The Effect of International Short-Term Mission Trips on Intercultural Sensitivity in Secondary Christian School Students

Conrad Swartzentruber

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THE EFFECT OF INTERNATIONAL SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS ON INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN SECONDARY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

Duquesne University

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

By
Conrad Swartzentruber

May, 2008
THE EFFECT OF INTERNATIONAL SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS ON INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN SECONDARY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS
ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF INTERNATIONAL SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS ON INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN SECONDARY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Conrad Swartzentruber

May 2008

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. James E. Henderson

This research study examined the effect of international short-term mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of secondary Christian school students. Christian schools utilize mission trips as a strategy to prepare students for an increasingly global, interdependent world. Research literature purports the short-term mission trip as one model for facilitating a higher degree of intercultural sensitivity through an experiential framework. Current literature contains studies that examine the effect of mission trips for post-secondary students and for younger students through mission organizations, but no empirical study explores mission trips organized by a secondary school.

A qualitative case study framed this research, providing an appropriate methodology for exploring the abstract human quality of intercultural sensitivity. Fourteen senior students attending two rural Christian secondary schools and participating in two similarly designed international mission trips were randomly selected
for the study. Reflexive photography was a key methodology in unraveling the underlying themes of the participants’ experiences.

All participants described a substantial impact from the trip. The effect was observed at both a corporate and personal level. Students noted changes in their worldview, attitudes toward life and possessions, and an increased empathy for others. Cognitive dissonance facilitated the changes described by participants. Three themes that illuminated the multifaceted change participants perceived were developing relationships, awareness of poverty, and serving others. Students were affected by their relationships with children, local adults, and classmates. An awareness of poverty evoked much reflection on the host culture as well as the participant’s home culture. Serving others provided the framework for developing relationships and the awareness of poverty. These themes were generally convergent with themes from related studies. One divergent finding was the impact of classmates on participants. Students described a personal impact from their observation of colleagues during the trip. A discussion of the findings and implications for practice and further research conclude the dissertation.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family in whom I find great joy.

To my best friend and wife, Sharon, with deep gratitude for her confidence in my ability to successfully complete this task and for her patience, encouragement, and love throughout the process.

To my three sons, Nathan, Matthew, and Ryan, for granting me the space to pursue this study and for keeping me grounded during intense days.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many people have guided and encouraged me through this amazing journey of doctoral studies. Relationships provided the essence of my experience and thus it is appropriate to mention a few people who have enriched my life along the way.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Duff Rearick, my mentor and friend for the past several years. He assured me at the beginning that I could complete a doctoral program with my faith and family intact and then proceeded to advise me to that end.

I am indebted to Dr. Jim Henderson for chairing my committee and for modeling how to lead with integrity.

Thanks to Dr. Marian Schultz for unraveling the intricacies of qualitative research and for encouraging me through the research process.

My IDPEL cohort colleagues provided encouragement and were responsible for my professional growth during this doctoral journey. Thanks to the professors and advisors who laid the foundation for this research study.

I am grateful for the administrative team at Shalom Christian Academy who encouraged me and very capably made my temporary distraction seldom noticed. Thanks to the school board for realizing the benefits of professional development and for graciously allowing me the opportunity to pursue this goal.

Finally, a special thanks to the advisors of the mission trips and the 14 students who allowed me to share in their journey and who willingly opened themselves to the questions of this study.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1: Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Background of the Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2: Literature Review</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Sensitivity Defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity as an Impetus for Intercultural Sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lens of Experiential Education in Framing Mission Trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lens of Service Learning in Framing Mission Trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Spiritual Distinctive of Mission Trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Trips as a Change Agent for Student Attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scope of Change ............................................................................................................. 76
Catalyst of Change .......................................................................................................... 78
Depth of Change ............................................................................................................... 79
Themes Affecting Change ............................................................................................... 80
Developing Relationships ............................................................................................... 81
Local Children ................................................................................................................. 82
Local Friendships ........................................................................................................... 94
Classmates ...................................................................................................................... 100
Awareness of Poverty ..................................................................................................... 104
Feelings Toward the Home Culture ................................................................................ 105
Feelings Toward the Host Culture .................................................................................. 107
Personal Impact and Challenges ................................................................................... 116
Serving Others ................................................................................................................ 126
Importance of Service .................................................................................................... 127
Impact of Service ............................................................................................................ 130
Nature of Service ............................................................................................................ 135
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions ........................................................................ 140
Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 140
Summary and Discussion of Findings ............................................................................ 140
The Impact ...................................................................................................................... 140
Nature of Impact .............................................................................................................. 142
Out of Comfort Zone ...................................................................................................... 142
Corporate and Personal Changes .................................................................................. 144
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participant Profile</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Total Number of References to Themes During Interviews</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Total Number of Participant Photos Relating to Primary Themes</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frequency of Themes From Photos of Greatest Impact Selected by Participants</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Summary of Theme Frequency From Photos of Greatest Impact Selected by</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Themes and Sub Themes</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dates of Photos From School G Participants</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dates of Photos From School S Participants</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shy Curiosity</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Big Smile</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Little Girl in the Yellow Shirt</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>These Children Changed my Life</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Joy in a Difficult Setting</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Gift of a Bracelet</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Surprise at Living Conditions</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Accident Scene</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A Gift of Kindness</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Children of La Carpio</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Economic Disparity</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Overwhelming Need</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Comparing my Home to Their Home</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I Could Have Been Born Here</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Waiting for Medical Service</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Construction Site</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Grateful Receivers</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Manual Labor</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The Key</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Volcano</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES (cont.)

Figure 22. God’s Splendor .................................................................................................. 149

Figure 23. Living at the Landfill.......................................................................................... 150
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This research study examined the effect of international short-term mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of secondary Christian school students. This chapter provides a general overview of the study. The background and description of the problem as well as its significance are stated. Research questions are described in the context of a theoretical framework. Limitations and assumptions of the study are acknowledged. A brief introduction to the study’s methodology concludes the chapter.

Historical Background of the Problem

Many Christian secondary schools conduct annual international mission trips that offer opportunities for service and the sharing of one’s faith (Walling, Eriksson, Meese, Ciovica, & Gorton, 2006). Schools invest substantial resources into mission trips with an expectation the experience will significantly impact the students’ lives. One expected outcome is increased intercultural sensitivity for the participants. Intercultural sensitivity is essential as students prepare to live and work in a pluralistic society with a growing global interdependence.

The demographic composition of the United States is rapidly changing. Hodgkinson (2002) notes the younger the population, the greater the diversity. He predicts “some parts of the country will be inundated over the next decade with diverse populations representing over 200 national origins and scores of languages” (p.7). The U.S. Department of Education found that 38.8 percent of public school students were minorities in 2000, up from 29.6 percent in 1986 (Holloway, 2003). Students in PreK-12 schools are more varied in their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic
orientations than ever in the past (Milner, Flowers, Moore, E., Moore, J., & Flowers, 2003). Our nation and its schools are enriched by this ethnic, cultural, and language diversity (Banks et al., 2001). It provides, however, both opportunities and challenges for educational leaders.

Banks et al. (2001) suggest “whenever diverse groups interact, intergroup tension, stereotypes, and institutionalized discrimination develop” (p.201). While there are possible negative effects and challenges from ethnic and racial diversity in educational settings, research suggests measurable, positive educational outcomes from increased diversity (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Meacham, McClellan, Pearse, & Greene, 2003; Wood & Sherman, 2001; Gurin, 1998).

Since private schools have less diverse student bodies than public schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003), their challenge is to prepare students in a relatively homogenous school setting for the workplace or postsecondary educational institutions that will likely be more diverse. Lopez, Freed, and Kijai (2003) suggest that diversity awareness and training is essential for Christian schools that want to be effective in preparing students for their future in a diverse, global community. Yet, Menjares (2002) indicts Christian education as being ineffective in matters of diversity on their campuses. One strategy schools have employed to deal with this deficiency has been an attempt to gain some benefit from diversity by sending students to experience diversity in non-campus settings (Kehl, 2005). An international mission trip is one strategy frequently utilized and is a growing phenomenon in North America.

International short-term mission trips emerged in the 1970’s as a method of exposing students to cross-cultural settings with the hope they would become vocational
missionaries (Linhart, 2003). In the 1980’s and 1990’s, the number of such trips grew at a staggering rate, paralleling an increase in all types of cross-cultural tourism (Linhart). Thousands of churches have been joined by hundreds of specialized short-term mission organizations that facilitate the mission experience (Friesen, 2004).

During the past decade, some Christian schools witnessed the transformation of senior trips with a celebratory focus to mission trips with the goal of providing a cross-cultural experience while serving others. This transformation has seemed more compatible with the Christian school’s spiritual mandate. In a typical short-term mission trip, high school students and several advisors travel to a selected country for six to ten days. For some schools the trip is mandatory and a culmination to the secondary school experience while for others it is an optional co-curricular trip. Activities and schedules are varied but generally focus on serving the physical and spiritual needs of others.

Mission trips are taken at substantial expense and sacrifice for the school community. Preparation demands valuable time for faculty advisors, administrators, students, and parents and substantial funding must be raised for each trip. Linhart (2005) estimates that nearly 250,000 middle school and high school students spent over 100 million dollars in 2003 to participate in short-term mission trips with the expectation of substantial benefits from the experience.

Given the multifaceted levels of sacrifice for the trip, it is imperative that outcomes from the experience meet expectations. One expected outcome for the cross-cultural trip is intrinsic personal growth and development for students. A key dimension of intrinsic growth is improved attitudes toward and acceptance of diverse peoples. One school describes two of its expected outcomes as “learning to relate to people outside the
cultural group which students have grown up in and to understand the barriers and differences of culture which have to be crossed” and to “develop and promote an attitude of caring” (Shalom Christian Academy, n.d., p.1). The Association of Christian Schools International expects that students will “focus on relationships that bridge cultures” while gaining “an insider’s view of the local customs and culture” (Association of Christian Schools International, n.d.). This study attempted to better understand the connections between these goals and the experiences of student participants on mission trips.

**Statement of the Problem**

Educational leaders have an opportunity to develop a future generation who will celebrate the individual uniqueness of diversity and at the same time enjoy the complex beauty of the whole. In a successful educational system, it is essential students leave secondary schools prepared for the world in which they will work. One goal of international trips taken by high school students at Christian schools is to positively affect the intercultural sensitivity of participating students. Increasing competition for limited funds cause educational leaders to continually evaluate the effectiveness of programs, particularly those demanding substantial resources. Valuable experiences are considered to be worth the investment, but outcomes must be demonstrated.

In this study, specific outcomes of international trips for secondary students were explored. This complemented emerging, related literature concerning service learning and experiential educational programs and the outcomes for their participants.

**Purpose of the Study**

There was a three-prong rationale for this study. First, as our world increasingly functions as one community, intercultural sensitivity will be an essential characteristic of
the successful high school graduate. Educational leaders must consider how intercultural sensitivity can be fostered in students both theoretically and experientially. The literature suggests the short-term mission trip as one model that provides an opportunity for acquiring a higher degree of intercultural sensitivity through an experiential framework. This personal growth is assumed by many Christian schools and is expressed in their stated goals or outcomes for short-term mission trips.

Second, Christian schools invest substantial resources into mission trips. Financial and human resource investments demand some evidence of gains or outcome achievement to justify the investment. There is increasing competition for limited funds and greater expectations from parents for effective use of resources. The assumed gains or outcomes from short-term mission trips have not been adequately tested empirically. Beers (2001) notes the “proliferation of study abroad trips…has not been accompanied by indicative research evidence to support the underlying assumptions of the program” (p.86).

Third, there is a lack of research regarding the impact of short-term mission trips designed by a secondary school institution for its students. Multiple studies have been conducted regarding the effect of short-term mission trips on college students. In these studies the college or university designed the trips. Other studies have evaluated the effect of mission trips on participants in which the trip was designed and organized by a particular mission or church agency. No study was found that investigated the impact of short-term mission trips that were designed as a curricular component by a secondary school. This research study helped fill the gap in current research literature.
The purpose of this study was to better understand the effect of a short-term mission trip on the level of intercultural sensitivity in Christian school secondary students. The findings help inform the development and planning components of international mission trips for Christian schools.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were posed for this study, recognizing that in qualitative research new questions emerge and help shape the study as information is received and analyzed (Merriam, 1998).

The primary research question explored “what is the effect of an international short-term mission trip on the intercultural sensitivity of Christian school secondary students”?

Questions that guided the study follow.

1. Do students perceive any changes in their intercultural sensitivity and if so, how do these changes occur?
2. How does the trip affect the participants’ perception of other countries and cultures?
3. How does the trip affect the participants’ perception of their home country and culture?
4. What aspects of the trip most affected any perceived changes in intercultural sensitivity for participants?

**Theoretical Framework**

Several topics in current educational literature helped shape this study, including experiential education, service learning, and cross-cultural learning. Many research studies demonstrated relationships between adventure education program components
and course outcomes. Experiential education experiences such as Outward Bound served as a model to inform the study of international mission trips because of similarities in design and goals. The prescribed physical environment for adventure education programs includes challenge, stimulation, and adventure. International mission trips similarly provide elements of physical challenge in an unfamiliar environment requiring students to reach beyond what they perceive as comfortable (Shalom Christian Academy, n.d., p.1). Being cognizant of this vein of research enriched the framework of the study.

Another related research area was service learning. Service learning gives students the opportunity to apply what they are learning in the classroom by performing acts of service to the community (Stott & Jackson, 2005). During the past ten years, a substantial number of service learning studies have been conducted measuring changes in students’ academic learning, leadership, problem solving skills, personal and interpersonal development, as well as identifying the processes associated with students’ development of tolerance and reduced stereotyping (Simons & Cleary, 2005; Stott & Jackson, 2005). International trips correlate with the goals of service learning and are structured with similar outcomes expected. Previous research studies and theories regarding service learning informed this study.

Extensive literature confirms the importance of face-to-face cross-cultural experiences in developing cross-cultural skills, knowledge, and competence (Merryfield, 2003). While students may be taught about diversity awareness and sensitivity in a formal setting, research confirms the value of cross-cultural experiential learning experiences that provide real life interactions as a catalyst to changing attitudes (Merryfield, 2003;
Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002). Findings from the research of experiential education, service learning, and cross-cultural experiences influenced the direction of this study.

**Study Significance**

Previous empirical studies had not examined the impact of an international mission trip on intercultural sensitivity of students in the context of a Christian high school. McBride, Benitez, and Sherraden (2003) noted the lack of studies of international service programs. This study was designed to begin to fill the void in educational literature regarding how an international trip affects the development of student attitudes toward other cultures and peoples.

Mission trips are taken with the expectation students will benefit intellectually, spiritually, and socially. Limited financial resources are allocated to help achieve this goal. This study empirically examined how a one-time experience affected student attitudes. Educational leaders profit from knowing whether stated goals are being reached. If international trips are not producing expected student outcomes, one could surmise there may be more economical ways to accomplish these goals. The findings from a study of international mission trips help inform and enrich the research literature regarding experiential education, particularly adventure education programs and service learning due to noted similarities.

**Definition of Terms**

**Christian School** – A private school with a Christian focus and mission. The schools are funded by student tuition and fundraising. These schools have more latitude than their public counterparts in setting curriculum and pedagogy. An association of
parents or a church selected body normally governs the school. The two schools used in this study were located in south central Pennsylvania and north central Maryland.

**Experiential Education** – A systematic approach to learning in which the educator allows the nature of the student’s experience to shape the educational process. Particular sets of experiences are selected that are conducive towards particular educational goals (Neill, 2004). It involves a transactive component between teacher and learner (Itin, 1999).

**Intercultural Sensitivity** – In general, this refers to the progressive capability of accommodating cultural differences (Bennett, 1993). A more complete definition will be synthesized from the literature in a later section.

**Reflexive Photography** - Reflexive photography is an innovative, qualitative research technique using photographs to bring a focus to the analysis of and reflection upon the participant’s experience. For this study, reflexive photography involved photographs taken by student participants during their mission trip. Participants reflected upon their photographs in photo-elicitation interviews with the researcher. Reflexive photography allows for more open and creative analysis of student perceptions through a more relaxed environment that focuses on photographs rather than the participant (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harrington & Schibik, 2003). Additional information in Appendix A provides a more complete understanding of reflexive photography.

**Service Learning** – Student activities designed to improve the community. These activities are intentionally connected to the regular curriculum so students can make connections between theories of the classroom and life experiences (Arenas, Bosworth, & Kwandayi, 2006).
Short-term Mission Trip – A cross-cultural trip arranged for high school students through the sponsoring school. A mission agency is often involved in planning the trip with the school leaders or advisors. The objectives of the trip focus on meeting both physical and spiritual needs of people. The literature reveals a range of trip lengths from one week to two years (Blezien, 2004; Friesen, 2004; Kehl, 2004; Linhart, 2005). For the purposes of this study, short-term mission trips will refer to an international trip of seven to 14 days taken by a high school student group.

Limitations

This study was conducted among high school students attending two mid-sized Christian schools in south central Pennsylvania and north central Maryland. It cannot be assumed their experiences are typical of public school students or Christian school students in other areas of the country. The range of participant ages was quite narrow. Findings were typical of these ages and may not be representative of other ages.

The mission trips in this study were relatively short, lasting less than two weeks. The time to experience and interact with another culture and its people was limited by the length of the trip. The mission trips took place in a limited number of countries and cultures with distinctive nuances. The results from this study are limited to experiences in these particular countries.

This study attempted to understand attitude changes that happened to students during mission trips. The source of data, however, was limited to student perceptions. It should be recognized that the results are not more extensive than student perceptions. It is conceivable additional changes in attitudes indeed happened during these experiences but were not perceived by the students.
Assumptions

The participants in this study were high school senior students. These students were asked to keep journals, take pictures, and to reflect on their experiences after their trip. It was assumed the students would take the project seriously and put forth a consistent effort in completing the journaling and photography assignment. It was also assumed the students would be able to adequately remember experiences from the trip and would be willing to describe their experiences during interviews.

The researcher serves as administrator at one of the participating schools. It was assumed the precautions taken to minimize potential barriers between the researcher and participants would facilitate a free flow of information during interviews.

Methodology

A qualitative case study was used to explore the research questions in this study. Previous research studies confirm qualitative methodology as more appropriate when dealing with an abstract human quality such as intercultural sensitivity. Reflexive photography provided structure as participants took photographs during their trip and reflected on these pictures during post-trip interviews.

Fourteen students randomly selected from two Christian secondary schools comprised the sample. Photographs taken by participants during the mission trip, corresponding journals, and interviews provided the data for analysis by the researcher. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously as themes and patterns were identified.
Summary

This study examined the effect of international short-term mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of secondary Christian school students. A deeper understanding of these trips helps inform the planning of more effective experiences.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of the literature that provided a framework for this research study. While the literature directly related to mission trips was limited, the theories of experiential education and service learning provided lenses through which one could better frame and understand the effect of mission trips. Similarities in structure and purpose allowed these theories to enrich the background of this particular study and strengthen the rationale for its design. To navigate these veins of literature, six sections will be reviewed.

The first section will synthesize a definition of intercultural sensitivity from current literature. Bennett’s (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity will be the focus of this section.

The second section will describe the impetus for improving intercultural sensitivity of students, why this is a reasonable goal for a secondary school, and the sense of urgency for schools to achieve this goal.

The third section will review experiential education as a related theme to mission trips. The educational components of experiential education parallel those of secondary international trips and subsequently will add insight to the mission trip experiences.

Service learning, one component of experiential education, is discussed in the fourth section as another theme that will provide a lens of inspection. Service learning is a common concept in secondary schools and shares many goals and design elements with mission trips. Research studies of service learning will be reviewed in this section.
The fifth section will review literature that describes the spiritual component of mission trips for Christian schools. This distinctive transcends philosophical theories and will enrich the framing of this study.

The sixth section will review studies centered on short-term mission trips of youth. Some studies considered secondary students while more studies centered on college students or older youth.

**Intercultural Sensitivity Defined**

The understanding of intercultural sensitivity is of increasing interest to educators as the world becomes more interactive. Linhart (2003) observes:

As globalization increases and produces greater cross-cultural encounters, greater attention will be needed as to how to promote intercultural dialogue and reduce the temptation to stereotype, reduce, or avoid the “Other” in these moments of cultural disequilibrium. (p.83-84)

Current research studies and literature postulate a compelling case for the importance of the issue of intercultural sensitivity for educational leaders, yet the literature reveals little in the way of a theoretical framework for understanding intercultural sensitivity and the few existing models lack conceptual specificity (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003). The one exception is the work of Bennett (1993), who presented a complex model of intercultural development that has been used as a foundation for education and training activities designed to move beyond intercultural competency toward more sensitive stages of personal growth. Bennett (1993) notes that “intercultural sensitivity is not natural” and that we must encourage
learners to “transcend traditional ethnocentrism and to explore new relationships across cultural boundaries” (p.21).

Bennett (1993) describes intercultural sensitivity as the way people construe cultural difference. The various experiences that accompany these different constructions provide insight into a developmental model. Intercultural sensitivity development is “the construction of reality as increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference” (p.24). This development is multidimensional, but generally moves through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

Bennett (1993) “posits a continuum of increasing sophistication in dealing with cultural difference, moving from ethnocentrism through stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference” (p.22). He defines three ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, and minimization) and three ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). He proposes curricular ideas specific for particular stages to help sequence appropriate training based on the group’s current developmental stage. While the study of this dissertation did not measure particular developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity for students attending mission trips, the principles found in this model enhanced the analysis of personal changes during trips. In light of this connection, the six stages are briefly described.

The first three stages operate from an ethnocentric base. Ethnocentric is defined as “assuming that the worldview of one’s culture is central to all reality” (p.30). Denial of difference is the first or lowest ethnocentric stage. The individual at this stage simply does not recognize the existence of cultural differences. In an extreme example, physical isolation can foster the denial of cultural difference such as in the case of isolated tribes
in Papua, Indonesia. Even in the U.S., a culturally homogeneous town or small city may provide isolation. This stage may be caused by intentional separation, such as a racially distinct neighborhood. It is characterized by naive comments regarding cultural differences or superficial statements of tolerance. The educational strategy for this stage is to facilitate the simple recognition of difference.

The second stage, defense against difference, is defined as “a posture intended to counter the impact of specific cultural differences perceived as threatening” (Bennett, 1993, p.34). In this stage, difference is overtly acknowledged and strategies are developed to fight these differences in order to preserve one’s own worldview. Denigration is one form of defense and involves evaluating cultural differences negatively and overtly expressing this negativity. Negative stereotyping to expose a group’s perceived inherent inferiority is an example. Superiority is another form of defense and emphasizes the positive evaluation of one’s own cultural status. Reversal, the third form, involves the denigration of one’s own culture and an assumption of superiority of a different culture. The strategy of education for this stage is to emphasize the commonality of cultures. Activities that help persons discover the “vulnerability and value that all human beings share” (p.41) are important aspects of education for this stage.

Minimization is the third ethnocentric stage of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). In this stage, cultural similarities are emphasized and cultural differences are trivialized. People put aside differences and focus on the common ground of shared humanity. Physical universalism, a substage of minimization, purports the concept that “human beings in all cultures have physical characteristics in common that dictate
behavior which is basically understandable to any other human being” (Bennett, 1993, p.42). A second substage, transcendent universalism, emphasizes spiritual or political similarities in people. The educational strategy for this stage is to facilitate cultural self-awareness.

The final three stages operate from an ethnorelative base. Ethnorelativism is the understanding that “cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context” (Bennett, 1993, p.46). The ethnorelative experience of cultural difference is nonthreatening for an individual while the ethnocentric experience is threatening.

Acceptance of difference is the fourth stage and first ethnorelative stage. At this level, people acknowledge and appreciate cultural differences. They recognize these differences as necessary and even preferable. The first form of acceptance, respect for behavioral difference, is evident when people accept the idea that behaviors will vary across culture groups and all forms of behavior are worthy of respect. Respect for value difference is the second form of acceptance and adopts the perspective that values and beliefs exist in a cultural context and vary across culture groups. The developmental strategy for this stage is to emphasize the practical application of acceptance through activities such as cross-cultural simulations.

The fifth stage of intercultural sensitivity is adaptation, “where skills for relating to and communicating with people of other cultures are enhanced” (Bennett, 1993, p.51). Persons maintain their own worldview, but add skills appropriate to other worldviews. This additive process does not threaten their integrity or cultural existence. A form of adaptation is empathy where persons attempt to think as those from other cultures would
think. Empathy comes from a position of respect. Pluralism, the second form of adaptation occurs when persons internalize multiple cultural frames of reference. They interact comfortably within this pluralistic experience. The strategy for this stage is to facilitate face-to-face interactions and discussions.

