

Planting Seeds: The Curricular Hope of Short Term Mission Experiences in Youth Ministry



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Abstract: This article presents research that examines the impact of short-term mission trips as an experiential curriculum in the lives of North American adolescent participants. Drawing from prominent experiential theories, the curricular structure of cross-cultural short-term mission trips is shown to be limited in its ability to transfer learning into the ongoing lives of the students. The author recommends continuing the educational components beyond a trip's conclusion so students can better integrate their learning. The study concludes that short-term mission needs to be situated as part of an overall emphasis, theologically and pedagogically, on service and mission within a youth ministry.

Introduction

The number of North American high school students who participate in cross-cultural mission trips and service projects is growing, though no one knows exactly how large. The growth has been described as a “fad” (Edmondson, 2001), a “boom” (Anthony, 1994), a “phenomenon” (Corwin, 2000), and a “movement” (Shaw, 2002). By conservative estimates, nearly 250,000 middle school and high school students spent over 100 million dollars in 2003 to participate in short-term mission trips. While there is no system or network to gather an accurate number (Nah, 2000), the amount of money, the presence of over 400 agencies that coordinate such trips (Nah, 2000), and the number of adolescents participating in them continue to increase. The words “boom,” “fad,” and “phenomenon” hold some truth in describing what has transpired.

Lasting usually 1–4 weeks in length, trip organizers and proponents of short-term trips for youth ministry groups promise significant benefits from the experience. These benefits include exposing people to the needs of the world (Livingstone, 1992), expanding the students' worldview (Borthwick, 1988), developing spiritual disciplines, teaching students to pray, exposing students to cross-cultural ministry (Edmondson, 2001), combating a materi-

alistic outlook, and instilling a sense of servanthood in the students' lives (Stiles & Stiles, 2000). There has been a corresponding series of critiques that question the positive impact, the substantial resources being used, the impact on long-term mission efforts, and the artificial nature of the short-term experience (Adeney, 2003; DeHainaut, 1995; Montgomery, 1993; Shepherd, 2005).

Despite the diversity of perspectives, opinions, anecdotal observations, and theories regarding short-term mission trips, there remains little that we know about the effects (both on those who go and those who host/receive) from these trips and experiences. Participants continue to report them as significant experiences (Rahn & Linhart, 2000), yet researchers have been unable to clearly describe the nature of that significance (Manitsas, 2000; Tuttle, 2000).

This paper will report new research on the curricular nature of short-term mission in youth ministry. Using a grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Linhart, 2003a) with a group of ten high school students and two adult leaders, this paper describes the curricular nature of short-term mission trips as experiential, often sacramental, and as a curriculum of Becoming (Heilman, Waltzer, Mehretu, & Sibley, 2004; Parks, 1999). The educational hope of the trip resembled a seed planted in their lives—that as the students participated in overseas missions, the experiences would grow and ripen into lives of passionate faith in God and service.

Research on Short-Term Mission Trips

Four research studies centered on short-term service projects associated with youth ministry (Beckwith, 1991; Jones, 1998; Linhart, 2004; Mabry, 2000). Six studies focused on the effects of short-term service projects with adults (Kim, 2001; Manitsas, 2000; McDonough & Peterson, 1999; Millham, 1988; Nah, 2000; Peterson & Peterson, 1991) while three studied college students on short-term mission trips (Beers, 2001; Blezian, 2004; Tuttle, 2000).

Two noteworthy qualitative studies (Beckwith, 1991; Mabry, 2000) are helpful in detailing short-term experiences from various perspectives, but lacked rigor in theoretical orientation to data analysis. Doosik Kim (2001), using topical ethnographic interviews and participant observation, examined the connection between short-term trips and the long-term mission efforts of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin). His study showed that participants on short-term trips from Korea were more fervent in their faith after their return, financially supported other cross-cultural service efforts, and were more likely to participate on a longer cross-cultural service project (p. 108). Kim's study reinforced some of the conclusions reached by two studies conducted by STEM ministries (McDonough & Peterson, 1999; Peterson & Peterson,

1991), which found that people who went on one of their short-term trips increased the amount of time in prayer and giving for missions and had a greater chance of returning on a trip for a longer period of time.

