

INCREASING SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARENESS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: TWO MODELS

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What happens when relatively privileged North American graduate students embark on international learning projects in settings very different from their own? What prompts professors to take on these experiences? How does international learning lead to justice seeking that carries over beyond the class experience?

This article unpacks for students and faculty the experience of two graduate-level social work travel-abroad courses. Both courses share the goal of bridging international learning and awareness with furthering social justice and dialogue across borders; however, they approach learning from two different cultural vantage points. The Mexico course is based in Paulo Freire's experiential pedagogy and the China course is taught in a Confucian scholarly style. The article provides an overview of the two courses, highlighting the differing pedagogical and research methods that underlie each course as well as the profound impact the experiences have on students.

Two friends and colleagues work in their offices across the hall from each other in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. The Tuesday after Thanksgiving each year, both women lead groups of students to remote areas of the world. They share a commitment to furthering social justice and dialogue across borders, along with a desire to interact more authentically with students in situations that call for honest and soul-searching reflection and dialogue. Lynn takes her group to Cuernavaca, Mexico. Julie takes hers to Beijing, China. This article highlights the professors' motivations that underlie taking on these intensive travel courses, the design and pedagogy of the individual courses, and the lasting effects on all participants.

Motivations for Undertaking International Travel Courses

Julie's Story

I have always loved Asia. Though I am not Asian, Asian culture was significant in my developmental process. When I was 5 years old, my aunt married a *Nisei* (2nd generation Japanese American). From that moment forward the holidays included sushi, red snapper, yakitori, and azuki sweets. One of my prize possessions as a little girl was a doll dressed in a kimono, with hairstyles that could change by using different elaborate wigs. I dreamed about the day I could visit Asia.

My junior year of high school, my wish became a reality. I was an American Field Service exchange student to Japan. Initially, even daily functioning was extremely challenging, because my only formal Japanese language experience was one week of intensive Japanese when we first arrived. Japanese high school students went to school 6 days a week. I took all the required *sun nen sei* (third-year student) classes, though some were completely over my head. Consequently, I was thankful that my credits transferred back to my American high school and not my grades. To get to school, I needed to walk 10 minutes, take a bus to the train station, and then take two trains. One evening, I made the mistake of transferring to the wrong train and found myself on an express train to Tokyo.

At *Chiba Higashi Koko* (Chiba East High School), I played on the *Kendo* (Japanese Fencing) team, and participated in the flower

arranging and tea ceremony clubs. I loved the people, the food, and the depth and subtleties of the culture. The longer that I lived in Japan, the better I understood the culture, but simultaneously understood that there was so much more to comprehend that was not overt and was likely to be out of my grasp as a *guijin* (foreigner). It was an amazing experience and created an indelible imprint on the person I was and would become.

Many years later as a doctoral student, I grappled with my dissertation topic. I knew I wanted to study adolescent resilience, but the exact topic eluded me. Then I was struck by the idea of studying resilience from a Japanese perspective. Japan was the other venue where I had spent my adolescence, and the concept of resilience was non-existent there. Consequently, I needed to create words in Japanese for the terms *resilience*, *risk factor*, and *protective factor*, because they had not yet been conceived. I collaborated with Japanese colleagues who helped me obtain funding through the Yasuda Foundation. I was the first *guijin* (foreigner) to be awarded funding from this prestigious foundation.

My Japanese team and I asked 815 post-secondary students about their life and experiences. I was struck by how many Japanese youth thought the survey was *muzukashi* (difficult), because they had never been asked to take a test that asked them their opinions. Moreover, there were no right or wrong answers. We learned a great deal about what makes Japanese youth so resilient. We found that many of the “Western” risk factors were equally deleterious for Japanese youth; however protective factors were not universally protective. The positive influence of a particular protective factor was more related to the student’s gender. Therefore, policies and programs that aimed at supporting Japanese youth needed to consider the gender as much as the developmental stage. Our results were published in both Japanese and English.

