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# **Negotiating Tensions and Roles in International Development: A Workshop for Graduate Students**

Jennifer Hales, (OISE/UT)

## **Abstract:**

This paper presents the findings from a qualitative research study involving graduate students who are studying or working in international development. The students participated in an activity-based workshop during which they reflected on and discussed their tensions and concerns about the nature of international development and their roles and positions in this work. Tensions ranged from those on a personal level, where students questioned their individual privilege and power in international development, to those on a structural level, where students questioned the overall nature of development practices.

The workshop activities, designed by the author and based on a global education framework (Pike & Selby, 2000), generated group discussion, provoked personal reflection, challenged assumptions and reaffirmed goals. The study addresses the potential pedagogical value of such a workshop in promoting critical self-reflection and raising critical consciousness about one's politics and practice in international development work.

## **Résumé:**

Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche qualitative concernant des étudiants gradués qui vont étudier ou travailler dans un milieu de développement international. Ces étudiants ont participé à un atelier d'activités où ils ont réfléchi aux tensions et aux soucis vis-à-vis de la nature du développement international, y compris leurs rôles et leurs positions dans ce travail. Les tensions se rangent depuis le niveau personnel, où les étudiants se demandent sur leur privilège individuel et leur pouvoir dans le développement international, jusqu'à celles du niveau structurel, où ils se questionnent la nature globale des pratiques de développement.

Les activités de l'atelier, conçues par l'auteur d'après un cadre d'éducation globale (Pike & Selby, 2000) créent des discussions en groupe, provoquent des réflexions personnelles, mettent en question les assumptions et réaffirment les objectifs. L'étude aborde la valeur pédagogique possible d'un tel atelier dans le développement de l'autocritique et dans le soulèvement de la conscience critique sur sa politique et ses pratiques propres dans le travail de développement international.

## **Introduction**

This paper presents the findings from a workshop that was conducted as part of a graduate-level course in Global Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) in April 2001. The

workshop, entitled, “International Development: Tensions and Concerns,” arose as a response to informal discussions with fellow graduate students who study and work in international development and who come from both the North and South<sup>1</sup>. Many had expressed criticism of and concern about prevalent Western international development approaches, and tensions regarding their role and place in this field. For some, there exists an internal pull between wanting to work in international development, while thinking that this may no longer be ethically justifiable for both personal and structural reasons. Critical of modern, Western development theories and practices, these students question whether or not they will have a place in development work, and, if so, what that place could be, and whether or not their actions will make a positive difference. Other students’ concerns focus predominantly on the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of macro-economic, Western development approaches and their impacts in the South.

The workshop had three purposes: first, to provide a space and opportunity for students from both South and North to meet in order to air and discuss their views, concerns, beliefs and tensions about working in international development; second, to elucidate what their tensions and concerns were; and, third, to see what, if any, impact the workshop activities had on participants’ views. Included in this paper are the pedagogical activities from the workshop. These can be modified as deemed appropriate and used in educational settings where facilitators wish to initiate discussion and reflection on the nature of international development and the role and place of practitioners in this field.

### **International Development: Controversies and Their Implications**

International development has been and continues to be a controversial and criticized field of work and study. On the one hand, there have been many positive results of international aid to poor countries. More children have been educated, diseases have been eliminated, life expectancy has been prolonged and individual choice has been expanded (Kabeer, 1994; Sen, 2000; Slater, 2004). On the other hand, as postmodern, post-colonial and feminist development critics point out, the result of many development schemes has been one of greater impoverishment of the poor (Amin, 1999; Escobar, 1995; Kabeer, 1994; Sen, 2000; Slater, 2004; Small, 2000; Wilson & Whitmore, 2000). Grounded in modernization theory and neoliberal ideology, mainstream Western development since the 1940s and 1950s has been predominantly top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic. Local and experiential knowledge has been largely ignored in favour of Western science, technology, objectivism and positivism (Escobar, 1995; Kabeer, 1994; Shrestha, 1995). In many cases, economic growth has become the primary goal of Western-style development, rather than the means to poverty alleviation and higher standards of living (Chossudovsky, 1997; Kabeer, 1994).

