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Mutual Empowerment in Cross-Cultural Participatory Development and Service Learning: Lessons in Communication and Social Justice from Projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua

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ABSTRACT *Two cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects conducted in El Salvador and Nicaragua illustrate a model of mutual empowerment formed from the unification of the three related literatures on developmental communication, intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, and service learning. The essay presents an argument for and illustration of communication and social justice research and action that is grounded in long-term, international participatory projects that empower community members, broaden sojourners' minds and personal growth, and result in increased communication skills and "education in citizenship" that empowers participants in both the learning context and the broader socio-political context. The essay includes an in-depth description of the projects, an overview of the continuing assessment research, and a consideration of ongoing concerns about project design, communication research, and ethics.*

> The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a "circle of certainty" within which he also imprisons reality. On the contrary, the more radical he is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. He does not consider himself the proprietor of history or of men, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he does commit himself, within history, to fight at their side.
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> —Paulo Freire (1970/1988, pp. 23–24)

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> I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.
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> —bell hooks (1994, p. 12)

The recent death of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, was a tragic event for activists and educators across the globe who have committed their lives to liberation and social justice. It seems that now is the right moment to reflect on the relationship between what we do as teachers and as scholars and what we contribute to the ongoing struggle for the betterment of society. Recently, Nakayama (1995) argued for relevancy in the communication discipline, suggesting that "[c]ommunication scholarship can (and should) make a difference in the everyday lives of people" (p. 174). This special issue of the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the degree to which we are doing just that.

This essay provides a case study that illustrates the links between communication studies and social justice teaching and research. Three distinct empirical and practical traditions are integrated to form a foundational argument. While the three literatures explored are quite disparate (rarely are they cross-referenced in the works cited here), weaving them together demonstrates how much they have in common around the theme of communication and social justice. First, the literature on development communication creates an argument in favor of participatory projects as having more long-term sustainability, producing outcomes in the empowerment of community members and, not coincidentally, in the acquisition of broadly applicable communication skills by community members. Second, the cross-cultural adjustment literature (from intercultural communication and international education) creates an argument in favor of international experience as broadening sojourners' minds, developing intercultural communication skills, and offering opportunities for personal growth. Within a social justice framework, this international experience can be empowering. Third, the service-learning literature creates an argument for "education in citizenship"; service learning empowers participants in both the learning context, especially with respect to communication skills, as well as in the broader socio-political context.

There are large bodies of literature in each of the three areas explored here, and limited space necessitates giving merely a brief overview of them in order to focus more attention on the cases presented. Two projects conducted in El Salvador and Nicaragua with students from a small, midwestern, liberal arts university illustrate the integration of these three arguments toward a model of mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning. Rather than empowerment being conceptualized as a one-way process (i.e., the advantaged empowering the disadvantaged), this model conceptualizes empowerment as a two-way process where the experience in and the people of a developing country also empower students to act as more responsible and globally-minded citizens at home. The literature review will demonstrate that participatory development—when grounded in the theme of social justice—intercultural communication, and service learning provide the conditions for mutual empowerment.

Following the development of a mutual empowerment model in the review of literature, this essay includes a detailed description of two specific cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects, and a discussion of their ability to facilitate the mutual empowerment of participants. Finally, some

consideration is given to ongoing concerns about the logistics and ethics of cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects, along with research opportunities presented by such projects for communication scholars.

Development Communication and Participation

Development communication is the "systematic use of communication in the planning and implementation of development" (Moemeka, 1994, p. 10). As a normative concept, development assumes that existing conditions in many nations are insufficient to basic human dignity and socioeconomic advancement. Within this conception, communication is "the web of society, its flow determines the direction and pace of dynamic social development" (Moemeka, 1994, p. 4).

Thoughts on the role of communication in national development have changed radically over the past half century. At one time, it was argued that deficits within individuals—lack of education, skills, and so-called "modern" attitudes—might explain poor rates of development. The mass media were seen as remedies because of their potential to reach and teach isolated audiences (see Lerner, 1958). Modernization theory emphasized economic development and individual change, but inadequately considered cultural and political development or broad-based societal change.

Technological and economic "progress" failed to produce subsequent changes in the human condition in many developing countries. If the inequalities among nations were beginning to diminish somewhat, the inequalities within nations—of employment, housing, education, health, and so forth—seemed to be increasing. Gross National Product did not reflect accurately the real quality of life, particularly in rural areas (Rogers, 1976). Consequently, theorizing about development communication evolved. In fact, in much of the current literature on development communication, the goals of liberation and social justice have superseded the traditional goals of "development" (see, for example, the collection of essays in White, 1994).

In concluding his review of theoretical traditions, Rogers (1976) offered solutions to the problems of communication and development. To achieve greater equality in communication and development, he suggested that developing nations consider a number of strategies, including using mass media to reach the most disadvantaged audiences, providing the means for those who are disadvantaged to participate in the planning and execution of communication and development activities, and producing messages that are of need and interest to the (particularly rural) disadvantaged (also see Hornik, 1988). As the new millennium approaches, the argument in favor of participatory models of communication and of development continues to proliferate (e.g., Casmir, 1991; Moemeka, 1994; Nair & White, 1987). The historical movement of development communication theory from "modernization" to "participation" is, in fact, a movement from thinking in terms of economic growth to a greater concern for social justice.

The specific goals of participatory development are (1) a redistribution of power and control to the people, (2) consciousness raising (or what Freire, 1970/1988, called *conscientização*, (3) self-reliance and sustainability, and (4) knowledge sharing (White, 1994). As White (1994) argued, involving "the unempowered poor is fundamental to development" (p. 16). In the development communication

literature, then, participation is used to operationalize empowerment for disadvantaged persons who engage in participatory development and participatory communication activities (see Berrigan, 1981; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

The importance of interpersonal (in addition to mass) communication has also moved to the forefront of development communication project design and assessment. Interpersonal influence and "opinion leaders" are now recognized as essential elements of the development process (Rogers, 1995). Mobilizing people at the grassroots level—as a precursor to and as a facet of development projects that utilize mass media—entails interpersonal and group interaction between and among change agents and participants. In this regard, White (1994) articulated the inherent relationship between communication and empowerment:

> Though empowerment is usually conceptualized as moving out of a condition or sense of deprivation or oppression, it can also be looked at as a positive, holistic outcome of self-discovery, successful human interaction, and the ability to dialogue with people different from one's self. The confidence to engage in group processes is itself a liberating action. (p. 23)

While the literature on intercultural experience is rarely related to the theoretical or empirical traditions of development communication, the literature resonates with many of the same themes, albeit more focused on individual, rather than societal, transformation.

Intercultural Experience and Personal Transformation

The growth of international educational exchange has been significant in the years since World War II (see Bochner, Lin, & McLeod, 1979), with a primary goal of facilitating mutual understanding and world peace. In his argument for international peace and cooperation through "transnational participation," Angell (1969) asserted that "the essential element is the regular interaction of citizens from many lands" (p. 23). More recently, Barker and Smith (1996) urged universities and colleges to re-examine their international education programs in light of the need for citizens who can appreciate the richness of other cultures, the differences created by ethnicity and religion, and the forces of power and history at work in the formation of nations and international relations. Specifically, they encouraged student participation in activities with community-based programs that enhance understanding of global and international issues while also serving both the institution and other communities. Here, too, we see a movement from an emphasis on international "experience" to the larger concerns of social justice.

Much of the literature on cross-cultural adjustment focuses on the effects of international experience on individual personal growth (e.g., Adler, 1975, 1985; Coelho, 1962; Kim & Ruben, 1988; Steinkalk & Taft, 1979). Among the expected outcomes of international experience are the development of cross-cultural awareness (e.g., Bochner, Lin, & McLeod, 1979), the creation of a global world view (e.g., Bachner, Zeutschel, & Shannon; 1993, Sharma & Jung, 1985), and the acquisition of intercultural communication skills (e.g., Gudykunst, 1979; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978). In fact, cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation are viewed increasingly as communication phenomena (see Kim, 1995, 1997; Kim & Ruben, 1988) because these processes are experienced primarily through interaction (also see Brislin, 1981).

