

CROSSING THE BORDER THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING:
A STUDY IN CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Chapter One
INTRODUCTION

We have the audacity to cut against the grain of most of human history which is a history of overlooking so many other peoples' suffering and pain and harm.

(West, 1997, ¶ 4)

According to the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)¹ and Census 2000 (NCLR, 2001; Census Bureau, 2000), there were more than 35 million Hispanics² living in the United States, reflecting an increase of 57.9% since the 1990 census, bringing this population into parity with the African American populace. In January 2003, a press release (Roanoke Times, 2003) indicated that Hispanics comprised 13% of the U.S. population, outnumbering the African American population of 36.1 million, or 12.7% of the U. S. population. The most recent updates to the Census figures show that the Hispanic population increased to 39 million in July 2003. In the two years following Census 2000, Hispanics accounted for one-half of the population growth in the United States.

These population figures for Hispanics include all people who claim heritage from any Spanish-speaking country, but interestingly enough, the Census Bureau has changed its classification system for race and ethnicity to say there are “two Hispanic origin categories-Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Race and Hispanic origin are considered two separate concepts and therefore Hispanics may be of any race or races” (Census Bureau, 2001).

The rise in the Latino population is occurring not only in the traditional regions of

¹ The NCLR is a private, nonpartisan organization whose goal is to reduce poverty and discrimination and thus improve the quality of life for Latinos living in the United States.

² In this study, the term *Hispanic* is used when referring to demographic information that uses the term to discuss population figures. In other instances, *Latino* is used to refer to Spanish-speaking people whose country of origin is south of the United States border, an area referred to as Latin America. For further discussion regarding the implications of using the two terms, see pages 35-37 of this document.

New York City, Miami, and the Southwestern United States, but also in Southwest Virginia. Due to the changing cultural landscape of the Roanoke Valley, there is an increasing need to provide educational, health, and social services in Spanish. The Latino population in the Roanoke Valley has almost doubled, rising from 1,359 to 2,679, or 1.1% of the total population (Roanoke Times, 2003).

This rise has had an impact on the Roanoke Valley schools, health care agencies, and social service agencies in profound and unprecedented ways. This growth is subtly apparent in the geographical landscape as well as in official agencies that track populations for federal and state aid.

The Latino community in the Roanoke Valley has continued to grow, not only since I first entered the community four years ago, but even in the 2 ½ years since I conceptualized and began this study. There are many more Latinos speaking Spanish when I go to WalMart, whether in Salem or southwest Roanoke County or northwest Roanoke City. There is now a large sign out in front of First Baptist Church in downtown Roanoke, announcing “*Clases bíblicas cada domingo a las 3:00 de la tarde*” [Bible classes every Sunday at 3:00 p. m.]. The section of authentic Mexican foods in the grocery stores seems larger every time I go shopping, and at local businesses, information racks often include brochures in Spanish and English. There are 15 Mexican restaurants in the valley in contrast to the single restaurant that sat on the main north-south thoroughfare that bisects Roanoke when I moved to town in 1980.

In more measurable ways, the Office of Research and Evaluation for Roanoke City Public Schools (personal communication, March 3, 2003) stated that in the annual report submitted to the Virginia Department of Education in September 2002, the students who identified themselves as Hispanic numbered 280. This figure reflects an increase from 158 in 1999, a rise of 77% over two years. Similarly, the Office of Human Resources (personal communication, March 3, 2003) confirmed that there are now 11 teachers of English Language Learning (the school system’s designation for English as a Second Language) in Roanoke City Public Schools in contrast to three in 1999, demonstrating an increase of 267%.

Although the media indicates abundant interpreter services in most situations (Roanoke Times, 2001), there are many instances when no interpreter is present to

explain procedures or possible options. Consequently, countless Latinos live in marginalized situations, either unaware of available programs or unable to communicate adequately to take advantage of them. Fortunately, some agencies realize the need and provide interpreter services.

One of the biggest changes I have observed is at the Roanoke City Health Department where Kristine,³ a former service-learning student, is now the first full-time interpreter for the agency, joining the part-time interpreter who has been there since 2001. Also in order to better serve the number of Latinas⁴ who currently go to the Health Department for family planning, there is now a monthly Hispanic Clinic. The growth in clients necessitates the presence of three interpreters at that clinic to deal with registration and examinations; usually either one of the female service-learning students or I go to the clinic to help the two resident interpreters, providing another indication that the Latino population is growing. As a result of the demographic changes occurring in the Roanoke Valley, the opportunity arose for university students and Latino community members to interact.

