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The University of San Francisco

GROUND ZERO PROJECT DEVELOPMENT IN BURMA:
APPROPRIATING THE FUTURE THROUGH HISTORY, IDENTITY, AND
IMAGINATION IN ASSESSMENT

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Leadership Studies Department
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Alyssa A. Bahr
San Francisco
May 2011

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

**Ground Zero Project Development in Burma:
Appropriating the Future Through History, Identity, and Imagination in
Assessment**

Toward the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the principles and practices of development began to veer from extractive, numbers-based, scientifically-grounded assessment methods, to a lexicon of participation-centered approaches that have sought to fill the holes left behind by traditional methods. However, for an interpretive participatory approach to take hold in the assessment arena, a shift in underlying assumptions must occur.

A shift toward an interpretive approach finds its roots in the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and social philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988; 1992). An interpretive orientation toward assessment in development in Burma could be meaningful and appropriate in its aim to ameliorate poverty and struggle of the Burmese people. An interpretive orientation houses the power to transform the way in which the development act is carried out by reconfiguring how we see ourselves in relation to others and the responsibility that ensues from this insight.

This research study followed a critical hermeneutic orientation and was guided by a research protocol process established by Ellen Herda (1999). Field-based research carried out in this tradition means, “learning about language, listening, and understanding” (Herda 1999: 93) so as to inform the creation of a text about assessment in international development.

This dissertation examined the nature of assessment in international development and the ways in which development can be different if housed in an interpretive orientation. This participatory inquiry with eight development practitioners in the Union of Burma and in the United States, created an understanding of the ways in which interpretive practices are already employed in the field, and the value that practitioners place on interpretive approaches as a means for understanding and application. I explored this new understanding of assessment in international development in light of Paul Ricoeur's theories of Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination.

The findings for this research study include: an alternative assessment orientation is emerging; narratives in assessment reveal identity; and adult learning in assessment is central to the process. These findings hopefully serve as a framework and catalyst for broadening the discussion on assessment practices. Suggestions for practical application based on the findings include: a reorientation toward working in partnership; re-figuring assessment practices in development to include narrative based practices; and thinking of assessment practices as a continuous learning process.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Alyssa Bahr
Candidate

March 25, 2011

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the people of the Union of Burma.

Acknowledgements

This text is the culmination of ten incredible years at the University of San Francisco. It is inspired by, built upon, and supported by a multitude of individuals who have walked by my side throughout this journey. While it has been my personal journey, it has been an endeavor with and for others in the pursuit of “the good life.”

I most humbly thank the following people:

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First and foremost, I want to acknowledge and thank a woman who has served not only as my dissertation chair and educational advisor, but a light in my life and dear friend. From the door of your classroom in 2004, to the waters of Inle Lake in the Union of Burma, you have taught me what it means to “*understand to believe*” and “*believe to understand.*”

Dissertation Committee Members

I want to thank Dr. Dan McPherson for his close reading of my proposal which helped shape my writing for my dissertation, and for his support in my work at USF. To Dr. Laleh Shahideh, thank for your solicitous encouragement throughout this process and whose words in *The Power of Iranian Narratives* illuminated my own research and writing of narrative identity. To Dr. Kelly Cooper, thank you for shepherding me through the beginnings of this process and offering me suggestions along the way, which made a world of difference in how I thought of and realized the research process.

My Family

I want to express a depth of gratitude to my parents David J. Bahr and Lillian G. Bahr; for instilling in me a sense of confidence and perseverance, and for faithfully supporting

my educational endeavors. To my sisters Kaleena and Monica Bahr; and my fiancé Joseph Casillas, thank you for your unwavering love and encouragement.

My USF Family

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I also want to thank my USF O&L classmates, particularly Timothy L. Payne. I cannot think of a better person with whom to have explored the art markets of Yangon and sailed the lakes of Inle.

We must understand to believe, but we must believe to understand.

The circle is not a vicious circle, still less a mortal one; it is a living and stimulating circle. We must believe to understand: never, in fact, does the interpreter get near to what [her] text says unless [she] lives in the aura of the meaning [she] is inquiring after.

Paul Ricoeur (1967: 351)

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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

The stakes facing development practitioners are enormous: lifting billions of people out of poverty and despair. The development evaluation profession has made major contributions to the improved effectiveness of development projects and programs, but it has done so in relative obscurity. The time has come to make its invisible college visible...development evaluation is finally coming center stage (Picciotto 2003: 228).

Assessment practices in international development are grounded and informed by the theory of change that most heavily dominates the development sector of the time. Over the last 60 years, assessment practices have shifted away from the idea of the external observer providing information about the underdeveloped, to decision-making, design, and implementation carried out in partnership. Assessment practices, at their core, have always focused on understanding and revealing what works and what does not work in development. What have changed over the years are the methodologies that have been used to arrive at such conclusions. Shifts occur as development practitioners and evaluators continually seek to “improve the quality of decision making by shattering ill-founded dogmas and self-serving policy assumptions” (Picciotto 2003: 228).

In today’s international development climate, billions of dollars are spent on development projects. However, in the last 40 years, this number has decreased, with “aid to developing countries” amounting “to less than \$50 billion” annually because “development assistance agencies now seek to align their assistance with development performance rather than geo-political objectives” (Picciotto 2003: 228). This trend, promulgated at the United Nations’ conference in Mexico and South Africa in 2002, has pushed development evaluation to the fore. As Picciotto (2003: 228) states, “the

simplistic dogmas of central planning and market fundamentalism have been consigned to the dustbin of development history.” Now more than ever, there is an opening in development assessment to rethink our undergirding principles. The foundation for how development projects are conceived and implemented is what I refer to in this dissertation as ground zero. Ground zero project assessment is the point at which the development act begins using the concepts of self and identity as cornerstones for both conception and application of assessment processes.

This dissertation examines the nature of assessment in international development and the ways in which development can be different if housed in an interpretive orientation. Through reflections on their own practices, conversation partners provided their own interpretations of current assessment practices. Informed by the critical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, the following three theoretical categories guide the collection and analysis of the conversational data:

- **Narrative Identity:** a critical hermeneutic approach to identity utilizes narrative as a medium for creating concordance from the discordant events of the past. The meaningful structure of the story creates an identity that is considered a narrative identity.
- **Mimesis:** mimesis is the act of representing human action through narrative. Through narrative, we can bring the historical past to the present and employ imagination in projecting a world in which we want to live.
- **Imagination:** imagination as mediated by narrative, gives us a space for creating and moving toward a world in which we want to inhabit that is different from where we are now and where we have been.

What emerged from this study was an understanding of the ways in which interpretive practices are already employed in the field, and the value that practitioners place on interpretive approaches as a means for understanding and application.

Background of the Issue

Basic assumptions inform our actions as developers and fellow human beings. According to Boston (2002), assessment is a formative process where the goal “is to gain an understanding...in order to make responsive changes.” For example, in international development settings, assessment begins first with how we see ourselves, as researchers in relation to those with whom and for whom we work in the field. This notion of identity influences how development is enacted, whether it be in installing computers at a school for the deaf, or building a fish farm to sustain a community. The point is that the process is jointly created and enacted. Assessment in light of international development projects is not to be confused with a back-end process known as evaluation. Whereas evaluation is “summative” and focused on end points of a process (Garrison and Ehringhaus 2009); assessment is found at the basic initial stage in an experience, at ground zero, and is constantly changing.

The methodologies used in assessment are influenced by and are a product of the theoretical paradigm in which they are housed. Theoretical paradigms provide a common structure for how theorists and practitioners view reality and how that reality translates into practice and principles (Kuhn 1970). Whether it is within traditional paradigms such as functionalism, structuralism and post-structuralism, or the participatory and interpretive paradigm, each has major implications for development practices. In the Review of Literature, paradigms are explored in terms of the role each plays in how development practices are implemented, and how assessment methodologies are influenced, whether the methodology is housed in a traditional, participatory or interpretive paradigm.

Toward the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the principles and practices of development began to veer from extractive, numbers-based, scientifically-grounded assessment methods, to a lexicon of participation-centered approaches that sought to fill the holes left behind by traditional methods. According to Chambers (1994b: 1443), participation-centered approaches “present alternatives” that provide a dimension of “depth, richness and realism of information and analysis” that are not found in traditional assessment practices in development, such as questionnaires or interviews. Large development organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Bank through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), during this period, began to adopt a participation-centered approach in the assessment, development and implementation of programs (Jennings 2000, Lansner 1998).

A country such as the Union of Burma, that receives aid and assistance from organizations and programs such as the UNDP, with its participation-centered programs, but still has a gross domestic product (GDP) that is “the 13th lowest in the world” (Charney 2008: 1), is an example of an emerging country where the development act is ripe for a shift in the development paradigm (Paller 2007: 2). A shift toward an interpretive approach finds its roots in the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and social philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988; 1992). An interpretive orientation toward assessment in development in Burma could be meaningful and appropriate in its aim to ameliorate poverty and struggle of the Burmese people. An interpretive orientation houses the power to transform the way in which the development act is carried out by reconfiguring how we see ourselves in relation to others and the

responsibility that ensues from that notion. As Herda (2007: 4) states, “we move beyond the act of application to one of creating relationships and new understandings among ourselves and those in local settings.” This is the case because not only Burma could find a new orientation toward development assessment, but other poverty-ridden countries could as well.

Today there are movements in many poor countries, including Burma, that strike a common cord among people who must take it upon themselves to work together with others to improve their lives (Moyo 2009). The key is a tone or attitude toward improving one’s life, namely taking on responsibility and working with others. As Herda (2007a: 5) points out, the development act is based in “relationship with the local partners in learning what development path to create and act upon.”

Significance of Issue

The implications of a paradigm shift are far reaching in the development act (Herda 2007). A shift to an interpretive approach has implications for project assessment, especially in a country like the Union of Burma, a country whose per capita GDP ranks 186 out of 229 countries, infant mortality rates are high, HIV/AIDS is an epidemic, and where human rights violations are rampant (USGAO 2007: 5-6). Project assessment in international development, within the interpretive tradition, would mean an approach to relationships that sees individual identity in terms of the other. When identity changes; the development act changes (Herda 2007). An interpretive approach houses the power and possibility to transform project assessment in international development in such a way that an imagined future of ameliorated poverty, especially in a country like the Union of Burma, may have more of an opportunity to become a reality than when

pursuing the traditional development paradigm. The interpretive approach places “an ontological appreciation of self and language, positioned in learning, on the part of both the researcher and the local participants” (Herda 2007: 4) at ground zero.

Summary

We are no closer today to eradicating poverty than we were 20 years ago, even with the shift from traditional to participatory methods. While there has been a shift to a more participatory approach centered on localism, the ways in which data are compounded and the subsequent way in which assessment is conceived and enacted, largely remain the same. As such, assessment in development does not match the realities of the poor (Herda 2007). Notions of identity, a reflection on the past, and imagination in projecting the future are critical orientations that must undergird any development act. An interpretive approach to development calls forth a sense of self as other and a new way of seeing oneself in relation to those with whom and for whom we work in the field. A shift in the current development paradigm to an interpretive approach may guide assessment in the development process to a place that more closely matches the everyday lives of the poor because they will have been involved in the creation and implementation of the development process. For Burma, this shift could mean coming into the world purview as an emerging country where development works.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND OF THE UNION OF BURMA

Introduction

The Union of Burma is a country painted with some of the world's most beautiful landscapes, from valleys of pagodas to sunrises over Inle Lake. It is bordered by India to the northwest, China to the northeast, Laos and Thailand on its eastern border and the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to the west (see Figure 1). Burma's population of 48



million people is comprised of varied ethnic people groups, from ethnic Burmans, such as the Shan, Karen, Rakhine, and Mon, to colonial migrants including British, Chinese and Indians (Eccleston et al 1998: 44). As rich as the culture, people, and landscape are, so too is the history of The Golden Land. A rich history of overthrown empires, colonial rule, and military takeovers has shaped the current social, economic and political structures of the country (Myint-U 2001: 1). This history also makes it ripe for international intervention.

FIGURE 1: Map of Burma
U.S. Department of State 2010

Burma's early history can be characterized by its three ruling dynasties: the Pagan Dynasty (current site of Bagan) (see Figure 2), the Taungoo Dynasty, and the Konbaung Dynasty. However, in the late 1800's, despite Burma's policies of administrative centralization, economic development, and its accommodating approach towards

encroaching Western imperialism (Myint-U 2001: 248), economic collapse, social unrest, increased repression, and an unstable monarchy all paved the way for British colonial rule. Colonial rule in Burma was different from other types of imperial rule in other subjugated countries. It occurred as a complete installation of British systems and structures. Government officials, local village leaders, and various other remnants of the



Figure 2: Ancient stupas and temples of Bagan

Photo: A. Bahr 2009

Burmese government and societal structures were completely decimated. Local leaders were not allowed to help transition the country to a British form of rule.

With the onslaught of World War II, Burma, still under the control of British India, joined forces with the Japanese military and successfully pushed the British out of Burma. Expelling the British led to a Japanese invasion of Burma, leaving it quasi-independent under Japan's oversight. Switching sides, the Burmese joined forces with the United States and Britain in their push to oust the Japanese out of Yangon. As a result, Burma completed its constitution in 1947 and, in 1948, was granted its independence (Eccleston et al 1998: 40). Even though a democratic, parliamentary government had been created, for the next forty years Burma experienced government instability and severe social unrest. In 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, also commonly known as SLORC, staged a military coup, suspended the constitution, and began its efforts to restore order (Thwe 2002).

During the past 20 years, the ruling junta, now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has continued its control. The SPDC completed a new draft of the Burmese constitution in 2008 and held a referendum, which the people widely supported. The SPCD held multi-party elections in 2010 (U.S. Department of State 2010).

Present Day Burma

From proclamations of kings to the official communiqués of colonial officers; from the ‘classical’ architecture of Pagan [Bagan] to the paintings of Sein Myint; through the study of nat (spirits) to the roles of Buddhism – the idea of Myanmar has emerged through a complicated mixture of historical, cultural, and political forms that have been continually shaped by an array of agendas, intellectual influences, and personalities...what has been generally spoken of as ‘Burmese’ are exemplified by the rich exchanges over its histories, institutions, memories, and cultures (Aung-Thwin 2008: 187).

The culture and climate of today’s Burma and what is “Burmese” is as varied and rich as its experiences and history. One has only to spend a small amount of time experiencing this beautifully rich and complex, yet simple country, to see the “complicated mixture” to which Aung-Thwin refers. This rich complexity can be seen in everyday life (See Figure 3), from visiting pagodas, to visiting a local market.



Figure 3: Everyday life of a street vendor.
Photo: A. Bahr 2010

The first glance of Burma is of the Yangon airport, with its throngs of people frenetically moving in disparate paths, Burmese airport porters asking to carry visitors’ bags, and uniformed military personnel appearing intimidating and

official at the same time. Leaving the noise of the airport, and sitting in an air conditioned bus peering from the window it is difficult to imagine what lies outside of the city.

In both the city and the country side, it is apparent the extent to which Buddhism saturates everyday life (see Figure 4). Theravada Buddhism is the most common form of Buddhist practice, with a majority of the population following this tradition (Spiro 1982: 187). However,

[n]ot all of Buddhism in Burma is Burman and not all Burmese are Buddhists. Ethnic minorities who play a pivotal role in the national community identify with their own Buddhist histories, local practices, and vernacular literatures. Prominent among them are the Shan, Karen, Arakanese, Mon, and Pao (Schober 2008: 265).

Buddhism's influence permeates the country, with golden topped pagodas emerging from the horizon to Buddhist monks walking down the street. Between the ages of 10 and 16, most young men and some women enter Buddhist monasteries. Such a move is highly respected and privileged.

On the way to Bagan, one of Burma's most intriguing and ancient sites, filled with 11th and 12th century pagodas; one will find a variety of local markets. Barraged by



merchants displaying goods, a young man is selling a book by George Orwell. Remnants of a British colonial past, the book, based on Orwell's time in Burma as a member of the Indian Imperial police, tells of the country's British imperial past. He opens the book describing the atmosphere of an evening in Burma.

Figure 4: People praying at Shwedagon Temple, Yangon
Photo: A. Bahr 2009

He (Orwell 1934: 1) read,

[i]t was only half-past eight, but the month was April, and there was a closeness in the air, a threat of the long stifling midday hours. Occasional faint breaths of wind, seeming cool by contrast, stirred the newly-drenched orchids that hung from the eaves. Beyond the orchids, one could see the dusty, curved trunk of a palm tree, and then the blazing ultramarine sky. Up in the zenith, so high that it dazzled one to look at them, a few vultures circled without the quiver of a wing.

Not only in this market can one find the influence of a colonial past, but sprawled in all directions is an entire economic agrarian system of production and trade. According to the World Fact Book, 70% of Burma's workforce is in agriculture and almost 43% of the GDP comes from agriculture (CIA 2010).

While agricultural goods are one of the most prominent forms of production in Burma, production of textiles and trinkets pervade the markets. From silk scarves (see



Figure 5) to silver jewelry and precious gems, the country of Burma is rich in natural resources, such as jade, gems, oil and natural gases (Moriada et al 1987). Its major export partners are Thailand, India, China and Japan, respectively.

Figure 5: Silk weaving factory, Inle Lake, Union of Burma
Photo: A. Bahr 2009

The 48 million people living in Burma today, range from ethnic Burmans, to Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Chinese, Mon, and Indian amidst others within the various people groups (South 2008). Intertwined in their national and ethnic identities lies a rich history of kings, colonial rulers, and regime changes. Despite the many transitions in this country's history, one still finds a culture and a people strongly tied to their Buddhist

traditions, preserving their past through artistic puppetry, moving forward as strong familial units, making use of a bountiful soil, and a soul of perseverance.

International Development in the Union of Burma

A variety of factors contributes to the lure of Burma as a country ripe for development projects, international relief and aid, and an increase in the number of non-governmental organizations. According to Myint-U (2006: 271), “incompetence, mismanagement, corruption, poor governance, and lack of transparency and accountability...have proved disastrous...it is an opportune time for Myanmar...” It is in the context of the current realities of the people of Burma and the role of international development in their lives, that the topic of ground zero project assessment finds its place. Ground zero project assessment in international development can help Burma emerge from its current situation to a place where development is appropriate and meaningful.

To this day, the SPCD maintains tight control and restriction over organizations coming into Burma, regardless of their humanitarian nature. “The United Nations Development Programme’s 2007 Human Development Report indicates that official development assistance totaled \$144.7 million in 2006, roughly \$3 per capita” (U.S. State Department 2010). Refugees International’s Joel Charney (2008: 1) says, “according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Burma receives less overseas development assistance...than any of the poorest 50 countries.” He also goes on to say that the average assistance per person for countries as poor as Burma is usually \$58 per person per year.

In the past, Burma has received technical assistance grants, concession loans, debt relief, and humanitarian aid from other Asian countries, such as China, Japan and India. Organizations including the UNDP, World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank have had programs in Burma in recent years. Other organizations, such as World Vision, have had a presence in Burma since 1958. Refugees International (Charney 2008: 3) indicates “international aid organizations in Burma has increased significantly in recent years” with “internationally supported activities in 300 of Burma’s 325 townships.” They also indicate Mon, Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, and Northern Rakhin States have experienced continued presence by international organizations (Charney 2008: 3). The SDPC maintains fairly tight control over international organizations working in Burma and require that they have a signed Memorandum of Understanding between the organization and the appropriate ministry prior to beginning projects (Charney 2008: 3). With the in-pouring of money and assistance, the question still remains as to what it is about the nature of development projects that is failing the people, as defined by the fact that so many are still suffering and living in poverty.

Summary

Chapter Two presents an overview of the Union of Burma’s history, from the early ruling dynasties, to today’s ruling government. Understanding the various transitions the country and the people have gone through lend themselves to an understanding of present day Burma with its rich multiethnic culture, complex political atmosphere, and everyday challenges that influence the livelihoods of its people. This Chapter also looks at development in the Union of Burma, and how its unique history has

made this country ripe for development projects. Chapter Three provides an overview of the relevant literature in development assessment.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The aim of development assessment is to understand the human condition and take action based on that understanding (Roche 1999). History has shown that development paradigms influence the way in which this knowledge is pursued. Traditionally, inquiry has been “based on the presumed discovery of law-like generalizations that serve as the basis for deductive explanation and predictions” (Herda 1999: 18). This orientation is grounded in the principles of science, with an emphasis on economics (Herda 2007: 5-6), positivism, empiricism, and structuralism.