While personal growth and the development of intercultural awareness are often taken for granted as outcomes of international experience, there is some evidence that individual differences—such as gender (e.g., Baty & Dold, 1977), host country characteristics (e.g., Jones & Popper, 1972; Kim, 1997), country of origin (e.g., Becker, 1968), and individual predispositions (e.g., Kim, 1997)—may influence the nature and the effects of this experience. Further, Martin (1984, 1989) emphasized the importance of pre-departure orientation and follow-up upon re-entry to the successful management of cross-cultural experiences. Advanced preparation and "framing" of the experience, along with re-entry "support," result in easier transitions and, presumably, facilitate making connections between the experience and ongoing academic concerns and personal identity formation (also see Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1983; Welds, 1986).

Despite an emphasis on advanced preparation, Adler (1975) argued that the "shock" of cultural transition is essential for the development of an identity that relies on an intercultural (rather than monocultural) frame of reference. In his stage model of cross-cultural adjustment, Adler (1975) suggested that while culture shock begins as a confrontation with another culture, it evolves into a confrontation with one's own culture and, eventually, with one's self. He posited a final phase of adaptation, *independence*, in which a person reaches a state of awareness and acceptance of multiple realities. "More directly," he argued, "the transitional phenomenon gives rise to a heightened sense of self" (p. 20). While perhaps not as relevant to members of Eastern cultures, for whom the entire concept of "self" is different, Adler's conceptualization of cultural transition and personal transformation is consistent with Western self-identity structures.

More recently, Kim (1995, 1997) and Kim and Ruben (1988) argued that cross-cultural experiences are transformational through a process of stress, adaptation, and growth. Like Adler, these researchers suggest that the stress of culture shock is critical to the growth process and that, after a cross-cultural experience, the person's "cultural identity is open to further transformation and growth" (Kim & Ruben, 1988, p. 313). The transformational model of cross-cultural identity illustrates how cross-cultural experiences increase individuals' linguistic and cultural knowledge, communication competence, and cognitive complexity, as well as their emotional and aesthetic sensibilities.

Perhaps most relevant to the projects reported in this essay is the nature of the specific cross-cultural experience itself. As Hanvey (1979) claimed, contact alone will not necessarily result in global awareness. He argued for the importance of "respect and participation" (p. 10) in order for a person to reach deeper levels of intercultural awareness that go beyond an awareness of superficial differences and stereotypes. In discussing the difficulty of attaining profound cross-cultural awareness, he explained that "[t]here must be a readiness to respect and accept, and a capacity to participate. The participation must be reinforced by rewards that matter to the participant. . . . [T]he ability to learn and change is crucial" (p. 10). Thus, intercultural contact and interaction are not enough; the development of global awareness may be predicated on an experience that is related more closely to social justice concerns.

Cross-cultural participatory development, in collaboration with grassroots social justice movements, can frame intercultural experiences so that they are more meaningful than mere contact. Working side-by-side with other cultural members gives both groups of participants a unique vantage point from which to

see each other's perspectives and experiences. Living with, and under the same conditions as, host cultural members facilitates an experience quite distinct from that of tourists or other sojourners (Baty & Dold, 1977). In the context of social action, then, international experience can go beyond producing "personal growth" for participants to encourage the empowerment of participants as global citizens and agents of change. The service-learning approach to intercultural experience provides the academic framework for this type of cross-cultural participatory development.

Service Learning

Service learning has become very popular in recent years, despite concurrent U.S. trends that reflect an increasing emphasis on individualism, decreasing sense of civic responsibility, and general alienation from community (see Barber, 1992; Kraft, 1996). Barber (1992) argued that students must learn the meaning and practice of liberty as the most fundamental component of education. His solution to the current "crisis" in U.S. education was a program of community service to "inspire a renewed interest in civic education and citizenship" (p. 245). The service component of education "promotes an understanding of how self and community, private interest and public good, are necessarily linked" (p. 249). Within a disciplined pedagogical setting, community service can teach citizenship and social responsibility (Rutter & Newman, 1989). As Boyer and Hechinger (1981) argued a decade earlier on behalf of the Carnegie Foundation:

> The aim is not *only* to prepare the young for productive careers, but to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not *only* to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not *merely* to increase participation at the polls, but to help shape a citizenry that can weigh decisions wisely and more effectively promote the public good. (p. 60)

Cross-cultural participatory development and service learning can take these ideas to the global level. At the dawn of the millennium, global citizenry—interdependence and mutual responsibility—should be *de rigueur* in service-learning pedagogy.

While service should not be seen as a panacea for deeply-rooted social problems (Boyer & Hechinger, 1981), it does fulfill a number of educational objectives—including active learning, collaborative learning, applied intercultural communication, perspective-taking, respect for diversity, critical reflection (Commission on National Community Service, 1993; Gamson, 1997), and *praxis* (Freire, 1970/1988)—while also providing needed service to local communities and opportunities for university-community collaboration (Gabelnick, 1997). In fact, Perrone (1992) argued that these collaborations are vital for connecting what is going on in the world with what is going on in school, especially in light of students' indictment of education as being remote from reality:

> They [students] are aware of racial discord, of community violence, of drugs, of war, of famine and environmental degradation. When [educational institutions] do not explore such issues deeply, or even ignore them, it reinforces for students that schools are about something other than the realities of the world. (p. 5)

Thus, education, as well as our own scholarship, should not just be about the *possession* of information, but about the *use* of knowledge.

The effects of service learning on attitudes, such as global awareness and international understanding, are relatively unknown, since so few service-learning projects are cross-cultural by design, and because little research has been conducted on the attitudinal outcomes of cross-cultural service learning. However, Myers-Lipton (1996) conducted research with students who participated (as part of their course work) in limited local community service during the regular semester, followed by a one-month project in Jamaica. He found that, compared to a control group, service-learning participants demonstrated an increased level of global concern. It is important to note that, while perhaps those who participate in service-learning projects may be concerned more with global issues in the first place, the control group actually showed a *decrease* in every aspect of international understanding over the same time period. MacNichol (1992) remarked that service learning also inspires and invigorates teachers, uniting their educational and social concerns in meaningful ways, and that it "humanizes 'the teacher' and transforms our relationships with students" (p. 9; also see hooks, 1994).

Importantly, there is a growing emphasis on service-learning programs that are connected to grassroots social justice movements. Kraft (1996) argued that "the concept of 'partners in service' needs to be embraced in the principles themselves for [service-learning] programs to emulate a paragon of equality" (p. 139). This entails expanding on the vision of service learning so that the strengths and weaknesses all parties bring to the relationship can be acknowledged. Further, he insisted, we must focus not only on the learning and growth of the student, but equally on the empowerment of the service community.

Communication and Social Justice: A Model for Mutual Empowerment

In the three bodies of literature reviewed, common themes emerge which form the basis for mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning. First, *meaningful participation* is identified as critical for successful development, intercultural experience, and service learning. Second, *communication skills* are noted as central to both the practice and the outcomes of participatory development, intercultural adjustment, and service-learning projects. Third, the *empowerment* of developing community members, intercultural sojourners, and service-learning participants is increasingly foregrounded as the primary objective of each. Finally, in all three areas, there is a growing emphasis on *social justice* concerns in order to maximize the benefits for all participants. Thus, participatory development is expected to empower the disenfranchised poor, cross-cultural experience is expected to induce substantial personal growth and intercultural awareness, and service learning attempts to empower students within the learning environment and (in a more generalized way) as citizens. When practiced together, the three components can be expected to produce evidence of "mutual empowerment" for both the so-called disadvantaged and advantaged participants.

As an illustration of the integrated argument for mutual empowerment articulated above, two cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects, one in El Salvador and one in Nicaragua, are described and discussed. Both projects reflect applications of the theoretical traditions discussed above. First, the projects featured participatory development models that were integrated with local grassroots community development movements. Second, both projects

emphasized intercultural communication as the vehicle for producing both mutual understanding and personal transformation. Finally, within a university program of service learning, both projects merged academic study and critical reflection with the enterprise of social action.