The final defined stage of intercultural sensitivity is integration. Persons internalize multiple cultural worldviews and are able to transcend their own culture. The first form of integration is contextual evaluation. Persons are able to evaluate any given situation in the context of multiple cultures. The second form is constructive marginality where someone operates outside normal cultural boundaries and sees oneself as the constant creator of one’s own reality. This form allows a person to mediate cultural differences since the person is not enmeshed into one cultural group.

Bennett (1993) notes this final stage is not an arrival, but simply the end of his continuum. Learning continues into new continua beyond his model.

Bennett’s (1993) six stages of intercultural sensitivity contribute a framework for understanding how students experience change during a cross-cultural trip. The distinctives of each level provide indications of how students may be experiencing changes in intercultural sensitivity as they move within a stage or from one stage to another.

Diversity as an Impetus for Intercultural Sensitivity

Current literature accentuated the necessity for students to develop a higher level of intercultural sensitivity in preparation for increasingly diverse communities of the future. Banks (2002) noted that, “the years from 1980 to 2000 were one of the most
prolific and productive periods in the development of ethnic studies scholarship and curriculum reform in the USA” (p.22). Banks added:

The ethnic studies and multicultural education movements in the USA – which grew out of and reinforced the civil rights movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s – have created transformative knowledge that has brought many benefits to American intellectual and scholarly life. It has facilitated the process of democratization in the USA, but has deeply influenced mainstream academic knowledge by helping to make it more truthful and more consistent with the realities of American life. It has also helped to liberate American students from many national myths and misconceptions and consequently given them more human freedom. (p.23)

In his resignation letter, Education Secretary Rod Paige (2004) highlighted accomplishments in closing the gap in academic achievement between minority students and their white peers as well as increasing Hispanic and African American test scores. The importance of diversity awareness was clear in the national educational agenda and was subsequently reflected in current educational research.

Broido (2004) described the distinctives of the millennial college students in terms of their awareness of diversity issues. She concluded we must embrace the reality that campuses will be different as our students change. Race, ethnicity, immigration status, and English language skills are ways in which the millennial generation differs from earlier ones. She made a clear case for changes and increased awareness at a leadership and research level in educating the millennial children.
Banks et al. (2001) described a four-year project to review and synthesize diversity research conducted by the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel. The study proposed 12 essential principles that describe ways educational policy and practice related to diversity could be improved. The authors emphasized the importance of being intentional when planning for the success of a diversified student body. Relationship building and policy-making were two of the principles identified. Relationship building is interconnected to the attitudes of students and is critical in improving these attitudes.

Astin (1993) conducted a longitudinal study using a sample of over 200 colleges and universities that participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program to examine 82 student outcomes and how they were affected by the college environment. Key findings were divided into three broad categories: academic development, personal development, and satisfaction. Under personal development outcomes, Astin included a measure called *cultural awareness*. This reflected the student’s perception of how much the college experience had contributed to cultural awareness and acceptance of different races and cultures.

Astin (1993) found that white and black students grew farther apart politically during their undergraduate years. This pattern of differential change indicates that the college experience actually serves to exacerbate already existing differences observed at the point of college entry. Astin suggested that voluntary as well as structural segregation might be to blame. He concluded that an institutional emphasis on diversity issues would have widespread beneficial effects.

Several schools conducted studies to prove a compelling educational value for student diversity from a legal perspective (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Kurlaender & Yun,
These studies were initiated in response to courts threatening to dismantle desegregation and were designed to achieve a richer understanding of the overall impact of diverse schools on the moral, intellectual, and social development of students. Kurlaender and Yun (2001) reported strong educational benefits in the three categories of critical thinking skills, future educational goals, and principles of citizenship. Orfield (2002) found that students in his survey indicated a high degree of comfort while living and working with students from other groups. The students felt their school experiences would help them in job settings and in other interactions with people different from them. Improving student attitudes toward cultural and social diversity is both a pragmatic and empirical concern of educators (Carrillo, Holzhalb, & Thyer, 1993; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Probst, 2003).

Sizoo and Serrie (2004) described cross-cultural skills as an essential criterion for success in the current global business environment. They reviewed five synergistic exercises designed to give college students experience in dealing with real-life problems. They noted students must learn to manage cultural difference at the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. The four experimental groups included freshmen taking a course on international business, foreign freshmen taking a course on U.S. living, adult learners taking a marketing course and freshman taking a cross-cultural course utilizing the five exercises of the study. Sizoo and Serrie concluded:

- Intercultural sensitivity does not significantly increase by simply living in a foreign country, or by getting older, or by taking an overview course in international business. It requires specific cross-cultural skill training that
addresses both the intellectual and experiential aspects of cultural differences.

(p.164)

Mahoney and Schamber (2004) examined general education curriculum on diversity through a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. They noted the urgency for developing student skills in managing personal and social difficulties posed by a multicultural society. Their study highlighted the importance of teaching not only knowledge of cultural difference, but skills in dealing with social stratifications and related tensions. Mahoney and Schamber observed, “A simplistic emphasis on a cognitive curriculum is insufficient, especially for courses intended to change attitudes and behaviors associated with intercultural sensitivity” (p. 316). These articles and studies give a sense of importance and urgency concerning the issue of respect for diversity. They identify the need to better understand relationships and attitudes concerning diversity.

Empirical studies regarding diversity awareness in Christian schools were more limited. Lopez et al. (2003) conducted a study that described the experiences of Adventist teachers, specifically their training, use of instructional strategies and adaptations, needs in multicultural settings, and the challenges they encountered when teaching students of different cultures. This study took five paradigms from past research that seemed indicative of teachers’ basic beliefs and practices regarding multicultural teaching. The paradigms selected were ethnic additive, cultural pluralism/cultural difference, self-concept development, language, and racism. Teaching strategies used most frequently were from the self-concept and ethnic additive paradigms, both of which are closely aligned with a Christian perspective and with teaching in general. The actions of
enhancing and protecting diverse groups (changing discriminatory practices and appreciating language differences) were seldom used. Lopez et al. suggested these actions do not come naturally and that training is needed in these areas. They noted teachers most receptive to training were those with the most experience in multicultural classrooms.

As evidenced through these studies, school structure and formal pedagogy are not complete in their ability to improve student attitudes toward diversity. Mission trips, a form of experiential education, could effectively complement the complete school curriculum.

The Lens of Experiential Education in Framing Mission Trips

In 450 B.C., Confucius made the well-known statement “Tell me and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand” (Neill, 2004, p.8). This statement provides a foundation for understanding experiential education. At the turn of the twentieth century, John Dewey promoted the idea that students learn through their experiences (Challenge Masters, n.d., ¶6). There has been a re-emergence of interest in experiential education in the past 20 years (Bruening, Lopez, McCormick, & Dominguez, 2002). Experiential Learning Cycles are models that draw on experiential education principles, largely based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey (Neill 2004). These Cycles describe from one to six stages of learning. They are foundational theories in many outdoor education programs.

Hovelynck (2001) describes experiential learning in terms of three processes that may occur simultaneously or in separate stages. The first process is recognizing in which students become aware of their behavior patterns often triggered by frustration with the
course of events during the activity. This frequently presents a motive for change.

Acknowledging is the second process in which students not only recognize events that take place, but become aware of their share in these events. Finally, reconnoitering refers to the process of exploring and experimenting with new possibilities for action.

An international mission trip shares many similarities with experiential education. “The educational ingredients of short-term mission trips emerge from learning through experiences, assigning the responsibility for learning to the participants, and their abilities to effectively interact with the experiences and integrate the learning from those experiences into their lives” (Linhart, 2005, p.258). Experiential components of high school mission trips include student-led problem solving, group collaboration, exposure to poverty and need, interaction with persons of the host culture, and cognitive dissonance.

Hovelynck (2003) calls for a “focus on learners’ actorship rather than program activities” and a “clear distinction between active learning and active teaching” (p.9). He notes three components of experiential education. First, providing an open learning space allows the activity to become their experience and allows a certain level of frustration, an important component of learning. Second, challenge by choice gives the participant the right and responsibility to set their own learning agenda. Third, there is a focus on “small intermediate learning outcomes versus final program outcomes” (p.5).

Outdoor experiential education most closely aligns with mission trips. One such program, Outward Bound is a non-profit organization with the mission:

To inspire character development and self-discovery in people of all ages and walks of life through challenge and adventure, and to impel them to achieve more
than they ever thought possible, to show compassion for others and to actively
engage in creating a better world. (Outward Bound, n.d., ¶1)

Kurt Hahn, founder, expanded the concept of experiential learning to include real
and powerful experiences to gain self-esteem, the discovery of innate abilities, and a
sense of responsibility toward others (Outward Bound, n.d.).

Many research studies (Garst, Scheider and Baker, 2001; Goldenberg, McAvoy
and Klenosky, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Smith et al., 2002) demonstrate relationships
between adventure education program components and course outcomes. Smith et al.
(2002) studied the impact of a 15-week outdoor experiential program on the moral
reasoning of 196 college students. A pre-test and post-test of the participants revealed
participants in the challenge course did achieve a higher Principled Moral Reasoning
score than the control group. These authors even raised the question for further research
“does actual kinesthetic involvement and experience cause improvement in moral
reasoning” (p.280).

McKenzie (2003) used an interpretive case study to explore the means through
which Outward Bound outcomes were achieved. Ninety-two students participated in the
study, using questionnaires, interviews, and researcher observation of group discussions.
The questionnaire included a quantitative matrix indicating the impact of course
components on course outcomes as well as a series of qualitative open-ended questions.
The five aspects of courses found to influence course outcomes were course activities, the
physical environment, instructors, the group, and students’ characteristics. The study
indicated that a wilderness setting could increase students’ concern for others. McKenzie
(2003) describes this relationship in terms of:
Working as a group, interacting with other group members, relying on other group members, taking care of others, and trying new behaviors in the group setting can increase students’ self-awareness, self-confidence, motivation, interpersonal skills, concern for others, and concern for the environment. (p. 18)

Goldenberg et al. (2005) identified linkages of an experiential education course with course components, course outcomes, and personal values. The study revealed that outdoor adventure education programs make an immediate impact in the lives of the participants and reinforce important personal values. Hobbs and Spencer (2002) examined the impact of a Wilderness Education Association Wilderness Stewardship two-week course on college students’ leadership skills. Pretest and posttest findings showed a significant difference in the areas of fundamentals of leadership, speech communication skills, character-building skills, and group dynamic skills.

Garst et al. (2001) used both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the impact of outdoor adventure trips on youth self-perceptions. Fifty-eight adolescents who participated in an outdoor adventure trip comprised the convenience sample. The quantitative component included a pretest, posttest, and four-month posttest questionnaire that focused on previous experience, reasons for participation, and Harter’s Self-Perception Profiles for Adolescents. The four subscales of social acceptance, behavioral conduct, athletic competence, and global self-worth were identified as most relevant and subsequently used in the study. The results suggested that social acceptance and behavioral conduct increased immediately after the experience and that behavioral conduct remained after four months. Qualitative data supported these results and provided additional evidence that the impact of self-perception occurred due to the
interrelatedness of several trip characteristics. The catalysts for changes in self-perception appeared to be the novelty of the outdoor context and escape from family pressures and negative peer influences. Their research suggested outdoor adventure experiences of three or more days provide sufficient time for escape from these influences.

Walsh and Golins (1976) described a model of Outward Bound programs that place a person in prescribed physical and social environments, give a characteristic set of problem-solving tasks, create a state of adaptive dissonance, and ultimately orient the person toward living and learning. Sibthorp (2003) noted while it is “widely accepted that the (a) individual, the (b) social environment, the (c) physical environment, the (d) task structure, and the course (e) instructor are critical to participant development, the interrelationships between these areas remains poorly documented by empirical studies” (p.81).

The prescribed physical environment for adventure education programs includes challenge, stimulation, and adventure. According to McKenzie (2003), “aspects of the physical environment found to influence course outcomes include the wilderness setting, the unfamiliarity of the environment, and the weather” (p.14). International missions trips are similar in that they provide elements of physical challenge in an unfamiliar environment requiring students to reach beyond what they perceive as comfortable (Shalom Christian Academy, n.d., p.1.). Walsh and Golins (1976) described the social environment as involving small social units of participants with collective group consciousness, objectivity, autonomy, individuality, conflict resolution, trust support, and reciprocity. Garst et al. (2001) found that the small-group structure increases social skills, teamwork, and problem solving. International mission trips for private Christian schools
consist of small groups of students with a conscious focus on group dynamics, trust, and cooperation. Developing and promoting “an attitude of caring and concern among class members” is one goal of the experience (Shalom Christian Academy, n.d., p.1). A balance is maintained between group processing and individual reflection of the experience through journaling and scheduled time for private contemplation.

The Outward Bound process involves an intentional state of dissonance for the participants. Cognitive dissonance, an influential model in social psychology, arises when there are inconsistencies between knowledge about oneself, one’s behavior, or the environment (Overwalle & Jordens, 2002). This dissonance causes psychological discomfort that motivates people to reduce it by changing their beliefs, attitudes, or behavior. The Outward Bound program refers to adaptive dissonance that is caused when a person has two different and conflicting thoughts that are reflected upon and results in the transfer of learning to future experiences (Martin, 2006). Walsh and Collins (1976) describe adaptive dissonance as the “therapeutic use of anxiety” (p.10). They suggest that change and adaptation will not occur without dissonance. Adaptive dissonance results in succumbing, coping, or thriving (Walsh & Collins). Dissonance leads to mastery or is used to regain a state of equilibrium and to overcome the dissonance (McKenzie, 2003).

An international trip provides a greater level of dissonance than formal educational settings. An international experience is outside the normal comfort level and experiential base of most high school students. This dissonance can be a catalyst that leads to changed attitudes toward diversity for students participating on an international mission trip.
These studies confirm the impact of a one-time experiential education program on participant learnings and personal development. Similarities have been noted between experiential education programs and international mission trips. As with an adventure education program, international mission trips create a state of cognitive dissonance. Hovelynck (2001) cautions that experiential educators tend to shift toward didactic teaching methods through a preoccupation with learning activities and predefined learning outcomes. He promotes the adherence to the true experiential process where participants are more involved in their own learning agenda. This resonates with the challenge and goal of short-term mission trips.

The Lens of Service Learning in Framing Mission Trips

Service learning has its roots firmly grounded in experiential education (McHatton, Thomas, & Lehman, 2006; Neill, 2004). Furco (1996) notes that definitions for service learning are as varied as the schools in which they operate. Cirone (2005) recognized service learning as a term used in public education to describe community service that meshes with academic learning. Donahue (1999) defined service learning as “the integration of academic learning with meeting the community’s needs to the benefits of both students and community” (p.685). Billig (2002) added that service learning involves meeting community needs, student involvement in planning, reflection to gain greater insight, and the celebration or recognition of accomplishments.

Arenas et al. (2006) considered service learning a subset of civic service. They defined civic service as “activities that seek to improve the local, national or international community either through community service or service learning” (p.23). They differentiated community service as service students provide to the community with no
prescribed learning agenda whereas service learning is similarly the provision of service to the community but “intentionally connected to the regular curriculum so that students can make connections between abstract theories of the classroom and their concrete experiences inside and outside the school” (p.24).

McHatton et al. (2006) added the dimension of reciprocity to their definition of service learning. They described service learning as activities that allow participants “to increase the depth of their learning by engaging them in meeting the needs of the communities through collaboratives that are reciprocal in nature” (p.76). Furco (1996) concurred by distinguishing service learning from other approaches of experiential education in its “intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure the equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring” (p.6).

In a global assessment of civic service programs, McBride et al. (2003) identified and surveyed 210 programs in 57 countries. They found formal civic service programs in every major region of the world. Youth were engaged as the servers in 77% of all programs. More specific to the school setting, Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain and Neal (2004) conducted a national study of community service and service learning in schools and reported thirty percent of K-12 public schools engage an estimated 4.5 million students in service learning. They found that 69% of K-12 public schools engage students in community service while 30% engage students in service learning. The use of service learning within higher education continues to increase as well (McHatton et al., 2006).
King (2004) notes that critics of service learning contend that these experiences may actually “reinforce prejudice and replicate power differentials between those conferring and those receiving the service” (p.123). Those providing the service experience are in a position of power in being able to walk away from whatever problem is being addressed. A patronizing relationship or perception can develop from a charity mindset during service activities. These criticisms expose real concerns when developing service learning experiences. Rather than deter service learning as a viable educational methodology, these concerns should provide guidance toward the development of more appropriate activities that guard against potential pitfalls.

Proponents of service learning note a wide range of personal and community benefits that result from meaningful community service activities integrally connected to academic curriculum (King, 2004). Students participating in service learning activities are given the opportunity to apply what they are learning in the classroom (Stott & Jackson, 2005) and are reported to have an increased sense of accomplishment and fulfillment (Bonnette, 2006). Service learning enhances the students’ ability to critically reflect upon their experiences (King) and is a viable tool to increase multicultural awareness and a sense of social justice (McHatton et al., 2006). Arenas et al. (2006) noted that research has shown service learning produces benefits in the areas of personal and social growth, academic and intellectual performance, and civic and political involvement. Kielsmeier et al. (2004) reported that nine of ten high school principals said service learning has a positive impact on students’ civic engagement, personal and social development, and school-community partnerships while eight of ten principals noted a positive impact on academic achievement and school climate. In a review of more than
20 research articles, Billig (2002) confirmed the positive impact of service learning on students’ social-personal development, academic achievement, citizenship, and career awareness. In addition to student benefits, schools were found to benefit from the use of this learning methodology.

Stott and Jackson (2005) emphasized the importance of using service-learning concepts as part of a comprehensive guidance program. They identified “multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to diversity” as one of six elements necessary for successful middle schools. Bonnette (2006) noted that employers are interested in students with real-world exposure as well as their academic preparation. He documents the value of service learning in providing real-world experiences.

Simons and Cleary (2005) explored the effect of service learning on academic-learning, personal and interpersonal development, and community engagement. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed, allowing for the disentanglement of pre-service, during-service, and post-service effects. Fifty-nine undergraduate students at a private teaching college participated in the service learning activities. These research findings showed that students improved their academic learning and participation in service. The qualitative responses demonstrated high frequencies of student connections to community recipients and moderate frequencies for academic learning and transformed perceptions of the community.

Scales, Roehlkepartain, Kielsmeier, and Benson (2006) explored the relationship between service learning and its role in improving achievement among low-income sixth to twelfth grade students. The study results revealed a positive correlation between community service and a smaller achievement gap between students from lower and
higher income families. It noted a positive correlation between experiencing service learning activities for at least a few weeks and academic outcomes between students from lower and higher income families. The researchers suggested “service learning may be an especially valuable strategy for student engagement and achievement for principals in schools that are urban, majority nonwhite, or high poverty” (p.53).

King (2004) employed the process of *defamiliarization* to explore if and how college students critically reflect upon their assumptions about self and society during an international service learning program. With an interpretive case study methodology, King used interviews, essays, and chaperone logs for analysis. Fourteen students participated in the program for seven days, constructing low-income housing during the day and participating in group activities and reflection in the evening.

King (2004) noted that critical pedagogy “seeks to open a path for social critique and transformation by exposing the contingent and power-laden processes through which knowledge claims and social relations are generated” (p.133). Defamiliarization occurred during the trip as students encountered circumstances, experiences, and perspectives that deviated from their own expectations. They were exposed to contrasting information and unfamiliar experiences that disrupted their own belief systems and caused them to think critically about these contrasts. Consequently they needed to reconcile these apparent contradictions. The students “came to reexamine preconceived notions regarding the nature of poverty, to re-evaluate elements of the lifestyles to which they had grown accustomed, and to recognize facets of their own privilege of which they had previously been unaware” (p.134).
King contrasted charity and transformative service learning. He noted when service learning is motivated by pity or one party simply doing something for the recipient, critical reflection is not likely to occur. In contrast, when service learning participants and communities operate as partners, relationships are more likely to be egalitarian and critical reflection is more likely to occur. King concluded that the service learning experience causes students to “recognize the partiality of their own perspectives, to question their preconceptions, and to acknowledge the possibility that current conditions could reasonable be otherwise” (p.136).

McBride et al. (2003) reported that international service is the most prevalent service form. When compared to national service programs, international service programs “tend to focus more on benefits for those who are served and their communities, and the service role is more specialized” (McBride et al., 2003, p.iv).

Connections between service learning and short-term mission trips of secondary schools are multi-dimensional and substantial. Attention to this strand of literature enhances the study of short-term mission trips. Conversely, a better understanding of mission trips adds to the understanding of service learning.

**The Spiritual Distinctive of Mission Trips**

The spiritual nature of a mission trip intersects both the philosophical design and detailed schedule of the trip. The spiritual nature is evident through a focus on service and demonstrating compassion for others. Even secular research has noted that this spiritual element is shared with experiential education as seen through programs such as Outward Bound. McKenzie (2003) proposed an alternative model of learning for the Outward Bound Program that includes service as a key component after she found that
learning from the course components did relate to compassion and service. She quoted contemporary political scientist Charles Taylor who cautions that the dark side of individualism is a “centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, making them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” (as cited in McKenzie, 2003, p.19). McKenzie (2003) described our society as demonstrating:

A widespread culture of self-fulfillment and narcissism, where individuals attempt to find meaning in their lives through being true to themselves and in the process, treat others and the rest of the natural world as instrumental to their self-fulfillment….If compassion and service become a horizon of significance for students, their communities benefit and they themselves can become enriched through a greater sense of identity and meaning in their lives. (p. 19)

Garst et al. (2001) found the outdoor experience helps participants perceive their world in a different manner and appreciation. Their findings supported a suggestion from Schroeder (as cited in Garst et. al., 2001) that “the deepest and strongest attachments between people and natural environments may give rise to spiritual experiences in which people feel a sense of connection with a larger reality that helps give meaning to their lives” (p.48).

Albert Schweitzer said, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know, the ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve” (Cirone, 2005). Sikula and Sikula (2005) suggested there is a meaningful relationship between spirituality and service learning when there is a focus on serving others. They proposed the inclusion of spirituality as a means of strengthening service learning in higher education. This would be a timely trend combining a “national
awakening of an interest in spirituality with a renewed emphasis on civic responsibility” (Sikula & Sikula, 2005, p.80).

Beyond the humanitarian ideals that prompt people to action, Christian schools embrace the sense of an even higher spiritual calling. Added spiritual value is expected for both the participant of the mission experience and the recipient of the service extended during the trip (Schwartz, 2003). Tuttle (2000) noted the Biblical impetus for Christian schools to promote community service in response to the mandate to serve with compassion in a community of diverse individuals. A scriptural mandate calls for forfeiting narcissism and giving one’s life for service and showing compassion for others. Matthew 20:26b states that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (International Bible Society, 1996). Galatians 5:14 concludes that “the entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself” (International Bible Society). These spiritual ideals of service prompt Christian schools to invest substantial financial resources for mission trips. In addition to the findings of secular research documenting a spiritual component for experiential education, Christian schools look beyond these connections to a compelling spiritual mandate for serving others.

From a philosophical perspective cognitive dissonance, a basic principle shared with experiential education, concurs with the spiritual understanding of growth through challenge and critical thinking. S. W. Parker (2007) identified short-term student mission projects as an example of dissonance theory at work. He investigated the use of practices for adolescent short-term mission trips that corresponded with cognitive dissonance stimulation and alleviation. S. W. Parker noted that when people have cognitions that are dissonant, they employ mechanisms to restore consonance to the cognitive framework.
From an educational perspective, “the learner is confronted with a dilemma in which she must fact cognitions which are dissonant and be guided to relieve the cognitive discomfort through healthy and productive methods” (S. W. Parker, p.7).

S. W. Parker (2007) outlined a Christian theological perspective on dissonance resolution, including Biblical examples in which elements of cognitive inconsistency seeking resolution were present. In his study, S. W. Parker examined eight dissonance tenets and how frequently they were employed by youth ministry practitioners and mission sending agency personnel. He discovered that the sample groups offered some material related to seven of the eight tenets, but the employment of the tenets was minimal in most categories. S. W. Parker noted that the areas of challenge and critical thinking emerged as the most frequently included and emphasized concepts.

There is limited research that explored the effect of international mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of Christian school students. This study is grounded in the context of a Christian school with a distinctive spiritual foundation.

**Mission Trips As a Change Agent for Student Attitudes**

Numerous studies focused specifically on international cross-cultural experiences. While cross-cultural experiences are readily available in one’s own cultural setting, this study specifically focused on international experiences.

**Post-Secondary Studies**

Four studies that investigated the effect of mission trips on college students will be described (Beers, 2001; Blezien, 2004; Tuttle, 2000; Kehl, 2004).

In the first study, Blezien (2004) explored the impact of summer international short-term mission experiences on the cross-cultural sensitivity of college students. He
found few links between short-term missions and cross-cultural sensitivity in the literature and subsequently used mixed methodology to study the two concepts.