The Research Project Emerges

As a full-time instructor and doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), the four hundred hours a year that I was spending in the community were overpowering. I continued to share the stories of my experiences with my students in the Spanish classes I was teaching, and they could never hear enough about the people to whom I had grown so close. I gradually conceptualized the idea of placing my students with the Latinos who relied on me as their link to the Anglo world, providing an opportunity for a mutually beneficial relationship in which each would act as a cultural mediator for the other.

From that initial idea ensued the service-learning class that involved my students in the community, working alongside the Latino families, helping them to navigate an often overwhelming bureaucratic system while teaching them English as a Second Language.

³ The participants in the project are referred to be a pseudonym to protect their privacy.

⁴ When referring to females whose origin is Latin American, I use the term *Latina* (singular) or *Latinas* (plural) since those terms are widely used in the U. S., especially among Latinos, when they speak English.

At the same time, the families were teaching the students Spanish, giving the students a chance to observe what life is like for Latinos living in the United States.

As the course developed, I decided to study the linguistic growth and the development of cultural awareness in the students. However, after a preliminary study it became apparent that a truly interesting and relatively unexplored aspect of the study dealt with the relationships that developed between the students and the Latino families. True to the qualitative tradition, the research questions emerged, replacing the initial ideas with ones that were more compelling and of greater meaning in terms of teaching for social justice. Thus this research project evolved, providing the opportunity for the reader to develop an understanding of the dynamics of a service-learning course situated in the higher education and the Latino communities.

The overarching objective of this study is to examine the nexus of the relationships that emerged between university students and community families as the result of a service-learning course. What happens when two disparate groups of people come together regularly in a small group setting situated within the boundaries of a service-learning course? The study also explores the intersection of community service, scholarship, and teaching-and-learning. It examines relationships that crossed boundaries of ethnic groups, language, educational levels, and socioeconomic status. Through my own involvement in the community and with the students, my professional life has come full circle, and after a hiatus of many years, once again I am an Anglo⁵ intermingling with the Latino community.

My Personal Journey as an Anglo

Beginning the Journey

My first work with the Mexican migrant population occurred in Illinois in 1970 when I was the first ESL teacher for the newly formed branch of the Illinois Migrant Council in a suburb west of Chicago. At that time, the Chicago metropolitan area was experiencing a similar growth in the Latino population in proportion to the one that

⁵ An Anglo is a native-English speaker who was born and raised in the United States. Since the feminine form of Anglo (*Angla*) is not commonly used in English, I refer to myself as *Anglo* despite the fact I am female.

southwest Virginia has experienced during the last decade. According to their web site, “The Illinois Migrant Council (IMC) has provided emergency and social services to migrant and seasonal farm workers (MSFW) in Illinois since its incorporation in 1966. The Council grew into an organization because of the concerns of Illinois church ministries about the plight of migrant farm workers in the early 1960s. IMC later expanded to serve the broader rural community including other underserved, low income [sic] families and individuals.”

When I was hired to teach English to Latino migrants, the program director and I were the only two employees, and government funding paid our salaries. As the sole untrained ESL teacher, I wrote my own curriculum, basing it on the Spanish textbooks that I had used in my student teaching.

In 1972, my church asked me to teach a Spanish course at night to a group of school personnel and health care providers who felt a need to communicate with their students and patients. At the same time, I was asked to teach ESL to a class of Latino immigrant junior high students who attended the school where I taught Spanish. I was deemed the likely candidate to teach these students since I could communicate with them; no one seemed concerned about my credentials for teaching ESL.

Then in 1974, I had a job through the YWCA teaching ESL in a foundry, and once again, I developed my own materials. Out of frustration with their inability to communicate with the men who worked in the dangerous environment of the hot furnaces, the management had turned to the YWCA, offering to release the workers from the morning shift one hour early and to give the afternoon shift men one hour of release time at the beginning of the shift so they could have a daily English class. Amazingly enough, they were paid for the hour they spent in the improvised classroom in the anteroom of the foundry.