Later, when I engaged in my job search, I was impressed that the University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) had a relationship with China Youth University (CYU). GSSW had been instrumental in helping CYU create social work education for

its students. The two schools had participated in faculty exchanges. When I joined the GSSW faculty, it was suggested that I might be able to replicate the Japanese resilience study in China.

Accordingly, the CYU faculty and I began getting to know each other and building trust. My connections to Japan were initially a detriment for my new Chinese colleagues. Most still hold a great deal of hatred regarding the Japanese treatment of the Chinese during the Second World War, especially in northern China where they were invaded by the Japanese military.

The faculty of CYU had never conducted a large-scale research project. We also needed to gain permission from the Chinese government to conduct the research. It took 3 years of visits to move to the data collection stage. During each of these visits, my children accompanied me to China. We all adored the Chinese people, the food, and the culture. We were struck by the Chinese enjoyment of joke telling and laughing uproariously.

During my third visit to China, I suggested that we begin student exchanges. My Chinese colleagues thought it was an excellent idea, and the dialogue continued over the next several years. It was decided that we would bring students to China, and hopefully Chinese students would visit us in Denver. Five years ago, I accompanied the first GSSW students to China.

Lynn’s Story

I have always liked Mexico, but unlike Julie, previous to leading the course, Mexico and the issues there were not part of my scholarship. Other than vacation trips to the beaches and beginning Spanish courses, I had only a cursory familiarity with the issues and people of Mexico. Instead, I inherited my course, or rather, a prior version of the course. A colleague who had been leading the course, *Global Relations and Poverty in Mexico*, for a couple of years was no longer able to do it, and encouraged me to take it on, saying she thought I would really love teaching it. Frankly, I was a bit reluctant, because it would take 2 weeks of my summer. However, I trusted this colleague, and so I said yes.

It was not an outlandish prospect for me, because I did and do have a fervent commitment to issues of social justice. My academic writing and research areas concern feminist practice and issues of power and privilege in couples and families. Moreover, my parents were social-justice minded. I grew up knowing I wanted to make an impact on the struggles of the world. Having been a social work practitioner for many years prior to coming into academia, I loved group work. And, though I did not know that these attributes would be a good fit for the course, when I agreed to lead it, the actual experience of the course felt like I had come home to issues, people, and a sense of solidarity with who I am at my best and at my roots. I felt I was doing what I was meant to do. What had been missing for me in academia was the experience of connection and collaboration—of being engaged in something really meaningful, life changing, transformational—all of which I experienced in the 2 weeks of the course. My group of slightly acquainted students slowly coalesced within an intense and powerful learning experience, and together began to scaffold a commitment to work for a better world for everyone.

I will share more about the details of the course in the next section. However, I want, in this beginning, to convey the passion I felt for the work there on that first trip. It provided such a stark contrast from the hierarchical, competitive nature of academia, which remains disheartening for me. When I arrived in Mexico and realized that we were immersed in issues of justice -- in dialogue each day with the people there about shared and respective problems, questions, hopes, and dreams each day—I knew I was engaged in making a difference, doing what mattered, that we as a group were engaged in a transformational process. There was no dissonance between my values and my work. Moreover, the relationship with the students felt more authentic. I was a learner with them in this process as well as group leader/facilitator. I reveled in the opportunity to craft a group process that gently and skillfully deepened the students' relationship with the course, the experiences, the content, and each other. The

two weeks were a firsthand experience of praxis: practice in action. I was able to use my skills as a seasoned practitioner to evoke a process of critical consciousness.

Design and Pedagogy of the Courses

So, our starting points as faculty for the courses were different. You will see that the courses are very different. They are taught from two different cultural vantage points. The China course is taught in a Confucian scholarly style. The México course is based in Paulo Freire's experiential pedagogy. Yet, our responses from students tell us that both courses change students' lives. In the next two sections, we describe a bit about each course, and then share some of our students' responses to the courses.

