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**Mentoring Teachers for Critical Global Consciousness:
Infusing Solidarity in International Service Learning
Mentorat des enseignants pour une conscience globale critique:
Infuser la solidarité dans l'Apprentissage par le Service International**

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Abstract

This study examines the little-studied phenomenon of teacher mentoring for global consciousness. It reviews the relationship between secondary school teachers participating in an international service-learning (ISL) project in Nicaragua and an NGO, Canadian Youth Abroad (CYA). CYA facilitates short, but intensive, ISL experiences. The teachers work for a publicly funded Catholic district school board in Ontario, Canada. Teachers who travel to Nicaragua with the students are mentored and accompanied by more experienced peers - "veteran" CYA/ISL teacher-participants. The mentoring process seeks to impart the CYA's particular transformative values to the new teacher-participants and through them, to their students. These values challenge the dominant charitable "help the poor" model of North-South engagement. The teacher-mentors follow CYA's Freirian pedagogical model that stresses the value of solidarity between Canadian and Nicaraguan participants.

Résumé

Cette étude examine le phénomène peu étudié qu'est le mentorat des enseignants pour une conscience mondiale. Elle révisé la relation entre des enseignants du secondaire qui participent à un projet d'apprentissage par le service international (ASI) au Nicaragua et une ONG, Canadian Youth Abroad (CYA). La CYA facilite des expériences ASI de courtes durées, mais intensives. Les enseignants travaillent pour un conseil scolaire de district catholique, publiquement financé, en Ontario, au Canada. Les enseignants qui voyagent au Nicaragua avec les élèves sont encadrés et accompagnés par des pairs plus expérimentés, des enseignant-participants « vétérans » de CYA/ASI. Le processus de mentorat vise à inculquer des valeurs transformatives particulières de la CYA aux nouveaux enseignants-participants, et à travers eux, à leurs élèves. Ces valeurs contestent le modèle dominant de bienfaisance « aider les pauvres » sur l'engagement Nord-Sud. Les enseignants-mentors suivent le modèle pédagogique de Freire de la CYA qui insiste sur la valeur de la solidarité entre les participants canadiens et nicaraguayens.

Keywords: global consciousness; international service learning; solidarity; peer mentoring; NGO teacher partnerships reciprocal north-south partnerships

Mots-clés: conscience globale; apprentissage par le service international; mentorat par les pairs ; partenariats entre enseignants et ONG ; partenariats réciproques nord-sud

Introduction

¹ Michael O'Sullivan is a long-time board member of Canadian Youth Abroad, the NGO featured in this study. He has not been directly involved with CYA/ISL program delivery but has had a role in the governance of CYA and has visited some of the participating schools and joined student trips as a field observer.

This study investigates an international service learning (ISL) program in Nicaragua that is facilitated by a Canadian non-government organization (NGO), Canadian Youth Abroad (CYA).² The actual implementation of the program is undertaken by teachers from a publicly funded Catholic district school board (DSB) in Ontario that partnered with CYA in a somewhat unusual relationship, described below. ISL programs undertaken by NGOs hardly constitute a unique phenomenon; however, we submit that the partnership of CYA and this particular DSB is worthy of attention as it combines a teacher-mentoring program with an explicit social-justice/solidarity approach to global north-south engagement. The program reflects a Freirian pedagogy (Freire, 1970) designed to encourage participating teachers to develop critical global consciousness (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007) and to accompany their students during an intense learning experience in Nicaragua that has transformative potential for the visiting students, teachers, and members of the host community. Reference to Freirian pedagogy and to the concept of critical global consciousness is elaborated below.

Methodology

This study employs an interpretive research approach through which “meaning is disclosed, discovered, and experienced. The emphasis is on sense making, description, and detail. ...Therefore, meaning-making is underscored as the primary goal of interpretive research in the understanding of social phenomena” (Given, 2008, p. 465). Following the methods commonly used in interpretive research, our study draws on interviews conducted by the first author in late 2013 with nine teacher-participants, including CYA co-founder Tony Sorensen; four of the interviewees were male and four were female. We also drew from a previous study (O’Sullivan & Smaller, 2013) that cited a participating-teacher, Steve O’Connor. O’Connor was a Nicaragua solidarity activist in the 1980s who led the first CYA/DSB ISL trip to Nicaragua in 1994 and subsequently led a total of 19 trips at the time of his recent retirement. O’Connor provided important historical background information on the program, including details of its relationship with the DSB. O’Connor was acknowledged by other teacher-participants as the “key” mentor. This purposeful sampling aligns with our intention to gain detailed insights from this specific group in order to understand the central phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2011).

