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# Transnational engagement in international community-based learning in higher education : a study in El Salvador

Mary E. Gallo

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN EL SALVADORAN STUDY

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to the  
Department of Leadership Studies  
Organization and Leadership Program  
School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

BY

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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

America has long held the reputation of being individualists and the belief has led to a question of American identity. This study responds to this crisis in America, a culture that is often viewed as individualistic rather than one that is communal. The research explores how American students' learning experience in the community-based learning program, Casa de la Solidaridad (Casa) in El Salvador, shapes identity and life purpose. It is my intention to explore how the mutual learning environment of Casa influences its students' being in the world to serve others rather than to simply pursue a career for solely personal gain. More specifically, I unveil how an immersion program such as Casa can serve to expand the horizons of American students in the following ways.

The first arena encompasses notions of *identity*. The three categories I employ are narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination, each of which promote conversations in the second arena, the field of *vocational discernment*. These two arenas are interrelated when one considers how the immersion experience at Casa may ignite a mutual sense of civic responsibility, global citizenship and commitment to community. This research may result in possible curriculum development and an expanded practice of international community-based learning, like Casa, in the United States, higher education. The potential to support students in their vocational formation toward meaningful and significant work lie in this endeavor.

The selected program, Casa de La Solidaridad in El Salvador, is defined as:

an academic initiative between the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), the University of Central

America (ACU) in El Salvador, and Santa Clara University. The mission of the Casa is the promotion of justice and solidarity through the creation of a meaningful academic experience where ... rigorous academic study [is integrated] with direct immersion with the poor of El Salvador ([www.scu.edu.casa/](http://www.scu.edu.casa/)).

Casa is established in a developing country that integrates semester-long academia with direct immersion into the communities in El Salvador. Casa is unlike many immersion programs in higher education today, which are more commonly offered in the United States and mostly during the spring or summer break. These programs offer a condensed version quite different than that of Casa de la Solidaridad that functions throughout the regular academic year.

This study focuses on a four-week Summer Program (2007) where students from Jesuit Universities throughout the United States immerse themselves into the Salvadoran community and the classroom. Here they learn who they are within the curriculum of healthcare, language and community living.

This study is based on a critical hermeneutic inquiry that employs participatory research in which both participant and researcher take an active communicative and interpretive stance in generating an understanding of the program's values and actions. Given this framework, I too participate in the summer program as a participant, researcher, and active observer, with the intention of immersing myself in the experience alongside the students and teachers. My line of inquiry is ontological in nature and calls for the researcher to become a part of the learning community to appropriate understanding and meaning through participation.

To increase our understanding of community-based learning (CBL), it is necessary to define it in a broad sense in order to understand the pedagogical basis of this field of study and the emerging influence it exerts on higher education in the United States today. Community-



based learning may be defined as “a structured approach to learning and teaching that connects meaningful community experience with intellectual development, personal growth, and active citizenship” (Cumming 1997:1). It is important to note that community-based learning is used interchangeably with other terms such as service learning and experiential education. However, for the purpose of this study, I refer to it as community-based learning.

### **Background of Research Topic**

An increasing number of American academic institutions are striving to incorporate new ways of learning that extend beyond the four walls of a classroom and into the community. Valuing the real and the experiential, higher educational institutions have adopted community-based learning or service learning into their core academic curriculums. It may soon be argued that CBL has become more of a standard than an exception, as argued by Kerry Strand and others in their collective work, *Community-Based Research and Higher Education*:

Over the past two decades, many higher education institutions, from small, private, liberal arts colleges to massive state-supported research universities, have begun to rethink their institutional missions and implement a variety of community outreach efforts (Strand et al. 2003:1).

Strand notes the increasing effort upon higher education institutions to incorporate community outreach programs within their curriculum. CBL is one facet of this growth. Strand elaborates his research on CBL to assert that the move to CBL has largely occurred as a response to a growing criticism of the gap between learning communities and higher education. A secondary factor in the turn toward CBL is a realized need to develop students’ civic capacity and preparation for global citizenry. They posit:

the growing realization on campuses that despite our best intentions, higher education is largely failing in its efforts to

prepare students for lives of social responsibility and civic and political engagement....the need to develop students' civic capacity and prepare them for active democratic citizenship, came largely from within the institutions themselves (Strand et al. 2003:1-2).

There is a significant body of literature within the last two years alone on civic engagement and community-based learning that challenges the traditional pedagogy of how we teach and learn in higher education. The global acceleration of technology, media, virtual learning, and virtual libraries are changing even the physical landscape on campuses; higher education is working diligently to keep up this pace (Daloz-Parks 2007). By the time today's Freshman graduates from college, there will be a number of new fields of study that did not exist when he or she first started college. This proliferation in higher education and the need to burgeon community engagement among students may ask if classroom learning alone is sufficient or will our learning environment become more fluid in this shifting context.

This growing body of research, highlighted in the following section, renders the rising need to expand learning models like community-based learning. The movement has been toward enlarging education to include areas of social responsibility, multi-disciplinary curriculum, vocational discernment, international and local developmental. These areas are not necessarily exclusive but inclusive of each other. Central themes common to CBL are its systematic engagement of students, its connection of theory to practice, its identification and provision of solutions to a diverse set of real issues in a real community, and finally, fostering vocational formation (Strand et al. 2003:6). This learning approach heralds an underlying pedagogical culture that is open, collaborative, and firmly based in experience.

To further argue for an ontological mode of educating the whole person, Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) writes about a shift that has occurred in higher education that is moving toward

objective knowledge that is compartmentalized rather than wisdom of the whole person. She writes:

We have become vulnerable to exchanging wisdom for knowledge and moral commitment for method...higher education can articulate no orienting vision or offer leadership toward a coherent unity, and discrete academic disciplines disclose only isolated (and thus distorted) aspects of truth (Parks 2000:161-162).

It is argued that higher education curriculum serves to educate within a compartmentalized fashion within each discipline. CBL may open doors in the direction of collaboration and cross-disciplinary practice. Given the collaborative nature of CBL a critical hermeneutic foundation is selected to complement this field. As Herda asserts,

In field based hermeneutics research, the object is to create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understandings. This acts as grounding for our actions. The medium of this collaborative act is language (Herda 1999:86).

This form of participatory research is grounded in language and interpretation and serves as the foundation for this study within the collaborative spirit of community-based learning. As this study shows, the scholarly and pedagogic history of CBL can help explain how and why its presence in and influence on higher education is increasing.

We have yet to explore how and why this form of learning is significant to understanding the theoretical foundations and daily practical work of a specific program in the field. The specific program of study will now be discussed in the next section.

## Significance of Research Topic

Casa de La Solidaridad is part of the larger, Jesuit institution, Santa Clara University (SCU), where the President of the University recently engaged in a critical piece of dialogue. At a community-based learning conference in March 2007, Fr. Paul Locatelli, President of SCU, stated that the important question to ask in Jesuit education is “Who do our students become?” and “How do we make the world more humane and more just?” (Locatelli 2007). Fernando Franco S.J. answered by claiming that what matters is “not just an acquisition of academic knowledge but the wise use of this knowledge” (Franco 2007). This recent dialogue, emblematic of an emerging dialogue in the field, underscores the need to guide ourselves as scholars and teachers as much as our own student’s journeys in defining the goals in their own vocation.

Casa de la Solidaridad was founded in 1999 and was born out of a founding event when five Jesuits, a mother and her daughter were murdered while speaking out for human justice.

Words on the Casa web site delineate its origins:

The program draws inspiration from the lives of the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter who were murdered at the University of Central America on November 16, 1989 and from all the people of El Salvador who suffered during the civil war, especially those who were killed in their struggle for solidarity and social justice ([www.scu.edu.casa](http://www.scu.edu.casa)).

This tragedy reveals an integral historical context that gives meaning and life to the program today. In many ways the Casa was literally born out of this brutal execution. Herda states that:

The ontology of participatory research in the critical hermeneutic tradition invok[es] the potential of humans to reflect on their history and to imagine worlds we could inhabit (Herda 1999:7).

Thus, Casa de la Solidaridad's mission has not only been grounded in El Salvador's political and social history, it has also been formed by the Jesuit's traditional pedagogical values of community, solidarity, and academic excellence.

Taken together, the important history of El Salvador as a whole encompasses and informs the Casa's practices today. As Richard Kearney writes, "It is essential to remember the past in order to honour our 'debt to the dead' and to ensure it never happens again" (Kearney 1999:31). After the death of 75,000 El Salvadorian citizens at the end of the civil war, this program has come to act as a living memorial voice for those martyrs and the values they stood for: solidarity and justice, and action.

Action from theory or skill may be defined as *praxis*. As Herda posits, "it is when word and deed become one" (Herda 2007:7). For the purposes of this study, *praxis* sites are what the Casa program refers to as student placement sites. They are situated in a common language of pedagogical and communal significance and described further in the research protocol. In Domenico Jervolino's work in the book titled, *The Hermeneutics of Action*, he states, "Praxis is to dwell and act in solidarity" (Jervolino 1996:68). This is where solidarity and education meet and intersect on a new horizon. It is one that transcends the linear, complacent tradition often found in education and rises to the urgency of action. Casa's approach to community-based learning may integrate praxis site work to balance the tacit, textbook knowledge typically taught in the classroom and challenge the future of higher education development. This implies that education not only has to be limited to comprehending a book or learning a theory. As Parks asserts, our institutions must serve a greater purpose, one that is connected to the greater good of a community through praxis.

Higher education is intended to serve as a primary site of inquiry, reflection and cultivation of knowledge and understanding of its wider culture. As such, institutions of higher education hold a special place in the story of human development (Parks 2000:10).

Herein lies Casa's attempt to transform knowledge into action: to design a pedagogy in which action is connected to learning by committing one's program to a shared and systematic engagement with the community. Strand et al. expands this idea to say:

Learning becomes a mutual process, with community stories holding common footing with academic information and questions of the community having greater importance than answers found in textbooks (Strand et al. 2003:233).

Community-based learning offered by Casa provides a model to help students discover a greater sense of purpose and meaning. This is simultaneously a departure from an individual-based life to a connectedness to the other and the greater community.

And yet, the model of Casa goes beyond the formal education of the student; it responds to the dire need for students to become socially minded, global citizens. As Trena Yonkers-Talz, Co-Director of Casa states (Yonkers-Talz: 2007), these students "are entering the classroom of the poor." Many student reflections speak to this transformational experience—they are changed by the discovery of their gifts, and their passion and use of these gifts for the benefit of the other.

Casa is a unique model that stands among other community-based programs around the world. In the United States, for instance, programs are guiding students in their search for meaning and purpose while coming into direct contact with the marginalized or least significant. While community-based learning programs are fairly represented and growing today in American universities, the focus is still predominantly local communities within the United

States. While this expanding practice is vital in our local communities, growth is needed in the international community and research in this area is still mostly left unexplored.

Thus more academic work still needs to be done in making the practice of CBL known. Dean Brackley S.J. teaches Theology and Ethics at the Universidad Centroamericana in El Salvador and is one of the scholar activists who inspired the vision of the Casa. In his article titled, *Higher Standards* (2006), Brackley speaks to the importance of teaching social justice in higher education in new ways, as well as the critical need to heighten student awareness of the real world:

We need wholesome crises to help expand our horizons. Frequently, such experiences occur when students engage in activities, like service learning, that draw them into close contact with poverty and suffering. There they are mugged by reality...their horizons open. Their world is reconfigured. Some things move from the margin to the center and others from the center to the edge (Brackley 2006:3).

Brackley's work explains how students often feel assaulted by different worldviews and constructs of what the good life is. He speaks to conflicting role models that exist in our culture that range from the sanctity and goodwill of Mother Theresa, on one hand, to the blind idolatry of tabloid icon Britney Spears, on the other. He argues that this is a critical stage in life for students who are searching for identity and life purpose. Brackley implores scholars of higher education to teach more than the fragmented facts that often constitute knowledge and to teach holistic wisdom, or *phronesis*. This wisdom, Brackley argues, can be carried over in the real world to serve a higher purpose without the splintering effect of so many conflicting worldviews. Equally imperative is to consider vocational guidance within community-based curricular design. One model that may live out this purpose is Casa de la Solidaridad.

## Summary

Community-based learning in higher education aspires to produce academic excellence in a socially responsible and responsive manner. In this model, students may find meaning and life purpose that carries over into their work throughout their adult lives. This research examines this program to determine if and how it transforms students' lives to become more socially aware and active in their work to serve the marginalized. This exploration seeks to understand how students may thereby reimagine their world through engagement with the poor. A critical hermeneutic interpretation of narrative identity, solicitude and imagination guides this process of exploration. Chapter Two of this dissertation introduces the history, geography, civil war, people and religion of El Salvador.



## **CHAPTER TWO: COUNTRY BACKGROUND**

### **El Salvador**

The Republic of El Salvador is the official name for the country more commonly referred to as El Salvador. Its history can be traced back as early as 10,000 years ago when the region was inhabited by Paleo-Indian peoples. When the Spanish arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the region was dominated by the Pipils, an indigenous tribe who were descendents of the Mexican tribes, the Toltecs and the Aztecs. Known as Cuscatlàn, the territory came under attack from 1524 to 1556 by the Spanish. This invasion led to the demise of the Pipils and their leader, Atlacatl. The King of Spain declared dominion over El Salvador for what would be the next three centuries, until the early 1800s. During this period of reign, the Spanish took over the fertile and prosperous land, sowing crops of cotton, balsam, and indigo.

On September 15, 1821 the Central American provinces declared their independence from Spain and became the Mexican Empire ruled by Emporia Agustin de Iturbide. El Salvador resisted this change and insisted on the independence of Central American countries from Mexico. Following this resistance, the United Provinces of Central America was born in 1823. This group included El Salvador and five other Central American countries. Shortly after 1838, El Salvador became an independent republic and for decades endured amidst instability, while several successful revolutions occurred within other Central American Republics.

After several internal revolutions throughout its early history, the country finally experienced a long awaited peaceful and stable state from 1900 to 1930. From 1931 to 1979, El Salvador was ruled by various militant dictatorships from within the country. But years of dictatorship influenced a growing discontent owing to egregious social and political inequalities.

## The Civil War

The Civil War in El Salvador broke in the late 1970s and yet the makings of this war began much early on in its history. “The roots of the Civil War in El Salvador lie in the country’s long-standing patterns of economic, political, and social exclusion” (Wood 2003:20). During the colonial period, major Spanish enterprises encroached upon the indigenous land and people to build their estates and haciendas. The fertile land for coffee production attracted the elites to specific geographical areas in El Salvador. “The geography of coffee cultivation put commercial and government elites in competition with the indigenous communities for land and indigenous labor” (Wood 2003:20). Many legal reforms in the 1880s made it hard for the indigenous people to hold onto their commercial and communal landholdings. Wood believes this laid the groundwork for the Civil War that erupted in the late 1970s.

The Civil War came at a time when the highest quality land was now in the hands of few elite coffee plantation owners. Soon an unfree labor market was established and the poor would migrate to these estates during harvest to make a humble living. Strikes or revolts against these inequalities were muted by government enforced private property rights due to the close relationship between the government and landowners.

In 1932, approximately 17,000 indigenous people were killed by state forces in the aftermath of a failed uprising organized by the fledging Communist Party, an event that seared elite memories and solidified elite opposition to political reform (Wood 2003:21).

This set an unforgiving tone that undermined Salvadoran culture and eventually abolished traditional language, dress and cultural practices. Economic power remained with the few elite families and the laborers became increasingly poor even by Latin American standards.

By the 1960s after many political defeats against the middle and lower class people, the government allowed a Christian Democrat to run in the presidential race. Even though he won the race, the military overruled the results. This event, along with the continued economic exclusion, led to military mobilization throughout the country as people of the middle and lower classes began to unite and revolt. At the same time, liberation theology and the teachings of the Catholic church were influencing and empowering the marginalized to act for social justice. These groups and other opposition groups were being organized and soon joined the guerilla organizations. “As the country descended toward civil war, four guerilla organizations founded the FMLN in November 1980 to better coordinate their efforts” (Wood 2003:27).

By 1980 the civil war broke out between the government, a right-winged conciliation party and the left wing, antigovernment, guerilla units, known as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). The FMLN slowly forced landholders out of the countryside despite great loss along the way. At the same time they planned massive attacks on the military. “In 1983, the FMLN significantly extended its control of territory, a trend that was halted by increased U.S. military assistance” (Wood 2003:28). The U.S. continued to aid the Salvadoran government with arms and training and the war became increasingly violent as the FMLN suffered greatly. U.S. citizens brought attention to this growing violence and

the U.S.’s role in training and arming the military led U. S. Government officials in late 1983 to convince Salvadoran military leaders to rein in the military’s human rights abuses in war-related deaths beginning in 1984 (Wood 2003:28).

Multiple shifts in the war by the government (ARENA) and the FMLN resulted from the backlash of the U.S. participation; however, the fighting continued under new strategies.

In November 1989, after a successful attack by the FMLN in San Salvador, the High Command ordered the assassination of six Jesuits. This event abruptly brought an end to U.S. support for aid to the Salvadoran government and ultimately led to negotiations that ended the civil war.

Roig-Franzia wrote about Salgado, a *campesinos* (a person who lives in the countryside) who fought in the Civil War in El Salvador and was interviewed in February 2007:

But as El Salvador commemorates the 15th anniversary of the war's end this month, Salgado is haunted by doubts about what he saw, what he did and even why he fought. A 12-year U.S.-backed war that was defined at the time as a battle over communism is now seen by former government soldiers such as Salgado, and by former guerrillas, as less a conflict about ideology and more a battle over poverty and basic human rights (Roig-Franzia 2007: A01).

This devastating conflict lasted 12 years and is reported to have killed 75,000 people. Finally, the opposing sides consented to a peace agreement that brought the military under civilian control and allowed the guerillas to participate in official elections. In Salgado's words, reflecting back on the war today:

I look back and realize those weren't communists out there that we were fighting -- we were just poor country people killing poor country people....We gave our blood, we killed our friends and, in the end, things are still bad," said Salgado, who has served three terms as mayor of El Salvador's second-largest city. "Look at all this poverty, and look how the wealth is concentrated in just a few hands (Roig-Franzia 2007: A01).

The FMLN played the key role in bringing El Salvador to democracy and the government came to terms with this.

This is the story of how the willingness of tens of thousands of poor rural residents to act together for social change, despite the high risks of doing so, led to the emergence of the FMLN as a group that had to be dealt with and thus opened the doors to democracy in El Salvador (Wood 2003:30).

Even though the FMLN fought for a Salvadoran democracy, today despair still lingers throughout the country, with a rise in gang violence and continued poverty. More political, social and economic healing is needed to fully recover the devastation of the Civil War. To conclude this centerpiece of El Salvadoran history the discussion continues to the geographical representation of the country.



Figure 1, Map of El Salvador, <http://www.ieq.org/elsalvador.html>

## Geography

Depicted above in Figure 1 shows a map of El Salvador. El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America. It encompasses an area of 8,124.59 miles. The country is bound by

Guatemala on the north, Honduras on the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. The mountains of El Salvador separate the country into three main parts: (1) a southern coastal belt, (2) central valleys and plateaus, and (3) the northern mountains. The capital city is San Salvador and is populated 2.2 million people. The U.S. Department of State reports an estimated total population in El Salvador of 6.9 million in the year 2005.

### **People and Religion**

The ethnic population of El Salvador is largely Mestizo, making up 90% of the population. The remaining ethnic groups are Caucasian at 9% and indigenous (site) at 1%. Although the evangelical Protestant faith is fast growing in El Salvador and throughout Central America, Catholics still make up 85% of the population.

Given the historical and social context of El Salvador, its people have endured often unforeseeable and undeniable odds and hardship. They have withstood decades of violent Civil War; a devastating hurricane in 1998, which left 30,000 homeless and 200 dead; and, an earthquake and drought in 2001 that destroyed 80% of the crops and which left a significant part of the country in famine. Salvadorans are known for their relentless work ethic and their generous and kind spirit. The ensuing struggle did not end with the war—the country continues to be in serious social and economic deterioration from post-war instability leading to many forms of suffering, most notably gang violence.

Chapter Three presents the Review of Literature and covers the introduction, theory and academic research on community-based learning, vocation, narrative identity, solicitude and imagination.

## **CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

The literature review is guided by research questions that are further elaborated in Chapter Four. The following Literature Review is organized in two parts: the first part provides a brief overview of literature on community-based learning in higher education, with a subcategory of vocational discernment. Within this Chapter, I integrate theory from experts in the field, namely, Sharon Daloz Parks, Kerry Strand et al., John Neafsey and Paulo Freire. The second part of the Literature Review illuminates the works of Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Kearney, whose work marks the three research categories of the hermeneutic framework of this proposal: narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination.

### **Community-Based Learning**

The community-based learning model is one that is experiential. Students and teachers are taught to engage in meaningful activities that address human and community issues within a structured curriculum that is intentionally designed for student learning and development. There are various forms of community-based learning, as Strand et al. explains:

Sometimes the focus is on a local problem facing a neighborhood or an organization. This can also be regional, national, or global. In every case, the community consists of people who are oppressed, powerless, economically deprived, or disenfranchised--that is, who are disadvantaged by existing social, political, or economical arrangements (Strand 2003:3).

Central concepts and practices typically reported in community-based learning are reflection, reciprocity and collaboration. Educational institutions that have adopted this pedagogy

realize that learning does not occur in isolation and therefore cannot be separated from its original purpose or intent to which it is directed. Parks elaborates:

Higher education is intended to serve as a primary site of inquiry, reflection, and cultivation of knowledge and understanding on behalf of the wider culture. As such, institutions of higher education hold a special place in the story of human development (Parks 2000:10).

Practices of reflection, reciprocity, and collaboration are ethical imperatives that undergird CBL across academic disciplines along with a sense of openness to the other.

