

## Good Intentions Pave the Way to Hierarchy: A Retrospective Autoethnographic Approach

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*I explore certain complexities of partnering university students with members of the Mexican and Honduran immigrant community<sup>1</sup> through service-learning. I reveal how my "good intentions" inadvertently created social hierarchy and deficit notions of the community, establishing the students as "haves" and community members as "have-nots." Critically examining my practices, I reflect on the service-learning instructor's role in fostering reciprocal relationships based on non-hierarchical constructs when bringing seemingly disparate groups together in service-learning partnerships.*

In the body of literature that situates service-learning within social justice or critical pedagogy, researchers and practitioners have written about the role service-learning plays in students' journeys from privileged, dominant culture backgrounds to an understanding of the lives people lead in non-dominant communities (Arries, 1999; Camacho, 2004; Dunlap, Scroggin, Green, & Davi, 2007; Kiely, 2004, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Pompa, 2002; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). Researchers have also tackled the thorny topic of service-learning's role in reinforcing students' hierarchical perceptions and attitudes toward non-dominant partner communities (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Eby, 1998; Morton, 1995; Pompa). Furthermore, with critical service-learning students examine social constructs that create inequalities while encouraging them to accept responsibility for implementing social justice-oriented change (Mitchell, 2008). However, I suggest that similar critical examination of faculty's own practices as service-learning practitioners is equally important, so as to constantly monitor our own attitudes and behaviors, which students and community participants may regard as models for their own interactions.

Therefore, in this paper I document my own transformative journey, exploring my role as the instructor of an academic course for Spanish and education students, Crossing the Border through Service-Learning (CTB). As the person who designed and implemented the course that brought students in contact with a hitherto unfamiliar population, I realized I was unconsciously creating social hierarchy and patronization through a workday each semester when university students delivered material goods to partner families while meeting each other for the first time. My situation was particularly perilous since I had

gained insider-outsider status in the immigrant community by collaborating and serving in various capacities for more than 30 years, always secure in the assumption I had "figured out" my role in the Spanish-speaking community, with the accompanying supposition that my actions were good for all concerned, students and families alike.

### Background

I initially designed CTB to partner university students with immigrant women for whom I had been serving as interpreter at prenatal and family planning clinics at the Health Department for two and a half years. I often spent hours with the women in clinic waiting rooms, and we had become friends. Consequently, they began to request my aid as a cultural mediator and interpreter in other venues, often asking if I knew where they could obtain clothing and furniture for themselves and for other family members immigrating to join them. I continually solicited items from my university colleagues, church members, and various friends and acquaintances to honor their requests for assistance.

Because time did not permit me to keep up with their requests for assistance, I decided to involve my Spanish students in the endeavor, responding to their interest in meeting and interacting with the families about whom I spoke in class. CTB resulted, offering a setting for reciprocal opportunities for the women to learn to speak English and navigate in a new culture, and for students to practice spoken Spanish and experience Mexican and Honduran cultures.

In addition to their academic readings, class discussions, and journaling about Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States, the students spent 50 hours per semester in the home of partner fami-

lies. During their time with the families, the students concentrated on helping the women develop the ability to navigate in a new culture. They practiced English with the family, tutored school-age children, made phone calls to obtain information or appointments, provided transportation, interpreted when sufficiently proficient, and generally responded to requests made by families. In turn, the families enjoyed helping students practice Spanish and learn their customs, often over a meal or while watching television. This simplistic view of reciprocity initially guided the course as I followed a path inspired by my own belief in the values of community service and cross-cultural relationships (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003a, 2007).

Early in the morning on the second Saturday of each semester, the students arrived at my garage to sort mounds of donated clothing and furniture to deliver to their partner families. Each student received the names, ages, and sizes of partner family members so they could choose items they deemed appropriate and suitable. Once everything was bagged and ready to go, we loaded cars, vans, and trucks for our cross-city trek to the families' homes. Because all the readings and class discussions up to this point focused on social justice issues in service-learning, I felt the students were well prepared for this experience.

However, regardless of the thoroughness of the foundational readings and my preparation of the students, Othering still seemed to occur as a result of the workday (Fine, 1998). In fall 2002, the semester that serves as the context for this paper, in the class following the workday, student criticism raised questions regarding the appropriateness of "cramming a bunch of university students" into people's private spaces. From then on, my growing unease about the event caused me to critically examine the workday in terms of the social hierarchy I suspected I was unintentionally creating.