During the Latin American economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, for example, most governments adopted World Bank and IMF cost-cutting neoliberal and economic adjustment policies, leading to drastic reductions in state spending in social services such as health and education (Arnove, Franz, Mollis & Torres, 2003). As the authors point out, by "...diminishing the role of the state in provision of basic services...the social safety net provided for the most marginalized populations has been effectively removed. The distance between the wealthy and poor is increasing." (Arnove et al., 2003: 332)

Faced with problems inherent in international development, some development practitioners and researchers are led to question both the credibility and efficacy of their individual work and those of development as a whole. One of the central dilemmas for practitioners and researchers alike involves "power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created and re-created" in development and field research processes (D. Wolf, 1996: 2). One's locationality (one's location in historical, national and generational terms) and positionality (one's relative position of power and privilege in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, place of origin, language, culture, class, religion, education) influence the amount of power one holds in relation to others (D. Wolf, 1996).

The implications for international development work are many. Postmodern critics view development's attempts to 'help' or 'represent' the poor in regions of the South as a form of white domination, "colonialism, ethnocentrism, racism and imperialism" (M. Wolf, 1992: 13). Grappling with the issue of positionality has also led some Northern development practitioners to question their position and validity as "outsiders" of the oppressed group with or for whom they work (D. Wolf, 1996). Diane Wolf (1996) also raises the particular position of development practitioners who are "halfies" (17) (i.e., born and raised in the North, but of the same ethnicity as those with or for whom they work in the South) and how the insider/outsider debate unfolds for them. Some development practitioners are concerned that their presence will create or reinforce the incorporation of the discourse of development and "modernization into local social identities" (Escobar, 1995: 52). Through a process of mental colonization, poor people of the South may see themselves and the South as "inferior, underdeveloped and ignorant" (Escobar, 1995: 52) and the North as superior and progressive (Escobar, 1995; Shrestha, 1995). Judd (1999) describes the dilemma many Northerners feel in being "implicitly and to one degree or another involved in promoting the political economy of globalization and its core concepts" (221). Many development practitioners, as a result, are left questioning whom development actually serves and what their roles and positions in the process are (Judd, 1999; D. Wolf, 1996).

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

It was with similar tensions, concerns and dilemmas that the participating graduate students came to the workshop. A letter of consent was solicited from eight graduate students at the University of Toronto who accepted the invitation to participate in the workshop. Four of the students, Michelle, Kala, Renée and Marcus, (pseudonyms are used) were born and raised in Canada. Michelle, Renée and Marcus are of European descent. Kala is of Asian descent. Sabeen, Arun, Kwame and Ana come from the South, representing four countries in the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. At the time of the workshop, all participants were studying either in a field related to international development with the intention of working in an area of the South, or in an unrelated field with a strong desire to contribute to international development in some capacity. Michelle, Renée, Marcus and Sabeen were graduate students in the Comparative, International and Development Education Program at OISE/UT. Kala, Kwame and Ana were graduate students studying international development in the University's Geography Department. Arun was a graduate student in Computer Science.

### ***Methodological Approach: Case Study Design and Constant Comparative Method***

Merriam (1998) describes case studies as “descriptions and analyses of a *single unit* or *bounded system*...such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community” (Italics in original) (19). This research is a case study of a workshop intervention with the eight participants described above. The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was employed to analyse data collected from the workshop activities and post-workshop interviews. Data from individual participants were compared to determine similarities and differences and grouped to form categories or themes for analysis.

### ***Pedagogical Approach: Comfort-Challenge-Reflection***

The four-hour workshop was comprised of activities created by the author and based on the philosophy and methods of global education (Pike & Selby, 2000; Selby, 1995). According to Pike and Selby (2000), learning experiences can be enriched when activities are designed to take participants through different phases: security/comfort, challenge/discomfort, reflection/analysis and application/action (25). The first three phases – security/comfort, challenge/discomfort and reflection/analysis - are addressed in this workshop.