A common feature of CBL is that it engages students across all academic disciplines from business, economics, and information technology to healthcare and theology and is applied in both local and international communities. The core philosophy of CBL is its refusal to accept education as passive and separate from community. Instead, CBL assumes that educators are responsible for the development of social progress and human justice amongst their students, the communities they live in, and, indeed, in their own lives.

In this awareness, we are composing and recomposing purpose, meaning, and faith when we encounter the other. Parks states how our professions were more traditionally rooted in community: “This sensibility is rooted in awareness of the needs and opportunities of one’s society and the motivation to invest mind and passion in something that transcends both the self and the profession: the public good” (Parks 2000:175). Experiences students and teachers encounter along the way essentially contribute to who they ultimately become.

Martin Heidegger (1962) whose work will be elaborated further in this section, takes this idea further to say that we are nothing unless we are in relationship with the other and that we are always on our way to knowing, thus furthering our orientation toward being with and for the



other. Parks, who has conducted a considerable amount of research in CBL in higher education, discusses the importance of students being open to the other, as she writes: “Further transformation, however, may be promoted by a deepening receptivity to ‘otherness’” (Parks 2000:101). Parks’ form of otherness refers to others who are significantly different from ourselves. Seeing beyond the likes of ourselves and our own culture forces a new depth of understanding and a new dialogue of truth. Parks extends this idea further to include the construct of social justice:

Ongoing meaning-making necessarily leads to challenging the system that protects some while neglecting others. Issues of social (and environmental) justice are essentially about who is to be cared for and who neglected, who is to be included in our community of concern and who excluded (Parks 2000:101-102).

Students who engage in social groups from different cultural contexts from their own envelope a sense of action, question and increase concern and awareness for others. This finding unfolds in the pilot and dissertation study. These findings will be discussed in the research protocol section. This position offers a firm ground upon which to build an understanding of what is meant by vocational discernment.

### **Vocational Discernment**

In the book titled, *A Sacred Voice is Calling*, John Neafsey (2006:43) refers to three key questions on vocational discernment that were initially developed by Dr. Michael Himes. Neafsey writes, “An authentic calling brings together three things: what we most enjoy doing, what we are good at, and what others need most from us.” Neafsey (2007) speaks to the “moral tug of the heart.” This is, in other words, to ask, “What is pulling at our heart at any given time?” The vocational metaphors Neafsey uses to describe this tug are, “listening” and “hearing.” Our

hearts respond to a sound uttered; we feel moved to *do* something rather than nothing. This motivation may come in the form of listening to the cry of the poor. The opposite of this is a hardening heart, which Neafsey describes as an “unresponsiveness to the suffering.” A metaphor here may be “impaired hearing” or a “numbness of heart.” For Neafsey, this amounts to “a moral hazard, an obliviousness to the oppressed.”

Neafsey’s work is important to this study in the way of understanding student experiences while in a service community like Casa. This awakening or stirring inside acts as a guide for students who want to understand where their passion or purpose lies. This study explores how student’s compassion is ignited and how the awakening to listen and respond to the other through service activities is observed. Similar to the construct of CBL, Neafsey explains that this is not an individual process but rather a communal one, in which case,

vocation is not only about “me” and my personal fulfillment, but about “us” and the common good. In Buechner’s words, our callings are found in the places where our “deep gladness” and the “world’s deep hunger” meet, on the holy ground where our heart’s desire comes together with what the world most needs from us. Authentic vocational discernment, therefore, seeks a proper balance between inward listening to our hearts and outward, socially engaged listening with our heart to the realities of the world in which we live (Neafsey 2006:1).

At this stage in one’s life, students ask poignant questions like, “What do I want to do with my life?” or “What is my purpose in this world?” or “How can I bring meaning into my life?” Evoking vocational or career questions is an inner contemplation and a common practice for students during collegiate life. How does such discourse proceed? The opportunity exists in higher education, specifically in settings of fellowship and solidarity found within community-based learning. Paulo Freire explains education as something that is “constantly remade in the

praxis” (Freire 1970:84) and that becoming fully human is related to vocation and human inquiry.

Freire describes vocation as a movement of inquiry, a human phenomenon that unfolds within fellowship and solidarity. Freire’s own life purpose was deeply shaped by his experience with poverty from the Great Depression. He writes here in one of his most distinguished works,

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed:*

The movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization—the people’s historical vocation. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so (Freire 1975:85).

To be fully human, as Freire states (1975), cannot occur in isolation rather only in fellowship. This is where the community folds into education, vocation, and service. These modes of inquiry are constructed together in meaning and relationship, not in isolation, suppression, or hierarchy.

I believe many of us have an inherent longing to contribute to society and community. This needs to be nurtured in order for students to thrive and be who they are called to be. Higher education has the potential to harness and nurture this in a profound and meaningful way. This research brings attention to new possible learning models within higher education that fosters civic engagement. Freire states:

One basic assumption: that man’s ontological vocation is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. This world to which he relates is not a static and closed order, a given reality

which man must accept and to which he must; rather it is a problem to be worked and solved (Freire 1970:32).

Freire believes that every person, irrespective of their background, intellect, or class “is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter.” As a whole, the Casa experience allows students to imagine who they are as global citizens, and that every person has a voice and the ability to contribute to a greater good.

Vocational discernment is a transformational moment of question in our lives that this research seeks to explore more deeply. The following part of the literature review will introduce critical hermeneutic theory by Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney who draw substantially from the works of Heidegger and Gadamer. The three categories, narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination serve as the parameters for the following review.

### **Narrative Identity**

Narrative Identity allows one to think of him or herself in a new way. To this end, narrative encompasses harmony and dissonance. We each have a temporal aspect of our identity called *temporality* and a fixed way of being that constitutes our identity. This occurs in a common place with others in the form of a story. This way of being is always unfolding, grounded in history, and has an ethical dimension.

In the text, *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur speaks to the question of identity. He argues that in order to explore the question of identity, it is first necessary to consider the notion of temporality:

Neither the definition of the person from the perspective of identifying reference nor that of the agent in the framework of the semantics of action, considered nonetheless an enrichment of the first approach, has taken into account the

fact that the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the actions depend have a history, are their own history (Ricoeur 1992:113).

According to Ricoeur, narrative is where we find the answers to questions about identity, for it is in the interpretation of life's events that we imagine and create our own identity. Moreover, life events become coherent through the act of interpretation. Questions of identity are given meaning through interpretation. Ricoeur elaborates on the idea of "personal identity." He presents two opposing uses of the concept of identity, which are sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). This argument implies there is a permanent sense of self and a temporal sense of self that is always changing and growing toward new meaning and understanding.

Ricoeur further explores the notions of character and keeping one's word to enrich our understanding of selfhood-identity. He defines character as "the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of a human individual as being the same" (Ricoeur 1992:119). Ricoeur asserts that character and ensuing character traits, which are among the terms that define us, can be thought of as the point at which sameness and selfhood come together. Keeping one's word, Ricoeur argues, requires self-constancy and a commitment to the promise stated, even if there is a desire to change. For Ricoeur, keeping one's word has ethical justification. All narratives have an ethical dimension and thus call us to evaluate their ethical truth, the ethics of the other. Ricoeur describes narrative identity as the means by which we make sense of ourselves through our involvement with others.

In order to amplify and extend Ricoeur's concept of narrative, it is important to lay the groundwork out in the form of storytelling. Human life can be told in the form of a narrative structure, one in which we view our lives and our actions in the form of a story. This story is rooted in language. Language is not used in the traditional sense as a tool to communicate but

rather as an action through which we live out our lives for language is the medium through which understanding happens and meaning is derived. Under this construct, we are the embodiment of language. For Gadamer (2004), the meaning of being human exists in language and understanding; these are inseparable. Heidegger similarly states, “language...is the house of being” (Heidegger 1971:5). If it is true that we create our world intersubjectively, through language, we must also embrace language here as a larger construct. It holds our traditions, our stories and it is how we make sense of the world. Narrative, specifically, storytelling is how we construct meaning out of scattered events that constitute our world.

The narrative life of community is grounded in storytelling. As Richard Kearney writes, “Every act of storytelling involves someone (a teller) telling something (a story) to someone (a listener) about something (a real or imaginary world)” (Kearney 2002:150). A narrative always encompasses a storyteller, a listener, characters and a plot. We are all subject to narrative just as we are all subjects within narrative. Our narrative identity is our life story and as social beings, this use of language is literally how we make sense of our lives. Given the premise that every human holds a narrative, and then it is evident that every organization also holds a narrative. Casa de la Solidaridad’s narrative was written, in part, by the tragedy inflicted upon the Jesuit martyrs and is still evolving today.

Ricoeur’s work in critical hermeneutics is enriched by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) and Martin Heidegger’s study of understanding and interpretation on a thematic premise. Richard Bernstein (1983:30) explains how Gadamer stresses the need to understand our own history, bias, and culture while examining others and becoming conscious of those prejudices when embarking on a theory, idea or culture. By Gadamer’s insight, it is only in unveiling our own historicity—through understanding and interpretation—that we can understand ourselves and

others more deeply. This simple yet complex thought asks us to realize the importance of self-interpretation and how this knowledge translates into praxis.

According to Gadamer, history is a part of us even before we exist, for we are primordial beings. Gadamer believes that we belong to history before it belongs to us. As historical beings, we carry prejudices and therefore are not objective beings. Gadamer posits that “Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us” (Gadamer 1977:9). We all carry our own history, our own experiences and this is what creates our biases. It is in the interconnection of the past into the present, through language, that we come to a current understanding that may be opened into a new horizon. Narrative identity intrinsically binds us to others as just acts of solicitude. Solicitude serves as the fountain of giving from which we readily drink and replenish, as described in the next section.

### **Solicitude**

Solicitude is deeply embedded within many of the concepts already elaborated in this study. In essence, it means true friendship, which entails the reciprocity and just outcomes of spontaneous giving and receiving. Ricoeur is one of the few philosophers of the 20th century who speaks and elevates the importance of true friendship.

Aristotle’s analysis of friendship...has to do with the conditions most propitious for mutual recognition, that form of recognition which brings friendship close to justice. Without constituting a type of justice, Aristotle says, friendship is akin to it (Ricoeur 2005:221).

Justice and friendship are inseparable in what Ricoeur calls solicitude. This does not mean selected friendships within our inner circle but true friendship with a complete stranger,

where the fight for equality may start to rise. Ricoeur suggests solicitude is developed through the connection between giving and receiving. It is in this connection of accord that relations of equality are made possible. However, when things go awry, Ricoeur identifies the problem as one of inequality in the distribution of goods within a political framework:

As for the corollary of reciprocity, namely equality, it places friendship on the path of justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way to the distribution of shares in a plurality on the community (Ricoeur 1992:188).

Inequalities in El Salvador were the basis of the Civil War. The fertile lands were stripped from the local farmers and communal landowners and controlled by a handful of powerful families. The echoes of inequality seem glaringly apparent today in current conversations in El Salvador. To extend Ricoeur's thinking to El Salvador requires that we extend his conversation to encompass the question of unequal distribution of adequate food, housing, and medical care. The distinction and disheartening presence between the haves and the have-nots of El Salvador may reveal themselves in the absence of solicitude in the country's political context. The result is social suffering not only from unjust poverty and an unjust war but also from an ethical absence of leadership.

Ricoeur maintains that to understand and address disparity, we need to speak of solicitude within our communities and lives, collectively and individually. Fernando Franco, S.J. (2007) follows Ricoeur's notion of individuated solicitude by explaining, "Love is an exchange between the one that has (knowledge, resources, and self-respect) and the one who doesn't have (knowledge, resources, and self-respect)." Acts of solicitude such as what Franco described is the groundwork of experience that leads students to imagination in closing the gap to the inequities



in their chosen community. Imagination holds the possibilities of action, as described in the next section.

### **Imagination**

Imagination undergirds the potential outcomes of education. In March 2007, at a Community-Based Learning Conference at Santa Clara University, keynote speaker Michael Himes urged that education should not foster imitation. He states in his address to the students, “Do not be an imitation, we are *imagers*” (Himes 2007). Himes posits this orientation toward the imaginative as being the single most important goal in education. He explains “imagination is the point in which we act in the image of God...” and that:

God is a maker. We should take the abstract and make it concrete, make your dreams concrete, give it a name and that is the vocation of every human being.

It is the very act of imagining that we can picture in our minds, our dreams, our hopes, and a new proposed reality. Kearney asserts that “Today we rely more than ever on the power of imagining to recast other ways of being in the world, other possibilities of existence” (Kearney 1991:228). The role of imagination is critical to propose a more just world, to create what is yet to be. This is an integral point of departure in this research and must extend to action.

On Ricoeur's analysis, every action is purposive and related to other actions. Action takes place in a context of meaningfulness. That is, actions must not only be understood as response to past actions, they must also anticipate future responses. Therefore, actions occur in what Ricoeur calls “historical time.” Given his integrative context of action, there is a creative force within our ability to imagine that intrinsically connects us to our past and future. In this important model, the retelling of the past as part of the present reality entails always recognizing future

possibilities in what Gadamer calls “effective-historical consciousness.” Imagination, then, can be understood as a faculty for moving from one experience to another with the opportunity to create a better future. Ricoeur writes:

Tragedy does not merely describe action but presents it in a more favorable light, making it appear higher and nobler than it is in reality. The emphasis on the creative character of tragedy points to a further and more profound affinity with action, for the latter too is animated by the creative power of imagination (Ricoeur 1981:16).

Ricoeur further claims:

The role of imagination is evident both on an individual level, where action is projected in accordance with an anticipatory schema, and on a social level, where individuals relate to one another and to their collective tradition through figures of ideology and utopia.

Thus, imagination influences the course of action.

How does such thinking inform our analysis of Casa’s pedagogic mission and the larger context of social and political life in El Salvador? The Salvadorans live in a common collective tradition that is shared--a common place and culture from where and how they live and a collective idea of how their lives should or “ought” to be. Ricoeur calls this central orientation toward the social an “ethical aim” or an “action toward the good life” (Ricoeur 1992:160). The good life represents the simple right every person has to fulfill their dreams or aspirations. This is what we wish for in others just as we wish this for ourselves.

When tragedy strikes a country, a collective orientation is not only disrupted but threatened in deeper ways as well. Care and concern for the other may appear to be absent. However, in the wake of such distress the need for solicitude may emerge and respond to the need for hope and memory in order to imagine, re-imagine and appropriate a new future or

course of action. This need signifies even more the important role CBL plays in moving toward supporting the community. Bringing imagination into the community-based learning experience,

Parks writes:

How young adults imagine or re-imagine matters of ultimate significance as they move into the future takes on additional layers of meaning in a time of profound cultural transition, because our shared imagination of life determines (economically, politically, religiously) the ways in which we will-or will not-be able to dwell and flourish in the decades ahead (Parks 2000:104).

In this context, Ricoeur claims: “This use of imagination carries our minds far beyond the sphere of private and public memory into the range of the possible” (Ricoeur 2004:182).

Similarly, Herda follows Ricoeur when she asserts “Imagination allows us to *refigure*” (Herda 2007:7).

### **Summary**

When students and teachers engage in conversation together within a community they can begin to bring meaning to their world and social development may become possible. While history and tradition are present, they have a voice and a way to imagine new ways of being.

This is manifested in language, where new meaning can be constructed. Herda postulates:

The nature of interpretative socioeconomic development practice falls into an arena that more resembles a story than a design or a plan...A story about ourselves only makes sense if we participate in an authentic interpretive manner in its creation (Herda 2002:97).

Chapter Four outlines the research protocol for this study. The contents in this section are theoretical background, research site, an entrée to research participants, participants, language and translation, research categories, research questions, data collection, data analysis, pilot study, and summary.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

### **Introduction**

The research was guided by critical hermeneutics, a participatory research protocol grounded in interpretive anthropology. In this mode, participants made up a community of interpreters who actively participated in creating a reality through conversation guided by ethics. This active participation of interpretation was conducted through data collection and data analysis from the research conversations to move toward understanding the issue at hand. Narrative and conversation-based research allowed the researcher to interact with the text as a way:

To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds with interpretation unfolds (Ricoeur 1981:94).

In this construct, a new understanding occurred through our own interpretation of the data in front of us. For it is in engaging our own prejudices that we may confront our understandings of reality, modify them, and as we gain deeper understanding through our experience. Within the interpretive setting, our worldview was subject to new possibilities and a new understanding of that which had once been foreign to us. Chapter Four includes the following: conceptual framework, an entrée and related praxis sites, identifying participants, invitation to conversation, participants, research categories and questions, data collection, data analysis, pilot study, and the background of the researcher.

## Conceptual Framework

The primary focus of this study was to bring forth an understanding of how American college students' identity and vocational discernment is influenced in an international immersion program. The major sources of data were the research conversations with American students from universities in the United States. The intention of these conversations was to bring forth the voice of the participants in a mutually agreed upon way. The conversations unfolded in an open and organic nature and were guided by questions related to identity, vocation and community-based practices. These questions were fashioned within the research categories of narrative identity, imagination and solicitude. The questions designed under these subject areas were intended to help serve as parameters for the research focus and guide the conversations. The categories were an integral part of the research in that they "carry the project forward, serve as markers for inquiry, provided the circumference of conversations, and served as points or themes for discussion in analysis" (Herda 1999:103). This form of inquiry rested upon the relationship of the research and participant and the researcher's orientation to the inquiry.

The multifaceted relationship amongst the researcher, participant, and inquiry of the research was the crux of this type of study. Herda postulates that "ontologically directed inquiry concerns the relationship between the researcher and the research participants and the active orientation of the researcher toward the research project" (Herda 2002:55). Many traditional forms of social research require the researcher to stand outside the context being studied and stand in a place of objectivity. In field-based hermeneutic research, the researcher and participant bring themselves, their history, imagination and understanding to the text, site, or event. When understood in this way, both can be said to participate and become open to an expanded sense of self in relation with the other. As the researcher, I participated in the program alongside the

students. I observed and built relationships that opened possibilities to a deeper understanding of identity, vocational discernment and community-based practices. This mutual development was brought to light through the meaning of solicitude or care for the other, imagination, and insight toward new understanding.

New understanding can bring forth new worlds of being. As Herda states, “The researcher may become a part of the community or the research project itself can be the impetus for renewing or creating the community” (Herda 1999:54). In my participation within this community was the hope to increase not only my own perspicacity as a researcher, but also to stand open alongside the participants and the Salvadoran community, aware of my bias and all that is foreign to me. Gadamer explains an interpretative understanding begins when “we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are open for the new, the different, the true” (Gadamer 1977:9). It is in this understanding that our world is affected by realities that empower us to imagine new ways of being and living in it. The following section outlines the field research location within Casa de la Solidaridad in El Salvador.

### **Entrée and Praxis Sites**

As has already been indicated, Casa de la Solidaridad was the primary research site. The Casa encompassed ten different praxis sites throughout El Salvador. According to the Casa’s mission ([www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa)) praxis site is defined as a field placement site in the Salvadoran community where students are placed based on their academic background, personal interest, and professional goals. The students in the Summer Program worked in one or more of these sites four afternoons a week. The Summer Program ran from June 20, 2007 to July 22, 2007 and was designed for students who are interested in pursuing careers in the healthcare

profession. The praxis sites were facilitated by medical professionals from El Salvador and teachers within Casa and University of Central America. The student praxis sites for this program were the two major hospitals in San Salvador and one rural health clinic. Other day trips include visiting Salvadoran families, orphanages, and other praxis sites that run throughout the year.

One example of a praxis site was in the community of Tepecoyo, La Javia located in a rural area outside of San Salvador. Tepecoyo suffered from the drop in coffee prices leaving many without work or an income to support their families. This site was one example of the ten communities that the Casa is a partner ([www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/)). Here, students were engaged in programs like teaching English and computer classes and tutoring students. Students were also involved with making soy products or distributing milk to families. The research took place in some of these praxis sites but not all, depending on where the students were assigned.

### **Identifying Participants**

Nine students who were accepted into the summer program were invited to participate as conversation partners in the research study. As soon as the students were formally accepted into the program in May, a letter was sent out to the students with information about the study and a letter of invitation to participate from the researcher and the co-directors. The students brought their own perspective as American college students to the research. Informal conversations took place with the faculty, staff and the local community who provided a different perspective given their various experience in the Casa program and living in El Salvador. The students who participated are introduced and listed below.

Kaylen is a junior at Boston College who had previous involvement in community-based learning. As a Freshman she took a CBL class called PULSE, a one-year commitment of community-based learning focused on philosophy and theology where she volunteered 10 to 12 hours a week in the community.

Ashly from Regis University in Colorado is a nursing student with a Spanish minor who is expecting to graduate in Spring 2008. Ashly also participated in CBL since she was a sophomore in high school where she lived in community at the Romero House at Regis University and also worked in the service-learning department on campus.

Katie is a nursing student from Loyola University of Chicago, with extensive experience in International CBL. Katie spent considerable time on service trips, starting from building an orphanage in Tijuana in high school to working on a native American reservation to living five months in Southeast Asia in Nubi. She studied in Bangkok and finally traveled to Guatemala to do a PBS documentary on her service work there. Katie is considering a career in International Healthcare in the area of research or policy development.

Mark is a chemical engineering student at UCLA who hopes to get his medical degree someday. Mark participated in CBL at his Jesuit high school. He joined the Casa program, in part, to immerse himself back into a Jesuit community of solidarity and service.

Kelly is a junior at Boston College studying in the nursing program. After her experience at Casa, she is now going to consider taking up Spanish as a minor. Her work in CBL was extensive, as she went on three post-Katrina service trips; built a house in Tijuana during Holy Week; and lived in Virginia on a community-based service trip during spring break.



Nicole is a junior at St. Louis University and is studying in the nursing program. When Nicole took a class titled Faith and Reason, she learned about liberation theology and Oscar Romero. This motivated her to attend the Casa Summer program and it was her first service immersion experience.

Francesca is a Junior at the University of San Francisco and is studying nursing. She attended the two-week Guatemalan service trip the year before with her fellow nursing students.

Charity attends St. Louis University as a junior this year. She is a premedical student with a double major in biology and international studies.

