Short-Term Missions:

A Guided Discussion on Elements of Effective Preparation and Community Development

Guided Thesis

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Author's Notes

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The Project: Introduction

Short-term missions (STM) has been a controversial topic within churches and those who study cultural and societal impacts of foreign aid efforts. STM are defined by Darren Carlson as "a vocationally focused period of full-time ministry in a setting away from the participant's home" (Carlson). Still, this definition does not point towards positive or negative aspects and outcomes of STM. In reality, being "vocationally focused" does not bring success in STM. On the contrary, many who are deeply dedicated to a mission may still produce undesirable results without 1. proper understanding of what is needed in the community in which they are serving (the host community) and 2. completing practical preparation steps for physical and spiritual readiness. What must be understood is that holistic successful short-term mission trips can create positive and sustainable impacts in both the host communities and in the lives of those serving within the mission team.

The Need for Preparation

Cultural Intelligence Preparation

I clearly remember my first trip to the Dominican Republic in 2011. We were there to hold sports camps and to teach kids about Jesus through Vacation Bible School (VBS) programs. In the back of my mind I was bewildered by the immense poverty I saw and wanted to help in more significant ways. It seemed to me that giving money to the local people or leaving my used soap bottles and bug spray cans were practical ways to loosen the grip of poverty. Unfortunately, such good intentions have the potential to do more harm than good by creating dependency or insulting the hosts. What I lacked was cultural intelligence. In the church today, a lack of cultural intelligence has all too often become the norm. When mission teams serve in a culture which

they are unaccustomed to, they must prepare themselves to act appropriately so that they may resemble Jesus within cultural context.

A primary mission of the church is to preach the "good news of the kingdom in word and deed" (Corbett 37). This heavy task is accompanied by the challenge of relaying this "good news" in a way that is a more culturally appropriate expression of Christ's love. However, in order to do this, missionaries must first understand the cultures they are aiming to serve. Adequate cultural education begins long before a mission team steps foot on the field. This training should begin months ahead of time and be thorough, engaging, and challenging. Unfortunately, many (STM) team leaders simply do not know where to start or how in-depth to make the preparation process. Because of this, short-term missions often create harmful situations in host communities rather than providing solutions to problems. They can create dependency within host cultures, mishandle resources, and serve to meet needs that are not fully understood by the team. To prevent the continuation of this, churches must culturally educate mission teams.

In Bryant Myer's book, *Walking with the Poor*, he discusses the distance factor that often limits development in poor regions of the world. He explains,

> When we are with the poor, we are 'in the field'; our office is in the city where we have access to email, telephone, and our computer, where we can 'get things done.' In addition, the differences in language, food, customs, and ways of problem solving all serve to create distance. We 'know' the poor only at a distance. (Myers 107)

The problem described here is the same issue that many STM groups face when trying to connect with a host culture. They may be passionate about missions, deeply love the people in a host country, and may even have researched core cultural values to better understand the people.

However, when STM teams view the poor from the comfort of their personal cultural norms, they often fall to the temptation to view them as the "other." As Dr. Lena Crouso, a former professor and Dean of Intercultural Engagement, explained to me in a recent interview:

> We don't need more money, we don't need more trips, we don't need to do more fund
> raisers and mission funds. What we need is to change our dispositions towards others in
> the world so that we truly are loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Not just
> loving our neighbors, but you have to add the other part of the scripture, "loving our
> neighbors as ourselves". It's just one word (ourselves) but we always forget it. (Crouso)

When people love but do not love as themselves, they distance themselves from those who are different. They love out of pity and sympathy, but they do not empathize and truly allow themselves to feel the pain of others. In STM work, this is the factor that differentiates self-serving and misdirected mission trips from the teams who take STM to impact host cultures in a beneficial and culturally appropriate and necessary way. According to Dr. Christopher Ellis of George Fox University, "Appropriate and successful trips occur when the skills and talents of a sending community meet the real or felt needs and desires of the receiving community, with the emphasis being on the receiving community" (Ellis). The key to achieving this is adequate cultural training and preparation.

Physical and Spiritual Preparation

In addition to cultural intelligence, mission team leaders must understand and be capable of explaining the practical ways teams should prepare for mission trips. In a personal interview, Dan Weaver, my former Youth Pastor who has led 23 STM to the Dominican Republic, explained how these basic principles are often underexaggerated and overlooked:

Obtaining a passport, knowing what medications are needed, good fund raising, and

making sure to follow the legal guidelines on taking minors out of the country... These

are all make-or-break things that must be addressed and done in a certain order for trips.

Sadly, I don't think a lot of mission leaders understand the importance of these things

unless they are very experienced or have failed to prepare in these ways previously.

(Weaver)

As pointed out by Weaver, there are many steps to preparing for an STM that must be done

within a set timeline and with the collaboration of parents, doctors, and possibly national and

foreign governments. Furthermore, successful funding is a vital aspect of missions. When leaders

are uninformed on how to organize and carry out fund-raisers, they risk not meeting financial

needs and not involving team members in the fund-raising process. What is needed is a guide

that clearly outlines legal and medical requirements for short-term mission travel as well as

suggestions for fund raising.

Another important element of holistically successful STM is spiritual preparation. STM

are geared to place individuals in situations in which they may lead others to Christ. Christians

are called to ready themselves for these experiences by investing in their spiritual health. Still,

teams often enter host communities unprepared to encounter spiritual warfare, stress, and the

calling of Christ to step out of comfort zones. Courtnie Pullen, a Global Studies student from

Indiana Wesleyan University who is also a graduate from Harvest School of Missions, shared

with me that "the mission field is much more than physical work. We live in a spiritual world

and we must take into account that there is more than what we can see—there is a spiritual realm

that is at play and there is evil fighting against all that we have planned to do" (Pullen). She

continued by saying that people cannot expect to only live Christlike on Sundays and on mission

trips and expect to be spiritually prepared. Instead, spiritual preparedness should be a lifestyle. While spiritual health is an individual's responsibility, STM leaders must be capable of ministering to their teams to help foster a spiritually prepared team.