Site and Participant Selection

All of the schools at which the teachers were interviewed were in close proximity to each other; several other participating schools were not included because of distance and time constraints. The teachers were chosen based on the fact they had made multiple trips, not because of their particular perspective on the program or the number of years they had been teaching. Consequently the group of participating teachers who were interviewed represents younger teachers relatively new to the program as well as others with considerable experience both in the classroom and leading student groups to Nicaragua. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to well over an hour and were audio-taped and then transcribed. Each interview consisted of 13 questions that formed the basis of a wider-ranging conversation. Questions included inquiries about their history with the program, their motivation for participating in it, their ideas on what the community and the students

² All names of individuals and organizations cited in this paper have been changed to respect the confidentiality of our informants.

get out of the program, and the mentoring process that they experienced and, in several cases, directed.

Limitations

We recognize that the small number of respondents in our study is an inherent limitation; however, we argue that this purposeful sampling is representative of the teacher participants who have multiple experiences with the program. We did not seek out former participants who did not volunteer to return to Nicaragua after being involved in a single ISL trip; therefore, we gathered only anecdotal information from our interviewees regarding one-time participants' reasons for not repeating the experience (e.g., health concerns in several cases and personal and professional considerations related to the significant time commitment involved with such participation). Although no one cited teacher-participant discomfort with the pedagogical orientation of the program this, of course, cannot be ruled out.

CYA/DSB Mentoring Program

It is not possible to fully appreciate the implications of the teacher-mentoring program that is the focus of our analysis without making reference to the transformative pedagogical model that informs CYA's unique program. The mentoring program is designed to ensure teachers can create learning experiences that expose students to ways of viewing the world that challenge the dominant world view that in turn informs their thinking. Here we provide an historical overview of CYA's ISL program in order to outline the framework and rationale for our discussion of the peer mentoring process.

Origin of the Program

CYA was founded in 1992 by Canadian activists, many of them teachers, who had been deeply engaged in the solidarity movement during the Sandinista-led Nicaraguan Revolution in the 1980s. Following the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, these teacher-activists wanted to continue their solidarity work with the Nicaraguan people even as many NGOs decided to pull out of the country. Consequently, when a Canadian-based religious order decided to sell a house they owned in the Nicaraguan capital Managua, two teacher-activists financed the purchase of the property for use as a resource centre and a local base of operations. The founders hired a Managua-based program co-ordinator and established two core programs: one to provide modest financial support to small projects proposed by Nicaraguan community groups, and the other an ISL program.

With respect to the latter, the CYA founders, given their long association with the solidarity model practiced in Nicaragua during the 1980s, rejected the charitable model of students going to the global south to "help" the poor Other. The CYA founders and supporters adopted Paulo Freire's (1970) consciousness-raising pedagogy in their solidarity work and it was natural that CYA co-founder Tony Sorensen and his colleague and fellow Nicaragua solidarity activist Steve O'Conner would take such an approach to the DSB in which they both taught. This led to the creation of the CYA ISL program and its corresponding mentoring process. Sorensen and O'Conner realized that their colleagues had little or no experience with such programming and would need to be mentored when they volunteered to accompany students to Nicaragua in a way that would prepare them to offer the CYA/DSB ISL program within the parameters of the solidarity framework. This

mentoring is undertaken to prepare the teachers with the values, skills and knowledge required to achieving at least the first steps towards the acceptance, by their students, of critical global consciousness and an understanding of a solidarity approach of North-South engagement.