Continuing the Story

When I moved to the central valley of California in the late 1970s, I taught Mexican migrant workers through the local community college. The federal government funded the program, and once again, the director and I were the only employees. To fill

out the application forms, I had to ask for a green card⁶, but the director told me that if they said they had forgotten to bring it, I should simply say, “OK. Bring it next time,” and fill out the rest of the application and forget it. In other words, we knew they were there without proper documentation, but, although the program was funded federally, the legal status of the students did not exclude them from participating. The academic situation was the same as in my earlier experiences: no books, no curriculum, no endorsement, and once again, no one seemed to notice or care. I continued to write my own material, but at least I now had accumulated some material from my previous positions.

After moving to southwest Virginia in 1980, I expected to continue my work with the migrant population, but to my chagrin, my inquiries were fruitless. I was told that the occasional apple picker passed through the area in the fall; when I asked about a migrant population, I received blank stares. In California and Illinois, I had been accustomed to migrant workers as part of the vital labor force, and it was disconcerting to realize that a population that had been an integral part of my work and interest was apparently non-existent in Virginia.

In the mid 1980s, I began teaching Spanish at the local community college as adjunct faculty. Once again, I asked about the possibility of teaching ESL in order to have a full-time position. I could not be considered for an ESL position because I did not have 18 graduate hours in English. I was completely taken aback, because I had never thought of teaching ESL as having anything to do with the English that is taught to native speakers. I had always been hired as a foreign language teacher who could teach English as a foreign language as well as Spanish as a foreign language. Despite my rich experiences teaching ESL for the past 15 years, I was unqualified to teach ESL in the state of Virginia, which seemed ironic when viewed in the light of the fact that the Latino immigrant population was relatively new in Virginia compared to the Latino population in Illinois and California where I had previously taught.

A New Chapter

My contacts with Latino immigrants were rare until July of 1999 when I received

⁶ The green card is the Alien Registration Receipt Card, or Permanent Resident Card, formerly issued by Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), but now obtained from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, a bureau of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security.

a call from Refugee and Immigration Services to go to the Health Department as an interpreter. I do not know how David Maxey, the director of the program, got my name, but I was free that afternoon, and I went to the Family Planning Clinic to serve as an interpreter.

One of the regular interpreters was on vacation, so David continued to call me, and I gradually became more involved in the Latino community. Realizing that many of these folks had no one to connect them with the “outside,” English-speaking community, I gave them my business card so they could call in an emergency. I was soon in the position of making appointments, calling about bills, apartments and cars, recommending babysitters, etc. In other words, I had become the Anglo link to community networking that Greenberg and Moll describe in writing about the Latino community (1990).

My Self as an Anglo in the Latino Community

I received calls at all times of day and night, most of them beginning in the same way: “*Señora, Ud. no me conoce, pero mi amiga ‘Fulana’ me dijo que Ud. me pudiera ayudar.*” [Ma’am, you don’t know me, but my friend ‘So-and-so’ told me you could help me.”] The callers asked for help for anything ranging from getting an appointment for a suspected pregnancy to finding a job or clothes for a newly arrived immigrant.

As I responded to their needs, I turned to my church, soliciting donations of furniture and clothing for the people whose homes I visited and whose needs I saw. The donations from the church members did not stop with furniture and clothes; people slipped me checks or cash for amounts ranging from \$20 to \$200. I put the money in an account through the church and used it to buy food, cribs, baby clothes, and whatever other needs people expressed. By now, my involvement in the community was all-consuming, providing the catalyst for me to develop a service-learning course, *Crossing the Border through Service-Learning (CTB)*, the context for the research project contained herein.

The Preliminary Study

When I first began to conceptualize this study, I was propelled forward by an all-consuming desire to immerse myself and my students in the Latino community. Although

I am Anglo, my identification with the Latino community has been strong and vital; because the immersion experience has been so rewarding and fulfilling for me, I desired to share the experience with my students.

At the outset, my conceptualization dealt less with research than with fulfilling a mutual need, but eventually the research emerged alongside the relationships that developed between the students and the families. What began as an attempt to provide cultural mediation for Latinos and cultural exchange for both students and families evolved into a study of two unlikely groups of people whose friendships transcended barriers that normally impede the formation of relationships.