In the first phase, activities are chosen that create a safe environment in which participants can express their ideas and feelings freely. Individual activities such as journal writing, drawing, individual brainstorming and thinking about a

topic, or two-person activities such as cooperative work, sharing of ideas and discussion, are examples of activities in the secure phase. The secure phase has the potential to prepare participants for the more challenging second phase. For example, the secure phase gives participants time to develop and clarify their ideas before expressing them in group settings. When participants feel secure and prepared, they are more inclined to participate in and contribute to discussions (Froese, 1994).

In the second phase, activities are introduced that gradually increase the level of discomfort and challenge. Asking participants to respond to provocative ideas and situations or to express their opinions in a large group are examples of challenging activities. According to Pike and Selby (2000), in this phase, “skills such as creative and lateral thinking, problem solving and decision-making are frequently invoked, experimentation and risk-taking are encouraged” (25). Before participating in further challenge, participants may benefit from returning to the secure phase and doing an activity that creates a safer environment. In this way, a cycle of activities that alternate between those in which participants feel safe or comfortable and those that are increasingly challenging or uncomfortable is established. With each increasing challenge, the potential to extend participant thinking and learning is enhanced.

In the third phase, through activities such as journal writing, drawing and discussion, participants are given the opportunity to reflect on and analyse their experiences of phases one and two. According to Pike and Selby (2000), the goal of the reflection/analysis phase “is for participants to attain something of a personal significance: new knowledge or insights, a refinement of skills, a shift in attitude or perspective” (26).

## **Workshop Activities and Data Collection**

### *Pre-Session Reflection*

Prior to the workshop, each participant wrote and submitted to the author a personal reflection responding to the question: “What are your views, beliefs, concerns and tensions surrounding international development work?” These reflections were read by the author and participants’ tensions and opinions were categorized into themes, as outlined in the “Findings” section of this paper.

### *Futures Drawing*

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to draw a picture of themselves five or ten years in the future, focussing on what they wanted to be doing in terms of international development work (Figure 1). Participants then shared their drawings with a partner, preferably someone whom they did not know and who was, if possible, from a different country. The individual drawing and sharing in pairs are examples of first phase, or security/comfort, styles of activities. After the initial sharing in pairs, and in order

to progress to the second phase of the learning cycle in which increasingly challenging activities are introduced and the potential for learning is enhanced (Pike & Selby, 2000), each set of partners joined with another pair to form a group of four and shared their drawings with members of this new group. Following the sharing of the drawings in the small groups, there was a vibrant full-group discussion in which many issues around international development were raised.

Figure 1. Futures Drawing by (i) Kala, (ii) Sabeen and (iii) Kwame.

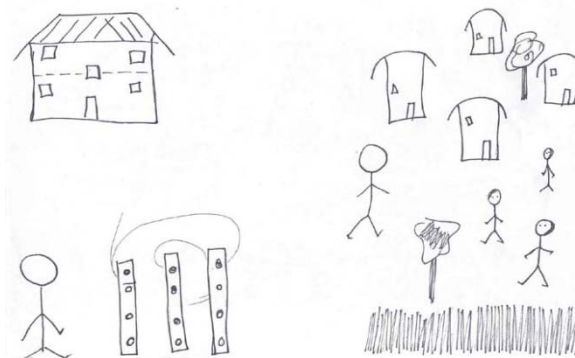
- (1) Kala as an academic researcher and professor in a university in the North (or West) and as a researcher in the field in the South (or East):



- (2) Sabeen (1) as a teacher in a community in the South, (2) as a researcher/writer at a Northern university and (3) as an academic presenting at conferences:



- (3) Kwame as a researcher at a university, as a professor and as a worker and researcher in a community in the South:



### *Where Do We Draw the Line?*

After a short break, the participants re-grouped for the second activity, *Where Do We Draw the Line?* (adapted from Selby, 1995: 322). Each participant received a bundle of sixteen statements, each on a separate small piece of paper, written by the author about the nature of working in international development (Appendix A). The statements are intentionally controversial in order to provoke and challenge participants to reflect on, question and debate issues. Each participant individually ordered his or her statements on a continuum from “most agreeable” to “most disagreeable” (i.e. first phase: security/comfort). Participants then partnered with someone with whom they had not yet worked and, as a pair, attempted to reach a consensus regarding how the statements were to be ordered (i.e. second phase: increasing challenge and potential for learning). Once the statements were ordered and glued to chart paper, each pair had to decide where to draw a line between the statements so that above the line were all the statements with which they agreed, and below it, the statements with which they disagreed (i.e. second phase: increasing challenge and potential for learning). This activity provoked much discussion among partners regarding their beliefs about development work. Following the activity was another full-group discussion.

