Chapter Six

Third Case Study

Liz and María

Liz Joins the Class

Liz graduated from Virginia Tech several years ago and moved from Southwest Virginia to Northern Virginia. She worked at a number of jobs before deciding to try substitute teaching in a wealthy school system in the area. Once in the classroom, she discovered a love of teaching, and decided to return to Tech to pursue a Master’s Degree that would provide the credentials to teach ESL. I had been in contact with her for a couple of months before she came to my office for advising for the program. I had known her previously, and it was a pleasure to see her again.

When she entered my office, I hardly recognized the elegant young woman who walked through the door. Everything about her appearance was perfect: make-up, clothes, carriage, manner. She could have stepped from a runway as a model, distinguished by her poise and self assurance.

She settled into the teal recliner beside my computer table. Right away, she pulled out a folder of materials she had downloaded from my website, and she began a barrage of questions. She needed a multicultural course for ESL licensure; since no multicultural seminar was offered that fall, I suggested that to fulfill the requirement she take CTB. Her undergraduate degree was in Spanish, so she was interested in the class on its own merit as well.

When she returned for the interview at the beginning of the class, she prepared to tell me about herself and her family. Right off, she described herself as a “brownie-baking, Halloween-costume-making, soccer-practice-driving kind of girl” who “got to do more of that kind of junk in the classroom” as a substitute teacher than she could do in the jobs she had in the business world. When I asked if that was how she saw her mother, she replied, “That is my mom and I was never prepared for anything else.”

Later, in a reflection, Liz further expressed her beliefs about the role of women in the context of her service-learning placement:
I strongly believe that women are the centers of culture. They are traditionally known as the “homemakers” and the ones responsible for cuisine, decoration, religion, and generally serve as the hub of family relationships. They provide a type of insight into a country’s culture that I feel I can only get by working with a woman and her family (September 6, 2002).

Liz restated her position on the role of women as seen from her perspective of an upper middle class woman working only for pleasure and self-fulfillment, not through necessity. Although I had not yet interviewed María and did not personally know her, I felt fairly confident that she was working such long hours to pay the family bills that there would be little free time for the pursuits Liz described as the role of “homemakers.” I thought it would be enlightening to observe the intersection of culture with the accompanying differences in socioeconomic class as we moved through the semester.

Liz continued describing her family, narrating the story of a wealthy family that enjoyed all the material possessions money could buy. Her father was a well-known lawyer in Southwest Virginia, known for volunteering his services to a variety of worthy causes such as museums and civic organizations. Her mother attended an elite women’s college in Central Virginia, then taught school for two years after graduating. Both parents came from families that owned old respected businesses in Southwest Virginia; Liz was proud of her families’ connections. She self-described as upper middle class, a portrayal reinforced by her designer clothing and country club manners.

Liz’s father and mother divorced when she was in middle school, a traumatic experience for her. Both parents have remarried, and both are enjoying lives that continue to bespeak an abundance of money. She referred to her parents’ new spouses as her father’s wife and her mother’s husband, not claiming relationship with them. Liz depicted her mother’s second husband as a wealthy retired CEO of a large, international company. Liz was the middle child of three in her birth family, but she was one of seven in the blended families that she reluctantly called family. She represented her extended family as an “old-fashioned southern family,” one that called to keep her in line if she ever does anything to get in trouble.
For Liz, the traditional family included two parents and three children. Until the divorce, her mother did not work, but rather spent her time volunteering in the community. Her dad worked long hours, and she seldom saw him. Liz was comfortable with her family situation, so she was disturbed when her parents divorced and her mother went to work. She was no longer at home baking cookies and welcoming the children home after school. To further complicate matters, according to Liz, her mother became severely depressed before she began to date the man who was now her husband. Soon after the marriage, her mother’s husband was transferred out of the country, and the family moved to another continent until the husband retired and they returned to Southwest Virginia.

Her mother and her husband lived in an upscale neighborhood, and since she had moved back to Southwest Virginia, Liz was living with them. They also had a condominium in Florida, so they spent much of the fall and winter there, leaving Liz to housesit.

Of all the students I interviewed, Liz was probably the one who positioned herself the most definitely within her socioeconomic class. At the time I interviewed her, I knew that the families we worked with in Roanoke are primarily from lower and middle socioeconomic class families, so I thought it would be especially interesting to follow Liz and her Latina partner. She was also the most self-confident of the students, as well as the most certain of how she wanted to shape her future as an ESL teacher.

As she narrated the history of a family steeped in old money and a background considered aristocratic in terms of Southwest Virginia, I wondered how a relationship could possibly develop between this polished, wealthy young woman and the Honduran woman with whom she would partner. Although I did not know María except through her cousin who was in the program, I knew that there was a good chance she would not be wealthy or polished in the same way as Liz. Most of the families with whom we work are from humble backgrounds; even people considered middle class in Honduras would not qualify for that social status here in the United States. A friend who spent time in Central America summed up the difference by saying that a person considered poor in the United States would have enough money and material possessions to be deemed middle class or
wealthy in Central America. If I wanted to look at the intersection of social classes, this might prove an ideal opportunity.

Liz decided to participate in service-learning not only because of needing a credit for her degree, but also because she has always liked to volunteer. For two summers, she had taught ESL for Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS) in Roanoke, and she found the experience to be fulfilling. She loved the challenge of not having books and of having to think on her feet. During that time, some of her teaching was in an improvised classroom at RIS, but she also visited the homes of some young Kosevar men. In her position as a substitute teacher before returning to Southwest Virginia, she taught ESL in an equally challenging situation, an experience led her to seek certification and reinforced her decision to teach ESL.

In her first reflection, she talked about her reasons for participating in CTB:

I chose to participate in this Service Learning course for three major reasons: the opportunity to gain insight into Hispanic American culture, the chance to impart my knowledge of the English language and everyday American life to the benefit of someone else, and the simple practicality of the program. … .

While taking full advantage of all that the program has to offer me, I also hope to have an equally large impact on my sponsor family. I aim to sharpen my teaching abilities by helping them with their studies of the English language in a casual, relaxed setting. . . . I also believe that just donating my time to someone who needs a little extra help by becoming their friend and listening to them can give them immeasurable encouragement. (August 31, 2002).

In reading this reflection, Liz expresses a strong sense of civic responsibility, but at the same time, she uses the expression “donating my time.” “Donating” is a word that suggests a hierarchical society (cf. Ransford, 2000). At the beginning of the semester, however, it is not unusual for students to think of service-learning in terms of community service based on volunteerism (cf. Sigmon, 1979). Liz does talk about friendship, though, so at the time I read the reflection, I thought it would be interesting to see whether she
developed more as a friend or as a beneficent member of the upper class reaching out to a member of the oppressed class.

In this reflection, she expresses her expectations as to what the program can do for her, referring to gaining cultural insight and a practicing as an ESL teacher. It is common for the students to begin their service-learning journey thinking in terms of what the program can do for them, while they in turn perform community service.

Liz does talk about friendship peripherally, perhaps because in class, as part of the introduction to the class, I had talked about friendships that develop over the semester. Since some of the students are committed to teaching ESL, I make a point of explaining that some of the Latinas are lonely, due to being away from home and isolated in the community because of the language barrier. For that reason, some of them are more interested in friendship than in language acquisition; it has been my experience that disappointment can ensue if I do not prepare the students, whereas if they are expecting that their family may seek friendship instead of language, they enjoy the experience for what it is rather than feeling they have failed as far as the goals of the class are concerned. Perhaps this caused Liz to think in terms of friendship, but I suspect that she truly was interested in forming a friendship since she continued to talk about friendship throughout the semester.