### **Invitation to Conversation**

The co-directors, Kevin and Trena Yonkers-Talz, M.Ed., M.S. of the program of Casa de la Solidaridad granted permission to this researcher for pursuing scholarly analysis of the Summer Program of 2007. Kevin and the researcher contacted the students prior to the program and upon acceptance into the program were informed of the study. Following their acceptance, letters of invitation were sent by the researcher to participants to introduce the topic, subject and scope of the research project. See Appendix A to view a sample letter of participation, which includes research questions to provide further information of the research scope. Once students consented to participate in the research, a letter of confirmation was sent out to all participants explaining the framework of the research and the details of his or her role as a participant. In addition, the letter outlined the dates of when the study was to be conducted and included further information about the research study. All conversations were transcribed and sent back to the participants along with preliminary analysis. The length of each conversation was 1 to 1½ hours time. Table 1 below is a list of participants in this study.

**Table 1**

<b>Casa de la Solidaridad Research Participants</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Trena Yonkers-Talz	Program Co-Director
Kevin Yonkers-Talz	Program Co-Director
Nicole Papa	Student, Saint Louis University
Charity Kaiser	Student, Saint Louis University
Kaylen Molloy	Student, Boston College
Ashly Blincon	Student, Regis University
Mark Dakaak	Student, University of California, Los Angeles
Kelly Placeholder	Student, Boston College
Francesca Samuelson	Student, University of San Francisco
Katie Parziale	Student, Loyola University of Chicago

**Research Categories and Questions**

Three research categories, as mentioned in the Review of Literature, were created as a scope for this study. The research categories were narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination. The categories were designed to organize the study, Literature Review, and to limit the focus of research to two major areas of focus: identity and vocation. The research questions within these categories were carefully created to be open and to provoke one to ponder deep within themselves questions of life purpose and their own identity development within a foreign social setting. The categories were outlined below with the respective questions to follow.

**Category I: Narrative Identity**

Regarding questions of identity, the researcher paid close attention to the students' use of language, for language has meaning. Our use of language is intrinsically connected and active in how we make meaning. To guide and explore the category of narrative identity, the questions were:

- Describe how you were before you entered this experience either in a metaphor or in self description.
- How does being a part of this program or experience change how you are, in other words, your being in the world?

### **Category II: Solitude**

Solitude is an experience of true friendship. To extend this idea further, solitude includes the gift one receives from giving. Our nature and belief in the West very often is the idea that we serve the poor to make *their* lives better, more like our own. However, solitude speaks to an action of equal and free exchange. It was the aim of this researcher to ask: in which gift exchange does the apparent giver actually become the receiver? How are the lives of the American students different or enhanced as a result of them touching the lives of the Salvadorans? This mutual learning, in return, might mark an exchange from the Salvadorans in the lives of the American students as something beautiful, something that is shared. It forefronts the Casa's mission of hope and growth for its teachers as well as its students. This phenomenon may be accomplished while addressing the social and political injustices that marked the lives of El Salvadoran people, a fundamental aim of the program. The research question used to guide and explore solitude was:

- What gifts do you receive from working with people in need?

### **Category III: Imagination**

Imagination is another facet to be addressed in the Casa's philosophy of education. It complements, as mentioned above, Domenico Jervolino's idea: "Praxis is to dwell and act in

solidarity” (Jervolino 1996:68). For how do we imagine a new, proposed world? One of the transitional goals of CBL is to put theory into action. This work must include a bridge toward the student-teacher’s ethical imagination. The following two questions guided a conversation within the category of imagination:

- How do you imagine the people you serve changing or improving their lives because you worked with them?
- How do you imagine a proposed new world in light of this work?  
In other words, how do you appropriate a new world from this experience, both in terms of your identity and in terms of living back in America?

### **Data Collection**

Data collection involved literature reviews, recorded and transcribed conversations, informal conversations, document analysis, and my personal journal. The data collection, through recording and transcription, allowed the researcher an opportunity to interpret and pose new meaning. In other words, the transcriptions became a form of text upon which to interpret new possible worlds. Each conversation took place at Casa and lasted one hour each. Once the data was transcribed it was sent to each participant for their review. Any changes or additions they made were revised on the final data. Other forms of data that were collected for analysis was the course syllabus, and my personal journal. My personal journal served to capture the experience and reflection of the researcher while immersed in this time, place, and culture. The process of textual analysis follows the data collection and is described in detail in the next section.

## Data Analysis

Philosophical hermeneutics embodies three elements: understanding, interpretation, and application. While theoretically distinct, these three elements are inherently intertwined in experience. Gadamer magnifies our sense of this practical overlap by arguing “these are not three distinct moments or elements of hermeneutics. They are internally related; every act of understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application” (Gadamer 2004).

This modality of data analysis was a “creative and imaginative act” (Herda 2002:98), whereby imagination was part of the interpretive experience in order to appropriate a new world view.

The research conversations revealed a text in front of me and I then appropriated the text, making it my own. I appropriated the text in a way that changed me and my interpretation was different from when I started the research. Themes were developed and pulled out of the text, analyzed and explored under a critical hermeneutic lens. The themes were then validated by extrapolating quotes directly from the students. The themes were scrutinized within the theoretical framework of critical hermeneutics thus setting a context for which the data could be presented and analyzed. Implications surfaced for interpretation and new meaning was created. In looking at the specific learning program, we extended our notion of data to encompass the living interpretations and ultimately action, given that they interlace with each other.

The aspect of temporality, as stated by Ricoeur, was applied here in the analysis of the text. Our reading and thus interpretation of the text may differ each time, depending on our world view at each moment, which is always changing. Ricoeur states:

The emancipation of the text constitutes the most fundamental condition for the recognition of a critical instance at the heart of interpretation; for distancing now belongs to the mediation itself (Ricoeur 1981: 930).

He further elaborates:

What is sought is no longer an intention hidden behind the text, but a world unfolded in front of it. The power of the text to open a dimension of reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real.

I have been changed by this experience. My identity continues to unfold within this experience. Each moment of distancing, I returned to the text with new insight and interpretation. This is reflected in the research on behalf of myself and the students as we evolved from this experience.

The following text was written from a pilot study on community-based learning in Belize, Central America. This study offered the researcher a more focused direction for the dissertation proposal from a personal point of view based in experience.

## **Pilot Study**

### **Introduction**

A pilot study was conducted on March 3, 2007 to broaden an understanding of the relevant issues and themes found in immersion programs in higher education today. The secondary purpose of the pilot study was to guide and further refine the appropriate research questions and categories for the research study. The study was conducted in the University of San Francisco's (USF) University Ministry Department in looking at the Arrupe Immersion Program. A synopsis of the pilot study includes a background of the participant, research conversation data, data analysis and implications.

My research conversation partner for the pilot study was Fr. John Savard S.J., who was the previous Director of University Ministry at University of San Francisco and led student immersion trips to Belize. Students and professors from the School of Education at USF participate in a Belize immersion program in the Spring, Summer, and Fall to serve students in an educational capacity.

The theory adopted for this pilot study was conducted within the critical hermeneutic research protocol (Herda 1999) and included the theoretical work of Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney.

As described in detail in Chapter Four of Research Protocol, the creation and analysis of a text, Herda describes learning as an ontologically directed activity as opposed to an epistemological foundation. This happens while we are in conversation with the other and not in isolation; therefore, the process of understanding concurrently evolves together through the event of conversation. Herda describes this as a “creative act that takes place in the relationship between an event and understanding” (1999:137). The shared learning that evolved between Fr. John and myself is more productively understood as an *event* rather than as merely an acquisition of knowledge. This event changed us both. When I spoke about the idea of humility and openness in this learning process, Fr. John responded:

It allows [participants] to put things out there and to work and they know they're there just to grow. I think they first go there because they think that they're going to help change a community by teaching and bringing something to them. And what they finally realize it's what's really changed is themselves.

For Fr. John, a transformation occurred in the students' minds. This transformation transpired in the space between the original purpose of the trip and what actually happened

during its events. Interestingly, Fr. John also observed this transformation to offer additional challenges for the students, in that they returned home as different people. This change required participants to act and conduct themselves in the world in a new way.

A new way of conduct for the students was in the idea of being with rather than doing. We all have the desire to do something in this goal-oriented society and see the results of our accomplishments. This common practice in the U.S. is cited here in Fr. John's reflection:

What I'm really realizing the important thing is, is the just being there, the solidarity, the walking with and just being able to come and be with this community, to share my gifts with them and let them know that they've shared their gifts with me.

This sharing entails a new narrative and perhaps a new identity for students in the U.S., while working in a new cultural and community setting. Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity serves to expand our understanding of how our culture and history are significant in the mutual act of giving. Our own understanding is altered when we challenge cultural assumptions as they arise in the immersion experience.

Fr. John spoke of the importance of just being there and accepting the gifts students bring to the community and, in turn, gifts that are brought to the students. He writes, "Rather than trying to think that I'm going to change this culture or transform it, it's just the being there is what I'm supposed to be doing." Fr. John also speaks about how students need to realize this and they also need to realize that sometimes they have "received more than they have been able to give."

Additional analysis from the text is the importance of exchange in another culture, whether it is in a form of dance or song but that an exchange was made possible. This may speak



to an expanding understanding of the self and others through what Ricoeur calls solicitude or true friendship. The data and text analysis brought out a creative act of interpretation and reflection that bred new understanding to inaugurate possible implications for further research.

### **Implications**

The implications of the pilot study centered on three themes: (1) students' disposition prior to entering the experience, (2) community and transformative learning, and (3) culture and transition. The Arrupe model further enhanced the researcher's understanding of students' learning experience in an international community-based learning. The experience offered the researcher a more grounded and expanded understanding of key implications and directions for further research.

The first implication that evolved from the pilot study was the idea of the students' ability to be open to a new experience. The tendency to open oneself to a new experience was critical in the student's overall learning experience and of the learning experience of the entire student group. Group reflections were also an important part of the daily learning experience and served as a safe place for students to share their experiences and interactions with the community.

The second implication revealed in the research data was the phenomenon of a learning transformation. Students found that their learning went far beyond a measurement of achievement they originally set out to do. The learning was based in experience that inspired a transformational outcome that was difficult to define or measure. As such, a change occurred outside a linear and measurable mode of being to a non-linear modality that reflected personal change beyond the set curriculum or practice of teaching.

The third implication found in this study is one of culture and transition. Students shared their feelings and learned ways of creating new understandings of their experiences with other cultures and communities who live very different lives from their own.

In summary, the pilot study offered new meaning to guide a more developed and educated approach in studying Casa de la Solidaridad. The conversation opened new meaning in community-based learning for both the participant and the researcher. This experience provided an even more fruitful research query by way of new understanding and an expanded view of students' immersion in a developing country. For the full pilot study analysis and transcription see appendix F. The next section of this study details the language element of the research.

### **Language**

All research conversations were conducted in English with English-speaking students, teachers, and staff. English is the language used at Casa, with the exception of Spanish classes and field study. When the opportunity arose to speak with Spanish-speaking students, teachers or people from the El Salvadoran community, the researcher had a translator present to assist. I have an intermediate level of proficiency of the Spanish language that helped the language discrepancies.

### **Research Timeline**

Data were collected between June and July of 2007. The research conversations were conducted on campus at Casa de la Solidaridad in El Salvador. The data analysis took place during the period of August through December 2007. The final draft will be available to hand to the committee in April 2008.

## **Background of Researcher**

As a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies program in the School of Education at University of San Francisco, my intention is to teach in the area of leadership with a focus in Latin American studies. Realizing the great potential of community-based learning I will develop new curriculum in this area to span across multiple disciplines. I have worked in the area of Training and Organization Development for 15 years in larger Corporations in the United States. Additionally, I served as an Executive Director for a non-profit organization to support low-income women to attain long-term employment. I currently serve as an adjunct faculty at the University of San Francisco and work in the field of Organization Development. My intention is to serve full-time as a teacher in higher education and expand community-based learning beyond our local communities and charter the international landscape of immersion learning. Having the ability to explore this new endeavor with new eyes and experience is a privilege I believe in and proceed with great excitement.

I acknowledge my own status as a privileged American in a middle-upper socioeconomic class. I bring my own historical perspective and bias to the research, along with an open mind and heart to better understand and serve in higher education and communities in need. I understand other students and teachers carry their own history and understanding as they too may expand their horizons, along with mine, by immersing ourselves into a culture so unique from our own, the country of El Salvador.

## **Summary**

Learning is an interpretive act for all understanding requires a level of interpretation. Chapter Four elucidates the proper framework for critical hermeneutic inquiry to unfold. Within

this framework the participants and setting were selected for the research to take place. Research conversations with each student served as the centerpiece to this inquiry and became the primary text which was developed into themes. Secondary data included document analysis and observations from my personal journal. As the themes were developed and analyzed from the data they were guided by the broad categories of Narrative Identity, Solitude, and Imagination. Furthermore, the pilot study provided preliminary direction for the primary research.

This study explores community-based learning and the interrelationship of identity, vocational discernment and global engagement among students in higher education. The Jesuit program Casa de la Solidaridad is leading the way in this field. This site was selected to serve as a learning model for future community-based learning programs and curriculum.

My hope is that this model continues to be embraced by American academic institutions and respond to a growing threat of individualism and sense of entitlement to embrace a global community where individuals contribute toward a common good. Education must work to deliver more than tacit knowledge but produce curriculum that engages wisdom, experience and concern for the other through action. What follows is Chapter Five titled, Presentation Data. Here, each student's voice is heard, as themes begin to emerge from the research conversation in El Salvador.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter on data presentation serves to contribute to future models in higher education that are committed to understanding how a student's identity and vocational pathway are shaped in global, community-based learning. While conducting the field research portion of this study in El Salvador at Casa de la Solidaridad, I had the opportunity to sit down with nine American students and have a conversation about their experiences. The intention of this Chapter is to let the voices of these Casa students be heard.

The participants currently attend Jesuit universities in the United States, with the exception of one student who attends the University of California in Los Angeles. More detailed information on each student is highlighted in Chapter Four. These research conversations took place during the fourth week of their five-week academic immersion program. The conversations were guided by the five research questions outlined in Chapter Four. These questions grew out of the broader themes of narrative identity, solicitude, imagination, and vocational discernment. Additionally, I provide insight from my own personal journal and informal conversations. The students spend each day in their assigned praxis site, either in a hospital in San Salvador or in a poor neighborhood where sick patients cannot afford to stay in a hospital. The classroom work included a Spanish class and a Cultural Perspectives in Public Health class, led by professor Christina Pallitto, PhD. Narrative identity will be presented next as interpreted by the students' point of view in the following section.

## Narrative Identity

Paul Ricoeur's Theory of Narrative Identity allows us to understand ourselves and our experiences with others through the telling and re-telling of our stories. The interpretation of these stories, or text, opens our understanding to the whole human experience. This interpretation is in constant motion and thus not fixed, as it is part of our actual, living history. Ricoeur writes:

Narrative Identity constructs a sense of self-sameness, continuity and character in the plot of the story a person tells about him--or herself. The Story becomes that person's actual history (Ricoeur 1988:247).

Eight out of the nine students I conducted research conversations with have fairly extensive experience in community-based learning, either at their high school or university. Their own identities in terms of how they see themselves are different with regards to their own history and this form of learning. Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts that our worlds are not exactly the same, and this embodies language too. One's world has a different orientation and therefore interpretation than another, based on one's experience.

My conversation with Mark, a chemical engineering and pre-medical student at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), delineates his own history by explaining how he first became involved with community-based learning at his Jesuit high school where he first learned about Oscar Romero and social justice. Mark's experience with the Jesuit tradition is what led him to the Casa program because it was "Jesuit-run," had a "spiritual component," and provided the combination of "medicine and community living." He describes his experience at the Casa as a very rewarding one and far different than the culture at UCLA where he felt he was becoming more career-oriented because his fellow students were more "goal-oriented." Mark talked about the difference in attitudes found at UCLA compared to the Casa and why his current

experience at UCLA was driving him to be more career-oriented, pulling him away from where he wanted to be. When I asked Mark how he saw himself during his experience at the Casa, he replied:

I just feel like, coming here. I definitely refocused my goals away from the profession to what kind of relationships and what role I have. How I'm able to contribute instead of what I can gain. I felt I had been shifting a little bit in the wrong direction.

Most of the students at the Casa, he explains, are from Jesuit schools that foster community and social justice in the curriculum. He realizes he didn't have that to go back to and felt intimidated by going back because his friends may not understand what he had experienced there. At the same time, he appreciates that it could be something positive to share with others, although he admitted that would be a challenge.

This experience influences a shift among many students in terms of their identity and their purpose for being there. Mark states, "Like I said earlier, I want to shift my goals and instead of a specific profession and what I can get out of the profession, but also what I can contribute." He continues, "I have been just trying to understand how I can use what I was given to make things a little bit better in some way. And it's definitely opened my mind."

By being a part of this program with like-minded students, Mark feels he was more able to make a shift in the direction toward what he really wanted to become. Mark explains how the Casa program enabled him to re-examine his place and purpose in life, and being around like-minded students supported this effort. As with many conversations, Kaylen also describes the influence of living in community:

when you're here and everyone is living in community, and you're working with people who have the same interests as

you or like similar philosophies about life, or the way the world should be going, it's easy to have that kind of upbeat-- like we could do something to really make this work.

Kaylen's story reflects many students' perspective of the powerful affects of learning by the experience of being around people who are committed to a similar purpose. One element that discloses itself on the path of understanding self is a sense of openness; an openness of self, to others, and to new situations.

### **Openness**

According to the students, one key component to making the "living-in community" aspect beneficial to the learning process is having the ability to be open to new experiences. Many students discussed the importance of their ability to remain open as a critical piece in their reflection, learning, working, and living in community. Openness may be a possible theme to elaborate on in the Secondary Analysis within Narrative Identity.

A sense of openness is a common discussion point in both international and domestic community-based learning programs. Having the ability to be open to share new experiences in the areas of cultural diversity may have implications toward transformative learning.

Kelly describes herself as open and anxious before she entered this experience. She states "It's really opened my eyes. I mean I grew up in a small suburban town in Boston. I was aware that there was poverty, but I wasn't aware of the extent of it in the world." In learning about how this experience changed her or her being in the world, she says she was thinking of this very same idea in her previous work week. he states:

I kind of just said "I'm trying to go for it now." Being in the hospital I've been working with children and it's really shown me that there are a lot of things that people can't



control here, like pneumonia and diarrhea. And kids die from very simple procedures--or very simple from the United States' perspective. I don't want to compare things to the United States, however.

When I asked her about her specific experience in the hospital she replied, "It's been heartbreaking. It really was. I had expected the experience to break me in some way. It's just really difficult to watch children suffer." To fully receive the experience they were searching for, the students committed to sustaining a sense of openness. One place where this characteristic is particularly critical is during their weekly reflection hour.

### **Reflection**

The students meet once a week for reflection and I had the opportunity to sit in, listen, and observe their experience. The reflection topic is on simple living where the students are encouraged to make a commitment to living simply while in El Salvador. In this discussion, they talked about, while it may be a choice for them, for many Salvadorans living simply is not a choice, but a reality. My journal entry states, "By becoming vulnerable, and living without the comforts, we can begin to change (our identity) and have the ability to be completely who we are: totally honest, not critical, and not living up to certain standards." I was amazed at how open the students were when they shared their feelings and fears of the week; it was truly an incredible lesson for me.

Reflection tends to be central to this type of learning, where students can sort out the layers of emotion during some of the most intimate of human interactions. Their enthusiasm and hunger for reflection became most evident during our research conversations and during reflection itself. Kelly remarked:

It's been really nice to be able to talk. Our reflections are only once a week. So having experienced so many things. I mean, yesterday I was jumping off a waterfall, and today I'm holding a baby, who like so many, are dying from malnutrition. There are so many highs and lows, and to be able to just sit down and get it all out is a blessing.

Even though reflection time was voluntary, everyone was present. Mark explained, "The other amazing thing to me is that it's voluntary, and yet, the reflection I went to, the room was filled. I think everyone was there." Charity reiterates how reflection is a core part of their experience by way of breaking down assumptions.

It's a really big part this experience, reflection and being together when everyone brings their experience from the week or the day and they share, and we learn in that sense as well. And then it breaks down some of the assumptions we have about each other too. That was a powerful night.

The students each discussed the benefits of reflection and the need to express their emotions in order for them to make sense of their world at that particular time. They spoke about how important their reflection time at Casa was to each of them, but they almost needed more on a daily basis to air out their emotions, experiences, and stories of the day.

In this sense, reflection pulls us together and moves us toward something that is grounded in language. Gadamer asserts that language and history make us who we are. It formulates new ideas and allows us to communicate old ones. Reflection makes a resounding point throughout my experience and is elaborated further in the Data Analysis Chapter.

### **Narrative and Metaphor**

Ricoeur refers to the *process of metaphorization* as a linguistic modality that allows us to imagine beyond ourselves and beyond the literary form. I invited the students to use metaphor in the second question on narrative identity as a way to describe their sense of self.

Kaylen, who is studying to be a doctor at Boston College, describes herself metaphorically as a coma victim. She said:

more like kind of a coma victim, if you will, because everything still goes on around you, and you're still taking part in everything, but only in one sense. You know everything's still happening to you and you can feel it happening, but you can't respond to it necessarily.

She continues:

things still go on in the world, they're still happening, you're still part of it, but you couldn't respond in the way that you needed to, to be completely awake and-alive, I guess.

I then asked her how she sees herself now:

I would say that I'm not out of the coma yet completely, but I don't know. This whole thing just really opens your eyes to the way that so many people live that you would have never thought to experience otherwise.

She expresses that this experience, for her, is indescribable and overwhelming, to learn and understand a culture very different from her own.

In my conversation with Ashly, I asked her how she saw herself before this experience and now, in which she refers to her own life metaphorically in terms of seasons. She remarks:

Since I've been here, I feel like I'm in the beginning stages of transformation. So I'm feeling ok with that and realizing being here and with the slower pace, and just sitting with patients at the hospital, that's what I'm here to do. It's like, literally, just sit with them and be with them.