The quantitative portion used pretests and posttests of 159 college students participating in short-term mission trips. The Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) and a portion of the Crown-Mueller Social Desirability Scale were used. A control group of 151 students completed the pretest and posttest. Independent variables of sex, age, family income, political orientation, school attended, length of project, and previous international travel were examined in the study. A statistically significant difference was not found between the QDI pretest and posttest scores of the short-term mission participants. Blezien noted numerous studies showing rich qualitative findings of an impact of short-term mission trips on participants while quantitative findings have yielded less evidence to indicate an impact. He suggested researchers must look for better instruments to document the impact observed through a qualitative analysis, proposing the Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) as an instrument worthy of consideration for future studies.

Blezien found a noticeable but not statistically significant difference in scores for short-term mission participants compared to the control group. Four of the independent variables were found to be predictors of higher posttest scores; students claiming to be politically liberal, possessing more experience with overseas travel, female, and younger in age. He noted that students who choose mission trips might already have higher levels of cross-cultural sensitivity.

The qualitative portion of Blezien’s (2004) study involved photo journaling, open-ended survey questions on the posttest, and photo-elicitation interviews. Themes
were identified and analyzed. Students’ understanding of God was enhanced and their relationship with God was improved. They reported being impacted cross-culturally in both cognitive and affective ways and felt their values and long-term mission calling were clarified. Catalysts of the impact included relationships formed during the trip, exposure to the host culture, moments of crisis, and the mission trip activity itself.

Tuttle (2000) analyzed the effects of short-term mission experiences on Christian college students’ spiritual growth and maturity using a mixed methodology approach. Through a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with non-equivalent groups, 64 study and 67 control participants from four institutions completed the Belief and Commitment Scale (BSC) which is a modified version of the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS). The quantitative data yielded no significant differences in pre and post scores of either the study or control group as a whole. The lack of significant findings was due in part to difficulty in data collection and attrition. A ceiling effect with the BSC was noted.

Essays and interviews with 20 students comprised the qualitative portion. Tuttle (2000) found the essays and interviews to be the most valuable components of the study. She noted the difficulty of measuring spiritual growth and maturity and that “quantitative methods alone will not produce a satisfactory or complete picture of spiritual growth and maturity. The value of the qualitative instruments in evaluating the ‘heart’ and motives is immeasurable” (p.136-137).

Tuttle (1998) concluded that short-term mission trips were very important to the spiritual growth of college students. She elaborated that the “disequilibrium created by cross-cultural experiences is most valuable when accompanied by quality training and
Beers (2001) explored the effect of one-month mission trips on faith development for 171 college students. Seventy-five students participated in an international mission trip and 99 students participated in on-campus classes. The Faith Maturity Scale and Growth in Mature Faith Index were used to compare the two groups. A qualitative survey was used to assess the students’ perception of their own development.

Beers (2001) explained faith maturity through two components, the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationships with other people. From the quantitative study, Beers found no significant faith growth for the control group or mission trip group. Within the individual question research analysis, however, he found an increase in sensitivity to cultural diversity and a sense of personal well-being.

From the qualitative aspect of Beers’ (2001) study, students described both aspects of faith maturity resulting from their experience. The data indicated growth in six of eight core dimensions of faith. The strongest two were sensitivity to cultural diversity and sense of well-being. Students noted host country personnel helped them understand the culture and its people as well as the ability to find joy without material possessions. Students felt the trip goals were met as they experienced interpersonal growth (team bonding and relationship development with local people), cross-cultural education (exposure to and acceptance of cultures other than their own), and mission outreach (involvement with evangelism and observed acts of kindness).

Beers (2001) affirmed the importance of the reflective/processing time during mission trips, a link to experiential education. He noted his findings coincided with other
studies that correlated mission trips with various aspects of experiential education. Students were engaged in and challenged by the experiences of the trip. The community around them supported the students and feedback was constantly provided. Finally, students took time to debrief and reflect upon the experience. Beers concluded “the role and influence of experiential education philosophy and methodology should be expanded” (p.102).

In the fourth study, Kehl (2004) examined the difference in outcomes of short-term and semester-long study abroad programs on student self-efficacy and global mindedness. This qualitative study observed three groups of students at selected Christian universities.

Educational leaders have advocated for an increased internationalization of higher education to prepare students for a growing global interdependence. Student participation in a study abroad program is a common strategy to internationalize the curriculum. Limited resources provide constant challenges as leaders balance competing programs. Kehl (2004) was searching for an objective means to evaluate the effectiveness of study abroad programs. While study abroad programs require significant interaction with a host culture, he noted the increased utilization of post-secondary short-term programs. Short-term was defined as a program of eight weeks or less.

Kehl (2004) selected global-mindedness and self-efficacy as two necessary components in preparing youth for the 21st century. Independent variables included demographic characteristics and three groups of students: students intending to study abroad, students who had completed an eight week or less study abroad program, and students who had completed a one semester long study abroad program.
Kehl (2004) found no statistical differences in the general self-efficacy of students who studied abroad for eight weeks or less and those who studied abroad for a semester. He found, however, a statistical difference in global-mindedness of students who studied abroad for eight weeks or less when compared with those who studied abroad for a semester. Students who completed a semester abroad reported significantly higher levels of global-mindedness than students on short-term trips.

**Youth Mission Trip Studies**

Five studies were reviewed that analyzed the effect of mission trips for younger students (Friesen, 2004; Jones, 1998; Kim, 2001; Linhart, 2005; Manitsas, 2001). These studies focused on either secondary students or a team comprised of participants with a variety of ages. A mission group coordinated all trips. It is noteworthy that no studies were found investigating short-term mission trips organized by a secondary school.

Manitsas (2001) used the term *service based experiential learning* to describe a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs. It is integrated into the student’s academic curriculum and provides students with the opportunity to use skills and knowledge beyond the classroom.

Short-term mission trips are equated with service learning experiences. This study investigated the effect of participating in a short-term mission trip to Mexico on spiritual well-being and self-concept using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition. Manitsas (2001) used a pre-test, post-test method for 14 youth and young adults as well as a matched control group of 11 non-participating youth. Of the 14 participants, seven had previous mission experience and seven had no previous
experience. All participants showed gains on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, but no differences were found between the treatment and control participants.

The study results indicated that participants with no previous short-term mission trip experience showed higher scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale at the post-test, while the other group scores were equal on both occasions. Upon returning home, group participants indicated feeling a closer relationship with God, more committed to Christian service vocationally, and more likely to participate in a future mission trip. Anecdotal reports of participants supported these findings indicating they believed their lives had been more substantially affected when compared with the control group.

Manitsas (2001) suggested the use of other measures that may better tap into important aspects of the short-term mission experience.

Friesen (2004) investigated the impact of the short-term mission trip on participants’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Mixed methodology was used with 116 youth (ages 18-30) from five short-term mission programs ranging in length from one month to one year. Friesen used a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test, follow-up design. The primary purpose of the study was to conduct a comparative analysis among various short-term mission groups with the groups themselves providing internal control. An external control group was used. A Belief, Attitude, and Behaviour (BAB) survey was administered to the participants prior to joining their mission assignment, immediately after the assignment, and one year after the mission trip. This survey focused on 24 values and beliefs. The longitudinal aspect of the study measured the impact of variables on participants over time.
Qualitative data was obtained through written essays and interviews with a selective sample of 25 participants. The interview questions for the post-trip and one year follow-up focused on perceived changes experienced by participants in their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Of particular interest were the reasons for the perceived changes. The essay questions included personal reflections of the mission experience and its impact on the participants’ lives.

Friesen (2004) found significant findings from his study, including the positive impact of pre-trip training, longer assignments, the cross-cultural assignment location, relationally focused assignments, and supportive families and churches. He reported a correlation between repeat assignments and interest in future mission involvement. His study found a significant regression in participants’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors one year after the trip. He concluded that inadequate attention is being paid to participant re-entry, the debrief process, and longer-term follow-up.

In a secondary school research project, Jones (1998) conducted a study of 852 middle school and high school students participating in five specified ministry projects. Her study compared the change in faith maturity and multidimensional self-concept for participants. The five groups used were females, males, 7th - 8th graders, 9th – 10th graders and 11th – 12th graders. Jones used a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test design with a convenience sample of youth attending one of five World Changers or World Tour ministry projects during the summer of 1997. The students were involved in construction during the day and worship and discipleship in the evening.

Post-test scores for both instruments were significantly higher for all youth. Female post-test scores were significantly higher than male post-test scores. There were
no significant differences in post-test scores among the three school grade levels. Jones (1998) noted her data would have been strengthened through qualitative data methods.

Kim (2001) used a qualitative approach to examine the influence of short-term mission trips on participants, local churches, career missionaries, and mission agencies in the Presbyterian Church of Korea. His interest was sparked by the growing participation in short-term missions as thousands of Korean short-term missionaries have been sent throughout the world in the past decade. He contrasted the proponents of short-term missions who suggest these trips play a vital role in our world with critics who emphasize drawbacks such as the lack of training and experience of participants and the financial requirements of the short trips.

For Kim’s (2001) study, the topical ethnographic interview and personal observations were used with 46 participants. He was particularly interested in the development of *intercultural competence* or *intercultural effectiveness* through short-term mission trips. Kim noted “the more globalized the world becomes, the more people in it need to become interculturally competent, not only to survive but also to thrive” (p.4).

Kim (2001) concluded from his study that short-term missions impact the acquisition and development of intercultural competence for participants. He noted short-term mission trips positively impact the subsequent commitment of participants to world missions.

Linhart (2005) examined the impact of short-term mission trips on high school students through the student ministries of Northern Community Church. The focus was not on gaining new knowledge about the country visited or the cross-cultural process, but rather on the students’ personal growth and what they would become and do as a result of
the trip. He wanted to discover and develop theories about the trips as curriculum for participants using a qualitative approach. More specifically, he wanted to advance the theory that students confront, explore, and construct their identities through service projects.

Linhart (2005) used a grounded theory methodology with ten high school students and two adult leaders on a trip to Ecuador. Interviews, personal recordings, and personal observations before, during, and after the trip provided the data. Using cassette recorders to compose audio journals was a unique methodology employed in this study. A combination of researcher-produced pictures and photos captured by students provided an additional data source during interviews. Emerging categories and themes provided the framework for future interviews.

Theories of experiential education provided a framework for Linhart’s (2005) study. He explained:

The educational ingredients of short-term mission trips emerge from learning through experiences, assigning the responsibility for learning to the participants, and their abilities to effectively interact with the experiences and integrate the learning from those experiences into their lives. The explicit experiential components include (but are not limited to) cross-cultural adaptation, teaching, exposure to poverty and need, service and aid, evangelism, interactions with people of the host culture or country, a close-knit community of fellow participants, Christian ministry, problem-solving, and structured discussion times with adult leaders. (p.258)
Linhart (2005) described the students’ journey through phases of experiential learning. They began to orient and focus seven months before the trip. The action phase took place during cross-cultural encounters during their trip. “The exposure to the new culture created disequilibrium as the students tried to understand the cultural differences” (p.262). Students defined and described the experience of moving out of their comfort zone. As students took risks, they became aware of a selfishness they had never noticed before. “The fact-to-face encounter with poverty, the loving response of those they had come to serve, and the awareness of their own materialistic values exposed a ‘self’ that they have previously not known” (p. 264).

Linhart (2005) observed a lack of intervention and coaching from the leaders. He felt more direction from leaders might have encouraged an engagement of deeper social and theological issues that arose during the trip. He noted the reverence of students toward the trip and the extra purpose this gave the trip. Students saw the experience as an effort of planting seeds, reinforcing the curricular nature of the trips.

Linhart (2005) concluded the future emphasis of trips should focus on the issue of transfer of learning into students’ lives after short-term mission trips. Greater attention should be given to the curricular nature of trips. He suggested the trips be situated in the overall emphasis on service and missions, more effectively connecting the surreal experience to students’ lives.

Summary

Current literature outlines a critical need for increased intercultural sensitivity among our maturing youth in preparation for a productive, contributing life in their
diverse, global world. Developing a level of acceptance of and empathy for people and cultures different from oneself is seen as a worthy goal of any secondary school.

Short-term mission trips provide the opportunity for students to observe and interact with other cultures. The intent and design of mission trips mirror that of experiential education, particularly outdoor adventure programs and service learning activities. These themes from current research provide additional context and understanding of mission trip experiences. Literature exposes an additional purpose for mission trips in Christian schools, the spiritual mandate to serve others.

Several studies were reviewed that demonstrated an impact of mission trips on students’ personal growth and spiritual formation. While most of these studies were conducted at a post-secondary level, a few focused on mission trips for youth through church programs.

The literature review revealed no studies considering the impact of a mission trip designed by secondary schools for their students. Intercultural sensitivity for secondary students was a topic also not found in the literature. The literature review navigated current research, finding a comfortable niche for the research question. This empirical study complements related research of post-secondary studies and church designed trips while filling the noticeable gap in research of the impact of mission trips on secondary students in their school context.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a framework for the methodology employed to answer the research question, how short-term international mission trips affect the intercultural sensitivity of high school students. An essential element of any research study is the adequacy of the design to address the proposed question. A rationale for the selected methodology is presented as well as a description of qualitative research and the case study. Further, the design of the study is outlined, including the utilization of reflexive photography as a key qualitative technique. A discussion of the researcher’s role and ethical considerations will follow. Finally, a description of how the data was analyzed and reported is presented.

The Qualitative Research Design

Selecting the appropriate research design is a foundational decision for any successful study. It is suggested that methodology must be selected based on the philosophical orientation of the researcher regarding the nature of reality, the purpose of research, and the type of knowledge to be produced through the research (Merriam, 1998). Glesne (1999) alters this thought with the view that researchers are attracted to and shape research problems that match their personal view of understanding the world.

This researcher believed a qualitative case study was the most appropriate framework for answering the proposed research questions. The literature confirmed the qualitative design as an effective methodology when exploring an abstract human quality such as intercultural sensitivity.
Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p.15)

Merriam (1998) elaborated that qualitative research helps us understand and explore the meaning of social phenomena “with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p.5). Merriam continued:

In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts…qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people’s experiences. (p. 6)

Qualitative research fits the philosophical orientation of this researcher who seeks an interpretive perspective. In interpretive research, education is considered to be a process and understanding the meaning of this process is the knowledge to be gained (Merriam, 1998). Individuals interacting with their social world construct reality. The interest for the qualitative researcher is in understanding the experience and constructing that understanding from the participant’s perspective. Qualitative research emphasizes discovery rather than confirmation and process rather than outcomes. It builds concepts and theories rather than testing existing theories (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher explored the reality of intercultural dynamics as perceived by the students participating in international trips. The students provided the stories and information from which this researcher constructed his understanding of their experience.
Creswell (1998) suggested, among other criteria, the choice of qualitative study because of the nature of the question, the natural setting of the study, and the need to present a detailed view of the subject. The research questions of this study explored how and why, appropriate questions for a qualitative study. This research was conducted in a natural setting that facilitated a higher level of detail about the students and understanding of their experiences (Creswell, 2003). The study was formulated based on the need to understand in greater detail how mission trips affect student attitudes toward other cultures. The product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). These criteria affirmed the selection of a qualitative design.

Qualitative methodology was recommended for other studies that explored multidimensional human qualities such as intercultural sensitivity. Several mixed methodology researchers have noted the impact of mission trips was difficult to quantify, but rich data emerged through a qualitative process. Blezien (2004) noted the necessity of including qualitative elements when studying the effect of mission trips on cross-cultural sensitivity. He explained:

With few exceptions, most of the research produced rich qualitative results while the quantitative findings yielded little in the way of evidence to suggest that these experiences had any impact on those who engaged them. It seems that either the instruments and or the research designs that employ them are not revealing the impact that is occurring. (p.117)

Blezien encouraged the continued search for effective quantitative instruments, but strongly endorsed the appropriateness of a qualitative methodology for exploring this topic.
In Tuttle’s (2000) study of the impact of short-term mission experiences for college students, she concluded:

Quantitative methods alone will not produce a satisfactory or complete picture of spiritual growth and maturity. The value of the qualitative instruments in evaluating the “heart” and motives is immeasurable….One of the values of qualitative research in the area of short-term missions lies in the description of experiences and accompanying reactions of the participants. (p. 137)

Friesen (2004) concluded from his study:

While triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative tools was used to describe the changes in short-term mission participants, there is no way to comprehensively capture the impact of the short-term mission experience on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of participants. The complexity of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours cannot be adequately captured by a 1-5 Likert scale. Interviews and essay questions come closer to this goal. (p.246)

Linhart (2003) questioned why participants deem these trips as significant when the results are so difficult to measure.

A qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate methodology to explore the abstract concept of intercultural sensitivity and to understand the complexity of high school student experiences in other cultures.

**Case Study Design**

Prevalent throughout the field of education, qualitative case studies have illuminated educational practices for thirty years (Merriam, 1998). Merriam describes the case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity,
phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 34). She notes that qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. They are particularistic by focusing on a particular situation, event or phenomenon. Descriptive indicates the results are a rich, thick, and complete description of the event under investigation. Heuristic describes the discovery of new meaning, confirmation of current understandings, or extending the reader’s experience.

Creswell (1998) defined a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded’ system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). The intensive focus on a bounded system distinguishes case study methodology from other qualitative approaches (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006). Merriam (1998) agreed and defined the case study as “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p.27). She notes that the single most defining characteristic of a qualitative case study lies in delimiting the study, the case. The case study is intrinsically bounded with a finite participant population and a finite amount of time for observations. This study was bounded by one event (the short-term mission trip), a limited number of students in one geographical area, and a particular timing for the experiences observed.

Numerous researchers have found the case study to be strongly suited for topics that probe ethical dilemmas, providing detailed portraits of participants’ emerging thinking, and capturing moral questions that arise from the experiences (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Donahue, 1999). This offered credence to the case study as an appropriate methodology for the investigation of intercultural sensitivity in high school students.
When high school students experience cross-cultural settings, their attitudes and feelings toward their home culture and the host culture may change from this complex interaction. The case study structure appropriately allows for insight, discovery, and interpretation of these experiences (Merriam, 1998).

The case study was selected in this project because it allowed the researcher to examine the interaction of important factors characteristic of the mission trips and to focus on holistic description and explanation of this process (Merriam, 1998).

**The Setting and Actors**

The qualitative case study is a bounded design and invites some initial choices concerning the setting and data collection. This section will describe the setting, the sample, reflexive photography, and data collection.

*The Setting*

Two Christian schools in the Cumberland Valley region of south central Pennsylvania and north central Maryland were selected. These schools were similar in size and located in a rural setting. Both schools have conducted an annual, ten-day international mission trip for senior students. The basic design of the two mission trips was similar. The primary difference was in the allocation of time for service, recreation or team-building activities. One class spent eight days in service work and two days at a beach for recreation. The other class spent two days doing service activities and eight days in sightseeing, recreation and team building. School S had 44 eligible students and four advisors who traveled to Honduras while School G had 17 students and two advisors who traveled to Costa Rica. Both trips were taken in May of 2007.
The administrator of each school was contacted. The research study was described and questions answered. Each gave permission to include his school in the study and specifically approved the participation of students in the research as designed. The administrator granted the researcher open accessibility to the group advisors, trip participants and related school documents.

Using two different schools in the study provided a greater breadth of data while maintaining rigor and consistency of the research design through the similar structure of both trips. The use of multiple schools facilitated a stronger study by minimizing the risk of individual quirks or mishaps of one particular trip. Accessibility was one reason for the selection of these particular schools. Of equal importance was the selection of schools similar in structure and mission trip design. Similarities in size, focus, and geographical location of the schools provided boundaries for the study and increased the credibility of findings.

**The Actors**

Sample size in qualitative inquiry is not an exact science. Qualitative inquiry has “purposeful strategies instead of methodical rules” and “inquiry approaches instead of statistical formulas” (Patton, 2002, p.242). Patton explains “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size” (p.245). Sampling to the point of redundancy is a common concept in qualitative research, but this strategy leaves open the question of sample size (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Researchers continue to interview until no new information is emerging. One solution to this dilemma is to present a minimum
sample based on expected reasonable coverage of the study focus (Patton, 2002). In two similar studies mentioned previously, Loeffler (2004) and Blezien (2004) selected 14 and 18 participants respectively for their sample. This study followed a similar pattern in terms of sample size.

Fourteen randomly selected senior students from the two Christian secondary schools participated in the study. A random purposeful sampling strategy was employed to select the 14 students from each school. Participant selection was made in a manner proportionate to the number of total participants from each school. A computer generated random list of all participants was used to determine order of selection. Random sampling helped address validity of the study (Merriam, 1998).

Each school provided a list of all students eligible to participate in the trip. International exchange students were removed from the list in an effort to eliminate cross-cultural influence. International students have different experiences in terms of influences from multiple cultural interactions, and if included in the sample may have detracted from the primary focus of the study. Students and parents were contacted in the pre-determined random order until consent was granted from 14 participants and their parents. When 14 participants had returned consent forms, the process of obtaining participants ceased. Twenty-one students were contacted to obtain the 14 needed participants.

After the randomized list was established, the researcher met with all students eligible to attend the mission trip at each school. The goals of the research project and the process for identifying the participants in the study were explained. After this initial meeting, the researcher mailed letters and consent forms (see Appendix B) to home
addresses. The randomly selected students and their parents were invited to attend a second meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to insure a foundation of uninterrupted communication through the following actions.

1. Explaining the goals of the research project, consent forms and expected processes.

2. Reminding parents and students that their choice to participate or not participate was completely optional and would not affect the student’s standing in his or her school.

3. Ensuring participants and parents of anonymity and of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

4. Encouraging parents and students to contact the researcher at any time with questions or concerns.

Upon consent to participate by both parent and student, an additional meeting with participants provided the opportunity to distribute notebooks to each student for journaling. Participants were given the opportunity to use personal cameras or disposable cameras provided by the researcher. Seven students used their own cameras and seven students used disposable cameras. Parents were fully informed of their child’s involvement at each step of the project through phone calls, mailings, and informational meetings. They were encouraged to contact the researcher at any time with questions.

The advisors were heavily invested in the mission trip with a strong sense of ownership. The researcher met with all trip advisors prior to departure. They were informed of the expectations for participating students (see Appendix C). Advisors were asked to periodically encourage the students to be diligent in their assignment of
photography and journaling. Other informal meetings and email correspondence with advisors facilitated an ongoing flow of communication before and after the trip. The researcher was available to answer questions for the advisors, parents, and participants throughout the project.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection for this study was linked to reflexive photography as a primary methodology. Students were asked to take pictures, journal, and to participate in interviews with the researcher after the mission trip.

**Reflexive Photography**

This study utilized the qualitative technique of reflexive photography for unraveling the underlying themes of the participants’ experiences during their short-term mission trip. Additional information in Appendix A serves to enhance the reader’s understanding of reflexive photography. Creswell (1998) encourages the pursuit of information from sources unfamiliar to the reader, such as data obtained through reflexive photography. Blezien (2004) suggests using creative qualitative research techniques when exploring the subjective nature of an affective variable like intercultural sensitivity. Collier (1979) observed that “because photographs are a close replica of reality they offer insights difficult to find in other field evidence” (p. 164).

Photographs both preserve a moment in time and are a reflection of the photographer’s point of view, biases, and experiences (Loeffler, 2004). Our world is increasingly visually oriented in terms of the dominance of imagery in traditional avenues as well as in all manner of communication (L. D. Parker, 2006). Wagner (1979) described the important role photography can and should play in social science research. He noted
that photographic work attends to the visual dimension of our knowing as well as providing truths about our social lives. He concluded that through our work with photographs, “we ought to be able to make our way well into the world and yet remember that the world itself only takes form within the frame of our perception” (p.298).

Photography has been used in qualitative research in two ways. First, reflexive photography can be used by having the research subjects take the photographs and then reflect upon them in photo-elicitation interviews. Blezien (2004) used this approach in his study by asking students to take photos with accompanying journal entries and then reflect on these during post-trip interviews. Second, reflexive photography can be used by having researchers produce images that are reflected upon by the research subjects. Linhart (2003) had students select ten photos from their larger collection to submit after their trip. He also took photos during the trip and used his photographs to spark description. Linhart noted a concern of researcher-produced photos as a method of reflexive photography. Do these photos help uncover the location and nature of truth during the interview or does the researcher inadvertently use the photos to guide the participant’s responses to his perception of the experience? For this study, photographs were taken by the participants and corresponding journal entries served as a primary source of data.

The use of reflexive photography for studies of college age students is described in Appendix A. This researcher found no studies using reflexive photography for studies of high school students. This research design used reflexive photography in part as an exploration of this methodology and its effectiveness in understanding the impact of mission trips on intercultural sensitivity in high school students. An advantage of this
approach for high school students was the focus on photographs rather than the participant. This allowed for a more relaxed setting during the photo-elicitation interviews and was particularly helpful due to the age of the participants. High school students are potentially more cautious in sharing their feelings than college students, conceptually supporting this methodology as an appropriate approach for this age group.