Cross-Cultural Participatory Development and Service Learning

Service learning can take many forms. For example, students may work part-time in local literacy programs or do a seminar project in conjunction with a volunteer position. The purpose of this section is to describe one model of service learning that incorporates the elements of (1) cross-cultural experience, and (2) a participatory development model.[1] While it is only one such program, it demonstrates the potential for mutual empowerment. It also illustrates several of the latent pitfalls of service work, and provides a context for exploring some of the research opportunities the work presents. Examples given are from participant-observation field notes for both projects, student journal entries of the El Salvador team, a student-produced video about the project in El Salvador, formal and informal interviews with students and community members for both projects, and an interview survey conducted in one Nicaraguan community.

Program Overview

The program discussed here began about 16 years ago in the Chaplain's Office of a small, midwestern, liberal arts university as an opportunity for students to spend the January term doing a service-learning project. It is now administered through the college's Center for Civic Education and Leadership. Over the years, students have done work in Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and now El Salvador, in addition to dozens of other domestic and foreign locations. Teams are normally composed of between 30 and 40 people (fewer for domestic sites) and are divided into three work teams: medical, public health, and construction. In addition, there are two faculty advisors and a "reflection counselor" (formerly a chaplain of any denomination; now anyone with counseling skills) who accompany the team. My research began when I served as the faculty advisor for a 1993 trip to El Salvador, and continued through my role as reflection counselor for a 1997 trip to Nicaragua (and I returned to Nicaragua in 1998 in the same role). The typical structure and activities of this program are as follows.

Each medical team includes a health care unit composed of two doctors, a dentist, two nurses, a pharmacist, and 6-8 pre-medical, pre-dental, and nursing students. Medical teams have been set up in local clinics, improvised on-site clinics, and/or organized traveling medical units that go from village to village by truck, canoe, or on foot.

The public health unit incorporates one professional public health educator and four students who have taken a semester-long course in public health education and who have translating ability in the local language (which is usually Spanish). Generally, this unit provides elementary public health education: sanitation techniques, basic nutrition, first aid, and family planning. These teams often are used to train or collaborate with local community health workers.

The construction team consists of an engineer and at least 15 students who work

with local volunteers to build a school, church, community center, clinic, or similar construction. Generally, the exact project is determined by the co-sponsoring organization (usually some type of humanitarian organization or non-governmental development agency) in collaboration with village leaders.

The structure of the team leadership uses a student-centered model. Student leaders are chosen for the positions of project officer, chief of construction, chief of medical and public health, chief of operations (money/arrangements/transportation), cultural affairs officer (who prepares readings and other educational aspects of the project), and reflection officer (who works with the reflection counselor to create and conduct on-site guided discussions, role plays, simulations, etc., for the team). The faculty advisors help develop an educational program for the students, assist on one of the work teams, support the student executive body, and serve as the ultimate authority. The student executive committee outlined above begins planning for the project about six months before the team departs from the campus, organizing construction and medical supplies, creating educational materials, and preparing the other team members (orientation, immunizations, packing recommendations, etc.).

In keeping with the characteristics of sound service-learning projects (see Barber, 1992; Boyer & Hechinger, 1981; Kraft, 1996), this program involves experiential learning, taking students into the "real world" to observe and to act. It uses a team approach where students experience life in a particular community while also learning to build and practice community. Participants work in task-oriented groups in planning and executing the project. The project also manifests several features of integrative learning and teaching (see Crabtree, 1997; Jennings, 1997). It is inherently multi-disciplinary because students and faculty come from various parts of the academy. Because students are responsible for much of the project organization, the program erases the traditional distinctions between the roles of professor and student, and encourages all participants to become collaborators in an egalitarian learning environment (Freire, 1970/1988). Further, integrative education rejects the conventional educational divisions between physiology, cognition, and emotion. Participants engage in hard physical labor and are exposed to new living conditions that challenge the body, as well as the mind and the spirit. Formal learning (reading, critical thinking, discussion, and writing) is built into the project in preparation, on-site, and during follow-up phases. The two projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua illustrate variations of this program, and both reflect the themes of participation, intercultural communication, social justice, and, to various degrees, mutual empowerment.

The Project in Consolación, El Salvador

Consolación is a small, repopulated community in the ex-conflictive zone at the base of the Guazapa Volcano in the Cuscatlán province of El Salvador. As is typical of marginalized *pueblos* in rural El Salvador, it does not have electricity or running water. In the neighboring town of La Mora, where the team was housed in a small community center, there was running water only for a few hours a day (most days) from a central source, and no electricity. As an outcome of an earlier exploratory trip to El Salvador sponsored by the university, the students and the Consolación *directiva* (community council) initiated a companion community relationship between the citizens of the college town and the Salvadoran community, a

relationship that has remained functional ever since. The project discussed here took place in January of 1993, although teams returned in subsequent years.

The community *directiva* in Consolación worked with representatives from the co-sponsoring organization to plan and implement the project. The construction site in Consolación was a 45-minute drive from La Mora in a cattle truck, bouncing over potholes and through creeks. People from Consolación and Salvadoran engineers and welders worked with the student construction team to design and re-build the community school, which had been a casualty of *bombaderos.*[2] U.S. American and Salvadoran women, men, and children worked side-by-side twisting rebar (metal framing), pouring cement, digging fencepole holes, and scrubbing years of dirt and lichen off the remaining walls. To replace some of the labor force the community lost to the construction project, students rotated into the community to work in the fields and in the kitchen to prepare meals for the large team. The students continually joked about "the international sign for tortilla," as many shared the experience of making enough tortillas in the morning for the entire crew's lunch.

Meanwhile, local health promoters integrated the medical and public health teams into their own ongoing plan for health care and education in the zone. The medical and public health teams split their time between the clinic in neighboring La Mora and traveling to various small and medium-sized communities in the Cuscatlán province. As many as 300 people lined up to be seen by the physicians on these visits, although only a fraction of them could be treated before it was time to race the setting sun back to La Mora.

The project in El Salvador included an additional team comprised of myself and two mass communication students that produced a video documentary of the project. While I was officially the executive producer of the video, the students took full responsibility for conceptualization, writing, videography, editing, and distributing it. In addition to documenting every facet of the project, the students also interviewed ex-combatants from both sides (including women), war-wounded, former refugees who were now repopulating their communities, community leaders, and the student participants. I acted as the translator for interviews. When our project attracted the attention of the Salvadoran media, the students arranged to get stock war footage to include in their documentary.

The project in El Salvador incorporated one short homestay for the students. As arranged by the co-sponsoring organization and the community *directiva*, students went in pairs (one bilingual person per team) to stay for one night with a family.[3] Morning meals were with the family (generally coffee and bread), but because of the extreme poverty of Consolación, the evening meal was prepared for the entire community with project resources.

For the academic component of the El Salvador trip, students completed a number of readings during the fall semester. Faculty advisors facilitated guided journal entries that responded to the readings. The entire team met on several occasions to discuss the land tenure system, the nature of the armed conflict, the role of the United States in El Salvador's political history, the ideological nature of development, the features of the alternative (participatory) development model, the cultural norms in El Salvador, and related matters.

Further, formal education did not end when the airplane landed in San Salvador. More guided journal entries, and presentations from ex-military officers, ex-FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) *guerrillas*, war-wounded

from both sides, women ex-combatants, community members, former refugees, ecology workers, journalists, and United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.) officials rounded out the learning agenda once in El Salvador. These presentations were often incorporated into evening reflection sessions. Students heard the stories of people from various perspectives firsthand, which helped them to integrate what they had heard and read before they came (including U.S. media accounts and their parents' appraisals) with what they heard from actual participants and what they experienced for themselves in the community.

The final evening in Consolación was a *fiesta* with a large meal, a clown (another trade of one of the Salvadoran community development workers), activities in the rebuilt school (e.g., games and coloring), and a dance. There was a presentation of the Companion Community Declaration from the college town, and several boxes of school supplies that had been donated. The children posted their drawings—about peace, family, friendship, and love—on the newly painted walls of the former ruin.