Knowledge about cultures, development practices, project evaluation, and measurements of success and failure are scientifically deduced based on observation, experimentation, and analyses. Kearney (2001: 127-128) says the “structuralists...believe that the historical sciences should divest themselves of all narrative functions in deference to objective norms and codes...” Explanations of the human condition have been based on outputs of numbers, and social issues have been thought of in terms of laws that govern man and behavior. Robert Chambers (1994a: 1255) refers to this approach as a “more extractive data gathering” process. He (1994a: 1255) says, “in data gathering the outsiders dominate. They determine the agenda, obtain and take possession of information, remove it, organize and analyze it, and plan and write papers and reports. Outsiders appropriate and come to own the information.”

An extractive process based on scientific theoretical principles often included traditional assessment tools such as surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. As Herda (1999: 19) states, “the relation of theory to practice,” within the traditional assessment paradigm, has been “chiefly technical, because” it seeks “to use general laws and

manipulate a desired state of affairs.” However, in recent years, increased critique of the empirical approach has led to alternative orientations, which seek to fill the vacuum left by traditional methodologies.

This Review of Literature offers an overview of the varying approaches to project assessment over the last 60 years and how these approaches have undergirded development practice in the field. Such approaches include prominent movements such as Robert Chamber’s Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). Also explored is an emerging shift in common practices to an alternative approach, interpretive assessment. The interpretive orientation takes into consideration basic assumptions about identity as it influences the development act. This paradigm shift in assessment is discussed in terms of implications for development in the Union of Burma. The assessment development paradigms, with their accompanying assessment orientations, are presented as follows: the modernization paradigm; the limited participation paradigm; the extended participation paradigm; and a shift in thinking toward an interpretive approach.

History of Development and Assessment Approaches

The following is an overview of the history of assessment approaches in relation to the development paradigms in which they emerged. The arrangement of the development paradigms and assessment approaches has been adapted from Chris J. R. Roche in his book *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change*, and focuses on practices from the 1950s to the present (See Figure 6).

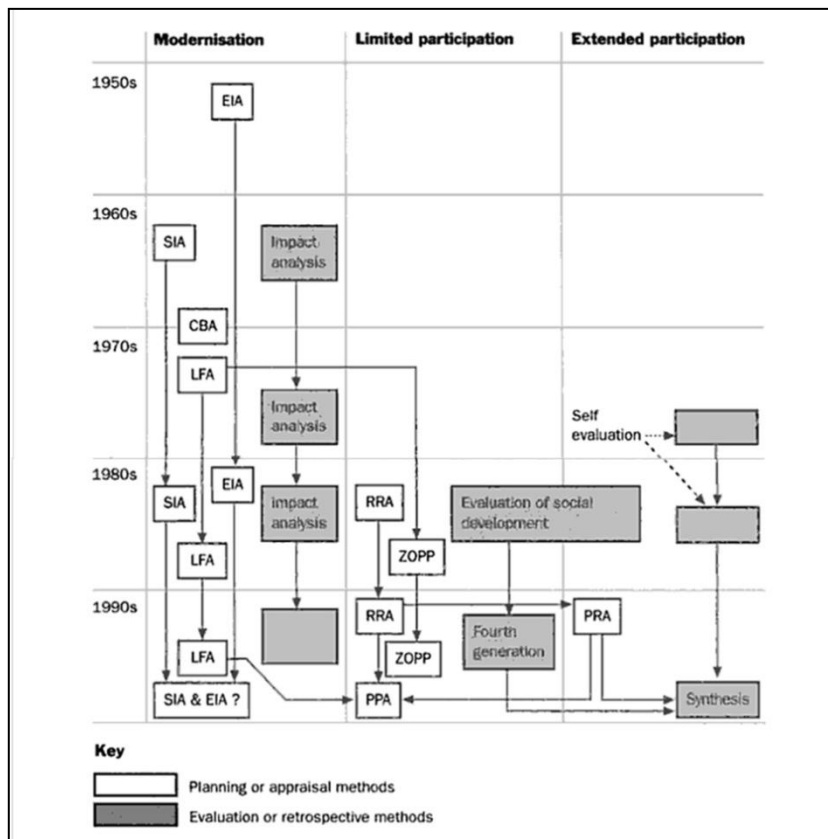


Figure 6: Assessment Approaches and Accompanying Development Paradigms (Roche 1999: 20)

The Modernization Paradigm

The post World War II climate is referred to by Rist (2008: 71) as the birth of the development age. With reconstructionism in Europe under the Marshall Plan, the newly formed United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), President Harry Truman's Four Points, and the use of the word underdeveloped, the world began to see development as an emergent concept. "No longer was it just a question of things 'developing,' now it was possible to 'develop' a region. Thus 'development' took on a transitive meaning (an action performed by one agent upon another) which corresponded to a principle of social organization, while 'underdevelopment' became a 'naturally' occurring (that is, seemingly causeless) state of things" (Rist 2008: 73). Effectively, development came to mean developing the underdeveloped in the Western tradition.

According to Walt Rostow (1990: 436), the modernization period in international development and foreign policy was an attempt “to generate a theory of development relevant to problems of contemporary Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and, on that basis, to define and crusade for an appropriate policy of the advanced industrial countries towards the development regions.” This paradigm of development thought, originating in the 1950s, emphasized applying practices employed by ‘developed’ countries to developing countries in their efforts toward progress. Harrison (1988: 8-9) describes this era as focusing on “the interrelationship of economic and cultural change, and more specifically, with the effects of Western technology on non-industrial societies.”

Impact assessment, an approach that is “about predicting, before the start of the project, its likely environmental, social, and economic consequences – in order to approve, adjust, or reject it” (Roche 1999: 18), has its origins in the 1950s and extends to the present. Environment Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, Cost Benefit Analysis, and Logical Framework Analysis are common impact assessment approaches that were developed during this time and are still utilized in development assessment. These approaches are further discussed below.

Environment Impact Assessment

Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) has its roots in the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Barthwal 2002: iii). The aim of an EIA is to evaluate predicted and unpredicted environmental influences produced by development projects. Assessing the impact of development projects on the environment allows for better

decision-making throughout the process. According to the United Kingdom's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2000),

environmental impact assessment enables environmental factors to be given due weight, along with economic or social factors, when planning applications are being considered. It helps promote a sustainable pattern of physical development and land and property in cities, towns and the countryside. If properly carried out, it benefits all those involved in the planning process.

There are three major components to an environmental impact assessment: a description of the development site, major determining factors, and possible changes in the environment.

Social Impact Assessment

As did Environmental Impact Assessments, the idea of Social Impact Assessments (SIA) originated from the 1969 U.S. National Environmental Policy Act. As a development practice, SIA's attempt to ensure communities are receiving the maximum amount of benefit from a project, and the least amount of negative social costs. Burdge and Vanclay (1995: 32) identify SIA's as "a process of assessing or estimating, in advance, the social consequences that are likely to follow from specific policy actions or project development, particularly in the context of appropriate national, state or provincial policy legislation."

Key components to an SIA are predicting, evaluating, managing, and reflecting on the consequences of the "human environment of planned interventions" (Vanclay 2002: 388). SIAs maintain any social process that is invoked as a result of project, policy, program or plan, must also be analyzed. Vanclay (2002) posits the major shortcoming of early conceptions of social impact assessment was its inapplicability to both developed and developing contexts. For example, in developed nations, SIAs focus on adverse

impacts on individual rights, whereas in developing countries, SIAs should be more focused on “maximizing social utility and development potential” (Becker and Vanclay 2003:3). Becker and Vanclay (1995: 3) also indicate that SIAs should concentrate more on how the impact of programs is distributed differently among different social groups, especially among vulnerable populations.

Cost Benefit Analysis

Cost benefit analysis traditionally has been an approach used by industrial countries in the development of water and transportation systems. Its formal application as an assessment tool dates back to 1936, when the United States, under Roosevelt, enacted the Food Control Act. As applied to international development contexts, it is a method for evaluating the “profitability and effectiveness of any project” (Dupont 1996: 39). The effectiveness of a project is determined by whether or not the benefits outweigh the costs. Benefits and costs are assigned values, sometimes market values, and often times in social development, social and communal values. Included in the analysis are direct and indirect benefits.

Logical Framework Approach

A logical framework (log frame) approach, developed by Rosenberg and Posner in 1979, provides a structure for examining social issues that potentially require intervention. With a logframe, the scope of a project is determined. What the project will look like, what may expound from it, and the expected outcomes are logically deduced. “In this approach, measurement of impact is, ideally, provided for from the start through setting meticulously cascaded objectives, goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) and plans of action” (Soal 2001). It is an approach that takes

complex social issues and places them in a linear process of identification, examination, implementation, action, and evaluation. The process is predefined and does not provide much room for deterrence from the original plan. Within this strain of steps, the question of whether or not the project is working is only answered by acknowledging whether or not the process was followed.

The Limited Participation Paradigm

Out of the first decade of development came a barrage of new agencies and a shift in the approach to development. Dependency theory challenged the idea that development strategies could be imposed in the same way across the board of developing countries. As Tucker (1999: 12) notes,

[d]ependency theory was the first major Third World challenge to Europe-centered academic discourse...it restricted its attention almost exclusively to the economic...mechanisms of domination and control...It provided a trenchant critique of the crusading imperialism of the modernization theorists and provided an alternative vision, which accorded more closely with the experience of Third World countries.

However, a subsequent lack of change and improvement for many nations of the south followed and, out of dissatisfaction came a self-reliant model of change, advocated in countries such as Cuba, by presidents such as Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, and by leaders such as Gandhi (Rist 2008: 138). The 1970s experienced

a growing number of people organized in support of Third World demands [who] built their discourse around one simple principle: it is necessary to act upon the causes of 'underdevelopment,' not just mitigate its effects; or, in other words, 'it is not a question of giving more but of taking less (Rist 2002: 141).

The 1980s experienced an emergence of what Roche (1999: 19) cites as "new methods of enquiry" which "sought to make people and communities subjects and active participants,

rather than objects of impact assessment.” Out of this new orientation emerged Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Action Research, and Participatory Poverty Assessments.

Rapid Rural Appraisal

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) has its origins in the 1970s with development practitioners looking for better ways to learn about and understand rural life. As Robert Chambers (1994: 957) states, RRA focuses on answering the question: “Whose knowledge counts?” He describes RRA as a way to “enable outsiders to gain information and insight from local people and about local conditions, and to do this in a more cost-effective and timely manner.” It has its origins in three areas of dissatisfaction among developers: 1) finding lower cost methods for attaining knowledge; 2) inaccuracy of questionnaire surveys; and 3) anti-poverty biases (Chambers 1994: 956).

Development practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s responded to the aforementioned limitations by implementing RRA practices. They believed locals were the greatest source of knowledge on local conditions. As they looked to more “indigenous knowledge,” they shied away from lengthy, complex surveys that often times produced inaccurate data. Additionally, the way in which data were attained often times hid the worst of realities. For example, researchers visited rural areas during the better times of the season, missing information about environmental factors on local livelihoods. RRA responded to the pitfalls of high cost assessments, ineffective assessment tools, and shattered long-held biases.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research is among a family of development approaches that are based on the ideas of Paulo Freire and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

According to Chambers (1994: 954), the Freirian theme is the “poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to conduct their own reality.” The components of participatory action research include collective research, reflections on history, application of folk culture, and transmission of knowledge through written, visual and oral forms (Chambers 1994: 954). The aim of participatory action research is to “empower” communities to take political action. From research to action, the undergirding assumptions are: 1) poor people can direct their own projects because they are fully capable; 2) the outsiders can play the role of facilitator or catalyst; and 3) underserved and underrepresented groups have the ability to be empowered and should be empowered (Chambers 1994: 954).

Participatory Poverty Assessments

Coined by the World Bank in 1992 (Norton et al 2001), a Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) is a research process that includes the views of poor people in the analysis of poverty situations and “the formulation of strategies to reduce it through public policy” (Norton et al 2001). Included in this participatory research process are, “decision makers from all levels of government, civil society, and the local elite in order to take into account different interests and perspectives and increase local capacity and commitment to follow-up action” (The World Bank 2011). Participatory poverty assessments do not follow specific and rigid guidelines in their pursuit of understanding poverty. However, they are guided by a common rationale, which is “if a government or institution is to develop a strategy for reducing poverty, it makes sense to include the views of poor people in the process of developing and implementing that strategy” (Norton et al 2001). According to Robb (1999: 8), a typical PPA costs up to \$200,000, has 40 to 60 communities participating, can take up to a year to complete, is comprised of

nationals of both sexes who speak indigenous languages, and is carried out by NGOs, academic institutions, or consulting firms.

The Extended Participation Paradigm

The 1990s were optimistic with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ousting of military dictatorships in the south, so much so that a new rhetoric began to develop—that of human development. The addition of human was therefore a timely epithet that gave the impression that something new was happening under the sun of development (Rist 2008: 205). As Tucker (1999: 10) notes,

perhaps the most extreme statement of the inevitability of universal modernity, in its Western guise, is Francis Fukuyama's claim that we have reached the end of history (Fukuyama 1992). However, rather than experiencing the end of history we are in the presence of a crisis of Western history, a crisis of imagination. It is for this reason that the myth of development is in urgent need of deconstruction; otherwise it will continue to block and subvert other imaginaries.

The new development approach responded to this need of deconstructing the traditional development paradigm and introduced an approach that turned away from the classical economics of the 1980s and toward more human-centered ideals.

Participatory Rural Appraisal

Robert Chambers, who proposes a form of participatory development known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), identifies three basic components: methods, behaviors and attitudes, and sharing (Chambers 1994a: 1255-1256). PRA methods include matrix scoring, Venn diagramming, and triangulation. The behaviors and attitudes of PRA practitioners take on a “hand-over-the-stick” approach. PRA calls for developers to take a back seat to local knowledge and direction. The practitioner merely serves as a facilitator. The third basic component of PRA is sharing. Sharing takes place

between local people, among trainers and developers and the local people, and between trainers (Chambers 1994a: 1255-1257).

At a time when the need existed for a low-cost method of development practices that embraced the increasingly popular participatory approach, the attractiveness of PRA grew worldwide for three reasons, according to Robert Chambers (1994b: 1440-1441). First, advancements in technology made faster communication and information gathering possible during the 1990s. Secondly, the open ended nature of PRA, with its focus on reflection and opportunity for revision, “has encouraged innovation” and the “practicality of applications has contributed to the momentum” (Chambers 1994b: 1441). Lastly, the overall approach to development in a PRA fashion has proved to be an enjoyable process, one where the type of rapport building it has afforded trainers has opened the gates for information that is “diverse, detailed, complex, accurate, interesting and useful, and shared in a short time” (Chambers 1994b: 1441).

A Shift in Thinking

Starting from the 1970s moving forward, development practitioners grew tired of the disillusionment and dissatisfaction that resulted from traditional assessment methodologies (Chambers 2008). Out of this disillusionment, Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal made their way into development parlance and practice. As Chambers (2008: 67) states, “decision-makers needed the right information at the right time but...much information generated was inappropriate or misleading and was slow to become available. Methods of gathering information were often insufficient.” However, after PRA’s 20 years of influence in development practices and principles, emerging critical and hermeneutic theorists have provided an alternative still to the

participatory nomenclature to say that participation is not enough, whether in education, business, economics, or development. As discussed in the Interpretive Approach section of this Review of Literature, an interpretive orientation grounded in critical hermeneutic theory places value on language in such a way that it is,

a medium through which we interpret and begin to change ourselves and our conditions. This medium brings us to the place of conversation and the domain of the text that gives us the capacity to redescribe or refigure our everyday world in organizations and communities. It is in this redescription where social action, which moves beyond old behaviors and worn-out traditions, has its genesis (Herda 1999: 22).

Language is the medium through which narratives, identity, conversation, imagination, and action emerge to bring about meaningful change. Ricoeur (1982: 277) says,

a story describes a sequence of actions and experiences of a certain number of characters...represented in situations which change or to the change of which they react. These changes...reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the characters, giving rise to a new predicament which calls for thought or action or both.

A critical hermeneutic orientation toward assessment asserts that when the person changes, so too does the nature and meaning of the development act.

An Interpretive Approach

Despite efforts by people like Robert Chambers with Participatory Rural Appraisal and American economist Jeffrey Sachs (2005: 269) with his goal to bring about the end of poverty by 2015 through the Millennium Development Goals, today's development efforts have yet to come close to that goal. According to Herda (2007: 6), this is because,

traditional markers of development still play heavily in decisions to continue outrageously expensive projects and to measure progress primarily in economic terms. This ongoing trend can be noted in the recent development of one more

world-wide plan to reduce poverty and promote health and human rights. This is the mega-plan of all time, the one that will produce ‘The End of Poverty.’

Herda (2007: 4) proposes a critical hermeneutic alternative to the economic model, one that allows for dialogue, critique, and interpretation in order to elicit understanding of self and other. The interpretive approach moves

beyond the act of application to one of creating relationships and new understanding among ourselves and those in local settings. Undergirding this orientation toward development is an ontological appreciation of self and language positioned in learning on the part of both researcher and local participants.

This approach moves the aporia from a deficit model whereby the development act is seen as attending to an insufficiency, to one in which there is a responsibility and ethical aim to care for and have solicitude for others as we carry out development projects.

Anthropological Foundations of the Interpretive Approach

The development act is not fixed in time, nor is there a specific prescription to be used across the board. What works in one community may not work in another and this is why the use of a specific development model, such as Participatory Rural, falls prey to shortfalls and criticism. Unlike traditional models of development, the interpretive approach is constantly figuring and refiguring identity and meaning. The interpretive approach holds traces of the early anthropologists who paved the way for an interpretive understanding of development.

Two of the earliest anthropologists, who worked specifically with hill tribe people groups in the Union of Burma, were Henry Noel Cochrane Stevenson and E.R. Leach. Stevenson was a member of the Frontier Service in Burma who wrote *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* in 1943. According to Chit Hlaing (2008: 4), “he wrote, perhaps the very first professional, theoretically focused ethnography for Burma.” Considered an

administrator ethnographer in the anthropological world, it was his written work on the Central Chin tribes in Burma and his friendship with E.R. Leach that informed Leach's later work on the Kachin, which is considered a major contribution to anthropological work in Burma.

What is of importance in Leach's (1954: 4) work, as it relates to the emergence of an interpretive approach, is his idea that "while conceptual models of society are necessarily models of equilibrium systems, real societies can never be in equilibrium." He (1954: 5) goes on to say that "real societies exist in time and space. The demographic, ecological, economic and external political situation does not build up into a fixed environment, but into a constantly changing environment." This idea opens the gates for an interpretive model that configures and refigures as understanding changes and develops about ourselves and the other. The interpretive tradition is appropriate for a concept of society that is forever changing. In our interpretation and reinterpretation of our past and present in a society that is not in equilibrium, we can continue to create meaning and thus inform our actions based on our expectations of the imagined future.

Clifford Geertz took the concept of an interpretive understanding in anthropology even further to shatter traditional notions of the role of the anthropologist beyond the external observer position. Geertz (1973: 9) said, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun; I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." Geertz takes an ontological approach to research whereby there exists a reciprocal relationship in the research act.

Geertz's ontological orientation has major undertones for an interpretive approach to today's development paradigm, as it challenges traditional economic models of external authority, top down approaches and the creation of reality according to the outsider. An interpretive understanding as appropriated by Geertz (1973: 14) and as applied to development discourse and practice holds the possibility to enlarge "the universe of human discourse." Through discourse, understanding, authentic relationships and joint authorship are made possible. At the heart of discourse is language, As Herda (2007a: 22) states, "Language is significant in bringing worlds into being, and most importantly, bringing forth a particular world in which relationships are disclosed and people recognize each other as having personal capacities for acting together." Language is not a symbolizing tool for communication but a medium for narrative, identity, understanding and action.