David L. Manitsas (2000), using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982) and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts & Warren, 1996), found no statistical difference for the 50 participants from his church when compared to a control group of 25 people who did not go on the trip. Further, any non-significant gains in post-test scores that he did find were not sustained 6 months after the trip's conclusion. Paul Blezian (2004) examined the effect that a short-term cross-cultural experience had on the attitudes toward other people groups held by 159 students from five Christian colleges or universities. He found no statistical significance when compared to a control group of 151 students. He noted that the qualitative component of the study revealed that participants grew in their understanding of and relationship with God, and the students gained confidence in their future life direction.

Some would see research that centers on those who "go" to serve as having an errant focus, noting that the theological purpose for mission is not to affect those who go. However, there often remains the implicit hope that participants will "catch" or learn something from their experiences. With the gaps of understanding still present concerning short-term service projects, I wanted to discover and develop theory about the trips as curriculum. Why do the participants deem these trips as significant when the results are difficult to measure, the observable effects apparently short-lived, and the constructs of the trips pedagogically questionable? Specifically, what is the nature of the curriculum for participants?

An Experiential Learning Process

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 can 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.

The theories of experiential education draw from the work by David A. Kolb (1976, 1984; Miettinen, 2000) and John Dewey (1938, 1958). Kolb's theories are the central reference point for a growing literature on experiential learning (Smith, 2001), including that of service learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999) and research on youth ministry short-term service projects (Jones,

1998). While the criticisms of the theory are numerous and well-founded (Anderson, 1988; Jarvis, 1987), the work of Kolb and his colleague Roger Fry (1975) continues to shape how people think about service-learning experiences.

There are an estimated nine different models of experiential learning (most of them have cyclical patterns) in the outdoor education literature (Greenaway, 2002), which often parallels the pedagogical structures of short-term mission trips in youth ministry. Laura Joplin's (1995) widely-accepted experiential learning model is particularly useful in helping understand how a short-term mission functions as a learning experience and in revealing where it potentially lacks the necessary components to function as an effective curriculum. Joplin proposes a model of experiential education illustrated as a five-phase process of focus, action, support, feedback, and debrief.

The learning process in her model begins as the participant focuses on the task and attention is isolated for the challenging action that is to come. The action stage places the participants in the situation or activity, often requiring the use of new skills or new knowledge to accommodate the problems presented and forcing the participants to act on their understandings. The next two components, support and feedback, are present throughout the learning experience. Joplin (1995) observes this support can come from other members in the experience, whereas the feedback usually comes from the teacher/facilitator. In the debriefing period of the process, the learning is recognized, discussed, and evaluated either individually or through structured experiences like group discussions or journals. These five components to Joplin's theory of experiential education provide the framework for understanding short-term missions as experiential education.

The Study of Northern Community Church¹

The design for the research project had to accomplish two objectives. First, the study had to generate substantive theory about what was happening on short-term mission trips and avoid mere description. Accordingly, the study design revolved around a constant comparison analysis of the data, a method that emerges from grounded theory. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory as a qualitative research method in which theory is induced from the data rather than preceding the data. Grounded theory describes and explains a system of behavior under study and is grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analyzed (Glaser, 1992, 2001).

Grounded theory is distinctive from other qualitative methods in two ways. First, it does not test a hypothesis, but discovers the emerging theory that accounts for what is happening in the given situation. Second, it is not

descriptive, but is conceptual and theoretical. Ethnography, for example, assumes that culture is pivotal from the beginning and sets about to describe its influences. Grounded theory would assume nothing is relevant until it emerges in the theory. The central theory from this study has been discussed elsewhere (Linhart, 2005), while the focus of this paper discusses the curricular nature of short-term mission experiences.

The second objective for the study was that data had to be collected in a manner that allowed participants to freely depict the trip as they experienced or lived it. To complicate this objective, the daily schedule of a short-term mission trip is usually hectic and without adequate "down" time, making it difficult to conduct regular interviews with students to provide any depth of understanding as to the nature of the trip's experiences (Linhart, 2003b). Because I wanted the emic or "insider" viewpoint, I adopted a phenomenological perspective to data collection in an attempt to discover the essence of the experiences as they are lived by the participants (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1990).