Ashly, who had been on an international service trip, made a renewed commitment to live more authentically. She says:

because I've been to El Salvador before and because I've lived in community before, I kind of relate to more of these issues, starting two years ago. That was a time where like

significantly my life changed. And, since then, I've tried to continue to challenge myself more and more to live; I use the word, just to live authentically.

Thus far, this has been a transforming experience in the lives of both Kaylen and Ashly, irrespective of their experiences as community-based learners.

While Ashly renewed a commitment to herself, another Casa student, Nicole, explains this to be her first encounter with community-based learning and describes herself as a textbook, on one hand, and caught between two places, on the other. She uses the word *textbook* simply because she read many books and watched many documentaries on El Salvador, but imagined them to be somewhat filled with propaganda. This enticed her even more to assert her own self and influence by coming to this program.

Secondly, she speaks about being caught between two places. In her words, "I'm still a little shocked and still completely humbled by a lot of things that I have witnessed here. And, again, I guess all the textbooks, all of these could not have prepared me for this." This metaphor leads us to further discussion on transformational learning and potential pedagogical implications in teaching and learning in foreign cultures outside of the classroom.

Katie describes her metaphor as "seeing myself sitting at a huge table, packed with tons of food, and I'm like eating everything all up." She continues: "like trying little bites of everything, I'm trying to understand all and get a little taste of it all. And I think that followed me through this immersion experience." Metaphors such as these move me in front of the text in a new way that I would not have otherwise experienced. It provokes an understanding of how the students were feeling during this experience, as I found for some; it was difficult to put into plain words. Katie was energetic and passionate about her work and this came through in her

metaphor. This also was her fifth international service trip, and she felt “at home” here in El Salvador. Metaphors such as these are a creative way to uncover one’s identity or particular feeling. Their sense of self is always changing, as we are constantly open to change and reinterpretation.

Finally, Charity describes this way of being in the world as an awakening process. For her, this means understanding the people and the history of El Salvador. She then tells a story about a surgeon who worked at the hospital who asked her her age and she replied, “19.” He said when he was 19 he was trying to survive a war and not traveling the world. Charity felt this put her in her place of how privileged she is as an American and that “normal” for her may not be normal to a surgeon in El Salvador. The understanding of oneself through interaction with others becomes evident on many levels within the students’ field work.

### **Collective Identity**

Following metaphor, many conversations lead to an emerging theme of what it means to be an American in El Salvador, a theme I refer to as Collective Identity. Ricoeur states:

identity, whether personal or collective, is always only presumed, claimed, re-claimed; and because the question which is behind the problematics of identity is “Who am I?”  
Ricoeur 1999:8

Throughout many student conversations, the idea of being an American college student in El Salvador provokes numerous questions in their minds. This narrative discloses a new layer of identity; the identity of being American. My conversation with Mark on this topic led to many questions in his mind. He explains:

I almost feel there’s just this sense of entitlement coming from the U.S. Like we’re entitled to things as humans,

whereas when you see these people's lives, why aren't they entitled to it also? It just makes you question everything.

He continues:

I feel like me being the white gringo American who comes from a wealthy family, me being here and really just showing compassion for them and have them understand that I want to understand. I want them to know that I care. I feel that would definitely give them more hope, if anything, that they are a good people. And that's definitely something that I think, too, is that it's given me hope having such good people around me, especially when you see how much harm we can make.

There are two points to consider here. One, the underlying assumption that because I am an American and I am here for you, you will feel better. This is a false premise that just by being American and showing we care, we will help others and this will lead to reparation. We need to be careful of our biases that they need us in the first place. Interestingly, in the same conversation, when I asked if he is changing their lives, he responded, "the first time I went on an immersion trip it was like these people do not need us, they are completely happy." This dichotomy of service is one that needs to be addressed and thus will be expanded upon more thoroughly within the narrative of solicitude. Secondly, there is an act of reciprocity he speaks of in terms of giving and receiving of hope. Having an increase of hope is a predominant theme among the students. More on reciprocity will be addressed in the area of solicitude.

American identity, or what Ricoeur calls collective identity, is a possible working theme for this study in the subsequent Chapter. From this perspective, narrative provides us with the valuable understanding of identity in relation to individual and communal. The question of student identity extends itself to the larger context of global citizenry and the understanding of civic responsibility. Ashly expands this point further by saying:

what's going on in the world today with the war and that people are incredibly aware of their history here because, number one, it was not that long ago; and two, there was this huge amount of suffering that came from it. ...they are aware of how intimately involved Americans were. Either simply because you're a citizen or just because they know the government. So I think, hopefully, what they can change is, if they originally had any pain from that or hurt from that, is to see that my interaction will simply convey the love and respect, that if there's any type of reparation whatsoever, that will be conveyed.

From a more political perspective, one student accounts:

I feel like it's bullshit that American companies can come here and pay 55 cents to the dollar. In the U.S. there are standards around the country because humans deserve something. But what we fail to recognize is our constitution does not say Americans deserve. It says men deserve these things. The Bill of Rights applies to the men of the country, the people of the country, the people. I find it very sad that we are able to ignore that when we're dealing with people who are not from our country.

Ashly describes a fuller meaning of cultural identity as an American in the context of community beyond her own boundaries.

Cultural identity and diversity education are both in the forefront in community-based learning literature. When students are immersed into another culture far different from their own, how does this influence their understanding of their own culture? To juxtapose this with narrative identity may lead to significant findings and furthermore, an understanding of how it may influence community engagement for the community-based learner. We learn about our own identity through interactions with others. The following section on solicitude examines students' interactions with each other and their patients more closely.

## Solicitude

My conversations on solicitude are guided by the question: What gifts do you receive when helping others in need? While it is fruitful to explore student identity in relation to oneself and the other in light of community-based learning, it is also fruitful to understand their work in the community and with the marginalized. This learning process moves us to the very core of the community-based learning model. Our own personal solicitude with others is an act of sharing our life-worlds and communal experiences together where we come together on equal footing. Ricoeur writes, “I would suggest the name solicitude for this movement of the self toward the other, who responds with an interpolation of the self by the other” (Ricoeur 1999:46). The term solicitude can be understood also as *with and for others*.

It is important to point out the level of enthusiasm the students expressed to participate in this study and their eagerness to share more of themselves with me. There was an instant fellowship among us, possibly due to a common spirit for the mission of Casa. This reciprocity is an example of solicitude itself, where there is an esteem for oneself and solicitude for others. I believe this exchange was present in the research process itself. Ricoeur writes:

Similitude is the fruit of the exchange between esteem for oneself and solicitude for others. This exchange authorizes us to say that I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. As myself means that you too are capable of starting something new in the world (Ricoeur 1992:193).

The feeling in the room was that they couldn't share enough with me and many expressed it as almost a healing process for them to talk about their experiences.

For many students, this was not the first time they lived in community. Ashly lived in community at the Romero House at Regis University. The Romero House ([www.regis.edu](http://www.regis.edu)) “is



an intentional community whose spirit relies upon the commitment of all its members to openly give and receive support.” The community organizes its own social justice exploration, spiritual reflection, social activities, and house responsibilities such as cleaning and meals. This closely describes what community living is like at the Casa.

Given one student’s extensive experience with community-based learning, I was curious to know what first motivated her to get involved. She replied:

The idea of community had always been inside of me, but I don’t know if I would have used that word then. I use that word now to describe it, which is kind of a hard thing about reflecting, but a lot of it though was just about having that great feeling.

She continues to describe the wonderful feeling one receives from being with the people that you serve. She also includes faith as a factor and focusing her life on living simply and not focusing on material things.

Another student says, as a matter of fact, “I’m receiving more than I’m giving.” The most important exchange that occurred for him was the human element. Almost every student spoke about the simplicity of being with the other and every student said they had received more than they had to give. He also describes an experience that seemed to enlarge himself and his understanding by saying:

It was a good way of showing to me and probably Elizabeth, too, the disparity between the rich and the poor. Maybe the poor do not have the money, but there’s such a sense of community in their homes. And they have very little, but they are so satisfied with it. And the house is full of life. And it’s valuable in another way.

The exchange for him is very simple and yet profound in a meaningful way.

Kaylen's interpretation of this exchange between herself and the people in El Salvador can be described as:

I feel like you always walk away with a greater awareness of, not only the situation that other people are in and their reality, but you're more aware of your own reality too, and the way they would view it too.

She continues:

for instance, if you don't step back and step into someone else's world, you can't see how yours looks from the outside.

This may be considered an important argument for expanding programs like this one, in the research to follow. This expanded sense of self is apparent as she continues to say:

If you're constantly just absorbed in yourself and not even just yourself. You don't have to be selfish, but if you never change your surroundings, then you start to think more narrow-mindedly, like this must be everybody's reality.

When I asked Kelly what gifts she received when working with people in need she replied, "emotional gifts." Kelly elaborates by saying:

I am blown away by the love the Salvadoran people have for people coming in from other countries, or foreigners where they're so eager to share with you what their experiences are with the war, healthcare system and the poverty. And they're so giving.

She describes an experience we all shared together when we went to the campo (country) to visit a family with very little resources or money, and they cooked for all 30 of us with their very limited resources. She so pointedly explains "their resources are so limited but their hospitality, their service, and their love so great." She continues:

I hope that my presence to them kind of eradicates some of the stereotypes so that Americans are seen as kind. I'm here

to learn as much as I can from them and evaluating with them and understand their suffering. I never really thought of what I could give them.

Solicitous giving is not pre-meditative. It is spontaneous in nature and not drawn from power; otherwise, it becomes the asymmetrical solicitude, unequal exchange that is forced. As Ricoeur states:

For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from power...the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands (Ricoeur 1992:191).

This moves us toward the heart of solicitude and reconfigures a new way to work together that transcends who we are as American, wealthy, privileged--to who we are ontologically and thus who we become.

To continue the conversation on reciprocity, Nicole shares with me the gifts she received while working with her patients, "Definitely hope and having faith all the time." She remarks on the different sentiments one may find in hospitals in the U.S. where patients have no faith in their situation or their condition. She feels such optimism in the Salvadoran patients and how many of them had a strong faith and a happy attitude about their life in general. Perhaps given their recent history and the conditions thereafter, many Salvadorans still live in survival mode. Nonetheless, she remarks that the Salvadorans are so strong and happy with what little they had she felt bad about complaining about the little things. This increased her spirituality and faith in other people.

Francesca responded in her own way, but very similar to Mark and Kelly, in that she had received more gifts out of this experience than the people she served had. One gift was the

realization of what's important. She explains that they don't have much, only in terms of money, but they have so much more than we [in the United States] have. She explains:

Their spirits are so high because they don't need much. It's like the more you have the more you need. You just get in the cycle of that. I feel like I've totally re-examined my life. I don't feel attached to material things. I think I do realize what's important. But I think you are constantly reminded of that to stay grounded.

This phenomenon caused the students to contemplate culture and values. A fusion of horizons occurred where two cultures so different, with conflicting values, confront us and our bias on what is important.

Gifts that Ashly received included learning a new language, building new connections throughout the world, and just being with someone in the most intimate and even painful times in their life. Ashly saw these as gifts she received on this trip. She says she felt like she just wanted to be there. She says, "I've never felt so like I just want to be here."

Charity spoke about the intimate connections that extend beyond language that were made and felt the people she worked with so embraced the human connection in a very real way. She explains that the patients do not have people who sit and listen to them, and they embraced this in ways beyond which Charity could imagine. She wondered how she could adopt these experiences here to bring home, and she realized one thing she could take with her is the human connection and, "realizing that people have so much to offer, and if nothing else, just their story."

Katie explains in her own words why she felt fortunate for these opportunities, "I'm so blessed. All these opportunities are thrown at me. And I'm like, 'Yes, yes, of course!'"

I responded to her by saying that I am the one who feels blessed to have had these conversations with students, like her, who are engaged in social justice and civic responsibility. Their excitement for their work in these conversations was infectious, and I soon began to learn that this experience was not only shaping their identity but my own. For example, we all feared going home. We all had changed in some way, perhaps for the better, and somehow by re-entering the U.S. we would subject ourselves to a culture that would lead us back to consumerism, materialism, and things that are not simple. We feared leaving El Salvador for the fear of forgetting. We needed to remember and reflect to make this experience our own.

Upon reflecting on a personal level, Katie expresses how she felt more at home in these places [Casa] with, “people who feel more deeply.” She explains:

it’s so strange because when I come back from these places I’ve been, it’s like I left me there. I left something there.  
Honest to God and as true as it gets for me is that I feel more at home around it. It’s so refreshing to be around people that feel deeply and that really get it.

I then asked her what she would feel like if she didn’t travel to these places and have these particular experiences and she replied, “I think I’d feel really lost.”

Katie explains how the instant love she received was her gift. Just being a part of the Casa family having this “love behind it” where it is “like instant love.” This includes all the families and staff. She says, “It’s like because I’m a Casa student they just have open arms...it’s been such a family.” She elaborates further, “Why do they just love me and hug me and want to know everything about me from the first time I even meet them?” Similarly, I too, shared the same experience personally and thus understand exactly what Katie was trying to say.

This ongoing theme of examining another culture in relation to one's own is heralded throughout the conversations and will be explored in more detail in the data analysis. These themes are all interconnected within the categories of narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination. The interactions between and among the students and their patients cause them to imagine what this meant for them and how they will take these experiences forward. The following section will present the discussion data on imagination.

### **Imagination**

Students relive moments of history as they sit and listen to stories told by the Salvadorans. As U.S. citizens, they are a part of the story being told. Kearney begs the question, "But how retrieve the betrayed stories of history if not through a critical redeployment of imagination?" (1991:215) Hermeneutic imagination enables the ability to discern "between reality as fact and existence as possibility" (Kearney 1991:216). Without this capability in this context, students remain hopeless and unable to imagine human possibilities within themselves and others. As Kearney states everything that man can become, everything he is capable of ... being-in-the-world understood as possibilities" (Kearney 1991:216).

Ricoeur summarizes this power of imagination to our identity and a sense of how would we move forward as a new person to produce new things. Finally, imagination as we will discuss in the next Chapter is ethical by all means. The essence of this study is to understand how these experiences will move students forward to apply this to their own life experience. The power of imagination acts as a way to create new possible ideas and solution to their social contexts. To guide the conversation toward Imagination, the research questions are:

How they might you change or improve someone's life because you served them?

Will you take this experience with you and apply it in your life back home?"

Did this experience influence your decision or direction with a chosen career path for the future?

These questions provoke deep thought for some students. Some students did not feel they were changing people's lives, yet they admit their life was changed. The consideration of where this experience takes these students is one we explored together in our hour of conversation. We discussed how they will incorporate this program into their careers, their communities, and their lives. The next section is designed to organize the data around hermeneutic imagination in regard to vocational direction and future civic engagement.

In my conversation with Nicole, I asked her how the experience has affected her being in the world now and she responded:

I think I just want to be more conscious of what I do in my life and to think about the disparities that are going on here.

She reflected on her role in El Salvador and her purpose for being there, where she assumed different kinds of responsibilities at times at the hospital in San Salvador, as opposed to her work at hospitals in the U.S. Nicole explained she felt being caught between two places by asking the questions, "Am I a student? Am I a tourist? Am I being of service? What is my role?" At times, all she felt she could do was simply sit with the patients and talk to them and this was something she eventually accepted as part of her purpose. She explains:

I've accepted that I am here to learn from the Salvadorans and just help out in any way that I can while they're in the hospital because it's not a great experience for anyone. But now I've experienced this right here, and then I know that within a week and a half I'm going to be going home. And

I'm going to be resuming a life that seems so different than my life right now. And it's so opposite from any of this.

Francesca, a fourth-year nursing student at University of San Francisco, was asked how she saw herself prior to entering the program. She stated:

I've always been conscious of diversity and different levels of classes and how they affect the world, but just never on a personal level. I've never seen it face to face, never had to challenge my own life and look at the dynamics of where I come from and how these people live.

While there were language barriers in the hospital while taking care of the children, many students talked about the simplicity of putting a smile on their faces. It made Mark realize, "I don't have the tools to fix anything. I'm not going to have some profound impact. All I can really do is with my hands, like playing and just really forming relationships." He says, "When I bring myself down to just simply showing compassion that pervaded everything." Kelly from Boston College translates her work in the hospital to assist her in her career path as nurse.

I just want to get a perspective and see how the health system works here and see what I can learn from that, and how to implement that in my life. I want to find a way to serve people after this experience.

Kaylen gives surprising response to the question: How do you imagine changing or improving lives of the people you serve because you've worked with them? She says, "I don't really think that's really the point of it." She talks about the little things that take place that might change their day and make it a little better but she doesn't feel she was changing their entire life, per say. The hospitals in the United States have play areas with coloring books for the children and many other things. In El Salvador, just to bring in a coloring book and sit and color with the kids, where there are no coloring books, she says, put enormous smiles on their faces.



I asked Kaylen if her time here influenced her decision in terms of what she will do when she gets back in regards to her vocation. She says:

This is what I want to do. For myself, I think that definitely this isn't the end of it, because this has been awesome, and we're only half way done.

She also mentioned doing international work in healthcare and that possibly Doctors Without Borders is something she would consider. Helping others is what she's always wanted to do, and this experience, she explained, just clarified it for her. She thinks there is more of a possibility to work with others in need in other countries. She says, "It really opens you up to realize that you don't have to live in the United States. You don't need to have all this stuff they have there." She always had something moving her, but she didn't know exactly what it was. Now, after coming to the Casa, she said, "It's clear...got it. Stop right there. Stop looking. Here it is." From her perspective, this experience solidifies her vocation in healthcare.

Similarly, Francesca said, "But I feel like I will have more of a sense of a duty when I go home. I came down here six weeks ago with the mindset that I wanted to be a midwife when I'm older as well. This has totally reinforced that, for sure." She continues to say that, at some point, she will return to El Salvador and facilitate a project or work in another country as a midwife. Finally, she said, "Yeah, I think my vocation has just been reinforced, really." Again, a solid theme arises of how this experience in healthcare in El Salvador confirms the students' desire to serve others within the medical field.

When the same question was introduced to Kelly, she states:

The one thing I hope is eventually possible is that people have access to healthcare, to clean water, and food. Conceivably it is possible to feed this whole world. Nobody has to be starving...we live in a society that's so based on

consumerism. That is something I hope to break out of personally with my own family - to not be as focused on consuming and recognizing the preferential options of the poor. I mean just being surrounded by a community of friends or family, I think that's where the change starts for me.

She continues, "I mean, like personally, we're on this earth to love and to live and learn from each other. And so often that's defeated." Kelly's desire to live simply and help others is her commitment to making a change when she returns home.

Nicole responds first from an educational imperative. She recognizes the need to understand another culture and not necessarily pursue development from the standpoint of the U.S. She describes this standpoint as the U.S. enters a country and turns everything upside down, but she now recognizes the importance to understand what their needs are for clean water, hospital sanitation and technology. She enthusiastically speaks of her career:

I'm already considering the idea of spending time abroad in other countries to do work and to help out in any way I can. I don't know what way yet. I guess right now it kind of feels like idealism, you know, a little bit...to use what I've learned here at the Casa and do it in the world as my job.

While this reaffirms many students' calling to healthcare, there is also a level of commitment to understand El Salvador's history and its relationship with the United States. The students relay the sentiment that they are sorry for what our government has done. This is explained well by Ashly who states that she hopes to effect change.

I hope it conveys that there are people who don't agree with it. And, just as much as they're struggling to work with their government, we're struggling to work with ours.

Kearney writes, "The capacity to project future possibilities itself requires to be supplemented by the capacity to ground such projections on examples from the past" (Kearney

1991:220). These students bear witness to Salvadoran narratives that propelled them to imagine a new circumstance. Kearney identifies this as testimonial imagination: “the power to bear witness to exemplary narratives legaced by our cultural memories and traditions” (Kearney 1991:220). The ability to project future possibilities requires us to draw from the past.

Charity and I also talked about how she can adopt what she learned at the Casa and take that home. She talked about the human connection and taking that home with her to use it in her interactions each day. She and other students were aware of U.S. corporations outsourcing to factories in El Salvador and other developing countries where there are unfair labor practices. This is a way they could make a small difference in their own way back at home.

Katie had very specific ideas of how she intends to take this experience forward into her work in international healthcare. She met with policymakers in El Salvador for her research paper and had the opportunity to interview a government official who is a director of health policy in El Salvador. In this interview, they discussed the vaccination process for women and children. Katie was able to see small discrepancies or possible loopholes in the system that might inhibit vaccinations, such as lack of documentation and language barriers. She remarked on her desire to be in a position some day to have influence over big policymakers, yet hold the humanitarian stance that one may hold at the grassroots level. In other words, bridge the two together and never forget the voices of the marginalized in the big policymaking process. She expressed:

If I'm ever in that position, to never forget about the justice part of it and to live with people and make friends with the people I'm working with, and to really be at that grassroots level and yet to have political power at the same time, do you understand?

I replied:

I do. You want to stand up for people, even the people who don't have a voice, instead of a big set of bureaucracies, like the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

She replied:

Right, and also with the people who work in the grassroots, who often get really frustrated because they don't have access to the big time because it's just like constantly scraping at the big timers; you can't get anywhere.

I said, "You want the power."

She responded:

But I want the power to be able to affect change. And I want to be able to work at the grassroots level and I want to know where the people are coming from...to never lose that essence of humanity, I guess, in my work in the future. It really hit me deep, really deep.

Katie explained how a project that was assigned to her in class is what led her to a conversation with a public health official. This combined with her work in the hospital further shape her vocational goals.

Continuing along the vocational pathway, I inquired to Katie whether this program had changed her in any way, and she exclaimed how the class motivated her to pursue work in international healthcare, specifically in the area of research and policy development. The students attended a class titled: *Cultural Perspectives in Public Health*. (Please see Appendix D for course syllabus.)

