

**FIGURE 1**



Adoration of the Magi

Pieter Bruegel the Younger

<http://www.abcgallery.com/B/bruegel/pieter1.html>

## Chapter 4

### THREE CASE STUDIES CONTEXTUALIZED IN A SERVICE-LEARNING CLASS

#### *The Tapestry of the Study*

Tapestry . . . a hand-woven fabric of plain weave. . . . The soft full weft threads of wool, silk, or metal entirely cover the warp, which remains apparent in the form of ribs. In true tapestry, the front and back surfaces are alike. . . . [The tapestry is] woven with the back to the weaver, who sees nothing of his work until it is finished, unless he uses a mirror to reflect it. A . . . painting on linen or paper. . . is provided for weaver to copy.

(Columbia Encyclopedia, <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ta/tapestry.html>)

I have spent much of my time knitting, crocheting, weaving, and doing needlepoint, always searching for new designs to create and different techniques to try. Constructing this narrative is a similar endeavor, but this time, the canvas is comprised of the service-learning class that provides the context for the case studies; the design is shaped by the interactions between the students and families; and the threads are the relationships that focus the design. I followed the method described by Wolcott (2001), but whereas he described his study in terms of a presenting a series of snapshots, I present mine in terms of a tapestry to continue with the metaphor that has guided this narrative.

This tapestry resembles an enlarged section of a painting by Brueghel (see Figure 1), the sixteenth century Flemish artist whose scenes, often woven into beautiful tapestries, provide a look at daily life, granting the viewer the opportunity to glimpse village life at a certain time and in a certain place. Similarly, this chapter provides a close examination of three dyads, allowing the reader to have a sense of the relationships as they developed between a student and a Latina. Just as the close-up of the Brueghel painting does not show all the inhabitants of the village, neither do these case studies show nor represent all the relationships that developed in the context of the class. In all these cases, my presence weaves in and out of the stories, sometimes as the narrator, sometimes as an observer, and sometimes as a participant.

When I first conceptualized this study, I planned to report only the findings of the semester that produced the formal data collection, including the interviews and documents to be interpreted. However, as I began to go over the documents collected in the semesters before and after this study, I made the decision that I could not limit the tapestry of the course and its implications to one semester.

Consequently, I first focus on the three case studies, presenting the data collected during the formal data collection, shaping the main characters in the tapestry. I stitch the details of these figures by analyzing and interpreting these data. Thus I am able to closely examine the relationships that occurred as the result of the class.

As I present the participants who participated in the program during other semesters, the background of the painting begins to emerge. The Latinas who are returning to the program provide descriptions that compare former students to those participating in the course during the formal data collection period. The threads of their voices begin to fill in the background of the tapestry by referring to data from all five semesters of class, setting the context of the findings.

### *The Focal Point of the Tapestry*

By a purposeful sampling, I have chosen to examine three dyads comprised of students and Latinas as a means of exploring the possibilities for relationships that develop in the context of a service-learning class. This chapter examines the first group of main figures in the tapestry, a dyad that is situated in the semester during which I collected data in a methodical, precise manner.

I begin by positioning the cases within the class, providing a rationale for why these I chose these cases. The following discussion examines each case individually, attempting to provide an understanding of the relationships that developed between students and Latinas. I present each case in the same format:

1. How I met each of the participants and what our relationship looks like.
2. Who each participant is in terms of socioeconomic, educational, and cultural background.
3. What each participant expected from the program.
4. How and when they met each other.

5. What they said about their relationship with the other person in the middle of the semester and again at the end.
6. How the Latinas felt about participating in the program the following semester.

The case studies described herein all follow the same basic format, are presented chronologically, and occasionally meander into the past or the future for analytical purposes. Because much of each case study consists of the participants' words, the length of the case studies varies slightly. Some of the participants were more articulate in expressing their thoughts in writing or in speech, and in order to present the total picture of the relationships, it is necessary to include more information. In other instances, one or the other of the participants was less loquacious, resulting in a shorter case study. In all instances, I have tried to remain true to the words of the participants.

The case studies include excerpts from the transcripts and the student-generated documents as well as my own interpretations and analyses. When reproducing the Latinas' voices, the Spanish is in italics and the English translations are between brackets in regular font. The italics between lines represent my voice, clarifying, interpreting, and analyzing the words of the participants. I chose to use a line to separate my interpretative and analytical voice from the participants' voices and my narrative voice much in the same way that some figures are outlined in black on a tapestry, causing the eye to go to the figures that are highlighted for further inspection.

Intertwined with the analytic and interpretive sections referring to the formation of relationships are my observations about the class itself. I constantly have a desire to improve the course, so consequently I used this study as a means of judging the experiences that result from the course, deciding whether the approach to certain issues needs to be changed. The purpose of qualitative research is not to judge, but rather to understand, so at times the two concepts of understanding relationships without judgment and improving the course based on judgment seem to intersect and conflict. However, as a researcher presenting the findings from a study situated in a class, I attempt to keep the two concepts as separate as possible.

Chapters five and six each present an additional case study, following the same format as chapter four. Chapter seven presents the project as a whole, showcasing a variety of student/family relationships that presented unique phenomena.

At the end of each case study, I present a summary of the findings for that case addressing them in order of the first two sub-questions: the expectations of the participants and how they changed during the semester followed by the salient issues that factored into the formation of relationship. In the final chapter, I present a cross-case analysis at which time I also present the findings for the role of the service-learning class in the formation of reciprocal relationships. In the analysis of the individual cases, I present certain emergent themes that are addressed in greater depth in the final chapter.

As the voices of the participants are heard, the power of cross-cultural relationships becomes apparent, and hopefully the reader can envision Greene's (1997) hope for the illumination of a troubled world through community and border crossing. The reader is given a glimpse of emergent relationships that cross cultural boundaries of ethnicity, language, educational levels, and socioeconomic statuses, bringing the participants an appreciation of diversity and friendship within the context of a service-learning class. Also apparent is the power of the intersection of teaching/learning with community service and scholarship, nurturing both university students and community partners to become agents of change as their worlds interact.

### *First Case Study*

#### *Kathy and Isabel*

##### *Kathy Joins the Class*

I first met Kathy when she entered my office, tentatively poking her head in through the door and asking if she could talk to me about a course she had heard I was offering in the fall. When I invited her in, she came closer to where I was seated at a table working at the computer, eventually sitting down in the teal recliner next to the table. In that first conversation, she shared that she had recently returned from Ecuador where she had spent a year through the Virginia Tech study-abroad program.

I leaned closer to her, trying to hear her soft-spoken voice as she explained that she had a wonderful experience in Latin America, becoming immersed in the culture and language, living with a family, and constantly meeting new people. Her Spanish was quite good, and we jumped between English and Spanish without thinking, using the “Spanglish” that often punctuates the speech of those who share a bilingual bond.

Although she was quiet, I soon found that Kathy can be a gregarious, enthusiastic person, and with pleasure, I listened to stories and perceptions as she talked. She fingered her necklace, made of tiny beads in myriad colors, giving her an even more gamin look as they lay against her slender neck. She peered out of her tortoise-framed glasses, looking me right in the eye. The directness of her gaze contrasted with the body language that bespoke timidity.