Theoretical Foundations of the Interpretive Approach

Language has been traditionally thought of as a tool for communication (Herda 1999: 10-11). Words are associated with an object and the object has an identity only insofar as there is a word for it. In this sense, the world is already pre-identified and we merely come into the world in order to learn for what the signs and symbols stand. In communication, language has structure, with grammar and syntax and in that structure a message is formed and is passed on from person A to person B (Herda 1999: 10-11).

An interpretive approach to communication says that "language is not structure; it is an event" (Herda 2007a: 22). In language, someone says something to someone about something and in that act understanding is reached. Language is the medium in which the self and the world are disclosed. As Gadamer (2004: 401) suggests, "Not only is the

world ‘world’ only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is re-presented within it.”

Language in terms of a narrative provides a person with a medium to reconstruct the past, bringing together discordant events into a plot. The events of the past which a person chooses to recollect “hold the contradictions, sufferings, hopes, the past, and the imagined future in a plot that allows us to make sense of our lives” (Herda 2007a: 15).

In the reconstruction of a life lived, a person can come to understand the present state of being. An identity, or more specifically, a narrative identity, is brought forth, allowing for self-reflection and meaning making. Understanding the past and bringing it into the present can provide opportunities for imagining a future in ways that the past did not succeed in fulfilling. As Kearney (2001: 132-133) says,

life is lived...while stories are told. And there is a sense in which the untold life is perhaps less rich than a told one. Why? Because the recounted life pries open perspectives inaccessible to ordinary perception. It marks a poetic extrapolation of possible worlds which supplement and refashion our referential relations to the life-world existing prior to the act of recounting. Our exposure to new possibilities of being refigures our everyday being-in-the world.

Understanding of self through narrative also informs who we are in relation to self and to other, which has implications for how we see our place in the world, the interconnectedness that exists and how we might carry out meaningful action.

As an event, language is an experience that can evoke dialogue and discourse within community. As Gadamer (1988: 404) says, “Language has its true being only in conversation, in the exercise of understanding between people” In a conversation, storytelling can serve as a common ground for the self and other. In a story, the listener may find a piece of the story to connect with another person and in that connection the

common ground is found. In retelling the past through stories and in the place of a shared experience, the horizon offers myriad opportunities for the projection of future experiences with and for the other.

Even as an avenue with many opportunities to turn left, right, and back around, there is still a projection forward, not necessarily in the sense of a linear line, but in the sense of moving forward in time and space, where language exists and opens up the world to us. As Gadamer (2004: 411) reflects, “whoever has language ‘has’ the world.” He (2004: 405) also says “infinite perfectibility of the human experience of the world means that, whatever language we use, we never achieve anything but an ever more extended aspect, a ‘view’ of the world.” Language in an interpretive paradigm is the medium in which dialogue, identity, recollection of the past, projection of the future, imagination, and action find themselves housed. Each one of these aspects of the human condition are understood and given meaning through language.

Summary

This Review of Literature offers an overview of history of development, describing three major paradigms in development thought and practice. Within each development paradigm, I explore the prevalent assessment approaches, providing a general and brief description of each. I present a general overview of how development and assessment practices have changed, from the 1950s to today. Finally, this Chapter explores an emergent approach already occurring in the field, known as the interpretive approach.

Chapter Four of this dissertation presents the Theoretical Framework that guides this research study, including the three critical hermeneutic categories that provide the

boundaries for this exploration. Following the categories is an overview of the Research Protocol, describing how data collection, analysis, and text creation in an interpretive participatory project are implemented. I provide a look back at the Pilot Project study which formally began this entire research project. Finally, I conclude with a Background of the Researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Introduction

Chapter Four of this study presents the research framework and protocol, which are grounded within a critical hermeneutic tradition. The Theoretical Framework section presents three categories that guide this inquiry. The Research Protocol includes my entrée to the research site, timeline of my inquiry, introduction to my conversation participants, data collection and text analysis process, and research questions. Following the Research Protocol is an overview of the Research Pilot Study, which I conducted in November 2009. Included in the Research Pilot Study section is the background of the conversation participant, a summary analysis, findings, and lessons learned. Lastly, I conclude Chapter Four with a Background of the Researcher and a Summary of the Chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the exploration of project assessment in development follows the critical hermeneutic tradition, in which interpretation is central to the examination of identity and imagination as mediated and grounded by the past, present and future. Through a review of the literature, research categories revealed themselves, which in turn served as the guide for the exploration of the research topic. This exploration was carried out through conversations, observations, and document analyses. As Herda (1999: 103) states, research questions grounded in the conversations, “...carry the project forward, serve as markers for inquiry, provide the circumference of conversations, and serve as points or themes for discussion in analysis.” The three

categories used in the development of the questions and in the data collection and analysis were Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination.

Research Category One: Narrative Identity

Paul Ricoeur's theory of identity (1984, 1985, 1988; 1992), as mediated and appropriated by narrative, fuses history and fiction to allow a space for exploring and understanding identity. Through narrative, the identity of a character or an individual is constructed. Ricoeur (1992: 147) argues, "the person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her 'experiences.' Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted." However, the sense of self and personal identity does not make itself known immediately. It is only through symbolic mediations of the lived past, the experiences of the present, and the expectations for the future, that the self is known. Narrative provides the medium through which these symbolic meanings are explored and the self is interpreted. It is through narrative that assessment in development finds an avenue for a deeper understanding of the identities of the people with whom we work and for in the field. An understanding of their identities encompasses an understanding of their history, where they are now, and an understanding of where they would like to be. Actions in the present are oriented in such a way so as to fulfill expectations for their future.

The use of narrative not only helps development practitioners understand others, but themselves as well. Ricoeur's theory of identity says that knowledge of the self is an interpretation. Identity is an interpretation in the context of history, experiences, and biases. Through the act of storytelling, the discordant events of the past are emplotted into a sequence of events, referred to by Ricoeur (1992: 141) as a "synthesis of the

heterogeneous.” Involvement in the development process becomes a plot point in the development practitioner’s story. In telling and retelling our narrative as we go through life and accumulate experiences, our understanding of ourselves changes. As we come to understand ourselves differently, the way in which we see others changes. Also, when we see ourselves differently, our actions take a new shape. It is at this juncture that we find a continual and spiraling process of self-assessment. Development contexts are constantly in a state of flux and, as such, it is necessary for development practitioners to move with these changes, lest we find ourselves the same and doing the same things as we did twenty years ago. Through the use of narrative in development, we mediate our identity and find new meanings that can lead to new action, which is critical in assessment in international development.

Research Category Two: Mimesis

The look to the past is our prefiguration, or what Ricoeur refers to as *mimesis*₁. In the world of development, when assessment is carried out, it is imperative that there is an understanding of events that lead to the present. The history of events past and the retelling of those events help to us to understand “our traditions, assumptions, goals, and motives” (Herda 1999: 76). The telling of the past helps us to understand the factors that have shaped assessment practices over the years, to the present.

In critical judgments about our past, we open ourselves up to the use of imagination of a future that we want to inhabit with the other, known as *Mimesis*₃. Ricoeur (1984: 71) describes *mimesis*₃ as “the intersection...of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality.” Herda (1999: 77) refers to this stage of *mimesis* as pivotal to becoming the people and

organizations that we want to become. Mimesis₃ is where we find the space to create something different than what has already been, instead of doing the same thing over and over again, slightly different. In international development, assessment practices and principles have remained largely the same and people remain in poverty.

As Sue Soal (2001) states, "...social development is pursued blindly. We hope that if we put all the measurable conditions in place availability of resources, information, opportunity, and even work at changing behaviors, then somehow, magically, something will change inside of people that will make all the difference. But we don't go there." Assessment is one of the most important aspects of project development, but as Soal stated, it has been approached in such a way that poverty still remains. Traditionally, assessment has been carried out using measurement tools and objective analyses. Mimesis₃ calls forth imagination of what could be in assessment by giving us a framework for asking the question, "Where do we want to be in our assessment practices?" The projection of what could be informs actions in the present, known as mimesis₂. Herda (1999: 77) describes Mimesis₂ as the mediation "between the world we already have come to – already characterized by certain actions and cultural artifacts – and the world we can imagine ourselves inhabiting." It is in our configuration of past events that we draw meaning about our present situation and are open to the possibility of interpretation and critique.

Research Category Three: Imagination

Ricoeur's hermeneutical orientation toward imagination takes a concept that has been traditionally viewed by philosophers, such as Sartre, as a projection of prior experience, to one that puts imagination in a place of interpretation of future possibilities.

His basis for imagination is not from experience already had, but from an internal project of something new. According to Kearney (1998: 145), Ricoeur's treatment of imagination as meaning versus visual allows for multiple meanings and alternative interpretations, leading to the creation of something new.

Imagination finds its place in development assessment, on a multitude of levels. Imagination, as mediated by narrative, can be seen as the catalyst for action. Imagining a world in which we want to inhabit, that is different from where we are now and where we have been, can lead to new ways of thinking about and carrying out assessment in development. Imagination, in opening up the world possibilities, creates an endless horizon. As Kearney (1998: 147) said, "this power, to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the 'possible theatre of my liberty,' as a horizon of hope." This horizon of hope is open to both development practitioner and local, as they both venture to imagine a world in which they live and act together in new ways. For the beneficiaries of development programs, imagination can be a powerful medium for changing the direction of one's life. For the development practitioner, imagination can change the way we assess the development context, the locals, and ourselves, as we move forward in action.

Research Protocol

This research study followed a critical hermeneutic orientation and was guided by a research protocol process established by Herda (1999). In this process of field-based, participatory inquiry, I had conversations with development practitioners in the Union of Burma and in the United States. The recorded conversations, guided by specific questions, were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. In this section I provide a

background of my entrée to the Union of Burma, a timeline of my research experience, and I give an overview of my eight conversation participants. Field-based research carried out in this tradition meant, “learning about language, listening, and understanding” (Herda 1999: 93) so as to inform the creation of a text about assessment in international development.

Entrée to Research Site

I conducted a majority of my research in Yangon (formerly Rangoon), the capital city of the Union of Burma. My entrée to the research site began prior to my July 2010 travels to the Union of Burma. I, along with the assistance of my professor (who will be introduced in the Research Conversation Participants section) set-up conversation opportunities. The remainder of my research conversations occurred with development practitioners in the United States.

Timeline

The data collection process of this research study began in May 2010 with my trip to the Union of Burma. My final conversation occurred in July 2010, which completed the data collection process. Transcription of the conversations occurred immediately after the completion of each conversation. All conversations were transcribed by August 2010, at which time I began an analysis of the data and text creation. The final dissertation was completed and submitted March 2011.

Conversation Participants

There were eight research participants in this study. Following is a description of the conversation participants.

Name	Organization	Role within Organization
Dr. Alberto Andretta	ChildFund International	Knowledge Management and Learning Specialist
Dr. Ellen Herda	University of San Francisco	Professor of Education
U Cin Lamh Mang.	Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery	Proprietor
Sandra Loo-Nee	Yangon YMCA	Secretary of Microfinance
Dr. Than “Sonny” Nyan	Yangon YMCA	General Secretary
Charles Owusu	ChildFund International	Sr. Manager, Impact Assessment & Advocacy Team Leader
Dr. Valerie Dzubar	Windhorse	Board Member
Akah Development Practitioner	Large NGO	Area Development Manager

Figure 7: Conversation Participants

Dr. Alberto Andretta

I met Alberto Andretta during my undergraduate years at USF through a mutual friend. Later, when I entered the master’s program at USF, I reconnected with Alberto and learned that he was in the process of completing his doctoral studies. Over the years, I had regular updates about the work Alberto had been doing in development, as he kept in contact with Ellen Herda, my dissertation advisor.

When it came time to conduct my research on assessment in development, Alberto was one of the first people who came to mind, as he had been doing development work since he graduated from the doctoral program. Currently, he works for a large non-governmental organization (NGO) that does development projects in 31 different

countries. I met with Alberto during the summer of July 2010 in Richmond, Virginia where he works and lives. Our hour long conversation could have lasted for days because of the natural affinity we both have for looking at development within a critical hermeneutic perspective. This common link between the two of us added a uniqueness to our conversation because he understands exactly the theoretical framework within which I was studying and carrying out my research. Simultaneously, he provided examples of ways in which he has been able to incorporate his critical hermeneutic background into everyday practices and principles of the development sector, which only strengthened my conviction that there is an opening for such theoretical principles in everyday application.

Dr. Ellen Herda

I met Ellen Herda in 2003 when I took my first critical hermeneutic course at the University of San Francisco. Since that class, I have travelled with her to Southeast Asia four times and have visited six different countries. Throughout my classes and travels with Ellen, I have begun to see the world, my place and the work that I do in a very different way.

While she may be my dissertation advisor, I knew that a complete exploration of my topic could not be possible without her invaluable thoughts and experiences coming into play as I created this text. My conversation with Ellen took place in a hotel in downtown Yangon, Burma. After a day's end, we sat in a room and shared our thoughts about the development work that was being done in Burma. We discussed one NGO in particular. As was the case with Alberto Andretta, Ellen provided a prospective of program development and assessment in Burma that houses a critical hermeneutic framework. A major difference between the work of Ellen and Alberto is the freedom

with which she has to carry out development and assessment in a way that is completely congruent with her theoretical principles.

Ellen Herda has over 20 years of experience working in development, from her time in Africa to her most recent and longstanding work in Southeast Asia. She has spent the last ten years continuously working with a very specific community in Southeast Asia, working alongside this community to jointly create and sustain the livelihoods of this group of people. She has firsthand experience incorporating critical hermeneutic principles into practice through adult learning programs.

U Cin Lamh Mang

My conversation with U Cin Lamh Mang serendipitously came about when my travel companions told me about a very special textile store in the local market. Through their conversations with the store proprietors they came to learn about the store's role in a development project. Intrigued, I went the very next day to the market in search of this store. I recall the day being extremely hot and my very short walk to the market provided nothing less than a sauna-like atmosphere while walking around the market and inquiring about a particular store.

After multiple inquiries to different shop keepers, I finally found a person who



Figure 8: Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery
Photo: A. Bahr 2010

knew which store I was referring to and led me all the way across the market, up a flight of stairs and to a Chin textile store (see Figure 8), which was pleasantly air conditioned. The conversation at first was, at best, formal and limited. However, as I

spent more time in the store, the proprietors began to see my sincere interest in their work and that is what led to a long conversation about the role in which the store plays in the development of the Chin community in the northern part of the Union of Burma.

The store proprietors were U Cin Lamh Mang, who did the majority of the talking, and his wife Daw Khun Shwe. U Cin Lamh Mang was educated as a veterinarian. However, he could not make a living in the Union of Burma as a veterinarian. He went back to school and decided to study anthropology. Within his area of study he decided to explore the relationship between Chin textiles and the preservation of Chin culture. U Cin Lamh Mang carried forward this study to his work as the owner of a Chin textile store, which also served, in its own right, as a development project whereby the promulgation of Chin textiles helped sustain a community and preserve a culture.

Sandra Loo-Nee

Sitting in the back of a crowded, fairly noisy room at a microfinance development site run by the Yangon YMCA, Sandra Loo-Nee, secretary of microfinance, took time out of her busy supervisory role to have a conversation with me. We discussed the YMCA's microfinance development program and the way in which she and the YMCA view assessment. Sandra Loo-Nee is a Karen woman from the Union of Myanmar. Her perspective of development and assessment comes from a very different place than that of my other research conversation participants who have been formally educated, worked for large NGO's and who have purposely made development their lives' work. Her experience and participation in development by way of the YMCA happened as a result of a mere job opportunity. With that in mind, most of her perspectives and view points are from a place of promoting the YMCA mission and vision in her community.

Dr. Than “Sonny” Nyan

My relationship with Dr. “Sonny,” as he is commonly referred to, began with an email which I had sent to the Yangon YMCA (see Figure 9) inquiring about their lodging facilities. I received an email back quite quickly and I mentioned the email and Dr. Sonny to my dissertation advisor, Ellen Herda. She spoke to contacts of hers in the Union of Myanmar and, in fact, they had heard of this gentleman and knew of his work with the YMCA. This led to arranging a meeting with Dr. Sonny and that meeting turned out to be a two-day learning experience, in which Dr. Sonny and his staff took me and my travel companions to various Yangon YMCA sites. At the conclusion of our travels to these



**Figure 9: Yangon YMCA, Yangon, Burma
Photo: A. Bahr 2010**

sites, Dr. Sonny hosted a lunch at a local Burmese restaurant and a second lunch at the Yangon YMCA, where I was able to have a conversation with him about himself and his work. Dr. Sonny has a Doctorate in Humane Letters.

Charles Owusu

Charles Owusu is a colleague of Alberto Andretta and is directly involved in program development and assessment within ChildFund International. After a formal introduction by Alberto, Charles and I corresponded back and forth and found a time to chat via an online chatting tool known as Skype. I sat in my dining room and Charles sat at his computer in Richmond, Virginia and early one morning we had an interesting and

in-depth conversation about program development and assessment from the perspective of his past and current experiences in the international sector.

Dr. Valerie Dzubar

I have known Valerie Dzubar since I first travelled to Southeast Asia in 2005. She is a graduate of the University of San Francisco's School of Education. Her specific area of interest while conducting her graduate studies was development in Laos. Currently she teaches nursing at Samuel Merritt University in Oakland, CA and actively participates in development opportunities. She serves on the board of an organization called Windhorse, which is dedicated to development projects in Southeast Asia and she often travels to Southeast Asia. My conversation with Valerie occurred after an exciting day at the market in downtown Yangon, where I had spent the afternoon talking to the owners of the Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery. As a conversation participant, Valerie brought a perspective of a critical hermeneutic orientation, a developer, and a nurse practitioner, which provided a unique perspective to my research inquiry.

Akah Development Practitioner

The Burmese Development Practitioner is a woman who I met in 2005 during my first trip to the Union of Myanmar. She is an Akah woman and was the first woman in her village to receive a college education. It is for that very reason that she was sought out by one of the world's largest and most well known NGOs, which carries out development programs throughout the world. Although only having met with her twice in the last five years, my relationship with her has been one of friendship, deepening trust, and respect. Sitting in her hotel room in downtown Yangon, she spoke to me openly and candidly about her work and the assessment process used in the NGO where she works.

Data Collection

The process of data collection included conversations, transcriptions of the conversations, and a review of transcript. After identifying conversation partners who held the possibility of adding value, meaning and opening up horizons within the research topic, I invited each participant utilizing a variety of communication avenues, including email, phone and mutual contacts. I made arrangements to meet with each conversation participant and recorded the conversation so that it could be transcribed into a fixed text. When possible, the transcription text was returned to the conversation participant for any additions, edits or clarifications. By doing this, participants had the opportunity to contribute their own voices and interpretations about the research topic and, in doing so, open themselves up to the possibility of new understandings about themselves, the other, and the development act. This interpretive, participatory approach may have implications for the future of international project development and assessment.

Data was also collected from a learning journal. The intent of the journal was to record thoughts, perceptions, and reflections on not only the conversations, but on other occasions where data may have revealed itself.

Research Questions

The use of guiding questions in field based hermeneutic research serve as a framework for the direction of the conversation in an unobtrusive and flexible manner. Informed by the review of literature and the research categories, research questions “engage participants and researcher in an open and honest conversation” in order to provide a “context for knowledge and understanding” (Herda 1999: 107-108). In authentic conversation, the topic at hand takes hold of the conversation, creating a free

flowing back and forth play between the researcher and the conversation participant. In conversational play lies the possibility of understanding, meaning and change within both the participants.

Guiding questions were sometimes asked in a different order and were accompanied by follow-up questions. The aforementioned conditions were dependent upon the conversation participant and the nature of the conversation and were acted upon at my discretion.

From the pilot study to the dissertation research, my guiding questions were revised. The original questions used during the pilot study process did not go to the heart of what my dissertation research was going to be. Ultimately, I felt that I could get depth and richness in five guiding questions. The following questions were the original questions used in the pilot study:

Guiding Questions Used in Pilot Study
Narrative Identity
1. To what extent is our own sense of personal identity portrayed in the development act?
2. What is it about identity that calls forth the desire to carry out development projects?
3. In what ways does the identity of the researcher influence the nature of development projects?
4. How do you see yourself in relation to the other?
5. In what way does your relation to the other inform your work in development?
Mimesis
1. Reflecting on the history of development, how have you seen development practice change over the years?
2. What do you see as the current development paradigm?
3. In what ways has the terms “participatory” shaped the direction of development?
4. In your opinion, what are the strengths of participatory methods?
5. In your opinion, what are the gaps left by participatory methods?