The Needs within the Mission Team

> *There's something that happens to our youth group kids when they get to a foreign country: all of the signs are in Spanish, and every single person is black. There is a humbling experience that takes place when we stand face to face with poverty and diversity. I've grown up as a conservative and for immigration laws and border security. Still, I also have seen poverty, the naked baby, the scared and starving child, and if that were my family, I would also do everything in my power to save them. It is because of short-term mission trips that I understand brokenness and injustice in a way that wrecks my heart and urges me to do something. It is that same compassion that I have seen in the eyes of the youth on our mission trips. It is a compassion that changes them forever.*
>
> *Rachel Disla 22 STM, Dominican Republic*

The previous quote comes from a friend with whom I have served on numerous STM and who now leads STM in the Dominican with her husband. During my fieldwork, we spent much time discussing the ramifications of STM. While much of our conversation centered around the impacts on the host culture, we stumbled into a discussion on the impressions that STM leave on those who serve and determined that STM are as much for the host community as they are for those who carry them out. While this may be interpreted as a misuse of STM for the Western Church's gain, it is by introducing the church to brokenness that it can best fight against injustice.

During my fieldwork, I was a part of a mission team that was comprised of 7 adults and 16 youths ranging from ninth to twelfth grade. The very nature of the mission trip is designed to prepare the students to serve the host community and the adults to serve the youth with the youth. This does not mean that the adults did nothing for the host community. Rather, the adults are there to serve and set an example for the youth while mentoring and pouring into them during potentially vulnerable time in their lives. I am the product of a successful outcome from this trip. It is because of the impact that the sponsors had on my life during a STM that I have come to call my current church home, have chosen this academic path, and have acquired a role as the Worship Leader and Youth STM Leader for Seymour Christian Church. More importantly, it is because of the mentorship I received on my first STM that I devoted many more years to this mission and have had the opportunity to understand injustice in a new light. This experience reminds me of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28, we are told to make disciples of all nations. When the church partakes in STM this is a vital step in fulfilling this calling. Although much controversy surrounds the belief of whether or not 10 days in a foreign country often creates disciples, it is through STM that the church is building missionaries to make disciples throughout their lives. Investment in the spiritual and relational health of those participating in STM is a building block to creating a foundation of believers who may carry out the Great Commission in the years to come. Churches need to recognize the mission within their mission teams as of equal importance to serving in a host community. Furthermore, STM leaders need educated on group development, mentorship, and spiritual guidance to walk alongside those with whom they are serving.

STM Leaders

The author of *The Role of Short-Term Mission Teams in the New Centers of Global Christianity* explains that many regions of the world (especially Central America) rely on STM to form a guideline for the Christian groups they wish to create (Offutt 796). Because of this, STM leaders should model Christianity and servanthood in a way that glorifies Christ and His followers. They also should understand the difference between tourism and mission work (Occhipinti). The inability to differentiate these two concepts could lead to gross misinterpretation of the overall goal for the trip. Most importantly, they must be like social entrepreneurs, in that they are "able to identify with others so they can understand their motivations and bring them together into effective teams" (Bornstein 28). The ability to identify with others is essential for team development as well as for connecting with the host culture. This is true in their work through developing their team and in their time in the host culture.

STM leaders must display characteristics of project leaders. A prominent trait of successful project leaders is the ability to navigate interpersonal communications (Whitten 49). While leading a STM, leaders must be able to admit when they are wrong, be direct in their explanations, use tact, effectively handle conflict, be a good listener, encourage their teammates, be willing to veer from tradition, and ask questions without assuming (Whitten 50-52). Furthermore, they should represent the church in their actions and set an example for both their team and those with whom they will be working in the host culture.

The Solution

Leadership Development

As explained by Neal Whitten, "Project managers are accountable for the successful launch, execution, and outcome of the project" (Whitten 80). A STM's success is largely dependent on the

preparatory work that is done by the "managers" of the mission team. The level of cultural, physical, and spiritual preparation as well as investment in those within the team are all components of the leaders' responsibilities. The effectiveness of an STM starts with the leaders and their ability to prepare their team for the cultural diversity they will encounter and the leadership roles they will hold. The solution to disorganized and unprepared STM is a thorough and detailed guide that walks STM leaders through the stages of planning for a trip. The guide is geared to be most beneficial to those who have little or no experience leading an STM. The outline of the guide will walk leaders through understanding the importance of mission preparation, provide a timeline for preparatory measures, an explanation of how to prepare for STM, as well as sample forms (applications, medical release forms, and parental permission forms) and meeting agendas. The creation of this guide will require the collaboration of seasoned STM leaders as well as the research behind sustainable STM efforts. Furthermore, distribution of the guide will require publishing, printing, and creating a digital archive that is readily available. Once this is accomplished, the guide will ideally be marketed through Christian mission organizations, Christian literature retailers, and churches that focus or wish to focus on STM. Following is an outline of the STM Preparation Guide as well as an estimated timeline for creation through evaluation.

Guide

1. Context
    a. Supporting the need for cultural education training within STM preparation.
    b. Incorporating interviews from those in host countries.
    c. Diving into practical preparation (legal, medical, and travel)
    d. Investing spiritually
    e. Discovering the importance in group cohesion and mentorship
    f. Evaluating skill sets (the importance of skill mapping).

2. Timeline

    a. Knowing when steps should be made for STM preparation.

    b. Understanding responsibilities to be met by trip leaders and in what order.

    c. Preparing for deadlines (a guide to when and in what order stages should be completed).

