Transformational Learning through International Community Engagement

Juanie Walker | Pepperdine University

Martha Zavala-Perez | Pepperdine University

Shannon Tefertiller | Pepperdine University

Delivered February 6, 2016
at the Fifteenth Annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts
Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA
Transformational Learning Through International Community Engagement

Concurrent Paper, Conversation on the Liberal Arts

*From Inquiry to Impact through Liberal Arts*, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, Feb. 4–6, 2016

Juanie N. Walker Ph.D., Associate Professor

Martha Zavala Perez, M.S. Candidate

Shannon Tefertiller, B.A. Candidate

Communication Division MC 4211

Pepperdine University

Malibu, CA  90263

Ph: 310-506-4211

Juanie.Walker@pepperdine.edu

Martha.ZavalaPerez@pepperdine.edu

Shannon.Tefertiller@pepperdine.edu
Abstract

Transformation—a process that involves conceptual change and taking up a new life—is central to the mission of liberal learning and at the core of Christian life. In recent years, practical theorists in communication (e.g., Barge, 2001; Cheney, 2007; Tompkins, 2009) have urged scholars to move beyond inquiry that justifies academic study to research that results in transformational civic engagement in social and political issues. Community engagement educators emphasize transformational learning as a precursor to community change. Combining critical thinking and perspective taking with action-based Christian development, Myers (2014) presents a model of Transformational Development in ministry and missionary work by living an undivided life of learner-practitioner. This paper builds on these theories to explore possible transformation in learning in an international community engagement project at Pepperdine University that took place in the classroom Spring 2015, a three-week international study program in East Africa during early Summer 2015, and research analysis from Summer – Fall 2015. It reports on (1) the participatory process of learning about and examining virtues, faith, and social responsibility in organizations; (2) articulation of a model of Organizational Transformational Development (OTD) drawn from interdisciplinary readings and analysis of the Kibo Group (www.kibogroup.org), as a prototype of Christian development in Uganda that hosts Pepperdine’s East Africa Program students each summer; and (3) patterns of transformation among student reflections about community experiences and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Uganda in relation to the OTD Model. Classroom learning in Malibu demonstrated marked improvement in skills of engaged reflection after using readings as a class to analyze Ugandan NGO artifacts. Analysis of reflection papers written by students in the East Africa
program revealed competency in engaged reflection skills and transformational practice in the following four stages of Personal Transformation Development (PTD): conviction, questioning truth, immersion/participation, and discovering a more holistic truth. Transformational practices were aided by and enabled use of the OTD. These instances of transformation suggest reflective, “triple-loop” (Bateson, 1972; Isaacs, 1988) and “significant” learning (Fink, 2003) among students in which new ways of thinking and acting emerged. The paper concludes with how this kind of learning can support social transformation.
Introduction

Transformation is pursued by advocates of engaged scholarship including organizational communication scholars who advocate using critical thinking about theories (e.g., Barge, 2001) for activism and social justice (e.g., Cheney, 2007; Tompkins, 2009). Barge (2001) describes transformation as a meaningful change in community practices and participant abilities that draws on methods of action-based research to honor the interests of community members and practices that transform individuals to make their lives better. Barge describes transformation processes of “mapping” knowledge and using “engaged reflection” to move toward “transforming practices.” Cheney (2007) urges organizational communication scholars to move beyond insular talk with a field toward meaningful change in the world, and Tompkins (2009) urges communication scholars to participate in mutual transformation through service, participant observation, compassion, and advocacy.

Moving beyond education constructs such as Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning, Fink (2003) describes “significant learning” as a process of being transformed long term that involves a process of engaged and high-energy learning and outcomes of change relevant to student lives and their future roles in the world. This kind of transformational learning consists of: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. More specifically, community-engagement educators distinguish transformational approaches as a quality of experience that goes beyond transactional exchange of resources. For example, Jordan and Gust (2011) identify the following necessary elements: willingness to deal with conflict and engage in reflective and emotional work, opportunities to stretch skills, knowledge and beliefs, and the support of trusted friends (p. 27). Similarly, Jameson, Clayton and Jaeger (2011) identify the following conditions of transformational learning: shared
developmental journey (involving deeper commitments and expectations of shifts in identities and values), re-negotiation of typical power relationships (including challenging norms and systems), long-term sustained relationships between campus and community (involving mutual growth and change), and attention to language (as a social construction of meaning) (p. 262; 269 - 273). Likewise, communication scholars have drawn comparisons between similar goals of communication theory and service learning (see Droge & Murphy, 1999) and a common history of liberal education with a philosophical tradition of pursuing truth and educating individuals for political and public leadership including civil discourse (Kimball, 1996, in Droge & Murphy, 1999, p. 1).

