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Missional Education for Social Action

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Abstract

The world is in the midst of rapid change due to powerful forces such as globalization. Although these changes have led to a greater sense of interdependence and interconnectedness than ever known before and tremendous advances on many fronts, the prevalence of conflict, injustice, and environmental degradation around the globe has also heightened people's awareness of their differences and the need for all Christians to be actively engaged in God's mission. In light of these concerns, the need for a missional level of social action and intercultural competence is of critical importance. The predominant models of education alone are no longer the optimal means for addressing the emerging missiological realities of the 21st century. Missiological education at all levels needs to focus on a learning process that serves a missional purpose and will provide Christians with new experiences, in addition to new skills and knowledge, to be responsibly engaged in missional social action. This paper analyzes the degree to which the principles of experiential education theories and practices can inform and enhance missiological education. "Essential Ingredients" for a "Missional Education" (ME) are presented, providing insights for an educational praxis.

Introduction

A few years ago I attended an international conference of missiologists. This was a “working” conference. Our specific task was to address the issue of effective education for world mission in an age of globalization. From the beginning of our collaborative work it became apparent that there was a division within our group. The majority of the contributors focused their research and discussion on the *content* of missiological education, elements such as the “right” course topics and academic disciplines, particularly within formal settings such as Bible schools and theological seminaries. Only a few people were discussing the learning *process*, i.e., pedagogy. Consequently, the greater part of our discussion focused on formal educational models and the content – courses, topics, theology, etc. – necessary for missiological education in the church and school.¹ Only a few participants raised the issue of creating a pedagogy for mission to assist in fulfilling the *purpose* of missiological education, i.e., exploring the *process* by which *all* Christians can most effectively learn how to be participants in God’s global mission within their cultural, or multicultural, context.

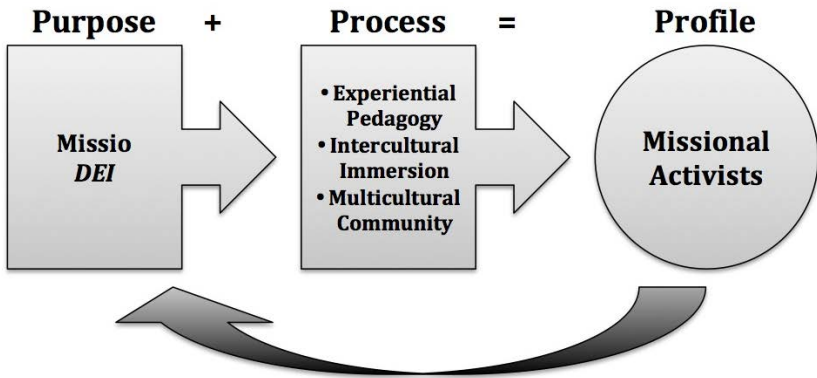
Educational experiences leading up to the conference had reinforced my thinking that the learning *process* was of equal importance as the content of the education, if not more so, in achieving the *purpose* of missiological education, which is equipping all Christian disciples for participation in God’s mission in the world. These experiences also reinforced my belief that missiological, and for that matter, theological education is not a higher level of Christian education (exclusive to academic qualifications, residency programs, and graduation into “professional” careers), but a dimension of everyone’s Christian formation, depending on their stage in life and calling.

While working at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN, I assisted in coordinating numerous short-term intercultural experiential educational programs through the Center for Global Education (CGE). All of the educational experiences occurred outside of traditional (formal) Bible school or seminary settings, instead including combinations of both formal and non-formal settings and educational processes. In many of the programs there was little or no reference to missiological literature or disciplines, yet results were

produced in the lives of many participants that I had rarely seen in my peers who attended seminary and studied missiology or other theological disciplines.

A “metamorphosis” happened with the learners during and in the weeks that followed these intercultural immersion experiences. Both “students” and “teachers” came away from these intercultural learning programs transformed. This was not evident simply in the participants’ testimonies of having “a life-changing experience.” Instead, the transformations were made evident by what happened with them *after* the program ended. Although none of the programs were explicitly missiological in their focus, these “life-changing experiences” were most profoundly expressed in an awareness of their responsibility as “global citizens” engaged in issues of social justice, the transformation of their worldviews, a greater understanding of their personal and communal vocation as participants in God’s mission in the world, and, most importantly, their *actions*. Upon further inquiry, I discovered that all of the participants connected their present actions to an awakening of their Christian faith as a result of the intercultural educational experiences.

These phenomena began to raise questions for me concerning the nature of missiological education – pedagogy, process, and vocational formation leading to action. My initial observations revealed that each of the “life-changing” educational programs had three ingredients in common: They involved (1) an experiential pedagogy that endeavored to engage the “whole” person (emotion, mind, behavior, etc.); (2) an intercultural immersion experience; and (3) a multicultural learning community (See Figure 1). Consequently, I began to ask, “Does the field of experiential education, particularly within a multicultural context, have implications for developing a missional pedagogy - actively centered on God’s mission in the world - which will lead to an awakening of the missionary vocation in Christian disciples and active participation in God’s global mission?” I think this is a critical question. The following are my insights following several years of research, particularly at the University of Northwestern (UNW), Center for Global Education (CGE), and School of Urban Ministry (SUM), toward discovering a learning *process* – a missional pedagogy – to more effectively prepare and engage Christian disciples toward fulfilling God’s mission in the world today.

Figure 1: Missional Education

A Missional Approach to Education for Social Action

For many, the teacher's primary task is to *form* people for the service of God's kingdom via a *cognitive* and *problem-oriented* approach, not *engage* people *in* it through actual missional action (Costas 1986; Woodberry, et al. 1996; Alvarez 2004). The primary "missiological contribution to theological education has been *formal teaching*, rather than *in-service instruction*" (Banks 1999:132). Missiologists have predominantly focused on the content (course topics, academic disciplines, etc.), innovations, such as distance learning, and the missiology of theological education in *preparation for future mission* rather than *reflective experience of mission*. This current approach is missiological rather than missional.

A missional approach to education is undertaken with a view of where the Holy Spirit is graciously at work from a local and global perspective. It emphasizes the essential missionary nature and vocation of the community of Jesus, the church, as God's called and sent people actively participating in God's mission. It is education that wholly, or partly, involves an intercultural immersion experience – overseas or locally – and involves a measure of doing and reflecting upon what is being studied. It is a pedagogical approach that moves from a mode of action, instead of the predominant (formal) pedagogies that move from a passive/receptive mode. In other words, a missional pedagogy finds its roots in a life-oriented faith focused on concrete actions and relationships.

Although the communities in which we live are increasingly interdependent and culturally diverse, and the need for a Christian understanding of a missional vocation for social action, what I call “missional activism” - is vital for mission. Yet scant attention has been paid by Christian educators to creating a pedagogy for the missiological challenges and opportunities created by the rapid changes from powerful forces, such as globalization. And although these changes have led to a greater sense of interdependence and interconnectedness than ever known before and tremendous advances on many fronts, the prevalence of conflict, injustice, and environmental degradation around the globe has also heightened people’s awareness of their differences. In light of these concerns, a missional level of social action and intercultural competence is of critical importance. Consequently, the need is not simply for educational innovations, better methods, or the inclusion of missiological disciplines, such as the behavioral sciences and world religions. The need is for a transformation in our concept of education: learning as reflective experience versus gathering content, a body of information; a movement toward a wholistic and practical approach, what Samuel Escobar calls a “post-Enlightenment missiology” (1996:111). The rational intellectual approach we have used for so long brings only new information and, at best, a new way of thinking. What is needed is a missional pedagogy that brings about a new way of thinking that leads us out to a new way of living. Thus, the goal of a missional approach to education needs to be the preparation of *every* Christian disciple with both the knowledge *and* experiences to *do* and to *be* missional activists and multicultural witnesses to God’s actions in the world.

Essential Ingredients that Emerge for Developing a Missional Pedagogy

Over the past several years, I have conducted research in order to investigate the degree to which the principles of intercultural communication and experiential education theories and practices can inform and enhance missiological education for assisting Christian disciples in the discovery of their personal and communal missionary vocation, and equipping and empowering them as missional and social activists participating in God’s mission to all creation in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent, and multicultural world.² Drawing from these educational principles and the discoveries

from my research, this paper introduces nine “essential ingredients” for a “Missional Education” (ME) toward the development of missional activists, i.e., Christians with global awareness, intercultural competence, and an apostolic imagination rooted in missiological values. These are strongly inter-connected principles that should guide the design and implementation of educational programs that are missional, multicultural, and experiential.

