volunteer experience did not require fluent English, but still gave the visiting students a sense of helping others.

Budgeting

Another critical component of the planning stage is to set up a good budget. Depending upon the visitors' educational needs and their length of stay, a budget can vary widely. One of the major items on a budget is airplane tickets. Since all of the twelve visiting program participants purchased their tickets in Korea, we did not have to include the airfare in the budget. For the twelve programs, the major budget items included accommodation, meals, translators, and transportation.

Regarding accommodations, we learned various ways to economize a budget. When some groups of the visitors stayed in New York for two weeks, they used room-and-board or home-stay houses. The houses offered two advantages: they were inexpensive and provide cultural immersion experiences. Using such an option may be available only in a larger city where reliable public transportation is established. One concern of using this form of accommodation is having less oversight of visiting students when they are dispersed across a city after their daily schedule is completed. Therefore, we recommend other hosting organizers to get a safety liability contract with visitors if they are scattered around a city.

What we strongly recommend is a suite hotel with a kitchen and laundry room in each unit. Some visitors stayed for two weeks or longer, so having a laundry facility within each suite was very convenient. Using a school

dorm and cafeteria is another option. Regardless of the type of accommodation, reservations should be made as early as possible.

The next item on the budget list is hiring interpreters and securing transportation. We learned that interpreters are another key to a successful program, because visitors listen to what the interpreters explain to them, not what the hosting agency staff tells them. The interpreters and transportation should be available from early in the morning through late night until everyone returns to their rooms. Since one of us is bilingual, the author worked as an interpreter and driver for the twelve programs. That was another way to reduce the overall budget.

To streamline the budget, our recommended size of visitors is thirteen. A 15-passenger van can hold thirteen visitors, one driver, and one interpreter. If a group's size is fourteen or more, there should be another vehicle. When airplane tickets are purchased as a group, the thirteenth ticket is free. The savings from the free ticket can decrease the individual ticket price. Since many schools require 15-passenger van drivers to take a special driving training, the training should be taken at the earliest convenient time. Also, we learned that sometimes using a private rental company could be another option if bureaucratic policies need to be avoided. Whether a state or private vehicle is used, the reservation for the vehicle is one of the first things to do.

Another tip to minimize the budget is to use community resources. Local Korean-American communities have been a great resource for visitors. When we introduced the visitors to local Korean-Americans, they supplied many daily necessities to the visitors during the visitors' long stay in the U.S., and some even paid for dinners for the visitors. Mutually, the visitors provided updates about news and trends in Korea. The local Korean-Americans repeated their hospitality for almost every group.

Another community resource was a local visitors' center. When we contacted the center, it provided us with local maps, trinkets, and information about the community in

professionally prepared tote bags. Sometimes, our university's visitors center gave them official campus tours and free or discount coupons for beverages and souvenirs.

Other Trivial but Important Items

One of the most frequently asked questions of us from visitors was what gifts they should present to the hosting university and agencies. It is a cultural norm in both countries to present a gift to express appreciation. However, because of possible cultural differences, visitors always asked which gift would be appropriate and how many gifts should be prepared. Therefore, the hosting coordinator should be straightforward about it.

An important duty of the hosting coordinator is to get a letter of invitation from an institution's representative for the visitors' easy visa approval. When applying for a visa as a university-sponsored group, it is much easier for visitors to obtain a U.S. visa than individually applying for a visa. Even though an invitation letter is not a determining factor of visa approval, it will certainly add more credibility to the visitors' applications. Visitors must apply plenty of time in advance. If some members are denied U.S. entry, applying in advance will give the team enough time to recruit new members.

Travelers' insurance is another requirement for visitors. There are many inexpensive travelers' insurance programs with good coverage. Sickness or injury during their stay in the U.S. could be very expensive. Therefore, it is a good idea for the hosting coordinator to remind visitors of the importance of the insurance.

Another practical tip we learned from the past twelve programs is to include contact names of hosting agencies, their telephone numbers, maps or directions to the agencies, and webpage addresses on the finalized schedule. This practice turned out to be very useful especially when we forgot to bring the information with us, at least some of the visitors had the information. More importantly, the visitors were able to get information about the agencies in advance through web searches.

When everything is in place and the visitors are about to leave for the U.S., the hosting coordinator should designate a place where he or she can meet the visitors at the airport. In the event of a possible delay, the hosting coordinator must have the flight schedules of all visitors. The information will allow the coordinator to track where the visitors are until they arrive at their final destination. It is also a good idea to prepare two vehicles for airport pickup to help transport luggage, even if the number of visitors is less than thirteen.

Stage 4: Implementation

Making a Demand for Work: Study the Hosting Agencies

We learned that a visiting program's implementation stage starts even before the visitors' arrival at the airport. After a tentative schedule is set up based upon the needs of the visitors, the hosting coordinator must place certain expectations on the visitors. When a tentative schedule is sent to the coordinator of the visiting group, the schedule must contain the web addresses of the hosting agencies they will visit during their stay. That way, they can look the agencies up on the web and gain a working knowledge of them. Because their visit to each agency will be relatively short, it is impossible for the visitors to learn every aspect of the agency during the visit. Therefore, it is important for visitors to have advance background information about the agency in order to make the visit more productive and effectual.

Making a Demand for Work: Identifying Internal Assets

Another area to be addressed is to identify and utilize group participants' strengths. As mentioned previously, our visitors made a positive impact upon rural troubled teens. Some groups prepared songs and dances for nursing home residents. It did not take a huge effort for visitors to prepare the songs and dances; the matter was to identify who had what strengths within the team. Even though some groups did not think they had any talents, they realized they had a huge asset by simply being from a different culture and society. We recall many visitors being asked to share how Korea

handles the same issues. They became very enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge. Even though we have not tried yet, it may be a good idea for visitors to offer cultural training for some hosting agencies in the U.S.

Making a Demand for Work: Team Building and Labor Division

The most important demand from the hosting institution is for team building and a clear division of labor among the visitors. It is an apparent need for visitors to have pre-entry meetings to build relationships with each other and to prepare for their visit. During the meetings, a clear labor division regarding various operational duties should be established among the visitors. The duties include: an internal team leader, a treasurer, an archivist, and a photographer. We experienced teams with clear labor divisions and those without any labor division. Some of the well-organized teams divided themselves into subgroups according to areas of interests, and conducted literature reviews about the areas. Those teams were very well prepared for agency visits. In contrast, one team without labor division even contacted us after returning to Korea to get pamphlets and other information about agencies they had visited.