The research question that guided this study were:

RQ1 What liberal learning processes were used in a community engagement class examining transformation? and

RQ2 How does transformational learning occur in an international development project?

This project attempted to create conditions for Barge’s (2001) transformational practice in three areas of community engagement in a project at Pepperdine University: an advanced organizational communication class of about 20 students on faith and social responsibility in organizations in Spring 2015 that included all coauthors of this paper; followed by a Summer 2015 program with 24 students in East Africa that included the undergraduate coauthor who served as a peer trainer; and analysis and reflection of student papers from the East Africa program by the master’s student and professor co-authors during Summer - Fall of 2015.

Classroom Community Engagement

Mapping of Knowledge

According to Barge, “mapping” involves examining puzzles, dilemmas or challenges
inherent to a practice and describing the strategies, moves, or structure that manage those problems. It requires a third-person perspective to map and describe unfolding processes to develop detailed descriptions that generate normative prescriptions for action. It asks, “What’s going on here?” “What are the underlying theories of a practice that can be used as guidelines in the future?” Students in an advanced organizational communication course read more than 20 journal articles and book chapters on the topic of organizational social responsibility, professional civility, virtues, faith, and vocational calling in organizations. Ability to map knowledge was assessed in students individually through a portion of an essay exam that asked them to summarize terms and arguments from authors of 18 of readings. The average score was an 83% with a range of 100% to 60% and a mode of 78%. Although the professor (faculty author) provided a study guide matrix of key terms and assumptions of each author, students expressed difficulty in retaining knowledge of arguments of such a large number of authors. When students were asked to work together with the professor to summarize prototypical characteristics of the Christian Transformational Development Model drawn from several common class readings, students demonstrated more competence and confidence in the task.

Engaged Reflection

As a community engagement component, students were asked to summarize prototypical characteristics of the Christian Transformational Development Model to examine artifacts of two NGOs (the Kibo Group and Buyamba/God Cares School in Uganda) for two affiliated organizational clients—Pepperdine University’s International Program in East Africa (that partners with the Kibo Group) and Buyamba, the local U.S. ministry organization that supports God Cares Schools in Uganda.

The professor and co-author of this paper then led students through Barge’s process of
engaged reflection—a reflexive process between theory and practice that requires going back and forth between abstract concepts and a particular situation by having students examine quotes and practices of the two client Christian missionary organizations in relation to the Transformational Development Model they had summarized. By drawing on the relationship between theoretical and practical discourses, they were better able to examine how the organizations address problems described in literature. In this step of engaged reflection, students drew from literature on the Transformational Development Model to develop a composite model referred to here as the Organizational Transformational Development (OTD) Model as a lens through which to view organizational practices and to offer suggestions for how to improve communication in relation to the model.

Two assignments were used to assesses student learning individually: (1) an analytical portion of the essay exam that asked students to identify and use arguments from class readings regarding organizational social responsibility, professional civility, virtues, faith, and vocational calling in organizations to analyze two organizational circumstances in the recent media based on the following critical thinking skills: critical analysis, coherent structure, and skilled writing; and (2) a research paper at the end of their term that assessed student ability to summarize purpose, methods, findings and recommendations of group community engaged research regarding the OTD model. (The latter assignment was coded by two other professors for interrater reliability.)

On the essay exam (average of 83%) students had some difficulty in applying theories to organizational media cases, with the majority of students expressing difficulty critically analyzing organizational cases without first having more significant practice in class. However, the semester-end, individual paper reporting results the team-based research scored an overall
average of 95% on writing and 91% on critical thinking, indicating strong skill competencies, perhaps related to the completion of the research in teams with the professor providing direct guidance and feedback.