3. Implementation

    a. Cultural Preparation: Define and Research

        i. Defining poverty: encourage team members and leaders to define poverty through their cultural lens and then to research poverty within the host community in which they will be serving.

        ii. Discovering how to help without hurting. Recommended reading: *Helping Without Hurting.*

        iii. Discussing the importance of global worldview (Holland) and the variations within them.

    b. Encouraging research on cultural norms as well as interaction with someone from that culture.

    c. Cultural Preparation- Engage

        i. Suggesting ways to use hands-on activities to motivate students to learn about the host culture.

        ii. Providing a plan for cultural simulation events.

    d. Practical Preparation

        i. Organizing Meetings

        ii. Arranging Transportation and Lodging

      iii.   Obtaining a Passport

      iv.   Preparing Medically

      v.   Acquiring Financial Support

      vi.   Traveling Internationally with Minors

      vii.   Investing in group relations and spiritual health

      viii.   Implementing skill mapping to develop leaders

   e. Sample STM Preparation Forms and Meeting Agenda

Timeline

Milestone Date	Milestone Name	Milestone Description
June 1 2019	Compile Research	Gather research from fieldwork, research, interviews to be implemented into the guide
July 1 2019	Compile Sample Forms	Acquire and revise previously used STM preparation forms, applications, and meeting agendas
August 1 2019	Create Guide	Combine the accumulated research and resources into a single document
Sept 1 2019	Editing and Proofing Process	Submit the document to accredited readers, seasoned STM leaders, and church leaders for edits

Oct 1 2019	Revise	Make any necessary changes to the document based on feedback from editors
Nov 1 2019	Selection of Test Subjects	Identify 10 STM teams to implement the document in their trip preparation
Jan 1-July 31 2020	Implementation of STM Guide	Allow the selected STM teams to use the guide to prepare their teams, partake in the STM trip, and return for evaluation
Jan 1-Aug 31 2020	Team Evaluation	Provide the test STM teams with evaluation such as surveys and open-ended response opportunities. Interview the test STM team leaders Compare guide effectiveness between the 10 trips based on degree to which they followed the guide, the demographics of mission team, the host culture, the leaders' opinions on group cohesiveness and spiritual growth, and their perceived effectiveness in the host community.
Sept 1 2020	Revision	Revise the guide based on the evaluation process

Jan 1- July 31 2021	Retest	Begin the test process again with 10 new STM teams
Jan 1- Aug 31 2021	Evaluate	Repeat the evaluation process as done before
Dec 1 2021	Publish	Find a publisher Make the guide available in hard copy, online, and in bundles with additional resources deemed necessary through the test and evaluation processes

Conclusion

Short-term missions are one essential way that churches place people in various cultures to share the love of Christ. Unfortunately, many teams lack appropriate training. STM teams must be prepared to encounter host communities through appropriate cultural contexts. Leader's must train team members to understand the culture in which they will be serving to a degree that enables them to act in a way that benefits the host community rather than creating further burdens and building animosity. Furthermore, teams must take practical steps to prepare for STM through knowing what is needed for travel, medical steps, and legal requirements. The program I propose is a guide for STM leaders to follow to better prepare themselves and their teams to prosper in STM through service, relationships, and spiritual growth.

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Contextualization: Introduction

Contextualization is the backbone to effective cross-cultural community development implementation. It is through contextualization that community developers are able to evaluate what is needed in a community and how they can, through culturally appropriate means, best provide solutions. Contextualization provides community developers with an understanding for *why* they are doing the work laid before them and helps them to strive for a beneficial goal. Moreover, I will explain the correlation between contextualization and community development, as well as describe how innovation and creativity overlap with contextualization, and how I have used contextualization practices in my own thesis project.

Contextualization and Community Development

As I sit down to write, my heart is burdened, and I am overwhelmed. Are we really showing Christ's love to these children? Today was difficult and a reminder of the impacts of poverty. While serving at sports camp, several of the sponsors refused to give the Dominican children water. Honestly, I get it. In the U.S. we require the children to wait for a water break to take a break. But, that is in American—those children play in air conditioned gyms with ice cold water. Here, it is nearly 90 degrees and these children likely do not even have water at home. How do we expect to be able to share the love of Christ when we refuse to provide their basic needs? Our group is struggling to understand the context in which we are in. We cannot pretend like we are in America. We must start treating these people with the love of Christ in a culturally appropriate and necessary manner or our work is in vain. (Fieldwork Notes, July 10, 2018)

From the experience explained above, I learned much of what it means to understand the context in which you are serving. Although our western view of the world is culturally appropriate in the United States, other areas of the world carry different contexts—thus the needs of the people may be vastly obscure or be prioritized differently than here in the United States. Contextualization is about more than understanding cultural norms. Rather, being well educated on context means that individuals also are aware of the ways they can meet the foundational needs of the problem at hand. Contextualization also allows those serving to know how to form partnerships with those in the host community. For example, when serving someone from another culture, missionaries must do what we can do prevent the hosts from feeling as though they are victims of coercion (Fadiman 37). In their book, *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert explain that "part of the learning process of a short-term trip entails recalibrating our hearts and minds, moving away from easy—but completely unbiblical—assumptions about the materially poor" (Corbett 14). Cross-cultural situations call for an adaptation of perspective in order to understand a change in context. Furthermore, when community developers act based off of assumptions, without an understanding of context, they risk doing harm to relationships. Myers points out, "poverty is relationally driven" (Myers 143). When relationships are damaged and a support system is lacking, people are at a greater risk of falling into a cycle of poverty. Corbett and Fikkert again expound on how poverty can be impacted: "Good intentions are not enough. Those serving need a different framework for thinking about poverty. Rather than simply defining it as lack of material things, they need to get to the very roots of the issue: broken relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation" (Corbett cover). With that said, a lack of contextualization holds the power to not only hinder good-doers but to damage the community development process altogether. If the underlying

issues in communities are not resolved, all efforts to resolve the "symptoms" of these issues are redundant. Contextualization is what presents the facts of a community's needs to community developers.

Effective community developers are equipped to create and successfully implement programs, processes, and interventions in the community. Contextualization is pivotal in understanding what resources are needed to further the community. As written by Bryant L. Myers in *Walking with the Poor*, "The unspoken assumption is that when the missing things are provided, the poor will no longer be poor (Myers 113). However, this misunderstanding stems from a lack of context when viewing what is considered "missing" and therefore hindering development efforts. For example, programs, processes, and interventions may look drastically different in various cultural contexts. In westernized poor communities, community development would likely take the form of connecting people with resources to hold sustainable jobs, deal with drug addiction, or receive necessities for living (i.e. water, food, shelter). In third-world poor communities, it is possible that community developers would be teaching locals how to farm, microfinance, plan for a family, and about modern medicine. While these are only examples, the variance between the two scenarios is evident. Yet, each of these communities could go through processes of programming and intervention based off of their specific contexts.

Another example is how uncertainty avoidance differs based on cultural context. Uncertainty avoidance, as defined by Geert Hofstede, is "the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede 191). In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance (like the U.S.), programs must be organized in a manner that fully prepares and educates people in the community for the coming developmental change. However, in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, programs do not necessarily have to provide in-depth

detail of the change that is planned to be effective in preparation. Without contextualization, a community developer's efforts are nothing more than a shot in the dark.