As I sketched an outline of CTB, she sat up straighter; interest and enthusiasm seemed to flood her body. She asked for the details of how to sign up and wandered back down the hall, trying to tie up other loose ends of the complexities of re-entering the university after a year’s hiatus.

When I interviewed Kathy, I found out that her parents are divorced, and her siblings still live sometimes with her stepmother and dad, a clarinetist with an orchestra in the southwest, and sometimes with her mother, who lives with her husband in the south. Kathy describes her dad as “a pretty famous guy in the clarinet world.” Her mother, although a voice major, stayed at home with the four children and Kathy remembers doing “really cool stuff” with her mother until she was 12, and her parents divorced; then “everything fell apart” and “timeframes were very foggy.”

She says she is not close to her family; for a while, she lived with a foster family, and expresses little desire to spend time with her birth family. She is close to her brother, however, and she says she takes him when “everyone else kicks him out.” In an interview with her, she described him as her “favorite person.” In that same interview, she described her mother as “middle class or upper middle class” and her dad as “very religious,” “a devout Catholic. He writes a lot of apologetics. He writes books about the clarinet.” She believes that he graduated from Yale with his Master’s in Clarinet Performance.

Now in her early twenties, she lives in an apartment with some friends and her brother, working in a restaurant to pay the bills and finish school. Her life is difficult because she is living independently with no assistance from her parents. She often feels weighted down with responsibility, having to provide for herself and her 17-year-old brother, who was living with her at the time she was in the class. Due to addiction and mental health problems, he does not always work and contribute his share to the coffer, so Kathy is often the sole provider for their family unit.

She decided to take service-learning as a way to interact with people, regarding it as an “out-of-class learning experience that is invaluable” because she does not want to “sit in the classroom and just read books and talk about theory.” It was also a way of maintaining the ties she felt with the Latino community during her year in Ecuador.

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*When I asked Kathy about her expectations for the class, I had already interviewed a number of students who had ready answers: to learn about their culture, to learn to speak Spanish more fluently, to help in the community, etc. Kathy, on the other hand, shrugged and looked pensive, finally saying she did not really know. Some friends had told her it was an interesting course, and it seemed a good way to ease back into being back in the U. S. Finally, after considerable thought, she formulated the reasons that appear in the previous paragraph.*

### *Isabel Enters the Program*

Visiting Isabel is always a great pleasure. Going to her apartment always follows the same routine. I first knock and wait for her to peer around the barely open door, finally opening it wide to hug me in welcome. Frequently she is in the midst of cooking supper for her husband Luis, so the aroma of frying onions chilies, and ground beef usually assail my nose the minute the door is open. As I enter the apartment, I notice the usual tidiness, with no toys on the floor or furniture, everything in place. Isabel is dressed in her Virginia Tech tee-shirt that was a gift from a former service-learner, its voluminous folds hanging loosely on her tiny body. Her long black hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and lines of tiredness trace their way over her face. Baby Irma is sitting on the couch, big brown eyes looking up, a smile creasing her face as she sees me. The volume

on the television is hardly audible as Janeth intently watches a cartoon in Spanish. Isabel holds a finger to her lips, cautioning me to be quiet. “*Está dormido.*” [He’s asleep.] As usual, to avoid waking her sleeping husband, we tiptoe across the living room to sit on the couch. No sooner do we sit down than Isabel begins her litany of needs alternating with her frustrations at dealing with the society in which she now finds herself.

I first met Isabel in the summer of 2000 at her sister-in-law Angela’s apartment. I dropped in to arrange to take Angela’s children to the doctor so I could enroll them in kindergarten, and Isabel asked if I would take care of enrolling her daughter Janeth as well. On a warm late summer afternoon, I drove over to Eastside Boulevard<sup>1</sup> and loaded the two mothers, Angela’s partner Paco, Janeth, and her cousin Vero into my van, setting off for Eastside School. As the time went on, not only did I enroll the children in school, but I also became a cultural mediator in other instances involving healthcare and bureaucratic red tape.

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*Isabel later shared her story with me in a formal interview. Three years ago, in her late 20s, she left a small coastal city in Mexico, bringing their five-year-old daughter Janeth, to join her husband Luis who was already in the United States working. Luis left Mexico to look for a job that would pay enough to keep his family and to send money to his mother; having only completed one year of high school, he found it difficult to find employment in Mexico that paid a good wage. While they were in Mexico, they lived with Isabel’s mother, who was able to help them buy diapers and milk, and sometimes even food. Isabel continued living with her mother after Luis left for the United States. During the two years he lived alone in the United States, he sent enough money home for Isabel to purchase a small plot of land with a house.*

*Her parents had separated when she was 14, and the four children in the family were divided among their mother, their father, and their grandmother, an experience that she described as “trauma.” Her father continued to work his small farm, and her mother remarried, so Isabel decided to leave her grandmother’s house to live with her mother.*

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the places referred to in this study are given a pseudonym in order to protect the privacy of the participants.



*After she married Luis, he was able to help her mother and her husband fish, which helped them out.*

*Isabel had completed three years of high school, but she left school when she was 16. She got married when she was 23, and in the years between leaving school and getting married, she worked for a trucking firm until she went to a larger city where she worked for a gynecologist until Janeth was born.*

*Isabel likes living in the United States, and is disturbed that Luis plans to send her and the children back to Mexico in the fall. Although she misses her family, she feels there is much more opportunity for them here. She remembers life in Mexico as nothing more than working and sleeping, but here there is more time to spend with the family.*

*Isabel's story is typical of many immigrant women. It is common for the men to leave Mexico in search of work (Uttech, 1999), sending money back home to buy the basic necessities. Sometimes the man sends back enough money for the woman to pay a coyote to smuggle her and the children across the border. Other times it is common for the men to have a family of "wife" and children on each side of the border. Isabel never indicated such a situation, and I would never feel comfortable asking.*

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In the next month, I spent a number of days with the family helping them with school enrollment, medical problems, and other numerous activities. During this time, I realized just how difficult life was for these two families who were bounded not only by linguistic difficulties but also by a lack of cultural knowledge. Due to a variety of physical problems, employment difficulties, and the ensuing dilemmas caused by these problems, I worried about their being able to survive without being able to communicate and without knowing where to go for assistance for their problems, some of which were fairly serious. I realized they might benefit from knowing other Anglos in the community who would be able to provide them with navigating the culture, and I began to conceptualize other ways to provide the assistance they needed to become established. I knew they could manage on their own, since many families who know no Anglos thrive and become quite successful, but both Isabel and Angela had become special friends to me, and I wanted to ease their way if possible by providing cultural entry into our often confusing bureaucratic agencies.

By November of that year, I had conceptualized CTB, and the first semester the program was in place, Juana and Marcos, a Honduran couple I knew from Planned Parenthood, were the only people from the group of families on Eastside Boulevard who partnered with the students. That first semester was a great success, as was evidenced by many casual conversations with the families and papers from the students. The following fall, additional families in the apartment complex joined Juana and Marcos for classes, including Marcos's brothers and their families, and Isabel and her sister-in-law Angela, all crowding into the small living room for English and fellowship. From that time on, the families on Eastside Boulevard would be one of our key groups with whom to partner.