Similar to many other youth ministries across America, the student ministries of Northern Community Church send interested students on short-term mission trips each summer. I selected this particular youth ministry program from a list of three potential groups based on three criteria. First, they were identified because of their "typicalness," thus maximizing what can be learned from the single case (Stake, 1995) and illustrative of what is normal, typical, or average in what is happening in short-term mission in youth ministry. Second, the group further fit the criteria for objectivity because I had no previous contact with them, so I possessed no power, authority, or prior relationship with the group's participants or leaders. Finally, the adult leadership of this group guaranteed complete access to all components, programs, meetings, and communications connected with their training, trip, and post-trip functions.

I met the students a few months before the summer trip, giving each of the ten juniors or seniors a microcassette tape recorder to carry through the trip's processes. I instructed the six men and four women to talk into their tape recorders during the trip processes and describe anything that was significant in their encounters, experiences, and thoughts as they participated. These students, though from various high schools, had applied for the trip and were accepted by the adult youth staff based on their spiritual maturity and desire to go and serve. There were a few relational problems between two of the female members, which continued throughout the entire trip, but the students were mostly close-knit, having participated in the church's youth ministry together for the previous three years.

I occasionally collected tapes during the trip so that I could listen and code for emerging categories that propelled the direction for the rest of the

data collection process. As the categories and themes emerged from the students' personal recordings, I focused subsequent interviews on those themes. All but three of the students recorded at least two tapes full of recorded data. Two students (one man, one woman) chose to write instead of talk into the recorders, and one student recorded only about 20 minutes of audio during the trip. In all, the students talked for more than 19 hours about the significant parts of the trip, in addition to 10 hours of audiotape that I recorded in interviews and personal observations during the trip. The students kept the tape recorders after the trip and continued recording their thoughts and experiences for 4 months after their return.

Focusing for Passionate Service

Students on this trip began to orient and focus (Joplin's first phase) on the trip seven months before the trip. Meeting once a month, the group training meetings served as encouraging times where the students prayed together and held each other accountable to behavioral standards and spiritual formation practices. The adult leaders taught the students about factors associated with cross-cultural missions and allowed time for students to practice their dramas, meet in small groups, and work on other tasks in preparation for the trip. The students had "homework" assignments that focused on their spiritual growth as they prepared for the trip. The monthly training sessions created a high degree of excitement, expectations, and focus in the students' minds.

This focusing continued daily during the trip in Ecuador as students gathered each morning on the hotel mezzanine to meet with the leaders of the organization that coordinated the trip for the church. The leaders presented the tasks for that day and led a time of worship and prayer. The adult leaders described the purpose of the week to the students: to develop the ability to respond to God's presence in their lives. The students were asked to seek wisdom from God. What did God want them to do? How were they to act on this knowledge? The leaders tried to provide the categories through which they wanted students to weigh and interpret their experiences. Since success of the trip pivoted on learning through experience, they instructed the students in ways to construe the experiences they were to undergo during the week.

Acting in Cross-Cultural Encounters

The students were commissioned to act on their discernment during their encounters, embarking on a spiritual journey that transpired in a for-

eign culture where they did not know the language or customs. The learning emerged from the steps of faith they took as they acted on their knowledge. The result, then, was that the culture removed the familiar markers of existence and the students developed a deeper faith in God. Joplin (1995) notes that this "action" process "places the learner in a stressful or jeopardy-like situation where he [or she] is unable to avoid the problem presented, often in an unfamiliar environment of the use of new knowledge" (p. 17).

A common philosophy or an intended curriculum (Eisner, 2001) exists, which states that a significant purpose of the short-term mission trips is to challenge and stretch the participants in their faith, thinking, and values. The curriculum is not centered on achieving specific behavioral outcomes in the lives of participants, but rather on molding behavior through engagement and learning processes. This engagement possesses what Elliot Eisner (2002) calls expressive objectives, which he defines as "outcomes that students realize in the course of a curriculum activity, whether or not they are the particular outcomes sought" (p. 161).

The adult youth leaders were clearly comfortable with such expressive objectives for the trip. Many of the students, like Joni, wanted to go on this trip to learn new directions through their experiences, the objective for participating on the trip. She reflected, "I wanted a chance to go to a third world country and be exposed to poverty. . . . I saw it as a chance to be stretched and getting out of my comfort zone. I really wanted to share God's love with the children."