The China Course: *Social Work from a Chinese Perspective*

In preparation for the trip, I teach the GSSW students a class called "Social Work From a Chinese Perspective." The class provides students an opportunity to learn the social, cultural, historical, political, human rights, and economic characteristics of China and how these characteristics shape social work in China today. In a country of 1.3 billion people, even a small percent of the population that is being affected by a social issue is an enormous number of individuals. The sheer number of people is almost unfathomable. For instance, it is estimated that 650,000 are HIV positive in China (UNICEF, 2004). To put this statistic in perspective, there are more people HIV positive in China than the entire city and county population of Denver, which totals 598,707 (U. S. Census, 2008).

Our students become aware that social work in China is a new phenomenon, with only a 20-year history. Many of the ideas regarding social work education were borrowed from the West initially; but over time, Chinese social work has come to reflect the ideas and values of the Chinese people. The juxtaposition of an ancient 5,000-year culture and a 20-year profession is an ongoing tension, because many in China cannot fully understand what the profession of social work actually is. One of the greatest frustrations my Chinese colleagues face is how to legitimize a

profession that is based on taking care of the weak and marginalized, which historically is an activity reserved for the family clan and not a responsibility of the greater society. Many in China see social work as care that should only be given by family members. Subsequently, they distrust care that is initiated from outside of the family system.

U.S. social work was built upon a strong Judeo-Christian ethic of giving to and caring for the less fortunate. Chinese social work has been unable to access that same philanthropic ideal because of the people's strong belief in filial care. This belief system results in there being very little financial support or infrastructure for social work programs. However, these values are beginning to change in Chinese society. The outpouring of emotional and financial support during the 2008 Sichuan earthquake represented a turning point. Ancient clan values are being further eroded by the unintended consequences of the one-child policy. With the creation of the one child policy a quarter century ago, the cultural concept of filial piety, the responsibility of the children to care for their parents in their old age, is being dismantled. The enormous burden placed upon the one child with possibly two parents and four grandparents, who is or at some point will be married to someone who also may have six elderly dependents, has caused the Chinese to begin to consider the creation of other forms of non-familial helping and support. These changes in social policy created profound changes throughout Chinese society and are now helping to propel the need for social work.

Much of what is taught in the classroom in Denver does not fully resonate until the students are actually in China. In Beijing, students are given lectures by faculty at China Youth University. These lectures tend to be given in the classical Confucian, hierarchical method of learned scholar and student. The professors are all experts in their chosen fields and try to best capture the areas where social work has made inroads in China. These areas include community social work, rural social work, school social work, child welfare, and gerontology.

The Confucian style of education is contrary to Paulo Freire's participatory experiential pedagogy. Students are recipients of professors' wisdom. Information moves from the venerable sage to the student. It is the "trickle down" approach to education. The knowledgeable professor imparts her/his wisdom to the eager student who quietly absorbs the information. Knowledge is a hierarchical experience. It is imparted from those who have it, to those who have shown merit and wish to possess it. At the university, the professors have both been students in such a system and now use these techniques to teach their Chinese students. When American students experience this system, they often have a hard time sitting quietly. They want to enter in dialog and ask questions. This American desire for the exchange of information in more of a collaborative manner is somewhat daunting and surprising for some Chinese professors; others enjoy entering into discourse.

Along with their teaching functions, the Chinese faculty members are responsible for creating, and overseeing needed social programs in the field and advocating for the growth of the profession of social work in China. This is an enormous task. For example, a Chinese colleague recently contacted me, because she was asked to bring medical social work to China. She called to gather information regarding what comprises typical medical social work in the United States. For Chinese social workers, it is both highly exciting and exhausting to be at such crossroads of the profession.

Students also have the opportunity to have ongoing discussions with Chinese social work students. They are often awed by the Chinese students' enthusiasm and trepidation. The Chinese students are aware that they are the front line of creating viable social work in China. Some are excited to bring social work to their countrymen and women, whereas others are fearful that after they receive their degree, they will not be gainfully employed in their area of study. Many Chinese students did not choose social work as their preferred area of study. However, because of their performance on college entry tests or their

desire to be in Beijing, they were put in social work. The lack of opportunity of the Chinese students to make their own choices about what they want to study is very difficult for the American students to comprehend or accept.