The Project in Solingalpa, Nicaragua

Solingalpa is a semi-rural town in the mountainous coffee-producing province of Matagalpa, Nicaragua. It is down river from the capital city of the province (also called Matagalpa), which contributes to the significant problems surrounding potable water. Solingalpa is made up of five *barrios*, or neighborhoods, totaling approximately 400 families. Some of the *barrios* have indoor plumbing, but water rarely flows. There is electricity in most parts of Solingalpa, though "brownouts" are typical. Since the return to capitalism after the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections, there have been few state-sponsored services in rural and semi-urban areas. The project described here took place in January of 1997.

The construction team worked on the second half of a building that had been started on a previous trip in January of 1992. The building was to be a women's center, with an educational center on one side and a child care center on the other. The work consisted of digging the foundation for the second half of the building, laying bricks, and placing the roof. A few of the local community members (all men) worked with the construction team, and several of the community's children "helped" (they were often more fascinated with the students than with the work itself). The community *directiva*, made up of representatives from the five *barrios*, had the charge of designing and implementing the programs. They are working on getting several sewing machines donated so they can form a sewing cooperative that would train local women in a trade, as well as make money for the community center.

There is a small medical clinic in Solingalpa, with a part-time doctor but no medicines. The medical team worked some days in this clinic alongside the local doctor and the community health *brigadistas* (volunteers). Other days we traveled by truck, bus, or on foot (as long as three-hour hikes through mountainous jungle) to nearby communities to set up clinics. Collaborations were made with small local clinics or schools. We typically saw 100 patients per day; the dentist pulled an average of 80 teeth per day (preventative and reconstructive oral health are unavailable for the poor, so extraction and dental hygiene instruction are the usual remedies).

The public health team conducted a water project which involved a survey of the town, a distribution of enclosed plastic water containers called *bidones*,[4] and education about chlorination and other water-safety measures. Some of the local community health *brigadistas* worked with the team on the water project, assisting with the survey, translating, and explaining the procedures in a way that community members could understand. The project entailed a lottery in which half of the families received the containers during the student stay and the other half received them six weeks later in order that experimentally-controlled project evaluation research could be conducted. The staggered distribution of *bidones* created some disharmony in the community as the research objectives did not necessarily match the immediate needs and priorities of the community.

In Solingalpa, the team was housed in part of a local church, and ate in an unoccupied house. Meals were prepared by a cooperative of local women who rotated responsibilities. The team took turns helping with clean-up, which created additional opportunities for interaction with members of the community. It was also an occasion to demonstrate healthy food preparation and sanitation practices, which, given the problems with water faced by this community, were extremely pertinent. No homestays were arranged, although some team members developed relationships with local families and were invited to their homes to eat and visit.

On this project, collaborative decision making took place in small group meetings with representatives from the community, the co-sponsoring organization, and the student leadership team. In the post-Sandinista era of Nicaraguan life, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and disillusionment plague the population (see Hume & Summerfield, 1994; Summerfield & Toser, 1991), and thus community participation was less fervent than in El Salvador. Most families have lost one or several members to the extended *contra* war and emigration. As discussed in the following section, the difficulty encountered in facilitating meaningful community participation affected empowerment outcomes for all participants.

Students had a reading packet and several orientation sessions as preparation for the trip, and we engaged in additional learning sessions in the capital of Managua before going out to the community of Solingalpa. These sessions covered issues ranging from the history of the political situation in Nicaragua and the recent elections to the health care system and the growing natural medicine movement. On-site education was more limited on this project; the most notable presentations came from a retired U.S. Presbyterian minister and poet who has been a resident of Nicaragua for many years, and a former Sandinista international relations delegate who now makes furniture and works in community development. The medical team also visited two hospitals (one for the poor, one for the rich) and a women's health clinic.

Reflection in Nicaragua centered around a series of evening activities designed to bring intellectual, emotional, and spiritual meaning to the work experiences. The themes of power, poverty, service, and vocation were most prevalent. A ritual to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday asked students to connect their work in El Salvador to the ways they lived their lives back in the United States. Letters from home (solicited before the trip) reminded students of the meaning of their connections in the world and the ways they had changed during this experience.

The project culminated with a community festival that included traditional folk dances arranged and performed by some of the local youth and a dance on the basketball court with a disk jockey brought in from the city of Matagalpa. The day the team members loaded their gear to return to Managua, the children of Solingalpa ran alongside the bus shouting their goodbye's to new friends until we reached the main highway. The dust raised on the dirt road leading out of Solingalpa obscured the final glance back, as the bus bounced onto the road home.

Evidence of Mutual Empowerment

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as having four dimensions: (1) meaningfulness (the fit with one's value system), (2) competence (the feeling that one is qualified and capable), (3) impact (the perception that the task makes a difference), and (4) choice (the degree to which one feels he/she can self-determine his/her goals and activities). Frymier, Shulman, and House (1996) argued that communication has a major influence on empowerment through its impact on conditions such as motivation. Relational communication variables influence feelings of empowerment through such behaviors as active listening, constructive feedback, credibility, and immediacy. McMillan, Florin, Stevenson, Kermin, and Mitchell (1995) recognized empowerment as a higher-order construct that subsumes other constructs nested within it. They suggested that empowerment is manifest in two ways: social action (efficacy and control) and multi-level and context-specific interactional processes. Similar to other frameworks, they delineated empowerment as perceived knowledge and skills development, perceived participatory competence, expectancies for future individual contributions, perceived accomplishments, and expectancies for future group accomplishments. Thus, their notion of psychological empowerment reflects both intrapersonal and interactional components (also see Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; White, 1994).

In attempting to develop a model of mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning, I am interested in both intrapersonal and interactional manifestations of empowerment. Specifically, feelings of efficacy and perceptions of one's knowledge, skills, and accomplishments, as well as actual participatory and communicative behaviors that illustrate mutual empowerment, have been noted in the data gathered so far. A few examples that begin to illustrate the potential for mutual empowerment are presented for consideration here. Some of these illustrations represent both the learning and empowerment of the students as manifest immediately before, during, and after the trip. Others reflect the empowerment of the community as derivatives of participation and intercultural interaction. These examples may not "prove" that empowerment was achieved (and no data prior to these engagements are available); however, they do begin to illustrate the potential for mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning as articulated in the literature review.[5] Applying Spitzberg's (1997) model of intercultural communication competence, these examples illustrate growth in cultural knowledge (cognitive dimension), strong levels of communicator motivation (affective dimension), and the development of relational network integration (operational dimension). Moreover, these examples depict a concern for participatory collaboration,

global awareness, and action for social justice. Together, these intrapersonal and interactional features suggest that the experience was indeed empowering for the participants.

Some early evidence of empowerment was noted in student journal entries that preceded the trip. The following excerpt was written as a reflection on some of the pre-departure readings:

> These articles coincided with my impression of politics and religion in El Salvador—morbid, bloody, hopeless, dark. When I saw the video, however, in last week's meeting, I was surprised to see villagers smile and have a sense of humor about life. They seemed self-motivating, rather than the type to allow others to influence them. (undated)

Here the student was beginning to wrestle with the conflicting perspectives on the situation in El Salvador offered in the readings as compared to preconceptions (mostly from the media and her parents). The student also identified and values the notion of self-determination apparent in the village depicted in one of the videos she saw.

Role plays asked students to apply what they had learned so far (in pre-departure readings and on-site experience) by taking the perspectives of a variety of social actors. The following journal entry illustrated the alliance of cognition and emotion facilitated in the on-site guided reflections:

> We had a great reflection Sunday night where we role played the stories of Salvadorans. I was a woman with 7 children—3 of whom died, along with my husband, in the war. I lost my arm and worked in the *guerrilla* encampments. Several of us were moved to tears. Then another group played a U.S. Brigade with a development plan that didn't acknowledge cultural context or community needs. We had a confrontation in our roles and then talked about it. (1/12/93)

This exercise seemed to bring a synthesis of cognitive, affective, and operational skills for this woman (Spitzberg, 1997). She was able to apply new knowledge about the social actors in El Salvador; she was motivated to take on a role with complex emotional and ideological facets; and she practiced effective communication skills in a particular intercultural context.