Practicing Contextualization

Understanding and respecting context is not enough to engage with the community. Community developers must practice creativity and innovation through contextualization. Understanding and practicing appropriate contextualization is a skill that comes from cultural intelligence. Cultural Intelligence, or cultural quotient (CQ), is defined as "an individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity" (Rockstuhl). CQ enables teams to appropriately engage with others in cross-cultural situations. David Livermore explains that *strategy*, "the ability to interpret cures and plan in light of your cultural understanding," and *action*, "the ability to behave appropriately when relating to serving cross-culturally," are two of the most crucial elements to cultural intelligence and effectively engaging with the community (Livermore 111). The first, strategy, is necessary for the creativity process. The strategy forming process should include the evaluation of what is needed in a community, calculating the necessary resources, and planning programs that aim to meet needs and empower community members to be independent. Kate Willis, author of *Theories and Practices of Development*, describes how NGOs are "able to provide such services more efficiently and effectively through drawing on local peoples' knowledge, and also using local materials" (109). When community developers are constructing programs to develop a specific community, they must use the knowledge of the local people and their resources to creatively make strategies that fit into the context of the culture. As outlined in *Cultures and Organizations*, "a single structural principle is unlikely to fit for an entire corporation" (Hofstede 406). In the same way, individuals and organizations must be flexible in their creativity as they strategically create opportunities for

people in a specific culture to connect to resources, form relationships, and find sustainable ways to be self-sufficient.

Second, innovation requires *action*. For community development to take place, creative strategies must be appropriately implemented. It is through innovation and the restructuring of previous projects that programs are created to fit the context of a community's needs. Furthermore, one's ability to implement successful programming is determined by how well they execute their role within cultural context and by their CQ. Robert Emmerling explains, "The measurement of strength or frequency that a given competency is displayed is also critical to understanding if the competency is displayed with appropriate frequency while the individual actually goes about executing his or her role" (Emmerling 10). In other words, a community developer is only as effective in cross cultural circumstances as their level of cultural intelligence allows. If one has a low CQ, their impact likely will be hindered due to their limited understanding of the culture they are in. In order for effective action to take place, community developers must understand the purpose of what they are doing with cultural context. For example, mission teams often strategize before they are in the field. They likely begin the creative process long before they step foot in the host culture. However, innovation and action may take place as the team discovers cultural context. As they realize the appropriate ways to engage with the community, they may have to be innovative in adapting their programs to fit the context. Once the context is understood, innovation may be implemented into the action process to make the program culturally relevant and attractive to the community. All in all, success or failure as a result of action and innovation hinges on an understanding of context.

Personal Implementation

My future vocational work will be as a worship pastor. However, I am active in mission work through our church and organize and lead the annual youth mission trip to the Dominican Republic. Because I play this role, contextualization is not only crucial to my work, but also something I strive to help others to value and understand as well. A key aspect of the mission trip preparation process is building the cultural intelligence of the team—contextualization is just one of the aspects of CQ, yet it is the foundation of all other CQ elements. I provided the following example at one of our recent preparation meetings: When Seymour Christian Church (SCC) teaches sports camp in the DR, teams often encounter children who have never seen a volleyball. In the past, the mission teams have explained that they will be teaching volleyball and then have preceded to spend three days teaching individual skills to hundreds of children. Through this, they provided the Dominicans with an opportunity to learn but did not provide context. The team did not explain the purpose of volleyball, the rules, or how each individual skill, such as passing and setting, relate to one other. At the end of the three days, there were children who were able to correctly set and pass but still did not understand *why* they learned these skills or when they should be used in the game of volleyball. The same principle applies to teams needing context in missions. Although mission teams may have adequate resources and participants who are skilled in fields pertaining to the work, without context they are not equipped to succeed. Mission teams must be given appropriate education on the context in which they will be serving. Teams must also be made familiar with the cultural norms that dictate how, as Christians, they should present themselves in public.

In my own work, I will be implementing contextualization education through the Short-Term Missions Guide that is part of my thesis project. In the project development process, the

entire program has been centered around contextualization. From the first meeting to the last, team leaders are encouraged to present their teams with information and simulations that best prepare them for the culture(s) they will encounter. Specifically, the guide urges leaders to connect with those they will be working with in the host context (if possible) to better understand the host community's needs and expectations and to acquaint their teams with the host culture.

Next, the guide explains the importance of cultural intelligence and contextualization. In this project I focus on two different forms of contextualization: macro cultural and localized. First, macro cultural contextualization refers to the broad-spectrum cultural norms in a society. These generalized aspects of a cultural context represent how people in that society perceive culture. As described by Geert Hofstede, "Culture is reflected in the meanings people attach to various aspects of life; their way of looking at the world and their role in it; in their values, that is, in what they consider as 'good' and as 'evil'; in their collective beliefs, what they consider as 'true' and as 'false'; in their artistic expressions, what they consider as 'beautiful' and as 'ugly'" (Hofstede 82). These underlying themes in a society's culture are crucial for mission teams to basically understand prior to being in the field. These customs serve as guidelines for how mission teams should conduct themselves when in a foreign cultural context. To best prepare teams, my guide encourages team leaders to create an overview presentation for their teams based on the basic elements of the host society's cultural norms. Moreover, the guide provides a basic lesson on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and how they impact cultural elements.

In addition to generalized societal culture, localized contextualization—the cultural elements that pertain to smaller groups within a society—must be recognized by mission teams as well. For example, religious groups often have their own set of norms. Mission teams often focus on working with and in churches in host communities. During SCC's Dominican Republic

mission trip, they work hands-on with the church leaders and youth in the church. While

Christians in the Dominican likely adhere to the culture of their country, they also maintain the

respect for Christian culture in a Dominican context. Because of this, STM leaders and

participants need to understand both the macro cultural elements as well as the localized culture

that pertains to the context of Christianity in the Dominican Republic. For the SCC team, and

other teams who may use this guide, the best way to discover localized contextualization is

through speaking directly to someone who lives in or is well accustomed to the host culture.