While in China, we visit several social work organizations. Many of these organizations have been created by faculty and are staffed by current students. The organizations often survive on extremely limited budgets and strive to make changes within systems that are often resistant to change. The American students sometimes comment that it is the proverbial "using a finger to plug a dam." With such an amazing amount of need—the huge population affected by any social issue, lack of resources allocated for social programs, very little infrastructure, and lack of institutional giving—social work in China is both awe-inspiring and overwhelming.

Following each day's activities, which include a lecture and visits to social work organizations or important cultural landmarks, we have a nightly synthesis of the newly acquired knowledge and experiences. Through these discussions, students come to understand that even though social work in the United States is often less than ideal, its firm establishment offers our students a sense of stability as well as opportunities for advancement in the profession. They worry whether their Chinese colleagues will be afforded the same security. They also consider how they would fare in a similar circumstance where there is so much that needs to be done and so many opportunities to create change. It is both an exciting and an extremely daunting predicament.

The México Course: *Global Relations and Poverty in Mexico*

The México course, in contrast to the China course, is not about social work in Mexico. Rather it focuses on putting students in dialogue with people in México to uncover the pertinent issues that are faced there and the interconnections to policies and practices in the United States and globally.

The course takes place in Cuernavaca, México, a center of emancipatory political, religious, and educational thought and

conversation, especially lively in the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s. Ivan Illich's Center for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC), founded in 1961, was a think tank and meeting place where many American and Latin American intellectuals came together to reflect on education, politics, and culture. Taking place during this time were the famous and vigorously argued debates between Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich on education, schooling, and the awakening of awareness. It was at CIDOC that Illich wrote his groundbreaking critique of the educational system, *Deschooling Society* (1971), arguing that schools made people dumb (Gajardo, 1993).

The course, *Global Relations and Poverty in Mexico*, follows the spirit of those times and is based in the community-learning philosophy of Paulo Freire, which provides a mixture of experiential and academic learning. Rather than going to books and texts, students learn directly from the local people via lively two-way conversations with peasants, spiritual and civic leaders, squatters, refugees, social workers, human rights activists, and indigenous peoples. It is not a service-learning-based project where we more privileged people come to help those who are less fortunate. Nor do we come to Mexico to study from academics or experts. Instead, the U.S.-based students and faculty come to learn from ordinary, local people with whom we dialogue and to whom we afford great respect. We are the students; they are our teachers.

The course privileges experience through dialogue and reflection first. This is the opposite of most academic learning, which mostly leads with knowledge from experts (books, professors) up front. Instead, we participants venture out of our comfort zones to visit remote communities where we gain knowledge regarding Mexican culture; individual, family, and community responses to poverty; historical patterns of oppression; spirituality and liberation theology; global economics and policy; and the role of indigenous movements. Theorizing and action plans occur organically in the process and experience of dialogue between the students and community people.

Included are discussions on the relationship between poverty in Mexico and policies in the United States; the plight of legal and illegal immigrants to the United States and Canada; and international trade policies—do they help or further marginalize those with less. The process is life changing, challenging participants to become agents in creating a world that embraces all who inhabit it.

This quote by Illich (1968), in his work, *To Hell With Good Intentions*, illustrates the position of learner that we strive to occupy:

I am here to tell you, if possible to convince you, and hopefully, to stop you, from righteously imposing yourselves on Mexicans. I do have deep faith in the enormous good will of the U.S. volunteer. However, his [her] good faith can usually be explained only by an abysmal lack of intuitive delicacy. By definition, you cannot help being ultimately vacationing salesmen for the middle-class "American way of life," since that is really the only life you know. (p. 2)

I am here to entreat you to freely, consciously and humbly give up the legal right you have to impose your benevolence on Mexico. I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the "good" which you intended to do... Come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But do not come to help. (p. 5)