The following two journal entries reflected changes in political views and sense of agency after another guided reflection. In this session, Robert Fulghum's (1986) humorous and philosophical text, *Everything I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things*,[6] was used to facilitate journal writing and discussion. One student wrote:

> Cleaning up your own mess: I guess that's what we're doing here. Much of the situation here is, to some degree or another, our mess. That's part of the poetic justice. We're rebuilding a school that our tax dollars destroyed. We're hearing stories of people who were invisible in the news. It seems like the right thing to do. (1/14/93)

This participant noted the interdependent relationship between El Salvador and the United States, while also recognizing a sense of responsibility and efficacy in the project's response to the situation.

Another, rather amusing, journal disclosure illustrated the deep dilemmas experienced during project participation. Participants wrestled with morality and

the order of the universe as they discovered their connections to a world totally remote from their own:

> Kindergarten. That perfect place where my biggest fear was peeing my pants because I was afraid to ask to go to the bathroom after recess. And where I played Chicken Little "the sky is falling." Now I've learned what is meant by "the sky is falling." I've seen the bombed-out houses where families lost parts of their bodies, some of their relatives, and most of their stuff. I've seen the holes in the ground where they hid while the sky was falling. All this was not of their making. The perfect world of Fulghum's writing is OUR world. Our safe, clean, fun world that prepares us to live well, to trust God, and to seek pleasure. I guess it's of no surprise that El Salvadorans live so poorly yet learn to enjoy such simple pleasures. I find it hard to know how they continue to have faith in God. (1/20/93)

Not surprisingly, hearing the people's stories inevitably engaged students' emotions in the learning process. The tragedy and triumph and personal loss and political devastation experienced by the Salvadorans and Nicaraguans made for profound reminiscences. It should be noted that spiritual concerns were often the focus of reflection sessions. No particular religion or denomination was privileged, though efforts were made to introduce students to local community faith practices as part of understanding the host culture.

This next excerpt (from a student on his second service trip) continues the critique of U.S. cultural values, exemplifying what Adler (1975) referred to as the confrontation with one's own culture that follows the initial "culture shock":

> This is easily one of the best things about a [service] trip, to see a culture much richer and deeper, but that may look on the surface as if it were broken down, struggling to survive because of its surface features. Americans deal so intensely with the surface. Our culture is becoming more and more material. My experiences in third-world lands have been much more fulfilling than any possessions anyone could obtain. The [local] culture seems to value giving over receiving. I want to be engulfed by it, and learn to live it. (undated)

These examples seem to illustrate the "meaningfulness" and "impact" aspects of Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) conceptualization of empowerment, as well as the increased cultural knowledge and motivation that are critical to intercultural communication competence (Spitzberg, 1997). Having access to so many different outlooks enabled the students to build their own conclusions and to develop a unique perspective grounded in both study and firsthand experience.

The focus on learning and practicing effective intercultural communication created a healthy environment for the emotional and psychological transformation that cross-cultural experiences can foster. Students were asked to withhold interpretation and evaluation of Salvadoran and Nicaraguan customs and, instead, were encouraged to observe, describe, and value the differences they noted. Learning about context, history, and culture helped students come to appreciate (rather than pity) the way of life lived by the very poor people of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Gaining a background in intercultural communication theory and practicing effective intercultural communication skills led to the development of mutual respect among students and community members.[7] Because the students were collaborators with the people—and not merely guests doing service in these communities—the cross-cultural exchange took place within an environment of shared power and purpose.

The collaborative nature of the project was highlighted in several journal entries. One student wrote, "I came here hoping to contribute my help to a shattered war-torn country, but I leave knowing that I collaborated with a very strong and determined people" (1/22/93). Another wrote, "I feel that the team is becoming closer, not only to each other, but to the Salvadorans. We have been working together successfully, and improvising when we don't have all the materials" (1/19/93). A third wrote:

> The construction team is working more hand-in-hand with the people of Consolación, both at the school and in the fields; the medical team would be paralyzed without the help of Francisco, the driver, and the health promotors, our cultural translators. (1/14/93)

The power of this collaboration was also noted by one member of the Consolación *directiva*:

> We sincerely didn't have anything to receive them with, except open arms, and to say, "*Compañeros*, you are in Consolación, welcome." And to see their sincerity, the love with which they came here to work; this is something that, even for an old man like me, it lifted my spirits. (Excerpt from the student-produced video *La Lucha del Campesino*, 1993)

The formation of intercultural bonds was also noted in social contexts. One student wrote, "I believe that some of us made a few friends with the locals in our own ways. The surrounding communities seem to be accepting us *gringos*" (1/17/93). One of the Salvadorans said, "We feel proud to be close to a North American, a good one" (quoted in *La Lucha del Campesino*). Another student noted, "I feel like everyone is getting a lot more comfortable here. Not only with each other, but with the people. Nick has kids on his lap, and Donnie is playing cards with a bunch of kids, knowing virtually no Spanish" (1/9/93).

These examples illustrate Spitzberg's (1997) intercultural communication competence dimension of relational network integration. One of the co-sponsoring organization's leaders observed specific changes in the Salvadorans' broader communication competency when he noted that "this is the first time Faustino talked to a delegation that his voice did not tremble" (quoted in student journal, 1/24/93). The students and community members thus developed and practiced intercultural communication competence through their acquisition of cultural knowledge about each other, their obviously strong motivation to build understanding and friendship, and their ability to practice new skills in interaction.

While cross-cultural experience is expected to produce "personal growth," within a social justice framework, intercultural relationships can also have political implications. Students indicated that they have changed, and several connected these changes with new responsibilities at home. One student wrote, "Our mission involves our responsibility to use this power" (1/19/93). Another wrote:

> While we are here, we are to look and absorb. And when we return, we are to tell and activate our feelings which we all feel so strongly at this moment. . . . We need to do more than just fondly recall the times. . . . It is an incredible challenge that cannot be failed. Our new awareness of another culture has brought us to a state of consciousness. . . . What are we going to do with our abilities? (1/17/93)

A growing sense of political consciousness was noted among the Salvadorans, as well. For instance, a former sub-sergeant in the Salvadoran Army, who did not even know what was meant by the term "communism" when he was conscripted into military service, was able to articulate his experiences during the war, as well as his evolving perspective. The students and the ex-combatants, both groups who had little impact on the policies of their governments, shared and negotiated a developing political consciousness about the war and its aftermath. Both groups seemed to acknowledge some responsibility for their former silence; one could argue that these newly raised consciousnesses might lead to future (and decidedly different) political actions.

While doing development work can be seen as social action in a general way, the students had the opportunity to exercise their rights and responsibilities as U.S. citizens, which also created an opportunity for the Salvadorans to have a political voice, as well. The El Salvador team, which included three members of the Consolación *directiva* and two other Salvadoran development workers, sponsored a unique visit to the U.S. Embassy and the offices of U.S.A.I.D. As one Salvadoran put it, "This was the first time that 'little hats' were allowed in the 'palace'."[8] The Salvadorans asked U.S.A.I.D. officers about their development plans in the ex-conflictive zone and in repopulated communities like Consolación. The students witnessed this exchange, asked about U.S. development policy in Central America and El Salvador, and demonstrated their involvement with U.S. government activities and their intention to hold government agencies accountable for their policies and actions. Much to the chagrin of the A.I.D. Officer, the students insisted the meeting be conducted in Spanish. It was an eye-opening experience for the students, whose firsthand observations in the community made them witnesses to past (failed) development policy and long-term neglect. It was also empowering for the Salvadorans, who became increasingly aware that not all U.S. Americans were their enemies. Recognizing the potential of the alternative (cross-cultural and participatory) development model, one Salvadoran said, "If one project comes to Consolación [from U.S.A.I.D.], I personally have the courage to say, 'I won't thank A.I.D. for it. I'll thank [the] University'."