The conversation went to a deeper level of her personal passion in relation to vocation. She energetically explains:

I'm a very passionate person in all parts of my life. I feel a lot. I can feel love very deeply. I feel things a lot. And even if I didn't have this experience, I'd feel like something was gnawing at me my whole life. I wanted to understand it deeper. It's still this constant need, like you know that constant search. And I feel like I would just be a lot, a lot early on my path, I guess, if I didn't have these experiences.

John Neafsey, noted earlier, described vocational discernment as a tug or pull at our hearts, and we respond in a way where we literally felt moved to do something.

At that moment, a fusion of horizons rose up from our conversation. New learnings and understandings expanded our horizons. I understood myself in the other and became expanded myself. I understood the same gnawing inside and deep sensitivity toward the marginalized. A calling that is inside, tugging at us is what propels us to move forward and act. Not only did I see my own self in her, but in the other students as well. Through this conversation we met on a new horizon with a new understanding that took us both to another imagined place.

On being of service, Katie said this:

My whole purpose here is to just be there, talk to them, and understand them. They've got nothing going on except sitting in their bed. No one is paying attention to them. And they've got nothing to do but share...and having this interaction has been a world more than I could ever have received from the classroom.

Finally, when I asked how she imagined a new and better world going forward and what that might look like, she spoke with conviction and said, "It would be Casa, honestly, all over the world. I mean infiltrating that [program] in all parts of life." She went on to describe that this ought to be a normal part of education where students are able to have this exchange on a global level and for it to exist throughout all disciplines. I asked, "What you mean is that this type of experience would be good to encourage more global minded, more aware people in the world?"

And she replied:

Heck yeah! It's one of the reasons we're all so nervous about heading back because we're in this incredible community here and I'm surrounded by these dedicated people all the time. And all the people here are just so like-minded in the sense that's what we want to do. This is what we love and we are so compassionate about and feel that we need to make a global community out of it.

Many of the students express the powerful development and learning within themselves during this experience. What I found throughout the conversations is how unique this phenomenon is and how this experience could not be replicated in the classroom alone but with the community and classroom in partnership.

I have read books before this whole summer experience, and I know the importance of being attentive to the patient and not just the disease that the patient suffers from. But I've experienced it firsthand here and not just read about it. And it's been really powerful.

### **Conclusion**

The data presentation rests on the ideas brought forth by the students about themselves and the community they worked in. Metaphor, community living, openness, reflection and collective identity open new horizons in the exploration of narrative identity. Furthermore, solicitude and imagination capture how students may take this experience forward into their vocations. The data present a valuable, personal, testament of the students during what may have been a transformational time in their lives. The Chapter that follows is Data Analysis.

## **CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter Six is organized using the broad themes of narrative identity, solicitude, and imagination for the data analysis. This Chapter utilizes Paul Ricoeur's theories of narrative identity and solicitude to understand the formation of student identity and the cultural and personal exchange between the students from the United States and the Salvadoran community. The work of Richard Kearney, Paulo Friere, and Sharon Daloz Parks is used to inform us of a possible expanded practice of community-based learning and to foster transnational engagement and vocational formation. Herda asserts that:

In field-based hermeneutic research, the object is to create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understandings (Herda 1999:86).

This analysis employs critical hermeneutic inquiry to understand if the present pedagogies in higher education are sufficient in shaping students' identity for today's global context.

### **Narrative Identity**

Within the setting of community-based learning, students encounter layers of experiences that lead them along a path of identity formation. In this setting, the students ask questions such as "Who am I in this process? What is my role? Where will this lead me?" These questions are most often found during the collegiate phase in one's life. Therefore, it is fruitful to examine Ricoeur's philosophy on narrative identity as it relates to the research data. Ricoeur (1995:159) writes:

The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.

Given this construct, we make sense of our own personal identity the same way we make sense of a character in a story. Thus, as we communicate with others about our life story, we begin to understand our own identity. This discovery of oneself is not a fixed process, but rather a temporal one, in that we are always moving toward a greater understanding of our self through our own narrative.

Our identity is grounded in history, as Herda asserts, “We do not enter the world or the village with a neutral stance” (Herda 2007:11). Gadamer’s work informed Ricoeur’s foundation of identity in that we are historical beings, we are born in to a living context, therefore we inherently carry prejudice.

We belong to a tradition before it belongs to us: tradition, through its sedimentations, has a power which is constantly determining what we are in the process of becoming (Bernstein 1983:142).

The hermeneutic function places our understanding within these traditions so we can question our bias in order to be more open to the interpretative process. The students bring their history and previous experience with them as they encounter this community-based learning practice. For example, Mark’s experience at UCLA seemed to influence him to be more “goal-oriented,” where the focus was on what you accomplish rather than who you become as a person. Comparatively, his educational experience in his Jesuit high school taught him ideas about social change and civic responsibility that led him to participate in social activism. By contrast, these two institutions influence his identity in different ways. Similarly, by entering into the experience at Casa, with like-minded people, he makes a shift in the direction toward who he



wanted to become. Students echo this idea of how their peers influence and even support their purpose and identity. Herda asserts that:

A significant element in an aspect of Ricoeur's (1992) theory of identity is his argument that each person has a permanent sense of self and transitory sense of self (Herda 2007:15).

There is a part of each of us that is fixed and a part of our being that is always changing.

Each individual conversation brought forth a larger conversation around the importance of community and reflection. The Casa experience, particularly, living in community, sharing these experiences together, mark a theme of identity development through the other. Kaylen talk about the power of living in community and the fear of going home:

I think that it's just going to be so hard to--like when you're here and everyone is living in community, and you're working with people who have the same interests as you or similar philosophies about life, or the way the world should be going, it's easy to have that kind of upbeat--like we could do something to really make this work. And then in a few weeks we're going to go home, and it's not going to be like that. We're going to be with people who didn't share this experience with us and who don't know--haven't seen what we've seen or gone through what we've have in the world and how a student sees his or her self.

Within community living, two points are clarified as being significant, reflection and a sense of openness. Guardado et al. writes specifically on community-based learning in El Salvador:

The experience of daily community living requires ongoing reflection and dialogue. Students experience both the joys and struggles of community life: sharing household tasks, supporting one another academically, and participating in community conversations (Guardado et al. 2007:12).

This holds true for the summer Casa students, whereby the community they created was itself a text, where language, metaphor, and narrative brought them together through discourse.

Communities here become learning contexts that are formed through language. Jürgen Habermas (1984) describes this as *communicative action*, where language becomes a modality to create consensus about each other's ideas and interpretations of their experience. This is shared linguistically in a common place of values and norms. Herda explains, "We learn about our own directives upon reflection and examination of ourselves in relationship to the people with whom we work" (Herda 2007:110).

This discourse is found in reflection where students share their beliefs, hopes, fears and stories of the day. It utilizes memory of our historical and cultural contexts, identity as we are characters in a living story and imagination to take the discourse to action. Students sharing stories represent the unfolding of new meaning, a new growth in learning, this knowledge is grounded in the reality that surrounds them and then they make sense of their world. In Freire's work on educating the oppressed he argues:

Reflection, which is essential to action, is implicit in Lukac's requirement of "explaining to the masses their own action," just as it is implicit in the purpose he attributes to this explanation: that of "consciously activating the subsequent development of experience (Freire 1970:53).

We need to be able to share our understandings of reality as we experience them in order to transform them into some sort of action. Freire argues that the experience cannot be separate from reflection and reflection must not be separate from action. Our personal narratives are shared during reflection, Kearney states, "In our era of fragmentation and fracture, I shall be arguing that narrative provides us with one of our most viable forms of identity--individual and communal" (Kearney 2002:4).

The theme of collective identity emerged from the data and is placed within a sociocultural-sociopolitical discussion on identity development. For this discussion, I define plural or collective identity according to Jeffrey Barash:

the phenomenon of identity, in its political and therefore plural dimension, gives rise: that of comprehending the precise contours of this phenomenon as it extends beyond oneself and the other as individual persons to encompass identity in its “collective” dimension (Barash 1999:33).

While many students explored with me the ontological idea of who they are in the world in this cultural context, many discussed the implications of what it means to be an American.

From a political perspective, the conversations brought forth the student’s in-depth knowledge of the United States government’s involvement in the Civil War in El Salvador. Moreover, students realized how informed the Salvadorans are of their own history, including the U.S. involvement in their history, and how much the Salvadorans wanted to share their story about this founding event with the students. By exchanging stories with their Salvadoran friends, teachers, and patients, they became aware first hand of the pain their own government inflicted upon them. One student writes:

people are incredibly aware of their history here because, number one, it was not that long ago; and two, there was this huge amount of suffering that came from it. ...they are aware of how intimately involved Americans were.

Many students felt a sense of duty to stand up and object to the action of the United States participation in the Civil War. They were prepared to make amends somehow. From their perspective, through their work there was a way to communicate this. “I hope that my presence to them kind of eradicates some of the stereotypes, so that Americans are seen as kind.” Another student reiterated this by saying:

I hope it conveys that there are people who don't agree with it. And just as much as they're struggling to work with their government, we're struggling to work with ours.

Another phenomenon that occurs for many students within collective identity was that of being a privileged American college student with the ability to travel to another country. One student writes, "how privileged I am, you know. And how my life that is normal to me is not normal to most."

This sense of privilege or entitlement is juxtaposed against our own sociocultural history as it relates to the influence of consumerism and individualism in the United States. We all know the culture in the United States is threatened by consumerism and individualistic tendencies and the implications of this are multi-faceted. Sharon Daloz Parks (2007:7) describes this phenomenon as "a potent challenge to the imagination and soul of higher education." She further states:

the intimate relationship between higher education and the wider culture is evident in the growing tide of consumerism in American culture, from which higher education is not exempt.

One student reflects, "We live in a society that's so based on consumerism that that's something that I hope to break out of personally." A sense of over-consumption and materialism surfaced in many conversations when students talked about confronting their identity as an American and the need to have so much "stuff." Through intimate contact with the marginalized, they are forced to examine their own lives. One student expressed:

it really opens you up to realizing that you don't have to live in the United States. You don't need to have all the stuff that you have there...I don't even want to go home...it's showed me that's it's more of a reality than you would think.

Learning from the Salvadorans, for many students, means learning about simple living, where students learn to “embrace a very real human connection.” They speak passionately about the authenticity in their relationships with their Salvadoran friends and how being absorbed by material things, they risk losing their identity or authentic sense of self. This cultural condition, Sharon Daloz Parks believes, may obstruct our true sense of calling:

We are all vulnerable to the conscience-numbing forces that would form us into unthinking, individual consumers, rather than responsive, creative, and committed citizens, living out of a deep sense of “calling”--a sacred awareness of participation in worthy purposes that yield a sense of life and work that has meaning and significance (Parks 2007:7).

The questions I pose here relate to the international aspects of immersion experiences in such a way that the Salvadoran culture influences a deeper sense of self and thus a yearning to help the other. Furthermore, encountering cultures so different from our own move us in new directions or at least contemplate doing so. President of Santa Clara University, Fr. Locatelli (Daloz Parks 2007:4) describes it as, “living in the gritty reality of injustice, poverty, and violence, permeates a greater sense of self or purpose.” This contemplation of differing realities is frequently discussed during their weekly reflections.

During reflection one night, the students decided to commit to simple living for the remaining time of the program. This meant giving up conveniences like the cell phone, Ipod, and other conveniences found in everyday life in the United States. One student made a renewed commitment by saying, “No matter where I am, no matter what society it is, I’m going to live simply.” In this context, students are situated to face their cultural differences and make decisions on how they choose to live.

The students and I discussed our fear of going home, a common conversation throughout my time in El Salvador. We feared this would lead us to the reality of being confronted with the plague of consumerism once again and fall out of the simple way of life. The fear of becoming numb again. Is it a fear of becoming numb? Or, is it a fear of forgetting? We know that once we're home, we will have a culture to interpret and reinterpret, imagine and re-imagine. Jon Sobrino (2003) spoke about Don Lito, a Salvadoran campesinos who represents the majority of humanity, while we North Americans, represent the exception to humanity. He writes, "in the world we live in, people are divided into two large groups: Those who take life for granted, and those for whom life itself is, precisely, something they can't take for granted" (Vigil 1982:x). We belong to the first group and now have a better understanding of why. We learned this from acts of human exchange or what I refer to as Solicitude.

### **Solicitude**

The present analysis turns to the exploration of solicitude to build upon the construct of student learning and personal development. Five possible implications evolved from the preliminary data and will be analyzed under the following points: (1) students report they receive more gifts from serving than they felt they were giving; (2) students acquire a greater sense of awareness of self and the other; (3) students were profoundly influenced by a deep level of human connection in the presence of poverty; (4) students recognize a hope toward healing through their presence and act of solicitude; (5) many students' experience a change in their own spirituality or faith belief system.

We begin this discussion by explaining the elements of solicitude and why it was elected as a research directive. The ethical perspective found within solicitude is what Ricoeur constructs

“as aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions” (Ricoeur 1992:172). What Ricoeur means by “the good life” is a culmination of our dreams and aspirations becoming fulfilled. In solicitude we want the “good” life for the other just as much as we want it for our self. One of the critical actions tied up with this ethical aim is solicitude, a reflexive aspect characterized by self-esteem. Solicitude and self-esteem do not exist without the other, therefore, holding esteem for one self also means holding esteem or solicitude for others. This means we are bound together to act responsibly on equal footing with the other.

Its status is that of *benevolent spontaneity*, intimately related to self-esteem with the framework of the aim of the “good” life. On the basis of this benevolent spontaneity, receiving is on equal footing with the summons to responsibility, in the guise of the self’s recognition of the superiority of the authority enjoining it to act in accordance with justice (Ricoeur 1992:190).

When solicitude is brought to the suffering other, there is an awakening to speak for or become the voice of the other, so that an equalizing may occur.

In true sympathy, the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return (Ricoeur 1992:191-192).

From the suffering other, there is a form of giving that no longer comes from a place of power but from the vulnerable or weak.

This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands (Ricoeur 1992:191).

In this search for equality in a country where there is inequality as a result of political, historical, or social injustice, there is a call for solicitude and the wish for the “good life” for our self and others.

In this analysis, students' agree, that they received more than they gave in this experience. As relayed in the pilot study, students report they received more out of the experience than they felt they gave. One student realized he valued his time sitting with the patient far more than the glorified moment of assisting in surgery. Mark says:

I would rather be with the people than standing over a patient who is knocked out. We watched doctors do their jobs. And while that is fascinating...I don't feel like I contributed anything, and I'd rather be working with the people. That might be a change in me because I've watched surgeries before in the U.S. and I am very fascinated by them. But now I've seen the humanistic side and there is way more than operating. I would rather have been upstairs with the patient...to gain some understanding of these people's lives, I feel like that's a lot more valuable.

In the U.S. the pressure to assist in surgery may be the priority, whereas this experience provides a different approach to treating the patient. He continues to say that he realized all he could give was compassion and that pervaded everything. This confirms a change in him from what, "I want out of the profession" to "what I can give." Herda states:

When we think of learning as a social activity, we move away from the idea that learning is the acquisition of knowledge of, or skill in, study, instruction, or experience. It goes beyond adding to one's store of facts or a change in behavior (Herda 1999:129).

Another implication in the act of giving is a greater awareness about one's self in relation with the other. In working with people in need, students connected with their patients on a deeper level that opened them up to a new understanding. During the student-patient interactions, one student remarked she was "blown away by their love" and described her Salvadoran friends and patients as having a strong sense of community, strength, and faith in the face of adversity while having so little by American standards.



I feel like you always walk away with a greater awareness of not only the situation that other people are in and their reality, but you're more aware of your own reality too.

The Salvadoran community is described by the students as being filled with enormous gratitude and generosity with their time, love, and openness. This spirit is emblematic of what they want to emulate and brought out guilt when they complained about their own life. There was an instant love every student spoke of regardless of who you are or what you have and this astonished them. This sentiment was shared after visiting a family in the campo who lived with very little. One student said "their resources are so limited, but their hospitality, their service and their love so great." They witnessed very little envy, greed or competition in the Salvadoran culture and we shared discourse on this phenomenon together. The day-to-day interactions seemed to lead students toward deep reflection of our own culture and lives. Herda writes:

Learning is a transformative process through experience that takes place over time...The act of learning does not happen in isolation; it only happens in a relationship with another, yet remains one's own responsibility (Herda 1999:133, 135).

The next implication within solicitude is codified by the hope of many, if not all of the students, to eradicate the pain and suffering and move toward a process of healing. A sense of duty is enacted in each of them to resolve the inequalities in the public healthcare system through sustainable development. One student states, "It's about dignity and that someone cares about what you have to say." More specific to development she explains:

I wouldn't come in changing their entire world because that's just...that's a very unnatural concept...to completely turn their world upside-down...but rather recognize a problem that is affecting them and then with the knowledge we have, with the technology that we have to improve their life.

Ideas are discussed as the students learned to apply their knowledge from the classroom and respond to real needs within the community. One example common in the U.S. a student applied here was the simple point that doctors should wear gloves to reduce the risk of disease and infection.

For many, the learning came in the form of their spirituality, seeing God in the eyes of others, especially those in need. One conversant discussed how her faith had been in question, and still is, however she remarked, “my spirituality and faith in people definitely increased dramatically.” She appreciated the fact that this “burdened” her to explore her faith further. The collegiate life phase is often a time when students question or examine their beliefs as they form their own faith or conviction as an adult. This formation considers their history as they ascribe to new beliefs or strengthen current beliefs; albeit it is found on their own accord.

Many books written by the Jesuits often point to Jesus and His life of living with the poor. Fr. Jon Sobrino who was living with the six Jesuits during the time they were assassinated by the Salvadoran government said:

Our compassion is a very specific form of love: love in practice, which arises when one is confronted with the unjustly inflicted suffering of others and acts to eliminate it for no other motive than the very existence of suffering--and without being able to offer any excuse for not doing so (Smith 2002:57).

Sobrino (2003:196) described the martyrs suffering as the “most real form of death in El Salvador, it is because they lived the most real reality of El Salvador.” The experience itself is what humanized them. Sobrino explained:

In El Salvador there is not only poverty and death, but the poor also possess and transmit realities and values which are very difficult to find outside their world: hope instead of

senselessness, commitment instead of selfishness, community instead of individualism, celebration instead of simple amusement, creativity instead of culturally imposed mimicry, a sense of transcendence instead of the blunt pragmatism and positivism of other worlds (Sobrinó 2003:197)

Sobrinó calls this the Salvadoran reality. When the Jesuits were murdered he said it is where they had to be, in other words, “they became human beings.” This specifically speaks to learning from another culture far different from our own. Community instead of individualism, Sobrinó writes, is only one example of what we learn in the Salvadoran way of life.

Interacting with the poor stirs up deep emotions within the students and places them in the most central, core part of being human. Compassion for others to a degree they were previously unaware of was repeatedly expressed to me. During this act of service, a transformational learning phenomenon occurs of which many students describe as the main point of their learning—to simply understand their suffering.

Kaylen explains what she received during her exchange with the people she worked with:

I feel like you always walk away with a greater awareness of not only the situation that other people are in and their reality, but you're more aware of your own reality too, and the way they would view it too...For instance, if you don't step back and step into someone else's world, you can't see how yours looks from the outside.

Once students became familiar with the issues at hand they then began to plot out specific action to be taken to create positive change. The natural course of thought for students at this point is to critically engage in solutions, thus prompting my inquiry toward hermeneutic imagination.

## **Imagination**

One integral question embedded in this study is to determine how students will apply this in their life beyond the Casa program. The students expressed their intention to continue down the path of service as an integral part of their life. Current pedagogies within curriculum development call us to re-imagined the classroom and create action-oriented pathways in student leadership in higher education. Educational praxis, when theory and action unite, is imperative to guide a students' toward real community engagement beyond university life. Secondly, critical awareness of community needs on every social strata enhances a deeper understanding and begins to close the gap on inequalities. Furthermore, reconfiguring academic study in higher education to guide a student's search toward their own vocation is critical during this life phase. These considerations for future learning in higher education are a direct response to the previously mentioned risk evading current American culture.

This part of the analysis pursues a vigorous analysis of how community-based learning may serve to answer these imperatives. To creatively merge academic study and community engagement as commonplace on the international platform requires an imaginative process. This study selects the Casa model as a benchmark to build upon.

Richard Kearney asserts we have a modern day threat regarding our imagination. He writes (1998:3), "One of the greatest paradoxes of contemporary culture is that at a time when the image reigns supreme the very notion of a creative human imagination seems under mounting threat." As referenced in the Review of Literature Chapter, Dean Brackley explains how students are at times assaulted by different worldviews and constructs of what the good life is. These images are constantly being thrown at us via the internet, mass media, and magazines. Brackley speaks to conflicting role models that exist in our culture and the pressure to become a

successful person as defined by certain societal norms. He argues that this is a critical stage in life for students who are searching for identity and life purpose. I argue this form of education opens students up to awareness of reality and moves them toward a meaningful and significant life of contribution.

Kearney (1998:191) proceeds to say, “Imagination lies at the very heart of our existence.” At the beginning, imagination has been acknowledged as one of the most fundamental, if concealed, powers of mankind.” When we interpret an event in our life, we reflect and imagine how to proceed in new ways. Further:

Imagination is ethical to the extent that it suffers the other to be other while suffering with the other as other. Its power of reception becomes compassion. The ethical imagination allows the other to exist “without why”--not for my sake, or because it conforms to my scheme of things, but for its own sake (Kearney 1991:225).

The start of this study endures the question of how students are influenced from serving others in this way. The result in the data is utter compassion for the other. Ethical imagination ignited utter unselfishness when students are in the presence of the suffering other. They put others before themselves and in turn broaden their own understanding of themselves.