1. Integrated Learning for Personal Growth

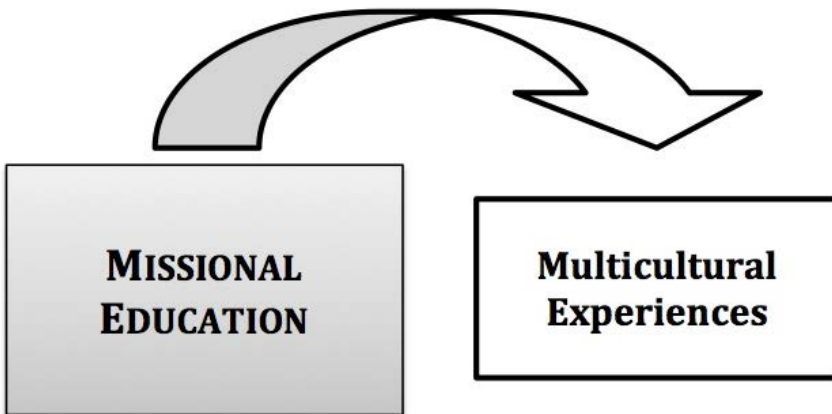
One of the core values of ME is the development of a wholistic educational framework. Thus the first key ingredient in developing ME is rooted in the suggestion by experiential pedagogies that the most effective kind of learning is “connected,” that is, coupled to an awareness of how one learns and integrated into one’s own life. Perhaps one of the most important things to be learned in ME is how to become open to a process of transformation, both within oneself and in the world. Hence, an experiential approach to missional education should be attentive to the learner’s personal growth and ability to integrate the educational experience into his or her own life (Dewey 1997; Freire 1970; Gochenour and Janeway 1993; Groome 1999; Hertig 2002; Wallace 1993).

Gordon Murray, who has directed intercultural programs in Nepal for many years, refers to this principle as the “inner side of experiential learning.” He states:

“I start with the assumption that everything the [learners] observe about Nepal is equally an observation about themselves and that every observation about themselves—their behaviors, feelings, values, likewise reflects Nepal. In this way I try to help them see their experiences not as exotic adventures but as integral parts of their lives, a chapter in their own broader evolution. I am often reinforced by the observation that when they feel good about that inner quest, they are more receptive to and involved in the outer world” (1993:27).

In this regard, missiologist Darrell Whiteman goes so far as to state that the greatest value of intercultural education “is not what we learn about exotic cultures that are different from our own, but rather, in what we discover about ourselves” (1996:137). Christian religious educator Thomas Groome refers to this process as the discovery of “self-identity,” namely, the awareness of one’s self-image, one’s worldview, and one’s value system (Groome 1999:109). This discovery of self-identity is central to the well-being of both individuals and communities. Research on learning outcomes in intercultural education suggest that learners often develop a deeper self-understanding and succeed in meeting personal challenges through living and learning in a different culture. Moreover, Christian disciples and communities of faith need a sense of identity before they can be engaged in God’s mission. Therefore, the discovery of self-identity through intercultural experiences should be embraced as one of the articulated goals of ME and incorporated into the design of a ME program (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: ME Praxis: Experience



My research on the use of experiential pedagogies within the Center for Global Education (CGE), the University of Northwestern (UNW), and School of Urban Ministry (SUM) reveals that students’ ability to connect the learning experiences to their personal lives was one of the most important learning characteristics reported. In response to a post-program question regarding the most significant experiences of a cross-cultural program, one UNW student commented:

“I think the most important thing from this semester is the reflection and the connections to me - personally. [...] I’m sure the many of us have thought about these issues before, but I think the important part of the class was connecting [it] to me. I have a better understanding of myself and my own culture and a new perspective from which to view others and cultural values. [...] My experience changed the way I look at life and my role as a Christian in the global body of Christ. It directed me down a future path I would not have explored otherwise.”

When connecting the learning to the individual, experiential educators utilize direct experience as a means to develop the whole person and present opportunities for self-discovery (Citron and Kline 2001:18-26; Gochenour and Janeway 1993:1-9). The experiential approach to intercultural education has been chosen by CGE precisely because “...the whole person is being engaged in the process and the very identity of the person may be fundamentally challenged. In other words, all aspects of the person – spiritual, mental, emotional, physical – can be affected” (McBride 2005). At the same time, the knowledge-based cognitive study in experiential education plays a supportive role by providing learners with the framework for interpreting what they see and experience. However, many educators consider the affective realm of experiential learning to be one of its most important values (Wallace 1993:11-16).

Research indicates that students learn best when they make emotional connections with the course material being studied through concrete experiences or form relationships with people who make the readings, lectures, and other formal learning methods come alive. Mark Warren calls these emotional and relational connections are “seminal experiences,” i.e., profound emotional and moral “shocks” accompanied by powerful emotions (2010:27). Seminal learning experiences often represent abrupt events or a series of events and factors, a crystallization of awareness in time, which spark a process of growing transformation and commitment (Daloz 1996:71). William Gamson calls this “hot cognition,” not just an intellectual judgment (1992:32). This is an awareness where the affected person, faced with direct experiential evidence, begins to make a real shift in challenging dominant ideologies and choosing alternative views (Warren 2010:

34). In other words, it is the integration of an emotional and cognitive experience rooted in a moral impulse, which is a critical step toward missional commitment and eventual action.

In his term paper reflecting on service-learning with World Relief Minnesota, undergraduate student Jesse Schustedt contrasts two of his own educational experiences: The first involved taking a course in Christian mission in which he learned about the plight of refugees without being changed in any significant way, while the second involved nurturing a relationship with a young refugee man his age in which his intellectual knowledge was transformed into emotional awareness, which became a seminal experience for him.

“What new insights [were] gained? Through [my friend], I was able to see a little more of what it is like to be a refugee. [...] It was not their greatest desire to move to this country. Many refugees would like to live in their home country, but they are forced to move because of terrible circumstances. [...] Many refugees carry a lot of pain and ‘baggage’ from their past. [Before] this was hard for me to imagine, even as I passed someone on the sidewalk, that they have been through a war. It was hard for me to imagine that I am walking among people who have experienced death, torture and rape because of the war going on in their home country. However... I have seen a little more of what it is like to be a refugee. I think I can empathize and should be sensitive to peoples’ experiences. [...] Many times God calls us to do things that do not make us feel comfortable. This project [was] a great learning experience.” (2006:1-2).

In addition to the affective nature of experiential learning, which helps connect it to the personal life of the learner, ME ought to involve some kind of personal challenge that supersedes the outcomes demonstrated in typical papers, reports, or exams. In fact, research suggests that the more intense and less routine the intercultural educational experience, the greater the impact toward personal integration and growth (Chickering 1997; Peterson 2002; Steinberg 2002; Hull 2004). In his essay “Educational Values of Experiential Education,” John Wallace suggests that the outcomes of such challenges include

“...an increased self-confidence, a deeper awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and a heightened knowledge of effective approaches to other human beings - all of which come from having functioned successfully in a strange environment and under a different set of ground rules from those found in one’s own culture” (1993:13).

This also has significant implications for spiritual growth. In his extensive research with short-term mission teams, John Hull discovered that spiritual growth can occur when people are separated from their normal life through cross-cultural immersion and community interaction. “Individuals are in an environment where they find themselves stripped of status, property, rank, role, or anything that may distinguish them and define their identity” (2004:133). This is a process of transformation called a “Faith-Centered Liminal Interaction” that serves to deepen faith and encourage growth (2004:22). This transformation is not simply cognitive understanding; it is all encompassing. It is personal and intimate. It is relational and wholistic. “It is a dynamic that reaches into every aspect of our lives” (2004:70, 72). For as learners move beyond their “comfort zones,” they are open to a process of discovery and absorbing new knowledge and experiences that will be the basis for their new identity and role in life as responsible missional activists. Such experiences, as well as empowering students to share in the responsibility of their own educational process assists them in integrating learning into their own lives and, thereby, more effectively opens them up to the process of transformation leading to personal growth.

2. Problem-Posing Content

A second essential ingredient for ME is directly connected to the first ingredient: The content of the curriculum should relate to real-life problems. Learning takes root and becomes transformative when it is situated in the real-life issues and felt needs of both the learner and the community. Dewey asserts that “problems are the stimulus to thinking” (1997:79). In addition, the student evaluations in my research confirmed that more formal educational materials can be made real through direct experience so that students can develop and test theories based upon their personal experiences.

Experiential educators propose replacing “banking education,” in which students are seen as empty accounts into which knowledge is deposited by an “expert,” with “problem-posing education,” defined by Freire as “the posing of the problems of [human beings] in their relations with the world” (1970:66, 168). This type of problem-posing education, which is also referred to as “problematizing,” does not just mean “problem-solving,” but rather “critical analysis of a problematic reality.” For example, when a class in a particular community problematizes a livability issue such as the lack of affordable housing that is affecting local residents, the discussion focuses not only on an immediate solution to the problem but also on analyzing the root causes of the problem and exploring a myriad of potential solutions. For example, in the context of ME, the UNW Intercultural Communication class in my research, addressed a conflict a student team encountered with their World Relief host family. However, reflection upon the conflict included an analysis of the broader intercultural context and underlying differences in values, gender roles, communication styles, and behaviors in which the conflict emerged.