Because of her husband's work and sleep schedule, Isabel decided to join the group at Juana and Marcos's apartment, along with Angela and her family. By that time, Isabel, Luis, and Janeth had moved into their own apartment just down from Angela's and Juana and Marcos's, so it was logical for all gather in one place to work with Frank and Laura, the students who were officially partnered with Juana and Marcos.

In the course of the semester, Isabel decided the others knew so much more English that she would no longer attend. However, Frank, a service-learner who spent over a hundred hours at Eastside that semester, began to visit Isabel and Janeth regularly, providing much-needed help with schoolwork for Janeth and Angela's Vero who were now in first grade. Frank made numerous telephone calls to the school, straightening out problems with school lunches, talking to the teacher about Janeth's schoolwork, attending PTA meetings, going to back-to-school nights; in every way, he functioned as a cultural mediator.

As the semester ended, Frank and Laura provided a Thanksgiving dinner purchased from Kroger, and in turn, Juana cooked a Honduran Christmas dinner for all the people who had participated in the classes. By then we were firmly established at Eastside, and the sense of partnership was strong.

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*I include this history of the program because it allow the reader the opportunity to see the development of CTB through the lens of examining one neighborhood, and the way it became focal to the further success of the project. Just as other community building in the Latino community has occurred with the Catholic Church providing the*

*framework for activities and unity among neighborhood residents (cf. Pardo, 1998), the students who first entered the community at Eastside Apartments fostered a unity among the Latino residents that might or might not have occurred without the catalyst of the English classes and the resultant friendships that developed not only among the students and the Latinos, but also among the Latinos themselves.*

*Frank, one of the two service-learners who was partnered with Marcos and Juana in the second semester of the program, managed to bring a sizeable group of together not only for English classes, but also for camaraderie and friendship. Frank's open and inviting personality, his boisterous enthusiasm, and his fascination with all things Latino made him the right person to work in that particular community. As far as he was concerned, the more people who attended, the more rewarding the experience would be. His willingness to spend countless hours in teaching English, sharing culture, and being a cultural mediator defined CTB as a program that cared about Latinos and wanted to help them adjust to their new home.*

*Had he not visited Isabel and offered to meet individually with her and Janeth when she quit joining the group at Juana and Marcos', Isabel would probably not be deeply involved with our program today. Also, although Janeth still has problems in school due to the rocky start she had because of the language and culture barrier, I suspect she would have found even less success without Frank's constant tutoring and calls to the school.*

*Even more importantly than the actual help he provided with Janeth was the precedent he established. He left in his wake the expectation that the students would come to do whatever was necessary to make cultural adjustment possible. Because of Frank's work, Isabel assumed that Kathy would work with Janeth. She assumed that Kathy would help her with phone calls and interpreting for the Anglo world. She expected that learning English would be part of the experience. Thus, Frank and the other service-learners who preceded him were foundational to Isabel's expectations for CTB.*

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In our first formal interview, Isabel shared about her life since she came to the United States:

*Al principio fue difícil, porque tenía que adaptarme al lugar, costumbres, modo de vivir muy distintos a los que estaba acostumbrada; pero después de seis meses de estar aquí, he encontrado personas que pueden ayudarnos, a los hispanos, en distintas maneras; eh, nos enseñan un poco de inglés. . . . Cuando yo llegué, me ayudaron con ropa. En el caso de usted, me ayudó mucho porque nosotras no teníamos nada, entonces, también, nos ayudó mucho en la escuela de mi hija y de esta manera, las personas que usted nos mandó para ayudarnos con el inglés, también me ayudaron mucho con mi hija en la escuela, para ella también fue difícil empezar en un lugar donde no se hablaba su idioma. Al igual que conmigo, en las citas con los doctores, en los centros comerciales, y las tiendas, fue difícil, ahora es un poco más fácil<sup>2</sup>.*

[At first it was hard, because I had to get used to the place, customs, a way of life very different from those I was used to; but after being here six months, I found people who could help us Hispanics, in different ways. They teach us a little bit of English. . . . When I arrived you all helped me with clothes. In your case, you helped me a lot, because we had nothing, then you also helped us a lot in school with my daughter, and in the same way, the people you sent to help us with English, they also helped me a lot with my daughter in school; it was so hard for her to start in a place where she didn't speak the language. It's the same with me, at doctor's appointments, in the malls, and the stores, it was hard; now it is a little easier.]

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*Just as I had suspected, Isabel was transferring her feelings about me to the students who came to her house. When I first knew her, she was not an outgoing person; she tended to be private and reserved. Her observations about her life in the U. S. after crossing the border are similar to those I hear from countless Latinos in interviews. Most often immigrants from Latina American arrive in the U. S. with nothing; crossing the border with the help of a coyote does not permit bringing any baggage, so those who cross the border illegally literally arrive with nothing but the clothes on their backs. It is*

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<sup>2</sup> At times, the translations are for meaning rather than literal word-by-word translations. However, I attempt at all times to capture the meaning, register, and tone expressed by the speaker.

*common for them to have trouble providing for the most basic needs of their families until they are able to find jobs and to get established, an often daunting task for those who do not speak English (Campbell, 1995).*

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She continued talking about the time she had spent with former students:

*Ellos también me ayudaron mucho y me hicieron regalos y cuando ellos venían y terminaba la clase hacíamos comida, comíamos juntos, ellos se daban un tiempo para estar un poco más conmigo y nos poníamos a ver un video en la televisión o a jugar un poco y pasábamos un tiempo bonito. A mí me gusta mucho que ellos vengan, porque así aprendo un poquito cada día, no se aprende todo, pero sí un poquito y eso lo ayuda a una.*

[They helped me a lot and they gave me gifts and when they came and class ended, we made food, we ate together, they gave their time to be with me for a while and we would put a video in the TV or play a little and we had a great time. I like for them to come a lot, because that way I learn a little bit each day; I don't learn everything, but I learn a little and that helps.

Encouraged by her ability to articulate her former experiences, I asked why she had decided to participate in the program again.

*Me gustó, el primer semestre me gustó y siento que es más es más ayuda si ellos vienen y hablan conmigo porque yo no tengo mucho la oportunidad de conversar mucho con personas que hablen el inglés. A veces aquí hay personas pero como que no lo hablan igual entonces me es difícil entender y con ellos como ya saben que uno no lo habla a la perfección ellos tratan de hablarlo calmadamente y un poco más claro y pues como me fue la experiencia que tuve la primera vez que me decidí participar me gustó y por eso, también aprender más, también porque quiero aprender más.*

[I liked it; I liked the first semester and I feel it is more, it is more help if they come and talk to me because I don't have much opportunity to talk to people who speak English. Sometimes there are people but since they don't talk the same, it is difficult for me to understand and with them [the students] they know that I don't

speak [English] perfectly so they try to speak it calmly and a little more clearly and since that was the experience I had the first time I decided to participate, I liked it, and therefore to also learn more, also because I want to learn more.]

Isabel continued talking, commenting on the way the students learn Spanish so quickly. She described the way she has to explain in Spanish the words she does not understand, and the way they have to rely on the dictionary.