### *Post-session reflection*

At the end of the workshop the participants wrote a personal reflection describing their thoughts of the session, how they felt once it was over and what they had learned (i.e. third phase: reflection/analysis).

Workshop activities and discussions were not audio- or video-taped so as not to intimidate or disturb participants. Instead, notes were taken during and immediately after the workshop. All of the activities involved writing and/or drawing. These materials served as artefacts for analysis. Participants each completed an evaluation form at the end of the workshop. Interviews (not audio-



taped) were conducted on a voluntary basis with Kwame, Ana, Arun, Kala and Marcus during the week following the workshop (i.e. third phase: reflection/analysis). Marcus and Sabeen each voluntarily submitted an extra post-workshop reflection. All eight participants read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper. Requested changes have been included.

## **Findings**

In this section, the nature of the tensions and concerns expressed before and after the workshop will be discussed, and ways in which the workshop affected participants will be described. Many of the issues expressed in the workshop confirm and echo issues raised by ethnographers, development workers and critics such as Judd (1999), Diane Wolf (1996), Margery Wolf (1992) and Escobar (1995).

### **A. Participants' Tensions before Coming to the Workshop:**

The tensions expressed in the pre-session reflections encompassed three general themes. While each participant has been placed under a certain theme, the themes themselves are fluid and dynamic and, at times, overlap for each participant. The following three themes, therefore, represent the *dominant* tension each participant expressed before the workshop.

#### ***Theme 1: Those expressing tension on an individual, personal level***

Three of the Canadian participants, Michelle, Kala and Renée, expressed their predominant tension in terms of an inner dilemma on a personal level. On the one hand, all three clearly expressed a personal desire to be involved in international development and to work for issues of justice, equality and rights. On the other hand, they simultaneously questioned their personal "locality" and "positionality" (D. Wolf, 1996) and the ethical implications of these. They questioned where they fit in the field of development, what their place is and the implications of their power and privilege as educated women coming from the North. This aspect of their tensions exemplifies the insider/outsider debates that Diane Wolf (1996) describes.

While excited about commencing her research in the South, Kala expressed concern regarding her positionality as, to use Diane Wolf's (1996) term, a "halfie." Kala was born and raised in Canada and is the same ethnicity as the people with whom she will be conducting research in the South. She is concerned how the participants of her research study will view her both as a wealthy woman from the North and as a high-class member of the country. She wrote:

Look at me, wearing jeans, speaking English, how patronizing is that?  
Why would they want to talk to me? They've had their experiences.  
They have probably been treated badly by high-class rich people (of

which I am one). People who do this kind of work are usually foreigners. [Poor people of my country] look up to them; they feel privileged to talk to them. White people's work seems more legitimate to non-whites. Blame colonization for that. When white people 'do' development, it is known that they are doing it because they have a good heart, they're kind, etc. A lot of the history of development by local people consists of corruption / patronizing attitudes. I will be placed in the same category.

Kala refers to the way in which local people in her country have, as Escobar (1995) describes, incorporated the discourse of development into their identities and see white people as superior. Part of Kala's tension lies in her concern about how the local people's attitudes of revering white Northerners will negatively impact on her.

After living in a country in the South and wanting to return there, Michelle is caught between two worlds. She wrote:

Despite five years of becoming a member of their community, there were always times that I was aware that I didn't 'fit' in. But on returning to Canada, then I don't fit in here too.

She now questions where she belongs.