In a program which frames course content in terms of problems, the experiential educator needs to first investigate the concerns and “felt needs” of the learners—what Freire terms the “people’s ‘thematic universe’ - the complex of their ‘generative themes’ ” - that is, the principal themes which preoccupy them (1970:86). These generative themes then become the starting point for critical analysis and dialogue which relates to the overall subject being studied and a greater potential for transformation leading to missional activism.

For example, students in the UNW program expressed a growing awareness of racism within the greater community and their own personal prejudices as they assisted refugee and immigrant families through their service-learning with World Relief Minnesota. For nearly all of the students, this was their first exposure to explicit personal and structural racism. Although they understood the concept of individual prejudice, they were not aware of, and thus not equipped to deal with, the complexities of prejudice enforced through power – both on the individual level and (especially) at the institutional level. Many of the students were both troubled and frustrated by the racism they witnessed, particularly among Christians. Seminal experiences of racism through the real life experiences of refugee and immigrant families created “moral shocks” and moments of “hot cognition.” Likewise, racism became a perceived problem or “generative theme”

that was embraced as a starting point for discussion. Selected reading materials, a documentary, personal stories from international and immigrant students (their own peers), and a guest speaker who could address issues of racism and biblical reconciliation from his own cultural perspective as an African American inner-city minister, were included in the course.

The challenge for the educator is to make the links between the students' concerns and the course material. This may require additional work on the part of the missional experiential educator, whose task, according to Dewey, is "to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (1997:27-28). However, by beginning with the problems and felt needs about which students are already troubled, the instructor can emotionally engage the students in the topic and use the students' experiences in the community as a point of departure for analysis and reflection.

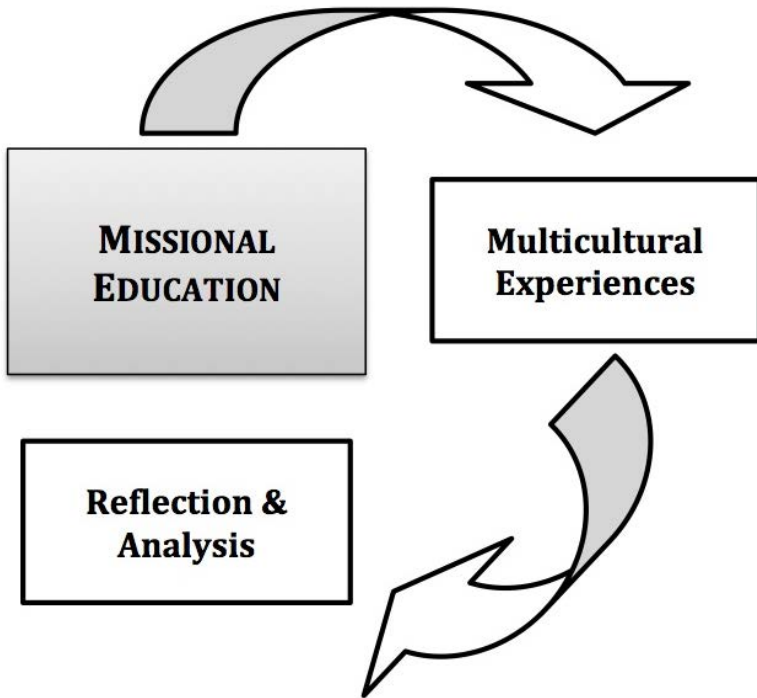
Because problem-posing education starts with problems identified by the learners, it involves the whole student on both the affective and cognitive level, engaging the student in the learning process by connecting the subject matter to the life of the student. Hence, Ira Shor asserts, "Through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions. In this pedagogy, students experience education as something they *do*, not as something done to them" (1993:26).

Although problem-posing education begins with the generative themes of the students, it must not end there when leading toward missional activism. Rather, if two of the goals of missional education are to stimulate multicultural thinking and awareness for social action, then it must broaden students' horizons by helping them to identify the problems and concerns of others within the "glocal" community. Dewey states that a system of education based upon the connections of education with experience must, to be faithful to its principle, take into account the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources (1938:40). This is particularly true in the multicultural and cross-cultural context, as local conditions pose new problems for students to analyze while providing different cultural perspectives on the nature of and potential solutions to such problems.

3. Reflection and Critical Analysis

As noted earlier, ME *requires* reflection and critical analysis of experiences in order to make the experiences educational (Freire 1970; Banks 1999; Groome 1999; Silcox 1993; Mintz and Hesser 1996; Welch 1999; Hull 2004). In other words, we do not learn from experience alone, rather we learn from actively reflecting on experience. (See Figure 3.) The necessity of this ingredient was reinforced upon analysis of the post-program evaluations and students' reflections on the learning experiences within the programs of this study. Furthermore, it becomes self-evident in problem-based education because it is impossible to solve a problem without first analyzing and understanding the nature of the problem. The initial analysis leads to the development of a thesis that must be tested, in other words, to some kind of *action*, which then requires further analysis and reflection as it is reflection that enables learners to make sense out of the new information and experiences (Silcox 1993). Dewey writes: "To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and a disciplined mind" (1997:87).

While it is clear that critical analysis and reflection are essential ingredients and, in fact, defining characteristics of experiential education, it is not enough to simply ask students who participate in ME programs to engage in critical analysis and reflection on their own. Rather, this is something they must engage in with others. By engaging in this process together, learners are often "pushed" by other group members to ask deeper-level questions, confront their own personal prejudices, and consider other insights and interpretations from one another's experiences. They also lose a sense of isolation as they reflect together and encourage one another. Consequently, students develop a growing sense of community.

Figure 3: ME Praxis: Reflection and Analysis

While this process of reflection and critical analysis is an essential ingredient for ME, in several respects it needs strengthening. For instance, a more objective criterion than simply reflection on personal experiences is required. Alongside reflection on one's personal situation, other critical questions must be considered. In order to accomplish the goal of empowering and educating learners to become missional activists, and thereby effective cross-cultural witnesses, it is also appropriate for critical analysis and reflection within ME programs to include social analysis that problematizes questions about the economic, political, cultural, and religious or ideological aspects of the society (Holland and Henroit 1983). For example, what is the dominant economic model? What are the relations of production and distribution? How is the government organized? What is the role of the military? How are education, health-care, and other social services organized and provided? What is the nature of the media? What are the principal centers of power and community institutions, including local churches? What constraints does the present cultural, sociological, or ecological context place on one's actions? What are the dominant cultural groups? What are the concrete rule and roles that should be followed? When problems are being studied, whose voices

are heard? And whose voices are excluded? The latter questions are particularly important, as critical pedagogies highlight the fact that particular ways of knowing and sources of knowledge that come from socially marginalized positions, such as women, indigenous peoples, cultural and racial minorities, and poor people, are often invalidated (Evans et al. 1986; Freire 1970; Giroux 1996; Gore 1993; Holland and Henroit 1983; Lee 1995; McLaren and Leonard 1993; Segunado 1976; Shor 1987, 1992, 1993). Educators should then encourage and guide learners to consider the nature and consequences of their own behaviors, and their subsequent feelings and emotions in relation to the social analysis and emergent questions.

After these important questions have been asked and a solid understanding of the situation has begun to take shape, biblical and missiological reflection must be integrated into the process (Hull 2004). In ME, critical analysis in conjunction with biblical and theological reflection within the context of ongoing mission in the world is vitally important toward the nurture of missional activists. The work of the Uruguayan Jesuit Juan Luis Segundo provides some valuable insights into the importance of this critical praxis of reflection in ME. Serving at the grassroots level with “Base Christian Communities” in working for social change, Segundo based his work on the praxis of Freire in developing a method of doing “liberating theology.” He calls this method of biblical and theological reflection the hermeneutic circle - “the continuing change in our interpretations of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal” (1976:8).

This method of theology begins with ideological suspicion: “Anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way” (1976:8). In other words, culture and lived experience always influences the way people think and must be taken into account when doing theology, reflecting, or analyzing. *All* theology is contextual. Therefore in Segundo’s process, liberation theology consciously tries to combine the disciplines that open up the past (such as biblical and historical studies) with the disciplines that help to explain the present (such as sociology and anthropology). The circular nature of his methodology stems from the fact that “each new reality obliges us to interpret the Word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the Word of

God again, and so on” (1976:8). This is doing theology by praxis, i.e., reflecting on the Word of God amidst the ongoing process of action and reflection.

Segundo’s methodology and hermeneutic is significant to the task of developing a missional pedagogy because it takes seriously the understanding of current reality in order to transform it and bring about a more just order manifest in the reign/kingdom of God. Both Freire and Segundo make clear that there is no such thing as purely “objective” understanding of reality; one’s worldview - the filters through which experience is interpreted - inevitably color the way reality is seen. Teachers and students alike are prisoners of their own worldviews and cultural backgrounds. And because the worldview perspectives of the politically, economically, and culturally powerful are too often considered “objective reality,” liberation theology tries to understand “reality” from the perspective of the oppressed by allowing them to be interpreters of their own experiences. A liberating theology allows the experience of the marginalized, silenced, or “invisible” communities (such as the poor, indigenous peoples, women, people of color, and children) to be taken seriously in doing theological reflection and biblical studies. It does not deny the experience of those who have traditionally held power, but says that theirs is not the *only* experience, and therefore consciously tries to do theology “from the underside,” from the perspective of the traditionally excluded and marginalized.