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*As Isabel talked about her experiences communicating with the students in Spanish, there was pride in her voice that she was able to teach them Spanish while they were teaching her English. Throughout the conversation, Isabel described a mutually beneficial relationship.*

*She believed that as Anglos the students and I could help solve her problems. When I first met her, she had hardly any clothes, food was scarce, and furniture non-existent. Since I had access to resources through my church, I was able to help her family as well as Angela's with their material needs, but at the same time, the stage was set for a hierarchical relationship (cf. Ransford, 2000), in which my access to material goods granted me social honor and prestige. To this day, she calls me doña Gresilda, and I would expect the title of respect is related to my help during those early days. However, she still refers to Juana as "doña Juana," so it may simply be her customary title of respect. Nonetheless, the theme of gratitude was present in each succeeding interview, taking its place alongside the theme of reciprocity.*

*This issue crops up continually in my relationships with the Latinas, and I have difficulty resolving how to handle it. Isabel did mention that she fixes food for the students and entertains them with games and videos, once again, describing a relationship among friends, not a relationship of a benefactor and recipient. Nonetheless, I am plagued by uneasiness about the hierarchy that is intrinsically present when members of the dominant culture provide material goods for those whose socioeconomic status places them in a marginalized group (cf. Ransford, 2000).*

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### *Kathy Meets Isabel*

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 twenty 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 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. Janeth 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. In class on Monday, the students expressed surprise at the warm welcome we received, saying they felt awkward—"a bunch of strangers crowding in to someone's apartment," but they quickly realized Isabel's delight at having us.

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. Most of her questions could not be answered in the few minutes available before we packed up to move on to the next stop on a busy workday.

We had spent the morning working in my garage, bagging clothing and sorting out furniture, and we now had to deliver the items to the families participating in the program for the semester; I felt badly at not being able to spend more time with Isabel, answering her questions, but I knew how many places we still had to visit and how late we were already.

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 negotiations for their weekly meetings. By the time we left, they were excitedly making

plans for Kathy's twice-a-week trip to Roanoke. As we walked back to the car, she enthusiastically talked about how nice Isabel seemed, how adorable baby Irma was, how cute Janeth was, and so on.

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*The class discussion on Monday was rich with comments about the visit to Isabel's apartment on Saturday. Some expressed discomfort at our middle class co-opting of another's space and privacy. Others expressed surprise at our warm welcome. Mostly, however, the conversation dealt with my conversation with Isabel about all the papers in the bag. For many, it was a eureka moment, a time of understanding the concept of cultural mediation (cf. Wertsch, 1991).*

*We had read "Charity (1998)," using Nava's short story about a Christmas party given by Lions' Club as a means of examining the coming workday in the light of charity versus caring and compassion, so the subject of charity once again appeared. The students observed that charity lacks involvement with the recipients of the benevolence, whereas the interchange they had observed between Isabel and me represented one friend helping another<sup>3</sup>.*

*They returned to this scenario when we discussed the reading by Greenberg and Moll (1990). They commented that we (they now included themselves in the scene) have enough cultural knowledge to know how to find answers to questions that seem overwhelming to the families, presenting my conversation with Isabel as an example of networking and sharing information. They realized that even if they do not have personal knowledge of the social service system, they at least know how to make the calls and follow the bureaucratic trail to find out the information, once again defining themselves as cultural mediators (cf. Wertsch, 1991). They also commented on their ability to speak English, the language of the society in which we live, another factor that contributes to improved quality of life in a culture that can seem alien to marginalized people.*

*Several of the students shared that observing Isabel's trust in me and her warm welcome to them helped them realize the meaning of the course. Isabel did not see us as outsiders or intruders; she saw me as an old friend and the students as new friends, all*

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see page 171 in the third case study, where I present the class discussion and Liz's reflection as they focused on the negative aspects of the workday.



*part of the tapestry that weaves us together in the service-learning partnership. Prior to that, they had heard me explain about cultural mediation and helping Latino families to navigate the system, but until that they saw the concepts in action, they did not understand its meaning. Had it been a staged performance, it could not have been more powerful; from that time on, most of the students had internalized sharing “funds of knowledge” and “confianza” (Greenberg & Moll, 1990).*

*For many, this workday was also their first personal glimpse at a life lived outside the social boundaries established by their middle class upbringing, a theme that also emerged from the class following the workday. In a way, the workday is a powerful agent in providing a means of taking the first steps toward erasing Otherness by allowing the students 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/sub consciousness. As the students commented, they realized that they would be working with real people in real situations, people who have their own lives and needs, people who are creating a meaningful life for themselves and their families.*

*Most of the time, I take my friendship with the Latinos for granted, but on workdays, I become aware anew of the beauty of the bonds that tie us together, of the strength of the long-term relationship that binds us. I believe that the initial glimpse of our relationship provides a basis for the relationships that emerge through the semester.*

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Kathy began the semester by helping with a major health crisis for Isabel. Isabel called me one day to tell me she had chest pain and asked me where she should go. She was reluctant to go to the emergency room because she was afraid it would be too expensive. I told her I would get in touch with Kathy to see if she could take her to the Bradley Free Clinic.<sup>4</sup> They arranged a time to go that same evening, but finding the Bradley Free Clinic overbooked, they went to the emergency room at the clinic nurse’s suggestion. After a harrowing five hours spent at the emergency room, with Kathy interpreting, they returned home to Isabel’s house with medicine for muscle spasms. The bond was established between Kathy and Isabel.

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<sup>4</sup> The Bradley Free Clinic is available on two days a week to provide free medical care to those who qualify financially. The physicians and nurses are all volunteers.

### *Friendship Develops*

Throughout the semester, I heard about Isabel from Kathy every week during class. She animatedly described a visit to the library and a trip to WalMart. Her reflections focused mainly on the readings, but between the conversations we had in and out of class, I heard descriptions of time spent together that sounded like any other time spent between friends, just as I heard from Isabel during the next interview.

First she described the visit to the hospital and the way Kathy had helped her. When talking about Kathy, she said:

*Kathy no tiene todavía una idea de cómo enseñarme y yo la entiendo porque ella nunca ha enseñado y entonces yo más o menos le explico mis necesidades y ella me enseña pero me ha ayudado bastante incluso con los biles, bueno es una latera con esos biles y me han ayudado mucho también en eso. Ellas hablan con usted y ya usted las guía como debemos hacer las cosas, pero si yo les estoy agradecida, porque me ha ayudado mucho.*

[Kathy still has no idea how to teach me and I understand because she has never taught and then I more or less explain my needs to her and she teaches me, but she has helped me enough even with the bills; she is a fiend with the bills and she has helped me a lot with them. They talk to you and you guide them about how to do things, but I am grateful to them, because they have helped me a lot.]

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*The theme of gratitude for all the students do bothered me because I was afraid she was perceiving the students' actions as charity until I had a conversation with another Latina who was describing friendship, and she talked about friendship as a reciprocal relationship between people who were willing to help each other with their needs, whether the needs were material, emotional, or spiritual. As I went back through these documents, I realized that by that definition, friendship was being described in every interview.*

*Isabel also described apprenticeship, or guided participation (cf. Rogoff, 1990). At this point, Isabel was the more experienced peer, and by communicating her needs to*

*Kathy, she was able to help Kathy become a better English teacher and cultural mediator.*

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During that same interview, Isabel described a meal they shared, “*El martes hice un mole y ella trajo una comida hindú, y ella dejo aquí comida hindú y se llevó mole, pero si me gusta la comida hindú, y a ella también le gusto el mole.*” [On Tuesday I made *mole*<sup>5</sup> and she [Kathy] brought Hindu food, and she left the Hindu food and took the *mole*, but yes, I like Hindu food and she also likes *mole*.]