As I considered planning a course to place students in the Latino community, students taking Spanish courses in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Virginia Tech expressed a desire to learn to communicate more fluently in Spanish and to learn more about Latino culture. They conveyed a desire to enter the community, learn from the families therein, and simultaneously provide translating and interpreting services that were sorely lacking. Given my involvement in the Latino community, the creation of a service-learning course situated in the Latino community seemed a logical way to address the needs of the community families and the university students with resultant mutual benefits for both groups.

Since my involvement with the Latinos in the Roanoke Valley had its roots in my work as an interpreter at the Health Department and my observation of the need for cultural mediation, the actual class was in response to the grassroots needs of the community and the students. In the early planning stages of the class, I chatted with the women as we sat waiting to see the nurse practitioner at the Health Department or the doctor at Planned Parenthood. They knew I was a Spanish teacher, so I broached the subject of the class to them. I told them that I had spoken of them to my students, and that my students were eager to meet them. Would they be interested in having my students visit their homes twice a week to teach them English and to help them with the other activities in their lives that required English? Almost without exception, the answer was a resounding *sí*, and the planning continued at full speed. Even before the class had begun, I received calls from friends and relatives of the women I had contacted, asking what they

needed to do to be in the *programa*. By the time the class actually started, there was a waiting list of some fifteen families who wanted to participate in the program.

The Canvas is Prepared for the Service-Learning Course

At the same time, I began talking to my students about the possibility of the class, and their excitement was contagious. As I planned and designed, I talked to the students who wanted to take the course, getting their input about what they would expect from the course. Five of the students in the first service-learning class of 25 were in the Intermediate Spanish class I was teaching that fall when the class was taking shape.

During that same semester, as a doctoral student, I was participating in a course devoted to curriculum theory and design, and every week I took in another piece of the design for the class. At the same time, someone suggested that I go to the Service-Learning Center for assistance in planning the course. I had not been aware of the Center's existence prior to my first visit, but with the help of Michele James-Deramo, the director of the Center, I explored the philosophy, responsibilities, and possibilities of service-learning.

Finally the course proposal and syllabus were ready to send to the Dean's Office for approval. I soon received word that they had been accepted and CTB was on the timetable for the spring, so now it was just a matter of tying up loose ends before the course began in January.

The Threads Are Ready

I expected only the five students from the Intermediate Spanish class and perhaps a few former students who had heard about the course through the emails I sent through the department, so I worried that there might not be enough students to make a class. The first day we met in the seminar room I chose in anticipation of the small number of students. Imagine my surprise when twenty-seven students crowded into the small room. Two of the students dropped the course because they felt their Spanish was inadequate to handle the tasks outlined on the syllabus, but the remaining twenty-five stayed in the class, and generated energy that charged the room with electricity and excitement. In order to have the rich discussions I expected as we examined the literature in the light of

the community work, I divided the course into two sections, one of eight students, and the other of seventeen, based on our schedules. From the outset, I explained the experimental nature of the course and told the students we would design and redesign the course as the semester progressed. Throughout the semester, we met once a week on campus, wildly and passionately discussing the literature and the families. During the entire semester, the excitement never abated, and the work and ideas continued to flourish amid the bags of Jolly Ranchers and cans of soft drinks or cups of herbal tea or strong coffee that kept us going.

I had actually taught most of the students in previous classes, so I knew them quite well. I quickly came to know the ones I had not known previously due to the intimate and informal nature of the class, so by the second week, I matched up the students who would visit the families in pairs. With great exhilaration we planned our first workday. Our first foray into the community occurred on the second Saturday of the semester.

People in my church had been donating clothing, furniture, and non-perishable food items for me to distribute to the families for the previous year and a half, so when I made an announcement at church about the workday the students and I would be doing, the donations poured into my garage and my mother's basement. Several members of the church volunteered to help with the sorting and distribution of goods, and a couple of men volunteered to drive their trucks and help lift the furniture.

The workday arrived, and about twenty-five people showed up in my garage, ready to sort clothes and load the cars, vans, and trucks. Fortified with donuts, orange juice, and coffee, we tackled the mounds of garbage bags and boxes. I followed a master list of the families, with the names, ages, and sizes of each family member, and the students sorted and bagged the clothes they felt would be appropriate for their families. As we sorted, we talked about the families and their circumstances. It surprised some of the students that all clothing was usable, as long as it was clean and in good repair. We talked about the jobs held by some of the family members: farmhand on a dairy farm, packer in a warehouse, cake decorator at a bakery, etc. From previous experience, I knew a worn jacket was more appropriate in the bakery where the temperature was kept cool to avoid melted icing but where the red food coloring stained and ruined good jackets. A

new jacket would hang in the closet, saved for going out; a worn jacket would be worn and appreciated against the cold floors and high, unfinished ceilings in the warehouse. Perhaps the chill of that January day as we worked bundled in our winter jackets to ward off the wind coming in through the open garage door helped us focus on what it would be like to pack boxes all day in an unheated warehouse.