All three questioned in their own ways the validity of their involvement in development work as a moral dilemma, echoing ethical concerns stated by Diane Wolf (1996) and Judd (1999). For example, Renée wrote:

Is my going to the developing world really going to contribute to the betterment of someone's life? Am I just contributing to the powerbrokers' plans of capitalism if I go overseas? What is my personal motivation for interest in the development field?

### ***Theme 2: Those expressing tension on a structural, macro level rather than on an individual or micro level***

The tension expressed by Marcus, the fourth Canadian, and Kwame, Sabeen and Ana revolved around issues at the structural, macro level of development approaches rather than at a personal level. While on the one hand, they believe involvement of the North is, in certain circumstances, necessary to address poverty and injustice in the South, they simultaneously criticize the prevalent top-down and ethnocentric model of development. Marcus' words describe this tension:

I myself am of mixed thoughts. I vacillate between believing it is a necessary endeavour to address poverty and injustice, and believing development is a neo-colonial function of Western states and institutions.

Sabeen expressed a similar tension:

I have mixed thoughts about development work in developing countries...Firstly, I think a foreign perspective is always helpful with

whatever work is being done. The perspective of an outsider can point out things that an insider may be desensitized to. Also, I feel it wrong to exclude based on ideas such as origin and authenticity.

On the other hand, she wrote:

I am very opposed to the concept of 'help' for it is terribly misconstrued.... It has taken me a long time to realize that when you claim to help someone, you are assuming a power relationship right there – that you are better than the other and wish to bring the other to the level that you are.... [A]ny intention of development work that stems from benevolence or charity or help is not too different from the mentality of the colonizers of the developing world.... I think the residue of colonialism is still apparent in developing countries via a deeply entrenched mental colonization... I think for this reason, employing foreign consultants or foreign initiated programs can be detrimental.

All four of them question the power, role and methods of the North in general. The focus of their critique was on international development as something done by foreigners and imposed on poor people in the South. Kwame's words exemplify this:

I have often pondered this whole 'business' of international development and if the absence of aid workers and volunteers would really spell doom for the millions of people whose lives and indeed their survival have become inextricably tied to the activities of these 'Good Samaritans'. My concern is with the short-term nature of development work. Today it is this organization doing this in our community. Tomorrow it is that one doing that thing. Next week it will be another one doing something else.... How sustainable are the fruits of this 'business' when it comes to long-term improvements for the lives of the beneficiaries?? For me, this only serves to reinforce the culture of dependency that has plagued many 'developing' countries.

### ***Theme 3: No clear tension expressed***

Arun did not explicitly express a tension. Rather, he expressed support for and agreement with the few examples of international development he has witnessed in a village in his country. If anything, rather than a tension, he expressed confusion over why some people feel tension and have negative views to development. While acknowledging the differences between the North and the South in terms of economics and infrastructure, Arun focussed on the positive consequences of development. In his pre-session reflection, he wrote:

All white people are considered to be good people with the helping hand. There are various reasons why people from the west are considered to be gracious and better people for these villagers. Better than the people who

run the government. Though they [villagers] are poor and illiterate, they understand that “americans,” though for a short time, have relinquished the life of comfort, and have come to their villages to build schools, bridges, roads or health post and because of this understanding, people have high respect for them.

Arun simultaneously recognized that his view may not be shared by others in his country, showing some awareness of his positionality. He wrote:

I don't think I am representing or can represent the whole country because of my unawareness of many issues prevalent there and my lack of exposure to that side and over-exposure to the 'educated elite' of the country.

### **B. As A Result of the Workshop:**

New themes, issues and dimensions of tensions emerged during the workshop activities and discussions. Participants highlighted these in their post-session reflections, feedback forms and interviews.

#### ***1. For those who expressed an inner, personal tension in the pre-session reflection, there was:***

*a) validation and a sense of solidarity:* Kala felt relieved that others felt the same way as she did, had similar goals and dreams and had the same concerns about the nature of development. These feelings of solidarity with the others served to validate the work she was preparing to undertake overseas. She expressed that the similarity between the futures drawings of her group members contributed to this feeling (Figure 1). In her post-session reflection, Kala wrote:

I am glad to know people are in the same boat as me. I always felt my concerns were very individualized. But I am not alone. I realize that development is not easy, and 'doing development' is hard for everyone, not just me.