Isabel continued, “*Le digo, ‘Tú tienes que comer mucho porque trabajas mucho y comes poco. El cuerpo no te va a dar,’ y Kathy dice, ‘Tú pareces mi mamá.’*” [I tell her, “You have to eat more. Your body is going to give out,” and Kathy says, “You seem like my mother.” Isabel described several occasions in which they exchanged food, and she good-naturedly teased Kathy, who is quite slender, but not as slender as Isabel herself, about eating more.

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*At a later time, I had a chance to chat with Isabel about Kathy, and once again, the topic of food arose. Isabel shared that the reason she liked to share food with Kathy was Kathy’s willingness to try Mexican food, as well as Hindu, or food from any other country. She brought up the subject in relation to the student who was currently partnering with her, and who self-described as “a picky eater.” Isabel regarded the willingness to share food from Mexico as acceptance of her culture, and Kathy’s eagerness to try the food represented her openness toward Isabel herself.*

*The theme of mutual concern also emerged. Kathy and Isabel constantly expressed concern for each other’s wellbeing.*

*The theme of learning language and culture was present in the conversations with both Isabel and Kathy, and in Kathy’s written documents. As reciprocity continued to develop in their relationship, the exchange of cultural information formed a constant background.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Mole* is a spicy sauce made of chocolate, chilies, and spices, often used for chicken dishes in Mexico.

I asked how they spend their time together, and she told me that she is learning about Kathy who is a dreamer, often lost in thought and distracted, worrying about her brother. Isabel said, “[Es] soñadora, pero[es] buena gente.” [(She is) a dreamer, but (she is) a good person.]

At the same time, I received a reflection from Kathy in which she said:

I am happy with Isabel. She remembers what we study and she studies to remember. She told me she wasn't going to disappoint me and I just laughed. How could she do that? Of course I told her how silly that was and said to her that I was learning with her and expounded on my lack of experience teaching. She tells me that I live in the clouds and we laugh a good deal about that. We have started exchanging tongue twisters and she is much better at them in English than I am in Spanish. Everything is going swell! (Reflection, October 20, 2002).

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*I was always amazed at the way Kathy's reflections and Isabel's interviews mirrored one another. I could usually count on hearing about the same incident twice with little variation. Interestingly enough, they visited twice a week for ten weeks, and although I received a total of 13 reflections, there were only three interviews. It seemed unlikely they would choose the same incidents as ones worthy of sharing with me, but most often, they did. I am tempted to believe it reflects the close relationship that developed between them. It was interesting at this point to weave the two data sources together to present the complete picture of a developing friendship. I also view it as triangulation of data.*

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In answer to my question about whether the experience was what she expected, she says, “Yo siempre confié en que usted me va a mandar personas las cuales usted sabe que me van a ayudar y no hay ninguna diferencia porque usted me manda siempre a las personas que yo necesito y tengo a las personas que necesito.” [I always trusted you to send me people who you know are going to help me and there is no difference because you always send me the people I need.]

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*Despite my asking her about her expectations and whether they had changed, I never did receive a more straightforward answer. I do not know whether the indirectness of her answer was due to her wanting to please me, or perhaps to her awareness of the tape recorder whose presence always caused her to sit up straight with her hands primly folded in her lap.*

*She went on to share that Kathy was going with her to a conference with Janeth's teacher because she had many things she wanted to discuss with the teacher, and she needed Kathy's help with communicating. It was apparent that she regarded Kathy as a cultural mediator who could help her voice to be heard and understood by a culture not her own (Behar, 1993).*

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Kathy wrote a reflection in which she talked about the conference with Janeth's teacher:

[I] raced to Roanoke on Tuesday in the hope of arriving on time to the 5:00 conference at Eastside Elementary School. All the way I worried about Isabel and the girls all ready and waiting on us. My fear was to lose a trust that has been created between us. . . .

Sure enough the teacher was still there just about to leave for the evening. Right off the top she informed us brusquely that our time was at 5:00, but I quickly jumped in and apologized blaming our late arrival on traffic and rain. She seemed quite impressed to know that we had come from Blacksburg and of our student status. Retracting her grumpy fed up teacher face, she welcomed us to sit down. She seemed rather disoriented in her approach to discussing Janeth's progress. The idea of another language seemed very foreign to her and I believe it made her uncomfortable. She showed us examples of Janeth's work and discussed various theories as to why her work was not very good. Some mistakes on one worksheet made her think that the language barrier "might have something to do with it, because don't they sometimes read and write from left to right." She seems to think Janeth has a learning disability, but I think she does not understand what a BARRIER a language "barrier" can really be. Furthermore, her failure to consider the lack of help Janeth receives from her parents because they do not

speaking English. It is my feeling that a sensitive intelligent teacher would not venture to compare Janeth with other little girls in the class because of apparent irrelevance.

Because Isabel is my friend, because I know she is good, because I want her to be understood, I was hurt by the way the teacher addressed her. She said “so she is the mother” and Isabel nodded her head and smiled because she understood. . . . I was frustrated and hyper aware of the way this woman looked at and spoke to Isabel. It is just that I do not understand why [I was] given more respect than she. In the perspective of the teacher, I think, she sees this business of dealing with other cultures and languages a hassle that was not in her planning book when she applied for the job. If it be true, I wish her to leave her current station and look to forage [forge] a new path. An alternative would be for her to take a 6-month trip to a foreign country and then resume work as an educator. (Reflection 11, November 11, 2002).

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*In this reflection, Kathy touches on several themes, and I chose to leave the piece intact rather than to separate it according to theme. She talks about the trust [confianza] (Greenberg & Moll, 1990) that she and Isabel share, expressing a desire to not lose it. She also discusses her awareness of the discrimination that Isabel suffers due to the insensitivity of the teacher, but she also alludes to other discrimination she has witnessed in other situations. She comments on the general lack of awareness in this country toward people from other cultures. Her outrage at a teacher whose ignorance led her to say that Latinos write from right to left demonstrates the move she has made into another culture. She is now identifying with the Latinos and seeing her own culture as an outsider. She has entered the realm I described earlier in this document; she has crossed the border to understand the Other. She still recognizes that she is Anglo, however, and she recognizes that she is acting as a bridge between the two cultures when she says that she was given more respect than Isabel (cf. Ransford, 2000).*

*At this point, Kathy identifies Isabel as a friend who is so important to her that she personalizes the lack of respect with which the teacher treats Isabel. She is like a mother who wants the world to recognize the brilliance of her child; she wants the*

teacher to understand that Isabel is “good” (cf. Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The theme of respect was present in all Kathy and Isabel said about each other.

Kathy also recognizes that being immersed in another culture provides insight that cannot be gained in any other way. Her desire for the teacher to live abroad for six months indicates that for her, the immersion experience was a perception-altering event. This conforms to comments that she made in her earlier interview about her year in Ecuador.

Kathy’s passionate outburst is moving in its expression of solidarity with Isabel. There is no pretense in the reflection; it is a poignant recognition that she has positioned herself with Isabel in solidarity against the dominant culture of which she is a member (cf. Collins, 2000).