Liz reflected on the Nava reading:

“Charity” was about a young boy coming to the realization that he was considered a charity case and nothing more by his local Lyons Club. . . . While being invited to the Lyons Club Christmas parties and given gifts each year might have made the Lyons Club participants happy, it embarrassed and humiliated this young boy. He was not considered for his individual personality and interests, but solely because he was poor and given a generic “boy” gift as a token of the holidays….I don’t want my family to view themselves in this way. I have even been out collecting donations for them and their children and hope that they don’t think I am only taking pity on them by giving them these things. . . . (Reflection 2, September 6, 2003).
Liz submitted this reflection electronically on Friday, and then on Saturday, we had the workday. When we met on Monday for class, she was bothered by the workday in general, saying that it felt as if we were demeaning the community when we went to the homes and began unloading furniture and bags of clothes. She was concerned that so many non-Latino children came out of the apartment complex to watch, and that they did not receive anything. We always take pictures to chronicle the semester, making sure the families receive copies, and that bothered her as well. She felt we were lining people up like exhibits to take their photographs.

It was the first time a class member had questioned our practices in such a way, and the ensuing discussion was heated and controversial. As the discussion swirled around me, I observed the class, watching the varying emotions and opinions. Thinking I had it figured out, I explained to them that although I am an only child, I grew up in a large extended family in which we constantly passed clothes around depending on each person’s current size or needs. I feel so close to the families that for me, sharing with them is simply an extension of what I have always done. Whoever has more shares with the one who has needs.

During the interviews I conducted with all the class members, I discovered that many students in the class were from middle to upper middle class families. Still believing I had the right answer, I later reflected on the class discussion, and it occurred to me that the students might be superimposing their feelings on the Latinos. The question, “How would you feel if a big ole Ryder moving van pulled up to your apartment and then a bunch of students swarmed out and crowded into your apartment to stare at you like animals in the zoo?” ignited the class discussion to an even more heated degree. The anger they expressed at the way they felt people were treated might have mirrored the anger they would have felt under similar circumstances.

At the same time, some of the veteran students came to the defense of the workday, saying their families had always expressed delight at meeting the students and receiving the goods. They became angry as well, and a rift occurred among some of the students that never was completely resolved.

Amy and Kimberly, in particular, were disturbed, telling me later in a private conversation, that the students who had been so upset about the workday “just don’t get
it.” They had also been disturbed on the workday because some of these same students had only wanted to give the families clothing they would wear to school. Despite my efforts to explain that the Latinos have told me repeatedly that they appreciate receiving work clothes, they remained firm in their belief that they should only take the “gently worn” items, and one of the students went so far as to put shoes that she felt were unsuitable in the garbage. Amy went right behind her and took them out. A final compromise involved putting the controversial items in a few bags to deliver to Goodwill. In the five semesters I have taught the class, that workday was the only time the class became divided.

Liz referred to the workday in her reflection the following week, referring to a chapter she had read from Campbell’s (1995) book of stories based on the border culture found in Tijuana:

Campbell states that the Americans cross the borders during the day to partake in their outdated idea of “Mexicanness” by frequenting saloons, brothels, and shopping for handicrafts. Tijuanans are happy to cater to this wild-western image by importing mass-produced “crafts” from other parts of Latin America (or even Asia) and inventing attractions such as a zebra-striped stuffed donkey on which tourists can pose under sombreros for photos. People crossing the border in the opposite direction, however, don’t cross just looking for daytime fun and relaxation. Tijuanans crossing into California head straight to the larger cities in search of work and a better life for themselves and their families. I found this whole article interesting considering our workday this week. I hope the families don’t see us as just wanting to gain a fake image of Latin America. When we had photos taken with our host families, I almost cringed. I kept picturing a silly Yankee perched on a stuffed donkey pretending to be a cowboy. They have crossed the border into our lives searching for what is real – happiness and a better way of life. We now need to cross into theirs with our eyes open – seeing what is really there instead of a preconceived notion of their culture (Reflection 3, September 15, 2002).
Since the inception of the course, I had talked with many of the Latinos about having the students come for the workday, and they all expressed delight at having the opportunity to meet the students with whom they would partner. They also said appreciated what they referred to as la dispensa [literally meaning “dispensation” or “exemption,” but used by the Latinos to mean “distribution of goods”] and looked forward to receiving the items we delivered.

After the class discussion and after reading Liz’s reflection, however, I began to question whether the Latinos had told me what they thought I wanted to hear. I returned to the literature (Love, 2000; Lugones, 1990, Ransford, 2000; Tatum, 2000; Wildman & Davis, 2000) seeking my way through the damning discomfort Liz caused me to feel. Love’s words especially resonated with me, helping me to view myself as a product of a paternalistic, hierarchical society that has socialized me to believe in all the above-described practices. As a member of the dominant culture, I am often unable to recognize my privilege. By unintentional actions with good intentions, I have the ability to perform hurtful acts, and I question whether that is the case with the workdays.

The patriarchal society from which I emerged sanctions charity. I am a member of a protestant church\(^1\) that considers service to humankind to be of the highest calling, whether in manual labor to build a house or with shared material possessions. I grew up in an environment probably typical of a generation of baby-boomers who were affected by Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963; we joined hands in sisterhood, seeking to blur otherness. I was appalled to recognize that my entire perspective about the workdays reflected the oppressive behavior that I abhor. I was blatantly exercising my White privilege to create invisible racism (Tatum, 2000) and classism. At this time of self-searching, Behar (1996) voice also resonated with my discomfort as she talked about the vulnerability of the researcher placing herself in the research. I felt I could not leave out this revelation of my own transformation and remain true to the beliefs that shape who I am, not only as a researcher, but also as a person.

Finally I recognized the missing piece in my assumption about the rightness of workdays during which we shared material goods with Latino families. When my family and I passed our clothes around based on who had children the next size or who had lost

\(^{1}\) Church of the Brethren
or gained weight, we did it as White, middle class family members among whom there existed no hierarchical structure, whether imposed by self or by society. When we made the rounds to deliver furniture and bags of clothes to the families, we did it from a privileged position. From our position, there was no self-perceived racism or classism. However, when we performed a similar activity with the Latino families, we did it from a position of power and privilege, albeit it conscious or subconscious. A practice that had its roots in a desire to blur otherness seemed to have resulted in othering of a group of people whom I respect and regard as friends (cf. Fine, 1998).

However, just as I was contemplating letting my friends and church family know that I could not accept any more items for the families, I received a call from Aracely who had been in the program for the first three semesters. She wanted to let me know she had returned from Mexico after a year and a half back home with her family, and she had no clothes or furniture. Once again, the van and a truck made their way across town to deliver what was available in my garage.

The need does still exist for sharing or charity or serving or whatever else we want to call it, although it has a different shape than it had when CTB began. Many of the families with whom we work have become fairly well established and do not suffer from the desperate need they did at one time. Some have even passed to friends the furniture we first provided as they replaced it with new pieces they bought, and with few exceptions, they have all the furniture and clothes they desire or their apartments will house. However, the need does still exist, and the question is whether it is right to distribute goods to people who have fewer financial resources.