Transformative Practice

Barge’s third process of practical theory, transformative practice, was measured in three community engagement experiences. Transformative practice is transforming behaviors and abilities of participants toward democratic, equitable, liberating, and life enhancing ends that honor interests of community members and that help transform individuals to make their lives better. It asks, “What’s going here?” and “What should I do now?” According to Barge, viewing practical theory as transformation involves assessing the consequences of the theory on the lived experiences of the parties involved.

Two forms of assessment for transformative practices in the course were used: (1) a portion of the individual research paper that asked students to reflect on transformation in organizations studied and (2) an optional e-portfolio that asked students at the end of the class to describe prototypes and make recommendations for three areas of practice in their worlds—their personal identity and calling, social responsibility and professional responsibility in organizations, and transformational development. These assignments were coded by two other professors for interrater reliability. Faculty reviewers assessed how well students explained, applied, and justified transformation in organizations studied based on the OTD model at 94% overall. This indicated that by the end of the term, students were able to analyze and recommend specific attributes of transformation. Six fully completed e-portfolios were assessed for how well students defined and described transformation in relation to three areas. Average scores between faculty coders were: 92% for personal identity and calling, 80% for social responsibility and
professional civility, and 84% for organizational development. These scores indicated that students were more adept at identifying and recommending transformation in their personal identity and calling but limited in their abilities yet to make recommendations for civility and transformation for the organizational contexts.

**International Program Community Engagement**

In addition to classroom assignments, three other community engagement applications were used: (1) a training manual developed in a communication training and development class in the Spring of 2015 with 10 students based on the OTD model summarized in the advanced organizational communication courses (covering practices for administrators and participants in short-term international missionary work for three clients—representatives of the two organizations examined in the advanced organizational communication course, students in Pepperdine’s East Africa Program, and a director of short-term missions program at a local church); (2) use of the training manual by student participants in Pepperdine’s East Africa program while in Uganda during the summer of 2015 that included peer training by the undergraduate co-author of this paper who led instruction with the manual during the program; and (3) evaluation by the master’s student and professor coauthors of reflection papers written by student participants of the East Africa program about their analysis of community immersion experiences and NGOs using the OTD. Analyses of these three areas is captured in the following section using two forms of data—(1) analyses of select papers from the East Africa program by the master’s student and professor coauthors of this paper and (2) reflections by the coauthors regarding their own transformation in the various parts of the community engagement project.

*East Africa Program Participant Papers*
Students who participated in community engaged research in the East Africa Program seemed to experience transformational learning that involved questioning assumptions that led to loosening of a mental frame of their identity/calling and of their views of service (from a transactional view to a transformational view of mutual learner or servant learner) as well as a determination to change current and future behaviors. The Personal Transformational Development (PTD) model figure (see Fig. 1) consists of the following stages: (1) Conviction, (2) Questioning the Truth, (3) Immersion/Participation, and (4) Holistic Truth.

Each stage of transformation consisted of three phases: arriving at a new tier of transformation (grey box), experiencing a trigger that prompted moving toward another level of transformation (purple box), and experiencing a type of discomfort from a gap in belief and action that prompted action or change (red box). Conviction was about owning or putting a belief into a particular action in one’s life/calling/career. The trigger was some form of physical, spiritual, or mental perspective that had changed or was being questioned that then prompted participants to move forward in the learning process. Discomfort from gaps were uneasiness or tension that seemed to prompt a desire for a new understanding and movement toward a new frame, first of the importance of acquiring more knowledge from the host culture and then searching for a broader life understanding.