Before Arrival

The hosting coordinator becomes very busy right before the visitors' arrival. Several administrative actions should be taken. The coordinator should send a reminder to all hosting agency representatives, translators, and drivers. Enough pens, notepads, copies of the finalized schedules, handouts for orientations, name badges, and parking passes should be ready. One practical tip from our experiences is to have a receipt-collecting folder for reimbursement. If any expenses occur during the visit, all receipts should be kept. By placing a receipt-collecting folder in the official vehicle for the visiting group, it will be easy to collect all of the receipts. Also, the dean or director and other administrative staff must have a copy of the finalized schedule so that they know where the visitors are at all times. Another miscellaneous tip is to set up

an "out-of-office" message on voice mail and email accounts.

After Arrival

The hosting coordinator should get to the airport in advance and check any flight delays or changes on the day of visitors' arrival. Because visitors may arrive earlier than the estimated arrival time, it is always a good practice to be at the airport at least thirty minutes in advance. Because international visitors often have excess baggage, it is necessary to have a second vehicle to transport the passengers and their luggage if there are more than ten visitors. When visitors arrive, a brief introduction of the hosting coordinator is appropriate. After all luggage has arrived, they can go to the accommodation facility where they will stay throughout their visit. We learned that pre-check-in was a good idea to expedite the visitors getting settled into their rooms.

We also learned that it was advantageous to have all visitors' room numbers and phone numbers for emergency contact when they check into their rooms. Right before the check-in process, we gave a brief orientation about the accommodation. After everyone settles into their rooms, we take everyone out for dinner, which is also used as an opportunity to let them know about the second day's schedule, the hosting coordinators' emergency contact numbers, and the mandatory use of seatbelts at all times inside of the vehicle.

We began the second day with an orientation about the overall schedule. The orientation provided the chance to get to know each visitor in person. As mentioned earlier, the orientation can include information about the hosting institution and community, federal and state governments, and other major social-service programs. We learned that we should inform visitors of getting permission before taking pictures and videotaping agencies or clients. Even though most of the visiting groups were aware of confidentiality and got permission before taking pictures, we often had to remind the visitors of the need to protect clients.

On the last day, everyone should check out of their accommodations as early as

possible. A pre-checkout will expedite the procedure. Again, it is a good idea to arrange another vehicle to transport the visitors and their luggage to the airport. Before the checkout, all invoices or receipts must be given to the visitors so that outstanding balances can be paid.

Culturally Sensitive Approaches for Both

Gaining cultural competence was identified as a major benefit of a short-term international program by previous studies (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Colling & Wilson, 1998; Cronin, 2005). We also learned some of Korea's cultural norms from implementing twelve different visiting programs. In this section, we would like to share some of the lessons we learned from the norms not mentioned in previous sections to help prospective hosts avoid some of our mistakes. First, introduce a faculty chaperone of the visiting team to the hosting agency representative with his or her permission. For some of the earliest visiting programs, we rushed to the main focus of their visit without introducing the faculty chaperone at the beginning of the visit. Later, a faculty chaperone informed us that it was a culturally sensitive practice to introduce faculty chaperones at the beginning of each visit. After the feedback, we began to introduce faculty chaperones to the agency representatives first, but some chaperones did not feel comfortable being introduced in front of their students because the chaperones were unable to respond back to the agency representatives in English. From the experience, we learned that it is a good idea to introduce a faculty chaperone if he or she feels comfortable.

Second, visitors should be advised that sensitive information about clients must be asked of hosting agency representative after meeting the clients, instead of during the meeting with the clients. Some students became enthusiastic and asked very personal questions of the clients. When such a question was asked in Korean, we advised the students in Korean to ask the questions in the absence of the clients. This worked well to protect clients, but not all the time. We painfully

remember one visitor, whose English was good enough to communicate with Americans, but not enough to sensitively communicate with American clients. The visitor used a labeling and stereotypical term in English to refer to some clients. This made us and the hosting agency representative uncomfortable, so the hosting agency representative interrupted the question. Since then, we have always included topics about when and how to ask sensitive questions as a part of an orientation.

Stage 5: Evaluation

Evaluation is a necessity in order to improve future programs. We used the last afternoon before the visitors' departure for the evaluation. Several times we hosted picnics, which turned out to be another cultural immersion experience for visitors and a chance to share their ideas about what they learned from the visiting program and what needed to change for future programs. We included two major topics in the evaluation: feedback about agencies they had visited, and feedback about the overall operation of the visiting program. Based upon the feedback, we removed or added certain agencies on other visiting teams' schedules, as well as made appropriate schedule changes.

In addition to the evaluation time in the U.S., most of the twelve teams published after-visit reports when they returned to Korea. We learned that those reports were required by their financial supporters or educational institutions. The reports contained additional information about what they learned from the agencies and services they had visited during their trip to the U.S. By reading the description, we were indirectly able to measure their level of understanding about the agencies and services.

Stages 6 and 7: Termination/Follow-up

Departure is one of the steps in the termination process. Due to the tightened security procedures, we learned that it is a good idea to wait until everyone passes through the security gate. After their departure, report to the hosting institution officials about the successful ending of the visiting program. Sending a letter or card of appreciation to the

hosting agency representatives is a very nice final touch of the current program and a good foundation for future programs.

Conclusion

We always found that hosting an international visiting program was very challenging. After each program, we experienced complete exhaustion. However, rewards from the job exceeded the fatigue. The most precious reward to us was the change among the visitors. We noticed one very salient theme among the visitors' post-visit reports: how the visits broadened their horizons, especially the undergraduate students. Most of the students were not from so-called "prestigious" universities. Before their visits, many students had thought that studying in the U.S. was possible only for graduates of prestigious universities, and that they were excluded from the opportunity. Being hosted by an American university helped them break through the glass ceiling of academic cliques and see another opportunity for their future. Actually, some visitors came back to the U.S. for their master's degree after their undergraduate degrees were completed in Korea.

Increased self-esteem was another common theme in their formal reports. We would like to remind readers of the fact that such a change in self-esteem is barely reported in outbound visiting programs by American students. We believe that this unique benefit is related to a sense of breaking the previously mentioned glass ceiling and sense of empowerment gained through their visit.