#### Literature Informing the Course

In CTB, service-learning defines a method/pedagogy that joins three concepts: community action and academic knowledge, with deep reflection on the intersection of the two (Eyler, Giles, & Schmeide, 1996). In planning the course, Dewey's work (1929/1997) echoed my belief in experiential learning as an integral component of education. Similarly, Freire's (1970) concept of emancipatory education resonated with my desire to co-create educational opportunities with/for Mexican and Honduran community women while facilitating an understanding of the power of praxis for students. Exploring funds of knowledge residing in the homes of Spanish-speaking families (González,

Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, González et al., 1995; Greenberg & Moll, 1990) also informed the students so as to challenge deficit notions regarding non-dominant groups.

Noddings' (1999) work on caring and competence underlined a class discussion on the virtues of caring. Eby's (1998) and Morton's (1999) cautions about service-learning and Nava's (1998) heartfelt portrayal of the pain of receiving charity also contributed to the foundational understanding of service-learning as opposed to volunteerism or community service. In all, I mindfully chose readings for the early weeks to facilitate an understanding of service-learning in the community.

#### Guiding Perspectives

Feminist poststructuralism refers to "renewed interest in writing a critical history that emphasizes diacronic (changing over time) analyses; on mutation, transformation, and discontinuity of structures" (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 24), providing "critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 6). Implicit in any structure are power issues that reach "into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). To reflect on these power issues, I use self-reflexivity, basing my authority on my own engagement with the class and the community, a view consistent with Lather's (1991) situating of self as "a first-world woman—white, middle-class, North American, heterosexual—my self-described positionality" (p. xix). Nonetheless, I realize that my position of power and privilege in society by no means provides answers (Kirsch, 1999) in regard to working with families from traditionally non-dominant communities, particularly as I weave the families into partnerships with university students.

Critical theory also provides a lens for examining the asymmetrical power structures inherent in any program involving university students in a non-dominant community (Camacho, 2004; Darder, 1991). From the perspective of critical theory, critical consciousness frames my examination of practice (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, critical pedagogy informed the class that provided the context for this autoethnography, recognizing the importance of "the social, cultural, and political in shaping human identity" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 6).

#### Analytical Process

I teach at a Land Grant Research I University, and although the students I teach represent a variety of

socioeconomic backgrounds, their university attendance usually reflects a more privileged economic situation than most partner families enjoy since the latter's socioeconomic situations make them eligible for public prenatal and family planning healthcare. From the outset I sought to establish a space where two seemingly disparate groups of people could relate to each other through their shared humanity, rather than simply as representatives of different socioeconomic, ethnic, educational, or linguistic backgrounds. I acknowledge the perils involved in such a "colorblind" approach, but at the time it made sense to me, and my initial qualitative research provided evidence that students and families do come together and develop relationships of varying depths that cross, or at least straddle, these barriers (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003a, 2003b, 2007).

Nonetheless, the initial data analysis suggested a need for re-examining the practices of the workday. I reread student journals, and I reanalyzed countless hours of informal time spent in the company of the students and families as recorded in my field notes. Actual words are quoted from the journals of two students who questioned the workday and from my personal journals<sup>2</sup> regarding the workday and student reactions to the event. That semester *conscientização* [conscientization] (Freire, 1970) began, causing me to question my established practice.

The self-reflexivity that guided this paper allows me to "be known and seen by others, . . . to open up the possibility of learning more about [my] topic, and [myself], and in greater depth" (Etherington, 2004, p. 25). Through self-reflexivity, I can reflect on and become more fully conscious of my own "ideology, culture, and politics," going beyond self-awareness to create a "dynamic process of interaction within *and* between. . . [myself] . . . *and* the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations," addressing "ethical issues and power relations" (p. 36) between myself and the participants in the class and the community. I could step away and "reflect on [my] actions through the eyes of the 'other's'" actions (Rhoads, 2003, p. 239), acknowledging "response data" from participants who forced me to "significantly reconstruct [my] interpretation" of my actions as I engaged in the process (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 184). In a text informed by "deconstructive reflexivity," I am able to be confessional and critical of my own actions in interacting with a university class and an immigrant community (Denzin, 2003, p. 236). My commitment to using a critical lens to examine my practice intersects with my commitment to develop a theory of praxis "guided by critical reflection and . . . revolutionary praxis" (McClaren, 1997, p. 170), informed by my "positionality as both [subject] and [object] of the gaze" (p.149) of critical self-reflexivi-

ty.