We are talking with the Latinas in the LWSG about ways to involve the Latinos in the workday as stakeholders. In the future, it may become a workday in which all participants work side by side in solidarity for the distribution of goods to those who need them. One of the basic principles of service-learning program is that the “served control the service(s) provided,” thus making them “better able to serve and be served by their own actions” (Sigmon, 1979, p. 3). Changing the practice would be one step further from having the participants regard each other as “the other” (cf. Fine, 1998).

Another struggle for me is how to handle the topic in class. By starting the placements with a workday, I have been overtly, albeit unconsciously, establishing the
students and myself as dominant members of society and the families as the oppressed. By setting us up as the “givers” and the families as the “receivers,” I am devaluing equality. To revisit Jackson and Smothers (1999), “Service-learning is a way of building relationships; not hierarchical relationships that are top-down, helper-helpee, but nonhierarchicial relationships in the sense that each partner has something to gain and each has something to give” (p. 113).

I still believe it is important for the students to have the opportunity to meet the families prior to beginning their visits, and I plan to brainstorm with the Latinos to find out how they envision that first meeting. I do know that I will eliminate the photo taking and its implications of objectification. Once again I will turn to my Latino colleagues for ideas to plan a get-together—or whatever they suggest—as a means of starting the semester in such a way as to truly foster reciprocal relationships.

María Enters the Program

As the semester began, I knew most of the Latino families quite well, so I was able to place them with a student I thought would be a compatible partner. Prior to the first interview, however, I did not personally know María. She and her husband Mario had just arrived from Honduras six months earlier, and they were living with Esmeralda and her husband Samuel. Esmeralda had been in the service-learning program since its second semester, so when she called to ask if I could send a student to work with her newly-arrived cousin, I told her I would send a student who could work with both of them. Esmeralda was adamant that each needed her own teacher, however, because she said she knew so much English, and María knew none. Esmeralda was an English teacher in a middle school in Honduras, and she has very definite ideas about education. I promised to see what I could do; I knew from previous experience that if Esmeralda recommended someone, she would be an asset to the program. Therefore, I was delighted when the class was large enough that I could send two students to work individually with María and Esmeralda.

María was almost seven months pregnant when I first met her on the workday. Her wide, welcoming smile and beautiful brown eyes drew attention away from her swollen belly. Her quiet self-confidence drew the students to her immediately. Liz knew
she had been assigned to María as her partner, so right away, she approached her and they began making arrangements for Liz’s return. Impressed with the easy warmth and friendliness that María showed the huge group who crowded into the small quarters, I was eager to return for her initial interview, so we also arranged a convenient time for my return.

When I returned, both Esmeralda and María were at home, and I was greeted with the usual hugs as I struggled to get through the door with all my paraphernalia for the interview. Esmeralda’s two little girls were busy playing on the kitchen floor, but when they saw me, they jumped up and came for their hugs as well. If possible, María looked even more pregnant as she leaned on the counter that separated the kitchen from the living room. Esmeralda’s house is the only one I visit where the television is never playing, but the squeals and shrieks of Monse and Debbie provided the background entertainment.

Esmeralda was cleaning up the kitchen when I entered, and she glanced around to greet me. Her black hair was pulled back in a ponytail, but a fringe of bangs softened her face. Looking at her slender body moving vigorously around the large open space, it was hard to remember she was in her mid-thirties.

I interviewed both women together, since that is what they chose to do. Esmeralda assumed the role of the expert, drawing on the two semesters when she had already participated in the program. Her answers were always philosophical and rich.

Esmeralda told María what to expect from the program. Six students had worked with her in the three previous semesters, because at that time, most of the students chose to work in pairs. Consequently, Esmeralda had a good understanding of the variety of students participating in the program. She said it was “divertido” [fun] and “un intercambio de ideas” [an exchange of ideas], but for Esmeralda, the most important aspect of the program was always to learn English. She was a highly motivated, intelligent, hard-working woman who wanted to get ahead in her new culture. I had told her that I believe she would be the perfect teacher’s aide in an elementary or middle school if she could learn enough English, so she was working hard to learn the language. Esmeralda had Temporary Protected Status (TPS), having come to the United States in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, so she was eligible to work in any position; she was
working at a nearby cafeteria cleaning tables. She was recognized as a leader in the Honduran community; all the Hondurans who knew her seemed to regard her with set-apart respect; I have heard various Latinas address her or refer to as “doña Esmeralda.”

During the interview, Esmeralda was the dominant personality, with María constantly nodding her head and saying, “Sí, sí.” They insisted on being interviewed together, so most of the information I gleaned during this first interview came from Esmeralda with María fervently agreeing. I did not include Esmeralda and her student partner in the case studies, however, because the service-learner did not regularly submit reflections, and when he did, they mainly reported events, with little reflecting. I especially wanted to follow María, however, since she was a newcomer to the program.

Both women came from large families, with Esmeralda being one of twelve, and María one of nine. Esmeralda came from a medium-sized city and María from the country. When María was thirteen, she left home for the city where she attended seventh grade. From that time on, she only returned home for two months of vacation every year. Both she and Esmeralda were proud of being from the city, comparing country customs with the more sophisticated ones found in the city.

I had explained to them that I was collecting data to write my dissertation, and they were thrilled to think they were part of the research. Esmeralda, in particular, wanted to share her culture with Anglos, and she saw my research as an outlet for her to do so. María, still not knowing exactly what to expect, said:

*Sé que hay muchas personas muy amables y tratan de comprenderlo a uno pero, hay algunas excepciones y a uno, o sea, uno se siente tan mal porque para empezar no habla el idioma y que le hagan un desprecio.*

[I know that are a lot of really friendly people, and they try to understand you, but there are some exceptions, and then you feel awful because to begin with, you don’t speak the language, and then they make fun of you.]

I have included the interview with Esmeralda not only because she was present and it would have been difficult to extract her input from María’s, but also because it was
interesting to hear the two voices, one that was experienced and well acquainted with the program and another that was completely uncertain as to what to expect from Anglos, much less from the program. Esmeralda spoke with a voice of authority, while María showed her hesitation about the whole process. Another difference between the two women was Esmeralda’s educational level. Having completed high school, she was considered an educated person in Honduras. By her own account, María did not care for school, and quit after ninth grade.

María said that her goals included learning “muchas expresiones más que todo” [a lot of expressions more than anything], citing “cool” as an example. As we talked, Esmeralda said that people tend to think of “los hispanos con cierto retraso mental” [(Hispanics) being mentally retarded]. She continues, “[Pero] la barrera de nosotros es el idioma”. [(But) our barrier is language.]

Looking back on this interview, I believe María was reticent because she had been in the United States for such a short time that she did not know how to answer the questions I was asking her. She was normally a quiet person, but when I knew her better, she opened up. However, she remained reserved, even when being friendly at the LWSG. The theme of learning English defined her initial expectation for participating in CTB.

Esmeralda articulates a problem that Latinos encounter on a daily basis—being considered “dumb” because of their failure to understand English. Linguicism not only creates barriers; it also sets up discrimination and inequality (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2000).