These visiting programs challenged some of the students' pre-existing beliefs about the American child-welfare system. One need that was consistently expressed to us by our visitors was to learn about this system. To meet the need, we included the state or county Department of Social Services or various school social work programs to their itineraries. Yet, to our puzzlement, students studying child-welfare reported their frustration about not seeing any child welfare agencies. Later, we found out through various conversations that what they meant by child-welfare agencies was day-care centers or preschools. Some of

the students shared that they became confused and frustrated by learning that what they were studying in Korea under the name of "child welfare" was not a social work field, but early-childhood education.

We learned that their confusion was a reflection of the overall social work profession's identity in Korea. Their social work faculty chaperones carefully explained why the students had become confused and frustrated. After the military dictatorship ended in the early 1990s, presidents with no military backgrounds were elected in Korea. One of the most common election promises was to enhance the well-being of Koreans through better social-welfare systems. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 made the country more aware of the limitations of personal care systems; consequently there was more consensus about greater governmental involvement in individuals' welfare. Due to these reasons, social workers' jobs exponentially increased while the country's unemployment rate skyrocketed. Therefore, the social work profession became very popular in Korea during the late 1990s. In this process, many non-social work disciplines such as home economics and early childhood education changed their names to "family welfare" or "child welfare" departments so that their graduates would have more opportunities for employment. Therefore, the students' confusion was a small scaled version of the country's confusion.

We also sensed from visitor feedback that Korea has been changing very quickly by adopting new welfare systems. About eight years ago, when the first visitors came, they were impressed by many social service programs and agencies that they did not have in Korea (especially services for homeless people, various domestic violence programs, continuum of care services for the older citizens, hospice, and food bank systems), but later groups expressed that they had similar programs.

As we reflect back, the twelve visiting programs were mutual learning opportunities for us and our visitors. We learned that globalization has been a national motto in Korea since the early 1990s. The country's

willingness to learn about other countries has resulted in sending many visiting teams from various disciplines abroad. The Korean Association of Social Workers also began to deploy its members to foreign countries during the same period (Korean Association of Social Workers). The visitors from the past twelve programs informed us that Korea is eclectically adopting welfare service systems and skills from Europe, Japan, and the United States of America. We believe that the country already has or will have a lot of programs from which American social workers can learn if the country remains eager to improve by learning from others. Unfortunately, we sometimes feel that believing the U.S. is the most advanced country blocks some of our American students from learning how other countries approach the same social issues. After witnessing personal changes among many visitors from the past 12 programs and sensing fast eclectic changes in Korea, we strongly believe that sending American students and practitioners abroad with open minds will eventually enhance many of our social welfare systems and enhance our clients' well-being.

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Intae Yoon, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at East Carolina University College of Human Ecology. Jim Ward, M.S.W., is the Director of Field Education at University of South Carolina College of Social Work. Sujung Lee is an M.S.W. student at the University of South Carolina College of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: yooni@ecu.edu.



E-SUPERVISION OF AN INTERNATIONAL PRACTICUM: FROM TSUNAMI RELIEF TO THE LADIES OF THE CLUB

Jane Birkbeck, M.S.W., Thompson River University, British Columbia
and Shawna Bava, B.S.W., Canadian Mental Health Association

International placements for social work students are rewarding, challenging, and filled with unexpected experiences and unanticipated learning. Supervision that encourages students to reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and on occasion to reframe their experiences, is a key component of international field education. This narrative describes the development of an international placement in India and subsequent e-supervision of one student, from tsunami relief work to agency practice.

Introduction

Early in 2004 I packed up my office, turned in my marks, and left the School of Social Work at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) destined for a six-month sabbatical leave in Tamil Nadu, India. Once away, my most enduring reminder of those final, hectic weeks was the picture of one student's wide smile as she stopped by my office door and whispered a last reminder, "Jane, find me a practicum in India." Shawna Bava, then a third-year student, wanted to complete her senior practicum in an international setting. University faculty who travel to international countries are well-placed to bridge academic communities and research international learning opportunities for students (Rai, 2004). I undertook Shawna's request with due diligence and minimal comprehension of the complexities involved.

International field education in less developed regions requires students to carry out tasks in culturally complex societies; thus, even the best pre-preparation planning is unlikely to ready the student for problems, surprises, and complications. The importance of international partnerships, collaboration, and communication (Barlow, 2005; Skolnik, Wayne, & Raskin, 1999), an approach to field instruction that takes into account the national and regional context (Bogo & Herington, 1986), challenges to the development of equitable partnerships between the North and

the South (Tesoriero & Rajaratnam, 2001), and the importance of preparing social work students for cross-cultural practice (Sachdev, 1997) are all critical considerations. While the challenges are significant, an international practicum offers the potential for students to develop intercultural skills, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence, and a reflective and competent practice (Tesoriero, 2006).

The School of Social Work at TRU had hosted a number of international social work students, but had yet to place a student outside of Canada. My goal was to find a social work program in India that would provide a challenging yet supportive placement.

The Search for a Placement

Through my volunteer work with Initiatives for Women in Development (I.W.I.D.), a women's policy development agency in Chennai, I quickly learned that the practicum would be less complicated if English was both the medium of instruction at the host university and the language of casual discourse between students. As the I.W.I.D. "policy proofreader", my language deficit challenged me from the beginning. All office communication at the agency was conducted in English, except at lunchtime when the stories, gossip and laughing responses were all recounted in Tamil. My sense of "foreignness" escalated even as I

acknowledged to myself that nothing is more customary than to speak one's first language. It took effort not to appear uncertain—or worse, disgruntled.

With this new learning in hand, I began my quest for a practicum placement in Chennai where four universities offer social work programs. I met with deans, directors, international staff, and university presidents. All offered *chai* and Indian snacks, information on various programs, and the promise of English instruction. English is the language of government in India, and most universities offer their programs in that language.

My final university visit was to the Madras Christian College (M.C.C.), inaugurated by Scottish missionaries in 1837 after the city was renamed Madras by its British colonizers. Today M.C.C. is a degree-granting autonomous college affiliated with the downtown University of Madras. Located in Tambaram, on the final stop of the commuter line in a city of over four million people, M.C.C. was once an exceedingly rural university situated far from the temptations of life in the City. Today it sprawls over 375 acres, boasts the second largest scrub jungle in Asia, houses three hostels for men and one for women, and offers 29 academic departments in both day and evening programs.