By one o'clock, we had sorted, bagged, and boxed all the clothes, furniture, and food; the vehicles were loaded and ready to go. We headed out, making the rounds of the Roanoke Valley to deliver the clothes and furniture. The families all expected us, so we were sure to visit everyone. As we unloaded at each house or apartment, I do not know who was the most excited—the family or the students. The families and the students relished the opportunity to meet each other so they would feel less apprehensive or shy about working together the first time. The students also appreciated the chance to meet all the families and to see where some of the Latinos lived in the Valley.

During the afternoon, we stopped at El Puerto, one of the local Mexican restaurants, to eat a late lunch. The students' exuberance carried them through the entire day, and when they went home, some of them as late as nine o'clock that night, they were tired, but eager to begin working with the families. A local television sports celebrity attends my church, and he thought our program might be of interest for the news. Much to the students' pleasure, a camera man accompanied us on one of the visits, interviewing the students and the families about the program (view the video clip at www.fll.vt.edu/lubbs).

Thus began the program that led to the current research study. As is witnessed by this narrative, I have been a continual presence in the research, working alongside the students and the families, involved completely, nurturing relationships and conducting interviews that provided data for this study. After a long process of entering the community and establishing the class, finally the foundation was prepared for the research study.

The Picture is Sketched for the Tapestry

My aims for service-learning can best be expressed by citing the academic and humanitarian objectives identified by Slimbach (1995, p. 10) in Table 1, showing how the

course fulfilled those goals in the preliminary study. The stated reactions of the students and families are based on the students' written reflections and informal interviews with both the families and the students during the semester the preliminary study was conducted.

Table 1	
Aims of Service-Learning	
Goals	Activities
1. Expand students' awareness and understanding of social problems and their ability to address or personally respond to such problems.	The students helped their families with Medicaid applications, rental contracts, driver's licenses, and other documents. They frequently commented that they had never before been aware of the injustices that non-English-speaking immigrants faced on a daily basis.
2. Enable students to learn from a different segment of society than that which he or she would normally interact with [sic].	The majority of the community participants in the program were from families living below the poverty line. Many of them had not attended school beyond ninth grade, some not beyond sixth grade. The students commented on the shock of seeing people who had to worry about having enough money to pay the bills and buy food.
3. Break down racial and cultural barriers through the process of students' reaching out and building between different demographic groups.	Although all but one of these students had taken Spanish before taking the course, many of them had never interacted on a continual basis with the Hispanic community. The students became so fond of their families and their families of them that they crossed the border culturally and emotionally.
4. Introduce students to an experiential style of	Several of the students commented in their

learning.	journals about moving the class beyond the walls of the classroom and the confines of the university. They lived the culture and the language in an immersion setting for a semester.
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The goals and activities in this table pertain to one specific semester, but with few exceptions, describe any of the five semesters of CTB.

Internships and Partnerships

In the process that brought the research project to completion, three students wove in and out of the tapestry, taking the course for one semester after another, immersing themselves in the community, becoming my interns and partners in every way. Without the help of these three young women, I would have lacked the physical strength or courage to continue my involvement in the community.

Kristine, my first volunteer assistant, graduated from Virginia Tech in Spanish, planning to become an ESL teacher; however, she decided that her heart was in the community working with the Latinas, so she left the graduate program to become the Health Department’s first fulltime interpreter. She still serves as a liaison between the community and the program.

Amy, my second assistant, was a senior with a double major in Spanish and English. She plans to become an ESL teacher. James-Deramo managed to obtain a grant from Learn and Serve America⁷ to fund Amy’s position as administrative assistant. Most importantly, she worked as CTB’s connection with both the Service-Learning Center and the community.

Kimberly graduated in Spanish and was also preparing to teach ESL. She was invaluable in running the class, keeping the records and generating donations for projects.