Michelle similarly wrote that the session validated a lot of issues that she has been thinking about, and highlighted those, such as partnership, which she feels are essential in development work.

*b) clarification of tension:* For Michelle, the source of her tension was clarified. In her post-session reflection she expressed:

The drawing and reflection helped me to see that my tension may be more about where I want to be regarding lifestyle rather than the validity of doing development work.

*c) clarification of positionality and affirmation of one's role:* While Renée's pre-session reflection was filled with questions about the validity of her role, her post-session reflection was not. In it, she clearly expressed her desire to be active and useful in the development field. She wrote:

Having the opportunity to study as a First World woman is both a privilege and a responsibility. I take my role very seriously. As an able human being, my active participation on this planet is necessary.

In this statement, Renée answered her own pre-session question regarding her motivation for doing development work.

***2. For those whose tension is based in macro-level approaches to development, there was:***

*a) re-examination of positionality:* Three of the participants who had not mentioned their positionality in their pre-session reflections raised it in their post-session reflections and interviews.

Sabeen was very struck by the *Where Do We Draw the Line?* statement, “Privileged people from any society cannot understand the marginalization or oppression of the poor. They should not be involved in development work.” In reading it and discussing its implications with her partner, she was reminded of her positionality as a woman educated in the North (since secondary school she has been educated in Canada) from the upper class in an urban area of a country in the South. An internal dilemma about her positionality surfaced. She grappled with this silently during the session. In her post-session reflection, she explained how it made her feel defensive:

I had come to the workshop as a voice from a developing country, and therefore not in a position where I had to defend myself. However, this statement put me on the other end of the spectrum.

The statement aligned her more closely with Northern development workers whose practices she had criticized, and provoked her to see herself as both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’. The assumptions she had made about herself had been shaken up and challenged, and a new tension had been created. In her post-session reflection, Sabeen came to some resolution:

Just as I will never fully understand the plight of the poor, agents of international development work will never understand the problems of the country. However, in both cases, there is something to learn, to give and to take. In my case, there is the commitment, the know-how, shared cultural base and ideology. In the case of the international development agents, there is the commitment, know-how and a comparative perspective. However, in either case.... neither should assume to represent the indigenous people, or feel that one has the power to save them.

Kwame and Ana both discussed their positionality as educated urbanites in their respective countries of the South. They described themselves as insiders and outsiders simultaneously. This was an issue neither had raised before or

during the workshop. It led them to see greater similarity between themselves and the Canadian participants. As Ana wrote in her post-session reflection:

I have many questions now about my role in international development, perhaps the same that someone from a developed country can have.

Finally, Kwame, Ana and Sabeen expressed their belief that it is not right to exclude anyone from development work on the basis of factors such as nationality, privilege or class. The most important issue for them is how development work in the South is undertaken by foreigners and by citizens of the South alike. As Kwame wrote:

The driving force behind international development work should be partnership, contribution and participation, as well as commitment on the part of the aid worker.

The three of them agreed that all development workers must be aware of their power and not abuse it through imposition, exploitation or assumed representation.

*b) an expressed desire to do development work:* After not expressing his own sense of desire before or during the session, Kwame wrote in his post-session reflection that:

...the dialogue and issues discussed made me more passionate about international development work.

Marcus also did not express personal desire to do development work until the interview when he described his passion for justice and the field of international development. For Kwame and Marcus, their desire to do development is not an aspect of their tension. International development is something they are going to do. Their primary concerns lie instead in *how* development is done on a large scale.

*c) surprise expressed because of similarities:* Ana and Kwame were both surprised by the similarities of all the participants' goals and values. Kwame had expected a greater number of differences to be voiced. He thought if the group had represented more diverse opinions then there may have been more opportunity for each participant to have their assumptions challenged, altered or validated.