Framework and Goals of the Program

The CYA/ISL program is based on an explicitly Freirian framework (Tony Sorensen, personal communication, 06/08/12). Freire is largely concerned with agency (Zimmet, 1987), i.e., moving people from accepting the inevitability of their social-economic, political and cultural circumstances to understanding that they, in concert with others, have the capacity to significantly and positively transform the institutions, beliefs, and practices that negatively impact their lived reality. Freirian pedagogy seeks to challenge “an unreflecting acceptance of the absolute validity and unquestionability of the world as it is and one’s own views” (Connolly, n.d., p. 5) to a perspective that “recognizes that cultural institutions are created and sustained by human purpose” and that “people shape and are shaped within culture; culture can be analyzed, deconstructed and, in principle, transformed by human action ...” (Connolly, n.d., pp 5 – 6). This reflects the achievement of Freire’s core concept of *critical consciousness*. The challenge facing practitioners of Freirian pedagogy – in this case the mentoring teachers vis-à-vis both their peers and their students – as Maureen Connolly points out, is to do so in a way in which the mentored teachers and the students come to see “agency is *their* desired outcome” (Connolly, n.d., p. 3, emphasis in the original). Agency can be defined in a variety of ways including taking action on behalf of others which, we shall argue below, is the charitable model of social engagement and is the opposite of what the initiative under study represents. It can, and in the Freirian context, must involve taking action to effect your own liberation but, ultimately, this involves in engaging in collective action at the local, national and global levels. Therefore, agency in the context of International Service Learning, involves recognizing that struggles for social justice in Canada and, in this case, Nicaragua, are interconnected and neither the northern “visitor” nor the southern “host” can be liberated by the other. Coming to consciousness and assuming agency is a process that is shared as people from a wide range of circumstances come to understand that the root causes of their alienation and exploitation are the same despite the significant differences in the particular contexts from which they come.

Freire’s pedagogy is viewed by the ISL team as the means by which the teachers and students alike can come to a state of critical global consciousness/awareness. Global consciousness has been explored by Veronica Boix Mansilla and Howard Gardner (2007). These authors argue, consistent with CYA practice, that it is important to “get beyond ‘knowing’ about globalization and seeing one’s implication in it in daily life” (p. 55). What Mansilla and Gardner are seeking to achieve in getting beyond the “knowing” about globalization is to instil within their students global consciousness, rather than simply global knowledge. They define global consciousness as “the capacity to place oneself and the people, objectives, and situations within which we come into contact within the broader matrix of our contemporary world” (p. 58). They identify three cognitive-affective capacities which they argue are “at the heart of global consciousness” (p. 58). These are

- *Global sensitivity*, or our awareness of local experience as a manifestation of broader developments on the planet;

- *Global understanding*, or our capacity to thinking flexible and informed ways about contemporary worldwide developments; and
- *Global self*, or a perception of ourselves as global actors, a sense of planetary belonging and membership in humanity that guides our actions and prompts our civic commitments (p. 59, emphasis in the original).

If teachers are to instil global consciousness into their teaching practice, it follows that they must have developed global consciousness themselves. It is an essential objective of the CYA/ISL program to assist the teachers to become critically aware and globally conscious.

Based on O’Conner’s initiative, one of CYA’s first decisions was to make the ISL program with the DSB non-credit bearing, which is a unique feature of this particular school-based ISL program (several other non-DSB affiliated educational institutions that subsequently joined the CYA program offer course credits for their respective ISL experiences). The decision made 20 years ago to adopt a non-credit bearing structure for the program continues to be adhered to by all participating teachers in the eight DSB schools that regularly offer ISL trips. This is so for several reasons. One is the ability to innovate the program free from official curriculum expectations although many of the program’s objectives do correspond to official curricular expectations, particularly though not exclusively, those of Ontario’s religion curriculum that are followed by schools in the province’s Catholic DSBs. Another is that credit courses are perceived to offer “artificial” extrinsic motivation for students to participate, and hence such motivation is eliminated or at least reduced. Finally, this approach alleviates concerns of teachers who lead groups to Nicaragua and of CYA board members that school officials or parents might try to change program expectations. (Steve O’Connor, personal communication, 10/16/12).