And so, it is our intention in this course to enter humbly with a willingness to learn from the people—to enter their homes; to sit with them; and to learn about their lives, their needs, their wishes, and their hopes. As well, we answer any questions they might have about us. The poor, the oppressed, and marginalized are our teachers. Their voices and stories are privileged. The following is a vision statement that greets students as they arrive at Quest, our home base, which is my facilitator's home expanded to house the students. This statement is written on the

walls of the seminar room where we gather and helps to create the philosophy that guides the course. "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then, let us walk together (*Lilla Watson*. n.d., p.1)

In accordance with "experience-first" pedagogy, there is not much upfront information given to students before they go to Mexico. Rather, the two or three on-campus sessions focus primarily on building community among the students. Students participate in exercises designed to help them get to know each other and begin to discern how they typically operate in groups. In addition, we examine what makes for good (and bad) group experiences. Acquiring a beginning sense of familiarity with each other helps students enter the intense group-living situation in Mexico and the unfamiliar experiential design of the course.

The course incorporates Freire's pedagogy for developing critical consciousness. The premise is that personal and social liberation occurs when people begin to unravel mechanisms of power, privilege, oppression, and dehumanization (Freire, 1978; Martin-Baro, 1994), understand how power relationships shape our perception and experience, and identify how we can assume a role in social change (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1999; Parker, 2003). The process we use simplifies these tenets into three phases of learning: see, reflect, and act.

See - We immerse ourselves in experience;

Reflect - We reflect and begin to dialogue with community people and with each other about our experience—our reactions to what we saw, felt, heard. Within that process, we begin to hypothesize, theorize, and evaluate;

Act - We develop action plans based on experience, knowledge, and thoughtful dialogue.

Freire contrasts experiential learning with what he calls, "banking education"—where experts (or teachers) make "deposits" of information that students are to receive, remember, and repeat -- a transmission of knowledge from the knowledgeable to those who know less, or subject to object.

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness, which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation (Freire, 1978, p. 73).

Because students have mainly experienced "banking" education, there is often some discomfort and even resistance initially. Students who for the most part have been passive learners often feel reticent at first to take ownership of their learning process. For example, they must learn to take responsibility to raise effective open (versus closed) questions—questions that encourage dialogue and exchange versus shut it down. When we visit the homes of the local people, everyone's comfort level and productive dialogue depends on each student's willingness to be actively, thoughtfully, and compassionately engaged in the group interchange.

I will highlight just a few of the people we visit. Nacho is an indigenous spiritual leader and local veterinarian. We visit him at his family home in Amatlan, a small community that still maintains ancestral customs. He tells the story of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. As well, we hike with him to a sacred spiritual center where he invites participants into an ancient ritual.

Maggie is now a young woman who tells her harrowing story of crossing the border and entering the United States with her mother and sister when she was a child. She weaves a poignant story of the family's experiences with their "coyote"; the attempts, failures, and eventual crossing; then of living and going to school in the United States; and finally of her return to Mexico after a U.S. social worker (wrongfully) threatened to remove the children

from the home. The telling of her story is conducted in her grandparents' home, where her extended family now lives. After Maggie tells the story, her grandfather serenades us with music, and her mother and sister lead the group in dance. Students experience the profound love within the family and the dire circumstances that led Maggie's mother to risk a border crossing without documents.

Ofelia, an exuberant woman, now in her 60s, tells of traveling as a young child to México City to become a domestic worker to help provide for her family. Though she hungered to go to school, education was denied her as a girl. As a woman, Ofelia became connected to a liberation theologian, Gerardo Thijssen, in the squatters' settlement where she lived. He helped organize the women to make changes in their community, for example, getting running water into their settlement. Interestingly, the wife of Ivan Illich (a friend of Thijssen) loaned her money to start a small *tienda* (a little store of sorts) where she could sell candy and gum. Ophelia eventually was able to leave her abusive husband and become self-supporting. She now organizes domestic workers in Mexico.