In this study, the 14 student participants were asked to take photographs during their trips. Students were instructed to take pictures of people, places, events, or activities that they believe would have an effect on them as a person (Blezien, 2004). The accompanying advisors of the mission trips established boundaries for taking photographs in order to maintain an appropriate sensitivity for the local people. Students were encouraged to talk with their advisor if they ever felt uncertain about the appropriateness of taking a photograph. Additional information regarding the photo-elicitation protocol is described in Appendix C.

**Journals and Interviews**

The students were asked to journal about each photograph, emphasizing why the picture was important to them and how it personally affected them. Students were provided with pre-printed, standardized forms (see Appendix D) to encourage uniformity of focus as they reflected on each selected photograph. They were encouraged to carry notebooks and a writing instrument to enable frequent note taking. If not practical in certain situations, the participant was asked to record impressions resulting from the photographs on a small tablet. They were encouraged to review their notebooks each evening to ensure complete journal entries for the photographs.
After students returned from their trip, the researcher contacted each student to obtain the photographs and journals. The items were picked up at the student’s school. A photocopy of the journal and a duplicate set of photographs for those using disposable cameras were returned to the student during the interview.

After photographs were developed and within six weeks of the trip’s completion, semi-structured interviews of approximately 30 minutes were conducted with each student. The interviews were scheduled at the student’s convenience. All interviews except one were held in the library or conference room at the student’s school. One student was interviewed in his home to better accommodate his schedule. Parents were not present during the interview to allow more open sharing by the participant. Interviews were conducted in this short timeframe in an attempt to maintain a freshness of memory and ability to recount the experience. The interviews were audiotaped, recorded, and transcribed. The researcher took field notes containing descriptions of additional visual data from the interviews. Body language, level of passion, and emotions that could not be noted through the transcription of the interviews were recorded in the field notes.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Merriam (1998) notes that the qualitative design is emergent and that a case study does not follow prescribed methods of data collection or data analysis. There is no single way to navigate the voluminous amount of data from a qualitative case study. The researcher ultimately must discover and identify the themes and patterns that exist within the data. This is accomplished through consistent comparison of the collected data.

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis is a simultaneous, interactive activity (Merriam, 1989). Merriam explains the analysis begins with the first
interview, observation, or document read, “Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turns leads to the refinement or reformulation of questions, and so on” (p.151). In this study, data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. Comparison of emerging data eventually shaped the final product. Software to facilitate word processing and data collation was used where appropriate as an aide in the identification of themes and the management of the data.

Coding for the qualitative data was used to fracture data based on similarities, group into codes, and finally to identify relationships between categories (Garst et. al., 2001). Merriam (1989) defined coding as “assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p.164). Coding used in this study occurred at two levels, “identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis” (p.164). Coding enabled this researcher to efficiently manage the data and served as a strategy to better ensure anonymity for the participants.

Merriam (1989) explained that “rigor in a qualitative research derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description” (p.151). Credibility, the qualitative equivalent to internal validity, was established using triangulation, persistent observation, and member checking (Garst et. al., 2001; Merriam, 1989). Persistent observation was achieved through observing trip participants before and after the trips. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcriptions for accuracy.
This researcher followed the basic steps for qualitative research as outlined by Creswell (1998):

1. Created and organized files of information. Coding was an important component of this step.
2. Developed a sense of the data by general reading and writing memos concerning the emerging themes.
3. Description of the case and its setting was documented.
4. Categorical aggregation looked for a collection of instances from the data. Patterns of categories were established.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. The qualitative researcher should be sensitive to his biases, values and interests, and how they shape the study (Creswell, 2003). “The personal-self is inseparable from the researcher-self” (Creswell, p.182). He is generally involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants (Creswell). The researcher’s own background and experiences are, therefore, important components of the research design.

This researcher lived in Asia for 11 years with a mission organization involved in holistic ministry, but with a specific focus on service. His roles included teacher, agriculture extension specialist, community development specialist, and program administrator. The researcher was aware of his own changed worldview and heightened intercultural sensitivity due to his international experience. This subsequently fueled his passion for the selected research topic. He helped many mission workers adjust to new
cultures and prepare for a return to their home culture. The researcher assisted in short-
term mission experiences and observed as students interacted with new cultures.

In his current role as school administrator of one of the two participant schools, he
has observed ten groups of students depart and return from an international mission
experience. Although never actually accompanying a school group on their mission trip,
he has discussed the mission experience with each group as a part of their debriefing
process. He highly valued these informal insights.

The researcher was aware of the special challenges of interviewing students from
his school. An asymmetry of power naturally exists between the researcher and
participants. This power imbalance was increased in this study with the presence of the
administrator/student relationship. Students could have been more cautious in sharing
open feelings with the school administrator present. To help compensate for this issue
challenge, the researcher used reflexive photography, a technique designed to encourage
more open sharing. The use of photographs during the interview helped detract from a
focus on the interviewer. Participants were adequately informed of confidentiality
safeguards. The researcher chose interview sites that provided a relaxed setting. Casual
dress and an informal setting helped minimize relationship barriers inherent to the
position of administrator. Students were reminded that their participation would not affect
their standing in the school. Another challenge was the potential for students to feel
unduly pressured into participating in the study because the administrator was requesting
their participation. Students and parents were reminded that their decision to participate
or not participate would yield no negative consequence to them. These challenges were
not as much a concern with the second school since these students did not personally know the researcher.

**Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas arise with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of the study findings (Merriam, 1989). The primary complicating factor for both processes is the researcher-participant relationship. This relationship is generally closer and more personal in a qualitative study. Merriam (1989) explains that “this relationship and the research purpose determine how much the researcher reveals about the actual purpose of the study - how informed the consent can actually be - and how much privacy and protection from harm is afforded the participants” (p.213). Ethical dilemmas have generated much discussion and varied positions in the world of scientific research. Glesne (1999) concludes “ethical codes certainly guide your behavior, but the degree to which your research is ethical depends on your continual communication and interaction with research participants throughout the study” (p.128-129).

In the discussion of research participant rights, privacy is the foremost concern (Glesne, 1999). Participants expect the researcher to protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity. In this study, aliases were used to protect anonymity. Transcripts were given to each participant for their review of accuracy. Tapes and transcripts were stored in a secure location and identified only by code. The code key coupling the participant’s name to the transcript was kept in a separate secure location. In addition, the following procedures helped protect participants’ rights (see also Appendix B).
1. The Institutional Review Board of the Duquesne University approved the study before data collection.

2. The researcher described the purpose of the study, including risks and benefits, to participants and their parents in writing before they signed the Assent to Participate and Permission to Participate forms.

3. Throughout the study, participants were invited to ask questions of the researcher at any time. Participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Verification

Qualitative researchers have identified qualitative equivalents to the quantitative concept of internal and external validity. Verification is a term commonly used to describe standards of quality or credibility in qualitative research. Creswell (1998) defined verification as “a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed” (p.194).

Creswell (1998) identified eight verification procedures often discussed in the literature and Merriam (1989) concurred with six of the procedures. Creswell recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two procedures in any given study. The eight procedures were triangulation, long-term observation, member checks, clarifying researcher bias, peer examination, rich, thick description, external audits, and negative case analysis. This researcher utilized triangulation, member checks, clarifying researcher bias, peer examination, rich thick description, and external auditors.

Triangulation involves using multiple sources of data or multiple methods in corroborating evidence to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 1998; Merriam,
In this study, triangulation provided a more complete understanding of the case by confirming emerging findings through multiple sources. Member checks were facilitated by providing participants an opportunity to review transcription records. Each transcript was emailed to the participant with an opportunity to correct any misinterpretation. No participant requested a correction. The researcher’s bias has been clarified in order for the reader to understand the researcher and his assumptions. Peer examination was provided by having two colleagues familiar with theme identification review interview transcripts to evaluate the accuracy of the identified themes. This peer examination took place after the researcher had identified themes from the collected data. Detailed description allowed readers to determine the degree to which information could be transferred to other settings. External auditors for this study existed through the interaction of three professional educators who served on the researcher’s Dissertation Committee.

**Reporting**

Findings from this qualitative study were reported through detailed descriptions that enabled the reader to understand the stories of the participating students and the factors influencing these experiences. The goal of this detailed reporting was to give voice to the participants’ experiences.

**Summary**

The overall question of this study pointed to a qualitative methodology. Researchers of previous studies examining attitudes such as intercultural sensitivity reported a deeper understanding of these attitudes through qualitative methodologies when compared to quantitative methodologies. The bounded nature of the study concurred with a case study design. Reflexive photography added a creative component
to the data collection methodology. The photo-elicitation interviews were more effective with teenagers due to its informal, non-intrusive approach.

Fourteen students from two Christian secondary schools were the focus of the study. They took photographs and wrote journal entries while on their mission trip. Upon return, the students were interviewed and the researcher analyzed their journals and photographs. Through data analysis, themes and patterns were identified. Every effort was made to protect the rights and anonymity of all participants and other ethical considerations were taken to ensure a sound study. The researcher was cognizant of his role in this qualitative study.

This chapter outlined the methodology for the structure of this research study. The ensuing chapter will describe and summarize the results.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the effect of an international short-term mission trip on the intercultural sensitivity of Christian school secondary students. Data in the form of interviews, photos, and journals was collected in the spring of 2007 from students representing two Christian schools during and after their mission trips. The organized presentation and summarization of this data was an essential part of the research process.

In this chapter the author describes the sample profile. A description is given of the process used in the data analysis. Three themes from student responses via their journals, photos, and interviews are described. Representative quotes from interviews and journals are presented to further explain these themes. The use of ample quotes allows a qualitative researcher to bring in the voice of participants (Creswell, 1998). Representative photos taken by students with their accompanying journal entries lend additional evidence of supporting data. This broad presentation of data provides the foundation for interpretation of the analysis in Chapter 5.

Student Sample Profile

Fourteen students were identified through a random selection process from two Christian schools. In order to achieve the goal of 14 participants, 21 students were invited to participate with seven declining. The 14 students were selected proportionately from the two schools based on the total number of students participating in the trip from each school. Of the 14 participants, four students were selected from School G and ten students from School S. All participants completed the assignment and were fully
included in the results of this study. Fictitious names were used to protect participant anonymity.

Table 1 provides a summary profile of the participants.

Table 1.

**Participant Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Previous International Trip Experience</th>
<th>School Attended</th>
<th>Years in Christian Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 14 participants, eight were male and six were female. All participants were familiar with the Christian school setting. Six participants had attended a Christian school since kindergarten. The average time spent in Christian schools by the participants was 8.6 years. Five of the students had previously participated on other international mission trips. Of the remaining students, all except one indicated they had participated in at least
a short-term trip with a mission or service focus in the United States. In most cases a
church group organized these in-country trips.

**Progression of Data Analysis**

The process for selecting the random sample and the collection of data was
described in Chapter 3. During the data analysis process, the author reviewed interview
transcripts, photos, journals, and his personal notes to guide the analysis.

The interview transcripts were organized in three primary ways to enhance the
analysis of data. In the first system, all transcripts were compiled into one document to
facilitate the search for common words and phrases. This assisted in the identification of
general themes. In the second system, the collection of all student answers to each
specific question during the interview was compiled and printed. Key thoughts were
identified. This provided an overview of student perceptions regarding each particular
question. In the third system, interview transcripts from each student were reviewed and
provided an important element of the analysis. These transcripts were coded to identify
frequency of theme discussion. After the more obvious themes were coded, the remaining
non-coded sections of the transcripts were reread to search for possible unnoticed themes.

The three themes identified were developing relationships, awareness of poverty,
and serving others. Developing relationships emerged through connections to children,
classmates, and local adults. Students became aware of poverty’s impact as they
interacted with local people during the trip. Service projects provided a venue for
physical work and reflection. The themes will be described in greater detail in a later
section of this chapter.
The frequency of discussion of each topic was summarized in a table to give an overview of the most frequently discussed items (see Table 2). This became a key component in the identification of developing patterns and eventually in labeling the emerging themes.

Table 2.

*Total Number of References to Themes During Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Developing Relationships</th>
<th>Awareness of Poverty</th>
<th>Serving Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflexive photography was used as described in Chapter 3 and was an integral methodology in this study. Students took pictures to help describe the trip’s impact. Some pictures included the participant but most were taken by the participant and reflected that perspective. Although photos including participants were valid sources of data for
analysis, due to confidentiality these pictures were not included as examples in this document. All pictures are original photos and were not altered to preserve the participant’s perspective.

Students submitted an average of 14 photos. Photos were attached to an accompanying journal entry. Each photo with attached journal entry was then coded during analysis in an effort to identify themes from that entry. The themes were summarized to give an understanding of the frequency of recurring topics (See Table 3).

Table 3.

Total Number of Participant Photos Relating to Primary Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Developing Relationships</th>
<th>Awareness of Poverty</th>
<th>Serving Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the interview, each participant was asked to select several photos that best described their experience. An additional table was then developed with the frequency of topics from photos selected by students as their first, second, and third choices (See Table 4). This supplemented the information from Table 3 by adding the frequency of most important themes as identified by participants.

Table 4.

*Frequency of Themes From Photos of Greatest Impact Selected by Participants During Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>First Photo Selected</th>
<th>Second Photo Selected</th>
<th>Third Photo Selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Serving Others</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 provides a summary of topics from the top three selected photos during the interviews.
Table 5.

Summary of Theme Frequency From Photos of Greatest Impact Selected by Participants During Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>First Photo Selected</th>
<th>Second Photo Selected</th>
<th>Third Photo Selected</th>
<th>Total From Three Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing Relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the process of identifying themes, member checking and the dissertation committee provided guidance and credibility.

As data was analyzed for emerging themes, a separation of data from the two schools indicated a similarity of themes between the two groups of participants. In spite of differences in trip design, there were no distinct differences of impact between School S and School G. This was a consistent finding for information presented in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

**Perceived Change**

The overarching theme that emerged was the determination that change in intercultural sensitivity was perceived by participants. This change was multifaceted and evident from various perspectives throughout the experience. As change was analyzed more extensively, the three themes of developing relationships, awareness of poverty, and serving others emerged. These three themes provided greater illumination of the change that occurred. As a framework for unraveling the findings, the overarching theme of change will be described followed by an analysis of the three additional themes.
The fact that participants perceived change as a direct result of their mission trip was evident from the various data sources. Two key facets of change, personal and corporate, became clear during the data analysis. Some participant discussions described the scope and depth of change and the student’s perception of how this change occurred. Participants described the need for further change by individuals as well as for entire countries. Students acknowledged the difficulty in sustaining change after their return home.

**Scope of Change**

Students described numerous changes they observed in themselves and their classmates. Bob mentioned that he is “more grateful for what I do have. And, uh, it’s also kind of taught me how to be a little bit more resourceful as well, like, not to waste as much”. Holly elaborated:

I definitely think that we need to value our blessings more. I think that we take a lot for granted. And it takes going to places like Costa Rica, like, the slums of it, to really remind yourself that you are really blessed.

Maria noticed two changes in her attitude and discussed these during the interview. She stated, “I don’t think I’m so quick to complain about things. I don’t think that if things aren’t going as quickly as I want them to, I’m ok with it now. I’m just kind of, it’ll happen in time”. Maria later talked of more general changes in her way of thinking. She said this experience “made me kind of want to expand my, my horizon a little bit. It made me kind of think more about my future, where I want to go and what I want to do”.

Wendy was more tentative about actual changes. She noted she is “more aware of things
happening in the world” but concluded that while she hoped she had changed, she was not actually sure how much change had occurred.

Several students described an expanded worldview that resulted from their trip. Dawn explained, “My worldview has changed and definitely broadened my knowledge of things, like the world and what people are going through”. She continued later in the interview, “I know that this is what I want to spend my life doing. Like I knew before, but I know that’s what I want to do, and it’s kind of been confirmed and stuff, working with people like this”. Roger noticed a difference in his ability to relate to children. He explained, “Well, some of it was like, I’m usually not that much of a kid person. I would rather just stand there and work, you know. But I talked, I played with the kids a lot, which I don’t usually do”. Holly commented that “going to different countries and seeing this actually helps me a lot as a person to mature, and realize that I need to not complain, and just take things as they are”.

Allen felt that “the experiences that I’ve had aren’t something you can see. They’re something you feel and, it’s, it’s something that changes you on the inside if you’re really willing and open to let God work in you”. Elizabeth added in her interview: With my life I’d like to change things, maybe, can’t change everything, but I’d like to impact people’s lives in some way….This world has really hard places, so, it just makes me want to change more, and it also did make me really want to go out on more missions trips and try and help more people. Maybe not long term, but short, and just try it. My heart is to help people, people’s lives and people’s homes, their country too.
**Catalyst of Change**

Students not only described the changes they felt, but they talked about why these changes may have happened. Allen described the importance of looking deeper below the surface to find solutions. This deeper inspection may facilitate change. Allen explained:

Now I want to look for like the different story behind people, and like, look deeper into things. People talk about how these third world countries go starving and Americans have all this food. That’s sort of like this. People went over and looked into the situation, and they saw something was completely different than what we thought it was. And now we can try and help change that. And that’s what I think America should try and do for the whole world, is go to these underdeveloped nations and try to help them. All we need to do is look closer and see.

Numerous times students described being stretched and taken out of their comfort zone. Moving into this uncomfortable realm helped enable changes to happen as Maria explained:

I think that once we were taken out of our comfort zone, like sent to Honduras, at least for me, it was more of the fact, well, you left everything that you know behind, and you left everyone that you know, and everyone who knows you behind, and so it was kind of an opportunity to start fresh.

Roger described the greatest impact of the trip for him as “just getting out of my comfort, comfort zone, helping me to stretch and grow a little bit”. He later reflected he is now less afraid of getting out of his comfort zone than prior to the trip.
Depth of Change

In addition to the types and causes of change, there were several references to the depth and permanence of these changes. Students wanted others to have a similar experience as they imagined the benefit this could be for everyone. Elizabeth described her own experience:

You can go out of your comfort zone, and just, learn extraordinary and be impacted in extraordinary ways. And, that even if you go somewhere for a short period of time, you’ll always just take a small piece of your heart with you. You can never take it all back. So I think for myself, just, don’t always live in your little bubble. Always venture out because you’ll get blessed ten times more than you ever imagined, and you’ll walk away with so much more. And maybe you cannot explain what you’re walking away with and how it impacted you exactly, but you’ll know.

Holly agreed that others should share the benefit of this experience. She said, “I think everyone should have the opportunity to just try it. Cause, a lot of times you go on these things and you really don’t know what to expect, but you come back changed yourself”.

Sam felt his own country would be better if people had a similar experience as his:

I wish a lot of other people could experience what we experienced, like just seeing where we went, because it would open a lot of other people’s eyes too. I mean, cause we have so much in the States, they have so little there, and we complain and they’re happy. So, it’s like it should be reversed and I think if other people could experience that, then they’d see more of it too.
Students perceived change as a result of this trip. They described those changes and reflected on possible reasons for the impact. An analysis of the total data provided greater understanding of the changes that occurred as described through the three themes that follow.

**Themes Affecting Change**

The credibility of identifying themes was achieved through the technique of triangulation, persistent observation, and member checking (Garst et. al., 2001; Merriam, 1989). The variety of data sources provided the base for triangulation. This resulted in a consistency in theme identification from the various data sources. Two colleagues reviewed transcripts to provide the benefit of member checking and participants reviewed transcription for accuracy.

The three themes that emerged were developing relationships, awareness of poverty, and serving others. Table 6 provides an outline of the themes and sub themes used to frame the remainder of this chapter.

Table 6.

*Themes and Sub Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing Relationships</th>
<th>Awareness of Poverty</th>
<th>Serving Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children</td>
<td>1. Feelings toward home culture</td>
<td>1. Importance of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Local Friends</td>
<td>2. Feelings toward host culture</td>
<td>2. Impact of service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first theme, developing relationships, included three groups of people. First, students spoke most frequently of the impact from their relationships with children. Second, students described impact from relationships with friends from the host country. Third, impact from the observations of their own classmates was noted.

The second theme resulted from the participants’ awareness of poverty. Students were impacted by the disparity of wealth distribution within the host country and between the host country and their home culture. This theme prompted much reflection by students on the distribution of wealth, reasons for the lack of equal distribution and how a nation or person should respond.

The third theme was the involvement in serving others. Students helped in construction, medical clinics, educational settings, and church programs. This engagement in service projects and activities provided opportunities for interaction with local people and instilled a sense of being able to help.

**Developing Relationships**

Discussions and photos describing relationships with people permeated the interviews and journals. The three groups of people most impacting the students were local children, their own classmates, and other local youth and adults with whom they developed friendships during the trip. Eighty photos highlighted some level of relationship with people while accompanying journal entries described the impact of these relationships. The 80 photos accounted for 32% of all pictures submitted. During the interviews, these relationships were mentioned 177 times accounting for 36% of the coded themes. Perhaps more importantly, the theme of relationships appeared in 50% of the pictures students selected as one of the top three photos that best described their trip.
Additionally, when students were asked to describe impressions they were not able to
capture with their photos, the most common response referred to relationships with
children, classmates, and local adults.

**Local Children.**

Both groups of students had an opportunity to interact with local children during
their mission trip. Children were discussed more frequently, with more passion and in
greater detail than any other topic.

Eleven of the 14 students took photos of children. Twenty-one percent of the
photos from students of School S depicted children. While School G had far less time for
interacting with children, 17% of their pictures focused on children. Twenty percent of all
photos taken directly correlated to a theme of children and the impact students felt while
relating to them. When asked to select photos that best described their trip, students chose
pictures of children 29% of the time. When asked for the one picture that would best
describe their trip, nine of the 14 students selected a photo and journal entry with the
theme of children.

All students referred to interactions with children during their interviews.
Interactions with children were discussed 103 times during interviews and these
comments were typically more lengthy and detailed than other topics.

Most students described the children as being initially shy but quickly warming
up to them. The children’s smiles and happy demeanor were discussed at length. Maria
took a picture of her first meeting with a curious boy (see Figure 1). She wrote in her
journal:
Figure 1

*Shy Curiosity*

This was taken in church and I thought it was my first look at how excited people/children were to have us there. The child in the picture kept staring back, looking at us shyly and that was cool to see his curiosity and excitement to have us.

Bob explained how easy it was to connect:
The children, all you had to do was just look at them and they would smile, like, it didn’t take much for them. They were just naturally happy. Like they were grateful for everything….I think it was their smiles that affected me the most, like, they just loved to smile. And I loved that about them.

Sam described his first meeting with children:

Whenever you saw the children, at first they were like shy. They were scared of you. All you had to do was walk up to them and smile at them, and then they would just want to be with you the rest of the time you were there.

Holly selected a picture of a smiling girl as being the picture showing the greatest impact for her. She wrote in her journal (see Figure 2):

Figure 2

*The Big Smile*
I love the girl’s big smile…The children’s smiles…were so big! At first they were shy, but providing face painting, puppets, hair braiding, soccer (etc) really opened them up to our simple acts of love.

Elizabeth wrote of the impact of these smiling children on their own world:

Everything seemed so gloomy, but these little kids brightened up this whole world. Nothing could bring them down, and they were going to make sure that nothing did. Finding the simplest of things to joke and play around with us made their day.

The participants also noticed that children accepted them even as strangers. Holly submitted a picture of her holding a small girl with whom she bonded instantly. She wrote, “This girl didn’t care what my name was, were [sic] lived, etc. but knew I was there to love, so she jumped into my lap and smiled the moment I saw her”.

Many students described the compelling, inviting nature of the children. Roger described the way children drew him into their lives, “I’m usually not that much of a kid person, I would rather just stand there and work, you know. But I talked, I played with the kids a lot, which I don’t usually do”.

Maria’s memories and emotions were triggered during the interview by recalling a girl’s smile as she viewed and described one of her pictures (see Figure 3):
This girl right here was very special to me. She was kind of my morning partner. We kind of did everything together. When we’d have story time she’d look for me and come sit on my lap. So, she was very special to me and just seeing her smile just kind of brings back memories because she always smiled. She, and we’d do our little thumbs up every time I did this. She’d just smile and put her finger up and that was really cool, cause. You know we didn’t, we didn’t have to talk much and we kind of had that connection. So it was really, it was really neat.