6. What is your estimation of the reality of the poor and what is published and written about in development?
Imagination
1. In our efforts to create a perfect world free of poverty and misery, what role does development play?
2. How can we achieve even a fraction of what development aims to do?
3. What has not been in development that would revolutionize our experiences in the field and the influence development practices have on the people serves?
4. What do you see for the future of development theory, practices and principles?

Figure 10: Questions Used in Pilot Study

Following are the revised questions that were used during the dissertation research process:

Revised Guiding Questions Used in Dissertation Research
1. Tell me a story about yourself and the work you do in development.
2. Why is development in the Union of Myanmar so important?
3. How do you assess the beginning, middle and end of a development project?
4. Tell me a story about a time when assessment worked and why. When did it not work and why?
5. What do you see for the future of development in the Union of Myanmar?
6. How have you changed?

Figure 11: Revised Questions Used in Dissertation Research

Data Analysis and Text Creation

This research study was carried out within a critical hermeneutic orientation, which drew data from the text of transcribed conversations. Recording the conversation allowed me, as the researcher, to relive the conversation. This distancing allowed me to reflect on the conversation, interpret what was said, develop a deeper understanding of the topic and come away with a new understanding of the text. In the interpretation of the text, I identified categories that guided the direction of my exploration. Supported by critical hermeneutic theory, I developed each category, substantiating each with quotations pulled from the conversation and the journal. The categories were discussed and developed in light of the issue at hand and the implications for future action were

identified. Through this process, Herda (1999: 98) states “the researcher sees the world differently than before the research, and implications are manifest for looking at the everyday problems differently.” Through an interpretation of text, understanding and meaning expounds, not only about the research topic, but about the self in relation to the topic and the world at large. My horizon has been fused with the world of the text.

Research Pilot Study

In the fall of 2009 I carried out a Research Pilot Project in order to determine the appropriateness of my research categories, as well as to gain experience in research conversations. Following is an overview of my Research Pilot Study, including a background of my conversation participant, an analysis of the data by way of the transcribed conversation, and the findings of the study.

Background of Conversation Participant

Assist International, founded in 1990, “is a humanitarian organization dedicated to relieving human suffering around the world by networking the resources in the world with the great human need that exists” ([www. charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)). The people of Assist International “deliver medical equipment, food, funds, building materials, educational supplies, business assets and more to charities, agencies, and refugee camps around the world” ([Assist International.org](http://AssistInternational.org)). These deliveries are used toward development projects that fall under four categories: medical, vulnerable children and widows, infrastructure, and natural disaster projects. Assist International and their projects have visited 58 countries throughout the world, including in the United States, and my specific country of study, the Union of Burma, formerly known as Burma. They have completed over 80 medical projects in 42 countries throughout their 19 years and have an upcoming project

in Yangon, Burma which involves the Defense Services General Hospital. This project is currently in its planning phase.

On Wednesday, November 4, 2009 at 10am, I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Tim Reynolds, Vice President and Executive Director of Assist International's Ripon, CA distribution center. At the time of our conversation, Mr. Reynolds had been an executive staff member at Assist International for six years. Prior to his work at Assist International, Mr. Reynolds participated in various humanitarian projects, utilizing his leadership skills, knowledge of construction management and his passion for service work. His prior works included building two houses in Caminul Felix Village II, Romania and securing property for a church in Cefa' Romania and a college in Oradea Romania. His most memorable moment with Assist International was his "first trip to Afghanistan, right after the major conflict was declared over by President Bush." He described it as "one of [his] most 'on-the-edge' experiences [he's] had since joining AI. It was intense." Mr. Reynolds is currently a Ripon, CA resident, living with his wife and four sons.

Pilot Study Summary Analysis

Through conversation with Timothy Reynolds, Assistant Vice President and Executive Director of Assist International, I had the opportunity to discuss project development and assessment, where it is today, in what ways it fails to address appropriately the issues at hand, and where it needs to go. The subject matter, and the way in which it was viewed and spoken about was largely a reflection of his own personal identity and how he views his relationship with the other.

Project development and assessment in international development, especially in countries such as the Union of Burma, are at an impasse in terms of their ability to do things in ways that have never been done before. Instead, the current answer is to take an ongoing problem and approach it in ways that have already failed, but label it slightly differently and call it ‘a new solution to the age old problem of the poor.’ This stalemate is the root cause of the incongruence that exists between development goals and the reality of the poor. The abyss that seems to fall in between the two exists because of a lack of basic assumptions towards the other and self that are necessary if the development act is to be authentic. Herda (2007: 7), in “Identity and Development: Learning, Language and Policy Implications” poses the question: “How can we begin to think in a different vein, in which unkept promises can be refigured to set the stage for development in a new key?” The answer cannot be found in the Millennium Development Goals, which are supposed to eradicate poverty in 2015. That is in five years and poverty still exists in every corner of the world. It is time for a new way of thought. As Rist (2002: 237) said, “tinkering around with old strategies will not be of any use. Only a new paradigm can alter, not the way things are, but our way of conceiving them.” He also goes on to pose the question, “How will people tomorrow judge the ‘age of development?’ It is too early to say. But it is high time to pose the question-so that the imagination can be called into struggle against what appears self-evident” (Rist 2002: 237).

Identity and the Development Act

What is self-evident in development is that the act itself is a reflection of how we see ourselves and the other. As Herda (2007: 1) states, “Our identity is portrayed in the

development act. How we see ourselves, who we believe the other to be, and how we act in the name of development all reflect basic assumptions about ourselves and the other.”

In my conversation with Tim Reynolds of Assist International, I learned that his personal identity as it is carried out in his work is very much influenced by his own personal religious beliefs. About himself, he said, “I am a follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ and he said go about doing good. So that is the driving force in my life. I want to make life better for people.” The Bible and its teachings play an integral role in Mr. Reynolds’ life, as reflected in his own identity and how his identity as a Christian informs the work that he does. One can also see that his Christian beliefs also reflect how he sees his relationship and responsibility to others. “What the Bible talks about is giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. The idea that going in and doing service in and of itself had value. I think St. Francis of Assisi said ‘Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words.’” Taking direction from scripture, Mr. Reynolds sees his relationship with the other as one of servitude and this is reflected in his self-identification as that of a builder. “I am a builder. That is who I am and so that’s what turns me on is building things. Like I said whether that’s an individual’s capacity or an organization’s capacity or a hospital’s capacity or a country’s capacity whatever. I am a builder. That drives me.”

The act of Mr. Reynolds narrating his life and his work is, as Paul Ricoeur would say, an act of interpretation. Mr. Reynolds, in the act of emplotting the discordant events of his life and experience in development, is actively configuring and refiguring his identity. As Ricoeur says, “A life story proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories the subject can take up and hold as constitutions of his personal identity” (Ricoeur 1984: 74). With each utterance, he is presented with the possibility of

extracting new meaning from the text which brings him closer to self-knowledge, understanding and preservation. It is in this self-understanding that as developers, our essential assumptions about self and others are to be found. This is of crucial import in the development act as it appropriately guides our praxis towards development that is appropriate, meaningful and reflective of those that we work with and for in the field. In particular, it will play an integral role as we are in the ground zero phase of project development. These essential understandings will form the foundation of our action and approach to projects. Often times, project development occurs without these most basic assumptions and the result is development acts that do not match the testimonies of the poor, but cater to the whims and fancies of major donors and funders.

The Present-Memory and the Imagined-Future

In project development and assessment, there are three crucial questions to ask before making any decisions about how to carry out a project. “Who are we?” as an organization, as a community, or as individuals; where have we been and what has happened that has led to the present? The second question should be, “Where are we now?”; what is our current condition and are we satisfied; what is working for us and what needs to change? Once we have asked the first two questions, then it must be asked, “What do we imagine our future to be?”

In international development, there are thousands of development projects that seek to improve the plight of the poor. The Union of Burma is a prime example of a country whose people make less than \$200 a year per capita and is ripe for developers. With the hundreds of non-governmental organizations and other organizations that are all seeking to do the same thing, how many are taking the time to build relationships, create

trust, have conversation, and make meaning prior to carrying out projects? How many hold those essential basic assumptions and are taking the time to ask the basic questions so that the development act appropriately reflects the interests of those served? In my conversation with Mr. Reynolds concerning the current state of development projects, there was one emergent orientation that seemed to plague development. When asked what the primary considerations in assessing a project were, Mr. Reynolds said, “The bottom line is funding.” In going into a project, developers must first ask, “Is a project fundable, because that kind of thing trumps a lot of things.” He went on further to say that the “sustainability of a project is important of course because there’s no point in building an orphanage if the group we are partnering with doesn’t have the long term means to sustain it...but a great organization can have all of that and if no one is interested in funding we have no real means to fund that.”

In asking where international project development has been, Mr. Reynolds stated that there’s been a shift to sustainable projects. He said,

For as long as I can remember, everybody’s said you know you give a man a fish you feed him for a day. You teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. But that has not been the practice of humanitarian work...there’s a real shift now to the kinds of things that build peoples’ capacity to care for themselves and I think that’s huge. I think it’s appropriate. I think it is the only real model that has a chance of living.

In Mr. Reynolds’ experience, developers had come to realize the existence of a gap between what was said and what was actually done. This gap left the development paradigm susceptible to the kind of shift that Mr. Reynolds spoke about in terms of capacity building. Within the idea of capacity building, there existed the opportunity to imagine what the future held. He said, “And so I think you have to ask them, what are you interested in? But it doesn’t have to be a big and complex business model.” Visiting

and understanding the present memory of what has taken place and understanding what is currently taking place holds the opportunity to use imagination.

Findings from the Pilot Study

The last twenty years in development have experienced an influx in the use of the term participatory, especially by people such as Robert Chambers, as well as by large organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme with their Millennium Development Goals. Even in my conversation with Timothy Reynolds from Assist International, while the term participatory did not necessarily surface, various participatory centered ideas and concepts were discussed. The participatory approach is the reality of what is being talked about and experienced in the field. While the participatory approach advocates for practices and principles that bring developers and their work closer to the realities of the poor, one must be cautious about the lure of this approach. As Herda (2007: 8) states,

the participatory approach does no more than simply make the other fall into a modality that we consider modern...one can do participatory research as a positivist, a qualitative researcher or as an interpretive researcher. Each of these three orientations is different, but the first two are the same in terms of the relationship between the subject and object and provide little difference in the nature of data collected than what one would expect from a well designed survey.

For a participatory approach to take on meaningful action, a shift in its underlying assumptions must occur, one that places this approach in the interpretive tradition. The implications of this shift are far reaching in the development act. Not only would an interpretive approach in participatory development transform the way in which the development act is carried out, but would transform the most basic underlying assumptions that we have about the human condition.

An interpretive approach to project development, especially in a country like the Union of Burma would mean an approach to identity that sees individual identity in terms of the other. In a country where there are minority people groups that are treated as lesser human beings, an orientation towards identity that includes the other could have a profound influence on community and country hood. Perhaps seeing the other in oneself may elicit care and solicitude in such a way that the need for outside developers might diminish and political subjugation and military cruelty are not such a large part of these peoples' reality.

An interpretive approach holds the possibility of eradicating what Mr. Reynolds called the "bottom line" consideration. In grant writing and in evaluations of program "effectiveness," funders and program evaluators are looking at the numbers to determine success or failure. Often times, there is such a push for statistically attractive numbers that the human story is overlooked. An interpretive approach in program evaluation would look to the realities of those who are a part of the development process.

Learning from Pilot Study

Through the Pilot Study, I learned two important lessons. As mentioned in the Research Questions section of this Chapter, the guiding questions used in the Pilot Project were revised in the dissertation. Originally I had 15 questions to guide the Pilot Study conversation; however, they were heavily dominated by theory. I learned that not everyone's work in development is grounded in theory and on the contrary, peoples' knowledge base can come from a place of experience. Therefore, I found a way to ask the questions in a manner that still spoke to the theoretical categories. Ultimately, the Pilot

Study conversation took on a life of its own and I had to let go of a rigid structure of sequential questions that I had predetermined.

Secondly, the pilot study was my first academic experience employing an interpretive, participatory approach to inquiry. It opened my eyes to the importance of language and identity. Both concepts are of central importance to the research process, as we seek new understandings based on our relationships with the people whom we partner in the research act. Language is the medium by which we can interpret and understand the world in which we live. An understanding of identity informs our actions in the present and in the future, as it speaks to where we have been and where we want to be in the future. As I reflect on my own personal identity before and after the Pilot Project, I see a person whose horizon has changed. This new landscape will undoubtedly significantly influence how I see myself in this world and how I will carry out research in my pursuit to further understand assessment in international development.

Background of the Researcher

I began my educational career with an interest in politics. While a curriculum in politics covers the spectrum of American Politics and Comparative Politics, I found that I was not interested in local politics, but was particularly interested in international politics. Realizing this, I found meaningful ways to extend my interest in international politics outside of the classroom by immersion trips. I consider these the beginning of my career and passion for international development.

My life has had two parallel paths: my professional career in higher education administration and my personal passion for international development. Finding a program in graduate school that was heavily focused on international concepts and issues while

incorporating subjects that had implications for leadership, business, education and many other arenas, was the perfect marriage of my professional life with my educational career.

I work at a private junior college as the Dean. On my own time, I have travelled to many parts of Southeast Asia, where I have been a part of development projects. Currently I am working on a computer project in a small village in Burma.

Summary

Chapter Four presents the reader with a detailed overview of the unique and possibility-driven nature of a critical hermeneutic research inquiry. This theoretical framework and orientation serve as the guide for the research protocol. I provide an explanation of my entrée to the research site, timeline, description of conversation participants, the data collection and text creation process, and a presentation of past and current guiding questions.

Chapter Five of this research study provides an overview of the data derived from the transcribed conversations and an in-depth discussion of these data in light of the three theoretical categories discussed earlier in this Chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter Five presents data drawn from research conversations and offers a preliminary analysis that sets the stage for a deeper theoretical analysis in the next Chapter. What emerges is a text that explores the narratives of individuals in the international development sector, and their thoughts and experiences about assessment practices and principles. The data presentation show many similar notions expressed by participants. Such data can appear to be repetitive; however, it is my hope that the ensuing discussions and analyses show these recurring ideas to be a part of a spiral process which reflects the heart of assessment, that is, on-going learning. This process is core to the work of most of the participants, and, hence, is reflected often in the research conversations. Data for this text also include journal entries about the research experience, and other textual materials collected throughout the research process.

Conversation partners offered personal narratives of their work in development, shaped both from their past experiences and the potential they see in the future. The transcribed conversations were fixed into a text that provides a position from which to critique today's assessment practices and principles in development work. However, in order to critique, the past must be creatively appropriated (Herda 1999: 74). To this point, Chapter Three delves into the historical nature of assessment practices and the influence those practices have on today's development world. It is in the here-and-now that, as a researcher, I have had the opportunity to add to the development story my own interpretation of the influence of assessment practices. Herda (1999: 75) states, "the referential dimension of a text unfolded in the process of interpretation...points to future

possibilities and alternatives for our social problems and requires creativity on the part of the interpreter(s) to imagine new possibilities and configurations of social life and policy.”

Themes that emerged from the conversations are: the place of narrative in assessment practices; assessment as a continuous learning process; and the future and imagination. What follows is an introduction to the concept of assessment, as viewed by my conversation participants, which I title Reflections on Assessment. Subsequently, I examine the aforementioned themes in the context of the three research categories Narrative Identity, Mimesis and Imagination.

Reflections on Assessment

Throughout history people have always developed themselves. It's very difficult for “an outsider” to study development process and to sustain the momentum without people themselves taking the initiative to lead their own development process (Charles Owusu, conversation participant, July 2010).

The eight people, introduced in Chapter Four, with whom I had conversations, are involved in international development assessment in a variety of capacities. The roles they play within their organizations, their level and type of education, and the contexts within which they work, are considerations that influence how they view and implement assessment practices. Five of my conversation participants work directly for three of the world’s largest non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Two of these NGOs are discussed in the ensuing text. The third NGO is discussed later in this section.

Alberto Andretta and Charles Owusu work for ChildFund, though in two different roles. Dr. Sonny and Sandra Loo-Nee work for the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The other four participants do development work on a more individual basis,

working with local groups of people on smaller scaled projects. Alberto Andretta and Charles Owusu are both involved in assessment in international projects around the world, except in the Union of Burma. Dr. Sonny, Sandra Loo-Nee, Brooke Zobrist, the Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery, and the Akah Development Practitioner do development work full-time in the Union of Burma. Ellen Herda and Valerie Dzubar have been doing development work in the Union of Burma for many years, but they also do work in other countries such as Thailand and Laos.

During my conversations, I asked participants how they approach assessment within their work. I found that participants who work for large international organizations approached assessment with a very sequential and structured methodology. Charles Owusu identified his organization's approach to assessment as the logical framework (log frame), which he explained is the dominant planning framework in international development work. The log frame "forces us in development to define specific indicators for specific projects...[and] tends to focus more on...outcomes." Alberto Andretta similarly described his interpretation of his organization's assessment practices as "mechanical. It's really trying to ...follow closely the progress of something we set out to do." Their assessment practices attempt to do three things. First, it measures outputs, answering the question, were the things that had to be done, done? Secondly, their assessment methodology attempts to identify the beneficiaries of projects and answer, who is benefitting? Lastly, their assessment process asks what the cost was.

The Akah Development Practitioner also works for a large international NGO. Her organization has recently made a shift to following the practices set forth by Dr. James W. Altschuld and Dr. Belle Ruth Witkin in the book *From Needs Assessment to*

Action. She and her organization are currently applying the principles of this book to their work in the Union of Burma. This shift created a tension between the newly implemented assessment principles and their previous local, contextually-oriented assessment practices. Traditionally, her organization began assessments with an orientation toward knowing “the situation, problems, culture, economic situation, and the local people.” In efforts to become familiar with the local context, they carried out a situation analyses by going to local communities, and talking with people about their interests. Based on those conversations they combined all of their results and “define[d] the issue, the needs, [and] the problem. At the first stage [they would] spend one year at the assessment state.” The Akah Development Practitioner feels the organization’s previous practices were more appropriate for the context within which she works.

A common theme among my conversation participants who carry out development work on a smaller, local scale is the participatory and relationship-based nature of their assessment processes. During our conversation, Brooke Zobrist explained her assessment process. In her current girls’ empowerment project, she identified “four areas where there are critical masses of girls in [her] target age group.” She spoke “to community leaders, monks, nuns, priests, orphanage administrators” and sought “their permission.” She furthered, “the way we are assessing the model is the girls’ ability to participate in the activities, understand the vocabulary, and very simple measures like...retention rates across the year and self-efficacy.” Ellen Herda explained that an assessment process that is local, participatory, and relationship-based, will contain elements of trust, and, in time, assessment will be built into the process. Speaking of Dr. Sonny and the Yangon YMCA Microfinance Project, Ellen Herda said,

this is the person who the community trusts...It's a very localized thing...My understanding is that the reason his microfinance system works is because he has set out extremely detailed ideas and before anyone does anything with this committee in this community, they understand the outline of the program...They go into small groups to teach. Then there's a trust. If the people do right with their loan, they get another loan. We saw one woman who had received a loan for the third time. Assessment is built into the process.

Valerie Dzubar's thoughts on assessment in international development work complement and support the ideas of Ellen Herda's and Brook Zobrist's. She believes that "in a project that is very local, and where the context is so important, you have to be able to respond to what is real, to where you are, with who you're having the project work done, for whatever goal." The Akah Development Practitioner shared a similar sentiment. Talking about her development projects in the Union of Burma, she pointed to the book *From Needs Assessment to Action* and said, "This handbook sounds very good but you cannot do assessment like this because it is very limiting. This book shows systematic actions. However, I think PLAs, participation, learning, and action exercises are more suitable for the local people because it is a participatory method and we can see the situation changing."