I arrived on a class break; the students offered hot *chai* and a cool place for me to sit. Sipping my tea, I observed that the language of teatime was English. As I waited to meet with the social work faculty, I could not help but wonder if I had found the ideal host for Shawna's practicum. Ease with language, and the ability to talk about trivia without translation all perhaps more important to the Canadian social work student's learning in India than a learned comparison of practice theories.

Miriam Samuel, director of the social work department, led me into the administrative offices. I stood in one large room with two generous windows, a desk in each corner, and a pedestal table in the middle. Miriam explained that the faculty once considered dividers to close off their desks but decided they would work more effectively if they could see and talk to one another. As I thought of my

colleagues and our isolation in individual offices, I could not help but agree.

We sat at the pedestal table and the two men and one woman who are the core of the M.C.C. Social Work Department shared classroom stories, and compared courses and even pedagogical approaches. I learned that Miriam had a two-year contract with the Chennai police department to provide gender sensitivity training for all police personnel. The course was also available to students, and I thought Shawna would likely find the class of interest.

A tour of the department revealed two classrooms, each with twenty-four writing desks set in a circle; a library room with too few books; a windowless meeting room with eight chairs around a rectangular table; and a computer lab; two aging computers set on a small table behind metal folding chairs. My careful inquiry gleaned the information that these computers are for the use of all full-time and part-time faculty as well as the students. I stood there considering once again the wealth of the West, the affluence and assets, how the computer in my office is regularly replaced—not merely upgraded—every three years. Facing the fruits of such inequity, I considered yet again how critically important it is that the West begin to seriously share resources with the South. As I thought about Canada's nominal contribution to foreign aid, it was difficult not to cringe.

On my next visit to M.C.C., I presented a mini-lecture to the students about social work in Canada, and then we simply posed questions to each other, uncovering the similarities and differences in our lives. I left with an invitation to teach International Human Rights on my return to India and my promise that a practicum student would arrive from T.R.U. in due course.

Pre-Placement Activity

On my return to Canada, Shawna and I initiated discussions with the Social Work Field Education Coordinator and the International Studies Office at TRU. Discussions began with MCC in the fall of 2004 about Shawna's winter 2005 practicum. She and I chatted as time permitted; then suddenly it was

November, and our work was truly in the details. Shawna emailed a number of questions to Miriam Samuel, head of the Social Work Department, and received this reply:

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"
Subject: RE: international practicum
Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004

We usually advise foreign students to wear a *salwar kameez* that is Indian, when they are in the field. You can get them when you come here. Will work out your placement details and let you know about it. Also we need to discuss about your course. This semester we have 3 electives in the areas of Gender, Human Rights and Environmental Issues. Do let me know what you are interested in. Yes malaria is common here. Hence you need medication for it.

Ah yes, malaria. Shawna and I had two discussions about the virtues of the daily pill that might cause some stomach upset versus the far more convenient weekly pill that could cause hallucinations and psychosis. Should she be vaccinated for Japanese encephalitis? Rabies? Questions of safety assumed increasing importance. We met twice for three hours, Shawna reading in advance so she would have questions, me making lists of what I thought were the most important topics to cover. After a meeting we would debrief by email:

Date: Sun, 21 Nov 2004
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: India

I started a list of things I forgot to mention - take a dozen of those little Kleenex packages, but don't bother to take toilet paper - you can buy it in Tambarim. Also, plan to buy a cell phone in your first week or so - it will be a godsend when you are in an auto-rickshaw and looking for an address. I used Air-Tel in Chennai with great success. I hope you will soon be able to get in touch with Miriam.

Pre-Placement Problems

Eventually, Shawna and Miriam connected, and the fallout from their conversation created a number of problems.

The issues were serious enough that they had the potential to end the placement:

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"
Subject: RE: international practicum
Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004

Regarding your payment you can send it as a bank draft in the name of 'The Principal, Madras Christian College'. You can initially send a draft for Rs.2500 which is about 25% of the total cost of your programme. Your accommodation is all arranged. As I mentioned earlier, there are some rules in the women's hall, such as you will have to be in the hall by 6.30 in the evenings and no alcohol is permitted inside. Boys are also not allowed entry into the hall. It may be a little odd, but I am sure it will be a very different experience. Two of my students sat in the hall, Misha and Geetha, and they will help you out.

After reading Miriam's email Shawna appeared at my office door, caught between laughter and tears. A 6:30 p.m. curfew? Her days would be taken up with classes, practicum and riding the train to and from her placement. How would she find time to email friends from the Internet Shop? To post to her website? To just walk around and absorb India? Perhaps shop for herself and for friends? I wondered if she could ask to have the rule revisited. Not eager to question the rules by e-mail, Shawna decided to leave curfew until she was in Chennai.

After talking with Shawna, I braced myself for meetings with my Dean and the Field Education Coordinator. In Canada, international students pay university fees to their home institution, not to the host university. Both the Coordinator and the Dean were adamant that Shawna, if required to pay for her placement, could not leave Canada for a practicum in India.

Fortunately, the contract was open to interpretation. Consultations at T.R.U. took place across academic disciplines, and in the end the most rational interpretation prevailed. Rs. 10,000 is less than 300 Canadian dollars. The cost of a course at T.R.U. is more than \$300 Canadian. Shawna, already signed up to take the Gender and Society course in

Chennai, would pay Rs. 10,000 for the course. Behind closed doors, Shawna and I breathed a sigh of relief and moved another step forward. In no time it was the end of term and we said goodbye; ready for the Christmas break, and excited about Shawna's adventure.

E-supervision: Framing Responses to the Unpredictable

On the 26th of December, 2004, the tsunami ripped through South and East Asia, destroying lives, livelihoods, businesses, and homes in many countries, including India.

Televised reports showed the bodies strewn on a beach close to Chennai and reported the tragic losses of the fisherfolk and their impoverished families.

Shawna and I emailed each other from our respective Christmas locations. Her parents wanted her to cancel the trip; she wanted to fly out as planned. As is often the case in social work decisions, limited information was available.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

From: shawna_baya@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: Fwd: Phone numbers.

I just arrived home from Christmas in Ontario and have been glued to news reports of the disaster in Asia. It is difficult to determine exactly what the situation is in Chennai. Have you been in touch with any of your contacts there? Although friends and family are suggesting that I postpone my trip, I do not think that is necessary. Do you? I picked up my Indian Visa when I was in Vancouver and am going for my final immunization on Friday. I will attempt to reach Miriam by email and phone over the next week.