In Nicaragua, the students also became aware of the challenges involved in enacting truly participatory and collaborative development. Perhaps because Solingalpa exhibited many of the troubles of semi-urban development (e.g., unemployment, frustrated consumerism, and disgruntled youth), along with the rampant disillusionment and distrust characteristic of post-Sandinista Nicaragua, community participation was sometimes stalled or manifest awkwardly. This time, the students began to question the actions of the co-sponsoring organization and to urge greater effort in providing the means and opportunities for genuine community participation. Their own experiences and insights were given voice as they became advocates for a more meaningful collaboration. Their critiques were shared with the co-sponsoring organization's leadership, the faculty and student leadership team, and program administrators back on campus. Some students felt they should, and could, exert influence over policy.

As one way of assessing the impact of the project on the community, a modified version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (which focuses on somatic symptoms, anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression, all prevalent in Nicaragua; see Goldberg, 1972) was administered in Solingalpa, Nicaragua. In addition to the modified 28-item GHQ, items were added regarding anomie and

attitudes toward community participation. The validity of the added items has not yet been determined, nor have the data been thoroughly analyzed, but some implications can be suggested at this time. For example, interviewees noted an increase in self-efficacy and community involvement during the time of the project.[9] Interviewees also had extremely positive assessments of their visitors, the project, and their hopes for a stronger community. Many took the opportunity afforded by the interview to ask questions about the project, and how they might get involved. Others indicated they would have been happier if the students had stayed with them in their homes, rather than in a central location. (They also felt students would remain healthier and be cared for better in community homes.) Homestays remain an important aspect of community members' ownership and connection to the project, and should be incorporated whenever possible.

The empowerment experienced by the Salvadorans and Nicaraguans is related to both the participatory model of development as well as to the cross-cultural component. Participatory development involves project beneficiaries in some or all facets of development efforts (see, for example, Berrigan, 1981; Nair & White, 1987; Tandon, 1981). We worked in accordance with local culture (e.g., time orientation) and adapted to the changing needs and circumstances we confronted. Decisions were not always made in the most efficient manner in U.S. terms, but they were generally the most locally appropriate and grew from local custom and self-determination. The students were frustrated with this in the beginning, but came to respect new customs and the people's tenacity. This led to a de-centering of the students in terms of both leadership/decision making and project *raison d'etre*.

The cross-cultural nature of both projects brought many *campesinos* in close contact with U.S. Americans for the first time. For the students and *campesinos* alike, it was liberating to notice similarities between people of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Through the collaboration with Salvadoran and Nicaraguan community health workers, for example, the college students and visiting doctors learned that, rather than needing their charity, the rural community health workers were well trained, well organized, and self-determined. The U.S. Americans also learned a great deal about the context of war in which these skills had been developed. Teaching U.S. college students and medical personnel validated the experiences, perspectives, and expertise of poor Salvadorans and Nicaraguans. Sharing laughter, stories, and hard work with U.S. Americans stood in sharp contrast to the years of war in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, wars funded and often conducted by "*los Yanquis.*" As reported in interviews with community members, telling their stories to their U.S. visitors was very therapeutic for many of those who had undergone years of trauma and violence, and who were struggling to reclaim their land and their lives. In Nicaragua, for example, the presence of U.S. social action brigades gave them renewed hope for the development of their communities.[10] In fact, some community members took active part in community mobilization for the first time since the Sandinista years, when grassroots community movements were popular and encouraged by the government.

The lasting impact of cross-cultural participatory development and service learning remains to be assessed, but some promising evidence exists. Based on the experience at the U.S. Embassy, for example, several students used their own political voices by writing to their representatives in Congress about development

policy in El Salvador, and by remaining active in solidarity work after the trip. Some relayed their experiences to friends, co-workers, schools, church congregations, and civic organizations in formal and informal presentations. The video documentary produced during the project has been key in these presentations. This artifact is a testimony to the growth and empowerment of the students; it focuses substantially more on the historical and contemporary experiences of the Salvadorans and the links to U.S. foreign policy than on the activities of the students themselves.[11] Many of these students became aware of U.S. foreign policy and international development issues for the first time. The unique context, postwar El Salvador in this case, taught the students about the history of this community and the root causes of underdevelopment in the zone.[12] Their experience—and the need to communicate it—helped them find a voice, and a sense of themselves as citizens. The long-term impact on the service communities, however, is more difficult to determine. Nevertheless, in all, the evidence presented here begins to illustrate how cross-cultural participatory development and service learning can be "the means by which men and women [in cross-cultural collaboration] deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Shaull, 1988, p. 15).

I close this section with the words of one student who wrote on the last day of the El Salvador trip:

> Tomorrow we head back to the States and disperse into U.S. culture—it's going to be a tremendous shock and mixed with pains and pleasures. . . . But let us hope that the passionate struggle for peace and justice continues—because, as the bumper stickers say, "If you want peace, work for justice." And there's plenty of work to do. (1/26/93)

Ongoing Concerns: The Challenge for a Social Justice Agenda

In whatever community we serve, we must be aware of the impact we have—both positive and negative. As Fiske (1993) warned:

> Cross-cultural communication which is initiated and directed by the more powerful of the two cultures (for power difference is always part of the cultural difference) always runs the risk of reducing the weaker to the canvas upon which the stronger represents itself and its power. This risk increases in proportion to the power difference between the two cultures. (p. 149)

Thus, while cross-cultural interaction can be expected to produce transformational and empowering outcomes for participants, the differential power relationship between the interactants' cultures is constantly present and reproduced in interaction. Along with evidence that supports the experience as being mutually empowering for Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and U.S. Americans alike, there is ample evidence that there were alternative and unintended outcomes as well.

For instance, the inhabitants of both Consolación, El Salvador and Solingalpa, Nicaragua were well aware of the material differences that existed between themselves and their guests. The collective possessions of the team members, who had been told to "pack light," could have easily exceeded the combined material wealth of the entire community. The children were enamoured of the notion and sheer volume of "personal belongings," and relentless in their requests for gifts. These concerns must be made part of pre-departure orientations, as well as on-site reflections. In semi-urban Solingalpa, the questions "What is poverty?" and "What

are the poor lacking?" produced interesting discussions about the relationships between material poverty and other types of impoverishment. In rural Consolación, many students remarked about how much they had learned about community, and the impression it made on them to learn that their hosts did not necessarily envy their complex urban and materialistic lifestyles. Nevertheless, the mounds of discarded belongings left behind for local organizations to donate to their needy communities testified to persistent differences and the afflictions of exogenous influence.

The influence of cross-cultural participatory development and service learning can be noted at the policy level, as well. With the El Salvador project, Consolación gained the attention of the Salvadoran National Committee for Reconstruction as well as the U.S.A.I.D. A housing project sponsored by U.S.A.I.D. has now been completed in the area. Our presence there served as the single-most influential factor in getting much-needed housing for that community. However, our presence did not necessarily cause U.S.A.I.D. or the Salvadoran government to rethink their overall development policies and priorities. In fact, this one housing project can now be held up as an example of U.S.A.I.D. and Salvadoran government responsiveness while other needy communities go unserved. Service-learning projects can easily be co-opted by special interests, not to mention the unknown or unintended long-term impacts such projects can have in a community. Raising community expectations unrealistically, participating in the short-term solution of what are really long-term and very complex problems, and contaminating naturally-occurring events and customs are all implications we must consider. Indeed, the very notion that service—rather than broad-based economic and social transformation—can provide solutions to social problems must be examined.