SCC's team leaders have multiple conversations with the leaders of the Dominican church to

understand expectations and cultural elements. Yet, as explained by my former mission trip

leader, Daniel J. Weaver, different people in one localized context may offer a variety of

perspectives on how they understand their culture (Weaver). The best way for mission trip teams

to gain a broad understanding of localized culture is to spend time with the people of that culture.

In the future, I plan to further this practice by sending leaders of the trip to the Dominican to plan

our trips with the Dominican leaders. This will provide a more efficient planning process for

both SCC and the host community's leaders. Also, this will give mission leaders an opportunity

to understand the cultural contexts in a more relaxed environment then when they are actually in

the field.

   My own cross-cultural experiences have helped me understand the necessity of training

for macro and localized contextualization. During my fieldwork experience in the Dominican

Republic last summer, I recognized that the community I was serving in offered a unique set of

opportunities for me to engage with the culture. Each time I have been to the Dominican, I have

experienced culture shock to some degree. This happens for various reasons, but one in particular

is due to the way people in the Dominican are resourceful and willing to work hard. While these

attributes can be applied to US culture, the way Dominicans display their resourcefulness was unexpected and admirable to say the least. In spring of 2018, I participated in an adult mission trip on which we built a perimeter wall for a ministry compound. Because we were working in a poor community, the paid workers used shovels to mix the sand, rocks, and cement to make concrete. As we assisted them in cutting rebar with a worn-down hand saw, transporting piles of dirt to level the road, and hauling buckets of concrete up cement-block "ladders", I realized how different our attitudes and behaviors were compared to what they would have been if we were performing the same work in the United States. Here, in the midst of poverty, we were willing to work hard while doing things in a much more difficult way than we were used to. However, in the U.S., I cannot help but believe that our attitudes would have been sour. When we are surrounded by wealth, we expect to have all of the necessary resources to make our jobs simple. Digging up piles of dirt would be done with machinery, not by hand and cement would be mixed not with shovels but with a cement mixer or truck. Anything short of this would be unacceptable and merit complaining. Yet, here, in the Dominican Republic, we expected poverty and found ourselves content with the methods through which we were working. In a Dominican context, this was normal. Yet, in the context of an American, privileged young woman interacting with such hard-working individuals, this experience was humbling and gave me a new outlook on life in the Dominican Republic.

Conclusion

Contextualization provides a foundation for cross-cultural work and community development. Varying cultures have different cultural contexts that are best understood by hands-on engagement with the culture itself. Contextualization is crucial in creating programs and implementing their processes and intervention stages. Next, contextualization is pivotal in

the creative and innovative stages of community development. It is through context that community developers cast a creative vision and form strategy. Similarly, through contextualization, strategy can be put into action through a process of innovation and adaptation to cultural norms and expectations. Through my own experiences I have come to understand and respect the importance of contextualization. In mission work, context forms a foundation for all the work that is done. Mission teams rely on understanding context to convey their message and share the love of Christ in a way that best relates to the people. Without context, community development is not applicable to diverse communities and is therefore useless.

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Qualitative Inquiry: Introduction

Qualitative researchers study communities, people, and cultures from a sociological perspective by participating with them and observing them in the context of day to day life. The purpose of this type of research is to understand culture from the perspective of the people being studied. The information received sheds light on cultural norms and practice and assists the researcher in understanding the thinking, values, and societal norms of various people groups. Community developers working in culturally diverse communities will benefit greatly from this research as they attempt to create sustainable, sensitive, and effective development programs to benefit communities culturally different from their own. Community development can be effectively implemented in a variety of ways and must fit within a given community context. This context is best understood through qualitative inquiry research methods.

What is Community Development About?

Community development is largely about equipping individuals and groups within communities to bring about positive, sustainable changes. These impacts may be made towards physical, social, or environmental needs within the community. Cultural understanding is critical (or foundational) to this effort. But first, let's consider how culture is defined. Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater see culture as an "invisible web of behaviors and patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share a common language (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 3). Naturally, for researchers to understand the depths of a culture, they must dive into the community. Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell point out that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Sharan). This can only be discovered through sustained personal interaction. Simone Joyaux concurs,

noting that through sharing first-hand experiences and stories with those investing in the research and community development, the researcher is able to obtain a perspective that goes beyond numbers on paper (Joyaux 238-239). Although one of the most effective ways of approaching a qualitative study is through cultural participation, beyond this, the qualitative researcher backs up their research with extensive notes on interviews and events, personal journal entries, archival research, artifacts from the field, pictures, and so on. All of these contribute to telling the story of a people/culture and must be evaluated thoroughly. Once researchers have gathered information regarding elements within the culture, they can better determine what programs will be most effective in reaching the needs and preferences of the people to further develop community.

Short-Term Missions

Over the course of my fieldwork experience, I spent a great deal of time studying the way that the Seymour Christian Church Youth Mission Team prepared for their mission trip, participated in the mission on the field, and how they debriefed the trip. While I also participated in these activities, the greatest amount of research material came from observation. My fieldwork consisted primarily of 10 days in the Dominican Republic with the mission team. During this time, I was faced with the realization that our team had not been adequately prepared to engage with this foreign culture. Our group simply did not grasp the foundation of the culture we were in and were unable to appropriately respect elements of that culture. We misunderstood the way body language is interpreted, spoke insensitively about cultural elements that were foreign to us, and disrespected the level of poverty present as we wasted resources. I distinctly remember numerous times when I would simply sit and watch as the team would interact with those in the Dominican community. Often times I felt discouraged at the lack of preparation our team seemed to have. We failed to understand the culture and therefore had no chance of understanding the

underlying needs in the communities. Through interviewing my friend, Rachel Disla, who has participated in these trips but now leads mission teams in the Dominican Republic, I realized how much more preparation work our group truly needs. Rachel explained that although our group is passionate about this mission, the training never adapts year after year. Because of that, our team never expands its understanding of the Dominican culture and misunderstands the deeper issues in the community (Disla). This conversation, as well as my observations led me to focus my thesis on short-term mission preparation. Furthermore, in evaluating my fieldwork, I discovered the importance of my own qualitative research. As I qualitatively studied my group, I began to understand the importance of equipping the team to study a qualitative perspective the culture in which we are serving. The basis of the mission preparation guide surrounds enabling team leaders to create qualitative learning experiences for mission teams prior to the trips. In doing so, teams will have the opportunity to better understand host communities and to develop respect for the various cultural elements before they ever hit the mission field.