Similarly, autoethnography presents "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis, 2004, xix). I examine my perspectives on working in non-dominant populations through the lens of the world that shaped me, but at the same time, I present a meta-ethnography that revisits my original critical analysis of practice (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003b), allowing me to alter the frame in which I wrote the original story, ask questions I didn't ask then, consider others' responses to the original story, and include vignettes of related experiences that happened since I wrote the story and now affect the way I look back at the story (Ellis, 2009, p. 13). I first addressed the issue of the workday in my dissertation (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003b), but in this paper I reconsider the event six years later, viewing the experience through the lens of my current perspectives about power and privilege.

### Early Times

Where to park? As I followed my husband who was maneuvering the Ryder moving van, I clutched the steering wheel and hoped for the best. All the cars following behind cautiously edged their way past the numerous cars and trucks in the parking lot. There were some 20 of us, so many of the students had to park out in the street. It was a warm September Saturday afternoon, so there were people outside milling around, creating a vibrant atmosphere. We finally managed to park and get out of all the vehicles to make our way to the families we had come to visit for the workday.

When we arrived at Isabel's<sup>3</sup> we had to wait outside while she finished negotiating with the vendor parked outside her apartment. He had backed his truck up to the sidewalk, and the pop-top was open, showing neatly arranged shelves filled with brightly colored vegetables and boxes of Mexican food. Yaneth was hopping around licking a sucker, stopping only long enough to run up and hug me.

After a brief wait, we went inside, some twenty students crowding into the one-bedroom apartment. The minute I sat down on the couch, Isabel said, "Permiso," [Excuse me.] and disappeared into the bedroom. She returned with a bag of papers, and within ten minutes, as the students stood observing, we had glanced at all the school papers and the doctor bills. . . . I was finally able to break into the litany of requests for help interpreting the stacks of papers to introduce Isabel to Kathy, the student who would be her partner for the semester. Each nervously uttered greetings, and as I moved away, they began their negoti-

ations for their weekly meetings. By the time we left, they were excitedly making plans for Kathy's twice-a-week trip to Roanoke. (Journal, fall 2002)

I present this excerpt from my journal about a typical workday to aid in understanding the situation and mind-set that guided my work at the time, to provide a baseline for the rest of the story. Looking back at this vignette, I am aware of the implicit social hierarchy being established, but at the time I wrote this, my only concerns focused on responding to perceived community needs and providing an opportunity for everyone to meet. I enacted historian Wise's (1980) words: "[A]n ironic situation occurs when the consequences of an act are diametrically opposed to the original intention," and "when the fundamental cause of the disparity lies in the actor himself, and his original purpose" (p. 300).

### How It All Started

From the inception of the workday to the student interrogation of the practice, it never occurred to me that I was creating a hierarchical situation between two groups of people whose life circumstances and socioeconomic status differed significantly. I was just doing what I had always done, trying to respond to people who asked for help of any kind. The only difference was my inclusion of students and families in the process.

Up to that time in my life, my way of being in and serving the world included beneficent acts in response to requests from the community. Inadvertently, through my sense of empathy, I converted my sense of caring into perceiving need among the families, subconsciously developing a deficit notion about the families. In so doing, I failed to appreciate their demonstrations of strength as evidenced by their ability to cope adequately and independently in a new and often alien society (Nieto & Bode, 2008). In other words, I was practicing kindness propelled by emotions and a sense of service (Morton, 1999), completely oblivious to the ramifications of my actions in regard to students' interpretations of the event:

The service-learning workday has already helped me on my journey to understanding the impact of the little things that people can do to help others. By simply donating clothes, shoes, and household items, we were able to brighten several families' lives. From house to house I learned the real need for our services. Each household had different needs and wants from the students, but they all needed our guidance. (Tina, September 2002)

At the time I read this reflection, I focused on her

empathy, but in rereading the words through the deconstructive lens of *conscientização* (Freire, 1970), her word choices epitomized Eby's (1998) cautions about service-learning. A young university student placed herself as a role model providing "guidance" to adult parents responsible for their families' livelihood, demonstrating her deficit notion regarding non-dominant groups.