Líz and María Meet

María became a presence in the class, because Liz shared constant stories about her with the class members. She also eloquently related her blossoming relationship with María to each week’s readings. When we read Noddings (1999), she spoke of her attempts to be a caring teacher with both María and Esmeralda:
I thoroughly agree with Noddings’ statement that “caring teachers want to do the best for each student” [p. 211]. This is what I am trying to achieve with María and Esmeralda. At the moment, María is in more desperate need of caring teaching because of her complete lack of English skills. She feels lonely and isolated at work, says that other people think she is stupid because she can’t communicate, and currently has a medical condition (she is seven months pregnant) that could further force her to communicate if an emergency arises. I consider myself a caring person. Because of this, I am attuned to the fact that María should not be concerned about learning classroom objects or the parts of a car. … She can fill out a form at a doctor’s office, knows how to spell her name, and count things at work. . . . . I care for María and know that speaking English will change her life – especially when I tailor her lessons to fit her specific needs at this point in time (September 20, 2002).

Throughout the semester, Liz continued to develop as a true teacher. She was pragmatic in her approach to teaching, and she continued to want what was best for María in every way. As I read her reflections and listened to her comments in class, I was amazed at the depth of her concern for teaching María to communicate in English. She was iconoclastic in her approach to teaching, constantly tossing aside theory and rules in order to fulfill her mission of helping María to defend herself in the new culture she faced under less than ideal circumstances. Her experiences were opportunities grounded in inquiry, experimentation, and reflection (Smylie, Bay, & Tozer, 1999) The theme of teaching ESL to María continued throughout the semester.

In the same reflection, she referred to a reading by Varas (1999) in which she discussed language acquisition through service-learning:

Varas claims that through the service-learning process, the student becomes “less self-conscious of language limitations and more willing to use the skills she or he has” [p. 129]. I have already found this to be true. Although it has been about two years since I used conversational Spanish skills, I already feel comfortable speaking Spanish around María and Esmeralda. I have discovered that I know
enough of the language to make myself understood even when I don’t have the exact word I am looking for. . . . Varas is also correct in stating that “through service-learning the students come into direct contact with a population largely invisible to them” [p. 128]. If it weren’t for this course, I would have never had the opportunity to interact with María or anyone like her. We have different types of jobs, live in different parts of town, and travel in different social circles. I am glad that I have had the opportunity to interact with her through service-learning (Reflection 4, September 20, 2002).

Having only been working with her family for three weeks, Liz was already exploring the reciprocity of her relationship with María and Esmeralda. Just as Krashen (1982) said, the lowering of the affective filter resulted in language acquisition. Because Liz was becoming so involved with her family and their needs, she was able to put aside her own anxieties about her language proficiency in order to communicate with María and Esmeralda. The theme of CTB as a catalyst for reciprocal relationships between disparate groups of people emerges.

Liz’s next reflection referred to the importance of dialogue and communication: Freire [1970] states that “[T]hose who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression” [p. 150]. I can easily see how this relates to our course by working with María. Because she does not speak English, she has (in certain situations) been denied basic human rights. This week she asked me how to ask where the bathrooms are. This is a basic human need that, before this week, she could not express to anyone in the English-speaking world she has been living in for the past few months. By teaching her English, I am giving her back her “word” and therefore the power to exist as a functioning part of society. The second point Freire made that I found interesting is the quote that “[A]t the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages: there are only men who are attempting, together, to learn more than they already know” [p. 151]. This, I think, should be the motto for service learning. My Spanish is far
from perfect. María’s English is still almost non-existent. But together, we realize that neither is perfect, both will make mistakes, and both will “learn more than [we] already know” (September 29, 2002).

In each reflection, I sensed that Liz was lessening the gap between herself and María. Here she realizes that María has a right to her basic human dignity, and Liz chose to frame that right in talking about a topic that can cause embarrassment to those who are unable to communicate in a non-native language. However, she was still assuming the role of the dominant culture by asserting that she could “give her back her word”. It is interesting that she chose a quote by Freire (1970) in which he decries domination in the form of “depositing” knowledge, condemning any kind of domination to talk about “giving her back her word.” This theme of being María’s voice continues to emerge throughout Liz’s data.

In class, we talked at length about being the conduit for the voices and the words of the Latinos, referring to Behar (1993) who narrates her role in providing the means for a Mexican woman’s voice to be heard and understood, as well as her right to do so. At the same time, we discussed empowerment issues and the fact that we as members of the dominant culture are not able to empower anyone, that we can provide linguistic and cultural tools to nurture the empowerment process, but only the Latinos can empower themselves.

In the same reflection, Liz referred to the reading by Greenberg and Moll (1990) to her relationship with María:

There are two case studies in which conclusions are drawn that by “developing social networks that connect classrooms to outside resources, by mobilizing funds of knowledge, [they] can transform classrooms into more advanced contexts for learning” [p. 344]. This is exactly the point of service learning. We have succeeded in developing this “social network that connect[s] classrooms to outside resources”, thereby mutually benefiting both sides. . . . Because we as service learning students have tapped into these outside resources (native Spanish speakers), people like María and I are both privileged to gain an
inside view of each other’s languages. Only through a program like this is María able to obtain personalized tapes of the English language from which to study, and only through a program like this am I able to attempt to imitate the accent of a native Spanish-speaker. Moll declares the essence of his project is “… the ‘harnessing’ of social resources for the transformation of teaching and learning” [p. 344]. Service learning does just that (Reflection 5, September 29, 2002).

As Liz discussed the reading by Greenberg and Moll (1990), she continued to talk about the recurrent theme of reciprocity. At this point she seemed to be relating everything she read to both the developing relationship between her and María and to the reciprocity that bound the relationship together. She and María are apprentices to each other, reversing their roles of more or less experienced peer as the situation suggests (Rogoff, 1990).

In the next reflection, the reader is able to see the impact that service-learning had on Liz as a preservice teacher. She seemed to voraciously devour all the readings, constantly relating them to her relationship with María:

[Cochran-Smith] outlined six basic principles of teaching social justice through inquiry. Throughout [s]he maintained the importance of teachers being constant learners as well. . . . The three principles I found most pertinent to my experiences w/ María are principles 1, 4, and 5. Principle 1 states that a teacher should enable significant work for all students within learning communities and more specifically that they should hold high academic expectations for all students. . . . I know my expectations are high for María’s success in the English language.

Principle 4 states that you should work with, not against individuals, families, and communities. This is service learning to a “T”. We are trying to add something to the lives of the people we work with. We are trying to add greater understanding of the English language and American culture. But, we are also guarding a respect for them and their Latin community. We don’t want to take away any of their cultural traditions or beliefs in the process. . . .
Cochran-Smith’s . . . fifth principle challenges the best means of measuring this education. This principle focuses on diversifying modes of assessment. We are not test-givers in this program. . . . I know that the real test will be when she is in a situation and is forced to communicate in English. If she can make herself understood, she passes, if not, then I haven’t done my job. We recently talked about her upcoming delivery. She now knows how to call 911, the word for “contractions”, and how to count to tell them how far apart they are. Because most of these medical professionals don’t speak English, I think this will be María’s first great test of English. (Reflection 6, October 5, 2002).

As I read this reflection, the readings’ effect on Liz touched me profoundly. At this point, I had no doubt about the impact of CTB on preservice teachers, and I began to formulate ideas about ways to incorporate service-learning into the teacher education program. Other preservice teachers had also talked about the influence of service-learning on their philosophy of teaching; however, it was Liz’s eloquence that convinced me to become an advocate for service-learning in the Latino community as a means of guiding preservice teachers to develop a caring disposition toward their students.

