

Sabbatical Report/Lane Community College

Hyla Rosenberg/Spring, 2012

Language, Literature and Communication Division

Speech and Communication Studies Department

My appreciation and thanks is extended to Lane Community College for this sabbatical opportunity, as well as to the many faculty colleagues at LCC who dedicate time and energy to the sabbatical program.

Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity? ~César Chavez

This sabbatical included elements of research, reflection and practice. There were three main components of my sabbatical:

1. Attendance at Annual SIETAR conference (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research) in Denver, Colorado.
2. Research and exploration of current intercultural communication theory, and discussions within the discipline about theories of conflict “management” and “transformation. University of Oregon library, Eugene, Oregon
3. Attendance at CONTACT (Conflict Transformation Across Cultures), a graduate institute at School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont. CONTACT is a program developed by Dr. Paula Green, director of the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding. This year’s CONTACT program brought together 55+ students from 22 different countries and/or cultural groups.

Why this focus?

Background: My undergraduate and graduate level experiences have included research in both intercultural and international studies, as well as an intensive nine-month internship which I completed as part of a rigorous program through the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. I received a B.A. from SIT, and its model of research, reflection and practice served as a cohesive model for this sabbatical as well.

I completed my undergraduate internship in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, volunteering with an organization (Sarvodaya Shramadana) which is internationally recognized for its perspective of “development” with the context of Sri Lanka’s own cultural

history, language and value system. Sarvodaya builds upon Gandhian precepts of non-violence, as well as the tenets of Buddhism, the dominant religious worldview in Sri Lanka. I specifically chose Sarvodaya because it was not an external development organization using paternalistic notions of empowering Sri Lankans based upon Western models of “progress.” My placement was in the predominantly Tamil area of Batticaloa. I volunteered as the teacher’s aide in an all-ages village school, a structure made of coconut leaves as shelter, the sandy ground as a place to write.

I received a Master’s Degree from Portland State University in Communication Studies, and a concentration in Intercultural Communication. My graduate thesis included a rhetorical analysis of U.S.-Peace organizations which were seeking to “melt” Cold War tensions through person-to-person contact. I analyzed each organizational approach to changing Cold war enemy imagery under the broad theoretical construct of “enmification.” Enmification refers to the social, historical, economic and cultural process of construing members of a group as enemies.

The first component of my sabbatical was to attend the SIETAR conference in Denver, Colorado. Here I was able to reconnect with colleagues from the Intercultural Communication field as well as meet new scholars, teachers and professionals who work in the field as “Interculturalists.” There were workshops and panels about all aspects of the discipline; the challenges of teaching Intercultural Communication to students who do not see the need for including the course as part of their undergraduate requirement; movements of indigenization in institutions of higher education; the role of oral narrative in teaching and learning; cultural absolutism and relativism and models of intercultural communicative competence.

I was interested in exploring the ways that conflict is approached and construed within diverse cultural contexts, and this served as central to my sabbatical experience. My research, which was partially completed at the University of Oregon library, allowed me to review both current literature in the Communication Studies field related to Intercultural Communication, as well as

specific journal articles which addressed conflict studies and current conflict models of transformation. Models of conflict management within western, “mainstream” contexts tend to be dualistic in nature, in consonance with the larger frame of deductive reasoning. Even models which have built upon the traditional win-lose construction (win-win) are still using that basic foundation as a reference point, and these assumptions form the underlying foundation of a given model.

I concluded my sabbatical by attending two weeks of intensive participation in Part I of the CONTACT program. We began the program by giving a brief introduction of ourselves to the group, as well as taking a small post-it note, and placing it on the places in the world with which we identify, live or place our concerns and thoughts.

The map was labeled, with countries and regions. This introductory process, in and of itself, was revealing. Participants from the Diné Nation were able to post in the general physical territory of Arizona where they live on the reservation, but there was no designation for their Nation. A participant from Palestine noted that there was no name or place for her country on the map.

Although I am intellectually aware of the cultural genocide which occurs when people are separated from the land they love, the act of witnessing others both expressing love of land, as well as the grief of disconnection was profound. I could easily place my sticky note on the area labeled Oregon on the map, and place one on the small island of Sri Lanka, a country which holds my thoughts and concerns through decades of war.

As CONTACT continued, we learned more about each other, and participated in small group discussions, small group case study analyses, panel discussions, and larger group discussions. My co-participants were/are a combination of peace activists, artists, writers, journalists, scholars, professors and college students. They came from all over the world, including Rwanda, Pakistan, S. Sudan, Italy, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Indonesia, Germany, Palestine, Algeria and the Czech Republic.

I was especially influenced by attendance at CONTACT, in which I met men and women who are living daily with the consequences of war, poverty, genocide and oppression. The common denominator in their enrollment in CONTACT is that every one of them is committed to peacebuilding in various contexts; the governmental board room; the classroom; United Nations assemblies; the local community center which provides a temporary safe place for children in war-torn areas.

CONTACT faculty members also represent a diverse group both in terms of their interests, experiences and cultural background: EuroAmerican, Japanese, Latina, New Zealander and Rwandan. Dr. Paula Green, the founder of CONTACT has been working with politically and culturally polarized groups all over the world; Palestinians and Israelis, Jews and Germans, Bosnians and Serbs.

We began each day at 9:00, and ended each day at 5:30. During lunchtime, participants volunteered to share more about cultural experiences and formed brown bag lunch groups about specific topics. In the evenings, there were special presentations from both guest speakers from SIT and the surrounding community areas.

What now?

The immediate applications of material into my classes include concrete explorations of views of conflict and intercultural communicative competence from a variety of perspectives, including those which are not Euro-centered. Most models of conflict theory and “management” do not include a transformational perspective, as was the focus during CONTACT. This is a more practical application, the translation of cognitive understanding of theories, models, histories and perspectives constructed during my sabbatical.

I am in the process of integrating different approaches and material to both to the Intercultural Communication course as well as the Interpersonal Communication course. Conflict is addressed in IPC between members of a dyad in a variety of familial, professional and daily settings, and conflict is a topic of much interest and relevance. I am using more diverse approaches to teaching tools, including

the creation of the “critical incident” case study which I base on an actual situation, but has been changed or modified for the purposes of the class.

With regards to the Intercultural Communication course, many issues arise quite “organically”: Issues of high-context and low-context expectations in communication; relationship to time; patterns of thought and language; influence of family and other systems as they reflect cultural values.

While it may be easy to address the process of transformation in an abstract manner, it is quite another to dive deeply into the center of transformation is quite another matter. On a macro-*process* level, transformation includes a focus on empathy, listening and being other-directed. Empathy does not presuppose agreement—in listening to the individual stories of CONTACT participants, this, among other issues emerged again and again. The goal is not agreement. The goal is not to “win”, even if it means both parties “win”. The goal is to enact long-lasting, enduring change which addresses the systems of inequity, the traditions of injustice, and draws upon the vast resource of humanity. I will continue to draw on this vast resource in my classes and to encourage recognition of this jewel within my students.