In the UNW and CGE programs, where biblical and missiological reflection incorporating Segundo’s hermeneutic circle was integral to the process of critical analysis, students stated (during class discussions and in final evaluations) that such guided reflection sessions were among the most significant learning experiences.³ The sessions were especially “helpful in showing different interpretations to questions and situations encountered.” They provided “a better understanding of my own cultural lens in interpreting Scripture” and “a new perspective from which to see others and how cultural values influence [the] interpretation of Scripture.” Several students stated that interactions with people of other cultures, and “hands-on experiences and biblical reflection challenged [their] thinking” and “serve[d] its purpose in broadening [their] understanding of the Bible and learning from Christians of other cultures.” Others found their “worldview being challenged” as they began to learn the cultural “lenses” of Jesus and the biblical writers, and, consequently, “reflect

on the meaning of Scripture from a different cultural perspective.” The value and necessity of an integrated approach to critical analysis and reflection for ME was succinctly stated by one student who noted that the cultural immersion coupled with biblical reflection served “as a catalyst... for a new understanding of global mission and the role of the entire Christian community in the struggle for global justice.”⁴

Kathy McBride, CGE Central America Director, shares Freire’s perceptions regarding the empowering nature of critical analysis and reflection. She states:

“As students come to recognize that certain features of their ‘reality’ – their worldview - is not ‘natural’ but is socially and historically constructed, they can act on these to change them. In this process they learn more about these structures and about themselves within them” (2005).

Clark Smith, a participant in a CGE travel seminar to Nicaragua concerning issues of fair trade initiatives and community development with Lutheran World Relief and Equal Exchange, illustrates the enlightening and empowering nature of this praxis of facilitated group reflection and analysis. While staying with a family in a small village in the mountains of Nicaragua he shared:

“Then it hit me that while the gracious people of La Reyna carry 100-pound bag after 100-pound bag of coffee cherries on their backs down these steep mountain paths, we carry the responsibility of valuing their labor and their coffee at a handful of nickels and dimes. For coffee sold on the ‘open’ market, small farmers, especially the many who are not part of a cooperative, often receive less than the cost of planting, let alone what they need to support their families. We are the ones, through consuming and accepting the market price as ‘fair,’ who dangerously undervalue the hard, hard work of the farmers in La Reyna” (CGE 2006:1)

If this process of reflection and critical analysis appears to be too one-sidedly cognitive, one should remember that the process of considering the ethical and missional questions mentioned

above has its counterpart at the level of personal integration and growth. Experiences, followed by intense reflection and analysis, allow participants to process their emotions in a way that lectures cannot. There is a depth and emotion that often surfaces as a result of experiential learning, which then becomes a powerful catalyst for reflection and application to real life. In the insightful words of one teacher, "...classroom knowledge without an experiential foundation does little to create a spiritually based (non-dogmatic liberating spirit) activism intended to alter unjust structures that are the root cause of human conflict and suffering."⁵ And as the following ingredients of ME will reveal, this revelation is significant because it is vitally important that students "act out," not just "learn from," the educational process. In this way, educators are not only *preparing* Christian disciples for missional social action but also *inserting* them into it. This is why ME is truly learning by "praxis."

4. Cooperative Learning

The wise teacher of Ecclesiastes said that two are better than one... and three better still (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12). Thus cooperative learning is the heart of problem-posing learning. As evident in the previous section on reflection and critical analysis, experiential educators believe that collaboration and dialogue within community are essential ingredients to authentic reflection and critical analysis in problem-posing education, for individuals are rarely if ever capable of perceiving all angles of a problem or grasping all aspects of an issue alone (Dewey 1997; Freire 1970; Holland and Henroit 1983; Hooks 1994). Reflection and critical analysis involve a collective process that helps learners move beyond their own perspectives to new understandings created through dialogue with others, and hence, cannot be carried out exclusively by individuals alone.

Dialogue, defined by Freire as "the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world," is not a new phenomenon (1970:64). Rather, it has played an important role in education since the time of Socrates, who began with his students' starting point and then asked questions, engaging them in the art of discourse. In the same way, Jesus, the "rabbi," often began with his disciples' (students') starting point for asking questions: "Who do

people say that I am? [...] Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13-20.) Similarly, Jesus often began with the listener's own questions to engage them in a dialogical learning process:

"A certain ruler asked Jesus a question. 'Good teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?' Jesus answered... 'You know what the commandments say.' [...] 'I have obeyed all of the commandments since I was a boy,' the ruler replied. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You are still missing one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to those who are poor so you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.' When the ruler heard this he became very sad for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for rich people to enter God's kingdom...'" (Luke 18:18-24).

As illustrated in Jesus' teaching conversations, dialogue, at times, has the potential to lead to conflict. However, healthy conflict can occur when individuals cooperate, allowing conflict to create "cognitive disequilibrium, which in turn stimulates perspective-taking ability and cognitive development" (Johnson 1998:29).

Within the context of ME, which seeks to promote an understanding of God's mission in a multicultural world, cooperative learning, dialogue, and constructive conflict cannot be restricted only to the community of learners themselves but must involve diverse members of the community, as people from the local community are the true experts regarding their own lives and culture. Hence, collaborative learning in the multicultural context should mean the inclusion of diverse members of the host community—including people with opposing or conflicting viewpoints—in both the definition of problems that serve as the core of the learning and in the critical analysis of such problems.

Religious educator, Thomas Groome, points out the dialectical dynamics embedded in the "controversy theory." Such a learning process involves a conversation, a dialectical relationship between the learner and the social context. In such a relationship between a learner and the social environment, the learner "accepts and affirms some of the social influence and refuses and rejects some," and from this comes a movement beyond the limitations of the learner's worldview (Groome

1999:113). When learners encounter opposing worldviews through discussion and critical analysis, they have the potential to discover new truth, even as their identity is challenged, thus moving beyond the limitations of their cultural and religious socialization. A “shared praxis” opens Christian disciples up to new truth, which in turn opens them up to new patterns of living and cooperation. In this way, truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in dialogue between “knowns” and “knowers” who are understood as independent but accountable selves (Palmer 1983:55-56). This dialectic relationship “promotes both the autonomy of the individual and the restructuring of society” (Groome 1999:115). It saves personal truth from subjectivism, for a relationship of genuine collaboration and dialogue is possible only as an integrity in the other is acknowledged that cannot be reduced simply to individual perceptions and needs (Palmer 1983:55-56). And when this relationship is properly promoted and facilitated, it is one of creative tension rather than opposition between two protagonists.

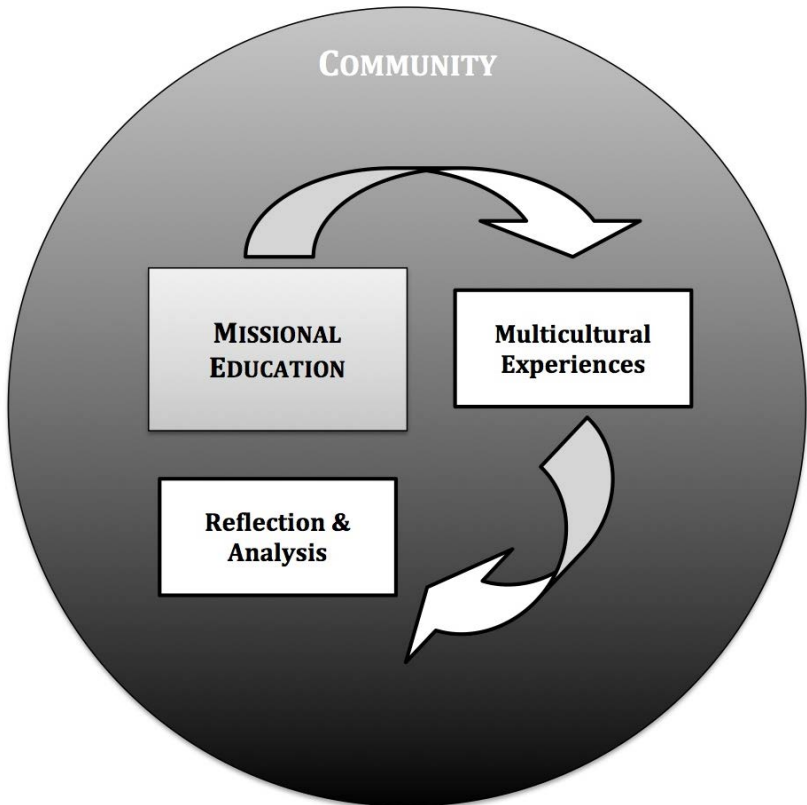
This process of collaboration, dialogue, and cooperative learning are especially important for building Christian community across cultures and mutual partnerships in missional social action. Because the Christian faith each person possesses and practices has been profoundly shaped by his or her sociocultural situation, ME needs the context of the entire global Christian community in order to more fully understand the dimensions of God’s character, become the community of Christ, and understand and participate effectively together in God’s mission. This is why listening within community and to other communities is so vital to ME praxis. Listening as part of learning provides a diversity of perspectives, interests, insights, concerns, questions, and ideas. Listening as part of community also offers each person a mirror on himself or herself and enhances the possibility of reflection (Saengwichai 1998:242). And learning as part of a community furnishes spiritual, emotional and intellectual support as we struggle through the process of self-discovery, transformation, and mutual participation in God’s mission.