Proposed Project:

The project I have proposed would walk mission team leaders through preparation for their trips. According to S. Rockwell, there are five steps in identifying "success outcome markers" (Rockwell). First, one must create a vision for the program. My vision for the short-term mission preparation guide is that it would equip team leaders to prepare their teams to understand the culture in which they will be serving, to understand the needs in that culture, to form sustainable relationships with the people in that culture, and to be both physically and spiritually prepared for missions as a group. The second step is to describe the mission. The mission of this proposed project is that it would assist in preparing mission teams to appropriately respond to the needs of host communities as well as preparing the group

themselves for the trip and work to be done. As revealed to me during my fieldwork and various interviews, many STM teams lack knowledge of how to ready themselves. Just as was the case for SCC, groups may be excited to serve, they are likely unable to do so when they have not researched the host culture or gone through in-depth group preparation.

The next two steps are identifying who is involved in the project and assigning outcome challenges for each person (Rockwell). In this case, team leaders who choose to use the guide are the program partners. They each will be given challenges that are adaptable to their unique mission settings. Finally, Rockwell suggests writing success outcome markers for each individual based on three levels: what is expected, what is liked, and what is loved as an outcome. Also, the project will include an element of evaluation for what was not expected, liked, and loved. For example, for the mission trip preparation, leaders should expect to see an increase in cultural intelligence in their teams that will be evaluated through group discussion on the trip and post-trip interviews. They should also see an increase in interest of the culture in which the teams will be serving. They should see their teams engaging with individuals in that culture and using the cultural intelligence practices from the preparation program. Furthermore, the groups will likely notice greater team-cohesion with fewer stressors having completed the training from the guide. Finally, a thorough evaluation and debrief of both the pros and cons of the trip, centering around the group's feeling of preparedness, will be a significant portion of the project.

Use of Qualitative or Quantitative Research to Ensure Impact of Project

There are three primary outcome markers that will be evaluated. First, mission team leaders will consult with the hosts on the mission field following the trip to evaluate the team's impact on the community. They will ask the host leader's opinion on how well the goal of the

mission was met, if there were unexpected positive or negative impacts, and what changes they would like to make for following mission teams. A positive response from the host is the greatest desired outcome. Second, deepening relationships between the mission team and the host community's people as well as the relationships between the mission team members are positive indicators that the mission team is appropriately engaging. The leader of the mission in the host community (who resides in the community) will be encouraged to debrief the mission project with the other leaders from their community. Their feedback will determine the positive or negative impacts of the project. The mission team will also be interviewed on the relational aspects of the trip while in the host country and then again a few months following the trip. Finally, the evaluation processes should be comprised of both positive and critical comments. While feedback about negative aspects of the trip are important, teams should ideally carry an overall positive attitude regarding the work they have done and their level of engagement with the host community. All feedback from the community will be obtained by the leader of the mission in the host community and will then be provided to the mission team. The feedback on group relations and preparedness will also be gathered by the team leader (or other team leaders) and discussed amongst the group. The information will likely have quantitative results, such as attendance numbers within ongoing projects, but will largely be qualitative and relationally focused through interviews and group debrief sessions. A negative response, which would likely represent a lack of relationships formed, little sustainability created, and a lack of adequate preparation, is an indicator of poor preparation and execution.

Effectiveness of Qualitative Inquiry

As I continue to work in missions, I must be flexible to change. Cultures change, demographics change, and needs change. The only way to truly understand the evolving cultures

in which STM teams wish to serve is through observing and stepping into these communities.

While statistics and studies based on numbers are beneficial, it is through qualitative work that a

deeper and more personal level of learning takes place. When community developers are able to

attach names and faces to the stories of poverty and injustice the mission becomes personal. In

my interview with the former leader of our youth missions at Seymour Christian Church, Donna

Sullivan pointed out that making social justice issues personal for mission teams is a crucial

concept. By introducing our teams to the issues real people are facing, they are able to

understand them better (Sullivan). Still, gaining this understanding takes time. David Livermore

covers this topic in his book *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*. He explains that there are great

dangers in taking "isolated incidents or people and applying them to everything or everyone in

the culture" (Livermore 68). When snap judgments are made about cultures based on limited

knowledge, there is a risk of causing damage to the work that has already been done and to the

relationships that have formed. Similarly, Corbett reminds readers that "as we enter low-income

communities, we must be very aware not to cheapen or delegitimize the pain that they materially

poor endure by claiming to understand it" (Corbett 23). The pains and trials of those in the host

community cannot truly be understood until those serving experience them for themselves.

Qualitative research opens the door for this to be possible.

Importance of an Appropriately Carried out Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research must follow certain standards to provide accurate results. Martyn

Hammersley explains that researchers should be able to answer the following questions

regarding their qualitative inquiries. "(1) How well is the study presented? (2) How significant

are the findings? (3) How well was the research carried out? (4) Were the research methods

applied fruitful? (5) Were the researchers competent?" (Mattsson 619). Qualitative research also

provides donors with information that invites them to "join a fight." Qualitative research values

often align with those of community development. These shared values are the most crucial

element needed for building community (Joyaux 50). Some of these values include

understanding communities based on the individuals in them, forming relationships as a means

of understanding cultures, and gaining broader perspectives through hands-on experience in

cultures.

Importance Within Vocation

The question I must ask myself is how qualitative inquiry can play a vital role in my

personal opportunities. I currently serve as the worship leader, a leader in the youth group, and

the leader of the youth mission trip for Seymour Christian Church. This job involves developing

relationships with groups of people and mentoring them in their service. I must prepare them to

serve adequately and can only do this if I understand the area of need. In missions specifically, I

have done a great deal of research. Years ago, I sought to understand the history of the

Dominican people and wrote a report on background of the country. I have had many

conversations with locals about numbers and statistics regarding their economy and government.