The theme of solidarity had begun to emerge with the visit to the hospital as Kathy expressed anger at Isabel’s treatment, and here again, she is irate about a social system that fosters such perspectives as the ones expressed by the teacher.

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Isabel, searching for words to express the *confianza* [trust] she shares with Kathy says, “*Le digo, ‘Quédate a vivir conmigo,’ porque así yo aprendo de ella y ella de mí y nos ayuda pero yo sé que no es posible.*” [I tell her, “Stay and live with me,” because that way I can learn from her and she from me and we will help each other but I know it isn’t possible.]

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During this conversation with Isabel, I was surprised at the affection she expressed for Kathy. When she had talked about the other students in previous conversations, she had always bragged on them and expressed appreciation for all they did, but I had never before heard her talk about wanting them to live with her. She talked about her relationship with Kathy in a way that expressed friendship and caring, first for Kathy’s health (worrying about her thinness and whether she was eating enough) and then wishing she could live with her. I was still afraid I was hearing what I wanted to hear, but I felt that I was hearing a description of a true friendship.

The theme of affection grew stronger as the semester continued. From the beginning Kathy’s and Isabel’s personalities were compatible, but the deep affection that

*is present here is representative of the relationship that developed between the two women.*

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Asked what her previous impressions had been of people from the United States, Isabel became emotional:

*Pues, que no nos ayudaban . . . yo tenía la impresión de que todos no podían ver a otra persona dentro de su país. Pero ahora, veo que como en todos lugares, aquí también hay gente buena y gentes malas, entonces hay que hablar con las gentes malas, tal vez el día de mañana el mundo sea otra cosa, por las reacciones que uno hace, o sea, uno ya quisiera que todos fueran diferentes, que no hubiera racismo, y no vieran mal a la gente.*

[Well, that they didn't help us . . . I had the impression that no one could see other people in their own country. But now I see that just like everywhere else, here there are good and bad people, so you have to talk to bad people, so that maybe tomorrow the world will be a different place, due to the reactions that you have, that is, I would want everyone to be different, that there would be no racism, and that you wouldn't see bad people.]

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*Isabel's comments about U. S. citizens confirmed previous remarks I had been hearing through the years. The Latinos with whom I talk frequently perceive Anglos as racists, but it was reassuring to realize that contact with the students changed the prejudice the Latinos felt against Anglos. The theme of change in perspective was present in these comments.*

*I heard similar comments constantly in class as the students discussed the racism they perceived against Latinos. Several student told stories about their families who had made discriminatory remarks about Latinos when they were at home for a weekend. We did an in-class journal about racism; I led them through a visualization in which I asked them to think about any time they had suffered discrimination. Several of the students included instances of discrimination they had witnessed or heard about in their families. Some of them expressed outrage at their birth families' words. One student disagreed with an uncle who was at her house for Thanksgiving dinner, and after a shouting*



*argument, she packed her suitcase and left for the university, signifying her having joined with her Latino family in solidarity against the dominant culture that was her own. In class, none of the students claimed discriminatory feelings, but when I do that activity again, I plan to frame it in such a way as to cause greater discomfort. I wonder if we can realize our own racism from our privileged position at the university.*

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### *The Semester Ends*

By the time I went for the last interview with Isabel, she said Kathy had helped her considerably with pronunciation as well as with visits to the school. She described their relationship as a “*bonita amistad*” [a beautiful friendship].

She told me they had celebrated their birthdays together, since they were only days apart. Kathy’s brother had come with her, and he had worked with Janeth. She was especially impressed by how Kathy always managed to find a way to get there no matter what. Due to Kathy’s transportation difficulties, it had become harder for her to eat with Isabel, but they still managed to save time at the end of every evening to “*jugar o a platicar, a ver la tele, a compartir, por ejemplo, alguna cultura de ellas con la mía, recetas de comidas*” [to play or chat or watch TV, to share, for example, some culture of theirs with mine, recipes for dishes].

Describing time they spent together, she said:

*A mí me hace bien, es un tiempo muy bueno para mí, porque como siempre estoy en mi casa, yo no veo personas. No platico casi con personas, entonces, es una aparte de que es una distracción, Para mí es muy bueno porque mis nervios andan bien en todo ese tiempo y yo ando bien, estoy en poco más ocupada y distrayéndome en cosas que me van a beneficiar.*

[It’s good for me; it’s very good for me, because as usual, I am in my house, and I don’t see anyone. I don’t talk to anyone, so it is a distraction. For me it is very good because my nerves have been doing well in all this, and I am busier and distracting myself with things that are going to help me.]

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*Once again, I heard evidence of friendship that had developed. They had continued to spend time doing ordinary things that friends do: cooking, eating, talking,*

*playing games, watching television, sharing knowledge. The theme of loneliness ran throughout my conversations with Isabel, and it was evident that she regarded the students as friends who alleviated some of her sense of isolation.*

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During this last interview, Isabel described Kathy as “*abierta*” [open], a fact that made it easier to get to know her and feel close to her. She shared the last conversation she had with Kathy:

*Terminamos de estudiar y todo, ella no se quería ir, y yo le dije: “¿Vas a seguir viniendo tú?” y me dice: “no sé, si yo estoy en Blacksburg, tal vez, eh, pero déjame, yo voy a ver a mis papás, voy a estar de vacaciones y regreso y tal vez pueda venir a verte o escribirte,” pero ella, ella no se quería ir, yo no quería que se fuera, entonces este, pues ella fue una de las personas, tuvimos más comunicación, nos ¿como se dice la palabra? Nos sentimos más, más, no encuentro la palabra, nos eh, nos unimos mucho, esa fue una amistad muy unida, entonces sí sentí muy feo, o sea, yo siento cuando ellos se van porque los conozco, ya me acostumbro a ellos y todo pero con ella todavía fue un poco más porque ella sí hacía mucho, o sea, ella trataba de ayudarme.*

[We got done studying and all, and she didn’t want to go, and I told her, “Are you going to keep coming?” and she told me, “I don’t know. If I am in Blacksburg, maybe, but I am going to see my parents; I am going to be on vacation and I will come back and maybe I will come back to see you or write to you,” but she really didn’t want to leave, and I didn’t want her to leave, because she was one of the people, we had more communication, we ... what is the word? ... I can’t think of the word, but we were really close, it was a very close friendship, so I felt really bad, that is, that’s how I feel when they (all the students) leave because I know them, I am used to them, but with her, it was even worse because she did a lot, that is, she tried to help me.]

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*As Isabel talked, her expressive eyes showed so much sadness that my first reaction was to question whether it is appropriate to send students to homes where relationships develop only to be terminated at the end of the semester. Whereas the*

*students are accustomed to short-term relationships dictated by the semester system, not all people are adapted to friendships of short duration.*

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In Kathy's final transformation paper, she spoke of the same event, echoing Isabel's words:

Isabel says no one comes back to visit after their time is up, but I plan on being the exception even though I don't have a car. In the meantime, I plan on writing her letters. Time and distance make me clench my teeth for I am trying to transcend both of them. . . . I have learned, to some extent, another language through a year long emersion and have become more willing and capable of communicating with and loving people. (December 19, 2002).