In Solingalpa, additional concerns about intervention became glaringly apparent. Because the community center was being constructed near one of the five *barrios*, there was some misconception in the other *barrios* about whether or not the center was for the entire community. Due to political divisions among the various *barrios*, we stumbled into a complex and insidious facet of contemporary Nicaraguan history and culture: families and neighbors are often divided along political lines. To overcome some of these divisions and misunderstandings, community meetings were scheduled during the students' stay with representatives from each of the *barrios*, members of the co-sponsoring organization's leadership team, and the student leadership team. The process of participatory, collaborative development is often wrought with cultural, political, and procedural differences.[13]

Another ethical concern that has not been considered in the promotion of intercultural effectiveness relates to the risks involved with what Adler (1985) termed "multicultural personhood." While individuals who develop excellent intercultural communication skills and effective adaptability can act as "mediating persons" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1960) in an unstable multicultural environment, they are also vulnerable to the pitfalls of multiculturalism. For instance, Adler (1985) warned that multicultural persons may suffer from unique stresses and tensions in their cultural identities because they are open to confusing, often contradictory stimuli. This can lead to a loss of one's own sense of authenticity; one's own adaptability can be reduced to a variety of roles that bear little relationship to one another. The multicultural person can easily become a dilettante, losing a sense of commitment and responsibility; the original enthusi-

asm brought to bear in new situations disintegrates into superficiality without a sense of deeper connection or involvement. For example, I noticed that students who participate in more than one service-learning trip begin to compare notes in ways that undermine the power and meaning of the experiences, especially for conversational partners who are first-time participants (e.g., returning students constantly referring to last year or another trip as "better"). I suspect this phenomenon is related to Adler's (1985) comment that, in the extreme, the multicultural person may seek "ultimate philosophical and psychological refuge in an attitude of existential absurdity, mocking the patterns and lifestyles of others" (p. 401). Ironically, then, intercultural awareness and effectiveness, when grounded insufficiently in a social justice commitment and sound academic study, could, in fact, become disempowering, leading to disengagement from meaningful interaction and agency.

While participatory development and service learning may provide a strong grounding for cross-cultural experiences, the marketing of service-learning programs is also a significant concern. As the idea of service learning comes increasingly into "vogue," university administrators and admissions officers will not fail to turn it into a marketing strategy, particularly at private universities like the one in this study. Trivializing service-learning components and minimalizing the social justice/empowerment approach in favor of a more charitable and vocational one undermines the credibility of the program itself. Barber (1992) argued that the market-framed conception of service as a "repayment" undermines the sense of empowerment that might be derived from service learning. Thus, a participatory framework for service, embedded within a solid foundation of critical reflection, can recast the notion of service from a charity model to a model more grounded in social justice and action. The university community, therefore, must be given ample time to explore the philosophies, goals, and consequences of service-learning programs *before* such programs are marketed to potential consumers. Then, the social justice aims should benefit from the same rhetorical prominence and force that are used to promote resumé-building and vocational outcomes.

Finally, the academic integrity of service learning must be upheld. I suspect that several of the weaknesses noted, in the Nicaragua project in particular, are related closely to lapses in the academic facets of the program. Service learning should be grounded in the theoretical concepts of various fields of study, and should include in-depth study of historical, social, political, and cultural factors related to service itself and to the specific service community. This convention will provide the essential links between the epistemological arena and the arenas of civic action and social responsibility. Service learning can and should be interdisciplinary, restructure power relationships between students and teachers, engage many epistemologies (e.g., knowledge acquired through study, action, and reflection), and demonstrate a strong connection to the processes of social justice in the service communities themselves. As manifest in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the winters of 1993 and 1997, respectively, these ideas and practices extended to the people of Consolación and Solingalpa. Students learned to value the knowledge of those who did not have formal education, as peasants came to teach what they have lived and learned. Such an experience suggests that a true critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/1988) for social justice and liberation can be achieved.

Communication and Social Justice Research

It is useful to examine how cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects can produce opportunities for communication and social justice research. The assumption here is that, as international education and service-learning programs and curricula proliferate, faculty must, and inevitably will, contemplate the personal rewards. It is not only wise for scholars to combine research, teaching, and service, but, within a framework of social justice, this type of integration creates a more ethical pedagogy, and more relevant scholarship, as well. Cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects offer opportunities to unite teaching, research, and action—to participate in the process whereby the knowledge we generate has a real impact on our society and potentially on the world.[14]

It is not coincidental that the development of communication skills is noted as central—by design and/or by outcome—to service-learning projects (e.g., Nelms, 1991) as well as community development projects (e.g., Moemeka, 1994; White, 1994). The terms "leadership," "participation," and "empowerment" are peppered throughout the literature on service learning and development communication; *the* critical component of each is communication (Windahl & Signitzer, 1992). While this research has barely begun to explore the roles of specific communication behaviors within cross-cultural participatory development and service-learning projects, there are ample opportunities for communication scholars from every area of the discipline to study various aspects of these experiences and their outcomes.

Development communication scholars can consider studying the roles of interpersonal/intercultural communication in community development activities. While interpersonal influence has been identified as central to the dissemination of new ideas (Rogers, 1995), little is known about the value of intercultural collaboration and interaction in participatory development projects. Current research on communication campaigns for development also stresses the importance of homophily between message senders and receivers (e.g., Windahl & Signitzer, 1992), which is one of the primary arguments in favor of participatory message making (Nair & White, 1987). Cross-cultural participatory development projects, however, feature both homophilous and heterophilous relationships, and it is unknown how this combination affects the communication process in a development context.

Health and environmental communication experts may be particularly interested in studying cross-cultural participatory development, since many such programs feature health and environmental components. Understanding the relationship between visiting health care personnel and local community health workers, for instance, would be particularly interesting. Further, the intercultural aspects of health care in developing countries could offer new insights for effective health communication in the increasingly multicultural contexts of the poor rural and inner-city areas of the United States.

In 1981, Smith criticized intercultural communication research for its emphasis on interpersonal adjustment, job skills, and cosmopolitanism without looking at international relations and intercultural diplomacy, or taking a global world view. In 1987, Rohrlich responded to Smith's concerns, writing that the study of intercultural communication did address global issues in both its substance and

procedure, as well as in its provision of information that might influence policy. He asserted that intercultural communication can contribute to the culturally sensitive contextualizing of all problems; in other words, a global view. Intercultural communication scholars can continue to develop this research agenda by studying how the "meaningfulness" of cross-cultural experience affects participants, with an increasing emphasis on host culture members. It is also critical to differentiate types of sojourn (see Bachner et al., 1993). For example, it may be that the features of the cross-cultural adaptation process are unique for those who work in collaborative development in disadvantaged communities. Further, the longitudinal impact of cross-cultural experiences within a social justice framework for both hosts and visitors is unknown, and the long-term effects on communities are particularly important to discern. This research agenda stands in sharp contrast to the studies of intercultural business interactions, as well as student, military, and missionary sojourns that have been concerned mainly with individual (and often profit-motivated) effectiveness.

Additionally, service learning provides opportunities for instructional communication researchers to examine the pedagogical implications of service on learning. Service-learning contexts are unique teaching and learning environments. In their study of service learning in a mass communication curriculum, for example, Cohen and Kinsey (1994) concluded that "service learning is more than *doing good*. It is an effective means of teaching that increases students understanding of complex material" (p. 13). Spitzberg's (1997) model of intercultural communication competence shows much promise for application in the multicultural classroom, as well as the cross-cultural service-learning context.

Communication scholars should consider expanding on previous work (e.g., Frymier et al., 1996) about the relationship between communication and empowerment in various educational contexts. We particularly need to operationalize the communication behaviors that help promote empowering and empowered action (McMillan et al., 1995), both within the classroom and in alternative learning environments, and the impact such behaviors have on learning.