In reading Liz’s reflections on the readings by Freire (1970), Greenberg and Moll (1990), and Cochran-Smith (1999); it was also apparent that being in the home of the students’ families would help preservice teachers to develop an understanding of their students’ home life and the influences that affect them. I wondered if Liz would approach her ESL students differently than she had when serving as a long-term substitute teacher in a large urban area. I also wondered how it would affect her teaching, helping her to realize the practical needs implicit in the ESL classroom. Would she redesign curriculum to better address the needs of ESL students?

As we moved through the semester, Liz continued trying to understand the culture that María represented for her. Starting with the ninth week of class, we read short stories and memoirs, discussing the Latino culture through the lens of these readings. In the reflections about these readings, Liz referred frequently to the financial status of María and her family. She talked about teaching her lessons “back in her small room, sitting on
a mattress on the floor,” describing María’s family as “very bright people who just don’t have the advantages of knowing English well enough to get high paying jobs.”

The theme of “funds of knowledge” emerged as Liz came to appreciate that María and her family brought much to their relationship. At this point, I began to see the blurring of otherness.

María had been diagnosed with gestational diabetes, so she had been transferred from Planned Parenthood to the OB-GYN Clinic. In class, Liz repeatedly shared her frustration with María’s healthcare. She had become aware that María was going to her biweekly appointments and not understanding anything that was said when María told her she was not sure how to interpret all the instructions. Liz decided the only recourse was for her to accompany María when she went for her next visit. As it turned out, María had not understood the directions the nurse had given her about checking her sugar level with the automatic meter, nor had she understood the diet she was supposed to follow. Liz became incensed at the lack of communication she observed. Because it is the Latino custom to nod and smile in acknowledgement that words have been said and heard, albeit not necessarily understood, everyone at the clinic had assumed María understood when in fact she had not.

After accompanying María to that appointment, Liz arrived late to class, in a rant about the injustices she had witnessed regarding María’s care. The nurse had told María she needed to purchase needles, so Liz drove María all over Roanoke looking for the best price on the needles to use in the automatic meter so María could monitor her blood sugar as the nurses directed. She finally convinced the Kuumba Clinic to provide her

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2 In the Roanoke Valley, pregnant women who are eligible for Charity Care can go to Planned Parenthood (PP) or to the Ob-Gyn Clinic. Patients who have chosen to go to PP transfer to OB-GYN if any abnormality occurs during the pregnancy. At PP, there is always an interpreter for the prenatal appointments. At the OB-GYN Clinic, there are no interpreters unless one accompanies the patient at her own expense and/or arrangement. One of the doctors at OB-GYN is fluent in Spanish, but the other personnel do not speak Spanish, other than perhaps a few set phrase, so ironically, those patients who needed the most care have the most difficulty communicating.

3 The Kuumba Clinic is a federally funded healthcare provider for families who qualify for low cost medical care.
with enough needles to last until the next appointment. Following that experience, Liz became committed to accompanying María to her appointments and doing all she could to allay her concerns about a difficult pregnancy.

During this time, Liz moved from the role of teacher/friend to the role of friend/advocate/teacher. She constantly made comments in class that indicated that she now considered María a close friend about whose welfare she cared deeply. She had also become María’s advocate, fighting in solidarity for her medical rights in a society Liz was beginning to perceive as unjust.

Increasingly I saw Liz joining with María in friendship and solidarity. There were fewer comments that indicated othering, and she seemed to appreciate the “funds of knowledge” (Greenberg & Moll, 1990) that María and her family brought to their relationship. Her comments dealt less with what she could do for María and more with the person she was growing to know and care about. The joined themes of advocacy and solidarity emerged with consistently greater force as the semester continued.

Based on Liz’s reflection, I differ with Lather’s (2000) premise that we must concentrate only on differences with to unsettle otherness. It was as Liz and María discovered their sameness that the gap between their worlds closed. When the semester began, Liz saw them as inhabiting two entirely different worlds that had few points of intersectionality. She placed herself firmly in position of dominance, armed with her textbooks and ready to change María’s life.

As time went on, her life became involved with María’s in a personal and caring way. She discovered that María was someone she cared about as a person, and not just as an oppressed person whom she could save by giving her voice through English lessons. Her solidarity with María’s fight for her medical care was based not on the differences that existed between them, but rather on their similarities as young women who were developing a deep friendship. Themes of commonalities and dissimilarities were emerging.

Friendship Develops

When I returned to conduct a second interview with María on Halloween, Esmeralda was not at home. María greeted me at the door, her belly bigger than ever as
she tried to hug me. She was due in early December, so her shirt hardly stretched over her middle. I had been hearing repeatedly about all her trials with medical care from Liz who had begun to accompany her to weekly doctor’s appointments, but she looked glowing and wonderful, if somewhat tired.

When I asked her how things were going with Liz, she told me that Liz was a great teacher, but that she was a bad student. Then as she catalogued all she had learned from Liz, it occurred to me that she was trying to protect Liz, thinking that I was there to check on whether Liz was teaching her English or not. She listed many topics she was able to talk about at work, topics that had been unknown to her prior to her time with Liz.

When I asked her what Liz was learning from her, María told me that she helps her some with her Spanish and that she talks some with her about Honduran culture. However, she said they spend most of their time with the ESL classes, spending little time talking about their personal lives. When I asked if they ever spend time watching television, she said:

Nosotras siempre tenemos la clase en mi habitación y ahí no hay ni tele (riendo). Desde que llega, empezamos la clase porque yo digo: “Tengo que aprovecharla el rato que ella esté aquí.”

[We always have class in my bedroom and there’s no TV in there (laughing). As soon as she gets here, we start the class because I say, “I have to take advantage of the little bit of time she’s here.”]

Liz and María went to the bedroom to have the ESL class; it was the only room where they could concentrate and work in a quiet atmosphere without the children’s interruptions. As is common in households where one more than one family lives, it is often difficult to find a place that is private and without interruptions.

During the time I have known María, I have never found her to be talkative. She was not reserved or reticent; she was just a quiet person. However, she remains serious about learning English, realizing how important it was for her to be able to have a better quality of life in this culture.

When I asked her how she regarded Liz, she replied:
Ah pues, ahora ya la estoy considerando amiga, o sea, al principio claro que no porque no sabía qué clase de persona era, pero ahora sí porque ella me ayuda bastante cuando yo tengo por ejemplo que hacer alguna cita, nomás la llamo a ella y ella me hace la cita, entonces, le tengo que contar todo lo que me pasa (riendo), para que haga una cita, ya la estoy considerando como una amiga. Yo digo que me voy a seguir comunicando con ella [cuando no venga más].

[Well, now I consider her a friend. At first I didn’t because I didn’t know what kind of person she was, but now I do because she helps me a lot; for example when I have to make an appointment, I only have to call her and she makes the appointment. Then I have to tell her everything that happens to me (laughing) so she can make the appointment. Now I consider her a friend. I plan to keep in touch with her (when she isn’t coming any longer).]

Based on the information in the interviews and the documents I analyzed, I do not believe that either María or Liz was the type of person to call just anyone a friend. They both were somewhat reserved in forming opinions about people, so when they both began to refer to each other as friends, I did not accept their words lightly. Here María was defining friendship in terms of Liz being willing to do things for her, but that did not seem to be the only reason for their friendship which emerged as a prominent theme in the data.

They have in fact stayed in touch. During the semester following the class when I collected these data, I continued to see Liz in a class I teach for preservice teachers, and I still saw María every week at the women’s meeting. Both told me about each other constantly in the semester. Liz continued taking her shopping or to Jennifer’s pediatric appointments even after the semester ended. They still maintained constant contact.