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*Both Kathy and Isabel were disturbed by the semester's end. I suspect Kathy's distress was due to feeling she was letting Isabel down as much as to not being able to visit with her. The theme of deep affection, respect, and trust ran through Kathy's verbal and written comments about Isabel. For her, they were inextricably interwoven with the reciprocal relationship that developed between them.*

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Referring to whether the program had lived up to her expectations, Isabel said, "*Pues, sí, sí, porque, pues aquí en este país a uno le hace mucha falta, mucha falta una persona que le ayude y yo he encontrado en las personas que vienen aquí, esa ayuda.*" [Well, yes, yes, because, well, here in this country, we have a lot of needs, and we need someone to help us and I have found that the people who come here give us that help.]

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*Surprisingly enough, when asked about her expectations, Isabel only spoke of her needs with cultural mediation. She said nothing of the deep friendship that had developed between her and Kathy. It was as if she viewed the relationship through two different lenses. One lens allowed to her to regard Kathy as another service-learner who had entered her home and her life to provide cultural mediation, networking with the Anglo community, and scaffolding (Greenberg & Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) to learn to navigate in the system. Another lens that considered Kathy as a dear friend whose*

*absence would leave a great void in her life. Once again, I suspect the presence of the tape recorder, because in casual conversations when I was not recording, Isabel shared much more personal information.*

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When I asked Isabel if she wanted to participate in the program again, she answered affirmatively, adding:

*(Riendo) Es que yo aparte de que me ah, uhm, bueno, tal vez me quede yo sólo este año pero yo quiero participar porque eh, uno, quiere tratar de entender mucho el inglés. A mí me gusta, pero yo creo no tengo mucha comunicación con personas que lo hablan y por eso no logro entenderlo bien pero, eh, esa es una y otra porque encuentra uno mucha amistad, muchos amigos, este, eh, invitación, o sea, son muchas cosas mezcladas entonces, sí, sí me gustaría, sí me gustaría y sí con esto pues ayudo a las demás personas pues mejor, mucho mejor.*

[(Laughing) Apart from the fact that I, uhm, that I may only stay this year, I want to participate because, well, I want to try to understand a lot of English. I like it, but I think I don't have much communication with people who speak it and so I don't manage to understand it very well. But that's one reason, and another is that I find so much friendship, many friends, this, uhm, invitation, that is, it's a lot of things mixed together, then yes, I would like to [participate] and if by doing so then I can help other people, well, that's better, much better.]

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*Although Isabel had difficulty verbalizing her expectations for CTB when the tape recorder was running, here she confirms the expectations she had communicated in informal conversations. Her primary reasons for participating in CTB were to share in a linguistic and cultural exchange while at the same time forming friendships. These themes were apparent throughout the interviews in one form or another.*

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In answer to my question about whether participating in the program had made a difference in her life, she replied:

*Gracias a usted también por haberlos mandado o sea, por mandar personas que me puedan ayudar, porque sin esta ayuda, no sé, sería muy diferente, yo no*

*entendiera inglés, yo no entendiera muchas cosas y estaría atada, su puede decir de pies y manos, pero no, ahora me siento con más confianza de salir a la calle.*

[Thank you for having sent them, that is for sending people who can help me, because without this help, I don't know, it would be very different. I wouldn't understand English; I wouldn't understand a lot of things, and I would be tied, you could say by my feet and hands, but no, now I feel more confident about going out.]

Returning to the topic of whether she wanted to participate in the program the following semester, Isabel said:

*Sí, yo le comento que sí, porque aquí encuentra uno en la calle puede encontrar personas amables y todo pero las personas que vienen a su casa ya es una amistad que va uno agarrando día a día entonces, este, pues si influye mucho, porque al principio llega uno y está solo pero ya luego ya va uno teniendo más amistades y todo.*

[Yes, I tell you “yes,” because here you can find nice people when you're out and all, but the people who come to your house offer a friendship you can take advantage of day by day, and well, it has a lot of influence, because at the beginning, you get here and you are alone, but then you end up having a lot of friendships and all.]

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### First Case Study: Kathy and Isabel

#### *What Did It All Mean?*

#### *Kathy—Different from the Other Service-Learners*

*The others.* In the course of three interviews with Isabel, I understood the depth of the friendships that she had formed with the students who had wandered in and out of her life for the past two years. Each experience had been different, but common threads of friendship, camaraderie, shared knowledge, support, and reciprocal relationships had tied them together.

She had liked all the other students; she had even felt that she learned more English from some of the others than she had from Kathy. From Frank and Laura, the first service-learners who entered her life, she had her initial taste of her host culture. She had her first Thanksgiving dinner, shared with Anglos, provided by Kroger. What could be more “American?” They also helped build trust with Anglos by helping her with the many needs she faced in communicating with the Anglo world in which she found herself struggling to have a better quality of life.

From Bill and Karen, the next students who partnered with her alone, she found that she could communicate with Anglos who speak little Spanish. Her circle of Anglo friends widened as she continued to rely on the service-learners to mediate with the outside world, whether making calls to Janeth’s school or to the hospital to straighten out the many bills that arrived in conjunction with the arrival of baby Irma. Whereas Frank and Laura had tried consistently to communicate in Isabel’s native tongue, despite Bill and Karen’s attempts to do the same, they were limited by their lower proficiency levels that hovered at Novice Low. However, a sense of friendship did develop, and Isabel spoke of them with affection.

### *Expectations for CTB*

*Kathy’s and Isabel’s expectations.* Themes of continued cross-cultural immersion and reciprocal relationship emerged from Kathy’s data. From Isabel’s expectations for CTB emerged the themes of linguistic/cultural exchange, cultural mediation, and reciprocal relationship.

Having just returned from a year in a Spanish-speaking university, Kathy was not sure what she expected from CTB. She just knew that she wanted to maintain the ties with the Latino community that she had experienced while studying in Latin America, and she did not want to lose the fluency she had acquired while studying abroad. She hoped to develop a friendship, and since she felt quite comfortable in the Latino culture, she expected it would happen.

Isabel talked about her relationships with former students, expecting to continue in the same vein with Kathy, the new service-learner. She loved the fact they came to her house, because she was not able to go to classes away from her apartment. She

anticipated having continued help with Janeth's schoolwork; as well as in dealing with all the school information. Finally, she mentioned that she enjoyed teaching the students Spanish while they taught her English.

### *Salient Factors in the Development of a Reciprocal Relationship*

The following themes emerged as salient factors in the development of a reciprocal relationship between Kathy and Isabel: language ability; commonalities and dissimilarities; affection, respect, trust, and mutual concern; and solidarity against an unjust society. Each of these themes to some extent affected the depth of their friendship, forming the foundation for reciprocal relationships.

*Language ability.* Not only Kathy's different expectations, but also her language proficiency, personality, abilities, interests, and background separated her from the other students. First, Kathy's Spanish is at a higher level of proficiency than the other students who had partnered with Isabel in previous semesters, so I would imagine they were able to communicate on a deeper level. Kathy was able to converse on an abstract level about ideas and feelings placing her proficiency level at Advanced Low to Mid (ACTFL, 1999), whereas the former service-learners varied between Novice Low and Intermediate Low.

The data revealed another difference from the friendships Isabel had with former students; Kathy is an unusually open person, willing to share her personal history in all its pain and joy.