Whereas for the first two years of my community involvement I did all the interpreting and translating, I could now hand over many of those responsibilities to Amy

⁷ Learn and Serve America is a corporation for national and community service that supports service-learning programs across the country by providing funding and training.

and Kimberly, confident they would take charge. They both continued to visit the women frequently, taking the pulse of the community. They remained as the student/peer contacts for both the students and the Latinos. We have truly been collaborators in the endeavor of the class and the research.

Purpose of the Study

As the instructor of a course in which university students and Latino families began a journey toward building mutually satisfying and trusting relationships, I hoped their partnerships would be characterized by an exchange of knowledge and skills where the strengths of both groups—students and Latino families—would be valued. During the first semester of the new course, the richness of the cross-cultural exchange became evident.

Reading the weekly reflections students posted to the class email group, I became increasingly aware the course had a life of its own, operating beyond the parameters I established when I first conceptualized CTB. I marveled as I read of rich relationships forming between the students and the families. Two disparate groups of people had come together with the common goal of knowing about the other's culture and language, and out of that interaction grew relationships that looked familial, or at least like deep friendships—relationships that far exceeded my initial expectations and hopes.

To assess the efficacy of the service-learning course, I conducted a preliminary study to explore the development of linguistic ability and cultural awareness in university students studying Spanish as a second language as they worked alongside Latinos in the community. The relationships that grew from the personal, one-on-one contacts between the university students and their host families emerged as an interesting and yet unexplored aspect of the course. From the seed planted during that semester and as a direct outgrowth of that study, I conceptualized the proposed research described herein—a study that seeks to examine the dynamics of relationships that develop independent of the usual socially constructed rules that determine the traditional formation of relationship.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study help to describe and examine the relationships that occur when service-learning students enter the Latino community:

- 1) What does the formation and development of the relationship between these two groups look like?
 - a. What are the expectations of each person involved in the relationship and how do these change over the course of the semester?
 - b. What are the salient issues that factor into a mutually beneficial relationship between students and community families?
 - c. What role does the service-learning course play in the development of a relationship between students and community families?

The nature of these research questions necessitated the use of qualitative research methods. The resulting narrative attempts to capture the essence of the setting, the actors, and the resultant relationships that emerged from the interactions that occurred between the class members and the community participants.

Justification for the Study

Based on the burgeoning Latino population in the Roanoke Valley as well as on the data generated by the study conducted within the context of a service-learning class, is it possible to conclude there is a place for a service-learning program in which university students work in the Latino community? Many of the Latinos living in the Roanoke Valley are frustrated with their inability to communicate effectively in English. They are often unable to convey their basic needs to the surrounding English-speaking community, causing them to suffer intentional or accidental discrimination. Learning English would greatly enhance the quality of life for Latino immigrants living in southwest Virginia. By participating in a service-learning project, they can be paired with university students who help them navigate the often-confusing system, both by teaching them English and by assisting them with forms, phone calls, and other situations that require a mediator with the surrounding unfamiliar, and often confusing, culture. These Latinos can find the means of empowering themselves in their journey toward cultural adjustment as they apprentice themselves to the students who are often learning about the bureaucratic world

of the social service system themselves.

On the other hand, the university students have the opportunity to become immersed in the Latino community, learning firsthand about the hardships and joys that Latinos living in the United States experience. Later in their careers, the students may be in situations that demand the use of Spanish, quite often in circumstances that involve health care, social service benefits, or financial interactions. In CTB, the students find themselves interpreting and mediating in real-life situations. In their desire to help people who have no one else to intervene for them, they forget their lack of proficiency in the second language. Gone is the conversation generated by other students communicating within the walls of the university classroom. In its place is authentic conversation that can affect the lives of people about whom they care. In all, the canvas is prepared for reciprocal relationships that can develop within the context of a service-learning experience.

The last year I spent reading, writing, and presenting about service-learning, attending academic presentations on service-learning, and being immersed in the community of the service-learning class convinced me that a reciprocal relationship can develop between students and families, one that can be serendipitous and rich, one that deserves to be nurtured. My eureka moment occurred when Kristine, the daughter of a doctor in Southside Virginia, made the comment in class, “Having grown up in a middle class family where I always had everything I wanted or needed, I had no idea what it was like to not have enough money for food to feed the family.”