While large international NGOs and non-profits are focused on outcome-oriented assessment practices, the narratives of those involved in the local work tell a story different from that of their organization's story. Their interpretation of what works and does not work resonates more closely with that of local, contextual developers doing participatory, relationship-based assessments. This alternative approach to assessment is in response to a variety of limitations created by current practices. Charles Owusu believes

a lot of programs tend to identify beneficiaries but it is very difficult for us to say whether the intended beneficiaries are actually benefitting. We all know that there

are very deprived and excluded people. Whether or not they benefit from programs is very difficult to see. We have not sufficiently considered the contextual and environmental factors within which the projects are operating before we even come to the issue of testing our indicators and outcomes.

The reason for this knowledge gap has to do with the relationship between standardized assessment practices created by corporate offices thousands of miles away from local contexts and the participants in the field. As Herda explained, “by the time they leave the community, come to the district, come to the country, then come to the national office, and then go to the international level, there is no reality at all... There is no relationship between this form and reality. That’s the biggest problem. There is no connection between the process and the real world.” Charles Owusu similarly described an example of the disconnect between organizational objectives and local reality. He discussed a project whose success was determined by interest rates, repayment rates and income levels. He believes that is one area in which projects fail because “it takes more than just credit to increase income levels. But that is one area where you can easily see projects fail if you see the organization’s expectation. And the project could easily succeed if you bring in the perspective of the community groups.”

The message amongst all eight conversation participants was similar and is best summarized by two comments made by Charles Owusu and Ellen Herda. As Owusu states:

My assumption has always been if you have a good process, it’s more likely that you end up with a good outcome. So if you don’t look at the processes, the processes are not well designed, the tendency is that you don’t achieve the outcomes. But then we all tend to be looking at outcomes rather than looking at the processes. Then it’s basically linear and I know the development sector has the mentality that it tends to think that everything would go from step one to step two to step three to step four. But in reality things don’t work that way.

The first message is the experiences of life do not follow a linear, structured, and methodological process, nor should assessment practices. The second message, as Herda states: “there has to be personal relationships before assessment and evaluation can succeed in development.” Successful assessment processes based in personal relationships come to fruition through three aspects of social reality analysis: Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination as posited by Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988; 1992). These three concepts are discussed below.

Narrative Identity

Just as rays of sun shine through small openings in the clouds, so too is narrative finding its way into assessment. A theme that consistently emerged in the conversations was the concept of narrative. Most of my conversation partners talked about narrative and how it can answer the essential questions in assessment: What are the interests of the community? How can those translate into action? Is this working? Are we doing what we set out to do? For my conversation partners, there is a quality of depth about narrative that reveals more about the human condition than can be expressed through questionnaires and numerical values. Alberto Andretta said, “while we tend to look more in terms of numbers, there’s very little attention that is given to the processes and the qualitative statements and testimonies that community groups raise as part of the process.” Charles Owusu believes this is because “the dominant learning tool does not take into account the voices of the people who are directly involved in the process who are supposed to be benefitting.” Narrative is a medium that partners in development can use to understand each other better. Telling the story of one’s life, with all its intricacies, offers a glimpse into another person’s world. This view can better explain the

development context than any other assessment medium. Valerie Dzubar said “assessment that includes this kind of data is something new and it needs to be measured by conversations. It’s more important than the numbers. It’s richer...”

The narrative reveals the identity of the characters, the plots of their lives, the intentions in their actions, and hopes for their future. “This ‘configurational’ operation, according to Ricoeur, allows us to construct “meaningful totalities of scattered events” (1982: 278). According to my conversation participants, what is revealed through the story is the heart of the matter. Valerie Dzubar holds that:

assessment is trying to answer a question for people. Is this working?..In order to answer this question you have to link what happens with where you started. Do you see where the journey’s been? And those are not always, they’re not adequately measured just with objective criteria. Some of that comes out purely in the story.

Kearney says, “the story told tells about the action of the ‘who’: and the identity of this ‘who’ is a narrative identity” (2004: 108). Understanding one’s narrative identity is to help answer the essential questions of assessment.

I asked my conversation partners how they assessed the beginning, middle and end of a development project. For all of my conversation partners, the assessment process begins with an understanding of the context that surrounds a development project. Charles Owusu said this

first phrase obviously is trying to understand the development concerns that the community or a project would have and will require some analysis of the causal factors and often times the best approach is to have a participatory process in which people are engaged in dialogue and debate about what the priority issues are and how these can be addressed.

The Yangon YMCA has taken a similar approach. According to Dr. Sonny and Sandra Loo-Nee, people from the community have come to the Yangon YMCA to tell them of an

interest or concern. The YMCA then went into the community and asked them what their priorities were. The organization for which the Akah Development Practitioner works, calls this stage “participation, learning and action.” Often times, the conversation partners identified specific people whom they would involve in this initial process. Dr. Sonny said the YMCA had “to arrange first with the community leaders, elders.” When meeting with a community leader, Ellen Herda recalled from a Thai development project, “I ask the leader to give me a story about some problem in the past they tried to improve, what worked and what didn’t work. In such a story I learned many more details than if I just ask questions. I can never ask all the right questions.” The details of the story guided her in determining what actions would be her next steps. In conversation, Herda brought to light a key concept of assessment. She discussed a way of carrying out assessment that was intentional in looking to the past. What happened and what did not happen? Inherent in the answer to these questions is the sense of whether or not there were unkept promises, which sets a tone for future action. To know the story helps create a context; to understanding of the here-and-now guides action. From the conversations surrounding narrative, the idea that assessment practices are more effective if grounded in narrative, was a prevailing theme. This theme is examined through a theoretical lens in Chapter Six.

Mimesis

It’s important to have a continuous process of learning to see what is working and what is not working and why
(Charles Owusu, conversation participant, July 2010).

In my research conversations, as indicated above, I asked my conversation participants how they assess development projects, and asked them to tell me a story about a time when assessment worked or did not work and why. The theme that

repeatedly emerged was assessment is a continuous learning process grounded in the past and future. Discussed briefly in this section, this theme is reintroduced in Chapter Six and examined in depth. According to most of my conversation partners, the point of assessment is to connect the past with the present and have an understanding of the journey that has taken place. A central concept to the Ricoeurian Mimetic process is in order to connect to the present, one needs to understand the past. This dialectic, Ricoeur (1982: 295) argues, “is what places history in the neighborhood of fiction. For to recognize the values of the past in their differences with respect to our values is already to open up the real towards the possible...there is only a history of the potentialities of the present.” Valerie Dzubar said “it’s like the circle. Whenever you do assessment you have to look at what your original assertion was and then see if it was carried forth.” It is a matter of comparing earlier ideas of what is needed to the present of what is taking place.

The Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery is an example of a development project where this principle of comparison has been applied. In my conversation with the



Figure 12: Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Store Owners and Project Developers
Photo: A. Bahr 2010

two project developers and store owners (see Figure 12), a husband and wife, I learned the story behind their store and the personal significance that their work holds for them. The store sells textiles from Chin State, an area in Northern Burma, and the funds from their store go to buying Chin textiles woven by women in their community. The store owners buy textiles for two reasons. One, it is a

way of preserving classic Chin textiles. U Cin Lamh Mang said, as he displayed a typical Chin weaving (see Figure 13), “mainly we have produced all of these textiles. And the



Figure 13: Chin Weaving
Photo by: A. Bahr 2010

towns where these textiles come from are of the highest quality. In no other place can people do these techniques. That’s why we want to sustain mainly this.” Secondly, it is an income generating business for the women of their village. By weaving Chin textiles, they earn income from selling their textiles to the store owners, as opposed to obtaining their income from alcohol production. When alcohol production is the primary source of income, social ills, such as alcoholism, domestic abuse, and familial neglect, are exacerbated. U Cin Lamh Mang said “we have so many new textile but we cannot stop there otherwise they have no income and they have to return their own business cooking alcohol, making alcohol. We cannot stop because this means their survival.” U Cin Lamh Mang and his wife Daw Khun Shwe continue to buy textiles even though they have more stock than they can sell. The husband said, “We buy raw material for them and we pay in advance money.” To understand whether or not this project is successful is to refer back to their starting point, that is, their mission. Below is the Yoyamay Chin Textile Gallery’s mission, which the store owners gave me as they shared their story (see Figure 14). Valerie Dzubar, who also visited this store, said,

it wasn’t until all this happened that we received the paper that shows the mission. And I could say ‘wow’ this is the real deal. This is a project that is working. They are not just supporting themselves. They have created something and they are living the good life and they are connected with their culture and this is not all about them. To me, those are all the elements of a successful project. That is what

I end up calling real progress. It gave people a job. It did all those practical things.

The connection between the past and present action was one aspect of the theme that emerged relating to mimesis.

The second aspect of the theme relating to mimesis is the notion of a continual process of learning. My conversation partners referred to assessment as a process of learning with the community. In speaking of her experiences in the field, Ellen Herda

YOYAMAY Ethnographic Textile Gallery FAQ's
<p>Q. What sort of textiles are you dealing?-We're dealing a large varieties of classic & contemporary textiles, basically ethnic Chin, plus textiles of Naga, Kachin & Karen and some tribal jewelries as well.</p> <p>-We belong to ethnic Chin and particularly have been trying to master on Chin textiles & Chin culture for years.</p> <p>Q. Where are Chin peoples living?</p> <p>-Chin peoples comprising over 50 subgroups had dispersed into Myanmar, India & Bangladesh for centuries.</p> <p>-In Myanmar, Hill Chins are in Chin State (north-west region) and Plains Chins; in Rakhine state and central dry-zone.</p> <p>Q. What about the typical Chin textiles?</p> <p>-Common significant features of the typical Chin textiles are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using pure cotton (often handspun..) & silk, -Employing natural dyes (indigo & other vegetables) -Weaving with back-strap loom by skillful Chin women, -Suggesting genuine expression of tribal culture. <p>-Chin textiles woven of intricate techniques, patterns & colors define their tribal prosperity, geographical locality & cultural functions of the textiles from group to group.</p> <p>Q. Are they still weaving textiles?</p> <p>-Young generations have no interest on hand-woven textiles. But now we are supporting young women to reproduce vegetable-dyed elaborated textiles in certain areas.</p> <p>Our Mission and Vision are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -setting up an income generation for the Chin women. -attempting to conserve the classic textiles. -doing research on Chin Culture and Chin Textiles. <p>*Every textile enthusiast is welcome to</p> <p>YOYOMAY.</p>

explained “when you identify the needs of a community and return back to discuss what this means, you can go back into the community to decide with the locals the priorities. This way, community members have a voice in the development process.”

She also related the conversation back to her experiences over the years with a group called the Yellow Leaf. “We do simple things, and we do it over time. We watch, and we're all a part of the process.” Charles Owusu similarly explained that development should involve community groups identifying their own interests and being a part of the planning process. The joint authorship creates a space for learning and understanding between the developer and the local. In shared understanding, future action has a more intimate meaning to both partners.

Charles Owusu said this creates a space “for learning

Figure 14: Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery Mission

what works and does not work.” To sum up the mimetic process as it relates to assessment, “it is not so much technical, as it is application” as Herda stated. Application is grounded in knowledge of events past and on understanding self and others in the present so as to move toward a future that you want to inhabit. An essential component in attaining a future you want to inhabit is an invocation of the imagination.

Imagination

Development is somehow connected to the future and to progress. Progress has to be something about leading a better life. Having something more for your children... We don't just have progress for progress sake. There's something intrinsic about being human, being alive. We can either move toward entropy and chaos or we can move toward something else. And that of course involves times, culture, tradition, the past, who I am and adding something new (Valerie Dzubar, conversation participant, July 2010).

Throughout our conversations, the importance of establishing working relationships was a common topic. Closely associated with the relationships was who we become throughout the development process. Actions, of both the developer and the local, could change as people began to understand their own self in new ways. The changing identities of the locals were revealed in the narratives they told. Ricoeur says that through narrative, “the meaning or the significance of a story wells up from *the intersection of the world of text [the narrative] and the world of the reader [the development practitioner and the local]*” (1991: 430). The meaning to which Ricoeur refers is the identity which we come to understand by way of unfolding “the implicit world which embraces the action, the personages, the events of the story told” (1991: 431). Furthermore, we discussed how identity houses what has been done in the past, how past events shape hopes for the future, and how an eye toward the future guides

action in the present. In our present day actions, developers such as Brook Zobrist “want[s] to promote the agency. The sense of ownership the children and youth have within their own community so they are not passive recipients of something... They can really do something else. They can become something else.” In order to create something new, Brook furthered “the first step is changing that attitude or really identifying people who don’t have that attitude who can become a part of a core group of people moving toward changing that attitude and opening up that space for creativity, thinking, dynamism, and action.” As Sandra Loo-Nee explained, for the Yangon YMCA, this opening was not created over night.

At the beginning of one of the Yangon YMCA’s microfinance development programs, Sandra explained how community members mismanaged their money. “They do not use for their children health, child education... and another thing is they have no income, lack of income regularly and no opportunity to earn money. Their land is not suitable for farming and this is why they cannot feed their children.” The educational component of the YMCA’s program (see Figure 15) changed all of that. She said,

now their understanding of everything is soft. At the beginning, they lied a lot. Now they speak truly and softly. When they are developed their eyes are open and they know strong and right. Now their children go to the government school. Our children are very good people.

San Loo-Nee’s and Brook Zobrist’s conversations about their respective projects point to



the idea that change must come about first through relationships, understanding and trust. Once there is a solid foundation of a partnership, then what guides present action is the question that Alberto

Figure 15: YMCA Educational Component
Photo by: A. Bahr 2010

Andretta posed, “How can they imagine their own future?” Where they see themselves in the future is what he referred to as “a shared understanding of a possible future...How do you agree on something that can become?” Ricoeur (1982: 181) posed the question “Are we not ready to recognize in the power of imagination...the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves?” To come to a deeper understanding of ourselves in relation to others sheds a different light on the possibility of who we can become and what we can do. Future action is informed by this notion of imagining the possible. Examined in a theoretical perspective, this is theme further discussed in Chapter Six.

Summary

This Chapter presents the data that emerged from my eight conversations with individuals in the United States and the Union of Burma. Talking within the context of international development, the conversations were oriented toward an exploration of assessment. The themes that emerged were: assessment practices may be more effective if grounded in narrative; assessment is continuous learning process grounded in the past and future; and imagination of the possible informs present action. In Chapter Six, I further explore these themes within the theoretical framework of Critical Hermeneutics and the three categories: Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination.

CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS

There are so many things that haven't happened here yet, happened all over the world, but they're not present in Burma. I think it would be really wonderful, because Burma would have to come along, that's the nature of life...Burma has some interesting choices as a place about how they're going to experience progress and ...they haven't answered these questions yet and how they're also going to preserve what's been there (Valerie Dzubar, conversation participant, July 2010).

Introduction

Chapter Five configured a narrative, the story of assessment in international development. This Chapter offers a glimpse of not the faults and failures of assessment practice, but the possibility of what can become in view of an orientation that uses the concepts of language, history, identity, and imagination as a composite for a guiding framework. As cornerstones for the conception and application of assessment processes, these concepts suppose a ground zero position. As Valerie Dzubar said, “the Union of Burma faces choices and possibility.” Her words resonate in my mind when I think back to my travels in Burma during the summer of 2010. As I was driving in the capital city of Yangon through a densely populated side street, I noticed a family sitting on their porch (See Figure 16). That moment in time, and those people, presented to me a call, a sense



**Figure 16: Family in Yangon, Union of Burma
Photo: A. Bahr 2010**

of ethical obligation to reach understanding and to promulgate that understanding into a text which informs future action toward the possibility of what can become.

The data for this assessment text are grounded in conversations. As Herda (2007: 11) states,

the play that characterizes depth-conversation is something that all people can engage in, given opportunity. The play, or back-and-forth movement in conversation, arises out of a particular kind of relationship between speaker and hearer – one that is characterized by friendship, orientation to reaching understanding, rather than mere behavior or codified knowledge, that we move ourselves in relationship toward realistic social change.

The Critical Hermeneutic tradition informs us that each conversation is a living text with which to have a relationship. By relationship, I refer to the dialectical nature that exists between reader and text. My encounter with each transcribed text presented an event within which my identity converged with the text, in such a way that what emerged was a different “mode of being” (Herda 1999: 102), with new understandings. As Herda (1999: 98) says, “when we expose ourselves to a text, we come away from it different than we were before.”

In this Chapter, as indicated in the summary of the previous Chapter, I explore these new understandings of assessment in light of Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination. I use the three categories to discuss the following emergent themes: assessment practices could be more effective if grounded in narrative; assessment is a continuous learning process grounded in the past and future; and imagination of the possible as central to present action.

Narrative Identity

One’s narrative identity is a composition of a musical score fashioned from the cacophony and lack of determinacy of our temporal experience. It is both a

disconnection and reflection of life that can dismiss the opposing accusations of sheer change or absolute sameness by opposing a dynamic concept of identity that is a unity of sameness (Venema 2000: 120).

The concept of identity as “sheer change” and “absolute sameness” is representative of the dialectical nature of the two poles of personal identity that Paul Ricoeur (1992: 148) refers to as *idem* identity and *ipse* identity. *Idem* identity is the “character in the story [that] has definite character, which is identifiable and reidentifiable as the same.” *Ipse* identity is the part of selfhood that changes over time with experience. The point of convergence for both aspects of identity is the mediation that narrative provides. “Narrativity is the mode of discourse through which...temporal being is brought to language” (Ricoeur 1991: 99). In language, with the use of narrative imagination, discordant events are emplotted into a meaningful structure of events. It is the meaningful configuration that exposes the plot, characters, intentions, and judgments that describe the “who” and the “what” of the story, known as the narrative identity (Kearney 2004: 108). Paul Ricoeur (1992: 142) says, “it is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself.” Ricoeur (2004) furthers his idea,

emplotment marks bifurcation in identity itself. Identity is no longer simply sameness. In self-identity, change is integrated as peripeteia. We can then speak of a narrative identity; it is that of the plot of a narrative that remains unfinished and open to the possibility of being recounted differently, and also of being recounted by others.

Narrative identity houses both the enduring character of a personage, as well as the changing selfhood. An understanding of identity through narrative can and will,

according to my conversation partners, answer assessment's main question "Is this working?"

Assessment Practices May Be More Effective if Grounded in Narrative

The most telling portions of my research conversations were the moments when my participants described in detail their development projects and provided their assessment of whether or not their projects are successful. In some instances, my conversation partners described development situations where assessment practices have limitations. As Charles Owusu stated, current assessment practices "do not take into account the voices and perspectives of people who are directly involved in projects or processes they are supposed to be benefiting from." In his estimation, this is the result of "the dominance" of "exclusionary assessment thinking," which "can cause disconnects between the intended purpose of the work, the reality beneficiaries face, and the actual results produced by assessments."

In another example, the Akah Development Practitioner described the way in which her organization's belief in common practices and standards on a national level inform the way in which she carries out assessment in a local context. In reference to a book on assessment practice she is currently reading, she said "although we have been implementing our area development program for many years...we didn't have this guideline. Now we have the menu or guidelines...about assessment but who teach this? We have to read on our own and do ourselves. This is our limitation." Unfortunately, this practice poses many difficulties for her, as the local context is unique to such an extent that what her organization is asking her to do poses many challenges to her projects. Often times her efforts are in vain because the local context produces certain limitations

which force her to look for answers in the wrong places. She said, “we cannot take the right information.” Because of this, the people she talks to “do not accurately represent the people who are causing or having the problem,” as Herda said. Since the new approach to assessment has been enforced, the majority of the Akah Development Practitioner’s work is based on falsehoods and practices that have no relevance to the local context.