Still, the most impactful experiences have come from qualitative elements of research. I

distinctly remember a time when it clicked, when aspects of the culture became less foreign and I

understood a key element of the Dominican culture: simplicity. Simplicity is relative and it is

likely that a Dominican would not consider themselves to live simplistic lives. However,

compared to my American culture, where many drive fancy cars, take annual vacations, and

dress themselves in the latest fashion, the Dominicans live simple lives. I had always viewed this

as a reason to pity the Dominican people but as I sat watching a mother sweeping her dirt floor, I

began to realize the beauty behind the contentment of the Dominican people. As I sat and

observed children playing in the dusty streets and old cars driving by carrying thin livestock, I

realized that each of these things are "symptoms" of cultural elements unique to the Dominican

Republic. I began to wonder how I could learn more about the culture and understand why

people act and things occur in the way that they do. Merriam and Tisdel's words ring true in my

ears still today relating to this memory; "qualitative data is obtained through "direct quotations

from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Merriam and Tisdel

105).

Conclusion

It has been through my interviews with the leaders in the Dominican church, missionaries

who now reside there, and the leaders of mission trips that I have gained the greatest amount of

qualitative data as well as have formed relationships. Still, I continue to long for understanding

of the Dominican culture. Each year, as I have learned more and more, I find that I am better

equipped to engage with the community and to form sustainable relationships with the people I

encounter. The qualitative research I have done through simply watching, listening, and

participating has opened my perspective to not view the Dominican people as the "other" but

simply as one more branch of humanity. My deepest desire for my mission teams are for them to

understand this concept as well. It is through qualitative research that they will accomplish this in

time. My fieldwork experience paired with interviews and research have provided me with the

drive to propose the STM Preparation Guide as well as to invest in the relationships and cultural

understanding of those whom I serve with and for.

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ICD Values: Introduction

In August of 2017, I was a recent graduate of a private university that cost as much annually to attend as 3% of the global population receives in income annually ("How Rich Am I?"). I attended classes, chapel, and events with other students whose parents could either afford this school or who had received scholarships due to previous academic achievements. I entered this International Community Development (ICD) program with much naivety about my own privilege but a heart willing to grow in understanding of injustice. Through this program, I have both solidified prior perspectives of the world and adopted new viewpoints on social justice. My personal transformation has given me a broader and more open-minded outlook on social justice, the importance of copowerment, and the need for service in the world.

Personal Transformation

I admit, I have ignorantly viewed those in poverty as inferior. I have neglected to understand the vast impacts that social injustices have on the poor, minorities, and the broken. My view of the poor has been skewed because of the privileged life I have lived. Part of my ignorance comes from my access to Christian community, church, and parents who taught me about Christ from a young age. While each of these are positive aspects of the life I have lived, I have allowed them to create a pride in me that placed me "above" the poor and the powerless. I have attended church services on Sundays my entire life, have had numerous opportunities to participate in missions, and now serve in the church. I must be highly valued by God because of this, right? This mindset leaves out the importance of the love God has for the poor. Daniel Groody, author of *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, explains, "As we read the bible from the perspective of the poor, we can more readily discern that the God of the Scriptures reaches out to people in pain, not because of merit but because of mercy, not because they are more

virtuous but because they are more vulnerable, and not because the poor are good but because God is good" (Groody 35). God loves the poor as much as those who have been blessed with financial, relational, and economic stability. As I have dwelt on this idea, I have been humbled to know that my privilege deprives me of need. While I will always require Jesus, I am able to provide for myself in many ways and do not long for Jesus as many poor do. The thought-provoking reading from the ICD course has encouraged me to see beyond the social class of others and to see people through the eyes of a loving God who cares little about politics, legalism, and social status.

Social Justice

We have all likely heard the phrase "social justice" more times than we can count and in a variety of social circles. This topic is commonly discussed by millions of people every single day, yet, there is still a struggle to make social justice a reality. Because many hold a perspective on social justice that largely hinges on their district worldviews, one must wonder if a consensus will ever be met on how social justice can be achieved. Yet, is the goal to find a single, omni-effective solution to social justice? Or, should we instead be looking to use unique worldviews to gain an understanding of the varying needs for social justice? I would argue the latter. In works by Volf, Thurman, and DeYoung, social justice is discussed from a Christian perspective. However, each writing brings forth a unique and valuable outlook on social justice, its purpose, and the way it can be implemented into both the church and the lives of the poor.

It is through my own worldview that I have come to understand social justice. I say this loosely because my worldview is subject to change. I, of course, have foundational values that are unlikely to shift, yet, my broad worldview changes with each life-altering circumstance, intercultural interaction, and revelation about who God is. My faith in Christ largely shapes my

worldview, but even faith can whither or grow. My worldview is currently shaped by 3 major

factors: religion, geographical location, and relationships. My Christianity encourages me to

value social justice, while my geographical location determines my relationships.

These relationships impact the way I perceive social justice around the world. My faith then

affects how I believe social justice should be enacted… and the cycle continues.

As mentioned previously, Volf, Thurman, and DeYoung all approach the discussion on

social justice through a Christian lens. Moreover, they each cover the way that social justice can

be brought about by the sharing of the "Good News." DeYoung points out how sharing the Good

News has been a gateway to conversion, which has led to the call to social justice for many

(DeYoung 15). It is through experiences, like conversion, that the Good News creates "warriors"

for social justice. This social justice is then used to bring restoration to the poor, broken, and

oppressed. Luke 4:18 says "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring

Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind

will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (*New*

Living Translation, Luke 4.18-19). Not only are we equipped to fight for social justice, we have

been sent to the world for this very mission.

While all three authors place emphasis on social justice as a mission for the church, they

each focus on different methods of doing so. DeYoung emphasizes how social justice it not only

the central point of Christianity, but also of various other religions. Yet, he spends much time

discussing the way that the Bible calls Christians to provide aid to the oppressed (DeYoung

12). In contrast, Thurman chooses to emphasize how the Church, namely the American Church,

has misrepresented the commands we were given regarding the poor. He expresses, "Again and

again our missionary appeal is on the basis of the Christian responsibility to the needy, the

ignorant and the so-called backward peoples of the earth. There is a certain grandeur and nobility in administering another's need out of one's fullness and plenty" (Thurman 2). With this, he is explaining how the church has misunderstood and poorly reacted to the poverty and oppression in the world. It is from this ignorance, that the American Church so often offers its solutions to the world's issues. Yet, since we are seemingly narrow-minded to culture, we struggle to see the reality behind many issues. Volf reiterates this concept in explaining, "We find it difficult to distance ourselves from ourselves and our own culture and so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic it practices… we need to let them pull us out of the enclosures of our own culture and its own peculiar prejudices so that we can read afresh the "one Word of God" (Volf 54). Unlike Thurman, Volf sheds light on how individual Christians can do their part to embrace God and culture.