The students interfaced with people from a different culture, one which valued a new set of cultural practices, signs, symbols, gestures, and interpretations with which the students were not familiar (Hall, 1997). The exposure to the new culture created disequilibrium as the students tried to understand the cultural differences. Wilma Longstreet's (1978) work detailing various aspects of ethnicity highlights the multifaceted ways that ethnicity affects our understanding of identity, our meaning-making in cross-cultural encounters, and the misunderstandings that may arise as we encounter the "Other."²

On short-term missions, there is a "boundary" that is frequently described as the "comfort zone." One male student defined it:

A comfort zone would be when I feel God impressing upon me to go talk to someone and I don't because I'm scared . . . you're scared to do it but you know it's what God wants you to do, so you go out and you talk to them and you do it anyways because what God wants to do is not about you.

The risk-taking by the students as they moved "out of the comfort zone" forced awareness of selfishness that they had never noticed before. For Joni,

the encounter with poverty pulled her from her comfort zone. She reflected on why this was important to her:

Um, because I think many times I'm pretty passive or whatever [and I am] just real complacent, and going to Ecuador just definitely stretched me. I mean I realize that here we have a whole mission field in front of us, just at school and around here. But, going there kind of just opens your eyes. . . . It's just good to be out of your comfort zone have to do things yourself, like, discover things yourself.

Tony Campolo (as cited in Borthwick, 1988) notes that passion is integral to life outside of an entertainment culture that influences even how youth work is conducted:

We in youth work have mistakenly assumed that the best way to relate to young people is to provide them with various forms of entertainment. For many of us, there is no end to the building of gymnasiums, the sponsoring of hayrides and the planning of parties. We would do better if we invited our young people to accept the challenge to heroically change the world. (1985, p. 20)

More recently, Kenda Creasy Dean (2004) argued that the church must reclaim passion, specifically God's passion in Jesus Christ, as central to the theology of youth ministry. She notes that this passion promotes a larger purpose: to enlist people in the mission of God (p. 21). Christian passion, she says, "reaches beyond self to others" (p. 50) in ways that imitate the suffering (or passion) of Christ. Students wanted to move out of their comfort zone as an act of imitating Christ, but they also desired to experience a passionate faith.

For the students, depending on the comfort zone for happiness and fulfillment equaled a lack of faith and dependence on God. They saw the desire to move beyond their fears and present their faith as a witness as one of the primary goals while on the trip. F. Earle Fox (1995) discussed the connection between experiential education and the spiritual life. He argued that all of the reform movements in the Christian church have been experiential (and non-academic) in nature. He adds, "The Judeo-Christian tradition is profoundly experiential, not to the exclusion of reason, but as the precondition of it. That is, the material upon which reason exerts itself is precisely those experiences of ours which need ordering and coherence" (pp. 154–155).

Students approached their participation on these trips with a deep desire and anticipation that it would produce a dramatic effect in their lives. As the students journeyed through the trip and its processes, these heightened de-

sires and expectations mediated their experiences. The face-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 had previously not known. When the students assumed the role of “servant” and/or “missionary,” they reflected on their identity as persons of faith and as persons of ministry. The students did not see the trip as a tour, even though tours comprise similar structures and experiences. The acts of service, even if they did not emerge as explicit contributors to the effects of the trip according to the students, proved a vital force in shaping the nature of the experiences, helping students identify their “comfort zone” and move beyond it toward new identities.

The Support Structure and Feedback from Adults

The adult leaders for the group facilitated the support and feedback that Joplin (1995) specifies is vital to the experiential learning process. Despite what I perceived as a lack of intervention and coaching, the students resonated with the leadership styles of the adult leaders. A more Deweyan philosophy on short-term experiences as education would have required adult leaders to step in and direct the experiences more for the students than they did. The students never engaged many of the deeper social and theological issues that arose on the trip. The learning from the experiences, flavored with all of their passions and interpretations, became the responsibility of the students, shaped by the previous months of training. It was not until the post-trip debriefing days in Chicago that an adult leader started to challenge the students (as a group) to think through some of their perceptions about the trip. Joplin (1995) notes that such intervention is crucial to the learning process:

Here, the learning is recognized, articulated, and evaluated. The teacher is responsible for seeing that the actions previously [experienced] do not drift along unquestioned, unrealized, unintegrated, or unorganized. Debrief helps the student learn from experience. Debrief is the sorting and ordering of information, often involving personal perceptions and beliefs. (p. 19)

The students were provided a time to share each night, both as a group and individually. These evening gatherings resembled more of a sharing time for students to tell what happened during the day and how that influenced their faith, versus a structured time of debriefing the day's experiences. The students found these sessions helpful, as reflected by Taylor's description of the Monday evening session: “Today was a really good day. I just saw a lot of

amazing things happen. At the debrief tonight it really just brought to my attention all that really did happen.”

