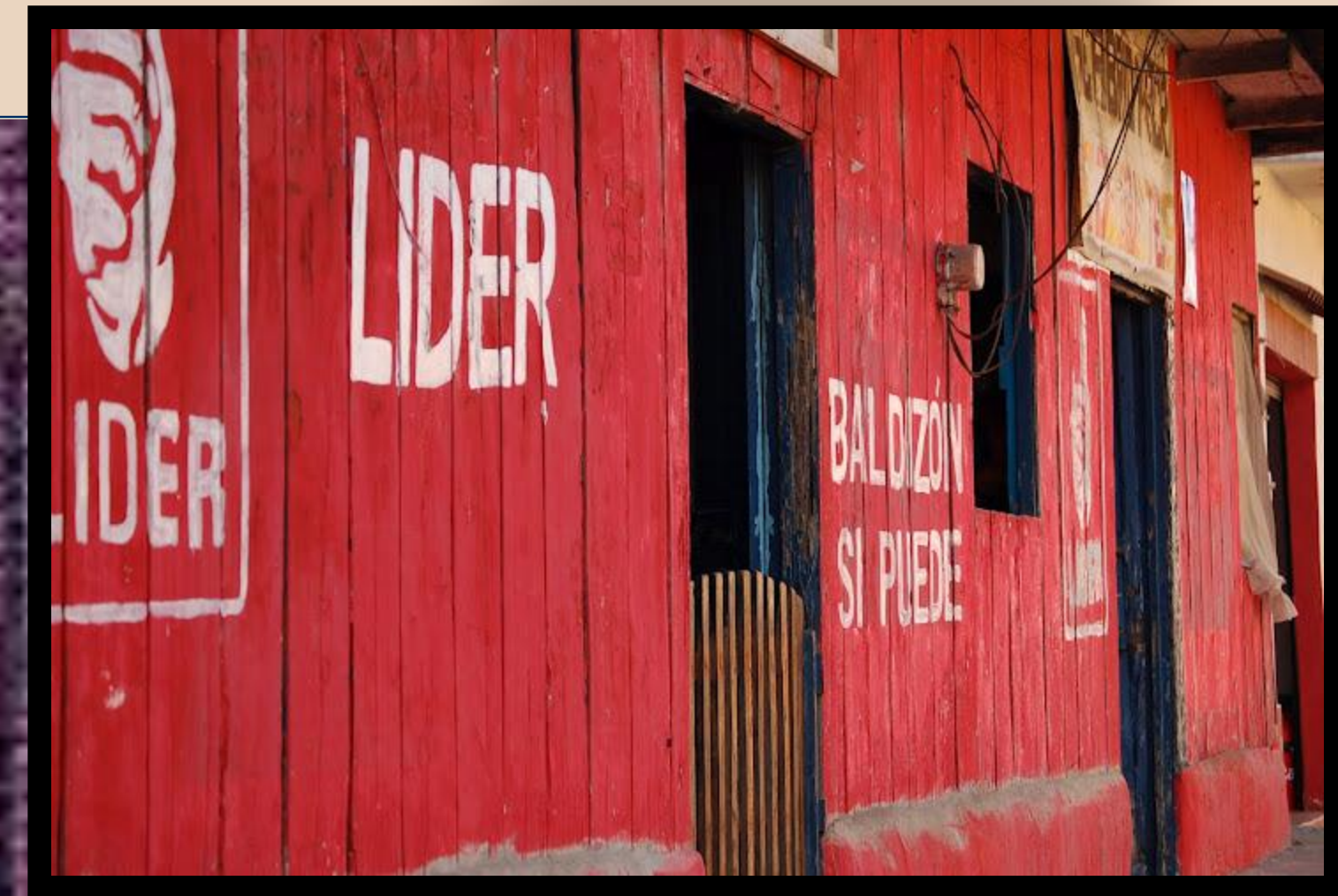




Transformative Learning and International Volunteering in Guatemala

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Operational definitions

What is transformative learning?

Learning that challenges the previous understanding of the learner and leads to a critical self-examination. Transformational learning encourages the learner to develop a new worldview and put that worldview into action in their lives.



Results:

Transformational learning does not necessarily occur during or after a person's international volunteer experience. Our research has found, however, that several **facilitating factors** exist that significantly aid in the transformative process.

Where true transformative learning occurred, participants experienced not only enhanced understanding of self, but also an expanded worldview.

Who are international volunteers?

Individuals working willingly without pay in a country different from that in which they permanently reside.

Facilitating Factors:

Elements of an individual's experience that contribute to the process of learning.

Volunteer Experience Categories:

- Beginner:** The experience in Guatemala is their first international volunteer experience.
- Intermediate:** The volunteer has participated in 2-4 international volunteer experiences, including their trip to Guatemala.
- Extensive:** The volunteer has participated in five or more international volunteer experiences, including their current trip to Guatemala or is volunteering in Guatemala for a period of six or more months.

"THE PROCESS OF EFFECTING CHANGE IN A FRAME OF REFERENCE."

- Mezirow



EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT

STRUCTURED LEARNING COMPONENT

PREPARATION

CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

SUPPORT AND REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES



ABSTRACT / Method

Service learning and volunteerism are of critical importance to both the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire and the field of social work. In the interest of fortifying these values, our research gathered evidence of causality between the disorienting elements of international volunteerism and the transformative learning process. In the spirit of naturalistic inquiry, researchers participated in volunteer projects alongside their subjects, interviewees were selected using a non-probability sample on the basis of availability and willingness to participate, and the study began with questions rather than hypotheses.

Twenty-six qualitative interviews were conducted with American individuals volunteering in the cities of Antigua and San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala during the month of January 2012. Interviewees were asked about motivation, the history behind their volunteer experiences, and personal values and views of poverty related to their ongoing volunteerism. Audio recording devices assisted interviewers in preserving the integrity of all statements and fostering accurate analysis. Transcripts of the on-site interviews and follow-up emails were analyzed in categories of experience as listed above in order to identify themes related to learning and the learning processes.

"The cooperation of Common Hope and the San Lucas Mission is gratefully acknowledged."



"I've also learned a lot about myself and my relationship to the world... doing this has sort of broadened my mind in a way." - **Mark Wofford**
San Diego, CA



"...I think the most powerful thing is that change of heart..." - **Kathy Klos**
Minneapolis, MN

"I notice myself getting frustrated when I get sucked into the self-centered mindset that is so prevalent in America... and I consciously work to remember the people from other parts of the world and the lessons that I have learned from them."
- Sarah Farnes/Burnsville, MN

"International volunteering has helped me realize a lot about American culture, the meaning of culture, and our almost innate predisposition to see our culture as the 'right' culture." - **Marisa Nelson**
Little Rock, AR