**Conviction.** Step One of the PTD is conviction. Conviction refers to reflecting on a commitment to take a particular action triggered by a gap between convictions and emotions such as fear, self-doubt, and moral indignation of wrong treatment. This step is illustrated by a participant in the East Africa program who reflected on a prior goal to join the Peace Corps, which was triggered by a gap between her convictions and emotions of fear and led to questioning her personal calling and career and discomfort with being only an outside observer
rather than a participant. She stated, “As I sat with only my thoughts [while in Uganda] I started imagining [living] life long-term in a village specifically if I pursued the Peace Corps like my plans once were. Could I do this for 24 to 27 months?” (Student 1). Because of a gap between convictions and fear/doubt, this participant questioned previous assumptions, contemplating, “Maybe if I were living daily with a family I would be more of a participant rather than an observer. If I were stationed in Jinja and visited the villages for work I think it would be okay.” (Student 1). Expressing doubt, the participant stated, “But I am not sure I could live in the village, I hated the thought, was I becoming too comfortable with my leisurely lifestyle in the [S]tates? Have I lost my spirit to live [in] other cultures?” (Student 1). This discomfort seemed to push her toward seeking a new perspective and approach to service.

Another student expressed discomfort between convictions and emotions: “[It’s] honestly embarrassing the petty things I hold grudges over when these people can forgive those that killed her family” (Student 8). This seemed to compel the student to seek a different perspective. An additional student described a gap between convictions to serve and emotions of being asked by the Kibo Group to serve as a learner through observation rather than by offering physical help or material resources. She said, “When we went to the village the first time with Kibo, I really struggled with that idea of being there just for learning instead of being there to serve. [Another student] and I went to the village with Harriot and Ida [from Kibo] to build the stove. They didn’t want us to help a ton because they wanted to educate the village on how to build the actual stove. While [we] were in the village, the women and children were doing some of the work“ (Student 7). This gap between knowledge and emotions seemed to push the student toward questioning the truth of formerly held beliefs of service being about fixing others’ problems.
Question truth. Step 2 of the PTD is Questioning Truth or previously held, received views from one’s own native culture or textbooks. The trigger was seeing “limits to assumptions,” or recognizing limits of prior views, which then prompted participants to examine personal truths by investigating and experience other cultural perspectives. Exemplifying a new perspective from cultural learning, Student 3 stated, “Also the sense of community in these villages is unlike anything I've ever seen. [A guide] was telling us how you can walk through anyone's garden and knock the mango off the tree and eat it and no one will mind.” The student continued, “Everyone in the village is like a big family and they all depend on . . . and count on each other. That is so amazing to me and something I wish we had more of in the U.S.” In this example, the student gained perspective from differing cultural norms.

Experiences caused students to reflect on their American ideologies. For example, one student stated, “I am in no way denouncing individualism, but when you compare the overall happiness of a Ugandan villager to a Pepperdine college student, I think more times than not you’ll see the villager as a happier person. No proof behind that statement, but a hunch I’m fairly confident would prove true.” (Student 12)

This trigger of recognizing limits of one’s own culture, however, seemed to create a discomfort between two difficult cultural views in the following account of one male student:

Before the village visit, we had been informed that there would be a very clear separation between male and female duties among the Musoga. In our village, it was less of a separation and more of a “the women will do literally everything and we will sit here, talk and eat.” I’m not sure if this dynamic would have been different if there were American girls with us, but the men of the house did not do anything, nor let us do any work to help. The women were usually gathered around the kitchen, which was behind
the house. We really only interacted with women when we first arrived and when we left. When we went to the borehole to fetch water, I made it a point to carry one of the heaviest jugs so that the girls wouldn’t have to. After about one hundred meters of walking, I switched from using my right hand to my left; our host . . . instantly grabbed the jug and gave it to a six-year-old girl who carried the five-gallon jug on top of her head for the remainder of the fifteen-minute walk. For an American young man, this was somewhat of an insult, but the reality of the culture is that this labor is reserved for the women. Another area where different gender roles were extremely evident was greeting other people in the village. Women, no matter their age, kneeled before you and shook your hand briefly, many times without making eye contact.” [Student 15]

Students learned about the East African culture from professors and books, but actually living there and walking through the village and seeing how individuals interact with each other brought a means of seeking a comparative truth. This then created discomfort because students were no longer sure of their roles, which led to Step 3, greater immersion in the culture as a servant learner. In the preceding case, Student 15 had more willingness to fully participate in the host culture and chose to become a servant learner in order to truly understand the host culture. He reflected, “The more time I spend traveling and observing humanity, exploring the four corners of are [sic] beautiful world, the more . . . I have come to the realization that we are not all that different (Student 15).