In this unfolding, students clarify their goals to imagine how they will manifest this learning experience into their chosen profession. For example, one student said, “This is what I want to do...for myself. I think that definitely this isn’t the end of it.” When I asked if this helped determine where this would take her in her vocational journey she said, “Got it. Stop right there. Stop looking. Here it is.” The question of what will I do with my life” for some is answered through their work in the hospital, in the campo, in the community. For another student, the answer was, “Yes, I think my vocation has just been reinforced really.” Many

students are driven by finding new ways hospitals could administer simple procedures as they are conducted in U.S. hospitals. In seeing firsthand the broken infrastructures that inhibits the most basic needs, student's imagined work in sustainable development so people could have access to healthcare, clean water and food.

The combination of fieldwork and classroom learning solidify a form of learning unique to student development: "having this interaction has been a world more than I could have ever received from the classroom." One student felt the program was specifically written for her because it fostered all the learning she had hoped for.

Literally, the program was written for me...I couldn't find a more perfect thing for me because it really focuses on the healthcare system as a whole and really the public healthcare aspect of healthcare.

A nursing major student conducted so much clinical work in the U.S., which was beneficial; however, she wanted to understand the broader picture. By having a cultural, political, and social perspective, she felt she would "have the power to effect change." The experience of administering healthcare in this environment enliven the students and motivate them to further define and articulate what aspect in the medical field they hope to pursue in their future careers. Indeed, the practical instruction is most necessary to acquire the knowledge medical practitioners need as doctors and nurses; however, the experience outside of the operating room or classroom seem to enrich the learning even more.

The Salvadoran influence ignites small ways to make a difference as they realize they had the power to effect change in their day-to-day choices. One example of this is to avoid U.S corporations that source their goods from factories in El Salvador and other developing countries with unfair labor practices.

Finally, Katie responded to how to proceed and meet the needs of education and community in light of this work. She replies, “It would be Casa, honestly, all over the world. I mean infiltrating that [program] in all parts of life.” The assumptions and questions posed of the impact of CBL on young adults are answered according to my participants. Imagination is instrumental in understanding how students may create new ways of contributing to their world after college. As Herda notes:

Rather we are using our knowledge and understandings to aid in shaping the future and interpreting the past with a pre-orientation that we will use this knowledge to create new possibilities for the future (Herda 1999).

We now understand new ways community-based learning enriches student learning in a multitude of ways. This research argues to expand this learning model in other developing cultures. This opportunity must be made more readily for students who are ready to challenge and broaden themselves in ways that that may not be possible in traditional learning settings. This is what Parks (2007) refers to as “high stakes” teaching for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This also supports the need to understand other cultures so we may become more critical of our own and challenge current economic, political, and social structures of our own.

Similar to our survival instinct I believe each of us has an equal instinct to serve. It is at the very core of our being. When given the chance to live our natural instinct to serve we become as Sobrino wrote, more fully human. With this knowledge we broaden ourselves to imagine new possible ways of applying ethics in our work.

Deprived of the fundamental ability to imagine otherwise, it is difficult to see how any ethics worthy of the name could operate. Imagining otherwise lies at the root of the two main principles of human values – freedom and solidarity (Kearney 1991:225).

This experience creates a space that extends beyond the private sphere to the public space for these new possibilities to be imagined and applied to complex issues facing our world. New understanding arises from experience and appropriation is possible thus charting a new direction for future recommendations and implications.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter may lead us in a new direction for immersion education. A direction guided by the stories and experiences of the students themselves along with my own interpretation. In so doing, this Chapter provides the reader with a summary of the study, implications and findings, suggestions for future research, and finally my own personal reflection. This research set out to understand the learning experiences of American students while participating in a service immersion program in El Salvador. Moreover, this Chapter enhances the aforementioned with the importance of student identity, global citizenship and vocational formation in a different cultural context.

### **Dissertation Summary**

This research can be summarized best in questioning who we are. Who we are as a nation, as a student, and as a culture. These three entities meet on a plane of shared narrative immersed into one community. Here we learn who we are in relationship to the other. Community-based learning is going to counter these issues in our world today. Moreover, this dissertation has shown that there is indeed, something for us to learn from the people of El Salvador.

The identity of the United States, the identity of Americans and our relationship with the other in El Salvador allows a new story to be written. As our identity continues to unfold so will the narrative. Each developing nation and post-industrial nation must experience the telling and re-telling of stories. The historical context in story anchors us to tradition and who we are, yet it

also allows us to evolve into who we chose to become. We know for example the undercurrent of individualism in the United States polarizes our culture away from community.

Similarly, students confront the duality and liminality of their identity in that a part of us stays the same (*Idem*) the “I am” and a part of each person has to ability to change, (*Iipse*) the “I can”. The first grounded in tradition and history of who we are and the other holds the belief that we can create and imagine change. This premise of Ricoeurian identity (*Iipse*) inaugurates the part of self that has the power to act and take responsibility.

Students in learning communities who have the opportunity to meet the face of suffering and political polarization in a service-learning setting, disclose their deep desire to act and create new stories. Their identity unfolds in a transformational way, where they chart new paths for their future. Their personal identity is challenged and questioned just as their collective identity, hence the fear of returning home. In finding who we are in a new culture we risk rejecting our own.

Educating the whole person is the higher standard upon us today in education. The recognition of our common needs and human suffering enlarges self and reveals deep compassion. Implicit in similitude, is the recognition of the Other through a common sharing of needs when we suddenly realize we all deserve an accomplished life. Solicitude or true friendship bursts through the seams of every action, service and conversation in these student exchanges. The purpose of this education is a critical understanding of and ability to respond successfully to the initiatives of the poor, institutionalized repression and violence, to alleviate world suffering and “morally prepare students to change the world when they leave the university” (Brackley 2006:5).

This does indeed, require a broaden approach to the classroom, textbook, and even career networking that is so heavily weighed in many elite universities in the United States. The educational directive here envelopes praxis, which implies a practical commitment and compassion for the Other, while positioning academia within the center of these encounters.

Alternatively, we continue to be threatened and abdicated by current standards of Ivy League trained individuals, many of whom aim toward power and profit. As we succumb to the growing, global ruling class we proceed to polarize this class from the poor classes of our nation and subsequently developing nations alike.

Once we take hold and bridge university and global communities in need, we institutionally and politically mark the transition toward higher standards in education. In the face of the suffering other, our stance may change direction to better determine who we are in relation to others and how we work institutionally toward an equalizing solution. Thus we begin to imagine and re-configure a new world-view. To make this possible it requires strategic narrative assessment for successful application and henceforth, expand and replicate, in part, organizations like Casa de La Solidaridad. In summary, it is time to re-imagine the classroom and re-imagine the teacher. Collaborate with educational systems in other countries such as China and India to globally meet the growing demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in ways yet to be imagined. This dissertation addresses “high stakes” (Daloz-Parks) teaching in an accelerated world of innovation however the imperative question will be: In what direction are we moving toward to reach our full potential? Next, chronicles the research findings from upon which the recommendations and suggestions are developed for further research where new educational initiatives can be considered.

## Findings

The findings reflect the importance of narrative identity and learning. They reflect the interpretations of the students and myself and they are as follows:

**A). Students thrive in learning communities.** Communities as learning contexts employ an openness toward others and drive the desire to contribute. Community-living inspires student learning and influences student identity in a multitude of ways. Students identify successful factors in this environment, such as those that foster reflection, openness, peer support, and social awareness and responsibility. Furthermore, and aptly noted within this community design is that students collectively agree that one successful component of the program is the collaboration with community partners such as hospitals, universities (UCA), Salvadoran families, like-minded peers, and Casa staff and faculty. Described here is the Casa community, which profoundly shapes their sense of self. In this collaborative approach, students' identity is shaped by their experience and advocated by educating the whole person in a transformative fashion.

**B). Learning is accelerated when the student assumes an open stance toward new experiences.** Placing oneself in a new and unfamiliar environment forces one to confront his or her bias and challenge their current understandings, to embrace a broader sense of who they are in a different cultural setting. Student identity is transformed during reflection, classroom instruction and community engagement when they practice a sense of openness.

**C). Students learn about their culture when understanding how Salvadorans see them.** Interactions with their patients expose them to consider a new set of values, traditions and way of life different from their own. American orientations of consumerism, individualism, and

being goal-driven are refigured and questioned to move toward appropriating new values, ideals and possible work roles. Furthermore, witnessing the affects of the Civil War on Salvadorans, as an American, and its involvement in the war, ignites a strong sense of duty to move toward responsible action.

**D). We learn about ourselves in the work we do for others.** In the context of solicitude, I hope to understand more clearly the learning implications from working in direct service to the poor. When we are in relationship with another we learn more about our self. The idea of solidarity, the being with, sitting with and listening to the patients stopped students in their tracks to say, “This is why I am here, this is what I am supposed to be doing, this is who I am at this moment.” As simple as this finding may be, it was the universal message found in every conversation. They became in touch with the direct correlation of their values and purpose within their work. In the work of service, students simply receive more than they give. These gifts include compassion, a deeper faith in people or in their religion, vocation clarification, and a strong sense of purpose. Further, it drives them to act and consider a plan of action in their future work.

**E). Self- awareness appears to increase in the presence of suffering.** While tools, technology and resources of various kinds may help those in need, students find the most important to be their presence. The compassion experienced in solicitude relays a mutual sense of dignity and respect that brings equal footing to the relationship, and by extension, allows a healing process between two cultures. Showing compassion here means understanding their suffering, and students indicate this act increases self-awareness.

**F). Community-based learning provides a context for life decisions.** The students confirm their vocation in the medical profession in a profound way in that they understand more deeply why they chose this profession and how it impacts the larger community. The students in this research have a strong desire to know how they could use what they've been given to make a difference. Given this program is designed for the healthcare profession, students are studying to be a nurse or doctor, this confirms and articulates their calling on a deeper level.

In summary, students develop a deeper sense of self and self-purpose within this learning context. Collectively, their narrative points to Casa as being a place where they can look deeply into who they are as a person in relation to others. Their learning also extends to their increased desire to resolve social, medical, political and development issues within a new context. For some, this call to serve was always there, yet this experience brought it to the forefront. Others made a transformation back to who they wanted to become as a person and in their profession. The change in self evolved over the course of the program that supports the teaching of the whole person.

### **Implications**

Community-based learning does in fact challenge and shape student identity development, civic engagement and vocational formation. It champions the examination of one's bias, compassion, political and social awareness, civic duty and vocational discernment. The implications are as follows:

**A). Expansion of international community-based learning.** As we learned from the research, the result from an international setting adds another dimension to this growth that can be applied back in the U.S. and future work abroad. This exercise creates a holistic perspective

for students and exposes them to various vocations when they apply academic study in real situations within a community. CBL research (Eyler et al. 1997:15) indicates successful results of enhanced learning in attitudes, skills, values, and understanding of social issues, which is one reason this form of pedagogy is currently well-represented and rapidly growing in universities throughout the United States. However, there is an enormous opportunity to expand CBL beyond the United States and into other countries.

Students' greatest learning experiences could not have been replicated at home or in the classroom alone. As one student explains, "having this interaction has been a world more than I could have ever received from the classroom." Students assert that this kind of learning opportunity is only made possible within an educational model like Casa. Students find this way of learning extremely beneficial toward making vocational decisions. It meets their specific needs academically and confirms a commitment to continue this work when they return home. Many students stressed they would have elected for the semester program; however, it did not work logistically within their major.

Finally, students believe this should be a part of mainstream higher education. A Casa-like model should be replicated to make more opportunities like this available for young adults. "It would be Casa, honestly, all over the world. I mean infiltrating that [program] in all parts of life." A strong advocacy of this kind of program is evident, for it engages, challenges, and allows the student to practice what they hope will one day be their career.

To successfully move in this direction the following recommendations are to be considered. First, participate in developing countries where a university or college is present and collaboratively create an integral partnership within that community. Secondly, successfully

collaborate with community partners such as corporations and non-profits organizations to carefully design a curriculum that integrates educational initiatives with community needs, thus broadening the whole person toward transformational learning. The University of Central America is an excellent example of this and the success of the Casa program's academic excellence. Furthermore, propose a unified model within the Jesuit community by expanding into other countries where a Jesuit University is present and where students from Jesuit universities from around the world can participate. The implementation would indeed align with the global mission of Jesuit education and social justice.

Alternatively, this expansion is not limited to Jesuit universities but rather can and should be considered in higher education at large. Critical to its success, the host country, as cited above, must have a university in the local community ready to collaborate to make classroom learning possible.

**B). Narrative assessment.** Assessment of any program is central to the organizational design and implementation. This research suggests exploring new forms of assessment, such as assessment as narrative. To capture the stories of these students as they progress through college and into their professional lives provides valuable information toward future programs to continually enhance and add relevance to future programs. Implementing ongoing student support to guide and nurture their future decisions of how to take this experience forward in their lives and career should be made available to students upon their return. Continued mentoring for career development and leadership roles in the community is one example for ongoing support. Continued opportunities to serve in their local communities will allow the experience of service to live on in the local community.



**C). Enhance Curriculum.** Examine curriculum development to include service and community-engagement within academic excellence. A fundamental question to ask is: What is the purpose of education? How do we measure achievement? Can academic achievement be measured in relation to one's contribution to the public good? If CBL becomes more broadly represented in mainstream education; reward and recognition criteria must be addressed and integral to the curriculum. While it is significant to study international service immersion as it relates to identity within one setting there is great potential ahead for additional research within this field.

### **Recommendations**

Given this study closely followed one group of students in one particular program, it would be interesting to look at two or three other International CBL programs and conduct a comparative analysis. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding and consider different views, cultures, and educational structures.

A second recommendation for further research is to understand how we can assist students as they re-enter their main cultural context after living and serving abroad. Many students expressed a fear of going home and feeling alienated in their own culture upon their return. It may be fruitful to understand how students make sense of this transition and understand how they move forward into their lives and careers. Further research in the area of long term assessment of students as they move forward will help to shape the success and development of immersion learning. A future study may examine the correlation between community-based learning and life choices, five to ten years out. In closing is my own personal reflection and

history of entering this experience. It speaks to how this research transformed my own world-view and future endeavors.

## Personal Reflection

This experience changed me. Like so many students, I too knew it would in some way, and yet I had no idea to what extent. First, the warm welcome from the co-directors to invite me in, a stranger, to pursue this study I felt wholeheartedly driven toward, was humbling. The success of this program starts with their authentic desire to support the students and the Salvadorans, to live out who they are and all they wish to be. The Casa community lives out the mission of education and service everyday. This community grew organically out of a passion and purpose for social justice.

I was struck by the students when I first met them in the campo. I remember feeling nervous with anticipation to finally have the conversations I'd hoped for all year. When I arrived they were excited and energized to meet me, to understand the study, and to participate. They were incredibly open, curious and filled with excitement to be there. This was infectious.

They were on an exploration to discover who they are, and wondering how this experience might change them. It was surprising to me to find so many students on a mission to serve, not just when they arrived but living out this mission prior to traveling to El Salvador. They were sincere, committed and utterly remarkable. Many American college students go to the beach or Europe with their families for their summer or spring break. Many of these students were on their third, fourth, or even fifth service immersion trip. I instantly felt hope.

I too lived in community. I lived with faculty member, Dr. Christina Pallitto, her husband and their two children Natasha and Sophia. I also lived with Christina, a Romero Scholar, who is a successful reporter now for a major newspaper in San Salvador. She is a true living testament

to the Casa program. I related to the students' experience with community living in this way. Everyone in my house had a similar mission and believed we were there for a worthy cause.

This experience brought me back to my own college experience, with my altruistic ideals and questions of purpose and belonging. Upon reflection, I realized that if I had a Casa to go to it may not have taken me 10 years to find my calling. Instead I took an internship at Habitat for Humanity in college and then immediately started working in business after I graduated. There wasn't a middle ground that could join my professional career with service; it was one or the other.

While doing very well in my career, newly promoted, I had a conversation with my Dad one night. I got the courage to say, "I want to serve the poor." He said, "WHAT!?" I said, "I want to work with the poor." He said, "Okay that's simple. You can join a convent and become a nun or get married and do charity work like you're mother." Given the historicity and generation, I understood, but at the same time, realized I didn't fit into either category. Ten years later, I'm neither a nun nor a wife doing charity work, but on a relentless journey toward a vocation of service.

This in no small measure has given me indication of where I will take my own career for many years to come. To understand the individual ethos of American culture it becomes necessary to consider learning from other cultures. For our own identity is not individual but rather found and shaped in working with the Other and this is identity in the fullest sense. My personal goal is to help students discover this fullness and their gifts to move in a positive direction. Furthermore, to understand that a successful career and service do not have to be separate. Muhammad Yunus, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize recipient exemplified this with his now

famous micro-lending model (Yunus 1999). This fullness is a capacity to see ourselves in a complete way and it is my goal to serve students on their path of discovering their own to lead and contribute. I truly believe community-based learning serves this purpose and exemplifies service in work and life-long global citizenship.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A--Letter of Participation in Research

**Mary Gallo**

Date  
Participant's Name and Title  
Company or Organization (if applicable)  
Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research. My research explores the International community-based learning in higher education. I am hopeful that the data of this research will be analyzed to better understand the phenomena of community-based learning and how it shape identity and vocational discernment among American students in higher education. I am inviting students, administrators, and faculty practitioners to participate in this research and to discuss their experiences.

In addition to agreeing to have a conversation with me, I am also seeking your permission to both record and transcribe our conversation. In doing so, our conversation will act as data for the analysis of the context I have described. Once transcribed, I will provide you a copy of our conversation for your review. You may add or delete any section of the conversation at that time. Once I receive your approval, I will use our conversation to support my analysis. Data that you contribute, your name, and your position will not be held confidential.

Your participation in this research is contingent upon your signing a consent form, a copy of which you will keep. By signing, you will be granting me permission to audio record and transcribe our conversation(s). In this way, our conversation(s) will provide data for the analysis of the subject I have described. Once transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of our conversation for your review, comments, and editing. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time. Once I have received your approval of the transcript, I will proceed with the work of analyzing our conversation. Your name and affiliation, the data you contribute, and the date of our conversation will not be held confidential.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them will be my product, and may include some of your editing. You therefore consent to forgo anonymity under these conditions. You acknowledge that you have been given complete and clear information about this research, and it is your option to make the decision at the outset about whether to participate or not, and can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Below you will find a series of proposed questions. These questions are intended as guidelines to direct our conversation(s). I would like to emphasize that I am seeking stories that reflect your personal history and experience with the topic at hand. My hope is that our conversation will provide an opportunity for us both to reach new understandings.

Please consider these questions in light of your experiences:

1. Describe how you were before you entered this experience either in a metaphor or in self description.
2. How does being a part of this program or experience change how you are, your being in the world?
3. What gifts do you receive from working with people in need?
4. How do you imagine the people you serve change or improve their life because you worked with them?
5. How do you imagine a proposed new world in light of this work?
6. In other words, how do you appropriate a new world from this experience?

Again, thank you for your willingness to meet with me. I look forward to our conversation.  
Sincerely,

Mary Gallo  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
School of Education

## Appendix B--Confirmation Letter to Participate in Research

**Mary Gallo**

Date:

Dear Participant.:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research. I am interested in hearing your experiences of technology and emerging understandings in adult learning. I am hopeful that the data of this research will be analyzed to better understand Community-based learning in higher education.

I am confirming our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ . Please let me know if you need to change our arranged place, time or date.

With your permission, I will record our conversation, transcribe the tapes into a written text, and submit the text for your review. After your review, I would like to discuss the conversation we had and review your changes (if needed). Please remember that the data for this research are not confidential.

The exchange of ideas in conversation is the format for my participatory research. It allows you to comment, add, or delete the transcript. This process will not only allow you to correct anything stated in our conversation but it also allows you the opportunity to reflect on our conversation. Only after your approval will I look at the text of the conversation that we had, gather new ideas, and possibly adjust my area under investigation and continue my research.

Once again, thank you and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Mary Gallo  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
School of Education

## Appendix C--Sample Thank You Letter

**Mary Gallo**

Date

Participant's Name and Title  
University (if applicable)  
Address

Dear Student:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on\_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research project. I am grateful for the insights you provided me.

Please take a moment to glance through the attached transcript and to add the changes or clarifying comments you feel are appropriate. I will contact you in two weeks to discuss any changes that you might have made. As a reminder, I will be using the attached transcript as data in my analysis for the voice of the online learner in helping higher educational institutions build sustainable programs.

Again, thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Mary Gallo  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
School of Education

## Appendix D--Conversation Data--Copy of Transcription

### Mark Dakkak- June 26, 2007 - University of California, Los Angeles

- M. Gallo: Hello Mark.
- Mark: Ola.
- M. Gallo: And is it ok that for the research conversation is it ok to record the conversation?
- Mark: Ok.
- M. Gallo: Let's see. Where do we begin? We went over the general kind of research methodology and we talked about movement, about hermeneutics (00:29.3) and meanings of interpretation and understanding, and then application. I mean that's one of the reasons why I chose it in terms of its clarity. It's really designed for what you're doing, this immersion program really well. Do you have any questions before we start?
- Mark: No, not really.
- M. Gallo: Ok, I'm going to just ask you some basic questions like your name?
- Mark: Mark Dakkak.
- M. Gallo: (00:58). What did your last name come from?
- Mark: It comes from (1:05).
- M. Gallo: (inaudible).
- Mark: Yeah. It's my dad's. (1:09) Mom is (inaudible) and dad is Syrian. And I don't know the specifics of anything.
- M. Gallo: Ok. That's a lot of Greek (1:19). There must be a lot.
- Mark: Yeah, there is a lot in Stockton, too.
- M. Gallo: Stockton (1:24)?
- Mark: Yeah.
- M. Gallo: Ok, now first of all you are at the one year (1:28)?
- Mark: Yeah.
- M. Gallo: And your year.

Mark: I'm going to be a sophomore this semester. I just finished my freshman year.

M. Gallo: Congratulations.

Mark: Thank you. It feels like an accomplishment to be done with it.

M. Gallo: Oh, yeah, definitely. (inaudible 1:45). And you're (premed?).

Mark: (2:00 Yeah, I chose engineering so most of my classes are with premed.) So most of my classes are with premed. But like my favorite classes in high school were physics and bio. I just wanted something that combined the two of them. (2:24 loved math). And I just figured just kind of like bio or science or engineering would be good.