And thus began our e-supervision. Students in international settings benefit from a readiness to face unexpected situations, and the understanding that a practicum in an unknown culture will bring significant challenges along with the rewards (Pawar, Hanna, & Sheridan, 2004). Even before the practicum began, Shawna was experiencing a variety of challenges. To provide support for these challenges and to celebrate the rewards, we had a plan to facilitate the flow of information

and ideas to and from Shawna's international setting. A variety of supervision models are utilized to follow students in international settings (Pettys, Panos, Cox, & Oosthuysen, 2005; Jounhson, 2004; Roby, & Panos, 2004; Raskin, Skolnik, & Wayne, 1991). Effective student supervision, including both educational and supportive input, can be provided through online delivery (Maidment, 2006). It was e-supervision that guided Shawna and me through this international placement.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Chennai trip.

I too have been glued to the news, especially *The Deccan Herald*, a reliable Bangalore paper, and *The Times of India*. It appears 143 people died in Chennai, most in a fishing village close to the city and a few strolling on the beach. What a horrendous tragedy for so many countries. I appreciate your dad's suggestion that you cancel. For now, I agree with what you propose; get more and more information. There is still time to make a decision either way. Meantime, I agree that you are the best one to email and phone Miriam - it is you who needs the news firsthand.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

To: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: chennai trip

Thank you for directing me to *The Times of India* and *The Deccan Herald*. It was helpful to read news reports from local sources. I have sent an email off to Miriam and will attempt to contact her by phone as well.

Miriam's response cleared the way for Shawna's departure, and to some extent it relieved the concerns of her family and friends, as well as faculty and students in the T.R.U. School of Social Work.

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"

Subject: RE: international placement

Date: Fri, 07 Jan 2005

Wishing you a Very Happy New Year. As you have mentioned everything is safe here. We are living 25km away from the Seashore. But we as a department are involved in relief

work. One of us from the department will be there to receive you in the Airport. So if you have anything you want to clarify still, we are very happy to do that. The Tribal Visit as scheduled is not decided still, because of the Tsunami, so we will keep you posted about that in one or two days. Looking forward to seeing you in Chennai.

**The Placement: Culture,
Conscientization, and Challenge**

And so Shawna flew to India, and email kept us in touch. But this was not the practicum we anticipated, and I felt apprehensive about the challenges she would face too soon after her arrival.

Date: Fri, 21 Jan 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: pre-departure planning

We will be leaving for the tsunami relief project Saturday morning at approx. 8 am. All of the schools of SW in Tamil Nadu are participating in this project. Unfortunately, I don't anticipate that we will have Internet access in the relief area. Instead, I will attempt to contact you by phone once or twice while I'm away. The plan is that we will be away for 3-4 weeks - returning in the second week of February. We spent today in a pre-departure planning meeting. I am responsible for the documentation committee and will also be working on the resource allocation committee. Our first task will be to complete government approved assessment forms for each family. We are also responsible for conducting focus groups within each village and compiling the information we gather. My understanding is that this information will be utilized by NGO's and the government over the next few years. Time is moving quickly as you said it would. All in all, it's been a great first week here in Chennai. I must go and finish packing.

How, I wondered, would Shawna head up the documentation team when, for an absolute certainty, Tamil would be the language of the field? I worried that, in the midst of the tsunami, her white skin would bring even more curious attention her way than in the normal course of

events. I felt annoyed with my colleagues at MCC for allocating her a supervisory position. But most of all I hoped her peers would remember to speak English sometimes.

Date: Mon, 24 Jan 2005
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: Re: pre-departure planning

I smiled as I read about the extensive documentation process; tons of forms will be amassed. Indian bureaucrats love their paperwork; perhaps a legacy of the 'Britishers'. The resource allocation committee sounds potentially difficult, with my limited understanding of how you will function. Could be a tough task, particularly when there are too few resources to allocate widely. I will be very interested to hear how you felt and what you thought as you worked in this area. I take comfort in the fact that your team speaks English and the team meetings will, I hope, be conducted in English. At the villages you will be thrown into the situation where you do not know the language and much or most of the day is spent speaking Tamil. I hope you have a friend who will do on-the-spot translation at certain times, and not just when you are doing documentation. Let me know how this goes.

Eight days into the tsunami relief effort, Shawna and her fellow students were permitted one day off. She headed for the only internet facility in the area and wrote about her experiences.

Date: Sun, 30 Jan 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: tsunami rehabilitation project

It has been a long, hot, and interesting week. Our team has travelled to at least 6 *kuppams* (hamlets) in Villipuram district. We completed many household surveys and encountered a few problems with data collection. Many are frustrated at the lack of relief dollars and supplies.

I appreciated reading your email today as this week has been a difficult one for me with the language barrier. Most conversations and interactions occur in Tamil and I've felt quite lost. There is so much work to be done that

the students don't always have time to translate in the field. I feel frustrated, angry, and upset at times, and try to bring myself back to task. I think I am mostly fatigued from all of the staring. It seems that there is no place or time for myself. We are sleeping on the concrete floor in a school and working 12 hour days. It's exhausting.

On a positive note, I am learning first hand about the politics of relief work. The student group that I am traveling with is great... they sing and play guitar and make sure we have a coffee each day.

In Shawna's place, I would have found a tea stall and tripled my daily coffee intake. Instead, she summoned the energy to write me during this exhausting and frustrating time, describing how she balanced the dreadful moments of being foreign with the positive moments of her learning. As I read about her experiences in the field, I recalled telling her that it took me a full month to adapt to living in India. She did not have such a luxury, and I found her resilience remarkable.

Date: Mon, 31 Jan 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: tsunami rehabilitation project

Frustration, anger, sadness and upset were emotions that I experienced every time I was cut off by the language barrier. I grew tired of asking people to translate. But as I read your email my mind expanded to the everyday experience of relief workers faced with the anger and fear of survivors. For you, working daily in disaster relief surrounded by traumatized people and unable to communicate...this is more complex than I can imagine. And I forgot to mention the staring, didn't I? I wonder why, because a foreigner is stared at all the time, even in the major cities. In a small village, the never-ending scrutiny is fatiguing, exhausting, and very annoying. Sometimes I used my scarf to cover my head, for protection from prying eyes. And even though I knew that the staring was not malicious, I tired of the curiosity factor. Your entry into foreign service falls into the crash

course category; nothing we expected. The politics of relief work will provide much reflection when you return.