These are just three of the amazing people students met with whom we dialogue. We also visited Gloria, a T-shirt vendor, who told of her escape from the massacre in El Salvador and the destruction of her family and community there; Alfonso, a priest, who serves the gay lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community and established a shelter for AIDS victims in Cuernavaca; Hector, a Zapatista, who told of the struggles of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas; Estella, a spiritual healer, who portrayed the struggles of women in Mexico; and many others.

The course incorporates experiential exercises where, for example, students compare shopping at the farmers market with the local Wal-Mart. After the shopping excursion, students deliberate the impact of Wal-Mart type companies on the local culture and economy. This is followed by dialogue with a professor from a university in México City that allows opportunity for the students to acquire more information about the history of México and the implications of trade

policies (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]). With the accumulating experiences, students begin to comprehend the repercussions of global policies on the 70% of the population who make only 40 pesos (\$4) a day. Arturo, another teacher, former diplomat, and community activist, challenged the students to feel and embrace the complexities, contradictions, and relationship of the struggles in Mexico with the relative privilege of the United States and to translate their learning into meaningful social action.

With each encounter, the students become aware of the huge and too often painful complexities of poverty, privilege, dominance, and subservience. How are we connected? What actions of mine—of my people—serve the whole, and which actions and decisions serve to maintain my (our) power and privilege while marginalizing others? Students begin to take to heart some of the major dilemmas as they sink into how intimately related we all are fundamentally. They dissect their reactions, challenges, new learnings, and confusions within a judgment-free context—first in personal reflection time that follows each visit, then in small group dialogue with other students, and finally in the large group.

Students Are Changed, But How Are They Changed?

Students from both courses say that the courses were transformational for them—that their experiences in the courses altered the way that they now view the world, their place, and responsibility in it. Mezirow (1991) defined transformative learning as a profound structural shift in a person's frame of reference that alters the way the world is viewed, engaged, and interpreted. Transformed learners grasp people and situations with a broader, deeper, and more heart-felt perspective. Mezirow identified three essential processes that facilitate transformative change: (a) reflection: the act of reflecting on experience and exploring one's culturally constructed assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values as they are uncovered in the face of the new and unfamiliar information and experiences; (b) discourse – or critical

dialogue: a sharing of learners' awarenesses and learning with one another as well as the meanings they are making of the experience; and (c) action: the natural emerging of action plans as students engage in the process of observation, reflection, and authentic dialogue.

Freire (2003) believed that *conscientization*, or consciousness raising, is borne of critical reflection. He maintained that transformation occurs as learners participate in an ongoing cycle of reflecting, acting on one's insights from reflection, then critically reflecting again on that action, or praxis (Freire, 2003). For Freire, personal emancipation is not the goal or ultimate aim of education. It serves only as a necessary starting point for social change (Mezirow, 1991).

Both courses use reflection as a primary tool to help students digest their daily experiences. Though the courses are very different in content and format, we instructors are aware of the similarities in the profound effects of cultural immersion and the shifts that occur in students' worldviews.

The feedback obtained from students in the two courses reflects the respective pedagogies. Julie collects mostly quantitative data via a survey, and Lynn prefers to interview students.

Julie's Students

Six months after we return to the United States, the China students are asked to respond anonymously on Survey Monkey to a number of questions about their experience in China. These results, a compilation of data from the last 5 years, indicate there is lasting change in who these graduate students have become, post trip. These changes are striking in both personal and professional identities.

For instance, 80.7% of students who participated in the China course believed they gained better insight into themselves through participation in the China class. Nearly 70% (69.2%) believed that the China class influenced their personal choices. Over half (57.7%) believed that participation in the China class affected their values. Over two-thirds of the students (65.3%) believed that the China class changed their self-perceptions. Nearly 70% (69.2%) believed participation in the China class increased their self-knowledge.

Almost 85% of the students (84.6%) believed that participating in the China class helped them to better understand others. All of the students (100%) believed that the China class increased their international awareness. Most (86.6%) believed that participation in the China class changed their worldview. Over two-thirds (65.4%) believed that participation in the China class changed their level of responsibility as a world citizen.