Most students interacted with children at a school, church or other public gathering area. Allen describes a unique opportunity to get a firsthand look at the home setting of one child. He had been helping two boys with their activities that morning:
At one point, after we were done with the craft, Je remiah just stood up, off my lap and walked out of the building. I’m thinking, “Where is this kid going?” So I picked up Jimmy and I walked after him. I mean, I’m trying to talk to him in Spanish, asking him where he’s going, and he pointed at a little shack off in the distance and I asked him if he was going to see his mom, and he said “Yeah”. He got up, walked very slowly up to the house and knocked on the door and he talked to his mom a little bit, and a, then he pointed back at me and his mom looked at me, smiled and shook her head. I don’t know what they said. I couldn’t hear them. But I probably wouldn’t have known, cause they were in Spanish. But then he turned around and ran back to me, and he, ah, soon as he was within arms reach he opened up his arms and jumped into my arms. And the look on his mom’s face was, it’s indescribable. It was like joy and gratefulness and thankfulness. I just, I don’t know what it was, but it was amazing.

Students frequently described surprise at the children’s joy and apparent contentedness in light of their socio-economic situation. Sam said the greatest effect the trip had on him was “being with the kids and them teaching me that you don’t need a lot to be happy. That all you need is to survive and have each other and you’ll be fine”. Allen took a picture of a group of children (see Figure 4) and commented in his journal, “I wasn’t sure how these children would affect me when I took this picture but it turns out these kids probably changed my life by making me more appreciative of what I have”.

87
Figure 4

*These Children Changed my Life*

Maria spoke of one particular two-year old boy she met and her difficulty in accepting his situation in life:

That was just a complete, like, culture shock. It was just like heartbreaking to see all these little kids have nothing, and that probably made me want to stay there longer than we did, because I wanted to be there with them more….It was just sad, because if you see, look at the houses that they have to live with and look, none of them, hardly any of them had shoes. And most of the kids would wear the same thing everyday to come here and be with us. But, um, once again they were just happy. They were just so happy to see us and so happy to be around us. But they had nothing, I mean, our poverty is, you know, rich to them. If they could have the things that we supply people in the projects with, they would be happy
and, it was just sad, cause you want to do more than just, you know, you want to
do more than just be there and play with them. You want to be able to help them
and know that they’re going to have a good future. But, you can’t, so it was kind
of hard.

Maria noted the joy and excitement in children even in what she perceived as difficult
surroundings (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Joy in a Difficult Setting

She wrote, “You could get a good look at the kind of houses they lived in, also to see the
excitement of the boys”.

Mike contemplated why the interactions with children were so impacting during this trip:

I don’t know why it always comes back to the children being the most impactful. I
guess just the look on their faces. It’s more descriptive than the look on the adults’
faces. And that usually, usually the look on their faces with the surrounding, their setting that they’re in, it’s, it kind of sums up the whole trip. Seeing a kid, standing in like the middle of an area like that, completely covered in dirt, having nothing, no toys to play with, no means of entertainment, like we have here, and yet still smiling, with a more descriptive smile than you’ve ever seen in your life.

Gifts given to the children and received from the children were noted by several students in pictures and interviews. Roger was given a bracelet by a local leader and told to give it to someone that week. He gave it to a young boy and reflected later in his journal, “It made me realize that I am capable of changing a child’s life even through small and simple gestures”. Allen described an experience of receiving a gift of candy from a child:

I was a little, should I take the candy, at first, because, like, she’s dirtier than I am. I don’t know where her hands have been, but I took it. And it just like, really, it shocked me when she offered. I wasn’t sure what she was doing at first, until. I understood a little bit of the Spanish of what she said. I mean I realized that she was offering it to me, but it was just, it was a big shock, because, we are a greedy culture, and these people are, they’re giving what little they have to people they don’t even know.

Students recognized a difference in their own culture and the culture of these children as facilitating their remarkable interactions with children. Mark noted:

So it was a lot easier for me to have fun with the kids and the culture there allows the kids to be much more personal and friendly with strangers than the American
culture would allow. So it was more enjoyable being with those kids than a group of kids that I’ve never met before from America.

Holly noted a difference in Honduran and American children, “Just the little things that you know maybe even some American kids would think are stupid, they just loved. And they were really thankful for it.”

In addition to describing the interactions with children, the students often considered how the interactions affected them personally. They recognized these children were drawing them out of their own comfort zone. The students seemed compelled to let down their guard and interact with the children regardless of their own personality. They noted changes in themselves during these interactions. Wendy described her experience with children during the interview:

I was down there and I was trying to minister to them. It forced me to slip out of my comfort zone and actually say something to them, make eye contact and that kind of thing. Cause I’m usually shy about that here and, and yeah it was just neat how you could just sit down next to the, next to one of them and you wouldn’t really have to feel like you had to talk or say anything. Cause they just snuggle up next to you and just smile and, and that was pretty cool.

Roger pointed to the picture of the kid to whom he gave his bracelet as a key picture describing his experience (see Figure 6).
Figure 6

*The Gift of a Bracelet*

He wrote in his journal, “It made me realize that I am capable of changing a child’s life even through small and simple gestures”.

Later in the interview Roger elaborated about this child:

I was forced to get out of my comfort zone a lot, and he had this, he had some problem with his legs, so he couldn’t like, run with other kids. And they all love to play soccer, and stuff. He couldn’t really play. And I felt bad for him…and so the whole trip forces me to be out of my comfort zone, which I don’t do often enough.
Sam considered how his home culture might be different if social structures were more like the culture he visited. He also talked about a more personal impact:

Whenever you saw the children, at first they were like shy. They were scared of you. All you had to walk up to them and smile at them, and then they would just want to be with you the rest of the time you were there. And if we had that kind of mentality around others, yeah, life would be a whole lot easier to get along with people. You wouldn’t have people just doing all these different crimes, cause everyone would just get along, and you wouldn’t even have to worry about it. So, I think that, that really, I thought I’d bless the kids, by helping them, but I honestly think they made me see more that I need to change in my life than they need to change.

The impact of children was evident as students described the difficulty in leaving. Allen remembered the children asking him if he was coming back the next day:

And we had to tell them, no, and that was one of the saddest things I’ve ever had to do. Cause that day, as soon as we opened up the van there was a flock of them outside, hugging each and every single one of us as we got out. And that was probably the most important part of the trip. Just being able to work with these kids, and making an impact in their lives. And we didn’t even do all that much.

As the participants reflected, a consensus emerged that indicated the interaction with children was of great impact. Holly concluded:

Everyone from our trip said that, um, that they wished they would have had more days with the kids. But other groups come in and do, do it too. And, um, we could
have done that the whole entire trip and been content. Everyone just really loved them.

Elizabeth agreed, “So we walked away with more than just a souvenir. We walked away with a friendship and just a memory of something that we’ll cherish in our hearts forever.”

*Local Friendships.*

Local friendships were often mentioned during interviews and in journals. Friendships were developed with translators, local leaders, pastors, and other adults met during service projects. Fourteen pictures described these friendships accounting for six percent of the photos. Local friendships were discussed 27 times during interviews.

There were several levels of friendship as evidenced by the content of journals and level of passion during interview discussions. Three groups comprise this category. First, translators who were a similar age as the students were mentioned most frequently. These relationships developed to a deeper level and evoked a more reflective thought process. Second, other local people such as a pastor, tour guide, and group leaders were mentioned. These relationships, while not of a close personal nature, were of great respect and admiration and prompted introspection for students as they processed their experience. Third, a general category of the indigenous people was included. The families for whom some service was provided were particularly noteworthy. These relationships were generally superficial, but prompted observations and analysis of the culture group being visited.

Students wrote and talked at length about close friendships that developed with translators. Maria wrote in her journal “even though we are from different backgrounds
Maria describes her connection with translators as she focused on one particular photo during her interview:

These were our actual school team translators. Like they stayed with us the whole week. And Mimi was our roomie. She was just the sweetest girl ever. She was just so smart and so funny. But um, Mimi and Belky were probably two of the close ones. Belky was um, she wasn’t really our roommate, but she stayed in the same area, and they were just really neat people, and so, so nice to everyone. And we could just connect really easily with them. I wish I would have a picture of um, Fermina, who was like my, my sister there. She was, really sweet and we just connected right away….She probably was my closest connection, like Honduran friend there. It was so hard to say good-bye to her, cause, you just want to stay and grow in that friendship. But um, she was pretty cool. She was really smart. She’s going to college to be a lawyer. And I just hope, like I said with the little kids, that she makes it. But um, yeah, they were pretty cool.

Maria reflected more specifically on the changes she experienced as a result of her friendship with Belky. She wrote in her journal:

Belky and I had long talks and she made me want to follow my dreams and what God has planned for me. I want to be more like her because she has such a kind heart and she is willing to do anything for God’s glory.

Maria also wrote of Mimi and noted, “she taught me how to be a better person and really helped me connect with the children”. Later in her interview, Maria gave some indication of the way these relationships developed and the possible ongoing nature of her new friendships:
Whenever you don’t know someone, and they spoke perfect English, so it wasn’t like you didn’t, you know, you couldn’t have a conversation. But it kind of gives you a chance to, you know, dive into things headfirst and just be really passionate about stuff. And, when you’re, when you’re that passionate, and when you guys have the same interests and things, it’s really, it was really easy to open up and, you just click so easily. And, I mean, it seemed like I knew them forever…. They’re real comforting and they were real, you know, they were just like us. So, it was pretty, pretty easy to open up to them and have a conversation and talk about different things. So, I still talk to her, on through email, and she has this thing called Facebook.

As several students described relationships with translators, their similar age was mentioned as one reason for the close friendships that developed. Denny compared this trip to a previous non-school mission trip where he interacted with older translators:

It seemed like there was a bigger connection between like the translators and stuff, because the first time we went there was only a few translators. And they weren’t really our age. They were kind of older than what I was at the time.

Eric pointed to a picture and commented, “He was pretty much the only teenager that went with our group. It was nice having someone our age with us, that was, that could help us, made things a lot easier. And he was, he was interesting”. Denny also selected a photo of a Honduran friend and reflected:

That’s Amelio. We became really close friends, just cause we could relate to a lot of things. He like enjoyed sports, and he was my, I guess 18, in college, and we just seemed to bond. It was hard to say good-bye.
Many students noted how quickly relationships developed with translators and the openness of these relationships. For example, Eric wrote in his journal:

> Ana was a good friend and I was really sorry to leave her. She was one of the translators with us on the medical team. Ana and I talked a lot, about pretty much anything. She made it seem as if we had known each other for years.

Denny talked about how comfortable he became with the translators:

> As soon as we walked in there everyone was really friendly, started asking you questions, and saying “Hello” every time you saw them. And we would all sit down for like our meals and they would just come and sit down and just join right in the conversation. So they made it like, really comfortable, and nothing was awkward with any of the translators.

Mark described how relationships with translators developed:

> It was a lot easier to progress. So I mean, I know it’s possible to have a fast friendship but it was much quicker than a friendship with an American person…. Because they’re less, they put up less walls. They’re much more open about stuff, so it’s easier to talk to them, and be open and be open with yourself with them.

While relationships with translators were discussed more frequently, friendships with other adults were also described. Mark took a picture of Jorge, their bus driver/tour guide, and selected it as one of his most significant photos. He wrote, “Jorge was possibly the person I became closest to on this trip. He showed me the importance of family and friends”. Stephanie talked about the impact of a local pastor who spoke to her class. She said, “When he talked to us, he like, encouraged us to be extraordinary and like reach out to other people, and just do things you normally wouldn’t do. So, I thought that was very
impacting”. During her interview, Holly described the great respect she developed for the same pastor as she discussed one of her photos:

Just seeing the picture of like the church sanctuary brings back memories of when the pastor um, gave us that speech. It was so good and you could see like how passionate he was, about what he did and what God was doing with his life. How he has taken him to so many other countries and does like TV programs and radio programs and he’s actually a Costa Rican and it’s unusual for Costa Ricans to go into La Carpio. And he just set up this church and he like lives among the Nicaraguan people that live in La Carpio, and he lives with the outcasts. And that’s kind of like, it reminded me of like what Jesus did. You know, he went to the lower class people, more so than the higher-class people, and you know, lived among them. He was born a carpenter’s son, and he, just, that guy was so passionate and he just told us that we were so much more capable of things that we have like no idea, like, what God can do through us. And we just need to be open to the extraordinary things that God can do through us.

Roger talked of the impact for change one of the local leaders had through a simple act of interaction. The leader gave Roger a bracelet and told him to give it to someone that week. Roger reflected on this in both his interview and journal. He recounted:

One of the leaders gave it to me…and he told me to give it to a kid, sometime during the week. And he forced me to jump out of my comfort zone, which I’m glad that he did.

In addition to translators and local leaders, students described relationships with local families. They made frequent statements describing their perceptions of how local
people differed from people of their home culture. They described the friendliness they encountered on a daily basis. Mark explained:

The culture, I feel, is much more accepting of outsiders than the American culture. And more accepting of any class of people, any race, religion and that was something that I wasn’t quite expecting. I guess, the acceptance, and, just one thing, like you could, while I was riding in the bus, I was in a good mood, and I decided I was going to say “Hola” to many people. And almost every person who heard me said it back while, just while we were driving down the road. So, that was the culture….It was warming. It was, made me feel like I could fit into that culture. And it was a feeling of like everybody would be your friend if you wanted them to be. And a random stranger would walk up to you and start having a conversation, if nothing else, but the weather. And just be very friendly and just open with you.

Holly’s comments followed a similar theme:

The Costa Rican people, I learned, were so much more friendly than American people. They were, you know, they always said “Hi” as they walked by you…Americans just kind of like shrug at tourists, they’re just like “Oh, what are you doing in our country?” And if you come here you need to learn to speak English. Like the Costa Ricans actually, a lot of them, like English was a language they had to learn, uh, because of the tourism and stuff, and they just really made you feel welcome.

This friendliness was not expected by all students and gave cause for reflection on this difference. Sam commented:
I didn’t think they’d accept us….just because, we have so much and if I was them, I don’t know how I’d be able to adapt to it, because it would just be weird. But they were, they were just as nice as anyone I’ve ever met in my life.

Bob reflected more specifically on one particular family. He selected a photo of a family who was the recipient of a new roof. The mother and children were standing beside the newly roofed house. He wrote, “That family was so nice to us. They were so filled with joy that we came to finish the roof. These people were easily joyed and I will always remember that”.

**Classmates.**

Secondary school international trips have a unique dimension of classmate interaction in a non-typical setting. Classmates are friends who may have known each other for as long as 13 years. During this time, these young men and women have observed one another in many settings and varied situations. The impact of classmates during the international trip was evident. Sixteen photos and corresponding journal entries referred to classmates. During the interviews, the subject of classmates occurred 44 times. Fourteen percent of the photos selected by participants when asked to choose the top three photos, depicted classmates. In addition, participants mentioned classmates as often as any other topic when asked what impressions they were not able to capture by their photographs.

The impact of classmates was described primarily in two ways, the strengthening of relationships among classmates and the observed impact of the experience on classmates. For the first category of classmate impact, students described how they grew closer and bonded to classmates during the trip. Before leaving, some expected this to
happen while others were simply hoping for positive cohesion among their group. Wendy noted, “I just remembered what previous classes had said about this trip and how, like it changed their viewpoint and they grew closer as a class and so I was just kind of hoping that would happen too with ours”. Sam reflected, “I was just kind of hoping that everyone in our class got along, and that we wouldn’t have any problems”.

During the trip, participants described a bonding with students outside their normal circle of friendships. Denny noted a picture of three of his closest friends, “I think we all bonded with people that we normally don’t talk to at school, which is cool too, cause we got to know our classmates a lot better”. Eric described stretching beyond cliques:

It also brought our class together a lot more. Like, we pretty much were just in our little groups before we left. We didn’t really talk to each other that much, and after this, it’s like, people that didn’t get along or just didn’t talk to each other before were really close.

Allen wrote in his journal that “as we worked together the rest of the week, we grew closer together. It was nice to get to know each other better than if we had been in school”. Mike’s journaling evidenced a new realization of the impact of classmates as he wrote:

I had never really appreciated my friends that I have had all my life. I had never really thought about how big of an impact they are on me and how much they mold [sic] my character, my likes and dislikes. They are very cool people.
Eric’s analysis went deeper as he described a shift in class priorities. One van of students came upon a deceased accident victim lying in the middle of the road with no one seemingly providing assistance. Eric described the reaction in the van:

At that point we were all pretty much irritated cause we had been traveling for almost 15-some hours. You’re tense, stiff, and we were just getting on each other’s nerves by that point. And it’s just, you know, the little things were turning into arguments and all of a sudden we just see this guy, just lying on the road. No one’s even trying and it made us realize that what we’d been arguing about is just so stupid, and pointless and we should just try to get along better.

The second way students described an impact from classmates was in the way classmates reacted during the trip. Frequently students mentioned being impacted as they saw classmates rising to the occasion in working and serving. Sam described his classmates:

People that you wouldn’t expect to do stuff, they, like they stepped out of their comfort zone to whatever it took to get the job done….For some it surprised me, some of the people. I thought they were just lazy, but they actually worked, so. It was, it was nice seeing them all give everything they had.

Mike selected a picture of a classmate as a photo of greatest impact from the trip for him. He explained why that picture was important:

He just represents a lot of the kids in our class. I didn’t really expect anything out of some of them. I didn’t expect them to work or to appreciate or to come through. But, yeah, a lot of them, a lot of the ones I didn’t think would come through at all ended up working the most, and ended up enjoying it the most,
getting the most impact out of it. Um, the level of work that they put out was very impressive, like, he never stopped. He was like a machine. I didn’t, I’ve never seen him work like that. It was very impressive to see that, um, and it was kind of like a role reversal. Some of the kids that I expected to have the most impact ended up just acting like all casual. It didn’t really impact them that much. But like kids like these you could actually see it and they’d talk about it like what was impacting them. So I guess, yeah, it was like a complex to see the difference in the way they were thinking. And what I expected from them was completely different.

Eight students identified a key effect of the trip as being the way their classmates were impacted emotionally by the children. Wendy focused on a photo of a male classmate and several little boys to describe one of her greatest impacts. She explained:

That was something really cool that happened up on the mountain team, was that a bunch of the guys started playing with the kids. And, I normally don’t think of that when I see James or Tim or somebody like that, but, it was really cute how they would just go up to the kids and just high five them. And this one is really cool, cause James got really close to this kid, Noel, and any time we had free time, to play with the kids, it would always be those two together. And, and James said, when we had to leave, he actually started to cry a little bit, and, cause when he told Noel he had to leave, like the kid’s face just kind of sunk down a little bit.

Elizabeth also described the boys in her class:

Knowing the guys at school being tough guys and cool and stuff, it was, it was a good perspective to see their hearts melt for like little kids and just be genuine,
fun guys and playing around and having fun. I think it impacted their lives more than they know it, and I think they’ll somehow, in their life, in their future, just really impact them, challenge them too.

In her journal, Elizabeth describes seeing a side of classmates not seen before:

Never was able to see that side of the boys before. And what I know is the most important thing through all this is that all their lives were changed. They were changed for the best, their hearts.

Holly notes she saw a different side of classmates as they interacted with the children:

Everyone just really loved them, and it was interesting to see all the guys in my class, like, really open up. I hadn’t seen that side of them, especially the ones I was with for 13 years. I still had never seen how they interacted, and a lot of them were touched in ways that I don’t think they really expected. And so it was cool to see that, being on a missions trip before I kind of was excited to see all my friends who hadn’t gone on one be touched in the way that I was touched when I went. And so that was, that was nice.

These references to relationships affirm the impact of people in the lives of mission trip participants. Children, classmates, and translators played key roles in expanding the experiences of the students. Depth of meaning was added to activities and interactions by these relationships. The impact was intensified as discussions happened and emotions were exposed.

Awareness of Poverty

All students were exposed to a level of poverty beyond previous experience. They were exposed to a simplicity of lifestyle and a focus on the basic needs of life that
transcended their own expectations. These experiences evoked deep thought and reaction from the participants. The examination of this theme exposed a complex level of processing and interpretation from students.

Forty-three photos, accounting for 17% of the photos taken, related to students’ reaction to poverty. Twelve percent of the photos selected during interviews as the most impacting photos related to the theme of awareness of poverty. The topic of poverty was discussed 113 times during the 14 student interviews.

The discussion of poverty caused students to speak with more varied emotions than other topics. Student emotions ranged from frustration, sadness, anger, puzzlement, and empathy.

**Feelings Toward the Home Culture.**

As students were exposed to poverty, they reflected on their home, the culture they were visiting and the personal impact and challenge this experience evoked.

A common reaction to the severe poverty students observed was to analyze their home culture. Students recognized how blessed they were and often highlighted certain perceived shortcomings of the U.S. culture. Dawn felt that Americans are “really selfish and stuff, like, we have so much more than they have”. Seeing people with so little made Eric realize “how much we have here that we don’t really need. We have so much here that it just gets in the way. But these kids don’t have any of it, and they still get along just fine”. Holly noticed a difference in road construction and wrote in her journal, “When in another country, you learn to appreciate the simple blessing that you might not give much thought to everyday – even if it’s smooth roadways”.

Allen described what occupies the thoughts and time of Americans:
We’re really selfish. We’re worried about the latest piece of technology that came out, the latest clothes, the newest phones. And we’re worried about what kind of shoes these, we’re wearing. And these kids worry about having shoes. America lives in a society of, “Oh, something’s newer, let’s get that and throw away the old one.”

Maria noted how easily Americans complain and suggested America should learn from other countries:

In America, if a kid had to eat rice and beans every day, they’d complain. But to them that’s a, that’s a meal. That’s great to them and they just don’t complain. But, um, I don’t know. I think that, I think that in a way, instead of America trying to be the great big country, we should learn from other countries and be more appreciative. And maybe that the people should, you know, um, you know, should learn from the Hondurans, because they’re hard workers, and everything that they get, they get by, you know, working really hard. And they don’t have short cuts there.

Mike referred to the independent spirit of Americans and felt there is a lack of concern for others:

While I was working down there, actually I thought about what’s going on in the U.S. right now. And I thought about cars flying down the highways with their nice jobs and leaving their nice homes, having all the money in the world that they could ever need, not even knowing it, always wanting more, wanting more, wanting more. And down there, I’m sure they want more, but you don’t see it. They’re content living in their shacks like that, and you can see that, um, it kind
of makes you think, like, why is it that everyone up here is so, we’re like self righteous up here. We think that, we, we don’t need anything else. I mean we supply for ourselves. We do everything for ourselves. We don’t need anybody else.

*Feelings Toward the Host Culture.*

In addition to critiquing their own culture, students described the host culture and often contemplated the contrasts they saw. They wrestled with the reasons for the differences and how changes could be implemented. The student descriptions of housing and sanitation provided vivid images of the situation they observed. Allen was shocked by the living conditions they encountered. He wrote in his journal, “I never thought anywhere in the world could living conditions be this bad (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7](image)

*Surprise at Living Conditions*
Elizabeth’s comment of her trip to LaCarpio provided a poignant image:

I think the one point where it really impacted us is when we drove into LaCarpio. It was just, our whole bus became quiet, because, it was unlike anything we had ever seen before. It was just trashy, wet, chickens, the houses made of metal sheets and, you almost wonder, how can people live here?

Dawn had difficulty imagining that people lived in some of the poorer houses.

That was one of the nicer houses, cause it had concrete on the floor….I can’t believe people live there all the time, cause, I can’t even imagine that. It’s like, a barn, but it’s a house.

Mike contrasted the house his team was building with the family’s original house as he talked about one of his photos:

It shows the conditions that they were living in. Just that shack with the tin roof. I think the tin roof was actually held on by a few tires. And then behind it shows us working and pouring foundation for their new house that they’re going to move into. It doesn’t show the house that was right beside that, what the house is going to look like, just a brick, four brick walls and a tin roof on top of that. But even that’s a big improvement for where they’re coming from.

Students noted several negative aspects of the host culture. One group came upon an accident scene with a body lying in the middle of the road (see Figure 8). Mike described how people were reacting to the situation. He was surprised at how relaxed everyone was about the accident and compared their response to his experiences in America:
Like here, there’d be like people swarming everywhere. Be like front-page news. It’d be like people running out covering up the body and paramedics would be all over the place. But here the traffic just drove around it. People were just, a few people were standing by the edge of the road, just like, talking. Like nobody really, their facial expressions didn’t even seem to faze them. About a man being dead in the middle of the road. There was no police, nothing, just. I guess they just drug the body to the side of the road, and carried on with their life. It was just more of a cold feeling to it, like human life wasn’t valued as much.

Later Mike continued to ponder why people responded as they did in the accident situation:
This guy could have been, he might not have had that much of a family...Or he could have been traveling. Like his bike here is lying along side of the road, and they rode their bikes for miles and mile and miles. So he could have just been from far away and their family had no means of getting there.

Mike echoed comments from several students as he discussed a serious family social issue that impacted society negatively and how it related to the many children they met:

Many of the women especially are just treated with complete disrespect and guys will jump around from one girl to the next. And so there’s a lot of, uh, fatherless children there. And so it’s up to the mothers to try and provide a good life for them, but many of them have no means to do that. So, the children are, well they’re everywhere. And most of them only have one set of clothing, if they’re lucky. They’re all kind of torn and real dirty, have lice. And uh many of them, I think, go with about a meal a day. So, the level of care is very lacking, and you can tell that by the level of interaction with the children, um. If you just smile at them, it just makes their day. They’re, they smile back. They start laughing, giggling, and they’ll be attached to you for the rest of the day, until you leave.