Part of the program’s strategy to maintain independence from the DSB and thus reduce the possibility of unwanted interference is to hold extracurricular pre- and post-trip meetings and to coordinate the trips in such a way that participating teachers and students take as few days off from class as possible. The DSB’s main contribution to the program is to provide participating teachers with a limited number of leave days. Given this restriction, the teachers organize the trips at opportune times, such as during the late-January semester turnaround (when no classes are offered over several days as time is set aside for exams) and during spring break (typically, in Ontario, a week in mid-March). Teachers from one of the participating schools have chosen to travel in June at the end of the school year. The concern about not being subject to outside pressures must be understood within the framework of the critical expectations of the program.

The Mentoring Process

The core objective of the mentoring program is to meet expectations related to achieving critical global consciousness consistent with those defined by Mansilla and Gardner (2007). Focusing on this core objective is important since teachers who volunteer to lead student groups rarely come to the experience with formal training in Freirian pedagogy, in global education, or in ISL. New teacher-participants are even less likely to be familiar with the CYA’s particular programmatic framework. O’Connor, because he was steeped in the Nicaragua solidarity movement and was fully aware of the objectives of the CYA founders and collaborators, had a clear vision of what he hoped to achieve with the teachers he was mentoring and the students he was leading during the inaugural trip in 1994.

Although many details have been tweaked over the years, O'Connor's essential practice has remained at the core of the CYA/DSB ISL programme. After the initial trips during which O'Connor mentored colleagues from his own school and others, many DSB teachers accumulated considerable experience working within the CYA framework. This unique mentoring experience remains undocumented, and though considerable scholarly literature demonstrates the value of teacher-to-teacher peer mentoring, this literature pertains largely to experienced teachers assisting new teachers to cope with the challenges that they face in the classroom during the early years of their professional lives (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). Because the literature about mentoring for global consciousness is virtually non-existent (Carano, 2010), this study constitutes a first step towards filling this gap. Mansilla and Gardner's (2007) work on global consciousness, for example, gives us a useful framework for conceptualizing global consciousness but situates the learning experience in the halls of academe. This case study firmly situates such critical professional development at the school level and in the field.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the CYA/DSB Model

The CYA/DSB mentoring model is primarily designed to expose the new teacher-participants to the overarching values and the critical perspective that underlie the CYA solidarity-based philosophy of ISL programming. Another important element is that it prepares them to deal with the complexities associated with leading their 17-year-old students on a 10-day overseas placement in socio-economically marginal rural settings. The model presumes that the participating teachers are open to learning about, and willing to integrate into their teaching repertoire, the transformative pedagogy associated with Freire (1970) with a view to introducing their students (and themselves) to critical global citizenship (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007). This model is understood to include embracing the Freirian notion of conscientization and seeking to take the first steps with these young students along the road of critical global awareness by:

- Teaching ISL students how to look at the world through a social justice perspective;
- providing them with an intense and potentially transformative experience; and
- encouraging them to think about how, upon their return to Canada, they might engage in activities that have social change/social justice as their objective.

The CYA model prioritizes the importance of establishing reciprocal relations between the visiting teachers and students and the host community that receives them. Establishing such reciprocity can never be taken for granted even by the most conscientious practitioners; and, indeed, the very possibility of achieving such reciprocity is contested (Jefferess, 2008, 2012; King, 2013; Sharpe & Dear, 2013; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Based largely on their experience, CYA and its participating teachers remain convinced, based largely on their experience, that ISL can be a transformative experience for both the students and members of the host community alike. They do recognize, however, that achieving reciprocity requires that participating teachers and students internalize the idea that they are not going to the community to "help" their hosts. Rather, they are seeking to learn about the lived reality of the Nicaraguan host families with whom they are billeted and to discuss their own lives and aspirations in Canada. These interactions are designed with a view to achieving a situation of mutual learning where both parties experience collective and personal growth and become increasingly politically conscious. This

includes teaching the students about the inequity of north–south relations as they collaborate with community members on a project chosen by the community and funded by the visiting students. These values, initially taught in the pre-departure sessions, are reinforced by the experience of living and working in the villages and in the post- trip reflection activities.