M. Gallo: Excellent.

**Mark A\_020**

M. Gallo: So you're doing biology?

Mark: Chemical engineering.

M. Gallo: Chemical engineering?

Mark: Yes.

M. Gallo: And you do want to go into (00:07)?

Mark: Yes. Like I do want to get an MD at some point.

M. Gallo: Really?

Mark: Yeah, I don't think directly after undergrad, but at some point, yeah.

M. Gallo: At some point. Ok. And is this your first immersion experience?

Mark: No, I did one other, the (00:24 childhood practical) at my high school. But that was two weeks and very different. It was structured very differently. But I mean I definitely had a very rewarding experience in high school.

M. Gallo: Your freshman year?

Mark: No, that was the summer of my junior year in high school. I went to a Jesuit high school that also studied social justice.

M. Gallo: You did.

Mark: Yeah, we had to.

M. Gallo: Great. And it's really different from (00:54)?

Mark: Yes, extremely, and particularly in UCLA.

M. Gallo: (1:00)?

Mark: Yeah, very (1:00) like nobody there kept tabs on who you are. We just kept tabs on what you do.

M. Gallo: That's very communal (laugh).

Mark: (Laugh) Like the judgment ideology like teaching the whole person vs. UCLA is just pretty much like...

M. Gallo: (inaudible).

Mark: Like do something good with your life and give them credit.

M. Gallo: (Laugh) Wow. OK and what moved you to enter the program?

Mark: A big part of it was my experience at UCLA and recognizing like what it means for a program to be Jesuit run. And when I was looking at things to do over the summer, the fact that this was through Santa Clara and had like a spiritual component made me like want to join. I mean, I knew like during the year that I wanted to do something over the summer, like go abroad and just try to get some kind of rewarding experience. And the combination of like the medicine with the community living and just experiencing the culture, it definitely made it very interesting.

M. Gallo: (2:23) El Salvador?

Mark: Yes, like I've learned a lot about it. And that was actually like another reason because my Jesuit high school was named after...the different buildings were named after the martyrs here. And we learned a lot about Romero in high school.

M. Gallo: You did?

Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: They knew about him?

Mark: Yeah, and like I even went to a School of the Americas protest in Georgia which was a direct result of what has happened in El Salvador. In Georgia I kind of like stood in solidarity with people who were harmed by the conflict down there. But coming down here has given me much more insight into that whole issue.

M. Gallo: Sure, absolutely.



Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: Absolutely. (3:07) obviously in high school influenced where you are?

Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: In a great way. Well, the first question is about identity. And can describe how you were before you entered this experience either in a metaphor or in a self-description. And you can choose either one.

Mark: (I choose a self-description, a metaphor is really poetic.)

M. Gallo: (inaudible).

Mark: I feel like this last year I've become much more career oriented. And I feel like that is a result of going to UCLA because up there, especially the atmosphere that I'm around, like taking classes with primarily premed students who are very goal-oriented. Everything would become like an ends to a mean. And it structured me. But then I feel like I also kind of let myself fall into it. Like there was one instance like I knew a guy through this volunteer group. I was walking with another friend of mine. And then he asked me why do this tutoring program and walk. And I was like, "Oh, it's a really good experience." He goes, "Oh, you're a premed right?" And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I'm in engineering but I'm interested in going into med school at one point (4:38)." ("OH so you're just trying to diversify your application." And then I like was shocked like how many people think(?). And I just feel like coming here and I definitely re-focused my goals away from the profession to like what kind of relationships and what role I have. Like how I'm able to contribute instead of like what I can gain. I feel I was shifting a little bit in the wrong direction.

M. Gallo: So you feel like you're working against a culture that's more materialistic?

Mark: Completely. (And that's one of the reasons I'm going back.)

M. Gallo: Really?

Mark: Yeah, and like the majority of the other students here are from a school that like fosters community and (thought social justice), some kind of social conscience, whereas I don't have anything to go back to, really. I mean I have an extremely good group of friends around me in school. Like that I've gotten them involved and stuff. But none of them are as proactively like conscious as me. I'm intimidated by going back, with them not being able to understand, what I've dealt with here.

M. Gallo: Right, the transition, which is (6:09).

Mark: Yeah, but I mean I also feel like it's good that I chose to do this because then I can share it with others. It will be challenging.

M. Gallo: I would imagine.

Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: Absolutely. Then how does being a part of this program change how you are, or in other words, your being in the world?

Mark: This program definitely (6:43). Like I've thought a lot about what I've seen. And the more that I see and the more that I understand, like at first I got upset at why things are this way and how it would happen. But then again when I see the amount of good people around me, it just motivates me like to be one of them and not ever forget what I've experienced here. And kind of integrate these experiences into my career. And I definitely, like I said earlier, I want to shift my goals. And instead of a specific profession and like what I can get out of the profession, but also what I can contribute. And I remember we read this thing when we signed up at first. And it was (like what our careers(?) the first thing was like something we were skillful at. The second thing was how we can contribute, like what need is there out there. And third of all, what do you love doing most? And I feel like that is a very good description of where I'm at right now, and just trying to understanding how I can use what I was given to try to make things a little bit better in some way. And it's definitely opened my mind. (8:11).

M. Gallo: Right.

Mark: (8:14) something like this.

M. Gallo: Right. And do you feel like you've received gifts from working with people in need?

Mark: Yeah, completely, like the work I'm doing now (8:35). Like today is a good example. We just watch this back surgery. Pretty much the entire time we were at the hospital. And most people would be very, very satisfied, like very ecstatic about being able to see that. But then in the back of my mind like yesterday we spent the entire day with a patient and became very close. And we had an awesome time. The kids in there they were incredible. And their parents are incredible. And I didn't get to see that at all today. And like honestly, like I would rather be with the people than like standing over a patient who is knocked out.

M. Gallo: (9:23).

Mark: All we did today was watch. We watched doctors do their jobs. And while that is fascinating, I'll do that when I'm a doctor. But I didn't feel like I contributed anything, and whereas working with the people. And that also might be a change in me because I've watched surgeries before in the US. And I am very fascinated by them. But now that I've seen the other side, like the humanistic side, there is way more than just operating. I would rather have been upstairs

with the patient and like not getting the science out of it. But like the science I did in classes. And if I wanted to watch surgery I can do that at home. But just getting to try to gain some understanding of these people's lives, I feel like that's a lot more valuable.

M. Gallo: You're receiving a gift?

Mark: Completely. I'm receiving more than I'm giving. All I have to give, which ultimately I realized, is compassion, especially with all the barriers that lay between me and these children. The very first week, I barely understood anything that anyone was saying. But I ended up playing with one kid who came with (10:49 Brian ?). For probably like four or five hours, over like a period of two days. And the entire time I did not understand a single sentence this kid said. But still I was able to play games with him with my hands. And with toys, for a long time, just being able to put a smile on his face. Sure I was entertaining him. But then on the other hand it helped me to realize that I really don't have the tools to fix anything. I'm not going to have some profound impact. All I can really do is like with my hands, like playing and just really forming relationships. It's just very passionate to get back to what like that outweighs the language barrier, like the cultural barrier. And the fact that this kid is five years old and I'm 19. When I bring myself down to just simply showing compassion that pervaded everything.

M. Gallo: (11:58).

Mark: Yes, and it just showed me. And I talked to my sister about this. And my sister has an MPH. And she's getting her MD. And she is like, "Mark, even when you get a collection of degrees, you still won't have the tools to fix their problems. Even then all you can do is show compassion." It's definitely been something that I've really taken in and experienced myself because that's all I can do. And that's how we're able to find solidarity with these people. You just have to be compassionate. And they're going to let you in.

M. Gallo: (12:39).

Mark: Exactly.

M. Gallo: How do you imagine...we were talking about imagining (12:53) how do you imagine people improving other people's lives because you worked with them?

Mark: How do I...I don't really understand the question.

M. Gallo: How do you imagine the people you serve

Mark: Like what would they think that I've done to them?

- M. Gallo: What do you think you're doing for them? How do you imagine changing their lives after working with them and being here? What do you think you're doing to them by being here?
- Mark: I feel that I'm able to form like friendships that signify that people care. That was a big thing. I want these people to understand I care because this is something I'm going to commit my life to. And I feel that would have a very positive impact on them because it signifies that those in power or those who are given more do (see or feel?) us. And I do recognize it because I feel it especially in this country. Those in power feel that (14:26) job of ignoring them those who are given very little. And I feel like me being like the white gringo American who comes from a wealthy family, like me being here and really just showing compassion for them and trying to be their friend and trying to be there for them and have them understand that I want to understand. I want them to know that I care. I feel that that would definitely give them more hope, if anything, that they are a good people. And that's definitely something that I think too is that it's given me hope having such good people around me especially when you see how much harm we can make.
- M. Gallo: Right. And so do you think that their lives would be fine and ok that you go on living without ever having (15:37)?
- Mark: Completely. Like one thing that is hard, but I also learned this. Like the first time I went on an immersion trip it was like these people do not need us. They are completely happy. And in that happiness I find very much hope. And it's very refreshing to see how happy someone can be especially as Americans we expect so much. I almost feel like there's just this sense of entitlement coming from the US. Like we're entitled to things as humans, whereas when you see these people's lives, why aren't they entitled to it also? It just makes you question everything and (16:27 inaudible).
- M. Gallo: No. That's good. I want to talk about that more. You made me think of something that I wanted to say.
- Mark: (16:44 I think that was the next question.).
- M. Gallo: Let's move on to this next question and kind of last question and see where it will take us. Again, on imagination, how do you imagine a proposed new world in light of this work? In other words, how do you appropriate a new world from this experience in focus or identity here and (17:19)?
- Mark: I was actually thinking kind of about this over the weekend.
- M. Gallo: Were you?
- Mark: Yes, on Saturday we went to (17:29 Hiacki) which is where (Jolio) is from. He's one of the leaders of (17:34). And we went to his house. And when we got to his house he has the dining room, a kitchen and like a bedroom which

is like dirt floors, like very typical, I guess you could say, for the lower class in El Salvador. But then in the back he had a big room with a cement floor with couches and a stereo in there. And I was just observant. And I just watched how mostly everyone went to that back room because that's what we're used to as Americans. That's what we're comfortable with. And then their family was up in the rest of the house. And I literally saw the separation, like the comfort, and I feel that is the biggest hurdle in creating some kind of new world because we as Americans have to lower our comfort level. I don't want to say Americans because there's hardship in America as well.

M. Gallo: (inaudible).

Mark: Yeah, exactly. But there has to be a middle ground. The kids were playing with a ball outside. And my first reaction was, "Wow, that ball is like a piece of trash." And then I started looking at in front of their house they had trash all over the place. And there's this little river of white liquid--I don't even know what it was--running down. And this kid runs home and grabs his candies and brings them back and opens it, puts it in his mouth and just throws the wrapper on the ground. He goes swimming with the kids in a river where the casa students are: "Oh, my god, this river is so dirty. How could they swim in it?" But the kids are running into the river with smiles on their faces. And it really hit me to truly be able to claim solidarity I have to drop everything, all my expectations. I have to drop my comfort zone because I need to be able to be like comfortable with what they're comfortable with. And then it made me start thinking what do humans deserve. I don't necessarily think, like the streets of my upper class neighborhood in Roseville, and I don't think I need that. I don't children need to be so separated from their waste.

M. Gallo: Right.

Mark: But then again, I don't think a family should have a little river of white liquid running in front of their house and trash all over the place. But then it really made me wonder what is fair because I feel like in any international issue there has to be standards. But I especially feel that it is economics related like with IKEA(?) issue. I feel like it's bullshit that American companies can come here and pay 55 cents to the dollar. In the US there are standards around the country because humans deserve something. But what we fail to recognize is our constitution does not say Americans deserve. It says men deserve these things. The Bill of Rights applies to the men in the country, the people of the country, the people. And I find it very sad that we are able to ignore that when we're dealing with people who are not from our country.

M. Gallo: (21:26 what does that mean as far as our country?)

Mark: There is no respect. And I feel like it's just a very priorities are (?) A couple of days ago I was, "I need to go to the (21:44) to see how much money I had." And then I just thought I (21:46). I was just looking at him because El

Salvador uses the dollars too. And then I just pulled a 20 out of my wallet. I'm just sitting there. I'm like, "This is a piece of paper. It's been constructed by our culture that this is worth something. And many people's lives are ruled by gaining more of this green paper." And then I was like, "How lost are they." Like this is all fake. To that point, it's almost become a product of (22:29?) because we're told this is worth something. But it has no intrinsic value. I was like just really getting to experience a community of positive... the fact that anyone can have on another. That is real.

M. Gallo: And there's not a lot of value on money.

Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: I agree with you. I think also there's this large irony and I don't know if you sense this, but with our culture as much as we have, I don't know if we have what (23:08) in terms of they're all running around. They're (23:10) everywhere. They're together, they're communal. And I just feel like wow, it's like we're all like walking on egg shells even saying to each other that we love each other.

Mark: Yes, that's funny because on Sunday we went to William's house. William is one of the guards outside. And I met him by just randomly sitting on a curb next to him one night and talking to him for an hour and a half. He's an incredible man. And he invited me up to his house. I went with Elizabeth, one of the coordinators. And while we were there, we were with like his kids most of the day, just doing what they do, following them, and just being there with them. And then one of his friends who had lived in the United States 35 years came over to visit. And this guy is a chef who got very wealthy in the United States and then came back here. And he's now separated from his wife. I asked him if he was divorced. He said, "No, I'm just separated." He has two sons in the US, both also extremely wealthy. And most of what this guy was saying is just the material possessions that he has. And (24:20) oh you guys have friends. I can pick you up at my house. And I was expecting... I know this guy is rich and he'll have a big house. But I was expecting like the homey house. So we walk like up the street for five minutes. And there's this huge mansion, a two storey, (24:38). Our excepting way, like gorgeous view. It's like in the big hill of the town that gets to see everything. Then we walked in. He has two dogs in the house. And of course there's this huge gate around the place. So we walk into the house. It's completely unfurnished except for a pool table, an air hockey table, a fooze ball table, and ping pong table. This man has 6 or 7 homes in that area. Other ones around the country, three homes in the United States, like ridiculously wealthy. But his house is empty. There was nothing in it. And he told us he actually lives in another house with similar styling, just down the street. It's not like a vacation home because you're just walking down the street from one house to another. But I don't understand it all. We started asking, "Why do you have these houses?" And he said, "Oh, just in case anyone from my family ends up coming. I'll just build them and if I ever

get in financial trouble I'll sell them." But I highly doubt that building homes is an investment here because there's not much of a market for that type of home. And that town was poor. But like there was this huge white house in the middle of the town. I just thought it was a very good way of showing to me and probably Elizabeth too, the disparity between the rich and the poor. Maybe like the poor don't have the money. But there's such a sense of community in their homes. And they have very little, but they're so satisfied with it. And the house is full of life. And it's valuable in another way.

M. Gallo: To them.

Mark: Yeah, but then when you walked into this guy's house, it was completely unfurnished. There was nothing there. And Elizabeth put it very well. She goes, "It feels like the empty spaces (26:52) but these empty homes because that's how you find security by just being rich, like being a rich guy." But then on the other hand, he owns all those entertainment things. That way he could play with the kids in the community. And when he goes home, he'll bring back 10 pairs of Raybans. And they're each like \$100. It's funny here. Some people need them. (27:15) we all have this really nice (27:17).

M. Gallo: I think that's a really good picture of what we're talking about. And yesterday I went to (27:27) house inaudible).

Mark: No.

M. Gallo: The family there of 11 children. And three of their daughters were killed in the war. So they told me everything. The story of what it was like. (27:43). But the kids are running around, the dogs, the chickens. And we were having cake and coffee. They were telling the story and swelling up with tears. I told them it's important tell this story, and re-tell it and re-tell it. And also just to witness (28:06 they have so little that they have so much.) We heard about it before you came here and you heard this and to see it, the family values in a whole different way, a way of being.

Mark: And also interesting is we decided to go to a big cathedral in San Salvador to go to church. And I was at church. And it was after communion. I was kneeling...

M. Gallo: This last Sunday?

Mark: No, it was the first time they were here. I was kneeling and praying. And then I started thinking what do the people here pray for. There were tons of people in church. It was packed. And they pray for their family, their loved ones, because it's all that they have.

M. Gallo: Right, it's true.

Mark: I was like, “You know what God, answer their prayers before you get to mine because they value what they have so much more than we do.” This trip has shown me like what priorities are, to take back.

M. Gallo: I hope we don’t forget about it.

Mark: Yeah.

M. Gallo: I definitely hear that.

Mark: I don’t want to leave them because I’m like growing.

M. Gallo: Well, last night I went to the cathedral, Salvador took me. And I went (29:32). And he went with me. And we went together. And I consider him a friend now. But how many taxi cab drivers would go into the church with you?

Mark: Exactly.

M. Gallo: But they don’t even think twice. They just do it.

Mark: (29:56 to see their faith).

M. Gallo: After everything they’ve been through.

Mark: Exactly.

M. Gallo: And they have such faith.

Mark: It’s definitely moving. And we talked about this last night actually. Just being here and understanding everything, it’s got to the point now where if I don’t believe that there is something greater than me, but there is something that brings us all together, then this world is just hopeless. We had to read one of Romero’s homilies before we came here. And I loved it! It talks about how we’re just planting seeds. And even if we never see the end product, there’s a sense of liberation in that. And it allows us to do our best. And it allows us to do what we do very well. But then at the end of the day we need to let God come in and do the rest. And it’s been very moving. I’ve definitely felt hopeless at times here. At first, I was very angry. How did this happen? How are humans so evil? But it is liberating to think I don’t have to change everything. Jesus came and died. He didn’t fix everything. There’s still stuff going on. I’m not expected to do that.

M. Gallo: There’s joy in suffering.

Mark: Exactly.

M. Gallo: joy isn’t pleasure, joy is something different. We have to find that joy in the suffering (31:48).



Mark: Well, it's definitely made me more faithful because I know that it is what gives us hope because if you don't believe in anything greater than us then humans just really are evil (32:06).

M. Gallo: (inaudible).

Mark: And I was talking about it. When I go back I need to keep my faith. I can't let things become hopeless.

M. Gallo: You give me hope.

Mark: Thank you. These last couple of weeks for sure.

M. Gallo: It sure has. It has been definitely a meaningful experience and exchange. And I want to thank you for that. And it's been important hearing your story and your experience. And I believe in it so much (32:49) in the world with you and everyone out here (32:55). I want to thank you for being open and sharing this.

Mark: No problem. It's definitely (33:02).

M. Gallo: I can tell.

Mark: It does (33:05) conveyed inaudible).

M. Gallo: Thank you, Mark.

Mark: No problem.

## Appendix E–Course Syllabus

# Cultural Perspectives in Public Health

## Summer Session 2007

### Course syllabus

<b>Time:</b>	Fridays, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
<b>Location:</b>	UCA campus, ICAS building
<b>Office hours:</b>	T.B.A.
<b>Professor:</b>	Christina Pallitto, Ph.D. <a href="mailto:christina.pallitto@gmail.com">christina.pallitto@gmail.com</a>
<b>Due date for final project:</b>	Wednesday, July 18, 2007

### **Description of course**

This course is designed to introduce social science frameworks and methodologies for understanding public health problems in developing countries, drawing on concepts from the fields of medical anthropology and public health. Qualitative and quantitative research methods will be introduced as tools for understanding the influences of cultural belief systems and socio-economic factors on health and illness and as a means for developing culturally appropriate interventions to address health problems. The methods and concepts will be studied by focusing on a different health topic in each class and by presenting case study examples.

The class will meet for three hours each week for four weeks, and it will include a combination of lecture, discussion, and group exercises. In addition to the class sessions, students are expected to complete one individual assignment in which they will apply concepts developed in the class to a health problem of their choice and write a proposal as if they are applying for funding from a donor.

Performance will be evaluated through class attendance (15%), participation in class exercises (20%), and an individual assignment (65%).

### **Objectives of course**

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- ❖ Explain the importance of understanding cultural context and cultural belief systems in the creation of population-level health interventions
- ❖ Identify several qualitative and quantitative research methods for exploring health and illness
- ❖ Discuss strategies for understanding and addressing public health problems

### **Class sessions**

**Class #1: Introduction to cultural perspectives of health and illness**

*June 22, 2007*

The first class will introduce the field of public health, differentiating its approach, methods, and purpose from that of clinical medicine. The lecture will discuss how both qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied in public health to understand health problems and the populations affected by them and to develop culturally appropriate interventions for addressing public health problems. Some background information about the El Salvador health system will be provided as well.

❖ **Class format**

9:00 to 9:30 a.m.	Introduction of course, professor, students
9:30 to 11:00 a.m.	Lecture
11:00 to 11:15 a.m.	Break
11:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Group activity

❖ **Required readings (prior to class)**

1. Introduction, *Anthropology in Public Health*, pages xv - xxii
2. Chapter 1 in *Anthropology in Public Health*, pages 3-24,  
Hahn RA, "Anthropology and the enhancement of public health practice"

**Class #2: Dietary behaviors, nutrition, and traditional healing**  
*June 29, 2007*

The effect of dietary patterns on health and illness will be discussed, as well as ways public health programs can improve nutritional practices. Several case studies will be presented, including a childhood nutrition program in Indonesia, a diarrheal disease treatment program in rural Mexico, and a diabetes prevention program among indigenous Canadians. In small groups, students will also discuss case studies in which public health programs link traditional healing methods with modern medicine.

❖ **Class format**

9:00 to 10:30 a.m.	Lecture
10:30 to 10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Group work and group presentations of readings

❖ **Required readings:**

1. Selected chapter from: *Anthropology in Public Health*  
(Each student will choose one chapter on sign-up sheet during class 1)
2. Chapter 9 from: *Anthropology in Public Health*  
Griffiths M and Favin M. "Cultural tailoring in Indonesia's national nutrition improvement program"
3. Gittelsohn J, Harris SB, Whitehead S et al. 1995. Developing diabetes interventions in an Ojibwa-Cree community in Northern Ontario: linking qualitative and quantitative data. *Chronic Diseases in Canada*. 16(4):157-164.