When I asked María if the service-learning experience had been as she expected, she was emphatic in her reply:

Pues claro que es diferente. Más confianza, más amigable. . . . o sea, cuando ella vino sí siempre platicaba conmigo mucho pero yo casi no, o sea no le mostraba
tanta confianza porque simplemente la tomaba como una maestra y ya a quien debo de respetar y todo, pero ahora ya la quiero como una amiga.

[Sure it’s different. More trust, friendlier. . . . I mean, when she came she always talked a lot to me, but I hardly talked at all. I didn’t trust her a lot just because I thought of her as my teacher, as someone I should respect and everything, but now I love her like a dear friend.]

I went on to ask her when the change occurred and what caused it. She replied:

Ah, la verdad que lo que causó el cambio fue el hecho de que yo la estoy molestando para que me sirva de intérprete, porque hay veces que cuando necesito intérprete, en la clínica. Yo le digo que si puede ir entonces ella va o a algún lugar que yo necesite un intérprete, entonces, ella se me ofreció. Entonces ahí me mostró más confianza. Ella me dijo que cuando necesitara cualquier cosa de que me interpretara ella podÍa. Entonces claro, yo ahí sentí más confianza. . . . Es bello, sí, al saber que uno tiene una persona que uno no puede hablar inglés y que tiene una persona quien uno puede depositarle su confianza y le pueden resolver un problema y esas cosas, es bien bonito porque uno se siente seguro, sí.

[To tell you the truth, what caused the change was the fact that I am bothering her to interpret for me, because there are times when I need an interpreter. I ask her if she can go some place where I need an interpreter, and she offers to go. That’s how she showed me I could trust her. She told me that if I needed her to interpret for anything, she could do it. Then, of course, I felt closer to her. . . . It’s wonderful knowing you have someone when you can’t speak English, someone you can depend on to help you with taking care of problems and all. Then sure, I felt closer to her.]

In this interview, María described a reciprocal relationship based on affection, trust, and respect just as Liz had in her reflections. For Liz, the reciprocity had consisted of her practicing Spanish and developing a friendship. At other times, María had talked about learning English from Liz, but in this passage, the reciprocity consisted of her being able to count on Liz to help her when she so desperately needed help with communicating with the Anglo world. Both women commented to me at different times
that they could not imagine what it must be like for non-English-speaking women who have difficult pregnancies and who do not have service-learning students or English-speaking friends who can help them with their appointments and medical care.

In analyzing the interviews and the documents, it seems likely that the bond of friendship was stronger because of María’s need and Liz’s willingness to help her despite the time commitment required to always be there. Liz was a fulltime graduate student at the time, which in itself is time consuming, so I often wondered how she found the time to spend with María. Liz confirmed my personal experience that each appointment at the OB-GYN Clinic required about four hours, to say nothing of the time spent providing transportation and finding needles.

Liz received the President’s Award for Service-Learning because her hours totaled more than 100, and she was featured in an article that appeared in the faculty newspaper and in the quarterly service-learning newsletter, recognizing her commitment to helping María receive adequate medical care during a difficult pregnancy.

My next question to María was whether she felt her life had changed because of Liz’s visits. She answered:

*Sí, ha cambiado mucho porque siento de que, de que voy a aprender. . . . Cuando termine mis clases con Liz, ah, pues si Liz no puede seguir viniendo y si todavía el programa existe que me manden otro maestro porque necesito inglés (riendo).

Uno necesita [inglés], porque en los trabajos uno sin saber inglés es nada. Y uno cuando está aprendiendo inglés uno sabe que si tiene la deficiencia del inglés. Pero que va por el camino de aprender inglés. Pero sin tener nadie quien le vaya a dar clase, peor a la casa, porque yo no sé manejar. Y eso me inspira mucho al saber que Dios me ha bendecido al darme un maestro en la casa y más que estoy embarazada se me hace más difícil. Gracias a Dios, todo lo que pensaba hacer en este país me está saliendo.

[Yes, it has changed a lot, because I feel like I am going to learn. . . . When I finish my classes with Liz, well if Liz can’t keep coming and if the program is still going, I hope you can send me another teacher because I need English (laughing).}
You need [English], because at your job, if you don’t know English, you’re nothing. When you are learning English, you know how much you need to know it. But you know you’re at least on the right track of learning English. But it’s hard if you don’t have anyone to teach you, especially at your house. Because I don’t know how to drive and it inspires me a lot knowing that God has blessed me by giving me a teacher at home, even more so since I’m pregnant, and it’s even more difficult. Thank goodness, everything I hope to do in this country is working out.]

As I listened to María talk, it was difficult to remember the young woman I interviewed in September, one who had no idea what to expect from participating in a service-learning program. Now she realized how important it was for her to be able to communicate in English from firsthand experience. She was so convinced of the power of learning the language that she even wanted another student to teach her the following semester. Her comments about appreciating classes in her home echo the sentiments of many of the Latinas with whom I work. Attending classes at a specified place at a specified time can be very difficult to arrange around work schedules and transportation. The Latinos welcome having students come to their homes.

As the semester ended, Liz wrote in a reflection, “María and I have become a lot closer lately because of all the extra time I am spending with her on account of the pregnancy.” She went on to relate that María had begun to share much more personal information with her. All the details she narrated about María indicated a different aspect of relationship than I had previously noted.

In this same reflection, Liz talked about the week’s readings, including a chapter by Anzaldúa (1999):

[Anzaldúa] explores the ambiguity Latinos discover when trying to find a new definition of self. I honestly don’t believe María has faced much of this yet. She is still so new to the country and still so surrounded by Latinos that I don’t think she has even had much of a chance to begin to let the “Americanness” of her new culture settle in. The language barrier keeps most of this at a safe distance- all
television shows, etc. are broadcasted in their home in Spanish and I am the only American friend she has (the fact that I speak Spanish is key to the relationship). This week she did ask me about some “American” things that she couldn’t figure out. (Reflection, November 16, 2002).

Liz’s observations about María’s acculturation are right on target. One reason I chose to follow María was because she was new to the program, and the other was because she was a newcomer to the United States. Liz realized that María’s adaptation to her new culture had begun, and that it would continue as she lives in this country and is exposed to more cultural products.

Liz summed up the situation well in saying that María lived her life in Spanish, and that Liz was her only American friend, and that the friendship depended on Liz’s ability to speak Spanish. When we look at the barrios that exist in other cities (Lane & Escobar, 1987; Menchaca, 1994; Pardo, 1998; Valdés, 2000), we see neighborhoods where Latinos are able to live for many years, even for a lifetime, without speaking English. In Roanoke, that is hardly possible since there are not enough Latinos to live independent of the Anglo community in terms of medical care, shopping, and other basic necessities. I wonder how the friendships that exist between the students and the Latinos affect the overall acculturation process in the Latino community.

In her last reflection, Liz referred to Johnson’s (1999) discussion of identity issues:

The final article by Johnson I found to be a little sad. This is the brief history of a man describing his Mexican-American family and his mother’s assimilationist tendencies. . . . When I think of Karen [María’s newborn baby], I know her mother will never betray her heritage in the way that Johnson’s mother did. María seems very proud to be Honduran. This might be because she is still a fairly recent arrival, but she prefers Honduran food to American food, listens to Hispanic radio and television stations and even flies a small Honduran flag in their living room. I can see her trying to balance the two worlds though. She is trying very hard to learn English, seems interested in my family as a “model
American family” and asks me lots of questions. When I asked her how she wants to raise Karen, she says that Karen will be bilingual. She also says that she wants half of her playmates to be Americans so that she will have twice the advantages of the typical American child. I am glad that María doesn’t see her Honduranness as something to hide from and that she can pass this pride onto her daughter (Reflection 13, November 30, 2002).