She went on to talk about her Latina friend Luz who is only two years older than she, and how she has three small children and an abusive husband, but that she is her best friend and she just loves her. She talked about the fact that Luz was the person she could talk to about her problems, especially those resulting from a date rape experienced during the summer. “My sorority sisters just don’t understand what life is really all about.” At that moment, I realized that a magical relationship had formed between this twenty-year-old university student and a twenty-three-year old Mexican immigrant whose husband is a hired hand on a dairy farm, earning an income that can only provide the necessities.

I knew immediately that I wanted to study the transformative power of relationships that took root in a class where students put theory into practice, going into a

community distinct from their own, forming friendships with people from a world that differed from any they had previously known. The contrasts in histories, perspectives, and backgrounds between the participants who inhabit these disparate worlds are vast; but the relationships they form despite the differences seem to cross the borders that normally separate groups of people in our society.

Limitations of the Study

While I am aware of the dangers of taking such relationships between student members of the dominant culture with Latino members of the marginalized culture at face value, this study supports the premise that relationships develop within the context of the service-learning course that cross cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and educational borders, resulting in a change in perception between two disparate groups of people who discover they share similarities in worldview and priorities in many instances. The students and families learned that there are common human joys and concerns that have no cultural boundaries.

The case studies presented herein reflect the relationships that developed between three student/community groups, and are by no means intended to be representative of all the students and all the families who have participated in the program. Although there is an attempt to present some cases that were less successful, the data for those cases were often less abundant, therefore resulting in less rich description.

There are issues that must be resolved, such as the void that can occur at the end of the course, especially for the families who are not governed by the socially constructed, artificial rhythm of the university semester system. Any time a structure is superimposed on people's lives, there is a risk of causing problems. However, the results of this study suggest that positive aspects of the service-learning class outweigh the inherent shortcomings of relationships that are by necessity related to the rhythm of the semester system. This study therefore examines the power of building community across borders that are seldom crossed in our society.

Crossing the Border of Self-Identity

Power systems that interfere with building community have no quick fix, but

building community needs to be our life—all our lives. Most important, we need to create better ways to communicate with each other for community building. Share my hope that people of goodwill can change these power systems by looking at them in our own lives. (Wildman & Davis, 2000, p. 58)

We live in times that are “shadowed by . . . the eating away of social support systems” (Greene, 1997, ¶1). However, as human beings, we have the ability to reach beyond ourselves into a space where we believe we should be, a place that is filled with the light of community and loss of isolation (Greene, 1997). In our society, from the time we leave home to go to school or to participate in any activity not based in the home, we begin our socialization and isolation. We tend to mingle with others whose ethnic group, language, educational level, socio-economic status, religion, and academic level are similar to our own (Harro, 2000). By identifying only with those who are like ourselves, we systematically, if unconsciously, begin the process of othering those who are members of groups different from our own. As we grow and mature, the barriers that separate us from other groups strengthen while becoming evermore invisible. In writing this qualitative study, however, I fear Othering by describing the families as Latino, or by stating their differences; I fear creating barriers of Otherness by the nature of the study (Fine, 1998).

By the time many students enter the university, they have identified themselves with their own groups. They are often unaware of the lives that people live outside their own groups. If we view higher education as a vehicle for constructive social change and empowerment, the groundwork is laid for the creation of a new paradigm of education (Ferguson, 1997) that will involve university students in the community as agents for social reform. Given the opportunity to enter the community in relationship with hitherto unknown groups, students have the ability to “push on the existing order of things” (Greene, 1997, ¶7), thereby integrating themselves with other people and crossing the border into understanding and social change.

As the academy prepares students to work and serve in the 21st century, we need to be constantly cognizant that upon graduation, these students will enter a diverse world. Whether they enter the world of work as teachers, social workers, lawyers, doctors,

engineers, or accountants, they may find themselves in an environment in which their students, clients, and colleagues represent diverse heritages and socioeconomic backgrounds. If we as educators have imbued our students with a sense of critical consciousness and social justice, they can be agents of change for creating a better social order.