My role in influencing social justice has continued to become increasingly clearer through my involvement in the International Community Development program and short-term missions. As explained above, a crucial aspect of creating social justice as a Christian is bringing together dynamics of culture and God's righteous ways. As I currently serve as a leader for the youth of our church, this quest has been heavily on my heart for some time. Now, I am blessed with the opportunity to lead this group of young people into a foreign culture where they will (hopefully) experience a revelation of how social injustice and brokenness that fills the lives of people around the world. Paired with this, it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit within our youth would set a fire in their hearts to fight for social justice.

Social injustice largely goes unchallenged even though we would never personally inflict such hardships on others. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda asks "Why? What gives rise to acquiescence? What has prevented us from refusing such brutality over the years and today? What would

enable us to live the opposite?" (Moe-Lobeda 25). These are the very questions I ask myself as I prepare to lead a mission trip. These are the issues I urge our youth to consider as they prepare themselves to encounter injustice in a foreign land. In my quest to fight for social justice, it is my goal to present these questions to others. It is my mission to help others understand that social injustice is a global issue that transcends all cultural, geographical, physical, mental, and moral barriers. Social injustice is an issue deeply rooted in the sin of a fallen world. It thrives on and encourages sin. As Christians, why do we stand by, often with broken hearts, unwilling to act? If the Lord allows me to fight for social justice, I pray I can do it in a way that encourages others to be sensitive to the realities of our broken world.

Copowerment

In order to create social justice movements that result in long-term change, groups of people must be empowered to create such a revolution. Gretchen Spreitzer exclaims, "Empowered individuals do not wait passively for the work environment to provide direction; instead, they take a proactive approach toward shaping and influencing their work environment" (Spreitzer 513). It is through empowerment that leaders invite others to join the fight for a common cause. The efforts of a few passionate individuals will never elicit sustainable change without others joining the fight and being provided with the encouragement and resources to do so. The key to making such an impact is *copowerment*. Empowering others is about creating a system of collective leadership through self-reliance and a unified vision for change (Kuenkel 22). When we master this, we are able to equip others to be leaders in their communities and fight for social justice.

After many years of working with short-term missions, I have finally begun to realize that the underlying goal is sustainability. While many seasoned missionaries would likely scoff

at the amount of time it has taken me to recognize sustainability as the target, it is sadly a theme amongst those in short-term missions to overlook this concept. The mission has often become the opportunity to have a mission trip—not to create sustainability in the community being served so that the mission trip is no longer needed. When we view mission trips in this light, copowerment can actually be an enemy of those in short-term missions. If copowerment is effective, mission leaders are no longer needed, mission teams have no one to help, and the passion to help the poor and broken is no longer relevant for that people group. *This* is what we should strive for. I have seen time and time again how stagnant programs fail to prepare host communities for life after the short-term mission team returns home. In fact, there is often damage done by short-term mission teams that must then be repaired once teams are gone. How have we veered so far from what missions is supposed to look like from a Biblical perspective? Where is the element of effective copowerment? Through creating a guide for short-term mission leaders, I hope to educate others on the importance of empowering others in leadership. We must begin to create leaders within younger generations in our communities and our church. My role in doing so is through raising up leaders in short-term missions who understand the importance of empowering those we are serving to serve themselves so that they can serve others as well.

Theology of Services

Throughout each person's lives, they search for our purpose. Christians often seek their role in servanthood for Christ. This is often called a vocation, or, for some, it may be completely separate from what we are paid to do from day to day. Like many things I previously held strong opinions about, my understanding of the theology of *calling* has been radically transformed through my time in the ICD program. The book, *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer has played a substantial role in this alteration.

I clearly remember sitting in a revival service in college for the sole purpose of seeking to discover my calling. It was worthless. I sat at the altar, my hands open before me, begging God to audibly shout my calling. It never happened. In fact, I gave up on listening to God and chose for myself what I thought would bring me the greatest fulfillment in life as a servant of God. I chose to pursue a career in human trafficking relief, not because it was clearly what God was calling me towards, but because it made sense. I was missing out on what I was meant to do despite the talents I knew I had and regardless of my past experiences that were preparing me for what I now know I am supposed to be doing. I was looking for some extravagant revelation of my calling when all I needed to do was sit in silence and wait. Palmer says the following; "Vocation does not come from a voice 'out there' calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice 'in here' calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God" (Palmer 10). These words spoke true to my heart and impacted me at the core of who I believed I was created to be. Nearly a year and a half ago I read these words for the first time and found them powerful. Now, having discovered my calling in this stage of life, these words remind me of the beauty in God's ordinance over the purpose of our lives. I was blessed with a voice that is capable of being used to lead worship. I have been given multiple opportunities to grow in my ability to lead my peers, and I have been given a strong moral compass from a young age to help me discern right from wrong. These aspects of my character and physical capabilities are skills that now equip me to be a worship pastor, to lead people in a time of praising God, to minister to those in my church community, and to lead alongside the people with whom I serve. God has been preparing me for this, my calling, for my entire life. All I needed to do was listen to the still small voice that was empowering me to develop my skills and passions that now equip me to serve in ministry.

Conclusion

Short-term missions is a crucial part of the work that the modern-day church does throughout the world. The popularity of STM continues to increase. Unfortunately, many STM teams are unprepared to appropriately interact with and minister to host communities. Through this guided thesis, I have outlined a proposed STM preparation guide that would equip STM leaders to ready their teams for intercultural interactions. I have also discussed the importance of contextualization in mission work. Furthermore, I have evaluated the significance of qualitative inquiry in understanding culture as a means of effectively developing community through missions. Finally, I have explained my personal values as they align with the International Community Development course and how they have transformed my thinking as I aim to help leaders in short-term mission prepare themselves and their teams to view culture through the eyes of the Creator.

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