The success of the CYA/DSB programme, defined in terms of infusing these values, depends largely on the veteran participants' mentoring skills and the openness of the new teacher-participants' willingness to adopt the solidarity model upon which the programme is based. The mentoring teachers who are charged with imparting both the critical values and the organizational skills that are required of teacher-participants are not left entirely to their own devices as they prepare their colleagues for involvement in the programme. The Canadian-based CYA staff and volunteers are available to assist the mentors and support the student groups prior to their departure and to help with the all-important process of debriefing upon their return. Furthermore, the Nicaragua-based CYA global education coordinator, provides workshops to all of the participants, teachers and students alike, upon their arrival in Managua and again after they return from their placement in a host community. The CYA staff-led presentations reinforce the programme's pedagogical orientation, explains the inadequacies of the charitable model of northern engagement with southern partners, and stresses the centrality of reciprocity and solidarity to the programme. It is the process of instilling these values through the mentoring process and the involvement of the CYA staff and volunteers in Canada and in Nicaragua that we refer to as mentoring for critical global consciousness. We find this approach to be consistent with Mansilla and Gardener's (2007) position on instilling critical global consciousness through a transformative pedagogy. This is the case despite the fact that their analysis was published well after the founding of CYA. As far as we could determine, none of the teacher-practitioners or CYA leadership were familiar with this article. This programme, like so many other teacher-driven pedagogies, were developed in high idiosyncratic ways (O'Sullivan & Vetter, 2007).

The CYA/DSB Mentoring Process in Action

With the exception of having supervisory responsibilities while actually in Nicaragua, the new teacher-participants are treated very much like the students on their first trip in that they attend all the pre-departure meetings led by their more experienced colleagues. They are not expected to take on major tasks for which they have not been prepared. As they gain experience, teachers who participate in subsequent trips take on more responsibility in collaboration with the lead teacher, although some have had full responsibility for leading a group thrust upon them rather quickly. For example, Paula Grafton, who accompanied two trips in the very early days, was then transferred to a new school where she quickly established the program. This led her to mentor numerous teacher-participants over many years, many of whom were subsequently transferred to new schools where they established the programme.

Ian Paxton was one of the many teachers mentored by Grafton. Like Grafton, Paxton was mentored at one school, participated in that school's trips, and then was transferred to a new school that did not have a Nicaragua ISL program. That provided him with the opportunity to establish a program at his new school. Paxton described the mentoring process that he experienced under Grafton's guidance as follows:

The first year I was predominantly a teacher supervisor. I went to all the [weekly] meetings that we ran through the entire year [which form] part of the solidarity model. ... My responsibility was just to be there in attendance, to watch the students, make sure that they're following the guidelines that we developed, and [do] whatever else that was asked of me, but [that first year] it wasn't much. (Ian Paxton, personal communication, 11/16/12).

Discussions with the mentoring teachers about their previous experiences in the field and reading materials suggested by their mentors, are important, there is little doubt that the most important element of the mentoring process occurs in the pre departure meetings where the students are in attendance. This 'on the job' approach is suggested by Paxton's description of his experience under Grafton's mentorship. Other key elements of the mentoring process occur during the two-day pre-placement sessions at the CYA resource centre in Managua and during the actual field visits where the students and teachers are accompanied by CYA field staff. The CYA Managua-based field staff take every opportunity to reinforce the CYA perspective as examples that permit this surface during the community visit.

It is noteworthy that Paxton specifically mentions that the weekly pre-departure meetings focused on the solidarity model. These are significant learning experiences both for teachers and students because the process involves learning about, and seeking to apply, a new and critical way of looking at the world—seeing engagement with members of the host community as constituting an act of solidarity, not of charity. Paxton is now a keen supporter of the CYA/DSB model and ensures that its values are infused into the experiences that he provides to students whom he accompanies to Nicaragua.

Grafton saw how serious he was during the entire cycle and asked him to become more deeply involved. Paxton reports that on his second trip Grafton “started showing me things behind the scenes” such as “dealing with the board's travel policy, [working with] parents, and taking a much more active role in the organizational details of the trip.” He noted that Grafton did not ask him to become more deeply involved until he had completed the full cycle as a teacher-participant. He surmised that she was evaluating his seriousness and giving him the opportunity to make a decision about his continued involvement based on having observed the entire process. (Ian Paxton, personal communication, 08/12/13). Such high-quality mentoring has ensured that while not all teachers have participated in multiple trips a core group of teachers in eight schools do repeat and provide mentoring to those colleagues who, intrigued by the program, choose to participate.