While students noted several negative cultural norms, most comments about the host culture were positive. Students described the culture and its people as being generous and caring with a unifying community element. Eric noted:

The people there are unified. They’re not families. They’re one group and it made them a lot better capable. They, what little they have they share with each other so that everyone gets by.
Dawn described a special, yet awkward moment when a boy gave her an ear of corn he was taking to sell at the market (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

A Gift of Kindness

She related her feelings about the incident, “I felt kind of honored that they would do that….We were just talking to them and they just gave me some corn and I asked them about it and they picked it and were going to sell it”. She described feeling “a little awkward because I had to be like, really cherish this corn and stuff, and it was corn but something that they valued too, cause they were going to sell it and make money off of it”. Maria found local people to be appreciative and although “they have nothing
compared to us, but they will give you the biggest smile and they’ll be the first, you
know, person to, you know, give you something, even though it might not be much”.

Students reflected on the slow pace of life and the primary focus on physical
needs. Mike explained how work is accomplished with simple tools and the impact this
has on their daily lives:

There, it’s an all day thing, where you take lots of time, lots of energy to do it.
And they have, I think it gives them more pride for their work, more. They have a
better work ethic, like, here, it’s just like, just get it done. There it’s, you got to go
find people. You got to put the time and energy in things to do it. And it’s so
much more simple, simple methods of doing things, that gives them, like, it kind
of changes the whole way that they live, because everything takes a lot longer.
And you have to put, like, like they said on the mountain team, their whole lives,
consist of planting crops, harvesting them, in order to have food to eat. From the
time they get up, to the time they go to bed, every day it consists of some way of
getting food for themselves. Where here it’s just like, you just go to your job and
then just go to the grocery store and get your food. I just think that’s a very, very
interesting contrast, from the way that the people live their lives there from here.
That was probably one of the things that impacted me the most.

Bob was impressed with the resourcefulness of local people. He helped with building and
observed how they made bricks and constructed water systems:

The people of Honduras are very resourceful. Um, they, the fact that they
basically bake bricks in the sun to make block is just incredible to me. Like, I
honestly never would have thought to use mud and make a brick out of mud, or.
And then behind where I took this picture, they had a, uh, a water system that ran down from the mountain. It was made out of banana…And they put these in a succession to one another and they’d run it down to the house and we would reroute it however way we needed to get the water to go. And it, I honestly never would have thought about that, you know. That they’re just really, really resourceful with what they have.

Mike postulated that poverty unifies a culture and helps people bond due to the common experience of struggle:

You see how a culture relies on each other for their means of living. And it kind of unifies the culture in a way. They trust each other, even without even meeting one another they’ll trust each other. And it’s just weird to see the difference in cultures by that way. Like we don’t trust anyone here, like I don’t even trust some of my friends. But down there, I mean, they, they make a friend, they trust him, because they’re going through the same thing all the time. They have the same struggles. But it’s, it’s a lot more independent up here.

An observation repeated frequently was the joy of people in spite of their difficult life circumstances. Students made comments about the relationship between material possessions and happiness in both their home country and the host country. Students sensed a lack of worry about tomorrow that was in sharp contrast to the norm of their own culture. Denny described the people living in the houses depicted in one of his photos:

In this picture you can kind of see in the background, all their like shacks, and everything. And a lot of these people, they were extremely happy. Like they’re
not all moping around and depressed or anything. But I guess if I learned anything from the Honduran people, it’s to appreciate what you have. Cause they really do appreciate what they have, and it’s not much.

Elizabeth learned from her experience that:

Even though it is a beautiful place, there are a lot of struggles. And yeah, that was made obvious. But even though there are a lot of struggles, the people still love and they’re happy and they’re not worrying about tomorrow, or when to get things done. They’re just really satisfied and they love their life, so that spoke volumes.

Bob was affected at a personal level by his exposure to poverty. He spoke in his interview:

The people had basically no, ah, material possessions….They were happy with what they had, and I realized that I just want more, basically, and I’m not always happy with what I have. Like, they, you know, if they’re happy with basically having nothing, and I have, compared to them, everything, and I’m still not happy, that’s not right. It shouldn’t be that way. I should be content with what I have and not be wanting more, the newer, the better thing.

Dawn wrote in her journal, “It’s hard to wrap my mind around everything I have and take for granted here – like clean water” (see Figure 10).
Allen compared the contrast of worries for American and Honduran kids:

And these kids worry about, food, and clothing, and what am I going to do after sixth grade? Because their family would have to pay almost half of their yearly income to send them to school. And it’s just, if I can keep these ideas in my head, I hope that I can, because I don’t want to go back to what I was….I was really ignorant of what I was taking for granted.

Dawn summarized her feelings by stating that it seems “more stuff makes you less happy”.
**Personal Impact and Challenges.**

While most of the quotes above regarding poverty were more descriptive, students talked at length during interviews about how this exposure impacted them personally and challenged their perceptions of different cultures. Many students recognized the power of this first-hand experience compared with only hearing about another culture and situation. Sam selected a picture of a house using only a tarp to repel the rain. He reflected on these difficult living conditions:

I don’t think anyone in the U.S. could even imagine living in something like that. So, that was another thing that you see on TV, poverty, and you’re just like, “Whoa, that’s not that bad”, but then when you actually experience it first hand it’s like “Wow, there’s no way I could deal with that”.

Dawn recognized how sheltered she was living in a comfortable community in the U.S. She commented, “I knew these places like this were there, but it’s hard to think about it unless you see it, cause living in America and stuff, you’re sheltered from it”. As Elizabeth faced a poverty area first-hand during the trip, she expressed surprise at the incredible impact of her experience:

That impacted me in a way that I was just like, wow. Because you’ve seen it, and people tell you, but until you walk through a city with, that’s wet and garbage. You’re walking on garbage and there’s a truck that’s not even a truck and you don’t even know why it’s sitting in front of a house because it’s not driveable. It just, you have to walk through it for it to impact you and that’s what impacted me most. I didn’t expect to have that reaction, like going down to Costa Rica. I knew things were going to be bad, but I was like, you know, I’m seeing a lot of things,
so, maybe it’ll impact me but not to that extent. But, no, it definitely was just an eye opener.

Students struggled with the economic disparity within the host country as well as between the host country and the U.S. This tension raised substantial dialogue and internal questioning. Holly described the contrast and her feelings that emerged as she wrote in her journal regarding Figure 11:

Figure 11

*The Children of La Carpio*

There were 5 or 6 children living in a house the size of my living room. These people of La Carpio are outcasts of society. The town is right beside a dump and only a couple miles from a nice neighborhood, yet their conditions were rough. La
Carpio is looked at as the “hood” you could say, known for gangs, crime, and being dangerous. Praise Jesus, God sent a man (pastor of La Carpio church) to minister and bring groups like us to share the gospel. Now members of some of those gangs are meeting for prayer with the pastor.

Denny questioned why this economic disparity exists:

One thing I didn’t really understand, it was different to see like, uh, we would be going from the airport or toward the airport and you’d see like a really nice house or really nice community and like a minute later you’d see just like a shack and a whole bunch of really broken down homes along the road, and the same way at the beach. Everything was really nice, then you take like a minute outside of the city or whatever and you just see like the slums. I didn’t really understand why, like there’s such a big contrast and going from one place to another.

After a week in an economically challenged area of Honduras, Wendy was impacted by the beach experience and the interview revealed her difficulty in reconciling the stark contrast of these two exposures (see Figure 12):
It was really different going from the farm where we stayed, to go to the beach, cause it almost felt like we were going into another country all together. Just cause we’d see like, adobe homes, and we saw homes with just like plastic and a couple sticks come together and then we come here to the beach and there’s all these nice houses, all these villas and even the run down ones are extremely nicer compared to the ones we saw there. Yeah, it was very different. I almost felt kind of bad for relaxing while I was thinking about the kids that I had just met. And how they probably would never see something like this.

Mike reflected on how he was different as a result of this trip. He observed that one difference is his “thoughts on the way that the world operates, kind of, it’s always the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and that’s really true”. Students occasionally described a feeling of being overwhelmed by the poverty and economic disparity. Mike
related that a local mother came and asked one of his friends when she was getting a better house. Mike described his friend’s dilemma:

He didn’t know how to answer that because he didn’t really know if she would ever get a new house. So there’s like a big demand for those. There’s probably a hundred of those shacks in that village, and there’s only maybe three of those houses so far. So it’s a big process in trying to pick who gets the house and how many of them there will be. It only takes $2000 to make a house like we were doing, but, a lot of the people will never get a house because the demand’s so great and the supplies and money so small.

Later Mike indicated feeling “hurt a little bit, just seeing the conditions that they were in, knowing that you probably would never get to change them just because there’s so much of a need there”. Maria also struggled with wanting to do more to help the children with whom she interacted. In one journal entry she commented, “It broke my heart to not be able to do more for these families who were living in complete poverty (see Figure 13).
Figure 13

*Overwhelming Need*

Later in her interview Maria elaborated:

They had nothing, I mean, our poverty is, you know, rich to them. If they could have the things that we supply people in the projects with, they would be happy. And, it was just sad, cause you want to do more than just, you know, you want to do more than just be there and play with them. You want to be able to help them and know that they’re going to have a good future. But, you can’t, so it was kind of hard.

As students reflected on the personal impact of exposure to this different culture, several indicated surprise at how much they were learning. Maria commented that “they influenced me in a lot of ways to just be a better person. And so maybe I benefited more on this trip than they did. But it was a good thing to learn”. Sam expressed a similar
personal discovery, “I thought I’d bless the kids, by helping them, but I honestly think they made me see more that I need to change in my life than they need to change”. Maria expanded this idea moving from a personal to national level when she said America should learn from Honduras because “everyone can learn from a simple culture and just learn to appreciate the small things.

Elizabeth took a photo of a simple dwelling and wrote in her journal about her journey in processing the contrast of this house and family with her own situation (see Figure 14):

Figure 14

*Comparing my Home to Their Home*
To think of the beautiful house I had back in Maryland to go home to, and then I thought, this is the house that the man and woman who lived there has to look forward to, going home every day. And for a second I felt sorry for them. I thought that they must dislike their house. But it is their home, and to them, I am more than sure that it is no different from my home in Maryland. I never heard one person from Costa Rica complain, they were always happy and excited to be with you or help you. I wish in many ways America was like that.

As students learned from this new culture, they described personal changes they wanted to make. They understood the difficulty in making these changes, but a determination to follow through was expressed during the interviews. Eric conveyed:

I pretty much haven’t even touched a store other than for food, since I’ve gotten back…I’m like ah, once we get enough money for this I’m going to get that or that or all this other stuff, and it just made me realize, I don’t need it. It’s really just going to get in the way.

Eric went on to describe how he internalized the lessons he learned:

I thought the same of the people but I didn’t apply it to myself before I left.

America needs to help people more and all that, but I don’t, that’s pretty much how I was before. I realize that I have just as much extra as everyone else does.

Holly reflected a similar sentiment as many of her colleagues when she expressed a desire to be more grateful and to keep the big picture in mind:

If I feel like I’m taking something for granted or if I go through a really rough time in my life and I think I have it kind of rough, I just try to remind myself, people have it so much worse than I do. Who am I to say, oh my life’s so hard and
so rough right now, when there are people like the kids in LaCarpio who are living in a house as big as your living room, with like, 10 kids, and just the things that they have to go, go through….And I just try to remind myself to not complain. So going to different countries and seeing this actually helps me a lot as a person to mature and realize that I need to not complain, and just take things as they are.

In her journal, Holly reflected on her own blessed situation in life and described an appropriate response (see Figure 15):
I Could Have Been Born Here

Walking down the streets of La Carpio left me speechless. These people had next to nothing, yet the children seemed content with smiles and excitement….I could have been born in conditions like that, but God has a reason for why I was born blessed with so many things and I need to share those blessings with my family, friends, and even the nations.
Students processed their exposure to poverty in different ways. Some probed at a deeper level than others to understand the economic disparity they observed. The reaction for some was to focus their thoughts at a corporate level while others personalized the lessons that emerged. The quotes mentioned above give an indication of the depth of processing evoked by the exposure to economic diversity during the mission trip.

**Serving Others**

Both mission trips had a component of serving others. School S had several more days of service activities in their schedule than School G, but students from both schools described the service opportunities as highly impacting. During interviews and through reflexive photography, students described the importance of service, the impact of service and the nature of service. Twenty-seven photos described some aspect of serving others accounting for 11% of the photos. During interviews, service was discussed a total of 81 times by the students. All students discussed service activities multiple times during the interviews. Fifty percent of the students took pictures of service activities. More notable is the fact that students selected 13 pictures of service as their top three photos in terms of impact. These photos accounted for 30% of the pictures selected.

Interacting with children was clearly a key avenue of serving others for the students. Since this data was discussed in detail under the *Developing Relationships* section, it will not be repeated here. Many service activities described by participants related to building or repairing housing. Students painted, repaired roofs, poured concrete floors, and helped build simple dwelling structures. Some participants were involved with a medical team and assisted with dentistry, first-aide, and general health activities. Other students taught Sunday School, shared their faith during worship services, conducted
craft activities, painted children’s faces, and washed children’s hair for lice. These activities were considered service activities and student data will be presented accordingly.

**Importance of Service.**

Students shared their perception of the importance of these service activities. They described this importance in terms of helping others and making a difference in their lives. Dawn selected a photo of the medical clinic to describe the impact of serving others for her (see Figure 16):

![Waiting for Medical Service](image)

**Figure 16**

*Waiting for Medical Service*
These are the people just lined up to get things, like Tylenol and stuff like that. Just crowded all around. I worked in the dentist a lot, actually, so. The people didn’t like complain or they didn’t really shout out either whenever they were getting their teeth pulled. Some of the kids cried, but, they were just so thankful to have it, I guess.

Some tasks were difficult to perform, but students recognized the difference it made. Dawn reflected on her task of washing children’s hair for lice:

I really didn’t want to do it at first, cause I really thought I was going to get lice….but I did, and I’m glad I did because they really enjoyed that a lot, I think. They were like, one little boy would be running around and be like, “No more lice! No more lice”.

In her journal, Dawn recounted her own fear of getting lice, but concluded with the comment “it is something they have to live with every day”. Eric was struck by the number of people who stood in line waiting for medicine that was “easily obtained in America”.

Many students were involved in some aspect of building as their service activity. Sam submitted a photo of the site where their construction team worked (see Figure 17).
Figure 17

*Construction Site*

Sam wrote, “The house is what they had to live in. They didn’t have much”.

Mike selected a picture of their building project as the most descriptive picture of his experience. He explained:

That just kind of sums up what we did for the majority of the time there. It shows the conditions that they were living in. Just that shack with the tin roof. I think the tin roof was actually held on by a few tires. And then behind it shows us working and pouring foundation for their new house that they’re going to move in to. It doesn’t show the house that was right beside that, what the house is going to look like, just a brick, four brick walls and a tin roof on top of that. But even that’s a big improvement for where they’re coming from.
Emotions evoked during the students’ experiences related to the sense of need. Roger wrote about a building project in his journal:

This is a picture of the floor we worked hard to pour. The floor we poured is the floor for a house for a family of 5. It was rewarding to know that I gave that family a nice floor while the tin shack they had before was leaky and had a dirt floor.

Common to the experience of other students, Stephanie noted the joy of work and the feeling of being able to help others. “We got the chance to do a lot of like work down there, and I just enjoyed it a lot, helping other people. And that was probably my favorite part”. Bob echoed the satisfaction of helping others in his journal. He wrote, “The father of the family shook all of our hands in gratitude for finishing the roof and the happiness in his face is unforgettable”.

**Impact of Service.**

In addition to reflections on the importance of service, students described the impact of service for the recipient as well as the giver. The impact of the service for the recipient was more noticeable for the students. Bob elaborated as he looked at one of his pictures (see Figure 18):
We were building picture four for this bro, for this family’s brother, and his family. Uh, but this is the family of her, of that brother, and um, they were just so grateful for what we were doing. Like they’d, the kids were all happy. They came and just played with us and the, uh. They were the nicest people in the world, and I just had to get a picture of them.

The extent of the need was impacting to Allen as he described in a journal entry corresponding to a picture of the community where they worked. He wrote, “I never thought anywhere in the world could living conditions be this bad. It made me much more appreciative of what I have”.

Perhaps more subtle was the impact of service on the students as the providers of that service. Roger reflected on how he felt during the building process:
It was definitely rewarding, to know that you helped, that we built a foundation for one house, poured the floor, uh, for another house, and that they’ll put like, six or eight people in that house. And they were all crammed into a really, like ten by ten foot shack. And, but at the same time, it was sort of like, uh, somebody needs to come back here and do the rest of the houses.

Mike’s involvement in serving others prompted feelings of empathy as explained during his interview:

Whenever it rains there we were thinking….about the people who were in that village, what kind of protection they had from the storm. I mean all they’ve got is a tarp hanging from their walls to try and keep the rain out. But I’m sure the mud flew right through where they were staying. So to think about what we were doing, putting a person on a concrete floor, and brick walls, protected from the rain, it was a good feeling. Cause they said pretty much every time a hurricane rolls through here the people lose their homes, or what they call their homes, and they have to start over again.

Even seeing classmates involved impacted the students. Sam referred to some of his classmates as he said, “For some it surprised me, some of the people….it was nice seeing them all give everything they had”.

Another impact of serving others on the students was their exposure to different ways of working. Students quickly recognized how much more work could be done with more mechanization. Roger commented that if he could add anything to the trip:

I would add modern machinery to our construction site, because, uh, on the farm we have a lot more power equipment and stuff. And if you wanted to put stones
somewhere, you just get the tractor and do it. But here you have to shovel, uh, everything onto the pickup, and shovel it off. And I’m just sitting there thinking about how much more I could do if I had the right tools.

Sam took a photo of concrete mixing by hand (see Figure 19).

Sam explained in his journal, “This is how we made the concrete to lay. They don’t have cement trucks so they don’t have much help. They had to do everything on their own”.

Manual labor was a unique part of building for Denny in this new setting. He described the contrast with his experience at home:

Well, first of all, doing work like that’s a lot different than what you’d do in the United States. I mean, what we did there, if we had a backhoe, a cement mixer, and like, that’s even, we could probably have did everything that we did in four
days in three hours, just because of all the manual labor you have to go through. You have to hand shovel all the stones onto the truck, hand shovel all the stones off the truck, hand shovel all the stones into like one pile, transport it with wheel barrows, and mix it manually and stuff like that, so. It’s a lot of manual labor, more than what I’m used to, I guess.

Mike suggested a possible advantage for doing things in the manner he observed of local people. He described a picture of work that he selected during the interview:

This picture is…a symbol of the way they work there. Like being on the construction team, we did a lot of work, and a lot of the methods were very, very different from the methods here. Like, everything, it took more time, it took more energy, took more effort, because they don’t have the tools that we have here. Like here you want to, you want to dig a footer to a house like that, you could probably, you could get it done in an hour. Because you’d have the proper tools to do it. But there, it’s an all day thing, where you take lots of time, lots of energy to do it. And they have, I think it gives them more pride for their work, more, they have a better work ethic, like, here, it’s just like, just get it done. There it’s, you got to go find people. You got to put the time and energy in things to do it. And it’s so much more simple, simple methods of doing things, that gives them, like, it kind of changes the whole way that they live, because everything takes a lot longer.

*Nature of Service.*

As students completed service activities and reflected back on these experiences, their perception of the nature of service emerged. Bob recognized the relationship
between serving others and showing love to people as he described the most important part of the trip for him:

Most important part, I think would probably be, uh, showing love to the people. 
Like you can build them a house and they’ll be grateful for it, but if you’re nice to them and show them love, it means all the more to them.

Holly added her thoughts about the true meaning of serving others and how this trip might influence her future:

I knew that I loved missions, and I loved uh, being with the kids and showing Christ’s love. You don’t have to speak Spanish or Polish or, you know, Japanese or anything, um. But love is a language in itself, and I’ve learned that I really want to go other places in the world.

As students participated in this single trip, they recognized the connection of their experience with something larger than this one event. Elizabeth described her school’s relationship with this particular ministry and the connected nature of this trip with previous trips from her school:

It wasn’t like you’re just going there and being just, take care of the children and give them fun for a day. Like, it had been a project throughout the years that’s still going to continue. And so, there was purpose behind it, and we’ve accomplished something as a school. And that was important, because, we’re still accomplishing something, and we’re giving to Costa Rica. Like, that’s just, that was awesome.

Allen’s reflection on his service raised larger questions of why these situations exist and possible solutions. A healthy frustration was evident during this interview response:
Two things I could barely believe, is that their government doesn’t do anything to help them. The United States has these different methods set up for people that would have to live like this, and they help them with that. They help get them houses and stuff, and I couldn’t believe that their government wouldn’t help them. And another thing I couldn’t believe is that Americans live in houses that have bathrooms as big as the rooms they live in, and they’re doing nothing to help. Just didn’t make sense.

Later Allen revealed how his involvement in meeting the needs of people impacted his own thinking about life:

And it’s almost like God was saying, you have the power to change the world. Because all these countries, like, a lot of countries around the world are in need and they don’t have anyone helping them….You can go affect these countries.

At some point during the trip, many students recognized the vastness of the need compared to the limitations of their capacity to serve. Denny expressed this struggle:

That was really hard, actually, because, when we’d actually work on the foundation and stuff of a house, you’d see people, just like, like you wanted to help everybody, but you knew you couldn’t and it was just hard to see the faces of the people that you couldn’t help. They were still happy, but in the same way they were kind of like disappointed you could tell. It’s just, I don’t know, like I said, you just want to help everybody, but you can’t.

Roger described one particular encounter with an older lady who approached the team and asked when they were going to build her a house. He commented, “it sort of broke my heart, you know, like, yeah, sort of a drop in the bucket for all those houses they
have”. Maria remembered the row of houses next to the one they were remodeling and her feelings about their project:

It probably made me, between a combination of being, you know, being sad and heartbroken, but then kind of frustrated. Because, like I said, you want to do more for them. The construction team was there every day that we were there, but they could only accomplish so much, you know. If you could see it, it was just a long strip of just small shacks, small shacks like this, and some were just smaller. And, that’s where they lived, that’s where these kids were growing up.

Eric had similar feelings as he worked with the medical team:

It made it feel like we weren’t even putting a drop in the bucket to solve the problems. Like, the medicines we were giving was only going to last so long. We didn’t even have enough to get through everybody.

The frustration of not being able to help more people caused some students to consider returning to help later. Others regretted that more of the trip was not doing service. Bob explained why he wanted to return to Honduras:

Go back up onto the mountain, do some more work. Cause I didn’t quite feel complete with not being able to finish the one house, you know. Kind of want to go back and do something else. Go up there for a longer time than what I was.

Dawn acknowledged that the short opportunity she had for serving others compelled her to do more:

I would have liked to do it for maybe a week more, especially the team things, with the medical team. Cause we only had, four days, I think? Three, I don’t remember. I would have stayed longer with that, a little bit, because it felt like we
only reached four small areas of people, plus we didn’t get to finish the one day, because of the rain.

Eric voiced a deeper level of questioning than many of his classmates as his thoughts pushed beyond the initial positive feelings of being able to help others and he considered the very complexities of serving others:

I guess just that they’re really, uh open to people. They want to talk. They want to be spoken to. They appreciate that people come down and try to help them. Even if all we can do is give them a little bit of medicine that will be gone soon enough, and they’ll be in the same problem, they appreciate that people are trying to help….It felt good at first, that we were able to hand out medicine and help these people. But like after a day or two, I realized that we, we’re not being able to change the environment, they’re going to get sick again.

The three themes just described represent a framework for understanding the impact of the mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of students. Other minor themes exist, but the three identified were clearly at the forefront of student thought and observation. These three themes were mentioned frequently and with more passion than other topics. More photos gave evidence of the importance of these themes. Developing relationships, awareness of poverty, and serving others were mentioned as being the most impacting elements of the mission trips.

In this chapter the author presented data with limited commentary for the review of the reader. Quotes selected were representative of the many comments heard from participants. Photos were a selected representation of the images submitted by students to
describe their trip. In Chapter 5 the author will present more analyses and will discuss the implication of the data presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research study explored the effect of international short-term mission trips on the intercultural sensitivity of Christian school secondary students. Through a qualitative framework, participants’ perceptions of change in intercultural sensitivity were examined. This chapter contains a summary of the relevant findings, conclusions from these findings, implications for practice and suggestions to guide future research.