This journal, which I posted to the class listserv, represents my thinking at the time:

As several of you pointed out, we are very different from the Lions Club described by Michael Nava (1998) in *Charity*<sup>4</sup>. The most important difference in my opinion is that I know and love each and every one of the folks we work with, and they know that. They know also that the students who work with them come to have a similar feeling about them, and they respond in kind. We are not simply buying anonymous gifts for anonymous people; we are sharing the bounty of our world with those whose material blessings are fewer than ours. Every item of clothing that was selected yesterday had a face or name behind it. Our gifts were for persons, for individuals. (Journal, fall 2002)

My discomfort lies not only in my patronizing attitudes, but also in the knowledge that my attitudes shaped the thinking of groups of students and community members, my tone of beneficent charity attempting to justify behavior about which I already felt uneasy. I include this embarrassing passage because I suspect I am not alone in having reacted this way as a service-learning instructor shaped by a life of service in the community.

### Student Uprising

I was not prepared for the class discussion that ensued following the actual workday as students questioned their own feelings and those of the families we visited, to say nothing of my role in facilitating the event. Some expressed discomfort at our middle class co-opting of another's space and privacy. Liz referred to "dragging a huge group of university students to people's apartments," which Bill called "tourism of the marginalized." Liz said, "How would you feel if a big ole Ryder moving van pulled up to your apartment and then a bunch of students swarmed out and crowded into your apartment to stare at you like animals in the zoo?" She also stated that she felt quite uncomfortable with my picture taking as if the families were exhibits. I never had thought along those lines; I simply wanted to create archives for the class.

The entire three-hour class was fueled by conversation about the workday, charity, and the true mean-

ing of service-learning. I felt defensive and irritated, defending my actions by stating that the families still needed help getting established and the workday provided the opportunity to deliver clothing and furniture people continued to give me. However, the two most vocal objectors did not buy my explanations. Truth be told, at the time, I was not acknowledging, even to myself, that it also provided an opportunity for me to empty my garage of the mountains of goods people constantly donated, probably also taking advantage of the opportunity to clean out their own closets, drawers, houses.

For the first time class members critically questioned my practices, and the ensuing discussion was heated and controversial. As the conversation swirled around me, I observed the class, watching the varied emotions and opinions. Thinking I had it figured out, I explained to them that although I am an only child, I grew up in a large extended family that constantly passed clothes around depending on each person's current size or needs. I felt so close to the local families that sharing with them was simply an extension of what I have always done. Whoever had more shared with the one who needed help, but I failed to see that my family did not include a great variation in social or economic status, and that our clothing exchanges tended to be reciprocal, vastly different from the dynamics of a large group of students taking clothes and furniture to newly immigrated families whom they were meeting for the first time, creating structures of power and privilege that would extend throughout the semester. I felt as if I had been pushed into a "disturbingly vulnerable place where I was forced to confront my ineptitude" (Vacarr, 2001, p. 286). Unlike Vacarr, however, I was unable to move away from my disequilibrium to create a teaching moment. I allowed my annoyance to prevent my revealing my humanity that framed an error in my judgment. I opted instead to maintain the "all-powerful Super Teacher" (p. 290) stance. Up to this time, I had resided comfortably in my position of power and privilege, believing that if I chose to ignore their existence, I could create an environment in which the societal constructs of race, class, and other hierarchical concepts could be blurred by my "goodness." At that point, I subconsciously began to confront my motives, but I chose to remain cloaked in denial and irritation, unable to acknowledge the situation I had created. Fortunately, I had created a class that encouraged questioning, even if I had not intended to be the object of the questions.

My journal from the following week demonstrates change taking place in my thinking:

In a way, the workday is a powerful agent in providing a means of taking the first steps toward erasing Otherness by allowing the stu-

dents and the families to meet each other, but at the same time, it is a day fraught with the danger of embedding Otherness in the students' and the families' consciousness/subconsciousness. (fall 2002)

I was accustomed to reading journals submitted by students who, charged with explaining their reasons for taking the class, wrote about wanting to "help people out" or to "help the less fortunate," familiar phrases that frame the altruism of the middle class. However, that class shook my beliefs about the rightness of the workday as students critically evaluated the practice. I describe the experience as the critical point of *conscientização* (Freire, 1970) that first caused me to feel self-doubt about the practice.