Challenging the Charitable Instinct

The CYA leadership, which includes teacher-participants who eventually joined the CYA board of directors, fully recognizes that the distinction between solidarity and charity does not come easily for all teacher or student participants. After all, participants in the CYA/DSB program are drawn from Catholic schools, and charity is a central tenet of their faith. Asking Catholic teachers to challenge their peers with regards to problematizing charity is asking them to undertake an enormous task. Given the centrality of charity to Christian (and in this case Catholic) doctrine, this approach can be considered an example of what Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman (2003) call “difficult knowledge” (p. 755). Nonetheless, it is important to understand that many of the participating teachers come from the Catholic social justice tradition that arose in the post-Vatican II era. The CYA program reflects teachers' critical understanding of the social role of the church and

resonates with their peers and their students even as it challenges the more conservative Catholic discourse around charity. The experience in Nicaragua serves to reinforce this critical stance. The very fact that a number of the teachers involved with the program over the years are school chaplains or teachers of religion underscores their level of comfort with the essential message contained in the CYA program. As Sarah Carr, a young teacher who has led several groups to Nicaragua, explains so eloquently:

Charity involves going into a community to ‘save’ the people from the conditions of poverty and marginalization in which they find themselves or to “change things according to what we think [they] should be”; solidarity, in contrast, “is going in[to the community] with a sense of respect for what the people of Nicaragua have already been through, and supporting them side by side in continuing that struggle for independence, autonomy, and access to the good things in life (Sarah Carr, personal communication, 03/12/13).

Carr is one of the younger teachers who had been mentored by more experienced teachers who had participated in the CYA/DSB program for many years. (Many of those experienced teachers have recently retired or are close to doing so and so it is important to mentor the next generation of teachers to facilitate the ISL trips.) For the most part, the mentoring model achieves the CYA mandate in that it offers an ISL program that challenges dominant modes of thinking about north–south relations. The participating teachers and their students (even the younger ones) are the key to achieving the program’s critical goals, and they now constitute a reservoir of historical memory and critical understanding. .

Consistent with the progressive literature on this issue (Crabtree, 2008; Gough, 2013; Guttentag, 2009; King, 2013), CYA argues that charity deepens structural dependency and reinforces the notion of northern superiority and the sense that the south can only solve its problems with the help of the north and of northerners. Solidarity, on the other hand, assumes mutual respect and equality, the sense that all of us are in this together, and the understanding that both parties engaged in the ISL project have much to learn from each other. In some cases these benefits are tangible, such as the completed project, and in other cases the benefits are intangible and take the form of mutual learning and critical awareness.

Impact of the Mentoring Program on Students

What the students take from the experience - how they understand it - is mediated to a significant degree by the teachers who accompany them. That is to say, regardless of the framework within which such a program is conducted, there will be a wide range of individual responses as each participant’s respective world view and/or biases will have a bearing on the learning experience that they take from the experience. Nonetheless, it is to be expected that the established framework, if competently implemented, should have a recognizable influence on the participants.

In this section we examine the extent to which the mentoring process enabled teachers to impart to their students elements of the critical global awareness that forms the core of the CYA pedagogical framework. To do so, we draw from the findings of O’Sullivan and Smaller’s (2013) study conducted at one of the participating schools just prior to data collection for the current study. As noted earlier, we seek to identify the extent to which the mentoring program achieves its goal of preparing teachers to accompany their

students in taking the first (and undoubtedly tentative) steps towards achieving critical global consciousness.

Mentorship's Role on Personal Transformation

Recently returned students interviewed by O'Sullivan and Smaller (2013) expressed a range of motivations for participating in the program; one young man said he had "an interest in exploring issues of social difference," another had "a concern about injustices in Nicaragua and the need for social justice."