Regarding students' professional social work skills, 80.8% believed participating in the China class helped them better understand group dynamics. Three-fourths (76.95%) believed their experience in China had an impact on their social work identity, and 73% believed their approach to social work was different because of their participation in the China program. Almost all (92.3%) believed that participating in the China class helped them to become better social workers.

It is striking that being out the country for only two weeks creates such enduring changes on students' worldviews, values, and identity. I believe this data underscores the importance of international experiences, adding credence to the notion that social justice can be deepened and sustained by involvement in international experiences. My students emerged from the experience in China feeling grateful to be from the United States and to be entering the social work field there.

Lynn's Students

Whereas the students come back from their China experience feeling that we in the United States are lucky, students from the México course leave their experience with the sense that we in the United States hold responsibility for many of the world's problems. Our advantage comes at the expense of others. They leave with a conviction that we need to change, struggling with their own consumerism and relative privilege. Many vow to buy more consciously in the future, for example, to examine labels to ascertain where the clothing is made so as not to buy brands that farm the work out to *maquiladoras* ("sweat shops") that benefit U.S. factory owners and marginalize young female workers from third world countries.

Jessica: I thought I was a poor college student who didn't have any money, but then I went to Mexico, and I was like, "Man, I don't realize how much stuff I do have, I mean, compared to the people there."

Aliza: As we attempt to make sense of all of this, we have questions. Everyday concepts suddenly have become complicated and confusing. What do we do with our money? What does it mean to be a consumer? How do we define happiness and poverty? What values do we use to make these judgments?

The students have been welcomed into homes with no beds, dirt floors, little food for the day and been told, "*Mi casa es su casa*" (My house is your house). "Come back and visit."

Jake: I like the idea of standing in solidarity with people. It does not presume that one person knows better or more, or that one group needs to educate or help another. Rather, we stand together in our differences, in our struggles, in our hope for a better future.

We have heard their stories. And, out of hearing another's experience comes the possibility of a different relationship. When we become aware of the other's humanity, so much becomes possible (Wheatley & Chodron, 1999). A transformative connection is built that is carried forward into students' lives in the United States.

Stacey: We have witnessed their lives and seen their tears. We have felt their pain. Their stories have reached into the core of our hearts and made us question everything we thought we knew before we got here. As people, we have a history of violence, oppression, and destruction. We have learned that here in Mexico, just like in our own country, the wealth and power are in the hands of a few.

Lisa: I learned how important it is to take accountability for our own actions and how these actions impact the larger picture. Everything you do, from the clothes you wear, the car you drive, what stores you patronize, impacts everyone else in the world. We need to be accountable for that, and make ethical choices. I would say to future students: "Definitely go with a willingness to have an open mind; go expecting the experience to basically rock your world; just be open to the

experience, and let yourself feel those raw emotions, because it's really going to hit you hard. Your whole worldview will be changed fundamentally, and so, just be open to that."

Conclusion

As colleagues, we agree that in the United States are lucky, but we also bear a responsibility. We are lucky to live in a country that has many opportunities that are not so available in countries such as China and Mexico. And we hold responsibility for many of the problems that others experience. Our privilege comes at a cost for others.

The opportunities that come alive in international learning experiences allow participants to be both be grateful for what they have and committed to righting injustice. We are convinced that international education, when well organized, greatly enhances social work education. It takes students out of the classroom and out of their ordinary daily lives to embrace realities very different from their own. As such, international education increases students' self and professional awareness as it catapults their commitment to social justice.

The international experiences are heart opening. That makes all the difference. This last comment by Luke conveys our sentiments well.

Luke: We have talked a lot about the idea of transformation. Transformation means to evolve, to change, and to grow. Transformation means that we have opened our hearts enough to see the world in a different way. When we change our hearts, our world also changes. We leave this experience a little more awake, and because of this, we are a little more free. This is transformation.

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