By this time, Liz sees great value in María’s Honduran culture. She seems to feel certain solidarity with María, wanting her to preserve her heritage rather than allowing herself to become completely Americanized. She is perceiving culture from the intimacy of a friendship rather than from the perspective of a student reading a textbook. María’s Honduran culture is real to Liz, and important as well. The theme of culture emerged from the data, concurrent with her expectation of gaining cultural insight.

In an in-class journal writing activity, Liz once again addressed her socioeconomic status in relation to María:

I realize that while I, myself, might not be very well off, both of my families are. My mother has a huge house, 2 Mercedes in the garage, a vacation home in Florida, and a boat—just to name a few advantages. My father is also well-off. He drives a Jaguar, BMW, and Jeep and at the same time has a home theater that is almost as large as a small 3rd world nation.

I don’t tell most people about these things. In fact, I often even avoid answering the question of where I live because I know the minute I say “Downer Place,” people’s image of me shifts.

Because my family is staying in Florida at the moment, my mother asked me to drive her car once and a while. I was taking it out on errands last week when I went to see María. I hadn’t thought anything of it until I got closer to the trailer park and here I came in a big, flashy Mercedes SUV, cringing and shrinking down behind the wheel. I felt like I was rubbing it in everyone’s face. Luckily Esmeralda and María took it in stride and didn’t seem to react one way or the other.
A little while later, I found María and I had spent way too long at the doctor’s office and I needed to get to Tech for class. We were much closer to my house, so as much as I hated to do it, I stopped by with her to pick up my books and save some time. Of course I couldn’t leave her in the driveway, so I asked her in. I felt ashamed at all we had and I didn’t want to make her feel ashamed of what she didn’t have. The next time I picked her up, I was half ready to receive the cold shoulder from her. Luckily, I think she has gotten to know the real me so well that it really made no difference. But I do think about this sometimes (November 18, 2002).

It was difficult to realize the same young woman who spoke with such pride of her family heritage in the initial class interview was expressing this point of view. I believe the service-learning experience caused her to step outside the box of her own perspective, causing her to reevaluate her own socioeconomic status from the perspective of someone living in different socioeconomic circumstances. She said that she had never been forthcoming about her family background due to embarrassment about her family’s status, but that was not the stance that came across in the interview. Now she was identifying herself as not having much money even though her parents did, demonstrating a different perspective than her earlier statement that she was upper middle class. Possibly because of the respect and affection Liz had developed for María, she had a desire to align herself somewhat more equally with María in terms of material possessions, thus saying that although her parents were wealthy she was not. The theme of a change in perspective was emerging.

The Semester Ends

When I returned for the last interview with María, everyone was at home: María, her husband Mario, baby Karen, Esmeralda, her husband Samuel, her two daughters Monse and Debbie. After the usual effusive greetings, I shared the article about Liz and María that had come out in the service-learning newsletter. They all listened attentively as I read through it in Spanish, and then María asked for a copy. As I had planned, I gave her the copy I had with me, and we then talked about the future of the program. At the
time, my own future was uncertain since I was preparing to graduate, so there was some question as to whether I would be at Virginia Tech to continue with the program. Esmeralda, articulate and action-oriented as usual, said, “Una petición. Es lo que vamos a hacer. Nosotros los latinos vamos a escribir una petición para que la lleve al presidente de la universidad diciéndole que el programa tiene que seguir.” [A petition. That’s what we’re going to do. We Latinos are going to write a petition for you to take to the president of the university telling him the program must continue.] She promptly sat down and wrote the petition and had all the adults present sign it4.

Finally, María and I settled down at the kitchen table for the interview. As usual, the noise in the small quarters made it difficult to conduct the interview, but this time, María was much more open and eager to talk.

In response to my question about how the semester had gone, she replied:

_Fue bien bonito porque he aprendido bastante inglés, ¿verdad? Pero sí me llamó mucho la atención el inglés y saber que lo necesito tanto. Y uno cuando se mete a estudiar como que más le va gustando, mientras no hay quien lo ayude pues uno como que se siente menos pero al ver personas americanas como se dice que se interesen por nosotros, a uno le llama mucho la atención de aprender más inglés. Para mí la experiencia fue muy bonita. . . . Y para tener una amiga también porque Liz es mi amiga ahora, sí._

[It was great because I have learned a good bit of English, right? But most of all, it made me aware of English and it made me realize how much I need it. And the more you study it, the more you like it. When there’s no one to help you, you aren’t as aware. But as you see American people that are interested in you, it makes you really want to learn English. For me the experience was great. . . . And to have a friend as well, because Liz is my friend now.]

In her final transformation paper, Liz also mentioned language acquisition:

_I feel that I have grown immensely in my Spanish language abilities since I first began working with María. . . . it had been so long since I had used the language_

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4 Esmeralda made sure the women in the LWSG also signed the petition, but fortunately, there was no need for the petition to be delivered to the president of the university since my position was renewed for a year following my graduation.
on a regular basis that I was not sure if I would still be able to communicate effectively. I had also never had the experience of being forced to interact in the ways that I was required to with María. Because her English was pretty much non-existent before I began working with her and because of her important health needs at the time; I did most of the communication from the start in Spanish. . . . Some of the situations we shared, such as numerous trips to the OB/GYN almost forced us to become close girlfriends. In the end, there really isn’t anything that we don’t feel comfortable sharing with each other. This closeness grew even stronger in relaxed settings like the times we spent alone in her trailer just talking about men, families, and life in general (Transformation Paper, December 17, 2002).

Both women referred to their acquisition of the other’s language, and both framed it in the context of friendship. Liz reaffirms her stance that her comfort level in speaking with María, just as María reaffirmed her belief in the importance of learning the language of the culture she now inhabits. The themes language and culture exchange occurred throughout the semester, so it was no surprise that Liz’s and María’s final words would include a reference to learning the language.

When I asked how they had spent their time together, María again mentioned all that Liz had done for her during her pregnancy, but then she went on to talk about how she had changed her perspective about Anglos:

*Para mí fue un tiempo muy precioso porque aparte de que me enseñó inglés, conocí a una buena persona, porque yo creía que todos los americanos eran racistas y me di cuenta que no, que son preciosos. . . . Entonces sí me di cuenta que si habían personas que nos quieren mucho, se interesan por nosotros mucho, más que los hispanos que la misma familia hispana. . . . Me despejaron más la mente, o sea, ¿cómo le quisiera decir? Me miré más amplia en el inglés, hicieron una diferencia porque yo me puedo comunicar ahora más en el trabajo. . . y ahora pues puedo agarrar un poquito de una conversación en inglés.*
For me, it was a beautiful time because besides learning English, I met a great person, because I thought all Americans were racists and I realized that they are lovely. . . . Then I realized there are people who care deeply about us, they are interested in us, more than the Hispanics in our own family. . . . They opened my mind up, that is, how can I tell you? I came to see myself as able to learn English. They made a difference because I can communicate more at work now and now I can understand a little bit of conversations in English.