The aforementioned statements and similar ones made by other student-participants reflect positively on the mentoring process. The teachers did achieve the aims of the program in that the majority of the students expressed value statements consistent with these aims. Certainly, the student respondents felt that the trip had been worthwhile, using descriptors such as "moving" and "eye-opening" to describe the experience. Two of the student interviewees who had participated in the program the year before were preparing to return to Nicaragua for the second time. One of them expressed the hope that the second trip would "continue my personal growth" and "maintain my sense of personal obligation" while the other hoped "to gain more insights into my personal feelings on this trip than on the last one, and have more opportunity to reflect" (O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2013, p. 12).

Arguably, such statements reflect a personal transformation, which Larsen and Gough (2013) refer to as "a dynamic shift in how students see themselves and the world" that encompasses "changes in their level of confidence" (p. 5). Teachers who accompanied students to Nicaragua and who had come to know these students extremely well noted the latter's increased confidence and an enhanced ability to work collectively. The teachers spoke proudly about a number of students who had changed their minds about what they chose to study at university as a result of their participation in the ISL trip several years earlier. These students set aside previously stated interests in studying maths and sciences or professional studies and instead chose to pursue programs such as political science, comparative economics, and international development studies, to cite just a few examples. This constitutes evidence that the students experienced elements of personal transformation (i.e., early steps in achieving critical global consciousness), which suggests that the teacher mentoring process is realizing its transformative pedagogical objectives.

With respect to evaluating the extent to which an ISL experience can be expected to have a politically transformative impact on the student participants, it is important not to have undue expectations, because the students are young and the experience, while intense, is brief. A more realistic expectation would be that the program inspires students to want to deepen their knowledge and their social engagement upon return. The fact that a number of the students were prepared to go on a second trip or take postsecondary studies that would allow them to further explore these issues is encouraging. Some have chosen to join CYA's Youth Action Programme.

Concluding Thoughts

The student responses to questions about their learning experience during the program coupled with the positive evaluation of the program by the teachers (O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2013) provides evidence that the mentoring process designed to equip teachers with requisite knowledge and values to lead such trips and introduce students to alternative

perspectives on social justice issues and north–south relations is a legitimate and largely successful mode of teacher critical learning.

This is so because the CYA model systematically provides teachers with an in-depth process of professional development underpinned by a critical and potentially transformative pedagogy, which few first-time participating teachers are familiar with when they sign on to the ISL experience. Furthermore, CYA entrusts the teachers, and not the CYA staff and volunteers, to be responsible for the delivery of the program. In other words, teachers have “ownership” of program delivery and, as Grafton pointed out, they can make changes as they gain experience (Paula Grafton, personal communication, 08/12/13). This is in stark contrast with the practice of many other ISL providers that essentially displace the teachers in this role (if they include them at all). The best-known example of that model is Free the Children, an international charity and educational organization whose staff implements its ISL program based explicitly on a charitable model that not only replaces teachers as agents but essentially replaces the host community as protagonists in the learning process (Jefferess, 2012).

The CYA program is based on a historical connection to the Nicaragua solidarity movement which stressed a reciprocal relationship between visiting activists and the host community (Tony Sorensen, personal communication, 06/08/12; Sarah Paxton, personal communication, 04/12/13). This reciprocal relationship, developed in a very specific context, remains central to CYA practice and is infused deeply in the framework within which the participating teachers agree to work. An important component of the CYA annual review is to evaluate the extent to which this reciprocal relationship between host community and visiting students is achieved. Where shortcomings are identified with respect to achieving the underlying goals of reciprocity and of imparting personal and political transformation among students, conscious efforts are made to identify and rectify the causes of such program deficiencies. (Tony Sorensen, personal communication, 06/08/12; Steve O’Connor, personal communication, 10/08/12).

The underlying purpose of the CYA ISL trip is to prepare students to view social change, be it in Canada or abroad, as an interconnected global struggle and to learn from the host communities members about their lives and their aspirations. The strengths and weaknesses of the CYA program must be evaluated within the framework of its self-defined goals. These goals are, necessarily, limited to opening the door to Canadian students to come to critical global consciousness and to encourage them to continue to familiarize themselves with north/south social justice issues and to do so within the solidarity framework. CYA’s practice embraces an annual process of critical reflection in conjunction with both the participating schools and the host community. Where shortcomings are found, adjustments are made. It is for this reason, the program remains dynamic after 20 years and remains relevant to teachers, students, and host communities alike.

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