Immersion. Once participants became fully immersed in the host culture, the trigger for movement became the guilt of the “god complex” -- the American tendency to perceive that because of money, resources, and right ideologies, that we know what’s best for another culture. The god complex was coded for within the data by looking at things such as the differences
between skin color, money, and availability of resources. Step Three involved guilt from recognizing privilege and “us” versus “them” language that resulted in a discomfort between hypothetical rights and actual humanity. It was this realization of differences between self and other/host culture that helped move participants toward the fourth step of seeking holistic truth to account for both cultural ideologies.

Most students reflected on the special treatment by women and children simply because of their status over them as Americans or as males. Since the villagers knew that the students were from the United States, the students felt a very clear sense of difference between “us and them,” which then made the students feel like they did not deserve special treatment. This then led to discomfort over an emotional gap between rights and humanity. One student reflected, “I had brought Crayons, a soccer ball, and books for the kids, which brought perhaps three hours of expression and entertainment but the laughs and smiles that were brought about from dancing the Busoga dance and speaking the Lusoga language and eating the traditional food brought them the most authentic joy.” (Student 22). In this case, the student felt discomfort because he/she had a wrong preconception that American games and material goods would bring happiness, however immersion into the host culture brought insights about what brought the children greater joy.

One student explained well a lesson from guilt over privilege:

On our day of arrival, a group of the villagers sat down with us outside to have a two-way, question-and-answer time period. Our first question was what they would want an American to know about their culture, and the women immediately grabbed our hands. They showed us how to pump water from the borehole and carry it on our heads, how to use a hoe to weed the plants, and how to stir the Posho on the Kibo stovetop. We only did each activity for about a few minutes before the women finally put an end to our failure.
This turned out to be much more physically draining than I expected it to be, especially under the boiling sun. I am amazed by how hard the women work within this village over labor that doesn’t provide even a little income. They also explained to us their excitement over the fruits and plants they were growing and the communal effort they put in to buy plastic chairs for their group members every Thursday. Both of these seemingly simple actions from an American perspective elucidated unification in the African community. This opened my eyes to the weighty cost of community and its relational benefits that America has paid for an easier lifestyle by means of technology. (Student 9)

The student also demonstrated discomfort between rights and humanity in participating in practices perceived to be inhumane, which served positively to cause the student to seek a more holistic understanding. The student laments,

However, the women are not treated with respect. They are just property. Their labors are taken for granted, simply expected. After seeing this, I could not help but cringe at the sight of a women of any age kneeling down before me to shake my hand, to welcome me to her village, to her home. (Student 9)

Student 18 who had previously been on an international trip to Fiji expressed discomfort over the gap between the potential ill effects of American privilege on the local Ugandans and a concern for their best interests:

We could hardly see while eating dinner or walking to the outhouse outside, and yet we danced to music from the cellphone of a young adult. Nevertheless, we danced to Justin Bieber music even. This made me concerned about the Western influence of technology within the area, and the possible detrimental effects that may idolize what we want rather than what we need. My thoughts about this instigated a
connection to my experience in Fiji when we heard that the villagers were saving up all their money to buy a TV rather than create transportation to a hospital because wealthy people (usually Americans) had TVs. Thus, we were encouraged to not use our cellphones or iPads throughout the trip at all in order to prevent the Fijians from believing that a piece of technology will provide wealth like an American [has]. This similarity of the juxtaposition of advanced technology and lack of essential[s] in the Ugandan village made me question if Western influence was causing problems. This discomfort and reflection on another international experience seemed to move the student toward a more holistic truth or standard.