*Commonalities and dissimilarities.* While Kathy's advanced ability to communicate with Isabel created a greater bond of friendship between the two, at the same time, it resulted in most of their communication being in Spanish, thus accounting for Isabel's comment that she did not learn as much English from Kathy. I tend to believe that since Isabel often spoke of loneliness and alienation, she encouraged the communication in also resided partly in the loneliness and alienation they both felt. They both brought major life problems to the relationship, and as a friendship grew between them, they were able to share personal thoughts at a deep level.

Kathy's background included a family that had numerous problems, resulting in dysfunctional relationships. Kathy has learned to overcome the pain of the past, gathering

from her inner strength the courage to make the necessary sacrifices to obtain her education. In a similar way, Isabel has suffered hardships resulting from a treacherous border crossing and a domineering husband. Although I chose not to include excerpts from the transcripts and written documents that refer to this personal and painful information, similar feelings of struggle and alienation were present in Kathy's documents and in my conversations with both women. In part, the shared suffering emerged as a thread that bound Kathy and Isabel together.

Similarly, Kathy felt a great sense of responsibility for her brother who was dysfunctional much of the time due to problems with addiction and schizophrenia, just as Isabel suffers from family relationships that include jealousy and discord. Both women seem to have come to terms with the circumstances that surround their lives, but a constant undercurrent of preoccupation informs much of their conversation.

Additionally, they both express feelings that indicate a lack of control over their lives. In her last interview, Isabel expressed a sense of helplessness about her husband sending her back to Mexico. Kathy expressed similar helplessness in the face of her brother's sudden descent on her, saying that it is necessary to do what she has to do. Isabel mentioned Kathy's worry about her brother, and although I did not encourage Isabel to expound on the topic, not wanting her to feel that I was asking her to betray a confidence, based on the comments Isabel made, I felt fairly certain that they had discussed the topic in depth.

Kathy had to work long hard hours to support herself and her brother. She did not have the material possessions that many university students take for granted, such as a telephone and a car, causing communication and transportation difficulties. Her worries about paying the bills and keeping her brother out of prison or a psychiatric ward go beyond the concerns that drive most of the students I know.

She and Isabel shared concerns at a deep level, as Isabel conveyed her loneliness and isolation situated in a life starkly defined by the blankets they lacked for warmth on the coldest days or the food that was scarce until the next paycheck. Kathy and Isabel shared their lives as women whose lives were not easy.

At the same time, I do not know and do not feel comfortable asking whether Kathy's family would come to her aid if her financial situation became desperate. From



her interview and from subsequent conversations, I would suspect they might not, especially if her brother was involved, but I have no data to support or deny either assumption.

Regardless of whether she would receive assistance from her family, it does not alter the fact that Kathy is a White<sup>6</sup>, English-speaking, university-educated young woman from a middle-class family, despite her current estrangement from her family. These aspects of her background alone distinguish her situation from Isabel is Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, a high-school dropout, and from a low socioeconomic class. The color of Kathy's skin, the language she speaks, her register of speech as determined by her university education, and her deportment that suggests a middle class background all grant her entry into a world that is often either closed to the Latinos or that regards them with suspicion (cf. McIntosh, 1989, Ransford, 2000; Tatum, 2000). Despite Kathy's current economic status, her ethnicity alone is sufficient to place her in a group that is given more access to power (Ransford, 2000).

*Affection, respect, trust and mutual concern.* Throughout the data, there is a thread of deep affection, trust, and respect Kathy and Isabel feel for each other. The comments range from Kathy's distress about possibly arriving late for the meeting with Janeth's teacher, thus destroying the trust she had built up with Isabel, to Isabel's humorous comments about not wanting Kathy to be skinnier. The comments they make about each other are those of friends who share mutual, reciprocal esteem and fondness. There did not seem to exist any hierarchy in their friendship; they seemed to regard each other as equals, as friends. Granted Kathy's background is contextualized in the dominant culture, but I think it is possible their relationship was deep enough to minimize their differences in terms of hierarchy (cf. Collins, 2000; Ransford, 2000).

In numerous comments made about each other, I sensed confidences of the kind that herald a deep friendship. Once again, I tried to avoid asking leading questions; due to the implicit power I held as the person who was in charge of the program as well as being a member of the dominant culture for Isabel or the person who would assign the grade for

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<sup>6</sup> In the analyses, I refer to the students as *White* when I am referring to the social construct that identifies them racially despite my agreement with Dalton's (1995) attempt to disentangle the concepts of race and ethnicity. For the same reason, I use the term *Hispanic* to represent Isabel, since that is the equivalent socially constructed term used by the agencies that refer to racial categories.

the class for Kathy, I tried to never ask questions they might answer unwittingly or because of the power that was mine.

*Solidarity Against an Unjust Society.* Kathy joined Isabel in solidarity, first when they went to the clinic and the hospital, and then again when they faced Janeth's teacher. By interpreting and by placing herself in solidarity with Isabel, Kathy took concrete action toward crossing the border to understanding and advocacy (cf. Collins, 2000; Edgington, 2000).

### *Wrapping it up.*

Kathy and Isabel joined together in unity and caring, each regarding the other as a true friend in a reciprocal relationship. Isabel knew she could rely on Kathy to help her as a cultural mediator, whether as an interpreter of oral communication with the outside world or as a translator of written documents, also from outside agencies. Through her relationships with the students, Isabel also crossed the border to understanding that Anglos are not all racists.

They also both wanted to share culture and language, but although that was one of the initial reasons they each expressed a desire to participate in the program, the friendship became the focal point of the visits.

### *Would They Do It Again?*

Isabel said she had learned more English from other students, and that she had enjoyed all the previous relationships she shared with service-learners. All other issues aside, however, it was Kathy, with her quiet ways, soft voice, and kind manner who was a kindred spirit with Isabel. It was Kathy whose departure made her sad, and who left a sense of loneliness in her wake.

Isabel had participated in the program for enough semesters that she knew the end of the semester probably signaled the end of the visits. For the first time, she had formed a deep bond with a service-learner, and her realization that the shape of the relationship would change caused her sadness. She expected to stay in touch with Kathy in one way or another, knowing the friendship had been special for Kathy as well. She expected it to

be difficult to maintain contact because of Kathy's transportation difficulties, but she hoped they could continue to be close.

It was Kathy's relationship with Isabel that made me question once again whether the researcher or instructor has the right to intrude in other people's lives until I realized that the relationships do not always end when they have been meaningful. They usually change due to the demands the students face at the university, but many of the students stay in touch with the families in one way or another. For example, Kathy has continued to write letters to Isabel in an attempt to stay in touch. Until recently, Isabel did not have a telephone, so Kathy could not call her, but now she has a phone, and I was not surprised to learn that they call each other. Last week, I received an email from Kathy: "Just wanted to know if you could send word my way if you here of anyone frequenting [R]oanoke this summer, as [I] would really love (still) to visit [Isabel]." This week, Isabel shared that she had her husband take her to Blacksburg to visit Kathy before she leaves for Latin America to begin a job, but they got lost and could not find her house. They plan to try again this weekend; Kathy gave her what she thinks are better instructions, and the adventure awaits her.

Would they do it again, knowing the pain of separation? I choose not to ask, because I think they would both regard the question as foolish, but I expect so.