The primary question that guided the study examined student perceptions of change in their intercultural sensitivity during the trip and how the change occurred. Other questions explored the effect of the trip on participants’ perceptions of their home culture and the host culture. A final question investigated which aspects of the trip most affected any perceived changes in intercultural sensitivity.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

This section consists of a discussion and analysis of the findings in the context of current research literature. The general effect of the short-term mission trip is described and the nature of the effect is detailed. Convergent and divergent findings within the literature are reviewed regarding the impact on participants.

The Impact

A key question of this study asked whether students perceived any changes in their intercultural sensitivity during the trip. In response, all participants indicated a sense of impact from the trip. Some were more confident of the impact and better able to describe its nature than others, but all perceived some level of change. When asked if
they were different as a result of their trip, students responded in three general ways. First, students noted a changed worldview. They described this as a broader knowledge of the world, different cultures and people groups. Dawn and Mike summarized it effectively as they reflected on personal change. Dawn said, “My worldview has changed and definitely broadened my knowledge of things like the world and what people are going through, and yeah, my heart has changed too”. Mike noted that “it kind of broadened my horizons a lot, actually knowing what’s out there, and seeing the way you can help people”.

Second, students described changed attitudes they noticed in themselves as a result of this trip. They described themselves as being more grateful, open and friendly, courageous, and cognizant of their blessed position in life. Sam noted he was different in his “perception on life, I guess, not taking stuff for granted, having to value everything”. Maria added that she was “a little more open to people” and stated “I think this trip helped me to maybe just kind of be more outgoing and be more friendly to other people I don’t know and get to know them”.

Third, students noted an increased personal empathy for other cultures and peoples, prompting some to think more seriously about continuing to serve others. These students described the change as a heart change. Elizabeth commented that visiting this country took a piece of her heart. She elaborated:

Going into this country, it was, like, it’s just another part that was added on to the different things that I, different things that I already had feelings for. Kind of like how I want to, it kind of just added more to the fact that I want to care for things.
And like with my life I’d like to change things, maybe, can’t change everything, but I’d like to impact people’s lives in some way.

The impact from the mission trip was evident and substantial. It was observed in the data and directly described by participants. The nature of that impact is detailed next to enhance the understanding of changes experienced by participants.

**Nature of the Impact**

A description of the nature of the impact responds to the research question regarding how perceived changes occurred for trip participants. Three general categories help describe the nature of impact from the mission trips. First, students referred to moving out of their comfort zone as a catalyst for change. Second, both corporate and personal changes comprised the impact. Third, reflections on the spiritual aspect of mission trips help frame the nature of the trip’s effect.

**Out of Comfort Zone.**

A shared experience between mission trips and experiential education is the concept of cognitive dissonance as a catalyst for change. Cognitive dissonance occurs when students are exposed to situations that prompt conflicting thoughts about previous attitudes and perceptions. Students may respond by ignoring the dissonance or by changing attitudes and perceptions. Martin (2006) described an Outward Bound program in which a student moves to a state of adaptive dissonance by reflecting on these conflicting thoughts and transferring that learning to future experiences. Walsh & Golins (1976) suggested that no change or adaptation could occur without dissonance. S. W. Parker (2007) outlined the correlation of cognitive dissonance theory and Biblical principles that guide the development of mission trips for Christian organizations.
Participants in this study described the importance of getting out of their comfort zone as a catalyst for the changes they experienced. The term comfort zone was not introduced by the researcher but was used by the participants’ own volition. Students recognized that change was not an easy process nor one they would necessarily have chosen. Post-trip interviews reflected the role of being moved from a comfortable setting. Wendy described it as being forced out of her comfort zone as she interacted with the children, “I was trying to minister to them. It forced me to slip out of my comfort zone and actually say something to them, make eye contact and that kind of thing. Cause I’m usually shy about that here.” Mike gave an indication of what caused the dissonance to happen for him:

I think that once we were taken out of our comfort zone, like sent to Honduras, at least for me, it was more of the fact, well, you left everything that you know behind, and you left everyone that you know, and everyone who knows you behind, and so it was kind of an opportunity to start fresh.

Roger observed a personal change after the trip when he noted “I’m less afraid to go out of my comfort zone”. Dawn responded to the question of what she learned about herself by noting “I can actually step out of my comfort zone and enjoy it”.

The international setting provided an additional element of cognitive dissonance by placing students in a country that was not their own. From the student responses, the exposure to poverty and children were key factors in creating personal dissonance. The observation of an accident scene (see Figure 8) forced students to confront a different culture’s response to death. The accident story was the most frequently mentioned incident as students described the first time they became aware they were in a culture
different from their own. The resulting cognitive dissonance from this experience demanded deeper reflection and analysis.

Allowing students to move outside their comfort zone is a critical element in the design of mission trips. Planners should not hesitate to allow the trip to expose students to new and even difficult situations. The role of cognitive dissonance in prompting change is convergent with other research. Blezien (2004) noted the role of crisis in creating an impact for participants as a definitive finding in his study. S. W. Parker (2007) observed in his findings that “the participants must be challenged to do things that they may not, at first, choose or desire, in order to challenge and change their thinking and values” (p. 174).

**Corporate and Personal Changes.**

The impact of this trip was observed at both the corporate and personal level. One level of the corporate impact was evidenced through the changes experienced by the class. During and after the trip, 12 of the 14 students described changes they observed in other classmates or in their collective class. Changes in class dynamics and inner class relationships were seen as positive growth. A second level of corporate impact was revealed through observations made regarding entire countries or cultures. Students made numerous comments concerning their country and needed changes. Observations and analyses were made of the host country and characteristics of its culture. The impact at a corporate level helped affirm and solidify the individual impact students experienced.

Many students made an important step from the observation of corporate impact to personalizing the lessons learned. Comments of national irresponsibility directed at the
home country resulted in thoughts of how an individual could make a difference. Eric described this perspective:

I didn’t apply it to myself before I left. America needs to help people more and all that, but I don’t. That’s pretty much how I was before. I realize that I have just as much extra as everyone else does”.

Intentional times for student reflection facilitated this progression from corporate implications to individual lessons learned.

**The Spiritual Nature of Mission Trips.**

Reflections on the spiritual nature of mission trips are pertinent to the research question of how changes in intercultural sensitivity occurred on the trips. In Chapter 3 the spiritual distinctive of mission trips was described, differentiating these trips from non-religious service learning and experiential education activities. A healthy tension exists within Christian circles when defining specific goals for mission efforts. This tension dates back to the late 1800’s as people debated whether to proclaim the Gospel message, be involved in social activities, or a combination of both (Linhart, 2003). In the 1970’s, one primary purpose for mission trips was “to expose students to cross-cultural ministry with the hope that they would become vocational missionaries” (Linhart, 2003, p.5). Today, goals for mission trips are varied with differences most noticeable in the balance of the verbal sharing of one’s faith and service activities designed to assist those in need.

Based upon a review of current literature it was noted that various researchers define the primary impact of mission trips in terms of personal change such as spiritual growth and faith maturity (Beers, 2001; Manitsas, 2001; Tuttle, 1998). Instruments that measured spiritual well-being and faith maturity were used in an attempt to quantify this
growth. It was apparent and logical that the researcher’s personal theology of mission trips shaped the study and findings. A mission trip leader who describes a primary goal for the trip in terms of spiritual growth or evangelism prepares participants for reaching these goals. Students then tend to reflect on those aspects in their journals, interviews, and survey responses, couching their comments in language reflective of a faith journey. It is therefore important for this researcher to reflect on his own theology of mission trips to facilitate the reader’s more complete understanding of the findings.

This researcher views all aspects of mission trips as spiritual in nature and, therefore, did not separate the spiritual dimension of the trip from other impacts. Rather, the spiritual dimension of a mission trip provides a framework for understanding how changes occur. Changes in a participant’s attitude or view of the larger world are inherently spiritual. Developing intercultural sensitivity or moving toward a more ethnorelative stage of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) is an exercise of spirituality. These changes may lead one closer to or further from God, depending on the nature of that change or direction of movement.

In this study, several students discussed their trip experiences in terms of spiritual development. A few examples of this spiritual journey for participants would help clarify the spiritual nature of these mission trips. Students spoke directly of internal wrestling with spiritual issues. Elizabeth described her first selected picture of a local church:

Their church was open and not, they gave their best and that was good enough and it wasn’t about rules or regulations or politics that a lot of churches have come to make and know. And it kind of impacted me in a way to think, you know, that’s not what God is about, he’s not about the rules and regulations that
everyone seems to expect, shoved in your face. And that’s why Christianity is really frowned upon. It’s like he’s the God of grace, and that just hit home in this church, cause I realized, you know, stop, stop trying to be the rules and regulation Christian, quote, unquote. Just be the Christian that you can be in living by faith and before God, and you’re never going to be perfect so just accept his grace and live in that. And that’s what, yeah, best describes my trip.

Allen wrote a journal entry that gave evidence of a spiritual application being made in his life as he described a key he found on the street (see Figure 20):

![Figure 20. The Key](image)

*The Key*

The key said “Globe” and it made me think a little. I picked up this key….It made me start to think about how God gives every Christian the means they need to spread his word or “He gives us the key to the world”.
Students frequently made a direct spiritual connection when they took pictures of nature scenes they observed. Holly described a picture of a volcano in a picture she submitted (see Figure 21):

![The Volcano](image)

*Figure 21.*

*The Volcano*

How could one not see God in that site?! The volcano was amazing. Late at night we went closer to it and watched spirits [sic] of lava come out. You could hear the volcano rocks hitting the side of the volcano. It was like nothing I’ve ever seen.

In another photo, Holly recognized her place in God’s grand creation (see Figure 22):
Figure 22.

*God’s Splendor*

I had to capture this on camera. God has given humans so much beauty in the world and I think we take it for granted sometimes. There are moments, like this one for me, you just need to stand in awe, and say “God, you are bigger and more powerful than I realize”.

Even when students did not directly use spiritual terminology, they gave evidence of growth in their faith journey. Mark’s journal had a short but poignant observation “The people of the town were satisfied living on the edge of a landfill” with his picture of an area they visited (see Figure 23).
This seemingly simple observation led to later reflections during his interview that indicated deeper thinking about poverty and contentment. As the complexities of student thinking and processing were analyzed, it became clear that an attempt to separate or identify “spiritual” themes or segments of the trip would do a disservice to the powerful, multifaceted impact this trip had on each student’s faith journey.

**Changed Attitudes Toward the Home and Host cultures**

Two research questions that guided this study explored changed perceptions by the participants of their home culture and other cultures as a result of the trip. During interviews, participants were asked if they thought differently about the United States and
its people as a result of their trip (see Appendix D). Feelings expressed regarding the United States generally reflected negative sentiments after the trip. This concurred with findings from other studies such as Walling et al. (2006) and Blezien (2004). While these comments seemed directed at the United States, it was combined with general unsettled feelings regarding the disparity of wealth in our world. Negative perceptions of the U.S. held by people of the host culture were mentioned, but only occasionally.

The descriptions of how participants now viewed their home country were given with deep thought and passion. Some recognized the privilege of living in the U.S., but also the responsibility that should accompany that privilege. Several noted that America should do more to assist people in poor countries. Eric stated that “America should help people more”. Maria observed:

Instead of America trying to be the great big country, we should learn from other countries and be more appreciative. And maybe that the people should, you know, um, you know, should learn from the Hondurans, because they’re hard workers. And everything that they get, they get by, you know, working really hard. And they don’t have short cuts there.

Students described the U.S. as being less friendly and open when compared to other countries. They sensed a higher level of trust in the host country. At some point during the trip, most students realized how blessed they were in the U.S. and that Americans need to be more grateful. In spite of being blessed, participants noted the people in the U.S. were not as happy and complained more. Sam described this disconnect for him, “We have so much in the States. They have so little there, and, we
complain and they’re happy”. Students described Americans as being greedy and arrogant. Maria observed:

We are just extremely lucky people, to have the land that we have, the government, the, just everything. But also I think that we kind of are greedy with it. I don’t think that we appreciate it the right way.

Why were these reflections stated so negatively? Were these changes an indication of healthy growth or simply emerging cynicism? Bennett (1993) defined the stage of reversal in his model of intercultural sensitivity as “a denigration of one’s own culture and an attendant assumption of the superiority of a different culture” (p.39).

Bennett describes a typical progression of development as moving:

From negative evaluation of the host culture (denigration), to an effort to “help” that culture progress toward an American ideal (superiority), to a disavowal of all American values and an embracing of unchanging host-culture values (reversal).

In this context, the reversal form may appear most sensitive, but is actually only changing the center of ethnocentrism. (p.39-40)

Bennett’s analysis at least partially describes what happened to the students in this study. Although their exposure was very short-term and the interaction with another culture brief, students displayed some elements of reversal as a response to their observation of a different setting, particularly the extreme poverty they confronted. Their reactions signified a struggle with the dissonance created by the awareness of their own wealth and privilege compared to the poverty and lack of privilege they observed.

The students’ criticism of their own country could also be understood in part as a spiritual reaction to the economic disparity they observed between the two cultures.
Christian ideals of serving others and sharing resources with all people forced students to reconcile the discrepancy of wealth distribution in some manner. One logical reaction was to evaluate and critique the wealthy group in this scenario. The criticism, therefore, was a positive part of spiritual growth as students personalized the lessons learned. Moving from mere criticism of perceived offenders to the discovery of methods for changing undesirable situations is an essential step in personal and corporate reflection for school mission trips.

In addition to reflections on their home culture, students described how their attitudes toward the host culture changed during the trip. A common initial reaction was the recognition that people living in this different country were real people with many similarities to the students. Elizabeth described the tremendous impact of people from the host country as she became acquainted with them:

There are like genuine people living there and surviving and struggling and even though it’s a beautiful place….there are a lot of struggles, and yeah, that was made obvious. But even though there are a lot of struggles, the people still love and they’re happy and they’re not worrying about tomorrow, or when to get things done. They’re just really satisfied and they love their life.

This acceptance of a different people group was an indication of the development of intercultural sensitivity in the participants. The opportunities to interact directly with people and build relationships facilitated a profound impact for participants.

**Convergent Findings: A Review of the Themes**

The three identified themes addressed two research questions that guided the study, how changes of intercultural sensitivity occurred and what aspects of the trip most
affected these changes. The themes were developing relationships, awareness of poverty, and serving others. Each theme had its own distinctive dimension but all were intertwined, providing a more complete picture of the impact from the trip.

**Developing Relationships.**

The first theme or primary impact of the two mission trips was developing personal relationships. All participants described relationships more frequently than any other topic. The face-to-face interactions with people from the host culture were key in facilitating changes in intercultural sensitivity. Previous stereotypes were questioned as actual stories of human challenge and perseverance were heard from people of the host culture. Students instinctively began to question why differences exist rather than condemning those who were different.

Children comprised the first group having impacting relationships with the participants. All participants discussed children during interviews and journals. As students described the greatest effect from the trip, relating to children was named most frequently. This finding corroborated the research of Blezien (2004) and Linhart (2003). Students described relationships with groups of children, but the most passionate descriptions came from individual relationships that developed between a student and child. The relationship that emerged was memorable, fulfilling and yet painful when the student had to say farewell.

Some participants struggled to understand why the interaction with children provided such an impact. In this setting, the uninhibited nature of the children drew reserved students out of their comfort zone and forced an interaction with people from the host culture. The smiles and cheerful demeanor of children had a deeper impact as
participants observed their simple living conditions. This impact intertwined with the participant’s awareness of poverty. It was the children who most often caused the students to confront economic disparity.

The second group who related to students consisted of translators and other local adult friends. Translators were generally educated youth who related to the participants on a close personal level. These collegial friendships enabled students to see the host culture through the eyes of a peer. This depth of perception permitted student thought to go beyond simple empathy for a group of people to the sense of hope and future these young people portrayed. This group’s impact coincided with the findings of Blezien (2004).

Other local adult friends mentioned were respected nationals such as a local pastor and a bus driver guide who inspired the students with their vision and outlook on life. Relationships with local adults were less developed but were indicative of the impact from local cultural values. Students noted the deep dependence on God from families and their gratefulness for meager possessions and life itself. As with all relationship groups, student observations were based on a relatively brief period of interaction, but cultural values from these friendships impacted the students and prompted the examination of their own values.

The third group creating impact from relationships was classmates. This group included individual relationships and changing dynamics of the class collectively. This was a divergent finding and will be described in greater detail in a later section.
Awareness of Poverty.

The second theme identified was the student’s awareness of poverty. This theme was complex in nature and even the assigned label seems inadequate to describe the impact. The theme of awareness of poverty coincided with research findings from Beers (2001), Linhart (2003), Tuttle (1998), and Blezien (2004).

Students described a myriad of emotions in response to their awareness of poverty. Their thinking clearly indicated progressing levels of complexity and depth of analysis. Initially they were shocked at the extent of poverty and needed to simply process the new images they were receiving. They quickly made comparisons to their home situation. The disparity between the two was glaring and prompted a deeper level of analysis and evoked various emotions. At times students expressed feeling overwhelmed by the extent of need and an inability to help everyone. The participants began to think beyond the specific situation before them and considered the global nature of poverty and the complexity of the issue.

As students compared the poverty in the host country with the perceived blessed status of their home culture, intense emotions were displayed. It was during these discussions that the most negative comments about their home culture emerged. There were also expressions of deep gratitude for their position in life and being in a privileged setting themselves. One student in this study realized she could have been born in a setting of poverty. She recognized this as God’s blessing to her and this heightened her sense of responsibility to help others. While students initially expressed feeling empathy for people living in poverty, these feelings were displaced by a realization that people
were content and though their house was a simple structure, it was nonetheless their home and possibly a place of great happiness for them.

With continued contemplation, several students questioned the reality of their blessed status. They noticed desirable values in this “poor” community that were not prevalent in their own culture. Students frequently talked about the joy and smiles they saw in this difficult setting and began to question who was really the most blessed. They were amazed and puzzled by the contentment they observed of people living in a situation they expected would create unhappiness. This progression of student thinking and processing coincides with findings from the study of Linhart (2004). He described his students’ reaction to the joy they observed:

This expressed joy was seen as independent of the circumstances in which the host people lived. Despite not having the luxuries that the students possessed in their everyday existence in the United States, the people appeared to possess an authentic joy and religious faith. For a trip where they had come in a position of power as caregivers, the students wrestled with a new awareness that their culture perhaps was not superior in fostering what they called “real love”. Still the students could not escape the ethnocentric view that their culture was superior and that material possessions are good “blessings”. For students like Erin, the concept of “being blessed” related to the cultural and social status to which they were born. (p.159-160)

Students reflected on desirable values they noted in the host culture. They observed that poverty appeared to unify people. Participants described people as being resourceful. They carefully observed the difference in priority focus for people in this setting, as procuring food occupied much attention. Some implications of poverty
emerged during the trip. For example, students speculated as they described the accident scene (see Figure 8) that the victim’s family may not have been there because they lacked quick transportation, something students take for granted in their home setting. One student noticed the bike beside the road and expected it was the man’s bike, meaning this was his mode of transportation. This inherently placed him at greater physical risk and dictated the response after the tragedy.

During interviews students seemed perplexed by the economic disparity within the host country. Seeing wealthy and poor houses in the same area provoked deep reflection. One student reflected on being uncertain as to why this situation existed and others speculated it was unlikely this situation would ever change. These observations highlight the key role of processing for participants in facilitating an effective mission trip experience.

**Serving Others.**

The third theme derived from the study was the service activities in which students were involved. These included building, helping medical teams and teaching children. While the service activities are discussed independently from relationships, these activities provided one of the primary venues for interactions with people. The developing relationships subsequently impacted and shaped the service activities. Additionally, the service projects frequently afforded an opportunity for the students’ awareness of poverty. In one sense, serving others was simply the framework facilitating the other two themes of impact. Serving others was a theme convergent with the findings of Blezien (2004) and Linhart (2003).
Service meets an emotional need of students who have been impacted by people living in difficult situations. Children desire attention and love, families need better shelter, and people need medical attention. The automatic response was to help and students described a positive feeling as they attempted to assist others. They found joy in their work and fulfillment in serving others. From a spiritual perspective, students considered serving others as a way of extending love to other people. One described service activities as her favorite part of the trip. Students recalled the unforgettable experience of a smiling family expressing gratitude for a new roof.

Deeper questions emerged as students embraced their work projects. Eric reflected on the nature of the help being extended to recipients. He realized “help” might not always be helpful. Medicine was distributed, but if the environment did not change, people would get sick again. What if medicines were not available the next time? The permanent or temporary nature of helping others was evaluated. Other students considered who was really being helped. Several students described a feeling of being helped more than the recipient of their service. They questioned whether they received more from this experience than they gave. This paradigm shift in their thinking was indicative of a deeper processing beyond the first impression.

Participants were exposed to different ways of accomplishing work with a greater reliance on manual labor rather than machines. Journal entries noted how quickly work could have been done with mechanization. It was assumed the addition of mechanization would be a positive improvement in the host culture. While students commented on the hectic, busy life in American as a negative part of its culture, they seldom contemplated
the deeper question of possible negative changes mechanization might bring to the host country’s lifestyle.

**A Divergent Finding: The Impact of Classmates**

One unexpected theme emerged from the study. In the overall organization of themes, the category of classmates was considered one of three groups of people having a substantial impact on participants through the broader theme of developing relationships. The two manifestations of this classmate impact was the relationship of the class as a whole and the observed impact of the trip on individual classmates. First, students felt the class bonded and connected beyond normal groupings and cliques. Participants saw this as a positive experience, drawing their group together at the end of their secondary school experience. This aspect of classmate impact was similar to observations made by Linhart (2003) and Friesen (2004). Most mission trip groups focus on team building before and during trips. Retreats often provide settings for encouraging camaraderie and an understanding of the importance of collective cooperation and support. Groups of students are typically living together for the duration of the trip and relationships are tested. A team dynamic on a mission trip rather than individual assignments provides benefits such as the ability to overcome difficulties (Friesen, 2004).

The second aspect of the classmate theme was a personal impact from the participant’s observation of colleagues. Participants were impressed and surprised to see classmates interacting with the host culture and being impacted by the trip. This was mentioned frequently in photo journals and interviews, indicating the impact was noticed during the trip and lingered as a key thought during the post-trip interviews. This dimension of classmate impact was not found in other studies. While several studies
examined the impact of college trips and mission organization trips, the composition and nature of these teams differ from a secondary class. The impact of classmates, therefore, may be a unique dimension for secondary schools.

In the two schools of this study, students described relationships with classmates that spanned up to 13 years. Both schools were small and relationships at times more closely resembled that of a family than classmates. Many school activities were designed to stretch students beyond their comfort zone during the high school experience. One school had a focused weekly service time. Social events were conducted as well as extended trips for music and athletic groups. Service activities were frequently intertwined with other school events. In spite of intentional curricular efforts to create an environment conducive to positive change, students reflected on this trip and made comments like Holly who stated:

It was interesting to see all the guys in my class, like, really open up. I hadn’t seen that side of them, especially the ones I was with for 13 years. I still had never seen how they interacted, and a lot of them were touched in ways that I don’t think they really expected.

Elizabeth described boys in her class showing true love and affection to the children. She concluded she was “never able to see that side of the boys before”. These comments were heard most frequently from girls about the boys in their class, but boys also noted this impact. Several students remarked how proud they were of certain classmates who worked hard or participated actively. These classmates surpassed expectations by rising to a higher plane than students had observed before.
Why was the impact of classmates so substantial in this study and not found in other studies? Why did six of the participants select a photo of a classmate when asked to choose the pictures representing the greatest impact of the trip? To answer these questions, it is worth considering the dynamics of the high school class and how changes occur.

Peer pressure is monumental at this age and what happens to others is significant. During a mission trip, students experience personal change and subconsciously seek to validate the reality of these experiences and changes. S. W. Parker (2007) suggests that after an individual makes a decision or change in response to cognitive dissonance, she will seek affirmation that she made the right decision. To observe a familiar classmate being impacted by the experience is a confirmation of the reality of the trip’s experience for the participant. The effect of observing classmates served a critical role in solidifying the overall impact of this trip. This unique dimension of school-organized trips for classes could offer key benefits not found in other mission trip experiences.

**Implications for Practice**

Substantial time and money are invested in short-term mission trips by secondary schools. It is imperative for leaders to continually evaluate the experiences and find more effective ways to maximize the trip’s effect. In the Christian school setting, parents, donors, and school personnel must understand the significant impact that occurs for trip participants. Intentional planning based on empirical findings can transform a good trip into a great trip.

The implications for practice emerge from the observation by participants that something happened on this trip that had never happened previously. Christian schools
intentionally plan a variety of experiences that encourage students to step out of their comfort zones and to interact with people who are different in age, race, and socioeconomic background. In spite of this intentional focus through 13 years of education, participants perceived that something different happened on this short-term, international mission trip. The impact was substantial and life changing and exceeded their expectations even though they had heard many former participants describe their trips. These findings advocate for the increased use of international mission trips and for the enhancement of their effectiveness.