Our individual Christian life is always related to the lives of others in community because the Christian life is relational. Christianity is life together. And in a very real sense, we “become Christian together” (Groome 1999:126). “Only in community does a person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become (Palmer 1983:57). For in a learning community we come to know ourselves as we are known by God (Kang 2004b:166).

“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ” (Bonheoffer 1954:21). As best expressed in an African phrase, “I am” is always also “because we are” (Lee 1995:8; Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter 2003:80). Thus our ability to struggle through controversy, resolve conflict, learn cooperatively, and work together, thus preserving our unity in Christ, is directly related to people’s coming into a relationship with God (Elmer 1993:27). The Church’s owned lived experience indicates that becoming Christian requires an educational process within a community capable of listening and learning together, working constructively through conflict, and “lift[ing] human life above its present standards and attainments” (Elliot 1953:219). For this reason, ME is profoundly aware of the need to continually listen and learn in openness to God’s Spirit and the world for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, “both education and religion leave individuals as good or as bad as the present level of society” (1953:225). In this way our relationships, our living, learning, loving, and working together affect God’s mission. Only a community practicing dialogue and cooperation in the pursuit of learning and understanding is ready to actively engage in God’s mission. In this context, then, ongoing dialogue and cooperation is nothing less than the gracious gift of God through the work of the Spirit within community.

5. Community

Since we have established that collaboration and dialogue are essential to ME, it follows naturally that community is also a key ingredient in developing ME since dialogue and collaboration are by definition collective and imply the existence of others. Education for participation in God’s mission in the world includes the formation of communities of learners, immersion in the local community and in partnership with the local Christian community, as well as reflection upon one’s connections to the global community. (See Figure 4) In ME, the formative power of the social-cultural context, particularly within Christian community, is foundational for Christian formation (Groome 1999:107; Kang 2004a:100).

Figure 4: ME Praxis: Community

First of all, as students reflect upon experiences prior to a ME program, it is important for them to recognize that much of what they have learned in life up to now has been profoundly shaped by the particular contexts and communities in which they have lived. Their self-identity has been shaped in large part by their social and cultural context, including their Christian social context, which has been significant in the process of coming to Christian self-identity (Groome 1999:108). Moreover, the Christian faith community itself has been systematically shaped by the same factors that shaped each person, as well as by the people themselves. For this reason, students are encouraged to reflect upon the communities from which they come and the ways in which these communities have been shaped, and simultaneously shaped their own values and perceptions of the world. Sparrow writes: “Self-awareness is crucial to intercultural learning. Our predispositions, expectations, and reactions affect our

perceptions. Our perceptions affect our judgments, how we solve problems and make decisions, and ultimately how we are perceived and trusted by others” (1993:155).

Secondly, since teachers and teaching are central to ME, special attention must be given to what a missional praxis means for teachers and teaching. In ME, missional experiential educators must strive to build a community of learners among the students who are learning together. This is consistent with both theological and feminist pedagogies that see learning communities as vital to transformative education (Conde-Frazier 2004; Groome 1999; Hooks 1994; Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter 2003). In these learning communities, education is learner-centered, not teacher-centered, and the teachers work to create an environment in which instructors and students work together as “co-learners” or “co-investigators in dialogue” (Freire 1970:68; McBride 2005). In other words, this relationship between teacher and students is based upon “cognitive equality” – the idea that all people involved in the educational process are participants of social conversations; “differences in expertise and experience have to do with time, location, dedication, and method.” Teachers and students are partners in the educational process (HECUA 2006).

Missiological educators, Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter, call this approach “incarnational teaching.” This is a model of engagement in which the teacher is willing to give up aspects of the teacher role, particularly that which fits his or her cultural background, and to take on a new “incarnational” role (2003:83). In this role, Jesus sets for us an example of engagement. And it is precisely here that divine wisdom is most fully revealed. Jesus’ focus was on establishing relationships, as an insider. This incarnational model of teaching was evident in his teaching and learning relationships with his disciples, the people he encountered in his ministry, and the Pharisees - a group of “teachers” from which he was excluded. Jesus accepted invitations to eat with them and to engage them in dialogue on issues of life and faith. He respected people, allowing them to share their stories and perspectives while at the same time challenging them in areas where their behavior was in contradiction to their expressed values and God’s “kingdom values.” Jesus often did this simply by asking questions or encouraging people to reflect on the very questions they had asked him (2003:84).

Jesus also modeled this incarnational approach by telling his disciples, “I no longer call you servants, but friends” (John 15:14). Perhaps, no teacher can be a true teacher unless to some degree the teacher becomes a friend (Nouwen 1971:11). In this way, Jesus became the real teacher because the fear of the teacher as judge was overcome, allowing the real learning to begin (1971:12).

Finally, the culmination of Jesus’ teaching in and through the cross reminds us that transformation that leads to missional action comes primarily through self-sacrifice on the world’s behalf. Ideas, no matter how profound or persuasive, are not enough: it is only in lives that embody and on occasion risk all for the truth that this happens (Banks 1999:172). Jesus did not have an impact on people’s lives simply because he was a good teacher, but only as he poured out his life for them.

The Apostle Paul illustrates from his own life, and thereby reminds us all, of the immense importance of being incarnational for the purpose of missional ministry.

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became like on who is under the law, even though I myself am not under the law. That was to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law... so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that in all possible ways I might save some. I do this all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

Reflecting on the immeasurably powerful example of Jesus and Paul, the Lingenfelters go so far as to state that the most important element in missional education for the “incarnational teacher” is “to recognize that as teachers we need to be learners” (2003:84). ME for missional action is a mutual learning process for both teacher and students. “They are fellow pilgrims in a journey of discovery and intentional practice of God’s kingdom in this world” (Kang 2004b:155). One way teachers model an incarnational approach is in trust-building behavior, i.e., by sharing their own experiences with students in such a way that their experiences are not seen as superior to but rather equal in value to those of the students. In this way, the incarnational

teacher creates a learning environment where students feel safe to be stretched beyond their previous experiences. Henri Nouwen calls this process the “redemptive model” of teaching (1971:10). A central characteristic of a redemptive teaching relationship is that it is “bilateral.” By this Nouwen means that the student not only learns from the teacher but, conversely, the teacher has to learn from the student (1971:12). Education is never a redemptive process until such time as the teacher is willing to become a student and allow the student to become a teacher.

This “incarnational” or “bilateral” process of teaching is essentially an open-ended process. Discussion, then, is no longer a means of getting a well-prepared opinion across students, but “an exchange of experiences and ideas whose outcome is not determined” (1971:12). In this way, discussion creates the possibility for discovery of new perspectives and insights. “When teacher and students are willing to be influenced by each other, learning can become a creative process that can hardly be boring or tiring. It is only through a relationship of this sort that learning can take place” (1971:13).

In a post-program evaluation for the UNW course on intercultural communication, a student noted that one of “the most significant learning experiences” was the professor sharing his own “cross-cultural mistakes” and “valuing the [intercultural] experiences of others,” which “helped the class feel free to open up and share.” Groome affirms the importance of the teacher’s attitude in creating a healthy learning environment for ME.

“The educator’s underlying attitude is perhaps the most crucial variable in shaping the activity of Christian religious education. The teacher’s attitude shapes, in large part, the teacher’s way of being with students, and ultimately education is a way of being with people. [...] If Christian religious education is to lead people out in response to the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ toward lived Christian faith and human freedom, then our most appropriate underlying attitude is to see ourselves as brother or sister pilgrims in time *with* our students” (Groome 1999:137).

In the same vein, in order for missional experiential educators to create the conditions for critical analysis and reflection, they must also devote time and energy to developing a healthy learning community. One of the goals of the incarnational teacher is to create a learning community and context that is familiar to students yet stretches them beyond their previous experiences. This is especially critical in a multicultural learning community. Central to this task is a respect for diversity and a sense of trust that one will not be verbally or physically assaulted for expressing a different point of view. Without this respect and trust, cooperative learning, controversy-based learning, and critical analysis and dialogue are impossible, because as Freire says, “trust is basic to dialogue” (1970:169). A UNW student affirmed the importance of the teacher nurturing a learning community with respect and trust when reflecting on a difficult and emotional discussion regarding racism.