*Holistic truth.* After participants went through immersion, they moved toward seeking holistic truth. In this step, participants connected meaningful actions across both Ugandan and American cultures and sought to understand a greater truth. One student addressed discomfort from gender differences, saying, “I did nothing to earn these women’s kindness and respect. I was simply a guest and they treated me with the upmost respect, not knowing where I come from, who I am, yet they still welcomed me with open arms. This to me was such a humbling experience.” Yet, this seemed to push the student toward a more holistic understanding:

For this is how we as Christians and as people need to go about our lives. Not only accepting people into our lives after getting to know them, but welcoming them without consideration. Welcoming with no alternative motives, no hidden intentions, but welcome people out of a common respect and desire to love one another. (Student 9)

Student 18 described a holistic truth this way:

Another aspect that I have been culturally transformed by is in understanding our shared human brokenness. When going to the villages of Uganda, the idea that these people are
in absolute poverty never truly struck me, and I came to realize that this did not mean that I was heartless. I was able to see the authentic riches that the Africans had in the harmony of their community and the enjoyment they shared in living presently. This communal aspect is something that American culture is poor in, and I realized the meaningfulness I was lacking in my own life with all the noise I had filled it with. Learning this prospect humbled me even more in realizing my own brokenness, and how much more that I am incapable to solving issues in Africa. My new, more truthful perspective is that we are all fragmented and only God can bring true restoration. Yet, we can share in our strengths to serve and teach one another, and we can grow past our weaknesses by learning and depending on each other.

The step involved the ability to receive a gift because of understanding its meaning to the local culture and affirmation of a greater common value. For example, Student 5 explains a time of receiving a gift in humility, “There were about four folding chairs present in the village, and anytime we were outside, we were instantly offered the chairs. This made me a bit uncomfortable since there were women and children who were forced to sit on the dirt and I would have had no problem giving up my chair, but I recognize it for an act of sacrifice and kindness that it was.”

Step 4 includes various physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental triggers and discomfort. Student 22 explained that he chose to be fully immersed in the local culture in order to intentionally face his fears, doubts, and limits. He described his desire to participate in an overnight stay without another American student from the program in a village with a past history of practicing voodoo because he felt “prepared enough and in such a context would be able to thrive.” Because he engaged in the local language more than English and participated in
the local culture in an authentic way that was meaningful to his host family and community, including giving a church sermon when asked, he felt “reaffirmed” in his faith, purpose, and identity that he felt was also meaningful to the locals. He elaborated,

Because I practiced the language and used it confidently, many people I had met in Uganda, in the village and otherwise, did not want me to leave or had urged me to return as soon as I could. And hey I even walked away with my very own African name.

Secondly, I feel that my faith in God was made stronger through my experiences in East Africa and specifically with my overnight stay in the village. . . . Beyond [giving a sermon] I came to appreciate the ways in which God was working in the lives of the villagers and in the village overall. The land was fertile and covered in productive crop, the rain came twice to flood the fields and provide clean runoff water for use in the home and more spiritually was the power of prayer that took place at every step.

Summarizing a holistic sense of understanding and meaning, he said, “In many ways I see this as a culminating event, where all of my cultural, spiritual and emotional development that occurred on this trip came together” (Student 22).

Another student summarized a holistic understanding:

I would just like to reiterate to you, and to myself, the importance of love. No matter where we are at or what we are dealing with, we need to be able to look at life and look at one another with open minds and open hearts. We need to be aware of each other’s differences and each other’s similarities. We need to appreciate the fact that we are all people and we are all broken. We need to better our relationships with one another. We need to strive to make life more abundant for ourselves and for those around us. We need to find new ways to put aside our differences and work together, side by side our fellow
man. We need to guard our hearts and overcome hate and work toward peace. We need to live life well. All these things can only be solved through love. We must learn to love unconditionally, for through this, the world will be a better place and He will be known.

(Student 9)

The trigger within this fourth and final step is the desire for holistic understanding. Participants who expressed such a changed view had a new definition or conviction based not just on individual, ethnocentric ideas but taking into account the host culture. The discomfort was in confronting the effects of living a divided life, as the process by which an individual separates his or her work and spiritual thoughts.

After experiencing this kind of learning, participants potentially restart at Step 1 of the PTD model given another opportunity for transformational learning, which indicates a cyclical process when coming in contact with a host culture with potential to loosen and reframe mental models. Students who didn’t perceive this kind of transformative learning seemed to be limited by the obstacle of an “either-or,” “us” versus “them” perspective between cultures and perspectives.

In addition, types of discomfort seemed to affect the ability to move toward a holistic truth by hindering or facilitating progress. Discomfort that serves as a hindrance is when feeling uncomfortable with some new perspective resulted in participants being unable and/or unwilling to move forward in the PTD model. For example, the ideas of not feeling deserving and having high levels of anxiety hindered students from progressing transformationally.