Part of the problem recognized by observers of these trips has been the lack of transfer from mission experiences of students into their lives after the trip. The moment the trip concluded, the support and feedback structures of the trip were removed from the students' lives. The students no longer met together and did not discuss ways to become servants at home and in the community. Nor did they support other team members in any structured ways. The cross-cultural experience ended, but what import did it exhibit in the students' futures?

Integration of Experiences: Social Contexts and Student-Centered Problem-Posing

A central concern of observers of these trips has been what happens after the trip both in the lives of those who go and the communities that receive the groups. Did the experiences aid or thwart the growth of the learners for dealing with similar experiences in their futures? Why is it that the experiences *seem* to possess great potential for integration of learning, but there are few observable changes 6 months later, as Manitsas (2000) noted? Some of these apparent limitations can be attributed to the existential nature of the experience for participants (Linhart, 2005). However, perhaps a deeper examination from a theoretical perspective of experiential education can reveal another potential problem.

Experiential theorists have long been concerned with the transfer of learning from the program (or experience) to future learning experiences. Program managers point to positive effects in the lives of those who participate in adventure education, short-term service projects, and college orientation programs. However, Michael Gass (1995) identified two confusing factors in understanding the transfer of learning:

First is the concern that the initial learning usually takes place in an environment (e.g., mountains) quite different from the environment where the student's future learning will occur. Second is the lack of knowledge concerning the variety of methods available to promote transfer. (pp. 131–132)

Three main theories explain how learning is transferred in programs such as short-term mission trips. The first two come from Jerome Bruner (1960), who observes that students can transfer specific skills in highly similar settings or can effectively learn a general idea and can form a general idea that can be used as a foundation for engaging later problems (p. 17). There-

fore, if a student working in an orphanage can learn specific skills in how to serve by caring for children in need, he or she would hopefully know how to help children in need in other settings. Bruner also observes that students can effect a non-specific transfer when, for example, they learn a general idea of what it means to be a servant or missionary and form a foundational lifestyle that prompts them to take action in their home community, making a difference in poverty-stricken and disadvantaged situations.

Michael Gass (1995) expands Bruner's idea of non-specific transfer for a third theory that he calls the metaphoric transfer: "The student [generalizes] certain principles from one learning situation to another. But the principles being transferred in this theory are not common or the same in structure, but are similar, analogous, or metaphorical" (p. 134). This poses the apparent ideal for many youth leaders' facilitation of short-term service projects. They hope that students who seek an adventure are willing to go and serve. Perhaps they will, upon their return, transfer the learning and make life changes. For youth ministry leaders, this hope includes growing in their spiritual faith and living lives of service and ministry within their communities. However, without extending careful support and feedback post-trip, the seeds of mission and service planted in students' lives during a short-term trip may never mature.

The surreal nature of the experiences, combined with the brevity of the trip, hindered the ability of students to reflect on the experiences and integrate the learning in their lives. Because the trips are often "squeezed" into the schedules of busy students, the opportunity for critical thinking is limited. Jayson talked about this a few months after the trip:

[The trip is] like, you put all this time into it and then all of a sudden, you're there and it's like, "Wow, we're really here, we're really doing this!" And, it's almost like, "Did this really happen, you know?" And then, so many things happen [in Ecuador] and then when I got back—right away I raced to my basketball game right away . . . then I, later that night, I was really there, two or three days ago I was in Ecuador and it's just, yeah, it's like a movie, almost real. I can't believe that it was real.

Despite the brevity of the trip and the lack of critical thinking about their experiences, the students of NCC experienced a curriculum that provided an opportunity for growth in their identities. Each student had an encounter on the trip that deeply affected not only his or her identity, but also provided stories that impacted their imaginations about everyday life. However, 8 months after the trip to Ecuador, none of the students had purposefully served others in formal ways, and only Jayson returned on a mission trip to Honduras the next summer.

The Hope for Planted "Seeds"

To describe what they accomplished in ministry on the trip, students told me that they had "planted seeds." Besides building an orphanage, they hoped that because of their efforts, people they encountered would be encouraged and that their Christian message would have an effect on the children and people who heard it. Analogous to the biblical parable of the "sower and the seed," they viewed their efforts akin to a sower who cast seeds, hoping something would grow. The students would never know whether their efforts had any effect. They could only hope they did.