Up to that point, my vision included facilitating a class to foster change within students, causing them to become agents of change in society. I never once considered they could serve as agents of change for me through what I perceived at the time to be probing, hurtful criticisms and accusations directed toward me. My idealistic notion saw the students as:

[L]eaven in the evolution of a critical mass of those who, whatever their profession or status in society, will have the compassion, conscience, and competence to act in solidarity with the poor and most neglected members of society as critically thinking agents of change committed to the fashioning of a more humane and just world. (Wood, 1998, p. 192)

Nonetheless, when the students acted in unconscious solidarity with the community by questioning my practices, my knee-jerk reaction was irritation and defensiveness. The journal entries for the week reflected student protests, but because I read them wearing blinders of caring (Noddings, 1999) about/for the community, I did not hear the student voices until I reanalyzed the journals.

The following spring, I defended my dissertation based on research conducted in fall 2002. Two committee members knew reaction papers I wrote for their courses indicating that through CTB I sought to provide an environment that would foster reciprocal relationships between university students and community members. When one committee member asked, "Kris, do you realize that you are setting up a situation in which all the participants involved will perceive the students as the 'haves' and the community members as the 'have-nots' of society?", I was so shocked that I could not reply. I knew she was correct; she confirmed what the students had said and I had ignored.

Although I passed the defense, I spent weeks reading social justice literature and critically examining both my practice and theoretical framework prior to

publishing the research on the university's electronic dissertation library (<http://www.lib.vt.edu/find/etds.php>). After that semester, I continued the workdays for two more semesters, before finally conceding that the practice reflected theory inconsistent with my beliefs about hierarchy (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Camacho, 2004; Eby, 1998; Morton, 1995; Pompa, 2002; Ransford, 2000).

### Gaining an Understanding

As my academic life continued, I became consumed with other concerns, but the issue of the workday stayed in my mind as a bothersome topic I needed to address honestly and openly at some point, if for no other reason than my certainty that I was not the only service-learning practitioner whose practices were inconsistent with her beliefs. As I reflected on the world I grew up in, I realized I am the product of a paternalistic, hierarchical society that socialized me to believe in altruistic behavior (Wildman & Davis, 2000). As a member of the dominant culture, I am often unable to recognize my privilege. By unintentional actions with good intentions, I have the ability to perform hurtful acts, and I questioned whether that was the case with the workdays.

Eby (1998) posits that although service-learning is a transformative pedagogy that helps students develop social responsibility toward the community, a lack of understanding about underlying societal situations may leave students with the impression that need exists in a marginalized community, and that they can "fix" the need by their presence or "help." According to Eby, such simplistic views of social problems lead to an emphasis on deficiencies in the community, rather than fostering appreciation for their strengths. Although I agreed with Eby's arguments, only after I began to question my practices did I completely understand his concerns regarding involving students in a non-dominant community.

The irony of this narrative is that the continuum of my transformational journey was precipitated by student questioning, a journey that changed me from enacting a deficit notion of the community, which I in turn implicitly had been communicating to the students.

Similarly, in designing a course in which members of a non-dominant community serve as text, teachers, students, and collaborators for a course whose mission espouses a social justice precept, my responsibility lay in facilitating relationships that would not reinforce existing societal constructs based on inequity and Othering. However, "random, individual acts of kindness" underscored my practice as I worked from "emotional response and not [my] head" (Morton, 1999). While pushing students to deeply examine societal practices that caused immi-

grants to live in marginalized circumstances, I interposed my own previous acts of random kindness, described by some of my colleagues in my department as my "missionary zeal," as a model for the relationships which would frame the CTB experience. Rather than fostering reciprocity through shared language and culture, I created a deficit notion regarding the community.

The patriarchal society in which I grew up promotes charitable acts as beneficent and virtuous. I am a member of a church that considers service to humankind to be of the highest calling, whether in manual labor to build a house through Habitat for Humanity or in donations to Heifer Project International. My code for moral behavior is similar to Kant's moral philosophy that extolled a life seeking how to comply with my ethical obligations, precipitated by the question: "What ought I to do?" (Johnson, 2004, p. 1). Perhaps Lamott (2005) best sums up the guiding principle that has framed my life for as long as I can remember: "You do what you can, what good people have always done: you bring thirsty people water, you share your food, you try to help the homeless find shelter, you stand up for the underdog" (pp. 307-308). However, CTB indicated the first time I included students and families in my efforts and beliefs.