However, students who experienced facilitative discomfort used discomfort as a way to help them move forward in their transformation. For example, two types of facilitative discomfort is when individuals allowed themselves to experience discomfort with another person
and acknowledged the challenges of adjusting back to American life. In those instances, participants used the discomfort to move forward in the PTD model by realizing that there was something else to be learned—some other form of truth or language that could only be learned by fully participating and being humbled by the host culture.

Effective progression through stages of transformational learning seemed to require mapping knowledge about relevant theories and opportunities to use and apply theories integrated into experiences where they are asked to be participant learners, not just service providers who fix and provide resources in an exchange framework, but rather learn from and are immersed in other cultures while being asked to confront their own conviction-behavior gaps.

**Student Author Reflections**

*Shannon’s View.* I was able to have the unique experience of learning and researching transformational theories in order to help create the Transformational Development Model and training model for classes. Then I became an active participant applying these tools in the East Africa program, resulting in a personal transformational experience. I’m now preparing to lead training session about the model for this year’s East Africa participants.

Through my personal experience working with the Kibo Group and analyzing this nonprofit before entering Uganda, I was able to see these theories put to practice. By working with Kibo and engaging in their practices I was able to share aspects of mutual transformation. Throughout this experience I can say that I have been transformed through a way of thinking in studying these theories and by participating in the East Africa program.

When I first arrived in Africa, a theory by Corbett and Fikkert [*When Helping Hurts*] struck me personally as I took in my surroundings, a term called the “god complex.” As we spent time interacting with locals, learning the language, and learning the culture in class, I began to
question the culture. Why are women treated more as possessions and caretakers than people? Why are women raised to believe they are a curse? Why are men so highly respected just for being men? Why does the culture feed into corruption? Why is Christianity so different here? And so on and so on. Everything I knew to be true in my life was completely challenged by encountering this culture. It was not until I built relationships and became a participant observer while immersed in the culture that I started to discover what this culture defines as truth and what their actual problems are. This added perception of the world through a different language, set of traditions, history, faith, music, and food gave me a more holistic idea of truth and transformed my way of thinking. It was through my prior studies and hands-on experience that I was able to “map” my experiences, deep learning, spiritual growth, and reflection in order to reach a transformational state.

*Martha’s Reflections.* In the class community engagement project, Barge’s concept of mapping was most helpful with evaluating non-profits because it allows the observation of not only the problems but possible solutions. I also found that by having the ultimate goal of giving feedback to the organization [client], I was more invested in the entire process. This is because I had a sense of purpose within the project and was looking forward to analyzing an actual organization that wanted my opinion.

Beyond the classroom, it was great to experience a directed study with Dr. Walker during the summer. I find the practicality of theory to be vital, so the opportunity to implement and create a model with theoretical knowledge was right up my ally. It was an empowering experience to collaborate and take all of this information and data and create a model [PTD model] that is pertinent and useful to both individuals and organizations. While coding the participant papers, the concepts from the advanced organizational communication course were
very useful. The critical thinking techniques used during the course to look at how organizations transform were indicators I applied in my independent studies research and I also experienced my own personal transformation. Through the creation of the model, I was reminded of the experiences in my life. I tutored at-risk youth in Oxnard for a couple of years and that experience was very much like going through this transformational process. Even though the students grew up in the same neighborhood as me and went to the same high school, these kids’ realities were very different from mine. Because of these differences, I had to be constantly rethinking my definition of truth. The injustices suffered by those kids regularly made me uncomfortable, but I pushed myself to understand them more and more. In the end, I was able to connect and make a difference in their lives once I accepted them for who they were and had gained an understand and respect for their subculture. Having grown up in a diverse environment I have never felt the need to travel abroad to learn about the “other,” many times I have been the “other” so I never understand how/why people felt transformed after service trips. Reading through the papers, I realized that each person recognizes their privilege in a different way. Service trips allow students to push boundaries and experience new realities for the first time.