The curricular nature and purposes of the trip reflected a similar educational philosophy in which "planting seeds" was important. The leaders of the trip constructed the trip and its experiences with the hope that the experiences would foster future growth in the lives of the students. They designed the trip as a series of experiences that would sprout growth in students' lives, like "dormant seeds" for later cultivation and growth. They wanted the students to develop a heart for the poor, a deeper passion for God, and the ability to care for the world in service and ministry. Like the students, the leaders of the trip would not really know whether their efforts had any effect in the lives of the students. They, too, could only hope for positive results.

The program possessed concrete boundaries, marked by the presence and support of adult supervision, and each student incorporated learning into his or her life as he or she saw fit. During the 8 months of preparations and the trip, the students experienced a process of becoming (Heilman et al., 2004; Parks, 1999) in which they engaged in practices that both fostered new habits of service and faith in their lives and reinforced existing ways of being.

Conclusion

Trips should be influenced by a more nuanced understanding of what this research suggests. The received curriculum (Eisner, 2001) was a curriculum centered on what the students were to *become* because of their experiences. The focus was not on gaining new knowledge about cross-cultural ministry or about the culture of Ecuador, but rather on the students' personal growth, on what they would do and become because of the trip. The objectives for the trip were not behavioral, but rather a classic example of what Eisner (1985) calls "expressive objectives" where engagement was the goal of the learning process.

The nature of the curriculum for the short-term mission trip was experiential, where learning was assigned to each student as he or she participated in the trip's activities. The students focused on each experience through training and other preparations. They acted in cross-cultural experiences, re-

flecting on each activity through the lens of their own identities. This action-reflection process occurred while students engaged in mission and service experiences supported by other students and adults on the trip. The students received feedback from the adult leaders mostly in the evening group meetings and during the debriefing day. Upon their return from the trip, the support for learning through experience faded, and the adult leaders began working on the next youth ministry event. For the students, the debriefing journals and pictures were the only components the students had to help them transfer the learning to their lives in their home communities for the months following the trip.

Richard Slimbach (2000) notes that the lack of critical interaction with a body of content can leave the curriculum of a short-term mission trip operating "a mile wide and an inch deep" (p. 439). He asks whether giving students the time of their lives is really the point of taking these trips. If the curricular nature is one of becoming (Parks, 1999), what is it, or who is it, that we want a student to become from these trips? Is it our place or the students' place to determine that? What educational structures will best assist in answering these questions?

Given the experiential nature of short-term mission trips and the usual goal of engagement versus specific realizing behavioral outcomes, a tension emerges for a curriculum of becoming. The chief concern for the short-term service projects as curriculum would be to ask *if* students are becoming, then *what* are students becoming. The focus on those who go constructs a series of expectations that, because of the experiences, the servant sojourner is going to receive something in return. Because of these expectations and the economics involved in funding (paying for) the trips, the curriculum possesses a transactional nature. However, an opposite tension occurs as students approached this experience with an attitude of reverent expectation. This approach anticipated that the encounters and experiences would be sacred moments where God would give special guidance or instill in the students uncommon passion or confidence for future service and ministry. This reverence offered by the students toward the experiences constructed a sacramental approach to their learning. Thus, the experience held extra meaning and purpose in their lives for their decisions, their faith, and their identities.

As youth workers strive to be more faithful and effective in their short-term mission efforts, future emphasis should focus on the issue of transfer of learning from short-term missions into students' lives after the conclusion of the trips. Short-term mission needs to be situated as part of an overall emphasis, theologically and pedagogically, on service and mission within a youth ministry. The disconnect from their own culture, combined with the surreal and experiential nature of the experiences, works against effective transfer and integration into students' lives without continued support and

feedback of adult leaders post-trip. Students can experience growth in their faith, lives, identities, and world-awareness from such trips; however the curricular hope placed on learning through experience requires greater attention to the way that a short-term mission trip functions as a curricular process.

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¹All names are pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.

²Often centered on racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, the category of the "Other" refers to all others, to people from the East, Africa, South America and, as Stuart Hall (1997) describes, the binary opposition of Us versus the Other, the west and "the rest"

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