“[Our professor’s] attitude encouraged listening... showing sincere interest in different points of view and being patient... even as emotions were expressed. [He] encouraged us to listen to the international and minority students in our class – to hear their stories of racism, what they experience every day. There could have been a lot of conflict in class, but [his] attitude created an atmosphere in the class where we could be vulnerable... and it was okay. I’ve been in a lot of programs and workshops on racism lately. Emotions always flare up and things get really negative... people just shut down... but this [class] was the best. We could be vulnerable because we learned to really listen to each other...and empathize” (Kraus 2006).

It is crucial that students are assisted in building a learning community from the start of the multicultural experience by getting students to reflect upon the communities from which they come and choosing orientation exercises that begin building respect and trust between students. As time progresses, it is important for teachers to help students address issues of power, privilege, and diversity within the group, particularly if some voices seem to dominate over others. This is crucial if a learning community is to exist in which there is a sense of equality. In the end, when careful attention is paid to nurturing a multicultural learning community, the educational experience will be enhanced from *within* the learning community.

Likewise, it is important that learning communities be immersed within the local host community. (See Figure 4) This serves to further the goal of learning from and within the local community because if students were to remain isolated in “island” communities of their peers, then their learning would be incomplete and they would fail to meet this goal of ME. As stated earlier, students must engage in dialogue with local people in the host community regarding the content of their education in such a way that their education is truly community-based. In doing so students have direct encounters with different family structures, work environments, social attitudes and values, gender relationships, organizational structures, moral norms, and many other patterns of behavior, communication, and organization. The community then becomes the classroom, and people within neighborhoods, churches, and local organizations become the primary teachers, as students engage in problem-based learning within the local community. And this process of dialogue for partnership is vital for both the effectiveness of the learning experience and the health of the host community.

Finally, the importance of community as an ingredient in ME becomes even more evident when considering why the pedagogy takes root in some learners and not in others. In fact, community is the indispensable ingredient *following* a missional education experience. Former UNW and CGE students all testified to the necessity of community in taking the new discoveries and energy from their learning experiences and putting them into action.⁶ This is true essentially for two reasons: accountability and partnership.

First, because, as Bonhoeffer said, “we belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ” (1954:21), community creates a structure of accountability whereby students are held to the expressed discovery of their vocation as missional activists, and the resultant promises made to God and one another. In other words, “we need each other because of Jesus Christ” (1954:21). As ME moves learners from reflection to action, community is needed to hold learners accountable to the critical movement in the learning process: active participation in God’s mission. Action is what brings the learning process “full circle” and moves students to the next cycle of learning. As one participant of several CGE short-term programs stated:

“I discovered I needed others to make the learning experience ‘stick.’ [After other CGE travel seminars] God had opened my eyes, but the promises I made never turned into real action.... But this time [the class] promised to hold each other accountable. [...] We need each other to remind us of our promise to God and one another.”⁷

Second, students not only need community for accountability, but also for partnership in fulfilling the vocational task to which they have been called. One’s missional vocation can never be fulfilled alone. Again, Bonhoeffer reminds us that, “a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ” (1954:21). And one only comes to Jesus Christ through community (Hunter 2003:54-55). God’s mission in the world is never done alone, but always in partnership with other members of the Christian community. And those partnerships are what sustain missional activists.

A former student who serves as an inner-city minister in Minneapolis shared that the only reason he has been able to continue in urban mission is because he has partners in ministry to help sustain him. “I have a circle of brothers and sisters that share a common passion... creating energy to sustain me in urban ministry. They are my partners in ministry... strength when I want to ‘throw in the towel.’ [...] I would have quit if I had to do this alone.” Another student said she discovered, “Community enlarges our capacity to be a Christian. We need each other to be the person and community that God intends us to be.... Even as we struggle together... our hope is contagious.”

The power of Christian community, community that learns together, discovers missional vocation together, and serves together as missional social activists was very real for one former CGE student:

“Luckily... I was surrounded by a network of people who were able to aid me in my growing process. The group was such an essential part of the experience, as each person had unique personal histories and goals from which to view and sort out all we learned during our travels.... Of course, there are problems that arise from being in a group, but overall these men and women provided me with inspiration, intellectual ideas, and hope in making our world a more just and

sustainable place. [...] However, an equally powerful experience was coming together [after the program] with people from my previous travel/study groups. [...] Coming together from places so far away to take part in things that manifested what we learned on our trips was an experience too great for words.... All of the [former CGE participants] reminded me of the fight for justice that we are struggling with, but also that we have each other to share these struggles with on our journeys” (Falbo 2005:6).

ME that includes full participation of the people in the learning community is the beginning of the process of community organization for social action. (Hertig 2002:63).⁸ When students change by becoming less passive and more the primary actors in their own learning and personal growth, learning becomes community empowerment for participation in God’s mission. Moreover, learning from and within the context of community involves and deepens our understanding of God’s missional activity in the world, enhances awareness of one’s own culture and other cultures, raises issues that require serious reflection, nurtures partnerships for missional ministry, and sustains us in obediently fulfilling the promises we have made to God and one another to be missional activists in the kingdom of God.

6. Transformation in Missional Action

One of the goals of ME is teaching students how to learn so that future reflection and analysis on experiences will lead to continual growth and missional action. Consequently, ME places greater emphasis on action than most other educational models, even those using the language of praxis. Therefore, it is critical to understand that praxis in ME refers not simply to actions but to the reflection that lies behind and within actions. Too often praxis is simply a synonym for action rather than for reflection on life oriented towards and involved in missional action. For ME, the “praxis of God” is the primary text for learning. To understand what God is presently doing in the world we must bring the biblical narrative into dialogue with our situation, for Scripture tells the story of God’s “missional activism” in the world. Moreover, if a core missiological value of ME is to actively engage the Christian community in God’s mission in the world, thus equipping

Christian disciples to become responsible missional activists and multicultural thinkers, we must more fully explore the praxis of “reflection-in-action” in experiential pedagogies.

As previously noted, intercultural and experiential education share common goals with ME of increasing students’ global awareness and intercultural competence, thereby empowering them to become missional activists. Most international experiential educators share the sentiment of CGE Central America Director Kathy McBride, who states, “In CGE programs we seek to influence students in the direction of becoming committed agents of change” (2005). This is a natural expectation because critical analysis and reflection, which plays a central role in experiential education, leads to “conscientization”—

“...an awakening of the conscience, a shift in mentality involving an accurate, realistic assessment of one’s locus in nature and society, a capacity to analyze the causes and consequences of that, the ability to compare it with other possibilities, and finally a disposition to act in order to change the received situation” (Boston 1973:28).

Experiential education is grounded in action and leads to new action after critical analysis and reflection. In fact, education has not really taken place unless it shapes commitment that leads to action (McBride 2005). Freire writes that “reflection—true reflection – leads to action...” because “thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world” (1970:52, 64). When education is centered on problems that require solving, it is natural for learners to want to take action. Freire’s problem-posing strategy empowers students to either accept their life situation, or challenge and change it. This is evident in the following journal entry written by a CGE student of a seminal experience in Central America:

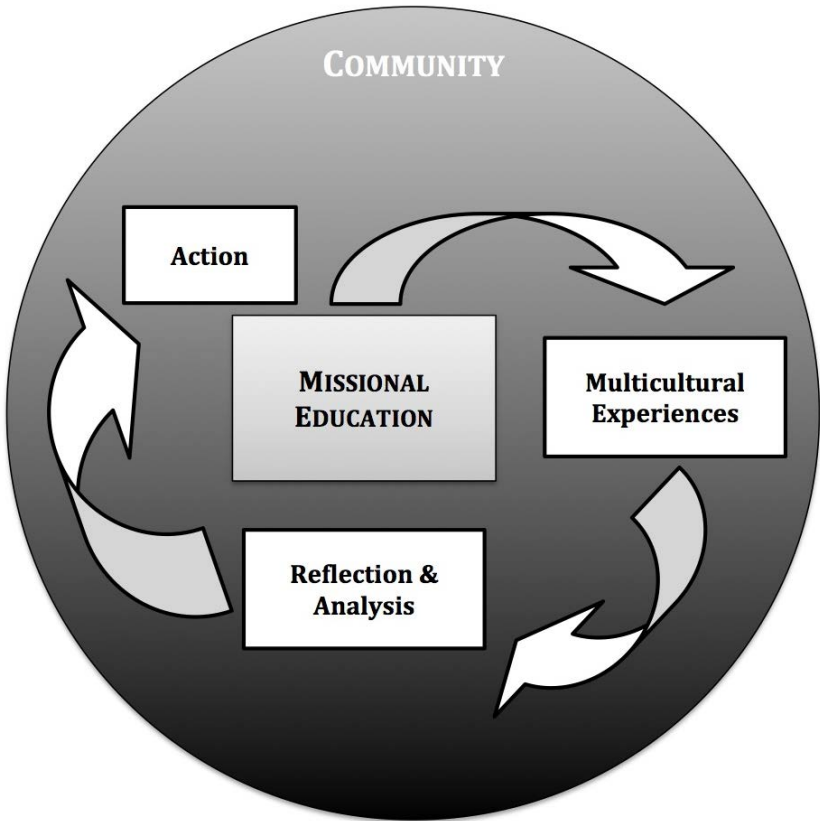
“In some ways I feel like my experience here in El Salvador was an awakening, but in other ways I feel like I have just been given an enormous amount of responsibility. [...] If anything, this trip has given me something to dream for. I’m not sure if it’s for peace, utopia, the kingdom of God on earth, or the fall of globalization. But what I do know is that it’s a good dream. A dream that calls for me to act with

everything I've been given in this life and shine it bright for everyone else to see. I can't exactly say what the change will be, but 'a new world is possible' if we all decide to do something about it. Poco a poco" (Jungerberg 2002).