### ***3. For the participant who did not express a tension in his pre-session reflection, there was:***

*a) new learning about international development:* Arun gained awareness of some of the complexities in international development from hearing the perspectives of other participants, and was provoked to think more deeply about the nature and purpose of international development. In his post-session reflection, he wrote:

This seminar has been very helpful for me in many ways.... there were many interesting points which I would not have thought about if I were not a part of it.... The workshop made me think more about the

dilemmas that people in 'development' grapple with.... it helped me a lot to learn about how the things are really done from the top, like how the money really flows from the development agencies.

Reading an earlier draft of this paper and an article written by Nanda Shrestha (Shrestha, 1995) a year later inspired Arun to re-examine some of the issues that arose as a result of the workshop. He wrote:

...if Nanda is a victim of mental colonization,...maybe I am too, watching those Hollywood movies since my early childhood, reading Robin Hood and Cinderella stories, reciting poems by P.B. Shelley, enacting Shakespeare plays and, above all, being mesmerized by the gadgets made in the West. It never came into my mind till recently.

Seeing himself as a product of mental colonization led Arun to question more critically the role and interference of the North in the development of poor areas of Southern countries, and of the privilege and power of Northern development workers.

*b) confusion remaining:* While provoked to ask new questions, Arun reiterated the confusion he felt about tensions:

I have not still completely understood why there should be tension.  
Knowledge grows out of interaction and transfer.

He believes there can be positive benefits from this.

*c) an expressed desire to do development work:* Arun clearly expressed his desire to help make a difference in the lives of poor people in his country. The picture he drew of a village in his country during the *Futures Drawing* activity exemplified this. In his words:

The drawing is my desire of what I want to do in my life. I would feel incomplete if I cannot be a part of where I come from.

## **Conclusion**

Each participant was affected individually by the workshop. It validated concerns, clarified existing tensions and created new ones, reaffirmed the choice and passion to pursue international development work, raised awareness of complex issues and provoked questions and the re-examination of individual positionality. The activities took participants through phases of security/comfort, challenge/discomfort and reflection/analysis (Pike & Selby, 2000). Critical reflection and analysis of one's beliefs, assumptions, values and practices can bring new insights and perceptions into established ways of thinking and acting. Applying or connecting these new insights to one's own politics and practice can lead to forming values and taking actions that are, potentially, more just and ethical. Due to time restraints, the workshop from this study did not involve

participants in applying their new insights into action. A subsequent workshop would not only allow for further and deeper reflection and analysis, but could also initiate the application and action phase of the learning cycle (Pike & Selby, 2000).

These findings have implications for different areas within the international development field. In international development and comparative education programs, a workshop such as this one can provide the opportunity for students to discuss their views, critically reflect on the implications of their positionality and locationality and, ultimately, begin to articulate the role that they wish to take in working in a community or for an international development agency. The activities can be used with those who have previous experience working in international development to fuel critical self-analysis and bring fresh perspectives into their work. Such a workshop can also be useful for people who volunteer or work in international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in the North and who do not travel overseas. By helping to illuminate biases, assumptions and dynamics of power, the workshop activities can lead INGO workers and volunteers to identify new values and practices, and re-think and transform practices that they do not value or find unethical.

Feeling tension around one's work in international development need not be negative, paralyzing or demoralizing. Rather, tension is a potentially healthy and constructive aspect of international development work. Tension can be the catalyst that moves, inspires and incites us continually to question and re-examine our assumptions, beliefs, values, politics and practice and leads us to greater critical consciousness of ourselves and the institutions for which we work. Workshops, such as the one described in this paper, can provide the place and a starting point for some of this critical learning to occur.