Of course, as her emails showed, Shawna was reflecting on the spot, empathetic about the pain of the people around her, realistic about her own responses, and always focused on the work. And I, sitting in Canada, struggled to find words of comfort, of empowerment, of minimal understanding of what this woman was experiencing. It stretched my writing capacity as I attempted to craft words that would acknowledge the extent of her ordeal and at the same time neither diminish nor exaggerate the circumstances.

Reflections on Relief Work

Date: Sat, 12 Feb 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: back in Chennai

I'm happy to report that we completed the tsunami rehabilitation project and arrived back in Chennai last night. You accurately described many of my thoughts and feelings in your last email. The past three weeks were an intense introduction to Indian culture and there were many times when I felt overwhelmed by culture shock.

In the most affected kuppams, we conducted household assessments of damage for all residents. The survey was not well designed and data collection was complicated. In all of the kuppams, we conducted focus group discussions and resource mapping. Most of this work was done in Tamil, but I was able to follow by reading the notes that students wrote in English or asking someone to translate for me.

We conducted programmes in many of the kuppams in our area, designed to be both educational and fun. The educational component focused on tsunami awareness. We found that superstition and misinformation was common, and many did not know what a tsunami was. The crowd would become silent and attentive as the MCC students provided accurate information about the tsunami. I think

this was the most significant assistance we had to offer.

Many of the children suffer from fear and anxiety that another tsunami will strike. We were doing a community programme one night and a lorry – a big water truck – came up the street. The sound startled the children, who thought it was another tsunami, and they took off from the crowd – running for high ground.

I was often approached by parents who offered me their children. At those times, I longed for the language to speak with them and explain that the color of my skin did not automatically guarantee their children safety from another tsunami or a better life.

We encountered grief, shock, anger, deceit, and denial. Social inequality and power dynamics interfere and families who need assistance are not receiving support. In most kuppams, relief supplies are distributed by village leaders equally even though some residents were not affected at all.

There is much more to write, but I am running out of time.

Shawna returned to Chennai saddened by all that she saw and particularly distressed that she was unable to communicate with the parents who pushed their children toward her, hoping she would carry them to safety. Without language she could only shake her head, when she wanted so much to offer comfort and hope. In the end, this was the most difficult part of her tsunami relief work. She also returned as a warmly appreciated member of the M.C.C. social work student group, began to attend her class and travel to her two practicum settings each week. Lack of time continued to be a theme for the remainder of the practicum; in the end Shawna decided to accept the 6:30 p.m. curfew. Between the curfew, her placement hours, travel time by commuter train, interactions with M.C.C. students and faculty, and her class, there were few moments for personal pursuits.

The Placements

Date: Fri, 18 Feb 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: agency visits

I completed two agency visits this week. On Thursday I visited YRG CARE – an agency focused on research, prevention, and treatment for individuals affected with HIV/AIDS. The group is working on a qualitative research project that examines the use of peer educators to bring about behavior change. It is a longitudinal research study being conducted in five sites worldwide: Russia, Peru, India, Zimbabwe and the USA. The coordinating body is the National Institute of Mental Health in the USA and John Hopkins University has been partnered with YRG CARE.

On Monday, I will visit the Y.W.C.A. in Egmore and meet with the senior social worker on staff. Miriam warned me that I won't necessarily receive a strong social work perspective there because it is run by well-to-do-ladies of society rather than social work professionals. However, the Y.W.C.A. will provide me with a ground level understanding of issues affecting women and children.

I was intrigued by the two very diverse practicum settings Miriam arranged for Shawna. Recalling some of my own experiences as a volunteer at counseling agencies in India, I wondered how Shawna would react to the work of the well-to-do-ladies.

Date: Wed, 09 Mar 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: update

My first day at the YWCA went really well. I met with my supervisor, Mrs. Immaculate Mary – the names here really get me – who has been working at the Y.W.C.A. for 18 years. We discussed some of the activities that I can be involved in and I am excited about the prospects. My supervisor wants me to write reports, and has also agreed to give me access to client files, written in

English, so that I can examine some specific cases.

Unfortunately, by the time I left the Y.W.C.A., I was not feeling well at all, and I spent all day yesterday in bed. I passed out in the bathroom at 2:00 am and was found by the security guard. It is VERY hot in the city.

I went into Y.R.G. briefly this morning - probably shouldn't have but I was feeling self-imposed pressure to get as many hours in as possible. I completed a report that was pending and took the train back to M.C.C. The commute to practicum at both sites is between 45-55 min each way, but I have come to enjoy the train ride as 'down time' for myself...as long as I can get a seat.

I was concerned about Shawna's illness; the combination of fever, heat, and sickness is unwelcome at any time, and even more so in a foreign country. As well, I was troubled by her approach to her practicum hours; her determination to respond competently in two settings and meet every requirement of a Canadian practicum meant Shawna had to move at an exhausting pace. I was unsurprised to learn she had collapsed and managed to arrange a telephone conversation to insist that she slow down. I suggested a number of tourist destinations, but it was almost two weeks before she embarked on a short holiday trip. A practicum supervisor at a distance can ask, but the learning opportunities may be too great for the student to acquiesce.

Date: Tue, 15 Mar 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: update

I am sorry and concerned to read about your illness. You are right about the utility of paying a visit to YRG while you were recovering. As far as the 'hours' go, as long as you are not in bed and sound asleep, you are putting in hours. The hour component in the policy manual describes the practice standards set by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. These do not apply to your work in India, where waking days are practicum days as far as I am concerned.

You may tire of demands to write reports, but it will be instructive to look at a few client files and see what issues are presented and what is recorded.

Seminars and Workshops: A Week of Learning and Reflection

Shawna had many learning opportunities presented to her during her time in India, with invitations to frequent seminars and workshops. I still remember workshops that provided some remarkable learning about India, and I was excited about Shawna's opportunities to learn and network.

Date: Fri, 18 Mar 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: another week gone by

This week was a week of seminars. On Monday, I attended a disaster management seminar. The governor and some chief ministers were in attendance as were many media representatives and few participants. There were some interesting speakers who introduced the idea of formulating disaster preparedness plans to protect social capital, but there seemed to be a large disconnect between the information presented and the reality on the ground and in the villages.

On Tuesday there was a speaker at the Y.W.C.A., a representative from the juvenile welfare board. She suggested that a woman's primary responsibility was to the family, and that interests outside of the home jeopardize the health of the family. That was difficult for me to swallow... but it is something that I continue to reflect upon. The traditional family values and focus on the family can be very positive and provide a nurturing environment for both individuals and the community. Still, the responsibility in India falls only to the women, increasing their workload and decreasing their freedom to do anything else. I would have preferred it if the speaker suggested that both the parents need to share the responsibility for the health of the family.