Summary

For East Africa program participants and student co-author participants, personal transformation experience seemed to increase their ability to use the OTD model to critique organizations. PTD stage 3 immersion seemed most relevant for recognizing transformation in organizations from a servant-learner position and a willingness and ability to look at a situation from a reflexive point of view that took into consideration personal and host culture views. The choice of key theoretical concepts from classes or training seemed to be those concepts that
overlapped with personal transformation, such as themes of relationship, partnership, and empowerment. Specifically, international program participants and student co-authors were able to engage in more reflexive and analytical assessments when they used their own experience with gaps between theory and practice and conviction and emotion to identify potential for transformation in organizations as well.

For example, many East Africa program students negatively critiqued the tactics of one particular NGO and leader because of what they perceived to be obstacles to transformation—ethnocentrism, god complex, and strategic use of exchange of material rewards such as soccer balls in the interest of evangelism even after living in Uganda for three years. Similarly, student co-authors were able to identify barriers of transformation related to their own personal experience with god complex or ego.

In turn, students’ positive assessments of NGOs based on OTD model standards was based on how well particular organizations allowed the host culture to influence it and acted as servant learners immersed in the host culture within third and fourth steps of the PTD. Specifically, program participants’ and student authors’ ability to think transformationally connected to holistic learning that linked back to examining convictions in the form of new decisions about personal calling—for the student coauthors who described a confirmation of continued graduate students that would allow them to teach/train for purposes of social justice for at-risk youth in the case of Martha and with ministry programs for Shannon.

Implications

The findings demonstrate that transformation is as much un-doing assumptions about one’s own culture as it is about learning a new culture. It is not only learning about another culture or perspective but about examining and deconstructing prior ideologies, stereotypes,
judgments, and criticisms of the host culture. It is that reflexive thinking about gaps that resulted in new frameworks and changes in positions of social action.

These examples of transformation through reframed views and changes in action relate to theories of transformational learning found in pedagogy and organization studies that could be further explored, including what systems researchers refer to as “third-loop learning” (see Bateson, 1972; Isaacs, 1988). Third loop learning (Isaacs, 1988) is a concept from organizational learning literature that refers to an individual's ability to reframe or shift from an old to a new perspective/conviction in regards to some sort of truth or reality or paradigm shift. It requires an examination of old assumptions and a recognition of the limits of the existing frame or mental model. When applied to group and organizational settings, it is used to collectively test existing frameworks and to create a new collective understanding in context with others. Third-loop learning offers a means to explain the central mechanism for transformational learning in the PTD model and students’ ability to effectively use the OTD model.

The emergent PTD concept of discomfort over gaps in attitudes and behaviors is similar to what Bateson (1972) and Isaacs (1988) describe as breaking through single-loop learning of simply making minimal and incremental changes or even double-loop alternatives to an ongoing worldview or paradigm. Patterns among the two types of discomfort emerged that seem to relate to organizational learning concepts of positive and negative feedback. Hindrance discomfort seems to be a kind of negative feedback that doesn’t help the person, group, or organization transform and grow.

Within the final two steps of the PTD model, that appear to be third-loop learning, facilitating discomfort was not only beneficial in participants’ individual learning but in ability to assess organizations. Students critiqued NGOs and their leaders who did not seek the kind of
transformation identified in the PTD model. These findings indicate that transformation in learning can be enhanced with community engagement that allows for immersion in different perspectives.

Reflected engagement occurred within the OTD model in the classroom and in Uganda. While some elements of PTD occurred in the classroom community project, it more significantly occurred for the student authors involved in engaged reflection through the directed study or peer training in the international program and more generally for several student participants in the East Africa program. Examples of transformational and third-loop learning seemed to most relate to Fink’s higher level stages of “significant learning” involving discerning their calling in the world that went beyond Barge’s mapping, engaged reflection, to transformational latter stages of human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. They also fit Jameson, Clayton and Jaeger’s (2011) latter stages of a shared developmental journey (involving deeper commitments and expectations of shifts in identities and values. Whether conducted domestically or internationally, community engagement that challenges students to examine gaps and inconsistencies between their convictions and actions in relation to their calling is recommended to develop passion and ownership for mutual, social transformation alongside members of their communities.
References


Figure 1: Personal Transformational Development Model