As discussed above in Chapter Three, while many assessment practices and principles have posed limitations for work in the field, my conversation partners do not see such limitations as an obstacle to their work. On the contrary, they see this limitation as an opportunity to try different ways which can promote new ideas to take hold in the development sector that may better answer the question “Is this working?” One of these opportunities is the incorporation of narrative into assessment practice. Alberto Andretta observed, “In my experience...it [referring to assessment] was more survey based...but when people learned the trick, it was just sitting under a tree,” and having a conversation with someone. Valerie Dzubar elaborated this point. She said, “the only way to know how exquisitely successful it [referring to a development project in Laos] was, was to have her talk about it.” What emerged from my conversations was the idea that there was value in what people had to say and through their stories, a development practitioner could come to know, in more depth, about the plight of communities, their history, their capacity for change, and how they interpret success and progress. “Those are not things you’re going to capture in how many or how big,” as Valerie Dzubar said. Kearney (2004: 99) explains the value of narrative: “critical hermeneutic offers, we believe, a compelling response to such questions by outlining...[the] central tasks of narrative...to

cultivate a notion of self-identity; and to persuade and evaluate action.” Incorporating narrative in assessment gives an individual “the power to refigure” the story of their life (Treanor 2010: 180). As Kearney (2004: 103) said, “the refigurative act of standing for the past provides us with a ‘figure’ to experience and think about, to both feel and reflect upon.” In recounting a life, the happenings of the past have relevance and meaning in the context of the here-and-now.

In an assessment situation that employs narrative as a pathway for understanding, the notion of identity moves away from seeing our local partners in development only within their idem identity. Facilitating a traditional, numeric-laden model of assessment relies “on a concept of identity that houses only one facet of a human being – that of self as a singular entity” (Herda 2010: 135). In their idem identity, those with whom we work within the field are known to outsiders only by the numbers they represent as constituted by traditional assessment tools, such as surveys. They are the percentage of a population, a number of people below a poverty line. As a figure in numbers, they represent the amount of increased yearly income; one of millions who received seeds to plant a farm. A notion of identity that only considers the idem identity is to ignore a person’s history, culture, experience, and expectation. Represented only by numbers negates the idea that in identity, there is movement.

Narrative, as actualized in conversation, is the mediating function that moves individuals beyond identity as sameness to identity as selfhood. The dialectical relationship between sameness and selfhood in narrative shows the enduring character of a person, while demonstrating “diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability” (Ricoeur 1992: 140). In a life recounted, we have the ability to “develop a story as a

whole that opens up new ways of thinking and acting, which may appear contradictory but which in actuality provide a new sense of time and order of importance of our activities” (Herda 1999: 4).

Incorporating a narrative component into assessment practice gives people the opportunity to examine their lives and share their stories in a way that is meaningful to them. The meaningful configuration of events gives life to the story; it gives it an identity. Inherent in narrative identity is the answer to the question, “Is this working?” because to understand a life is to understand unkept promises and future expectations, both of which guide action in the present. As Treanor (2010: 179) explains, “Narrative does not merely recount stories; rather it both *describes* and *prescribes*.” Progress, as Dzubar said, is about making life better for one’s children. However, in order to understand what “better” is, one must understand that which led up to what is currently. Herda (2010: 140) states, this

act of reading, whether in oral or written form, resides in what Ricoeur calls a ‘thoughtful experience by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us.’ Herein, Ricoeur posits, ‘narrative exercises the imagination more than the will.’ The person or persons moving in a social imagination that can house the opposition between imagination and will is in a moment of both stasis and impetus. It is due to this inclusion of impetus that the moment becomes a provocation to be and to act differently.

The desire to move toward something other than what currently exists is the provocation and prescription for future action. An understanding of narrative identity, as employed in assessment practice, informs the specifics of future action. As Herda (2010: 14) further explains, “Ricoeur describes the development act when he says this ‘impetus is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I Stand!’” The provocation of the impetus is what beckons us to answer the call by way of our

actions. To answer the question of, “is this working?” is to ask ourselves in an assessment situation, are we proclaiming, “Here I stand” with those with whom we work with and for in the field, working together in a relationship that is based on friendship and mutual understanding?

Mimesis

Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence
(Ricoeur 1984: 52).

Narrativity offers a mode of discourse that has the ability to bring to temporal existence the disconcertant events of the past. Kearney (2004: 155) states “testimony is the ultimate link between imagination and memory, because the witness says ‘I was part of the story. I was there.’ At the same time, the witness tells a story that is a living presentation, and therefore deploys the capacity of imagination to place the events before our eyes, as if we were there.” Emplotting events past in a meaningful structure is “the active process of imitating or representing something,” known as mimesis (Ricoeur 1984: 33). As discussed in Chapter Four, Paul Ricoeur describes mimetic activity in three phases, which he calls mimesis₁, mimesis₂, and mimesis₃.

Mimesis₁ is the prefigured world. Ricoeur attributes to mimesis₁ our understanding of the semantics of action and symbolic mediations, which provides the foundation for our ascription of meaning and significance. This is the world prefigured and our memory of the past in the present. Mimesis₃ is the world refigured as a result of our “reception of the work” (Ricoeur 1984: 53). Ricoeur refers to this junction as the place where “the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader” meet. The interplay between text and reader is where the plot of the story confers on the reader a

prescription for future action. Ricoeur (1984: 77) states, “the text is a set of instructions that the individual reader or the reading public executes in a passive or a creative way.” Mimesis₃, the present expectation, is the invocation of the imagination in projecting the possibility of a different world in which we might live. The traversal from mimesis₁ to mimesis₃ is found in the mediation between present memory and present expectation – namely mimesis₂. The present is where the prefigured past and the refigured future are configured. Ricoeur (1984: 54) states, “we are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time.”

Narrative, with its mimetic function of representing life, can provide assessments with an understanding of how “utopian projects,” of which development projects could be considered, “are about unkept promises of the historical past being reprojected, reanimated in terms of a better future which might realize such lost opportunities or unfulfilled, betrayed, possibilities” (Kearney 2004: 152). As Kearney (2004: 113) posits, “what we learn in the narrative ‘imitation of action’ we may incorporate in our return journey from text to action.” My conversation partners, in their assessment efforts, hope to find the right path in the journey from text [assessment findings] to action, but realize that it is a continuous learning process, like the mimetic spiral.

Assessment is a Continuous Learning Process

*I would rather speak of an endless spiral that would carry
the meditation past the same point a number of times,
but at different altitudes (Ricoeur 1984: 72).*

A continuous learning process encompassing different altitudes of learning and understanding were a reoccurring theme in my conversations. My conversation partners

spoke of the concept of change – how it took place in their development projects, with regards to learning and understanding. Alberto Andretta shared, “the evaluation and the learning piece...were to me the juicy part if you will.” Assessment, according to Alberto, “required an understanding of what has changed really, if anything. Or, what ‘changes’ positive or negative took place there” and the only way to understand is to “engage with all possible actors, participants, to hear what they have to say.” Alberto’s orientation toward assessment places a value on narrative. “Hearing what people have to say” gives participants in his projects a platform for giving credence to what the journey has been. Knowing what has taken place in the past helps Alberto and his organization to refigure their actions in the present so that the future of the people with whom he works, is something other than what is presently.

Having participated in a variety of development projects internationally and specifically in Burma, Brook Zobrist is constantly working along the endless spiral of deepened understanding. The learning process has brought her to a different altitude of understanding with each new project and has informed her choice in her current project to establish “a network infrastructure.” Her understanding of what has worked and not worked in the past with the female youth in Burma (mimesis₁), shapes her vision of what she would like to see in the future (mimesis₃). She wants “to create a situation where further humanitarian investments can take place.” Her idea for a different future for the Burmese female youth influences what she is doing in the present (mimesis₂).

From all eight conversations, the most demonstrative example of a continuous learning process that considers past, present and future in assessing local contexts so as to inform action, is the case of the Akah Development Practitioner. Her story is both

interesting and compelling in view of the importance of learning in assessment. She not only carries out development projects within her region of the Union of Burma for a large development organization, but she has also been a direct participant in a development project. However, to call it a project is to downplay the magnitude of relationships, reciprocity and understanding that envelopes what has taken place in her community. A long standing relationship with a foreign woman has brought about many changes to the life of the Akah Development Practitioner and her community. Over the years, their partnership has produced an orphanage, an organic fish farm, new farming and sanitation techniques, and new perspectives. What came to fruition was something that was dreamt together based on relationships that housed mutual understanding, care, solicitude and imagination.

During my conversation with the Akah woman, we talked about traditional forms of assessment that require development projects to produce financial reports that show an analysis of costs and benefits. The international organization for which she works requires her projects to produce such items. In contrast, the development project in which she has been personally involved does not require such items. Berger and Chambwera (2010) describe this attitude toward project accountability. They offer the following explanation:

For some community-based adaptation, alternative tools are often better at capturing important concerns and aims. The options beyond accounting for costs and benefits include analysing cost effectiveness, economic impacts or value as perceived by stakeholders (known as ‘social return on investment’). More informal assessments are often developed by the communities themselves.

When asked what the foreign woman requires from her and her community to show progress and accountability, she said, “Absolutely no. I have no financial reports. I don’t

need to take any financial report, any activity report to my sponsor.” When asked why, she said it was because “we trust each other.” This informal approach speaks to idea that it is difficult to assign values to benefits and costs in development projects because their forms vary across the board and cannot be “realistically quantified.” Additionally, the value of various costs and benefits can differ from agency to agency, including the community. What a community values may be different from that of development or government agencies.

In the case of the Akah Development practitioner, the community and the foreign woman collaboratively created a notion of what success means to their project. In relationship with each other, narrative opened up a space for understanding this community’s past and what they hoped for in the future. With an eye toward what could be, they worked together, often times having to revise and improvise based on what they learned in the process. The partnership was a living embodiment of Ricoeur’s mimetic spiral. With each new experience, their partnership was at a different altitude in their point of understanding and learning.

All of my conversations-partners have a vision of what they hope the future will look like and every action they take is one more step toward living in a different world. The mimetic spiral has applicability whether it is in Lao, Thailand, Burma, or the United States because it guides us in meaningful reflection and action toward practical and ethical action. What that action is in the present tense depends upon what we envision our shared world to be. What we envision through the invocation of imagination helps us to “move toward good” (Ricoeur 1992: 197).

Imagination

Through the creative work of imagination, life is both represented and understood; through discourse that is close to the creative power of the imagination life and self are most clearly revealed (Venema 2000: 39).

In the critical hermeneutic tradition, imagination is the productive power that brings the mimetic spiral to temporal existence through the narrative function. This hermeneutical orientation positions imagination in a space of production. Ricoeur posits “imagination may have a disruptive function; it may work as a breakthrough. Its image in this case is productive, an imagining of something else, the elsewhere” (Ricoeur’s fifteenth lecture cited in Kearney 2004: 165). Through the narrative function, productive imagination has the ability to “to put memories before our eyes” and “bring us outside of the real world – into unreal or possible worlds” (Kearney 2004: 155). Possible worlds are created with our ability to imagine and play with “free variation[s] of possibilities” (Ricoeur’s eighteenth lecture cited in Kearny 2004: 166).

Imagination also has a distancing function, placing us in a space outside of temporality. Distance from that which is given opens up a space for interpretation and critique. Invoking the imaginary to narrate the lived past gives us an opportunity to think about and “rethink the nature of our social life” (Ricoeur’s first lecture cited in Kearney 2004: 166). In rethinking what has been, we have the opportunity to critique that which we want to change. The use of narrative imagination can open us up to possible worlds in which we want to live. Assessments, grounded in narrative imagination, can be a source for understanding the social condition and can be a starting place for realigning action with the expectations of the people with whom we are working in the field.

Imagination of the Possible Informs Present Action

Imagination, as a construct, was indirectly present in each of my conversations. Imagination came into play in the following question: “How do you assess the beginning, middle and end of a development project?” Imagination played a central role when my conversation partners assessed the beginning of a project and is invoked on two levels. First, the purpose of development projects, for my conversation partners, is about change and creating a better future. Inherent in their ideas for change and a better future is their own projection of a possible world as summoned by imagination. However, it is not only about the development practitioner’s vision of a future, but how locals envision their own future. As has been discussed in the last two sections of this Chapter, narrative is the mode by which we understand how identity influences expectation and action. In narrative, we come to know how “they imagine their own future” as Alberto stated. Venema’s (2000: 120) works parallels the aforementioned concept. He elaborates this point when he says,

by following the ascendary movement created by linguistic works, a world of possibility is opened in front of consciousness which can become a new mode of belonging. The world proposed by the text becomes the critical counterpart of the immediate world to which the reader belongs. The interpretive relationship between text [development partnership] and reader [participants] is the ‘intersection’ at which the possibility of the world of the text becomes the interpretation and ‘disclosure’ of a possibility to be actualized by the reader.

In a development scenario in which assessment is narrative-based, the text that is configured is not necessarily the story that is told by the local, nor the story told by the development practitioner. The text that unfolds, which is interpreted, and out of which possibilities expound, comes from the relationship between practitioner and local. The partnership is the text. As Venema stated, the interpretive relationship between the text

and the readers (participants in development) is the point of intersection where the possibility of what can become is actualized.

The Yangon YMCA's microfinance development program is an example of this partnership (see Figure 17). Their goal is to have community members participate in the microfinance program in order to better their lives. As Sandra Loo-Nee expressed, "the YMCA [is] working [with] the community and then for the microfinance [program] so parents can send their children to the clinic with their own money. If we have no money, [they] cannot go to the clinic." To Sandra, this was the initial purpose of the program, to give people the means to live healthier lives. As the microfinance program has progressed over the years, the program's horizon has expanded. Sandra described the community with which she works: "Now they know small saving is for the six month, they have a lot. And then they can put capital and do more and so now they know." What "more" means has been a negotiation between the limitations of what the locals knew, and what



the YMCA can do to help them open their eyes for a different future. Likewise, the possibilities for YMCA's work is actualized through the interpretation of the relationship the YMCA has with the community.

Figure 17: YMCA Microfinance Development Program
Photo: A. Bahr 2010

When development is carried out in partnership, relationships have an influence on how the future is envisioned. As relationships develop, my world and your world are no longer separated from each other. What develops is our world (Habermas 1984). As

Alberto Andretta said, there is “a shared understanding of a possible future.” Our projection of a possible world in which we might live together informs what action should take place in the present, so as to guide us toward our shared horizon of a possible future.

Conclusion

To this point, this text has come to fruition from the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and my eight conversations partners. The conversations we had gave us a forum for understanding, interpreting, and critiquing assessment in international development. A text, as Herda (1999: 2) states, “refigures the world under consideration and, in so doing, engenders new possible worlds in the shared meanings obtained among the members through the research act.” Chapter Six of this research study analyzes the conversations about the “world under consideration” – assessment in international development, using a Critical Hermeneutic framework. The themes of Narrative Identity, Mimesis, and Imagination are the three categories through which the themes of assessment practices grounded in narrative; assessment as a continuous learning process grounded in the past and futures; and imagination of the possible as central to present action, were examined.

My personal experiences, my conversations, and the analysis I carried out configured a text that is an assessment narrative. The interpretive relationship that I have with this text is what has opened my eyes to what is possible in assessment. In Chapter Seven I present my research findings, as well implications for practice, which is the point at which we can move from text to action. I also provide recommendations for future research and a personal reflection.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY

Introduction

Chapter Seven presents the conclusion of this text, but an opening for the assessment narrative to be reinterpreted. In a sense, the mimetic spiral that will keep this conversation alive and changing as new understandings change identity, our view of the world, and our actions in it. What follows is a summary of the research process, which takes the reader back to my first experiences with development and leads to the present text of new insights and possibility. I present my insights in the Research Findings, and support the findings with Implications for Practice in assessment in international development. As this text probes questions of assessment practice in international development, in general, the inquiry has always been with the Union of Burma in mind. As such, I present my Recommendations for Future Research, as this text provides a call to development practitioners in the Union of Burma for a reorientation toward development. I conclude with my Personal Reflection on this research experience.

Summary of the Research

Six years ago my relationship with the Union of Burma began when I visited the country for the first time. I call it a relationship, because it truly is a developing friendship and partnership with the Burmese people. With each visit, each project undertaking, and as my friendships continue to shape themselves; understanding, friendship, care, and solicitude are all elicited and deepened. During my 2005 trip, my interest was sparked to learn more about development and what must be present in order for it to be successful. Hans Georg Gadamer (2004), promulgates a concept that best describes that ‘ah-hah’ moment when a spark is ignited. His theory of a Fusion of

Horizons is foundational in critical hermeneutics. Gadamer (2004: 306) writes, “in the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded.” I encountered new experiences and my understanding of development changed. My horizon expanded and the view was different. I had had a fusion of horizons.

My experience in 2005 was met with additional trips to the Union of Burma and supplemented with a theory of being that values interpretation, my history, and identity, and urges me to invoke imagination to project the world in which I want to live. As such, critical hermeneutics provided the theoretical framework for this research study. In this text, I explored the nature of project assessment and development, what it has entailed, and what it should entail, on a very rudimentary level, which I term ground zero.

Employing critical hermeneutic concepts of language, narrative, and interpretation, the data for this participatory research study were grounded in my conversations with eight individuals in the international development sector. I asked each of my conversation partners to tell me their stories about their journeys in development. I questioned them as to how they assess their development projects and about times when assessments were successful and not successful. Lastly, I requested that they discuss their hopes for the future of development and assessment practice.

I valued in my conversation partners their passion for their work. Development work is not always easy and often time meets challenges, whether in funding, resources, timing, or underlying theoretical principles that do not match reality. However, these challenges do not impede their work or overshadow their hopes to continue improving the ways in which we think of, and carry out development, of which assessments are

crucial. What emerged from the conversations were the following themes: assessment practices should be grounded in narrative; assessment is a continuous learning process informed by the past and future; and imagination of the possible is central to present action. I explored these themes in detail in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, in light of my three critical hermeneutic categories narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination. From this analysis I present my research findings and implications.

Research Findings and Implications for Practice

The following research findings and implications for practice emerged from a review of the literature, the research conversations, an analysis of the data, and my own reinterpretation of the assessment narrative. These processes provided an understanding of the present reality of assessment and their implications on everyday practice. I present the research findings and the accompanying implications as follows: An Alternative Assessment Orientation is Emerging; Narratives in Assessment Reveal Identity; and Adult Learning in Assessment is Central to the Process.

Research Finding #1: An Alternative Assessment Orientation is Emerging

My conversation partners fall into two categories. In one category, organizational boundaries limit the freedom my conversation partners have in employing assessment practices that were congruent with their personal beliefs about assessment. In another category, my conversation partners' personal orientations toward assessment and what they employ in the field were congruent. Those that fell in the latter category carry out development differently from mainstream practices. They employ assessment practices that do not include complex surveys, venn diagrams, mapping exercises, and that are not

focused on numbered outcomes. Their assessment practices are based on what they learn in relationship with others.

Dr. Sonny, Sandra Loo-Nee, and the YMCA's assessment practice includes community members coming together with the developers to identify issues and potential actions. Similarly, the owners of the Yoyamay Ethnographic Textile Gallery have a very simple assessment approach which is linked to their mission. Incorporated into their mission is the preservation of Chin identity and providing an income-generating source for the women of their community. As Valerie Dzubar said, speaking of a project in Laos, and relating it to the Textile Gallery, which were very similar in nature,

you don't need to ask...how much salary do you draw from the businesses...just the fact that...she was with the person in a 100% commitment until they were able to feed themselves with their products. That's, I think, beautiful criteria and I think this Chin family is doing something very similar.

The Akah Development Practitioner, in her own personal participation in a development project discussed how her partnership with the American woman was one that has developed over time, and includes trust, care, and love. Through their relationship they have come to new understandings about each other and themselves, and that has come from something as simple as genuine conversation. Assessment is built into their work. The world in which they want to live in the future informs present actions. If in action, something occurred that was not intended, the partners do not see this as a failure, but an opportunity to learn and refigure future action.

Conversely, Alberto Andretta, Charles Owusu, and the Akah Development Practitioner in her professional capacity, are limited by organizational directives. Their association with large, international development organizations puts specific parameters on the type of assessments they carry out. For the Akah woman, she has to adhere to

assessment methodologies found in a book, that all people in this organization need to use. However, in talking with her, I came to understand that those methodologies do not have a place in the local context and what works in her community is simply to speak with the community. Charles Owusu discussed in length the limitations the current logical framework produces as an undergirding for assessment and development practice. Alberto also referred to limitations that pertain to funding and funders. Charles discussed the need for a clear theory of change that includes the voices of the beneficiaries. Alberto supported that point by pointing out that assessment can work simply by sitting under a tree and engaging in conversation.