I grew up in an environment probably typical of a generation of baby-boomers who were affected by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. We joined hands in sisterhood and solidarity. I was appalled to recognize that my entire perspective about the world and the workdays contributed to the oppressive behavior I abhor. I was blatantly exercising my White privilege to create invisible racism (Tatum, 2000) and classism (Ransford, 2000). At this time of self-searching, Behar's (1996) voice also resonated with my discomfort as she talked about the vulnerability of the researcher placing herself in the research. I felt I could not leave out this revelation of my own transformation and remain true to the beliefs that shape who I am, not only as a researcher, but also as a person.

### The Conundrum

Nonetheless, just as I was contemplating letting my friends and church family know that I could not accept any more items for the families, I received a call from Aracely, who had been in the program for the first three semesters, letting me know she had returned from Mexico after a year and a half back home with her family, and she had no clothes or furniture. Could I help her? Once again, the van and pickup truck made their way across town to deliver the clothes and furniture stored in my garage, this time with the assistance of my family and one student

whom I called to ask if he could bring his pickup truck to help with the delivery. That occasion represented the final large delivery we made, either through the class or personally.

Even today the need still exists for sharing or charity or serving or whatever else we want to call this complex concept, although it has a different shape than it had when CTB began. Many of the families with whom we collaborate have become fairly well established and do not suffer from the desperate need that shaped their lives when they first immigrated. Needs continue to exist with increasing frequency, mirroring the economic downturn the world is experiencing. The conundrum is how to address appeals from people who have fewer financial resources and subsequent needs. A recent phone call made me realize anew the imponderability of the situation, causing the end of the story to touch the beginning.

Marta called to check on me, beginning with her usual, "*Quería escuchar su voz.*" [I wanted to hear your voice.] Her husband quit his job at a local dairy, tired of constant abuse from the owner, but he continues to face great difficulty finding constant, consistent work in construction, a reflection of the general economy. I knew they had moved in the spring from the trailer provided by the dairy into a small house in a nearby town, and I had accepted her excuse of the move for terminating her relationship with the CTB students who visited her weekly. Not until we talked last week did she share that the reason she could no longer host the students was due to the fact that she had no food in the house to offer when they visited, a fact that embarrassed her greatly. Now they are feeling more secure, but their budget is still tight and she tentatively inquired if we could loan them some money. Her call was one of several, reflecting the recent lack of work many immigrants face.

#### If I Had Known Then . . .

Reflecting on these conversations, I am confronted anew by the proposition of how to provide assistance without deepening the divide of the "haves" and the "have-nots" of society. On a personal level, I continue to operate from the point of view Behar (1993) described in talking about her dealings with Esperanza, a Mexican peasant whom Behar interviewed over a period of years: I remain honored to serve as their *comadre* [friend who has more and thus can share].

By starting the placements with a workday, I was overtly, albeit unconsciously, establishing the students and myself as dominant members of society and the families as the marginalized. At the same time, I recognize that "[s]ervice-learning is a way of building relationships; not hierarchical relationships

that are top-down, helper-helpee, but nonhierarchical relationships in the sense that each partner has something to gain and each has something to give" (Jackson & Smothers, 1998, p. 113). Additionally, I acknowledge that the "served [should] control the service[s] provided," thus making them "better able to serve and be served by their own actions" (Sigmon, 1979, p. 3). Keeping in mind these two basic precepts of service-learning, I seek creative ways to involve students with families in empathetic relationships that foster attitudes of concern for social justice and equity not based on deficient notions but rather on a realization of their responsibility to help people meet their basic needs (Eby, 1998). I intend to place more emphasis on the literature and class activities that deconstruct societal contexts that affect immigrants to promote an understanding of the economic hardship involved in immigration both in leaving the home country and in living in the host country as well as the discriminatory practices that restrain many immigrant lives, affecting their opportunities for earning a living wage.