And herein lies the power of experiential education: having learners reflect on experiences and through that reflection make decisions about changing their thinking *and* behavior. Changes in thinking and behavior requires learners to "create new forms, new methods, new structures; and it requires them to find new content, new ideas, new truths, and new meaning to bear on the new challenges" (McLaren 2004:192). From a missional perspective, this means coming to awareness that Jesus' call to the Kingdom of God is a call to transformation from one way of life to another. And such an awareness leading to transformation only takes place as a learning community and its individuals open themselves to the Holy Spirit; for in community learners are joining together to help one another experience transformation.

Missiologist Robert Tuttle, Jr. states that to grow in Christian faith and life is to be open to the "converting work of the Holy Spirit that takes place through faith and trust in Jesus Christ." This means that our Christian life will be a series of conversions because "we remember then forget, remember then forget, but we mostly forget..." what we have learned about God's work in our lives and the world. This is why we need community. Community helps us to remember God's narrative in our lives and the lives of the community past and present. This is how we open ourselves up to the experience of being "converted again and again."

As the learning community prayerfully reflects upon and analyzes problem-based content together with the members of the greater community in the multicultural setting, engaging in dialogue, and collaborating with them, learners can become empowered and, in turn, develop the skills they need in order to take action that makes a difference in God's world. (See Figure 5.) This is because some of the skills needed for mission are precisely an awareness of cultural differences, the ability to listen to others, to engage in respectful and vulnerable dialogue, to analyze problems critically from multiple angles and perspectives, and to foster reciprocal partnerships within the community (Whiteman 1996:138).

Figure 5: ME Praxis: Action

ME can also expose students to diverse cultural understandings of mission and responsible missional activism, as well as to diverse cultural approaches to social transformation being taken by leaders within their spheres of influence within the host community. For example, nursing students can conduct research regarding important work and critical care issues related to HIV/AIDS addressed by healthcare workers in the host community, while business and economic students can meet with local business leaders to search for new approaches to ethical leadership in the context of globalization. Ministerial students can learn about different cultural approaches to evangelism and church planting among diverse people groups, while social workers research indigenous approaches to community development. And so on.

Students who possess adequate language and/or intercultural communication skills may collaborate with members of the host culture in local projects of social transformation as considered appropriate by people within the community. In addition, teacher and community members can help students engage in ongoing reflection upon their missional vocations and the type of action they may take in the future. In such situations, field notes, journals, and other writing assignments are also excellent tools for reflection upon the meaning of God's global mission, and action for on-going personal and social transformation.

True transformation is a not a temporary change, a feeling, or "mountain top experience" that wears off in time. It is a change within a change that causes us to see life differently, to change values and perspective, to change priorities and motives, to change thinking and actions (Hull 2004:72). It is an on-going process. What we will be is not yet clear. God is constantly transforming us from what we were and are into what we are becoming, not just as individuals, but as participants in the transforming realities of families, communities, cultures, and the world. In this way, new transformation does not nullify former experiences, but rather reshapes them for growth. This reinforces the need for constant reflection and analysis on our experiences, particularly within the context of Christian community, so that we remind each other of God's gracious work in our lives and our commitments to participate together in God's mission in the world. In this way the learning community "acts out," not just "learns from" in the ME process, for ultimately the importance of learning is living out our missional vocation as a transformed and transforming community. This is a praxis that can truly be called missional activism!

7. Reciprocity

Because a distinctive of God's mission in the world is one of relational reconciliation – about creating a new community, ME programs ought to be based on reciprocity with the communities in which we live, learn, and serve. Therefore, the design and implementation of ME programs, as stated earlier, involve collaboration and dialogue with community constituents regarding the ways in which educational programs can be mutually beneficial. Roland Wells, founding director of the School of Urban Ministry, calls attention to the needs of the local community as well as students, and highlights

the problem of “using the community to provide an education for the participants” (2005:6). Similarly, in her analysis of the impact of U.S. students on Indian society, Jennifer Ladd asks,

“How are they [the Indians] affected by our process of growth and learning? Are we in danger of using other cultures... for our own... needs, this time taking personal growth and cross-cultural awareness instead of cotton and tea? Are we exploiters or imperialists unconscious of the consequences of our learning?” (1990:123).

John Wallace phrases the ethical questions regarding reciprocity in intercultural education as follows:

“How much obligation do we assume toward the host culture in which these experiences are offered? When we enroll students in a laboratory course on campus, we are placing them in an educational setting that is completely under our control. When we encourage them to engage in experiential education, we are implicitly urging them to use a particular culture as their laboratory. Is this fair to the hosts? How would you and I react if a young Saudi Arabian, for example, were to visit our communities and our homes and ask us to assist him with a study in which he proposed to find out American attitudes toward cleanliness in public toilets? It is in many cases just such individual studies that we are inflicting upon our overseas hosts. Should there be a line drawn beyond which activity would be considered objectionable, intrusive? Who draws such a line, and how can it be justified to the students whose education will be inhibited thereby?” (1993:16).

Given the goal of educating for missional *action* and multicultural *competence*, missional experiential educators must grapple with these ethical questions regarding their relationship to the communities in which students are placed, ensuring that their educational programs and social actions are not undermining their goals of increasing understanding and promoting justice by instead engaging in acts of cultural invasion. Freire writes:

“In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. All domination involves invasion - at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend” (1970:150).

Most missional educators and advocates for justice would argue that their purpose is not cultural invasion but rather the nurturing of harmonious and non-exploitative relationships between people of different cultures. Therefore, they have a responsibility to work collaboratively with the local community to ensure that their relationships are built on reciprocity and not on any kind of exploitation.

In her research regarding both educators’ and community partners’ attitudes toward the benefits that the latter may receive from intercultural experiential education, Amy Greeley identifies two primary types of reciprocity. The first is “specific reciprocity,” which involves “giving back directly to those who have served them,” whereas the second is “generalized reciprocity,” in which the experiential education program and the community “believes that someone or some group, be they from the host community or not, will benefit from what participants contribute to society someday” (2004). The latter may be the most common in experiential education and is clearly the most difficult to assess. Thus a few strategic questions for those involved in the design and implementation of ME programs are: “What type of reciprocity, if any, is involved? Does the larger community benefit from the students’ learning; if so, how?” (2004).

Service-learning, short-term missions, and internships are often seen as forms of direct reciprocity because it is hoped that participants make valuable contributions to the communities where they work, giving back to the host communities while also learning from them. These kinds of programs are becoming increasingly popular with an ever-increasing number of students participating in internships and cross-cultural service programs. Nonetheless, special concerns about “cultural imperialism” are raised by this demand for international service-learning, short-term missions, and internship programs, because students who are not fluent in the

required foreign language and who do not have the proper attitude toward and a full appreciation of the host culture may unwittingly act as cultural imperialists and do more damage than good. In the now famous words of Monsignor Ivan Illich, “To hell with good intentions. (This is a theological statement.) You will not serve anybody by your good intentions... the road to hell is paved with good intentions... (1968). Therefore, ME programs must evaluate students’ suitability for service-learning, short-term missions, and internship projects, provide sufficient training and preparation, as well as assess the desire for and potential effectiveness of such projects in the host community so the working and learning relationship will be truly reciprocal.

8. Celebration

While in El Salvador on a CGE travel seminar, our class stayed in the agricultural community of Nueva Esperanza – “New Hope.”⁹ There we lived with, worked alongside, and learned from the members of this Christian cooperative community. Sister Naomi was our cultural guide and teacher, and the spiritual leader of the entire community.