This finding is significant in international development assessment as it leads to the following implication and its rationale:

- **Reorientation toward Working in Partnership:** Over the last twenty years, development practice has veered away from the concept of “outsiders” coming into development situations to impart knowledge upon locals. Today’s prevalent approach is a participatory method. According to Herda (1999: 15), participatory methods can be carried out in a variety of orientations. However, the critical aspect to participatory methods is the orientation of the development practitioner. The reorientation referred to here is a concept of participatory assessment practices that engender ideas of true, collaborative partnerships, in which there is equal value and voice of all involved. Charles Owusu describes this concept: “I tend to see development as a process of facilitating and supporting people to build the capacity to lead their own development processes...” Development projects, at their inception through

assessment, at ground zero, must be partnership oriented. This entails creating understanding and meaning together, so as to work together in the design and application of development projects, as they move toward creating a shared future.

Research Finding #2: Narratives in Assessment Reveal Identity

Paul Ricoeur tells us the narrative function is the configurational act of emplotting the discordant event of the past, creating the plot of a person's life story. The events, characters, hopes, and suffering constitute the character of the story, or a person's narrative identity. According to my conversation partners, the use of narrative as an assessment has the ability to provide the development practitioner with a deeper understanding of the local context. Narrativity brings the historical past to the present, in such a way that the narrator, through imagination, is able to bring the listener into the experience. The listener may not have even been a part of the past, but can imagine what happened, who was there, how people felt, and reinterpret the story in a way that has personal meaning.

While in conversation, I never specifically asked questions about the use of narrative as an assessment practice. However I found that narrative is already finding its place as an emergent practice. Alberto Andretta specifically pointed to the idea of sitting under a tree having a conversation is more valuable than other tools commonly used. According to Valerie Dzubar, narrative provides an opportunity to see what the journey has been so we can link back to where we started. She pointed out the detail you find in narrative is something that you cannot find in any other type of assessment tool, such as a pre-fabricated evaluation. She stated, "in development projects that are grounded in

today, you want to have to be open to what can happen that's in addition to what you've already anticipated or planned for. And those other happenings, those other successes are not going to be reflected in a pre-fabbed evaluation plan." Brook Zobrist and the YMCA's Dr. Sonny and Sandra Loo-Nee also have a narrative orientated assessment approach. Their projects begin on a conversational level, starting with members of the community.

My eight conversations revealed the value placed on conversation. In narrative, people have the opportunity to pick and choose the people, events, and feelings that are significant to the story they want to tell. Understanding these components points to an understanding of the person and their identity. Identity is valuable in project development and assessment as it informs future action. A person's identity holds past experiences. To know what to do in the future is to see what worked and did not work in the past. Working toward a shared future is to understand what peoples' expectations are. This finding is significant as it has implications for assessment practices. What follows is a brief discussion of this implication and a rationale for its significance.

- **Re-figure Assessment Practices in International Development to Include Narrative-Based Practices:** Assessment practices that do not include a narrative framework produce assessments devoid of the rich detail and intricacies of the human experience. Without an understanding of history, identity, and expectations for the future, how can assessments appropriately serve the communities for which they are intended? As Charles Owusu said in conversation, the development sector is constrained by a logical framework that creates disconnects between the people with whom we work with and for

in the field, the intended purposes of our projects, and what assessments are telling us. A contributing factor of our inability to break from “exclusionary assessment thinking,” as Charles expressed, is

in part because of reasons related to sustaining financial support for programs, and in part because of the seductive nature of numbers and the ability of many to generate numerical falsehoods from data that is often hard to verify. Qualitative evidence-based analysis is often undermined.

There needs to be a reorientation toward how we think of and carry out assessment. We need to employ assessment practices appropriately.

Assessment should not be such that the data produced are easily manipulated or can be used to create a false picture of reality. We can view assessment as a way of informing the move toward meaningful action through conversation.

Research Finding #3: Adult Learning in Assessment is Central to the Process

Each conversation partner discussed the notion of adult learning in their assessment processes. Adult learning is grounded in language. Language is the modality through which we configure and refigure meaning about ourselves, others, and our place in the world with others. It is, as Shahideh (2004: 29) tells us, “the medium for transforming thoughts and imagination toward a better future into realities by which one lives life in the present.” Through language we come into relationship with others, by way of conversation. When conversation provides the foundation for building relationships, the opportunity for new understanding is present. When our understandings change, there is a part of us that changes. Herda (1999: 23) says, “humans think, act, and change their lives in language and communication.” This process is not stagnant. We are constantly changing as relationships and understandings change. This is the mimetic spiral- a continuous process of learning. Each time we pass the same point in the spiral,

our understanding is at a different level. The implication of this finding and its rationale is as follows:

- **Assessment Practices are Continuous and Learning Oriented:** As new understandings emerge about ourselves and others, our actions take different shape. However, in assessment orientations such as the logical framework, which holds a linear view of progress, assessment methodologies are thought of as cause and effect. Reality is not always cause and effect and human nature is not necessarily linear. As Charles Owusu stated, “the real world is complex.” In order to move with the motions of life, assessment practices need to be fluid and continuous. Often times what an assessment teaches us today may change tomorrow. Therefore, assessment must be continually a part of the development process because as interests and ideas change, so to should design and practice. Congruently, a continuous assessment process enables the developer and the locals to learn what works and does not work. This learning component should be central to development projects.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study presents only a glimpse of what is taking place in the development sector in one region with a small number of participants. The research conversation partners highlighted alternative views and practices in assessment and project development, which represent an emerging shift that may be taking place. These emergent practices may constitute a paradigm shift, but more appropriately they are a return to rudimentary orientations that serve as ground zero for project development and assessment. As discussed in the previous section, this shift, or return, could have major

implications for project assessment and development. The following research recommendations are made for further understanding of the influence this shift may have.

**Recommendation #1: Further Investigate the Potential
of a Shift in Assessment Practice**

With the potential success of interpretive assessment approaches, I suggest further examination of how appropriately the current paradigm responds to the interests of those benefitting from development projects. There also could be an exploration of how the interpretive approach responds differently to assessment and practice and the influences this difference has on achieving practical and relevant goals.

The concept and application of development is a learning process. Over the years, paradigms have shifted in response to the changing interests of the world, learning from what works and does not work. Development is slowly seeing the introduction of alternative approaches. Further study in other locations, in which there are concerns about the use of ineffective approaches, could promote understandings about the nature of conversations that lead to a shift in development philosophy.

**Recommendation #2: Carry Out Inquiries on Local Development Policies
Compared to International Standardization**

There are international development organizations worldwide doing significant work. Often times their work extends to a multitude of countries. Their vast reach is not problematic. What is of issue is the standardization of processes and practices. As was expressed by my conversation partners, the local context is of critical importance. Locals can provide a wealth of knowledge and information about the community's interests. This knowledge base is the reason many of their projects begin with a conversation with community leaders or village elders. As was exemplified by the Akah Development

Practitioner, her organization's implementation of a standardized assessment process produced false information because it involved the wrong people. She knows that this approach is not suitable for her community's context. She knows that a more localized and participatory assessment process provides her with rich and valuable information and guidance. However, she is limited by her organization's policies.

Further research is needed to explore how international organizations can move beyond standardization to local development policies, in ways that are still beneficial to the effective management of their projects and programs.

Recommendation #3: Examine Development Projects Already Applying Interpretive Assessment Practices

Development scenarios that employ alternative practice, such as interpretive assessment, have largely remained in the shadows. This obscurity may be due, in large part, to the local, small-scale nature of such projects. However, they do exist and they are doing work in the field that has significant influence over the lives of the people they work for and with. Such projects include those that are mentioned in this research study. With the slow shift that the assessment and development paradigm is experiencing, projects that are applying alternative assessment practices can provide information and guidance. I recommend bringing to the forefront projects that are applying alternative practices. Additional examinations of these practices and principles may provide a catalyst for reflection and future action.

Personal Reflection

While the process of writing this dissertation began six months ago when I began my research in the Union of Burma, this journey really began six years ago with my first trip to Burma. In addition, my conversations with eight individuals who have broadened

my understanding of development work have further shown me what is required to have a positive and significant influence in this world. Our conversations have revealed to me the importance of narrative, the past, and imagination in the projection of a future world where assessment practices reveal the true depth and complexity of life. Only when we get to the heart of the story are we appropriately informed and guided in action.

Carrying out research in the critical hermeneutic tradition seeks to expand the horizon of possibilities. My hope for this text is that it opens the gates of possibility for project development and assessment in the Union of Burma. Herda (1999: 2) states, “the text refigures the world under consideration and, in so doing, engenders new possible worlds in the shared meanings obtained among members of the members of the research act.” I bring to this text my imagination for a future Burma that houses people who are taking action to live the lives they want to live, in their possible worlds. Herda (1999: 2) tells us, “the world we propose through participatory research finds its legitimacy in our organizations and communities – in our language, understanding, and action.” I end with my final thought for this text, but with the first step, hopefully, for others to find new meaning as we challenge, critique, and change the way we see ourselves and the work we do in this world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Pilot Study Transcription

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Appendix C: Thank You Letter

Appendix D: IRBPHS Letter of Approval

APPENDIX A: PILOT CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPTION

AB: Can I ask you how you got your start in development?

TR: I began as a volunteer. Actually I was pastoring in a church in Livermore. And this was during the dotcom era so there was actually a lot of money. Our church was specifically interested in doing those kinds of things, not so evangelistic in nature but more in terms of what as I said. What the bible talks about is giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. The idea that going in and doing service in of itself had value. I think St. Francis of Assisi said "Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words." So he was definitely an advocate of doing things and so that's kind of the ____ (6:45) that our church had. The orphan project that we had begun, and I say we and I say begun, we always partner with groups on the ground doing things. We never really establish a presence in a country. We go in and help them do things that they would normally otherwise be able to do: capital improvements, the building of orphanages, the establishment of intensive care units, those kinds of things. So when I say "we," there's always a partner on the other side who is going to be there running it day-to-day. We had helped build and establish an orphanage in Romania coming out of the fall of Ceaușescu and the fall of the Iron Curtain and all of that and a huge orphan problem in Eastern Europe at that time. At that time, that property that the orphan village was built on, I think it was six homes, maybe eight homes, was held titled in the name of somebody who was Romanian. Because you couldn't, as an NGO, hold title to property in Romania at the time. Well after all of the homes were built, and the families were established, then that guy decided that since held title, he would take over the project and own it. He dismissed the Board of Directors, fired the people, captured the homes, and all that. The courts stepped in and kind of froze things and said "wait." So we knew and the group we worked with, Caminul Felix, which means "Happy Home," knew that we have a year or two years through this kind of appeal process to either build another village because we thought we could lose these, those kids could go back to institutions or back to the streets. So I was pastoring in Livermore, that was the dotcom era, there was a lot of money in the churches at the time. So Assist International came to me and said this is our dilemma. And the government in Romania would give them I think it's 20 acres or so to build a new village but of course building anew is a problem. So we as a church there said what we will do is build the first home, pour 3 more foundations so that other groups can come along and it'll kind of set it up and make it easy for them. This was long before Extreme Home Makeover was rebuilding homes in you know, a week. I went in. I took a group of about 45 volunteers and we built a 4,500 square foot house in 10 and half days, start to finish, beds made, toys on the shelf, dishes in the cupboards. And that was just volunteers. So I did that back then. Later a group called the Hancock Foundation wanted to build a home. Of course they had the money but didn't have the means. We were asked again if we could come in and build that home for them. So we went in, built a second

home. An apartment complex was started there for as the kids turned 18 they had to move out of the orphanage for the protection of the children, but they're not really ready to go into town. They are establishing their careers, they're going to college. These are kids that are kind of digging their selves out of hole anyway. And so they are often not as developed or ready or prepared for independent living. So we started to build an apartment complex where the manager would help them with, how to do your laundry, pay your bills, cook your meals, clean your house, while they are going to college or establishing their careers. So we got involved in that. We got involved in helping a Gypsy community outside of Aradia, Romania in the town of Cefa. Buy property that they started a school on. Actually graduated the first Gypsy kid from high school in that community ever. So that was really cool. So I got involved on a volunteer basis, leading groups and teams, which is my kind of my organizational leadership, organizational development side of me is something that I do. So we began to do that role. I pastored there for ten years as the lead pastor. I knew I was beginning to transition so they asked me if I would come on here and do that kind of thing. I also have a contractor's license and a background in conflict resolution, negotiation and all that stuff so it all came together. They made the perfect package for me so I would come here and do more of the same. So that's how I got here.

AB: Interesting. Now, when Assist is considering a project, and I like to call that phase the ground zero phase, what are the considerations that Assist takes into consideration when determining where, how, why, who's involved?

TR: The bottom line is funding. Is a project fundable, because that kind of trumps a lot of things. If you have an organization like a rotary club, or an individual donor, or a corporation, or a church that says we want to do something in this location, and they're willing to fund it, that kind of trumps everything. But there are considerations, there are things that we look at like stability of government. There are things like the law and order, the lack of fraud, those kinds of things that also come into play. Sustainability of a project is important of course because there's no point in building an orphanage if the group we are partnering with doesn't have the long term means to sustain it. So we do look at those kinds of things. But a great organization can have all of that and if no one is interested in funding we have no real means to fund that. We act as a networker. Our old slogan was "Networking Resources with World Needs," because we would hear of something and we would find a group that wanted to do something. We'd be able to marry those two into a successful project. Networking resources, networking has changed in the last 15 or 20 years to mean something completely different: computing networking. So we changed the slogan. It's still a great slogan for what we do. We network resources with world needs, but the word networking has a different meaning to people nowadays than it used to. So the funding trumps everything really, but we do look at that kind of criterion.

AB: Are there basic assumptions about your relationship with the people you work with in the field, those who work by your side and those who are served that inform all of this, alongside the funding factor. I mean you wouldn't exist if it was for the mere fact that there was a project and there was funding and you would do the project. I think that there also has to be a very basic belief system, kind of what you talked about the cup of cold water that inform really the purpose as to why Assist even exists. Does that make sense?

TR: Yeah. I think Assist exists really because of the founder's personal faith. That was what birthed it. We are not missions, we say we are not a faith based organization. That is it's not a part of our purpose to evangelize. But nonetheless the organization exists because of the founder's personal faith. We operate as a humanitarian organization because we do not focus on a specific belief system. I mean we work with Hindu's, Buddhist, and a lot of Islamic countries and all of that. So we are not driving a religious agenda. And we work with major corporations and services clubs which, you know, would honestly shun us if we were driving a religious agenda. So we are not and we don't. In fact we are really careful to make sure that that's not something that we do when we are out there. But it does exist because of the founder's personal faith. But we operate as a humanitarian organization without regard to a particular person's or group's beliefs. Does that answer your question?

AB: Yeah. It doesn't. I mean, what about you personally? When you do your work, is there a reason why that you do this work in particular?

TR: Me specifically?

AB: Yeah, you specifically. Not Assist.

TR: Yeah I know I am a follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ and he said go about doing good. So that is a driving force in my life. I want to make life better for people. And so that's a part of that. Going about doing good. In my own core make up of who I am, I am a builder. Whether that be an organization or building an orphanage or a hospital or critical infrastructure or building peoples' personal capacity. I am a builder. That is who I am and so that's what turns me on is building things. Like I said whether that's an individual's capacity or an organization's capacity or a hospital's capacity or a country's capacity whatever. I am a builder. That's drives me. so...

AB: You know there are so many theories and applications that are floating around in the development arena, what do you, because you are in the thick of it because you are doing so many projects in so many countries. What do you see, if you had to describe the current development paradigm? Do you see there being one particular approach or theory that overarches what you are seeing today?

TR: Well, there's a real shift to sustainable projects. For as long as I can remember, everybody's said you know you give a man a fish you feed him for a day. You teach him how to fish you feed him for a lifetime. But that has not been the practice of humanitarian work. It just simply hasn't been. And there's real shift now to the kinds of things that build peoples' capacity to care for themselves and I think that's huge. I think it's appropriate. I think it is the only real model that has a chance of living. We simply can't sustain with the AIDS issues that are out there and with war and with fraud and stuff in governments. You can't feed the machine enough. You simply can't. The only way I think that you can do it is to help individuals be able to care for themselves. Because you take out the government crime stuff that is involved in it. If you give a lady an oven and she has a baking business- she has a baking business. And no money goes to anyone else except for her to care for her family. That kind of thing. An example, we bought for an organization a single oven which about 10 ladies signed up to use to run their baking business and one lady in particular, she began to bake for wholesale and has 10 ladies who work for her in retail. They work for themselves basically but they buy from her. So out of that one oven, about 30 ladies have work. And this lady makes about 30 U.S. dollars a day which in Africa, is a month's salary and she makes that a day. There's no organization studying it. There's no government controlling it. It's a lady that goes in at night and she bakes you know, 2-300 cakes and she distributes those to her retailers in the morning and they go out and hit the streets. And so I think it's the most sustainable model. So the micro-enterprise, the vocational training at a grassroots level. And all over Africa, and that's where I spend most of my time currently, I see vocational training centers and I see you no real change because there's too many people studying and it's way too academic. And what is needed is ladies in particular because I think statistically and you can confirm the statics because they might be a bit skewed but if you give money or help to a lady, about 90% of it goes to her family. If you give it to a man about 30% makes it to the family. So really empowering women is huge. Expanding their personal capacity is huge and I think that it really aces out all of the other stuff that tends to eat up money and never really hits the ground.

AB: Can you talk to me more about the grassroots level. I mean you talked about vocational education or providing practical things. What are the specifics of that grassroots level?

TR: Well what we are finding in focusing on that women's empowerment side of things. What we are finding is that you don't need a large organization there with Ph.D.'s and all of that. What you have to do is get real capacity building stuff to small groups of ladies that will work together. In Kenya, Webuye, Kenya, we took about 30 ladies that were involved in the commercial sex trade and gave them jobs. This one lady had to make \$1.21 a day to support her family. She was getting \$.20 per sex act so basically she had to have 5 "John's" a day to feed her family. Now, with a small vegetable stand she makes

about 3 dollars U.S. a day. So she's more than doubled her income and she's not, well she probably has AIDS but she's not at risk of AIDS. She's able to take care of her family and is not dependent on a man who had multiple wives in multiple villages. And that's what I'm talking about the grassroots. And all she really needed was a \$100 to buy the first bunch of fruit, vegetables and kiosk. So \$100 put in the hands of a lady and honestly you don't need an organization and mechanism to help her continue.

AB: Taking an example like this, but not just specifically this, how do you determine what that particular thing is that, like for example with the woman it was a fruit and vegetable stand. How do you determine what that thing is?

TR: Well I think you have to figure out what is her interest and her capacity. So you have to have a half dozen or a dozen kinds of opportunities from baking to tailoring to running a fruit and vegetable stand to a clothing stand. I mean we are talking about a little kiosk. You're talking about \$100/\$200 investment and so they can buy bundles of clothes from China or India or Goodwill here I think. And so I think you have to ask them, what are you interested in? But it doesn't have to be a big and complex business model. It's a matter of getting the money down to that grassroots level-a lady or small group of ladies that are able to do a couple of things you know.

AB: Do you find it difficult to get at the core at whatever the person's interests are because of the fact that you may be the outsider or is that the companies that you partner with, or the organizations, do they already have established relationships in these areas?

TR: Yeah. Again I feel we are most successful when we work with a small community minded community type leader, a within a village who knows the half dozen or dozen ladies she's going to try and work with within her community and she is able to find out those kinds of things.

AB: And communicate these things to you?

TR: Yeah. So in Kenya, we have a lady in particular. She's just started her own organization but she works with about 30 ladies and she is able to manage and monitor that group of ladies and she's a good communicator with us via email and digital pictures. We know what's going on. Again we don't need a big machine. Just a lady that you trust, with a bank account, a digital camera, and an email account and she can manage 30 or ladies in helping them establish businesses. When those ladies establish businesses, they pay the money back over time so it tends to become a perpetual kind of thing.

AB: Knowing everything that is going on in the international development scene, and especially in the field. Do you feel there are any particular strengths, or maybe even any gaps right now that need to be filled. That are not being filled with the organizations, the people in the field, maybe even their particular approaches to development projects.