On Wednesday, I was at Y.R.G. I had the opportunity to go into the field - a slum

community- and I felt some anxiety about what I would encounter. I found that there were many similarities between the urban slum communities and rural villages - lack of sanitation, limited resources, similar dwellings and methods of cooking and cleaning. The purpose of the visit was to touch base with one of the peer educators and visit with other community members. For the rest of the day, I worked with members of the domestic violence research project, who have a peer educator's manual that the staff is currently testing

On Thursday, I was back at the YWCA for a presentation on mental health at the Navajeevan Center. The consulting psychiatrist spoke on how to detect mental illness. The doctor was trained in Britain and she functions as the 'gatekeeper' for the mental health programme at the YWCA. Once a woman is on medication and "cured" of her illness she will be admitted to the programme.

On Friday, the Sahodari project - family counseling center - at the Y.W.C.A. hosted a seminar on managing behavioral problems in adolescence. The presenter stressed the role of parents and counsellors to provide adolescents with love and support, and a way to express those feelings. She said "adolescents today are hungry for experience, and we keep feeding them explanations. They are undernourished." After I got back to the residence, I spoke with a few of the girls about this and they agree that the level of expressed emotion in many families, especially higher caste families, is very low.

The topic that interested me the most this week came from a book rather than a seminar. My interest in 'family planning programmes' was sparked when I spoke with a doctor at a primary health center. This week, I found a book that linked family planning programmes to funding for development from Western countries and the World Bank. I've been reflecting on the idea that these programmes have been introduced to maintain control of resources rather than to assist the local population and that the programmes have a

disproportionate impact on poor women. It's an area that I would like to explore further. Is it possible for you to call one afternoon next week? Let me know.

I read and reread Shawna's long email, recognizing the maturity and wisdom she brought to this practicum as well as her thoughtful reflection, desire to learn, and ability to articulate her ideas so well. At the same time, cultural complexities made her question her learning, and she was willing to speak to those complexities in her e-mails.

The Limitations of E-Supervision

Date: Sat, 19 Mar 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: another week gone by

Your email identified much learning in the last week, Shawna. Some of that learning is difficult to deal with, particularly the role of women in all social classes. As I read your thoughts on shared childcare I could not help but reflect that we do not have a firm template for shared parenting in Canada, either.

You are absolutely right about the family planning programmes in India; the 'balanced family concept' has had a profoundly negative effect on girl-children. And so in India female feticide, practiced only by those able to pay a physician, is ignored by police and policy makers, while the male population grows. In the 2001 Indian Census there were 899 females aged 0-6 for every 1000 males. And in some areas of Punjab, a very wealthy state, there were towns with as few as 764 girl-children. This is not about development but globalization - boys cost less and bring more rewards, and the consumerism/commodification of women has created a desire for fewer girls. For the poor, there was forced sterilizations under Indhira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, and I am not certain these have ended. In India, family planning programmes are routinely linked to funding allocation.

Again I found myself reaching for words that would convey encouragement, education, guidance, and support. Words on a computer

screen have the ability to do all of the above, but they may also suggest judgment or unfair interpretation. Shawna chose to view my comments in their best light.

Date: Sat, 19 Mar 2005

From: shawnabava@hotmail.com

Subject: sunday reflections

Thank you for your email...I always feel better after reading a note from you. Supervision has been slim here and it's been very helpful to have your guidance and wisdom from across the miles. I look forward to hearing from you on Wednesday morning.

While email communication is quick and may be reasonably responsive, nothing can take the place of a real voice; even one interrupted by static on the telephone line. Shawna and I had a number of telephone conversations while she was in India, but they were all arranged on an *ad hoc* basis, usually at her request. In the future, I will have the number of a private telephone which the student can use, and I will make arrangements to call at a certain time even before the student left Canada. While this set time might not work for all telephone calls, it would be much better than nothing. It was during our infrequent telephone calls that I learned more about both the substantive and the less significant issues that concerned Shawna. In one call she vividly described her anger as one man after another pushed in front of her to buy tickets at the train station counter.

Date: Tue, 29 Mar 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: hot hot hot

On the phone, you used the word 'rage' to describe your response to your apparent invisibility at the train station. I recalled my own rage, as I slapped my hand down on the third hand that weaseled around me at a station counter, wanting to buy a ticket.

I was neither kind, gentle nor humble in those moments. And, as you said so well on the phone, I too believed the "protected, cared-for woman" was a stance simply useful to Indian men. It seemed a matter of simply

making rules that would keep women at home in a place of servitude and isolation, while pretending to come from a place of caring and protection.

I think of you wading through the humidity and am glad you will be on your way to Goa shortly.

At last, I was "heard" by this too busy and very focused young woman who agreed to embark on a brief trip. It was a delight for me to describe for her the best way to travel by train, to find a decent hotel, to get around, and to see the sights. And, as I learned from Shawna on her return, it is essential that students in international settings take time to explore the country where they study and volunteer, to rest and to recreate. But after three months in India, even with a brief holiday, Shawna still felt tired and somewhat depressed.

Placement Reflection and Action

Date: Fri, 01 Apr 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: week in review

Visitors from the U.S. have been at Y.R.G. all week. The agency is conducting feasibility interviews and focus group discussions with potential participants. I've been involved in observing these sessions and typing transcripts in English. One of the staff listens in Tamil and I type in 'proper' English. I've noticed that a lot of information is 'lost in translation' causing some confusion. I've been reflecting on ways that this can be avoided as some of the miscommunication is serious.

I have been asked to put together some information on a gender sensitization workshop for the male staff regarding domestic violence.

At the Y.W.C.A., I've observed a lot of "bad" counseling skills and spoke with my MCC supervisor about that. He suggested that I try to give some feedback in a workshop format with staff. It will take some preparation for me to be able to do this in a way that will be acceptable to the staff. Still, I will try to do

so because it's been really difficult for me to sit silently while they pass judgments about the client in English when they know that the client cannot understand, and do other things to perpetuate a 'power over' relationship with the individual.

I started to feel down this week. This work is tiring and I don't get much comfort from the environment in the dorm. I'm sharing a room with two other girls, who often have two or three other girls visit in the evenings, and I long for privacy.