### **Notes:**

1. Categories to describe the geography of global economics and politics -- developing, developed, Third World, First World, East, West, North, South -- are contentious and have been criticized or used with caution for various reasons (Amutabi, Jackson, Korsgaard, Murphy, Martin, & Walters, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Reddock, 2000; Slater, 2004). Aware of the limitations that any one set of terms can hold, in this paper, I have chosen to use the terms 'North' and 'Northern' when referring to regions of North America and Western Europe that hold the majority of wealth and power, both in those regions and in the world. I have chosen to use the terms 'South' and 'Southern' when referring to regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and regions within the 'North' that do not hold the majority of wealth or power. These are also regions of the world that typically were colonized by European powers during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Concurring with Slater (2004) and Hall



(1992), I assert that the category 'the West' "is a *historical*, not a geographical construct... [and] functions as an *ideology*" (Hall, 1992: 277). 'The West,' in this case, is a "measure of social progress for the world as a whole" (Slater, 2004: 9). It refers to a "type of society, a level of development...that is industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern" (Hall, 1992: 276-7). Thus, I use the categories 'West' and 'Western' to refer to Western society and Western-style development and economic policies. Where authors are cited or participants quoted, the categories they employ have been used.

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## Appendix A: Statements for “Where Do We Draw the Line?”<sup>1</sup>

1. Privileged people from any society cannot understand the marginalization or oppression of the poor. They should not be involved in development work.
2. In working towards improving the living standards of the poor in developing countries, people from rich countries are imposing another (powerful) society’s values. The process itself is an exercise in colonialism and domination.<sup>2</sup>
3. The involvement of First-World countries in international development has been beneficial for developing countries. Diseases have been eliminated. Life expectancy has been prolonged. More poor children are educated. It is clear that the First-World has a continued and important role to play.<sup>3</sup>
4. The development industry is just that - an industry. More money eventually makes its way back to the west. That which remains in developing countries reflects western biases and agenda about what is worthwhile funding. Development serves to satisfy westerners’ philanthropic needs. Development does not really benefit the poor.
5. First-World people interested in development work should direct their energy to dismantling power structures, reformulating First-World institutional policies and raising awareness of global issues at home. Grassroots struggles should be left to those at the grassroots. First-World people should not go overseas.
6. “Developing” or “underdeveloped” regions exist within so-called “developed” nations. It is not justified for anyone from a developed country to go to a developing country to work when there are so many problems at home that need addressing. These should be their first priority.
7. It would be a great loss to have First-World development researchers and practitioners confine their research and practice to the First World. Their perspective as “outsiders” of communities in developing countries is important and valuable. They have knowledge and skills that they can contribute.<sup>4</sup>
8. It is not a matter of “who” does development work. The real issue is “how” it’s done.
9. As global citizens living in an interdependent world, it is our responsibility to help wherever help is needed - be it at home or abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Facilitators may find sixteen statements too many. This was found to be the case in a workshop for twenty-five participants held in Toronto in March 2002 when twelve statements were used. The choice, content and number of statements can be adapted to suit each audience. Note that each statement needs to be on a separate slip of paper so that participants can easily lay out all the statements and re-arrange them.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from M. Wolf, 1992: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Kabeer, 1994: 70.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from M. Wolf, 1992: 5.

10. It is discriminatory and a violation of human rights to exclude certain groups of people from doing development work on the grounds of race, ethnicity, place of origin, class or language.

11. Development workers from wealthy countries carry the baggage of the past wrongs of development and colonialism making it problematic for them to be involved in development work.

12. It is wrong for compassionate committed development workers from privileged countries to be condemned for their colonial past in the face of the corrupt, oppressive and marginalizing regimes of many Third-World governments.<sup>5</sup>

13. Why are development workers from other countries needed at all? People in poor countries would not necessarily be worse off without their help, and perhaps would be better off considering the problems “development” has brought.

14. Outsiders have limited knowledge of the language, culture and socio-economic context of communities in developing countries. This makes it impossible for them to truly represent those they are trying to help.

15. First-World people working in international development are capitalizing on the opportunity to travel. Many go simply for the “experience”. Poor people cannot even dream of these luxuries. This ends up exacerbating the power differential between development workers and development recipients.

16. Unequal power relationships exist between privileged development workers and poor people. By recognizing the problems inherent within this inequality and countering it with the development of mutual respect and regard for each other’s strength and experience, a mutually beneficial partnership can evolve.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from M. Wolf, 1992: 6.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Sadli and Porter, 1999: 449.