Related to the goals of participatory grassroots community development, service learning creates opportunities for collaboration among various communities, both in the solution of problems and in the generation of knowledge (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Sirianni & Friedland, 1997). For this reason, participatory action research is a uniquely relevant approach to consider (see Brown & Tandon, 1983; Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1981; Voth, 1979; White, 1994). The movement for more democratic research methods is global (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). As Gamson (1997) argued, "We must recognize that communities are not voids to be organized and filled by the more knowledgeable; they are well-developed, complex, and sophisticated organisms that demand to be understood on their own terms" (p. 13). Participatory action research makes scholars and communities collaborators in the research process, thereby providing the knowledge that is relevant to the self-determined interests of communities. This approach to research leads to a stronger appreciation of indigenous knowledge, and links research not only to the process of knowledge building, but to education and action, especially for less-powerful people (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997). However, faculty may engage in social justice research only to the degree that university administrators find ways to support and value it. This may entail altering the incentive and reward procedures in ways that encourage cross-boundary and

interdisciplinary research that focuses as much on relevant community-based action as on knowledge production (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).[15]

Conclusion

While this essay has been far from a comprehensive report of the ongoing research, it has presented an argument in favor of new learning and research models that focus on communication and social justice. I have reiterated the well-developed argument for participatory development communication and demonstrated its significance to cross-cultural service-learning project design. A brief review of the literature on intercultural adjustment showed the potential for both growthful and empowering outcomes for participants when this experience is conducted in conjunction with social action. The service-learning literature provides ample evidence of the value of action-based and integrated teaching and learning models. Together, these arguments testify to the real potential for mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning. As Barber (1992) implored:

> Without education that treats women and men as whole, as beings who belong to communities of knowledge, . . . [and] without schools that take responsibility for what goes on beyond as well as in the classroom, and work to remove the walls that separate the two worlds, students [and faculty] will continue to bracket off all that they learn from life and keep their lives at arm's length from what they learn. (p. 260)

The projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua illuminate this vision, as well as some ongoing concerns. These projects also elucidate many intriguing interdisciplinary and multi-methodological prospects for communication researchers.

In reflecting on the life, work, and revolutionary theories of Che Guevara, Freire (1970/1988) wrote:

> [A]t no stage can revolutionary action forgo communion with the people. Communion in turn elicits cooperation, which brings . . . people to the fusion described by Guevara. This fusion can exist only if revolutionary action is really human, empathetic, loving, communicative, and humble, in order to be liberating. (p. 171)

If we substitute "communication research" for "revolutionary action," it is possible to envision and *feel* what Nakayama's (1995) call for relevant scholarship means to us and the field of communication studies. Communication research can (and should) be about communion, cooperation, and human liberation.

Endnotes

1. The selection of these two projects was ostensibly a matter of convenience. As a faulty member at the sponsoring university, I had unique access to the Winter Term in Service (WTIS) program. In fact, it was during the last week of the El Salvador project that the link between development communication and intercultural communication theories became evident to me, along with the potential for mutual empowerment that this link suggested. I was fortunate to be invited to participate again, even after leaving the university's faculty. Another selection criterion was that the development model must be participatory. This is a difficult condition to meet, and all cross-cultural service projects do not do so. Future research might entail comparable case studies with other service-learning programs and different co-sponsoring development organizations. Because my participation in these projects was primarily as a teacher rather than as a researcher, I have yet to apply sufficient methodological rigor to my research of cross-cultural participatory development and service learning. I am working to

incorporate an increased focus on observed communication behaviors and their relationship to mutual empowerment outcomes.

2. *Bombaderos* is a common reference made in the community to bombing missions made by U.S. airplanes flown by Salvadoran pilots. De-population and de-forestation were two goals of these missions, in addition to being direct attacks on the *guerrillas*, who were well supported and integrated within small communities in the countryside.

3. The 12-year war in El Salvador devastated the environment, communities, and, most of all, families. The men who were still with their families were often seriously disfigured from combat or landmines. Only a few homes, or partial structures, remained after bombing raids ended. The home where I stayed was comprised of a woman, her son, and her two daughters. One daughter was blind and deaf from shrapnel when their house was bombed. The other daughter was born in a cave, where people often hid for as long as a month at a time during periods of frequent bombing or when the Salvadoran military or paramilitary "death squads" occupied the area.

4. Unsanitary and uncovered 50-gallon oil drums generally are used to collect water; they are filled from a truck that comes to town semi-regularly.

5. The "measurement" of empowerment outcomes remains one of my primary concerns. Scientific method might suggest a pretest/posttest questionnaire of students' political attitudes before and after the trip. Interpretive and ethnographic approaches are more consistent with my own work, but the "proof" of empowerment remains elusive. I hope that the potential for mutual empowerment illustrated in the theoretical discussions and the words of students and *campesinos* are persuasive for now. Clearly, more research, increased focus on communication skills, and creative multi-methodological approaches are needed. Future guided journal assignments will ask students to reflect on their communication behavior within specific interactions with each other and with members of the host communities.

6. The student reflection officer selected this text (probably in collaboration with the University Chaplain) as an exemplar of the values the WTIS program promotes. It is a useful text in this regard; its combination of light humor and philosophical simplicity is attractive to students.

7. The two faculty advisors for the El Salvador trip had backgrounds in international/development communication and interpersonal/intercultural communication, respectively, as well as experience in Central American solidarity work and living in Central American cultures. Both had functional to fluent ability in Spanish. Faculty advisors for the Nicaragua trip were Spanish-language teachers with extensive experience living and traveling in Latin America. It could be argued that faculty with little knowledge of intercultural communication theory and practice could have difficulty facilitating this aspect of a project for students.

8. It is interesting to note that the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador is rumored to be built on an ancient Mayan burial ground. It is the most opulent structure in the entire country and very well guarded. It is virtually unheard of for *campesinos* (peasants) to gain entry into the compound, let alone have an audience with U.S. officials.

9. While the GHQ is meant to be given as a written questionnaire, literacy and cultural issues required it to be given orally. Further, participants tended to give narrative, rather than Likert-scaled, responses. For these reasons, I refer to survey participants as "interviewees." Results reported here are from the interviews themselves, not from the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data, which is not yet available. This experience points to many concerns surrounding the cultural relevance of many traditional research methods.

10. Some people reported that their hope was dashed when the Sandinistas came to power; others felt it was lost sometime during the Sandinista period, when scarce resources increasingly were committed to fighting the *contra* war instead of enacting Sandinista development policy. Still others found their hope turned to disillusionment and despair when the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections.

11. The video also won "Best Student Film"and "Best Documentary" from the Indiana Film Society, 1993.

12. Some questions remain as to whether this model would work in most contexts. The revolutionary context and the historic moment in El Salvador were critical factors in the design and success of the project. Further, it is arguable that a similar level of social organization to that achieved by rural

communities in El Salvador and the prevalence of substantial grassroots development efforts are prerequisites for successful participatory, self-sustaining development projects.

13. I am less enthusiastic about the empowerment outcomes of the Nicaragua trip for several reasons. First, the co-sponsoring organization had never worked in a community this size, and had not anticipated the unique characteristics of Solingalpa that challenged the expectations for development that working in smaller communities had given them. Second, the faculty advisors on the Nicaragua trip did not maintain the same emphasis on the pre-departure and on-site learning dimensions of the project, as had those in El Salvador. Particularly absent was substantial discussion of development ideology itself. Third, the majority of students did not appear to be deeply moved by their experience in Nicaragua, as they had been in El Salvador. This could be due to underpreparation in the learning components, the particular chemistry of this group, or various aspects of the project context. Fourth, aspects of the context may have produced contradictory evidence. There were prior divisions within Solingalpa and it was a decidedly different historical moment in Nicaragua. The community continues to have mixed reactions to our presence. Students' concerns have been examined carefully by the co-sponsoring organization and, while the university will be working with the same organization again in the future, program administrators are remaining vigilant to reoccurrence of these issues.

14. Suggestions for ways of studying the relationships among participatory development, intercultural communication, service learning, and empowerment are welcomed. Theoretical, methodological, and empirical resources—as well as related anecdotes—would be greatly appreciated. Contact the author at rcrabtre@nmsuvm1.nmsu.edu.

15. Teachers interested in service learning also can tailor a project to meet their own teaching and research agendas. For instance, one communication development organization that co-sponsors trips to El Salvador has strong connections with the growing community radio movement in the countryside. There are unique opportunities to study development journalism, media organizations, and the role of media in society. Another global education organization that leads trip around the world has created programs that focus on art and music, environmental issues, politics, and so forth. Most co-sponsoring agencies will design a project around the specific interests of participants.

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