I thought about my time in India, always with a room to myself—a quiet haven rented in a family home. I simply could not imagine working all day with so many people around me, negotiating space among masses of people on the street and on the train, and then coming home to absolutely no privacy. It was little wonder that Shawna longed for quiet time and a quiet space to be alone.

Date: Thu, 07 Apr 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: week in review

Yes, much is lost in translation. I expect Y.R.G. will want to hear your concerns. A workplace that provides gender sensitization for the male staff is clearly thinking about good practice. I am aware that you are a resource to many in India; you have accomplished much in a very short time.

Oh my, and then there is the Y.W.C.A. and "the ladies of the club." Like you, I saw such 'bad' counseling at my N.G.O. in Bangalore. There was no getting around the director of the N.G.O., who would actually interrupt a counseling session to tell a client that she must not go back to her husband, or stay with him, or whatever. It was simply dreadful. Like you, I would bite my tongue, but I did not think to put together a workshop. You are indeed a resource.

I hope you find a quiet place to put together these workshops; I cannot even imagine making it through one of your days and then coming home to NO PRIVACY!!

Evaluation and Endings

Date: Thu, 14 Apr 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: evaluations

My final evaluation at the Y.W.C.A. was on Tuesday. Miriam came to meet with Immaculate Mary and review the practicum. The evaluation was brief but positive. I didn't feel that I could speak openly about some of the observations that I've made there regarding counselling style and interaction with clients. Instead, I asked Immaculate Mary if she would be interested in me facilitating a short seminar for the staff in the family counselling center. I allowed her to choose the topic and she suggested 'counselling strategies'. I was very pleased with her choice and agreed to do just that. So, I will be returning to the Y.W.C.A. on April 27th to lead a short session in the afternoon. When that is over, I will feel that the practicum is complete. I didn't want to just walk away on Tuesday afternoon without attempting to contribute something to improve the counselling that takes place.

My final evaluation at YRG CARE is scheduled for tomorrow morning. In the past week I drafted the gender sensitization workshop; a very interesting project. I submitted my first draft last week, but after speaking with a few male staff members I realized that I needed to revamp the whole thing and get down to the basics. We had a conversation about 'Eve-teasing' (the term for sexual harassment in India) and the men were suggesting that the way to combat harassment was to educate women ... because that empowers them. I questioned if they believed that men needed to be educated or change their behaviors to change the system, but they didn't believe so. My heart sank.

I changed a lot of the exercises in the workshop in the hopes of engaging them personally rather than academically. I've asked that they reflect on their relationships with women in their lives whom they respect and who do not experience violence - mother, sisters, aunts and so forth - and question why

those women should be free from violence while other women must "adjust" to their experience of violence. I've heard women say countless times in the past few months that we/you/they just need to adjust. That seems to be the response to many situations of domestic violence.

I read this email and reflected that Shawna's time in India was quickly drawing to a close; her separation from that country, on an emotional level at least, was certainly well underway. Yet there she was, putting workshops together to gently confront violence against women in its many and varied forms.

Date: Fri, 15 Apr 2005
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: Re: evaluations

I am so impressed with the work you do to promote change within systems that can only be approached through empowerment practice. Your decision to prepare and facilitate workshops is one more example of your reflective practice.

As I read your work on gender sensitization and your decision to carry on with a personal model - which is so much more profound than a theoretical one - I considered again the depth of your practice wisdom. I read your ideas and thought about your ability to work with and through resistance. I wish I was there to watch you in action. Well done, Shawna. For the workshop at the Y.W.C.A., I have a small suggestion. You know it is difficult to 'hear' information that is contrary to one's usual practice. Perhaps you could print handouts of some important points from your presentation, for consideration by the staff after the session.

Endings . . .

Date: Thu, 28 Apr 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: on my way

It's hard to believe that I am in my final hours in Chennai...and that this will be my last email from India. I remember you saying that

thoughts of your bed were what made it easier to get on the plane...for me, it's thoughts of escaping from this heat.

Wednesday afternoon I returned to the Y.W.C.A. for a brief seminar on "counseling strategies from Canada." So, now that practicum experience feels complete.

My mind and emotions are spinning today...I feel that I have only touched the tip of the iceberg during my stay... the information has at times been overwhelming. So much to learn and so little time, but overall, I would say that this has been a very rewarding experience. Again, I thank you for your encouragement and guidance. There were many times when I was disheartened, thinking that no one here understood what I was feeling, and I would receive an email from you and know that you understood. I cannot thank you enough.

And New Beginnings

Date: Thu, 12 May 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: request

I've been applying for positions from India and London and I have a job interview scheduled for Monday. I arrive back in Vancouver on Saturday. The position is a new initiative that "involves a recurring 26-week program for groups of 6-10 youth who will receive training in a variety of life skills, personal and group development, and career related areas. The program will culminate in a 2-week overseas project to participate in a restoration project in Sri Lanka." If you will be a reference, please let me know what contact information I should pass along to the agency.

Shawna was hired into the international facilitator's position, where she worked until November, 2006. In her two years with the program she accompanied one group of youth to Sri Lanka to build homes lost to the 2004 tsunami, then moved into the coordinator's position. She recently joined the Canadian Mental Health Association in Calgary, and in the fall of 2007 she will begin a Master's

program in International Social Work at the University of Calgary.

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Jane Birkbeck, M.S.W., is Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work and Human Services, Thompson River University British Columbia, Canada. Shawna Bava, B.S.W., Canadian Mental Health Association in Alberta, Canada. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: jbirkbeck@tru.ca.

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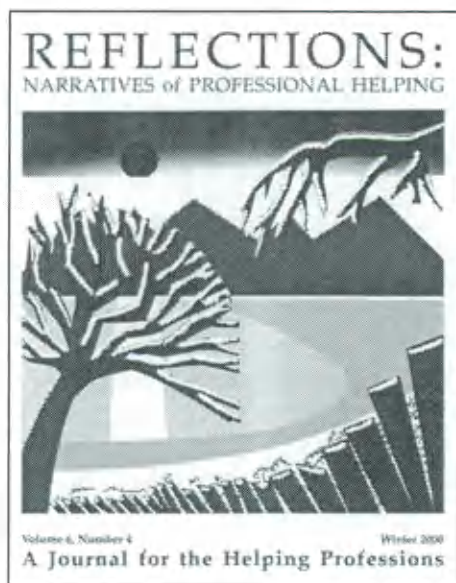
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