TR: I have some opinions. They are just opinions. I think there's too much study and reporting. And I understand if you are putting big money into things you have to have the study and the reports and some very good questions are asked in those. We run into it when we write grants. They want to know how many people. For how long and what was the results and those things have to exist when you're handing out a million dollar grant, but a huge proportion of that million dollar grant feeds this study and reporting machine. You don't need that if you just giving \$100. You just don't need it because we burn \$100 in an evening by going out to dinner here. I don't need a report back. If I give \$100 to this lady that we trust and she sends me pictures of a lady selling shoes, that's all I need. So I think there's just too much...I understand the necessity but I also understand that a lot of money is feeding a machine that's not really helping people but there's something other that has to happen. I think the area that really is a shame is malaria. Malaria simply shouldn't exist. To any degree in any country because it is so curable for such a little amount of money. And the impact of it is huge. I just wrote an article on my blog so I have some of this stuff in my mind. 443 million school days lost to children annually in Africa because of malaria. 443 million school days lost per year. That's huge. It's one of those diseases that feeds poverty and poverty keeps it there. If people can't work because they're sick then they're in poverty. If they're in poverty they can't get the treatment they need for the malaria so it begins to feed on itself. And yet it can be so easily eradicated. It has been in so many places. And you know a mosquito net is about \$1.70 to buy a mosquito net and the rest of the \$2.00 is spent to be able to retreat that net for a year. So for \$2.00 you change the life of a child, either their schooling or the father who works and can go to work. And it's huge things and it just shouldn't and I think it needs to be focused on. And I think it is being focused on. I'm not saying it's not being done. When I look at writing a grant for a lot of things we do, in my head, I come back and say Malaria. I will write a grant for water projects, because it's critical and I hope we get it. But in my head I'm saying you got to wipe out Malaria and it's so doable.

AB: I have this interesting story about my professor working with some of the people she's worked with, that is was just the mere concept that had to be translated, of using a net because the net prevents the mosquitoes from getting in and it's the mosquito that transmits malaria. That concept has not always been there.

TR: The whole cause and effect isn't there. The education. The same with AIDS though. You'd have to understand what's killing them. And that's true. If I don't have Malaria than the mosquito that bites me and bites you is not going to give you Malaria. It's that easy. So it's something that once you get started on you begin to wipe it out pretty fast I think.

AB: I've sort of been doing a lot of background research on development and the theories and a lot of the talk probably for, oh I don't know the last 20 years, has been this participatory approach to development. Are you familiar with it?

TR: Help me understand your terminology.

AB: Participatory in the sense that, traditionally, a lot of development projects have been very observer/observee type of relationship, very outsider/insider type of relationship. Outsider coming in doing projects type of relationship. Whereas participatory really means people are working in conjunction with each other. That it's not informing somebody else of what their particular, for lack of a better word, need is. But it's a learning process together that they go through the process from beginning to end. And it's not outside organizations implementing the project, but largely what you've spoken about, working in conjunction together to bring in for example, that woman who the village leader or leader in her community to help manage a particular project. It's just something that I've come across.

TR: I think you're right. Because we could go in and do a lot of good things and in one sense they don't understand really why we're doing it or what the need is. They miss that cause and effect and that happens. We do a fair amount of water filtration for hospitals and in a lot of cases the hospital doesn't really...I mean we will get a water sample and analyze it. We look at the analysis and say wow this water is terrible. We got to filter this stuff. They've been drinking it their whole life and don't really see why are you filtering our water. What's the point of that. Why do we need our water chlorinated? We've been drinking it our whole life. They may or may not understand that it's what is ailing a proportion of their population. We drink bottled water because we don't trust what's coming from our own city. Which is ten times better than what they're drinking. So we tend to be overboard on it. So I think that somehow you have to help them grow in that process. You can't just come in and say hey you know, we checked your water, it's bad, we're going to filter it. They'll be like sure go ahead. But the maintenance of it, they're not going to maintain the equipment. They are not going to put the chlorine pucks in because they really at their core, don't believe there's anything wrong with the water. I think that would cross over to a lot of different kinds of things, where we as Americans, or we as outsiders have a lot of ideas of what should be happening but either they don't grasp it or they're just not really sure that's an issue.

AB: There's a gentleman, his name is Robert Chambers. Have you heard of him?

TR: No.

AB: Robert Chambers is a gentleman and it's building off of the participatory approach but he talks about, he calls it Rapid Rural Appraisal. And I think it's interesting because a lot of what he talks about is going into these communities, and it is a participatory approach, but he talks about questionnaires and diagrams. He is interesting in his approach. How do you feel about organizations that come into development projects

using things like questionnaires, interviews, things of that sort, to get at the heart of what the local interests are of people.

TR: I think it's good and I think it's critical but I think the information you get will also be skewed. And so I think you have to find somewhere the balance between those two things. We'll go in on some of our projects that we manage for corporations and so we'll go in on the assessment trip and we'll ask a lot of questions about their water systems and filtration and how often is the water off, and are there draughts. Seasonally you run out of water and the same with power. How often are there power outages. How long are they off. Is that a seasonal thing? And you take all of those answers and you create a solution and you talk to them about the solution. You come in and implement the solution. But when you come to implement the solution, you find the information was pretty bad. And if you ask someone else you get a completely different story. I think that you have to ask, you have to get from them, but it's very difficult to get good information and to get that information fast. Just for example, I'll always ask when I'm in Africa, "Is this the rainy season?" And one guy will tell you "Oh yeah, this the rainy season." You ask the next guy, "Is this the rainy season?" "Oh no no, it's not the rainy season." You ask ten people and you're going to get 10 different answers. And part of it is their desire, I think, I think part of it is that they want to give you the answer that they think you want. And I think part of it is that they want to get whatever you have to offer. Whether they need it or not because they just simply don't have much. So I think it's a difficult thing, one of the most difficult things we face is finding out what is the real need. What is the real capacity to manage the stuff that we would bring to them. It's very difficult. So if this guy you mentioned has a solution, I'd love to look at it.

AB: In reading a lot of his theory, a lot of his focus is actually not so much in the field, but largely training the trainers. Really it's about going in and establishing whatever your code of ethics is and for the trainers to go into the field and do their work in a very decentralized type of way. But also, involving some government sectors. He talks about being in an area or a project over the long haul. He thinks that's important. And basically to bring in the element of self-evaluation or reflection and revision as you move forward with your projects. He's kinds of a big name. I see his name everywhere.

TR: I think that that is good. One of the things we work with, organizations that are there, that are basically lifers, so they are there for the long term. But while we, Assist International, come in and get back out. We aren't running the program anyway. We are helping them take the next step that they would have a hard time taking. And so I absolutely agree. You have to be there on the ground running things. But we don't personally do that. That's not our role.

AB: For example, if somebody came into your organization, or even these organizations that you work with, I don't you know evangelize to them. Is there every any discussion

around, for example, empowerment issues. Do you ever do trainings for people who go in. I mean you might know more about a community and the country than maybe the organization that you're working with does. But they, for whatever reason, felt they needed to come in and do a project. Is there every any joint training or education around the development process and act itself. How we interact with people there, attitudes going into projects.

TR: Yeah definitely. Let's say we're going to go out and build an orphan home and so a Rotary Club says "We want to go out and get our hands dirty." We certainly prepare them for culture and what they're going to experience. What culturally is appropriate and not appropriate. They may have some ideas of what they want to do and again, we work with an organization that's there on the ground so they kind of set those rules. We try to help them and prepare them for not only the culture shock they'll experience but the things they are going to need to be safe and the things they're going to need to do to not disrupt the community life and the balance of that society. Like giving gifts, those kinds of things. Paying more for things than you should pay because those things can mess up economies.

AB: What do you see for the future of development projects or what would you like to see for the future of development projects?

TR: I really think the problems that exist out there have to be tackled really at every strata or at every level. From personal capacity building, that's the lady who now sells vegetables up to combating government fraud and system changes for hospitals. How do you keep records on patients to how to keep your operating rooms sterile. It's just really at every level. It has to be attacked at every level. And personally I think that's why there's room for every organization. Everybody approaches things with a different expertise, a different interest. We work with a group in Rwanda called ACCESS. They help hospitals know how to run a hospital. And that's huge. That won't do a surgery but we'll handle that side of things given the equipment we work a lot with, with General Electric. And they provide a ton of equipment, anesthesia, x-ray, and ultrasound and patient monitors. All of that stuff is great but they also need someone to tell the hospital how do you schedule patients and keep patient records. I think there's room for all of us. Everybody needs to be doing what they can do. And focusing really on the highest levels, working with Ministry of Health, ministry level on down to helping a lady learn how to sow There's room for everybody.

AB: Do you think there are any issues with working from the top down, like the Ministry of Health?

TR: No, I don't think there are and in fact that's in large part what we do. I talked a lot about the women's empowerment. That's the bottom grassroots level. That's our

women's empowerment program. My wife, because my family and I we lived in Africa for a short time, my wife started a business called Enzi Imports a Swahili word for Empower. What she does is helps ladies start their business, helps ladies start businesses. She then buys their product at market value that they set so that we don't skew, so teachers don't stop teaching to make jewelry. She sells it then the after tax profit goes back to organizations that are doing feeding programs and medical programs and school sponsorship. That's the grassroots level. And Assist International, the nonprofit side, we couple with her so that we both have the for-profit, which she doesn't make any money from because it all goes back with the for profit versus the nonprofit. We couple those together because of the advantages that both have. That's a very grassroots level and I've talked a lot about that. Assist International, on their medical side of things, and on the infrastructure kinds of things, kind of moving away from the orphan and vulnerable people side to the infrastructure and high tech medical, those kinds of things, we always work from the top down, where we begin with ministry level people, Minister of Health, Minister of Finances, all the way up to the Vice Presidents of the country. We start at that level and we work down from there through a local service club or something like that, or local church or whatever it seems to be the best route to affect real change within major teaching hospitals around the world. We kind of are doing both. We are working very grassroots level with women's empowerment, but we also do a large part of our work and our focus is Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finances, on down to major teaching hospitals within the country. That was our core model. More recently we've begun to backfill on this bottom with women's empowerment side of things.

AB: Was there a reason why you made that shift?

TR: Well we made the shift really because of my wife's passion and she said "hey, let's do this" and so she began to introduce opportunities and ways to do that. And so we said, "Yeah, let's do that." I think Assist International kind of hits it all. We do that top end Ministry of Health level stuff. We do the building of schools and orphanages and that's kind of midlevel to me, carrying for masses of vulnerable people and then there's the women's empowerment which is in some ways a one to one kind of thing. Very dirt level. So we are kind of hitting all three of those I think.

AB: Can I ask you what's your feeling on, there are two ends of the spectrum, one that says you have to have the biggest amount of influence, even if it's for a small number of people, or the goal would be to hit as many people as possible. Can you tell what your feelings are on that?

TR: Again, my personal feeling is we need both. If I'm understanding what you're saying, we build family style orphan villages. We believe that the family, the makeup of the family is the mentorship and the training, an example that children need so in our mind it's a very different thing if you are in institutionalized orphanage where you have a

rotating and they come in and do their eight hour shift and they raise you as the best that they can do, that's a very different example for a child to grow up seeing, a rotating staff as a parent figure than it is to be raised in a family style orphan home where dad gets up and goes to work in the morning. It's two very different things. Well we favor the family style orphan village over the institutionalized. And so everything we do in that is in that family style care for orphan and vulnerable children. But that doesn't mean I don't think there's a place for institutionalized because if you're a child on a street and your starving and you're at risk to older kids, you're at risk to men who would prey on you, you're at risk to starvation and all of that, than shoot give me a bunk bed with 50 other people in the room and give me education, medical care and food. So, while we are focuses on family style I don't say "Well that's wrong. They're institutionalizing these kids." Hey, there has to be all levels. And that's kind how we began when we made our shift from Eastern Europe and working primarily in Romania on orphan and vulnerable children projects and our first family style orphanage is there. When we made the shift to a heavy focused forest in Africa we kind said, "Ok, there's a huge need in Africa. It's eclipsing what the issues were in Romania." So we said, "Ok, if we were starting from scratch in designing our ideal, what would that be?" That ideal we built it around the idea of concentric circles of care. From the kids who's living with his parents but just doesn't quite have money for school fees or doesn't quite have enough nutritional food and they need just a small supplement, and you go through the concentric circles of care from that kid who just needs a little help to kids whose parents are dying of AIDS and they need a little bit more help. They need maybe to be placed in an extended family but they are still able to function. On down to kids who need to be, to getting a mass of children off the street. From feeding programs to getting children in mass off the street and into institutionalized care on down to a core program which would probably be family style. I think you have to address it all. That's my thoughts. We do focus on family style. But I don't snub those who are going to take 100 kids off the street and give them basic care. They need that. I would hope that they would move them in time, those who are successful, in that kind of program would be moved to a family upbringing because there's so much to be taught in family. And there's such a sense of permanency and belonging that you're not going to get from the institution. In the institution they are going to say, "You're 18. Good luck." But family is family forever. Even though you move out, those are your parents. Those are your siblings. You're still family. I think that's it's the better model and we're trying to do that as much as we can but for the kid who's in the street at risk, shoot, get him in a house. Get him food. Get him education. That's what we try.

TR: Jeffrey Sachs, one of the leading economists in the world, he turned around, I think, Poland and Bolivia's economy. He's a Columbia.edu guy I believe. Heavily influential in helping the U.N. develop their U.N. Development Goals and what he terms as to wipe out extreme extreme poverty by 2025.

AB: I feel like I do know him because it started with x amount of years, and I feel like I read it again and then it was x amount of years. I feel like I'm familiar.

TR: And I'm sure you are. He wrote a great book called "The End of Poverty." His basic theory, well he looks at the history of humanity from let's just say 0 A.D. and through the 1700's everybody was living subsistence level farming except for a few rich landowners who had all the people doing the subsistence level farming for them. But in essence everybody in all people groups were living hand to mouth, turning the dirt, trying to grow potatoes, and living. Then something happened in the 1700's which we know as the industrial revolution. And if you look at the GDP of any nation it was flat lined for 1700 years and then suddenly it was this huge upturn and from the 1700's to now, a relatively short period of time, it's just like a rocket. And so he said "What happened? How did this happen to get that countries began to develop?" And of course it began in England and so he said, "What were the things that made England unique? What was the scenario?" They had navigable rivers. They were relatively safe and at peace because they were an island nation. They were hard to attack. They had good trade partners in France and Germany and other places that weren't very far away. They had an ocean, which is a huge thing. Which, part of the problem with Africa is there are more landlocked countries in Africa than any other continent. If you don't have an ocean, it's really hard to sell your stuff and get things that you need. And so he began to look at what are the factors and he identified those and said, "Ok, if we can provide, well they had free and open society. They were able to think different kinds of thoughts and implement personal responsibility in starting businesses. And so he shows how that happened. So he said if we can identify what these things are and we provide, his belief in theory is that any country, if we can get them to the first rung in development, they can go from there. An example being India. Suddenly they made it. China. India. They made it to the rung and then they can climb on their own but they just need somebody to give them a boost to the first rung. That's his theory. And so he looked at these things and said ok, we can do this. He sold the U.N. on it and they began to make 2025 the Millennium Development goals. It had things like education, and transportation and basic infrastructure and all those kinds of things. You can read the book. It's a pretty good read actually. It helped me really, for the first time, understand, the industrial revolution, all of what happened and put it in a pretty good context for me. What they did is they went across Africa with test cases and so they quit looking at Africa not in terms of country by country but in terms of resources because they're going to share. They have the same kind of weather, the same kind of minerals. They grow the same kind of crop. So they took Africa and divided it by different strata, Sub-Saharan Africa primarily. And then they chose test villages. And so they said these would become Millennium villages. And Millennium villages was a village they were going to help that village with things like education and medical care and transportation and all those kinds of things. And there would be a cluster of villages around them, they could opt in and out. They had access to the same education, same ideas. They could choose what they did and

didn't do. They put these all across Africa and it's funded by the U.N. Columbia University is heavily involved in it. What we do, because we facilitate a lot of General Electric's humanitarian projects, they dream up a project. We do it for them. They said well we're going to do the hospitals that support the village, the Millennium village. So we came to the hospitals that support these cluster villages all across Africa. If I walk you through the warehouse you'll see a lot of stuff ready to ship to these cluster villages. Well in that process of being involved in these Millennium village projects, what I found was so much studying. Academics. Rooms full of people with computers crunching numbers and to where they're looking at the death rate of AIDS infected people over 80. Well what does it matter if you're over 80, and you die of AIDS, is that a significant number? Do we really care at that point? You're over 80. I mean I don't want to be callus, but they're dying. To make it to 80 when the average life of somebody is in the 40's, do we need to study that? And yet we would have the hard times sometimes, finding the support that we needed to go out and do the hard core work on the ground to implement some lifesaving things because they were study study study study. So that's just my personal beef is that there's so much academics. So much studying. So much reporting. And we're crunching numbers and all of that and like I said early on, there has to be a certain amount of that especially if you're giving out large large quantities of money. And I'm not sure the large quantities of money is what's going to change the world as much the small scale things that empower women on the ground to take care of their family first, to pay back so someone else can, and to care for a handful of orphan children. That's what to me, changes the world. It's really to me the small scale stuff that's so important.

AB: We'll I'll have to pick up the book.

TR: Yeah, it's a good book.

AB: Like I said, I feel like I've read about the Millennium Development goals.

TR: Yeah, you've probably...it's out there so you know of it. You can't be where you are without knowing of it. It's a good book. He has his detractors of course. Being around it, there's way too much study, the academics, crunching numbers but nonetheless, I think the theories are pretty solid that there are certain things people need. They need freedom. They need education. They need access to a market outside of themselves. They need those kinds of things. They need basic healthcare so that they're not dying of Malaria. You can't go to work if you're sick. Those basic things. And if you can get those things to people, they can prosper and make it on their own. I firmly believe that and so those are the kinds of things we try to promote.

TR: Should I give you a little tour?

AB: Yeah, that'd be great.

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION

[Date]

[First Name, Last Name]

[Organization]

[Street Address]

[City], [State] [Zip Code]

Dear [Name of Potential Conversation Participant],

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Alyssa Bahr. I am concurrently a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco and an avid international developer. I am conducting research on the nature of project development and assessment, with a focus on development projects in the Union of Myanmar.

The theoretical framework for my research approach is based in interpretive theory, with a participatory emphasis that includes conversation versus traditional methods of surveys and interviews. From our conversation I hope to show how a shift towards an interpretive approach, one in which identity, the present memory and the imagined future can transform the current paradigm so that the development act appropriately reflects the reality of everyday life.

I would really appreciate an opportunity to have a conversation about you and your work at [organization name]. Your experiences in the field and insight about current international development practices and principles are important and valuable to me both personally in my development work and educationally in my current research interests. The following are guiding questions that I will employ to guide our conversation:

1. Tell me a story about yourself and the work you do in development.
2. Why is development in the Union of Myanmar so important?
3. How do you assess the beginning, middle and end of a development project?
4. Tell me a story about a time when assessment worked and why. When did it not work and why?
5. What do you see for the future of development in the Union of Myanmar?
6. How have you changed?

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation so that I may transcribe it and have you review the transcript for accuracy and elaboration in order for me to revisit the content as I pursue my research.

It is my sincere hope that you and I can meet within the next week, schedule permitting. My deepest appreciation for your consideration of my request.

Sincerest regards,

Alyssa Bahr
Research Doctorate Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education

APPENDIX C: THANK YOU LETTER

[Date]

[First Name, Last Name]

[Organization]

[Street Address]

[City], [State] [Zip Code]

Dear [Name of Conversation Participant],

Thank you for speaking with me on [Date] and exchanging your thoughts and insights about project development and issues in today's development arena.

I am including a copy of the transcript of our research conversation for your review. The transcript is a very important piece of my research. Kindly review the transcript for accuracy and make any notations on the transcript including changes, deletions, or additions you would like to make. I will get in touch with you upon receiving any comments and alterations to the transcript. Once the review and editing process of the transcript has been finished, and upon your approval, I will use the revised transcript for my data analysis.

Again thank you for participating in my research study. Your unique perspective about this topic is a valuable contribution to the research material I have collected.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Bahr
Research Doctorate Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Organization & Leadership Program
Bahral2@netscape.net

APPENDIX D: IRBPHS Letter of Approval

April 21, 2010

Dear Ms. Bahr:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #10-018). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the date noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

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