**Class # 3: Cross-cultural perspectives of gender inequality and violence against women**  
*July 6, 2007*

This class will introduce the concept of gender inequality as it manifests itself at the societal, community, and interpersonal levels, as well as methods for measuring its prevalence and its relationship to violence against women. Cross-cultural examples of violence against women will be discussed, and frameworks and research methods for understanding and quantifying gender inequality will be presented.

❖ **Class format**

9:00 to 11:00 a.m.	Lecture
11:00 to 11:15 a.m.	Break
11:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Group exercise

❖ **Required readings:**

1. Ellsberg M, Pena R, Herrera A, Liljestrand J, Winkvist A. 2000. Candies in hell: women's experience of domestic violence in Nicaragua. *Social Science and Medicine* 51(11):1595-1610.
2. Newell KS et al. 2001. *Discrimination against the Girl Child: Female infanticide, female genital cutting and honor killing*. Youth Advocate Program International: Washington, DC.

**Class #4: HIV/AIDS and reproductive health**

*July 11, 2007*

This class will focus on some of the ways that cultures define norms around sexual and reproductive health and how the culturally defined norms affect health-seeking behavior and health practices related to HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health issues.

❖ **Class format**

9:00 to 10:45 a.m.	Lecture
10:45 to 11:00 a.m.	Break
11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Group exercise

❖ **Required readings:**

1. Chapter 4 in: *Anthropology in Public Health*  
Green EC, "Engaging indigenous African healers in the prevention of AIDS and STDs," pages 63-83.
2. Chapter 15 in *Anthropology in Public Health*  
Justice J, "Neglect of cultural knowledge in health planning: Nepal's assistant nurse-midwife program," pages 327-344.

## **Appendix F–Pilot Study**

### **Pilot Study**

#### **Introduction**

A pilot study was conducted on March 3, 2007 to broaden an understanding of the relevant issues and themes found in immersion programs in higher education today. The secondary purpose of the pilot study was to guide and further refine the appropriate research questions and categories for the research study. The pilot program was conducted in the University of San Francisco's (USF) University Ministry Department in looking at the Arrupe Immersion Program. A description of the pilot study includes a background of the participant, the program itself, data analysis and potential implications.

#### **Conversation Partner**

My research conversation partner for the pilot study was Fr. John Savard S.J., who was the previous Director of University Ministry at University of San Francisco. For the last 20 years, Fr. John Savard has worked in University Ministry in the Jesuit community throughout the United States. While working in this capacity he has led student immersion trips to developing countries. His most recent work was at the Arrupe Program in Belize, where the mission is to assist students and teachers in underserved areas. The program seeks to help these schools gain access to computers, technology resources and training to broaden the educational opportunities of their students.

Students and professors from the School of Education at USF travel to Belize in the Spring, Summer, and Fall to serve in an educational capacity and experience another culture different from their own.

## **Theory**

The theory adopted for this pilot study is the theory discussed above in the conceptual framework section. Critical hermeneutic participatory protocol (Herda 1999) was followed with the theoretical work of Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney used as the basis for the data and analysis of text.

## **Data and Analysis of Text**

The conversation between the researcher and Fr. John Savard lasted an hour in length and resulted in a meaningful conversation of his experiences leading immersion trips to Belize. The first part of the conversation was related to Fr. John's personal experience and the second half was his interpretation of the students' experience in the Belize immersion trip.

I asked Fr. John to describe himself in a metaphor before he entered this experience in Belize and his response was "like a tourist." He talked about previous trips to poor countries. On these trips, he and his group would meet with public officials, labor unions, and church leaders, but he did not really experience the people, the place or the community. Fr. John spoke about these trips being educational but not consistent with the mission, experience, or goals of a true immersion.

The students Fr. John brought undergraduate or graduate students to Belize from all disciplinary backgrounds but mostly from the school of education. Student background or experience was not the most important factor to be accepted; instead, one quality required of students during the application process was simply the ability to be open and non-judgmental.

He then began to tell a story about a woman who initially came to the immersion program with the prejudice that people are poor because they are lazy. Yet in the reflection group, she admitted that she had never seen people work so hard in her life. This experience was as difficult for her to square with her prejudice as it was for her to share with the group. Nevertheless, she did. In our conversation, Fr. John claimed that what made this participant different was that she was able to name her prejudices. The dynamic of marking prejudice against the experiences of immersion are explored more in the study, especially the way participants come to reshape their sense of identity—both about themselves and others. The pilot study emulated key understandings into the students entering the Casa summer program. It queried how such personal hermeneutics change as participants develop relationships with the El Salvadoran people.

In the creation and analysis of text, Herda describes learning as an ontologically directed activity as opposed to an epistemological foundation. This happens while we are in conversation with the other and not in isolation; therefore, the process of understanding concurrently evolves together through the event of conversation. Herda describes this as a “creative act that takes place in the relationship between an event and understanding” (1999:137). The shared learning that evolved between Fr. John and myself is more productively understood as an *event* rather than as merely an acquisition of knowledge. This event changed us both. When I spoke about the idea of humility and openness in this learning process, Fr. John responded:

It allows [participants] to put things out there and to work and they know they're there just to grow. I think they first go there because they think that they're going to help change a community by teaching and bringing something to them. And what they finally realize it's what's really changed is themselves.

For Fr. John, a transformation occurred in the students' minds. This transformation transpired in the space between the original purpose of the trip and what actually happened during its events. Interestingly, Fr. John also observed this transformation to offer additional challenges for the students, in that they returned home as different people. This change required participants to act and conduct themselves in the world in a new way.

Another significant realization that we both encountered in our conversation was this idea of being with rather than doing. Doing something or accomplishing something is common practice in the U.S., yet in his reflection he expressed:

What I'm really realizing the important thing is, is the just being there, the solidarity, the walking with and just being able to come and be with this community, to share my gifts with them and let them know that they've shared their gifts with me.

This sharing entails a new narrative identity for the participants in the study, as well as the community in which they work. Here, Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity serves to expand our understanding of how our culture and history are significant in the mutual act of giving. It assists us in understanding the inevitable modification of cultural assumptions that are carried into and out of the immersion experience.

Ricoeur believes that humans understand themselves through an interpretation of their cultural and linguistic world. For Fr. John, the students found themselves in a culture in Belize that is based in community rather than individualism. This forced them to reinterpret and reconfigure their world in a new way. One that is different from their own, one that is community-based rather than individual-based.



Fr. John spoke of the importance of just being there and accepting the gifts students bring to the community and, in turn, those that are brought to the students. He writes, “Rather than trying to think that I’m going to change this culture or transform it, it’s just the being there is what I’m supposed to be doing.” Fr. John also speaks about how students need to realize this and they also need to realize that sometimes they have “received more than they have been able to give.” Additional analysis from the text is that it is important to give and receive in this culture, whether it is in a form of dance or song but that an exchange occurred. This may speak to an expanding understanding of which they encountered and what Ricoeur calls solicitude or true friendship. The data and text analysis brought out a creative act of reflection that transpired from the conversation.

From this interpretative experience, new meaning and understanding was made possible and should be considered in the implications of this study. These implications hope to enlighten further potential research in this area.

### **Implications**

The implications of the pilot study centered on three themes: (1) students’ disposition prior to entering the experience, (2) community and transformative learning, and (3) culture and transition. The Arrupe model illuminated the researcher’s understanding of students’ learning experience in an International community-based learning program in higher education. While it is not a semester-long credited program, it has offered the researcher a more grounded and expanded understanding of key implications and directions for further research.

The first implication that evolved from the pilot study was the idea of the students’ ability to be open to a new experience. The tendency to open oneself to a new experience seems critical

in the student's overall learning experience and of the learning experience of the entire student group. The process of being immersed into a new culture requires an open mind and an open heart; it cannot succumb to prejudice, despite the often overwhelming vertigo that results from so many unexpected experiences. Experiential sharing in the group can help expedite the transformation of these previously held views. Group reflections are therefore an important part of the daily learning experience and serve as a safe place for students to share their experiences and interactions with the community. Being open to share even one's prejudices allows for a more fluid sense of personal growth and understanding.

The second implication revealed in the research conversation with Fr. John was the notion of the learning transformation. In our culture we emphasize the importance of doing, of accomplishing a task. This phenomenon may also be found in the traditional education setting in which we write a paper on a theory or take an exam to measure one's aptitude of a particular subject. Fr. John claimed that when students go to Belize with the intention of teaching a class or instructing students about information technology, they often strive to fulfill a task they have named long before they arrive. What students sometimes find is that they did not achieve what they originally set out to accomplish. However, other critical learnings occurred outside this measurement of achievement. The learning process is marked by experience-based learning models that inspire transformational outcomes that are yet to be defined, moves the process away from linear modes of being to more non-linear modes that ask us to consider personal changes well beyond the curriculum. Fr. John said:

I remember one young woman...she really felt like a failure...she wasn't able to teach as much as she wanted and they didn't learn as much as she had hoped. But the students loved her... and almost not being able to walk because all these kids were just hanging on to her. She thought she

needed to bring them spelling and math but what they needed was just someone to hang on to.

As Fr. John explained, students of Belize appreciate the time spent with them, the listening, or perhaps singing or sharing a cultural tradition. Fr. John explained that the transformation can occur when the participants are simply being with the other and sharing their gifts. Many tourists pass through these communities and when someone stays for awhile, it is a powerful statement as opposed to passing through. Given that this could constitute a learning experience in itself, the immersion central to the Casa program suggests participant learning will extend well beyond more traditional models of education.

The third implication found in this study is one of culture and transition. Many community-based learning experiences are located in marginalized communities that allow students to become engaged with people who are less privileged than themselves. Many American students from privileged backgrounds have not come into direct contact with the poor and those who suffer from social inequalities. This sense of newness of this work can have a profound emotional affect on a student's identity and perception of life. This is where group reflections may play a powerful part in the learning process where students share their feelings and learn ways of creating new understandings of their experiences with other cultures and communities who live very different lives from their own.

In summary, insights from the pilot study provided new meaning to guide a more developed and educated approach to studying Casa de la Solidaridad. The conversation opened new meaning in community-based learning for both the participant and the researcher. This experience provided an even more fruitful research query by way of new understanding and an

expanded view of students' immersion in a developing country. The next section of this study details the language element of the research.

### **Pilot Study Transcription: Fr. John Savard**

1. Describe how you were before you entered this experience either in a metaphor or in self description. (This could be when you first started your community development work/serving the poor- or the Belize experience specifically.)

I think I was more like a **tourist**, you know, traveling visiting different communities. I remember um my early experiences of emersions one of my first was going to quenabaca and visiting poor communities there. And we really we went to visit different community leaders um labors union, church leaders and things like that it was actually an educational experience got to hear what the experience of the poor was like but really didn't get to experience that and really did not get to move into that situation very deeply and so um.

**Mary:** were you with students? Undergrad?

**John:** I was with students I was with a group and I'll think of the name later. Augsburg University, they have these into emersion programs and so then again it was that educational thing but wasn't really an emersion. It was labeled that but we really did not get to immerse ourselves into and that's were I was before.

**Mary:** that's where you were before and so can you describe what it's like now with Belize and how you are involved on this program?

**John:** I take students to um Belize 2 or 3 x a year um also our information and technology staff we've been going to a location south called dengrigo Belize town of 6 -10 thousand there's about 850 students in this grammar school and going back time and time again I've been able to get to know this community. And some of our students have gone down 2 to 3 times and they are able to get a little deeper into the community as well.

**Mary:** And what is their background are they in theology, graduate undergraduate?

**John:** some of them are attached tot his program because they are teaching students they are learning to be teachers so they are in what we call the dual degree program, as undergraduates. Um some are business some are nursing, science, art they come from all over the university.

They have an applicant process and it's really just doesn't matter what they can do if they feel they can hold their own in the classroom, a lot of them have worked in Camps before and do some tutoring and so they have they've got the skills to do that. We're also looking at people who are open, and just open to new ideas people who are not so judgmental. You know that they are able to really not people who are able to examine the judgments that they do have. And the last time we went down, a woman, sophomore, who grew up in southern California. We have reflection every couple of nights and she said you know I have to tell ya I come down here with this thing

In me that says people are poor because they're lazy. And then I'm here watching and seeing this community here and I've never seen people work so hard and so its very challenging and I know that's the wrong thing and its hard for me to say that it's hard for her to say this in the community but in this group of students but I'm glad that she did.

**Mary:** yes, exactly.

**John:** and so she helped all of us re-examine and to look at that part in ourselves that has that b/c that's an American myth, that if you work hard you make it.

**Mary:** exactly.

**John:** and if you don't you don't make it and she said that you know i think there are structural issues that keep people poor. And I'd like to examine those a bit more. So that's what does happen when people are able to really get to know people. And talk to them and meet them a couple of different times.

**Mary:** yeah they talk about how we how all prejudice in a real way not in a negative sense of the word and that are prejudices are our openness to the world.

**John:** right.

**Mary:** and that's such a beautiful example of how that brought everyone by admitting what's inside of us what is difficult then you reach a new understanding.

**John:** right and again what made her different then maybe another participant they we wouldn't want to take is that she was aware of her prejudice and could name it. And is free to do that in a group and I think that's a level that creating a tight community allow that to happen, we all laugh at each other, we can say stupid things.

**Mary:** I bet that is very important and very profound experience.

**John:** yeah

**Mary:** to be so open and have humility

**John:** it allows them to put things out there and to work and they know they're there just to grow. I think they first go there because they think that they're going to help change a

community by teaching and bringing something to them. And what they finally realize it's what's really changed is themselves.  
And so that is the challenge of the emersion.

**Mary:** hmm would you say that is a positive challenge?

**John:** I think it is a positive challenge and it's um because then they come back here changed and they can be different people. Through the world, but they are the ones that are changed

**Mary:** that is amazing I think and so along those lines with this question how does being a part of this program or experience change how you are or your being in the world I would ask from your perspective as well as the students. I think you started to talk about that a little bit already

**John:** with me its not so much trying to do something or accomplish something even though I think I do it's taken me you know I have a full time job here, and they've asked that I kind of help with computers and so I'm working with that. But it's were bringing computers down and we're developing a computer lab at sacred heart school and will be delivered and we'll be developing a small computer lab in sanbite where I'll go in March.  
But what I'm really realizing the important thing is the uh is just being there, the solidarity, the walking with and just being able to come in a be with this community um to share my gifts with them and let them know that they've shared their gifts with me.

Um this community that I'm going to um I remember going there in 1999 with a group of students from another university and before we left the women of the town gathered us together and performed for us some of the native dances that would have been nirikua dances um there's a couple different communities there – there is a Creole community, and then there's this African community. Called gerifina. And so this area that we go to in gerifina and there are certain dances and traditions that come from Africa and then during their journeys as a tribe and that was their gifts to us, to let us perform for you who we are. So it's the more we can just be there and accepting gifts of ourselves a lot and the students and that is my gift and that is how I've changed. Uh rather than trying to think that I'm going to change this culture or transform it it's just the being there is what I'm supposed to be doing.  
The um the students have to realize that also. That they realized that they have received more than they have been able to give. Um

**Mary:** is that hard for them?>

**John:** I think so, I think that um they can be very critical of themselves, we're in a we come from a culture that is very uh..doing oriented, it's about accomplishment.

**Mary:** huhm, yeah.

**John:** and you know even though we're in a classroom I remember one young woman, probably a sophomore, she came to the end of this, the experience of two weeks of teaching, and she really felt like a failure. And she really wasn't able to accomplish much in class, and she wasn't able to teach as much as she wanted and they didn't learn as much as she had hoped. But the students

loved her and I just have a video of her of just her walking to class and almost not being able to walk because all these kids are just hanging on to her.

**Mary:** REALLY

**John:** and um

**Mary:** You mean you have a video of that/

**John:** I do somewhere in my

**Mary:** She's a student?

**John:** She's a student and just um that's what they needed. She thought she needed to bring them spelling and math but what they needed was just someone to hang on to.

And to feel love in a very different way. Their family's are large, I'm not sure how much real affection there is shown and she was able to show this community affection. Of course you know she leaves and that affection leaves with her but at least the students know that affection is a possibility. And so what I try to help this community see is that whatever their expectations were may not be what the experience was about. And help them realize that it was about something else. It's about being there perhaps out of a whole class, maybe they made an impact on one student but how huge is that?

**Mary:** right, now when you have your reflections it is the group that goes down only not with the students or the members of the community there.

**John:** Yeah it's our USF students and staff.

**Mary:** um I want to go back to the solidarity, I added that in. but my next question is how do you imagine the people you serve change or improve their lives because you've worked with them and I think you have talked about it, a great example in terms of affection is there any more you want to add?

**John:** I think this community changes um I think they feel a little more connected to the world um with an isolated , these towns are very isolated, people come to this town I'll talk about Dangika, and sanbite, people come there to just move through it they are just passing through it.

**Mary:** The people who live there?

**John:** The tourist, the guest. In other words there is a community there that everybody comes through to pass through they stay overnight one night in order to get a boat to the islands and to the keys to go snorkeling and scuba diving and sailing. And we've come there and we stay, so we stay for two weeks, we've come back a lot of different times. We gotta again we've been building up a computer lab and we bring students down. And teaching professionals who can help them learn what this is about and so and put them online so they have internet capability. So they have one of the things that have changed is that they're now this little school is now online um and I think it feels like they have been connected up to the larger world.

**Mary:** OK um and you already spoke to and you talked about solidarity and one of the things I jotted down when I was waiting out front was we talked about this last night in class jerboline author said Praxis is an act that dwells in solidarity” and hear we hear about this word praxis and we hear throughout the Jesuit communities about solidarity and casa talks about solidarity. And I’m trying to learn more about solidarity and what it means to you?

**John:** I think it means being with a community for an extended period of time and to help advocate for them in ways that they may be able to advocate for themselves. Especially the us Jesuits, the Jesuit communities from around the world in solidarity with the people in el Salvador and the Jesuit community there. And has made a great difference because it has really help protect that Jesuit community who doesn’t want an eye looking at el Salvador and they can continue to do their work even though in times it can be pretty repressive.

**Mary:** hmm so you mean the outside Jesuit larger community has their eyes on them protecting them and their work.

**John:** right. Precisely because the Jesuit community was murdered there in 89

**Mary:** right

**John:** uhm and now there is just a greater sense of solidarity um Jesuits were murdered and other Jesuits just flew down there to take their place and so that the work continues.

Um and working with this community and part of solidarity is um you know creating connections and really helping the community with resources that they feel that they need. And again it is computers right now. Jesuit who was in the middle east for awhile was in Baghdad maybe 25 years ago and he says you know we want to build a school, or really they need water and so we’ll help them build water pipe and the people there wanted a Mosque. And so if you really, solidarity is about being present enough to listen and to also if there is a project to work on to do it together. It’s not just that we do this for you or giving this to you which is a very top down thing but we’re kinda of working on this together.

**Mary:** And you’re imposing what you think they need.

**John:** Right

**Mary:** You’re really just helping them within whatever it is they need in their community

**John:** right

**Mary:** And do you think, well some of the journal reflections I’ve read in Casa really its hard to transition back into our culture and you learn from this group of people who have such love and smiles on their face and so compassionate and forgiving and so you see these qualities that exist that are perhaps more heightened or you are really aware of them?

**John:** right?



**Mary:** For the people in Belize do you see a different quality in their culture that you see That they exude out.

**John:** yeah, the um Belize hasn't gone through a civil war so it is not the situation that El Salvador they haven't gone through that oppression. There is c so there is a sense of pride in culture and what our students walk way with what I always walk away with is being attentive of what we don't need. All the stuff that we can have in our lives..that can really keep us from being attentive to who we need to be to one another. They don't have all that, but now everyone has a TV now which kind of urkhs me because now the TV is always on but they don't have a lot of games they pick up what is ever on the ground and start playing with it or they play soccer or things like that. But it was funny the uh one evening I came home about 8 o'clock and all the usf students were kind of huddled together in the back of the building that we're staying in. And the lights were out and there was just a little lamp light over there and I say oh my gosh what is happened, and I got closer and what it was all the students sitting around lying on mattresses was one of the students just reading Harry potter and it just we don't see that in our culture and its just and they were mesmerized because in our house we don't have a TV. I asked them not to bring ipods if we're going to listen to music we have a music box and we all listen to it. And so when we get rid of all that stuff, they don't have cell phones, so they can't just be calling one another. They have to be attentive to each other. And I think that's one of the things that happens there and that's what Belize has they've got that tremendous a sense of community where they're there for one another. So they have to be and I think our students learn that kind of solidarity that they have to be there for one another. Because they have to be.

**Mary:** speaking of the students and there time over there, one of the things I am trying to learn is this sense of calling or calling to serve and how b/c I know for myself I had this conflict.....add this in.....

**John:** a student named Chris after he came back he decide to decided to work with the Jesuit volunteer corp in jan. so do another year of service. And I've experienced that a lot even if they do that and go into in law school it will be different immigrant law I think everybody is changed by it some go into teaching and they realized what an impact teaching can have and they take it for granted in the us back in Belize 2 or 3 % gets a college education so those are the kind of things that happen with students with life changing experiences even if its for 10 days I think what happens is if someone is thinking about a volunteer experience teach America or peace corp they will look at if I do a volunteer work is there a community aspect is there a spiritual aspect. Because that's what really comes true out of we can talk about the deepest parts of ourselves about our experience out of university ministry and we can do that safely um these are conversation that don't happen in college um and they can happen on something like this I think that they become reengage with that and also that they see volunteer work as not real work or not volunteer but that volunteer work is real work. But they will try to bring that to the community. And a lot of people who do the volunteer corp take a year off life but people who do cbl immersion it is a part of life it is part of their journey so I feel that um a lot I think an experience like

Two or three percent of that the population