When I receive random calls from people asking for help, I will devise ways to involve students personally in the process of reaching out to people in their moments of authentic need. If a time comes when economic necessity determines a need for reestablishing the widescale distribution of food and clothes, I will abandon the role of trying to "fix" the situation single-handedly. I will invite students and women to come together and discuss the possibilities for identifying and addressing community needs. I play with the idea of returning to the Nava (1998) piece, having the students and women work together in small groups to read the story and deconstruct the impersonal charity that framed the event. I would suspect that by brainstorming together they might come up with solutions that would be far better than any I could devise. I can envision resulting reciprocity, which would then form the basis for critically thinking about ways for the families to address their needs. Through dialogue, the students should be able to recognize connections between the families' situations and the social contexts in which they are rooted as they move through the "cycle of theory, application, evaluation, reflection, and then back to theory" (Freire, 1998, p. 75) and thus into *conscientização*. The bottom line is the imperativeness of involving the women in the process of praxis to transform charity into collaboration.

#### The Aftermath

After I discontinued the workday, some changes occurred. The students and families still needed an opportunity to meet prior to beginning their partnerships, so we began having a Meet and Greet as the

third class meeting. These potluck social times took place in my church fellowship hall, providing neutral ground for two seemingly disparate groups of people to meet without automatic assumptions regarding power and privilege. Also, because the students no longer spend 8-10 hours on the workday, I cut the required hours back to 40. As more of the children began attending elementary school, the need for tutoring and homework help has increased, so the students tend to spend more time working with the children than with their former service-learning activities that focused on the women's needs for interpretation and social navigation. I now incorporate more literature about multicultural education, such as Nieto and Bode (2008), as we challenge the deficit notions that frame public schooling for immigrants.

In recent years, the women stepped into leadership roles with the students, constantly making suggestions about the partnerships, whether regarding scheduling, course content, or expectations for students. The women now lead busier lives that include jobs, church, children's school activities, and friends, so they determine their availability based on their convenience, rather than accepting whatever time the students suggest, as was the case in the beginning. Initially, the students and women did a final collaborative media project talking about the women's lives in their home countries, their immigration, and their lives in the United States. The women expressed boredom with repeating the story every semester, and they now determine a new topic each semester, choosing topics such as the difficulty of living in the United States and not speaking English. They also take responsibility for holding the students accountable for their commitments, informing me of any infractions they are unable to resolve. From the way the women speak and behave, I believe they perceive themselves to be stakeholders with a "voting voice" in the program. Their enacted freedom to direct their experiences reinforces my belief in the power of critical pedagogy to effect emancipatory attitudes and roles (Freire, 1997/2005; Kincheloe, 2008).

Would these changes have happened if the workdays had continued to place them in the role of recipients of charity? I don't know.

### A Word of Optimistic Caution

In my exploration of the implications of placing university students in a traditionally non-dominant immigrant community, I reinforced my belief that such partnerships are rich and meaningful for most participants, but the instructor who chooses to engage an immigrant community in such a partnership needs to exercise extreme caution in regard to fostering Othering and reinforcing social hierarchy, concepts that are diametrically opposed to the pre-

cepts of service-learning (Jackson & Smothers, 1998). The necessity of constantly including the community members in decisions and policy-shaping is imperative, which I do by meeting periodically with the women to seek their input about their goals regarding the program and how the students and I can best help them achieve those goals. As service-learning instructors practice critical examination from a variety of disciplines, pedagogical practices, methods, and theoretical frameworks, the challenge is to begin/continue to examine our efforts through the crucible of self-reflexivity. This critical examination of my practices seeks to engage in dialogue with other service-learning researchers and practitioners as we consistently interrogate our own practices.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Although I refer to the Mexican and Honduran community, in actuality in the locale where my work is situated, the two groups do not often intersect. Nonetheless within the confines of CTB, the context of this paper, the two groups *do* intersect and interact frequently. I avoid using "Latino" in an attempt to circumvent generalization and stereotyping of Spanish speakers who immigrate from south of our border. In addition, the women whom I interview as part of my research self-identify as Mexican or Honduran. In certain places, I do use the term "Latino" when quoting or referring to statements made by students.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, journal and field notes will be used interchangeably to refer to my personal writings.

<sup>3</sup> All names used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect the participants' privacy.

<sup>4</sup> In preparation for the workday, the students read a memoir about being the recipient of the generic beneficence of the Lions Club at Christmas time when he was a young child whose family had recently emigrated from Cuba.

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