The worth of a mission trip will always be weighed against the perceived value from the impact. It is imperative that administrators ensure the clear articulation of the nature of impact from the trip to their constituencies. This communication can flow from various sources, but should include participants sharing their personal stories. The most powerful portion of this study for the researcher was hearing stories directly from the students.

The mission trip is grounded in principles of service learning and experiential education. It should be viewed through these two lenses as the trip is planned and components are determined. Cognitive dissonance clearly plays a role in facilitating a deep impact. Parents are always concerned about the welfare of their child and protection is a high priority. While this perspective must be considered, planning trips with some dissonance is not a negative practice. It is precisely through these times of dissonance that an environment conducive for change exists. For example, exposing students to extreme poverty is uncomfortable, but provides a setting for introspection and possible changes in a philosophy of life.
In light of the findings of this study, it would be prudent to plan trips with multiple opportunities for personal interactions. Connections with children and youth from the host culture enhance a positive impact. The more frequent these personal interactions, the more balanced the students’ reflections will be. Processing the deeper “why” questions will be done most effectively in the midst of interactions with people from the host culture rather than as outsiders contemplating these complex issues from a distance.

Physical service offers a key connection for young people and should be incorporated into any mission trip. Service activities would ideally provide opportunities for social interaction while completing essential tasks. Several students regretted not spending more time serving others. They would have preferred service work rather than the recreation planned for the group. This was due in part to a changed perception of life priorities as the trip progressed. From this study it was clear the students’ perception of impact came more from service activities than any other portion of the trip.

Bennett (1993) suggested specific strategies for helping people move through his six stages of intercultural sensitivity to the more advanced ethnorelative stages. This information could inform leaders as they plan future mission trips. During the trip, students progressed in their thinking as more ethnorelative comments emerged. For example, students noted values held by the host culture that were desirable. The students’ respect for these values allowed them to accept local people with their differences. The quantitative classification of students in Bennett’s stages of intercultural sensitivity may not be as beneficial as simply allowing general principles enhance the planning process, particularly in structuring participant reflection sessions.
The guided and intentional processing of information by participants is critical to a positive impact. Opportunities for discussion and reflection should be scheduled daily during the trip. A careful balance of guided processing and allowing students to take the initiative for their own learning should be maintained. Students should be encouraged to consider the “why” questions rather than “what” questions exclusively. Discussions of why poverty exists may lead to solutions or at least possible individual responses.

Reflexive photography and journaling were instrumental in hearing the impact from students. In addition to being a great asset for future research studies, this methodology could be incorporated into annual trips to enhance student reflection. Post-trip processing and follow-up could focus on the themes and questions extracted from the photos and journals. Integrating this methodology into the ongoing curriculum of the school would enhance the connection between theory and practice.

The findings of this study may inform the timing of the senior trip. The two schools used in this study currently schedule their mission trip at the end of the senior year. Students return from the trip a few days before graduation. The final flurry of activity and emotion as students prepare to leave the school can overshadow the mission trip experience. The school hears a brief presentation from the students as a final follow-up to the trip. The spring timing does not maximize the full impact of the trip for either participants or the remaining student body. It would seem advantageous to schedule the trip earlier in the year to allow for more extensive follow-up and sharing of the impact with the rest of the school. A more complete processing of information combined with peer or mentor accountability for desired changes could be facilitated during the remainder of the school year. Students could have opportunities to share their stories with
faculty, students, and home churches. The opportunity for ongoing follow-up is a unique advantage of a mission trip designed by a secondary school as compared to other institutions.

Few secondary schools conduct a mandatory mission trip. School leaders should consider a required trip that is an integral part of the curriculum for two reasons. First, if one believes the significant impact that is evidenced by this and other studies, all students should participate. Requiring a trip reinforces the importance of intercultural sensitivity through international experiences and serving others. Second, a mandatory trip allows a more complete integration of the trip into the school curriculum. The trip should be woven into the framework of multiple courses. Not only will this better serve the academic needs of students, it would create a bridge between the textbook and real life.

This study informs current practice by emphasizing areas of greatest impact from mission trips. Planning should reflect the nature of these emphases. Given the significant impact discovered, additional research would serve to enhance and fine-tune the planning of mission trips for secondary schools.

**Implications for Further Research**

There were no studies found that explored short-term mission trips designed by secondary schools. In light of this void, additional studies are needed to better understand this increasingly utilized activity for Christian secondary schools. Future research should view secondary school groups differently than college or mission groups.

The impact of classmates was an unexpected but key finding in this study. Additional research should explore this dynamic to better understand how an individual’s impact from a school trip is influenced by the impact observed in a close group of
classmates. A study of secondary student trips for individuals compared with groups could further enlighten this topic. In a school group setting, is the impact different for students who have been classmates for 13 years compared to new transfer students?

Elements of the trip’s design would benefit from additional empirical data. International trips could be compared to local trips with similar designs. A comparison of different schools or individuals who have participated in both types may be an appropriate framework for this study. As more students participate in various international mission trip experiences, one could profitably examine the differences of the impact for students with previous experience and those participating for the first time. The further exploration of required versus optional trips would contribute to current research findings. Do optional trips have the same classmate impact found in this study?

The longitudinal nature of the trip’s impact would be worthy of additional exploration. While Friesen (2004) examined the long-term impact of mission trips for a variety of youth groups, a secondary school group has different internal dynamics and possibilities for encouraging the retention of impact. Conducting a qualitative study of the longitudinal nature of impact may provide insights into the keys to maintaining desired change that have eluded quantitative instruments. A related aspect of mission trips is the optimal timing. Moving the trip earlier in the school year would allow for continued processing of the trip, enhancing the possibility of maintaining change. Would an earlier trip allow students to have a more positive senior year with greater class cohesiveness?

Reflecting on one’s experience is paramount to internalizing the impact. An examination of best practices for processing the experience would be beneficial. What
elements are best used for sessions before, during and after the trip? What is the role of both advisors and peers? What influences the ability for a student or class to maintain changes? How is accountability best structured for secondary students?

Linhart (2003) examined the curricular nature of mission trips for groups, but not schools. A similar study for schools could examine how trips could become an integral part of the ongoing scope and sequence for the senior year curriculum. Incorporating the mission trip into the curriculum would help students view the trip as a part of the whole rather than an extra addition that doesn’t connect to coursework. Would overall student achievement improve by integrating the trip with curriculum?

A study of the impact of mission trips for the rest of the school would be beneficial. What is the nature of the impact for underclassmen? Could that impact be more intentionally spread throughout the school body? Future research could explore variables such as gender, ethnicity, race or age to determine possible differences in results.

Parents have a substantial influence in the perceptions of a high school student. How does an international trip impact a parent’s perception of the trip’s value? How do parents influence their child’s experience?

Reflexive photography proved to be a unique and rich catalyst for analysis in this study. Photographs facilitated an effective presentation of participant stories as they described their trip experiences. Pictures enhanced the written descriptions from journals. This methodology was highly effective in unveiling the stories of participants and is recommended for use in future studies regarding the impact of mission trips for youth.
Conclusion

The findings of this study confirmed the effectiveness of short-term international mission trips in the development of intercultural sensitivity for secondary school participants. While this study only begins to peel back a few layers of a complex event, the implications offer significant hope to educators desiring to better prepare students for an international world. It is hoped that in some small way this study prompts the increased utilization of mission trips as an integral part of the school’s curriculum, improved practices for schools currently conducting trips and further exploration of the subject as it relates to secondary schools.
References


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APPENDIX A

Reflexive Photography as a Methodology in Qualitative Research
Reflexive Photography as a Methodology in Qualitative Research

Obtaining real and credible information from participants in any research project is a challenge that is crucial to the success of the research. Young people must feel a sense of ease that will allow stories and feelings to flow, particularly when the researcher is interested in an abstract concept like intercultural sensitivity. Appropriate methodologies can aide in creating an environment where participants feel free to share their experiences.

Reflexive photography is a technique using photographs to bring a focus to the analysis of and reflection upon the participants’ experiences. “Photographs are charged with psychological and highly emotional elements and symbols” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p.108).

John Collier, a researcher and photographer, first classified and conducted photo-elicitation in 1957 on a multidisciplinary research team from Cornell University (L. D. Parker, 2006). Collier and Collier (1986) describe several unique advantages of photo-elicitation interviews. The photographs are examined together with the researcher and research subject, creating a more relaxed environment. It reduces the asymmetry of power between the researcher and participant by focusing on the photographs rather than the participant. It can even invite the participants to take the lead in inquiry and tell their stories more spontaneously. It encourages open expression and “usually elicits a flow of information about personalities, places, processes, and artifacts” (p.106).

Studies Using Reflexive Photography

Reflexive photography has not been widely used as a qualitative methodology, but several recent studies support its increased consideration as an effective alternative to
more traditional methods. Harrington and Schibik (2003) used reflexive photography to
study impressions of the freshman year experience. They randomly selected ten students
and asked them to “take pictures that will illustrate your impression of the university or
that will help you describe your impressions” (p.30) for a three week period. Written
descriptions of the photographs and follow-up photo-elicitation interviews helped
identify underlying themes including perceptions about the university’s physical
environment, interactions with faculty, and career counseling. Harrington and Schibik
noted this technique allowed for more open and creative analysis of student perceptions
and concluded “reflexive photography can provide significant and meaningful
supplementary insight” and that “very little possibility for misinterpretation of results
exists with reflexive photography” (2003, p. 37).

L. D. Parker (2006) explored the methodological dimensions and potential of
photo-elicitation as a historical research tool. He discovered a strong potential for
contextualized, interpretive and critical study through this venue. He describes the
increased ability to peel back hidden layers and voices through the introduction of photo-
elicitation. L. D. Parker (2006) concludes photo-elicitation:

Is inclusive in that it offers participation options for individual and group
interviewees ranging from photograph construction to image interpretation. It
deals with the material, but searches for the intangible. It visually portrays images
of locations, people and events, but potentially offers opportunities for
deconstruction and critique of what we thought we already knew. (p.12)

In a more topically related study, Loeffler (2004) used reflexive photography to
study the meanings of outdoor adventure experiences. This was the first time photo-
elicitation was used for an outdoor experience study. Fourteen participants, aged 18-21, were selected using criterion-based sampling from a college-based outdoor program. Photographs taken by the participants during the experience formed the foundation for the photo-elicitation interviews. Interviews were audio and video recorded. Loeffler used an inductive thematic analysis using these transcripts combined with the photographic images.

A unique feature of this study was the absence of any instruction to participants before leaving for the outdoor experience. Loeffler (2004) thought it unethical to affect the participants’ experiences by introducing the photographic stimulus. By not giving the participants the photography assignment, he expected the experience to be fresh and untouched by the research process. Loeffler noted that this solved one dilemma, but created others. For example, participants who did not take photographs were automatically excluded from the study. Researchers from all other studies in this literature review, explained the photographic assignment to participants before the experience began.

Loeffler (2004) concluded photo-elicitation proved to be a powerful research tool and model for collaborative research. “Participants used photographs to capture moments of intense emotion, connection and celebration” (Loeffler, 2004, p.554). He recommended that photo-elicitation receive further use in investigations of outdoor experiences.

Linhart (2003) employed photography as a part of his data collection strategy in a study exploring the curricular nature of short-term mission trips. He used a combination of researcher-produced photos and images captured by students. Linhart participated on
the trip and was designated as the trip photographer. He took over 1400 photographs and
digital videos during the trip. In addition, students took pictures and selected ten photos
that were the most meaningful and brought them to the post-trip interview. Linhart used
his photos to spark description during the interviews by displaying a picture of a situation
the participant was describing.

Linhart (2003) noted the advantage of photography in taking the focus away from
the participant who may feel like the object of the interview. He commented on the
difficulty for researcher-produced photos to extract the truth from participants. Using his
pictures placed a greater burden on the researcher to not succumb to a natural tendency of
suggesting an answer for the essence of the trip.

Blezien (2004) used reflexive photography in a mixed methods empirical study of
the impact of short-term mission experiences on the cross-cultural sensitivity of college
students. Photo-journaling and photo-elicitation interviews were a part of the qualitative
component of the study. Eighteen short-term mission participants were selected to
participate in the qualitative study. They were asked to “take photographs during your
short-term mission of people, places, events, activities, or anything that you believe has
some impact on you as a person” (Blezien, 2004, p.44). A corresponding journal to the
photographs was kept and submitted with the photographs after the trip. Six months later,
photo-elicitation interviews were conducted. Blezien noted the richness of the qualitative
portion of his study as well as other related studies compared to the difficulty in
documenting the impact of mission trips through quantitative methods.
Reflexive Photography in This Study

In this study, participants took photographs during their trip and reflected on these photographs during a photo-elicitation interview. These interviews provided insight into the deeper meaning and symbolism inherent in the photographs (Harrington & Schibik, 2003). It was important in this study to have photos taken by the students rather than the researcher. This more accurately portrayed their vantage point and ideas of potential impact were less likely to be planted in the student’s mind by the researcher. Participants were able to observe and analyze detail in the photos after the trip and the researcher could investigate unmentioned details of the stories when noted in the photos. For example, in Figure 8 the participant noted a possible connection between the bike in the upper right corner of the picture and the man’s socioeconomic status. This was a plausible explanation for the lack of family present at the scene of the accident.

The pictures assisted students as they recalled the experiences represented by the images. From participants’ facial expressions during interviews, it was obvious the photos helped bring the details of the experience to their memories and to life. More complete descriptions enabled richer data to inform the findings.

A substantial challenge for a researcher who serves in school leadership is to create an environment where students will relax and openly share regarding their experience. In this study, both the researcher’s age and position could have hindered open communication. A notable benefit of reflexive photography was the opportunity to focus on pictures rather than the participant. During interviews, students frequently picked up photos or looked at them as they answered questions and relayed their stories. In particular, students searching for additional stories, feelings or examples relied heavily on
the pictures displayed in front of them. This benefit has been noted in previous studies of graduate students (Blezien, 2004; Loeffler, 2004), but was accentuated in this study of high school youth because of their younger age.

It was noteworthy that photo themes corresponded with themes from other data sources. The pictures were true representations of what the students felt most impacted them during the trip. Even as students were asked what impressions they were not able to capture by their photos, they responded with themes already represented in many photos. The two most common answers to that question were classmates opening up to children and the general interactions with children. Both of these were well represented in the total collection of photos. The pictures presented a relatively comprehensive view of the experience.

A review of the times photos were taken by students affirms theme selection. Students were instructed to take photos at any time during the trip of things that would help someone understand their experience. The majority of photos were taken during days students were involved in service activities. School G participated in service activities on May 21 and 22. Forty-three percent of all photos taken by School G were from these two days (see Table 7).
School S participated in service activities from May 25 through June 1. The final two days were spent at a beach, a distinctly different experience from the previous week of service. Table 8 shows that most pictures were taken during the week of service. An additional observation is that the initial days generated more photos than the final days of service activity.
### Table 8.

*Dates of Photos From School S Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Photos</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Date</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflexive photography proved to be more than simply an instrument for data collection. It provided the heart and depth of this study. The researcher highly recommends reflexive photography as an effective methodology for anyone examining the impact of a mission trip for youth.
APPENDIX B

Student Assent to Participate Form

Parent Permission to Participate Form

Student Assent to Participate Letter

Parent Permission to Participate Letter
STUDENT ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY


INVESTIGATOR: Conrad Swartzentruber
PO Box 273, Marion, PA 17235
717-375-2724 (home)
717-395-7995 (cell)
cswartz@shalomca.com (email)

ADVISOR: Dr. James E. Henderson
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL)
412-396-4880

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that investigates the effect of mission trips on intercultural sensitivity for high school students. You will be invited to attend a brief informational meeting to describe this study. You will be asked to take photographs during your mission trip, to write in a journal about these photographs and to provide both the photographs and journals to me after your return. In addition, you are being asked to allow me to interview you within six weeks after returning from your mission trip. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will be audio taped for purposes of transcription. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks from participation greater than those encountered in everyday life.

COMPENSATION: Participation in this study will have no direct benefit to you, but may contribute to strategies that educators use to
develop future mission trips. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All data generated by this research will be secure and anonymous. No identity will be made in the data analysis or reporting. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher’s home. Audio tapes will be stored in a locked file and destroyed after being transcribed. During transcription, identifiers of you or anyone you talk about will be deleted. This will enable the sharing of transcriptions with others, such as the dissertation chair, without compromising your anonymity. Journals and photographs will be identified only by a code. All materials will be destroyed within one year of completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Your grades will not be affected by your decision to participate or not participate.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: As a participant, I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. I understand that data and photographs from this project may be used in the dissertation manuscript and future publications. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Conrad Swartzentruber at 717-375-2724, Dr. James Henderson at 412-396-4880 or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board at 412-396-6326.

_________________________________________   _______ ___________
Participant's Signature                          Date

_________________________________________   _______ ___________
Researcher's Signature                           Date
PARENT PERMISSION FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY


INVESTIGATOR: Conrad Swartzentruber
PO Box 273, Marion, PA 17235
717-375-2724 (home); 717-395-7995 (cell)
cswartz@shalomca.com (email)

ADVISOR: Dr. James E. Henderson
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL)
412-396-4880

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: Your child is being asked to participate in a research project that investigates the effect of mission trips on intercultural sensitivity for high school students. You and your child will be invited to attend a brief informational meeting to describe this study. Your child is being asked to take photographs during his/her mission trip, to write in a journal about these photographs and to provide both the photographs and journals to me after his/her return. In addition, your child is being asked to allow me to interview him/her within six weeks after returning from the mission trip. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will be audio taped for purposes of transcription. These are the only requests that will be made of your child.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks from participation greater than those encountered in everyday life.

COMPENSATION: Participation in this study will have no direct benefit to your child, but may contribute to strategies that educators
use to develop future mission trips. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to your child.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All data generated by this research will be secure and anonymous. No identity will be made in the data analysis or reporting. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Audio tapes will be stored in a locked file and destroyed after being transcribed. During transcription, identifiers of your child or anyone he/she talks about will be deleted. This will enable the sharing of transcriptions with others, such as the dissertation chair, without compromising your child's anonymity. Journals and photographs will be identified only by a code. All materials will be destroyed within one year of completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. He/she is free to withdraw consent to participate at any time. Your child’s grades will not be affected by his/her decision to participate or not participate.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you and your child, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: As a parent, I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of my child. I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that my child is free to withdraw his/her consent at any time, for any reason. I understand that my child will not experience any risk greater than normally encountered and that my child will not be disadvantaged in any way by the decision to participate or not participate. I understand that data and photographs from this project may be used in the dissertation manuscript and future publications. On these terms, I certify that I am willing for my child to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my child’s participation in this study, I may call Conrad Swartzentruber at 717-375-2724, Dr. James Henderson at 412-396-4880 or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board at 412-396-6326.

______________________________  ______________________________
Parent’s Signature                  Date

______________________________  ______________________________
Researcher’s Signature             Date
Date:

Dear Student’s Name,

I am pleased that you received this letter, meaning you will be given an opportunity to participate in my dissertation project. You have been randomly chosen from the senior students at (Name of School) to participate in this research project during your mission trip this spring.

I am a doctoral student at Duquesne University in the School of Education. I have chosen to study how mission trips affect the attitudes of Christian school secondary students. I believe this research will be a great help to Christian schools as they prepare students for our increasingly diverse community and world. I have spoken on several occasions with (Administrator) and he has graciously agreed to allow his students to participate in this study. With your consent, I would like to ask you to participate in my study. You will help me better understand mission trips and how you feel about the experiences of your mission trip this spring.

I will attempt to understand the effect of mission trips by interviewing students and discussing their photographs and corresponding journals from their trip. If you choose to participate, you will agree to take photographs during the trip, write a description of the photographs, and describe your experiences to me during an interview after the trip.

I am requesting that you attend a meeting at (Name of School) with your parent(s) in (place) on (date). At this meeting I will explain this research project, outline expectations for participating students, answer any questions, and ask you to sign the assent form if you choose to participate.

Enclosed is the Student Assent to Participate form that will request your informed assent to participate in this research project. This form describes the project in greater detail. I highly value your participation and thank you in advance for considering this request. If you have any questions about the project at any time, please contact me at home at 717-375-2724, on my cell at 717-395-7995, or by email at eswartz@shalomca.com.

Sincerely,

Conrad Swartzentruber
Parent Letter and Permission for Child to Participate in this Qualitative Study

Date:

Dear Parent’s Name,

I am pleased that you received this letter, meaning your child will be given an opportunity to participate in my dissertation project. Your child has been randomly selected from the senior students at (Name of School) to participate in this research project during his/her mission trip.

I am a doctoral student at Duquesne University in the School of Education. I have chosen to study how mission trips affect the attitudes of Christian school secondary students. I believe this research will be a great help to Christian schools as we prepare students for our increasingly diverse community and world. I have spoken on several occasions with (Administrator) and he has graciously agreed to allow his students to participate in this study. With your consent, I would like to ask your child to participate in my study. Your child will help me better understand mission trips and how each participant feels about his/her experience from the mission trip this spring.

I will attempt to understand the effect of mission trips by interviewing students and discussing their photographs and corresponding journals from their trip. If your child chooses to participate, he/she will agree to take photographs during the trip, write a description of the photographs, and describe his/her experience to me during an interview after the trip.

I am requesting that you attend a meeting at (Name of School) with your child in (place) on (date). At this meeting I will explain this research project, outline expectations for participating students, answer any questions, and ask you to sign the permission form if you choose to allow your child to participate.

Enclosed is the Parent Permission For Child to Participate form that will request your informed permission for your child’s participation. A second form is the Student Assent to Participate form for your child to sign. These forms describe the project in greater detail. I highly value your child’s participation and thank you in advance for considering this request.

If you have any questions about the project at any time, please contact me at home at 717-375-2724, on my cell at 717-395-7995, or by email at cswartz@shalomca.com.

Sincerely,

Conrad Swartzentruber
APPENDIX C

Photo-Elicitation Protocol
Photo-Elicitation Protocol

Each participant was asked to take photographs during the mission trip. Students used personal cameras or a disposable camera provided by the researcher. Each participant was given the following instructions:

1. During the trip, take photographs of people, places, activities or anything you believe would help someone else understand how the trip was important to you.

2. You may take as many photographs as you feel are necessary to describe the effect this trip has on you, but you don’t need to take more than 24.

3. Record in your journal the following information for each photograph:
   a. The time and date of the photograph.
   b. The primary focus of the photograph.
   c. Why the photograph was important to you.
   d. How did the person, place or activity in this photography affect you?

4. Your advisors will give you advice about when it is okay or not okay to take photographs. If you ever feel it may be inappropriate to take a photograph, check with your trip advisor.

5. Be available to participate in an interview with the researcher for about one hour in length within six weeks after your trip.
APPENDIX D

Photo-Elicitation Interview Script
Photo-Elicitation Interview Script

Each student and parent signed an Informed Consent Form. Within six weeks after the students’ return from their mission trip, the researcher conducted an individual interview of approximately 30 minutes in length. The researcher held the interviews in a casual, informal setting. The parents were not present during the interview to facilitate a more conducive environment for open sharing by the student. The photographs taken by the student were the central focus for the interview. The interviews were audio recorded. Questions similar to the following guided the interview in a semi-structured format.

1. Think about how you felt before your trip to ________. Before you left for ________, tell me how you thought this trip would affect you.

2. Describe an event or situation that happened on the trip when you first became aware that the ________ culture was different from your culture.

3. At this point in the interview, the photographs will be displayed and we will review the collection of photographs. Clarification of selected photographs and journal entries will be included in this section of the interview.
   a. Which photograph best describes your experience and tell me why?
   b. Pick another photograph that describes your experience and tell me why.
   c. Do you want to talk about any other photograph?

Some additional probing questions after each photograph selected may be added as follows:

   a. Why is that (person, thing) significant to you?
   b. How did you feel about that (person, place, event)?
4. Can you tell me how your photographs show what you have learned about _______ and its people?

5. What were some impressions of the trip that you were not able to capture with these photographs?

6. What do you think was the greatest effect this trip had on you?

7. Do you think differently about the United States and its people as a result of your trip to _____? If so, how?

8. Imagine you had created an amusement park before you went on the trip to _______. What ride or attraction would you want to add to your amusement park after you returned? Why would you add that ride or attraction?

9. Are you different as a result of your trip to ________________? If so, how?

10. If you were in the lunchroom and a student from another country was sitting at your table, how might you talk to him/her differently now than you would have before the trip?

11. What was the most important part of the mission trip experience for you? Why?

12. What have you learned about yourself as a result of participating in this trip?

13. If you had a magic wand and could go back in time and change anything about the trip to ________ to make it a better trip, what would you change?

14. Is there anything else you want to tell me that would help me better understand your experience?