One day over 1,000 people from the surrounding rural communities came together to rebuild a dike that had been destroyed by a powerful hurricane. Although international aid had been given to the Salvadoran government specifically for rebuilding the dike, the government failed to act and during several rainy seasons the communities along the river flooded. So on this day, Sister Naomi had brought the people together to do “God’s work” by rebuilding the dike. In sweltering (115 degree) heat and humidity, we worked together filling bags with sand and rebuilding the dike. The work was grueling, yet no one seemed to complain. After 12 hours of backbreaking work, we gathered at the church in the center of Nueva Esperanza to celebrate the Mass. Hot, sweaty, smelly, dirty and exhausted, we sang praises to God at the top of our lungs. As we prepared for the Holy Eucharist, the “Great Thanksgiving,” Sister Naomi stood before us, and with arms reaching to heaven exclaimed, “Today we celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit among us! Today we celebrate the new thing God has taught us! We have learned that together, united in Christ’s Spirit and Body, we can do what no government or mighty army can do to us or for us. In this Mass, we celebrate the work of Jesus, His presence, in our community!”

On the final evening of our stay in Nueva Esperanza, during a community Bible study, Sister Naomi led us in joyful celebration and thanks to God for the new things each of us was learning, even giving thanks for our struggles and questions. She also gave thanks for the new experiences we would have in service to God as we lived in solidarity with the people of Nueva Esperanza.

Following our final “fiesta” together, a student asked Sister Naomi why she placed so much emphasis on celebration.

“It is the Latin way,” she replied. “It is also the biblical way... to celebrate new learning and God’s revelation in our lives. Jesus said, ‘I have taught you these things so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.’ Joyful celebration is both the outcome and the fuel that provides the energy for service and learning, which in turn keeps the cycle going.” (See Figure 6.)

Sister Naomi told us that education has not occurred until a new action step has been taken, until we take what God has revealed to us and obediently put it into a new action – a new way of living. Real learning is evident in a life transformed by God’s Spirit, and that is worth celebrating. Celebration also serves as a ceremony, a rite of passage,¹⁰ which acknowledges our transformation as new creations in Christ. In the same way, Kathy McBride, of CGE, says that celebration serves to imprint what we have learned, evidenced in our new actions, on our hearts and minds. Whether these are “big” or “tiny” actions steps, they must be celebrated because they are important (McBride 2005).

Figure 6: ME Praxis: Celebration¹¹

Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, states that since most action steps are taken within the context of or relation to community, they should be celebrated with the community. We should celebrate the work of God’s Spirit among us as the body of Christ no matter which part does the work; it is still together. New actions are signs of openness to the Holy Spirit and God’s transforming work within us. And this work of God has missional implications; it is a living testimony! New learning, evident in life transformation, no matter how small, encourages others in the community – those who have been partners in our learning and those to whom we can be a witness (Foster 1998:191).

“Celebration brings joy to life, and joy makes us strong” (Foster 1998:191). Our work in God’s mission can be exhausting and make us weary. But Scripture tells us, “The joy of the Lord is our strength”

(Nehemiah 8:10). Celebration restores our whole being! It restores our strength to press on in God's strength (1998:191). Learning leads to action, and action leads to celebration, but we will not know the genuine joy of celebration until there is a transforming work in our lives and communities.

Perhaps this is the missing ingredient in so much of education. Ultimately, joyful celebration is what will keep the ME praxis going. For celebration produces energy that gives us strength to live in joyful service in God's world!

9. Program Evaluation and Educational Assessment

Missional experiential education requires ongoing community-based program evaluation and educational assessment to ensure that the stated objectives are accomplished and to continuously improve the overall quality of the educational and community program. Perhaps, this is the most overlooked ingredient in educational programs, as well as missional social activism. But it is critical for determining if learning and transformative outcomes match stated goals and objectives. Consequently, two types of assessment are necessary: first, the assessment of student learning, and second, the assessment of the missional program or action itself. In fact, the evaluation process is also a critical part of practicing an experiential pedagogy (Gingerich and Lutterman-Aguilar 2002:75; McBride 2005).

In the evaluation and assessment process, both missional activists/learners and community members should return to the stated learning and social justice objectives to evaluate the extent to which those outcomes have been achieved. To aid in this evaluation process, missional activists and experiential educators are also encouraged to conduct a self-assessment, which reflects upon program and community objectives and can assist people in their own critical analysis regarding the quality of their work and the degree to which they have accomplished their objectives.

In addition to assessing missional activism and learning, it is essential to engage in continual assessment of program effectiveness related to goals that are explicitly incorporated into the program design (Wallace 1993; Wyatt 1993; Jaenson 1993; Citron and Kline 2001). Overall program evaluations should remind missional learners of the

stated program goals so that programs can be evaluated on that basis. Just as student learning should be evaluated on the basis of clearly articulated learning objectives, ME programs themselves should be evaluated on what they say about themselves, their implementation of experiential learning pedagogies, and the extent to which they are truly rigorously academic, experiential, intercultural, wholistic, transformative, and missional.

If Christian disciples are going to be prepared for the missiological realities in this era of globalization, they will need to learn how to *think and act* both globally and multiculturally (Smith 1999:132). Consequently, missiologists have a special role in casting a new vision for missiological education, i.e., creating a missional pedagogy that will help all disciples think multiculturally and act globally. This topic is of vital importance. “More of the same kinds of missiological education will put us further behind. The church needs new paradigms of missiological education freshly drawn from both the text and the contexts of ministry” (Elliston 1996:232). The time has come to redefine the *purpose* of missiological education and discover a new learning *process* – a missional pedagogy – to more effectively prepare and engage missional activists toward fulfilling God’s mission in the world today.

The “essential ingredients” articulated in this paper may serve as a helpful starting point for the implementation and assessment of ME programs toward effectively fulfilling the stated objective to provide a distinctive missional pedagogy, which awakens the apostolic imagination of Christian disciples and prepares them to competently participate as missional activists in God’s mission to all creation.

Notes

- 1 Traditional forms of formal education in a classroom setting, particularly in higher education, i.e., Bible college or seminary, were the dominant models that were presented for learning. In addition, the “professional” educator, e.g., pastor or theological professor, were considered the primary models for teaching and mentoring. It should be noted, though, that there were challenges to these “traditional,” and primarily “Western,” models of education. Participants who serve “illiterate” populations, people in remote areas without access to “higher” education, members of oral cultures, etc., expressed concern at the narrow definition and model of theological education being proposed by the majority of the group.

- 2 The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) has proposed the following basic “Principles of Good Practice” for experiential education: Intention, authenticity, planning, clarity, monitoring and assessment, reflection, evaluation, and acknowledgment (NSEE 1998). I have drawn from the NSEE principles, in addition to three of the fundamental principles of service-learning—collaboration, reciprocity and diversity (Mintz and Hesser 1996), key principles in the experiential educational philosophy of CGE, and critical elements discovered in my research to propose what I think are the “essential ingredients” of “Missional Education” (ME).

- 3 Not all CGE programs include biblical reflection as several programs are in partnership with secular colleges and universities.

- 4 These comments were drawn from the following post-program evaluations: UNW 2006, CGE 2004 and 2005. They represent a sampling of (anonymous) student comments related to the value of critical analysis in conjunction with biblical reflection.

- 5 Larry Hufford, PhD., is the Graduate Director of International Relations at St. Mary’s University, San Antonio, TX. He participated in his first CGE travel seminar in 1986 to El Salvador and Nicaragua. He states that the experience was “spiritually transformative.” He has since taken students on over twenty CGE travel seminars.

- 6 For those who have shared in a transformational journey of learning, a pilgrim experience, a pilgrimage experience, a strong bond of *communitas* is formed (Zahniser 1997). In ME, the shared realities

of a “faith liminal experience” combined with the absence of normal cultural identities, statuses, and roles, draw participants together in an uncharacteristic, yet deeply meaningful way (Hull 2004:21).

- 7 This comment was made on the last day of class, during the final reflection session, following a short-term immersion experience in El Salvador embedded in the middle of a Spring 2005 course entitled, “Latin American Liberation Theologies.”
- 8 By community organizing, Hertig is referring to a community that comes together to take action on issues that are vital to their community and the world.
- 9 The people of Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) chose this name in hopeful thanks to God for God’s presence with them during the Civil War in El Salvador, in their experience as refugees in Nicaragua, and the hopeful future for them and the generations to come. Upon returning to El Salvador in 1991, the people cooperatively purchased a farm and established their new home. 104 families live in a community that is founded on the Christian principles practiced by the early church in the book of Acts - unity, solidarity, democracy, sharing, and sufficiency.
- 10 Rites of passage are rituals and ceremonies that facilitate and recognize the transition of an individual or community from one stage of life to another. The process results in the old status being replaced by a new status (Hull 2004:19).
- 11 As the figure illustrates, the MEE praxis is a continuous cycle; it is not a circle. It is a helical – an ascending and widening spiral in which each new stage covers the same 360 degrees of territory as its predecessors but in a larger way. Each stage in the praxis enfolds, embraces, integrates, and revalues the gains of previous stages in the learning process, and, in doing so doing, rises to a higher level. So if this figure continued through multiple stages of MEE praxis, the helical would be one of emergence, that is, the outer ring embracing everything within it; and it needs everything within it. Without the previous learning praxis, it wouldn’t exist.

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