Greene (1997) suggests that if one is introduced to a reflective or learning community, one will become aware of a dearth of understanding in his/her own domain, of the blocks to knowing and questioning. Based on this rationale, we can assume that a university course that promotes reflection and community involvement informed by critical discourse can propel students toward a questioning of the social order and a desire to effect change. By establishing relationships with people in various domains, students can learn to view the world through a lens that is not limited to the colors and textures that inform their own narrow worlds. They can see people who are members of other groups as colleagues in a diverse world. In addition, by interweaving the students with the community members, the divided relationship that often exists between the university and the community can only be strengthened.

Likewise, those Latinos who inhabit the community can expand their worldview by sharing relationships with university students, a group equally removed from their domain. The Latinos who come to the Roanoke Valley tend to live in isolated pockets, working and socializing with other Latinos, often having little contact with anyone outside their own social system. After spending four years in the Latino community as an interpreter, a cultural mediator, and a friend, I know that for many of the Latinos, before they became involved in CTB, I was the only Anglo they knew and trusted enough to regard as a friend.

Establishing Relationships

At the outset of CTB, my only goals were to provide the Latinos with another resource, in the form of a student, to help them navigate the complex social system in which they found themselves barely afloat and often drowning while at the same time placing the students in an environment with native speakers who could foster their acquisition of Latino language and culture. In addition, I wished to conduct a research

project that would allow me to look at the students' language and culture acquisition over the course of the semester. As I began collecting data, I realized changes in perspective were occurring alongside the exchange of language and culture. Latinos who had previously complained bitterly about the *racismo* they encountered on a daily basis, were praising the students and all they were doing for the community. I was hearing stories of meals shared, of warmth and true fellowship and love. From both students and the community participants, I was now witnessing mutually beneficial relationships that had grown and developed over the period of the semester. Thus the data collected for the preliminary study conducted during the first semester of the class provided the impetus for the subsequent study of the relationships that developed within the context of CTB.

Preparing the Canvas

Returning to the beginning quote by West, I can summarize the essence of the first chapter. We as educators can have the “audacity to cut against the grain of the human history of suffering and pain” (1997, ¶4) by enabling our students to enter the community as agents of change. This change can be examined by looking through the lens of relationship as observed in both the students and the community members. We in the academy must also be willing to take the risk of entering the community, working alongside the students and community members to nurture the development of critical consciousness and social justice.

By creating a space where two diverse populations can come together, dialogue and communication become possibilities. As Greene (1997) says, the social and the ethical imagination is “concerned for using ideas and aspirations to reorganize the environment or the lived situation” (¶11). Change and illumination thrive in the midst of relationship. We as educators can serve as facilitators for change while society enjoys the benefits of the critical thinking we have instilled in our students.

Overview

Chapter two develops the perspectives of feminist and critical theories, outlining the tenets of effecting societal change through providing students with the opportunity to

benefit from the interaction of scholarship, community service, and teaching and learning. I also present a historical overview of Latino immigration to the United States, with special emphasis on the Mexican and Honduran populations, reflecting the backgrounds of the community participants in the study. There is a brief review of current theory of language acquisition since all the participants mentioned language acquisition as a primary reason for participating in the program. Chapter two also consists of a literature review of service-learning in higher education, and social justice as evidenced in teaching and learning. Included is a history of service-learning, with special emphasis given to service-learning in the Latino community. The examination of critical theory informs the interaction of higher education with the community.

Chapter three outlines the details of the research design and the methodology used for data collection, with a special emphasis on interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis. Means of analysis are also explained.

The reader is introduced to the students and the community participants in the case studies presented in chapters four, five, and six. The relationships that develop between two disparate groups of people, the students and the community participants, are presented in the context of three distinct case studies which examine the relationships as they develop between the students and the Latino families.

Chapter seven presents an overview of the class from its inception to the end of the study, a period of five semesters. Included are vignettes of a number of participants whose relationships demonstrated interesting phenomena.

Chapter eight presents a summary of the study's findings by answering each individual research question in a cross-case analysis. The results are presented in a synthesized form. Also presented are implications for the future of foreign language education and the education of preservice teachers preparing to be second language teachers. Finally, there are suggestions for future studies.

Concluding Remarks

This study represents the intersections of the passions that have informed my life for many years: the Spanish language, teaching and learning, and service/action in the Latino community. These passions are intertwined and inseparable, representing who I

am as a researcher as well as who I am as a person. This study blends the interests that shape my life as a teacher, researcher, community activist, and above all, as a person whose life is inextricably intermingled with the lives of those with whom I interact.