No matter how often I hear the Latinos talk about how their perceptions that all Anglos were racists changed because of their friendships with the students, I always feel gratified that the students are changing even one corner of the world. The theme of change of perspective toward U. S. citizens emerged at this point. I had not heard María mention discriminatory remarks or attitudes from U. S. citizens since the first interview when she and Esmeralda talked about people making fun of them.

Liz also commented on María’s ability to communicate in English, especially at work, stating that they had not made as much progress as she had hoped since her medical needs often “outweighed lesson time.” She continues:

I can tell that even the little English she has learned so far has changed her life. She told me about a month ago that someone asked her to translate something simple to her boss. She was truly surprised at herself and proud beyond belief that she was actually able to do it. Even though the translation was only two or three words and was in slightly broken English, they all understood what she had to say. I could tell that that particular moment gave her a sense of power in a place where she had never felt she had any (Transformation Paper, December 17, 2002).

Throughout the semester, Liz remained aware of empowerment issues, and here she described María’s empowerment in terms of self-empowerment. There was no mention of an outside empowering agent, simply a sense of pleasure that María was able to feel a sense of power.
Describing the time she and María spent together, Liz spoke at length about the medical appointments. She also talked about her growth in cultural awareness, saying that she gained “inside information on the country and culture of Honduras that few other people have been able to do without a passport.” She mentioned foods, weather, and family as cultural topics about which she had learned. She summed up her cultural experience saying, “I never knew when I’d find another gem of a tradition or superstition from Honduran culture.”

Liz talked about how her relationship with María changed over the course of the semester:

In the beginning I was simply an English teacher and translator. I came over twice a week and we studied English. Once and awhile I would make a telephone call for her, translate a letter or two, or go to [her work] and straighten out scheduling problems with her boss. I was also a chauffeur. I drove María to medical appointments and other places she needed to go. And, sometimes, I felt like a tour guide of the Roanoke Valley. We discussed the neat local places to see and some of the cheap places to shop. However, as time went on, we became closer. I felt like more of a friend to her. We talked about things that all girlfriends talk about. We went shopping, laughed together, and shared pictures and stories about our lives and families. Despite all of these things, I realized that in the end there is one thing I became for María that is far more meaningful than just a teacher, translator, chauffeur, tour guide, or even a friend. I became her voice. . . .

She told me later, while shopping for baby clothes, that she was amazed [by] her helplessness sometimes. She said they could have said, “Ok, we need to take out your heart,” and she would have agreed just because she didn’t understand and didn’t know any better. This is so dangerous and as her friend, I feel responsible. I know that I have an incredibly substantial job. I am her voice. I have come to know her so well that I know the kinds of medical procedures she would want or not want, I also know her medical history so well that I can recite it without help. I feel very special and honored that she trusts me well enough to
basically put her life in my hands by being her voice to the world (Transformation Paper, December 17, 2002).

In the same tone, María talked about how her relationship with Liz changed during the course of the semester:

Pues cuando la miré por primera vez creí que ella sólo simplemente venía a darme clases de inglés y que ella no tenía nada más que ver conmigo. Pero ella me fue dando confianza. Como se lo he dicho entonces cuando la miré por primera vez creí que sólo era una maestra de inglés y nada más pero a medida de que la fui conociendo me di cuenta de que era una persona que quería ayudarme mucho no sólo en el inglés sino en las ¿cómo te podría decir? sino en mi vida o sea a llevar todos mis problemas que ella pudiera resolverlos. Yo creí que ella solamente era una maestra, pero después me di cuenta de que era una persona que me quería ayudar mucho más que una maestra.

[Well, when I saw her for the first time, I thought she was only coming to teach me English and that she wouldn’t want anything more to do with me. But I started trusting her. Like I said before, when I first saw her, I thought she was only an English teacher and nothing more, but the longer I knew her, the more I realized that she was someone who wanted to help me with a lot, not only with English, but also with, how can I tell you, my life; that is, she was able to solve all my problems. I thought she was only a teacher, but then I realized she was a person who could help with a lot more than just being a teacher.]

In these two excerpts, both women concurred that they shared a friendship that surpassed the expected relationship between a teacher and a student. Liz and María perceived Liz to be the holder of knowledge, the one who could resolve all María’s problems, harkening back to Liz’s initial comments about empowerment. Liz’s description of herself as María’s voice positioned her as a member of the dominant culture, othering María by co-opting her voice (cf. Fine, 1998). However, I do not believe the situation was as straightforward as the words would imply. By the end of the semester, the otherness between Liz and María had blurred as their friendship grew. In every conversation, in every document, I sensed true concern and caring, affection and
trust, solidarity, and genuine feelings of reciprocal relationship. I would suspect that by saying she was María’s voice, Liz simply meant that she had the ability to interpret for her so the surrounding culture could understand her. In analyzing the data, it seems apparent that Liz and María moved from a hierarchical relationship comprised of a “helper” and a “helpee” to a relationship between friends who cared deeply for each other.

In the transformation paper, Liz once again talks about charity, referring again to Nava’s (1998) short story as her favorite reading, saying, “I really took this lesson to heart.” She continued, saying:

Luckily, despite all of the donations I have passed on to her and her family, I never felt that any of it became an obstacle to our relationship. What I spent more of on María was time, and by giving that to her, she knows that I really mean what I give. I also don’t actually feel that what I am doing is considered “charity”. When I think of that word, I think of a one-sided relationship. I am not the only one giving something in this relationship. María gives me her time, her sense of humor, her strength, her patience, and her knowledge as well (December 17, 2002).

For both women, the relationship was mutually beneficial. Contextualized in the overwhelming medical needs that undergirded the relationship; a strong friendship flourished and grew. They saw themselves as equal partners in the relationship, each one giving to the other from her “funds of knowledge” (Greenberg & Moll, 1990). María never mentioned any perceived difference between her socioeconomic status, although I am sure she must have been aware of it, and in Liz’s final paper, she did not refer to their difference in status, a difference that had been a theme throughout the semester. When it came to the final evaluation for both of them, the importance of their relationship lay in their friendship.
In talking about whether the service-learning experience had lived up to her expectations, Liz said, “I would say that this service-learning experience not only met, but exceeded my expectations.” She summed up her experience by saying:

My undergraduate major was Spanish and I think I can honestly say that this one class I took as a graduate student has been the most productive and memorable Spanish class I have ever taken. It has taught me to be able to “think on my feet”, so to speak, in a foreign language. It has also given me insight into a culture that I would never have otherwise had direct contact with. I wish I had been able to take this course as an undergraduate and definitely think that all Spanish students should look into it. However, I don’t think that it has had a significant impact on the way that I think. I like to believe that I have always been a fairly open-minded person, and will continue to be. This course has given me more confidence about the way I use the Spanish. Because of that, I feel much more competent and am willing to take risks with the language (Transformation Paper, December 17, 2002).

Third Case Study: Liz and María

What Did It All Mean?

Expectations for CTB

Liz’s and María’s expectations. Themes of gaining cultural insight, teaching ESL, and developing a friendship emerged from Liz’s data. From Maria’s expectations for CTB emerged the theme of learning English.

Cultural insight. At the beginning of the semester, Liz expressed a desire to learn about culture beyond what she could learn in a textbook. In every way, she experienced culture with María, learning to appreciate Honduran culture to such an extent that she hoped María would retain her culture and teach it to Karen as she grows up.

ESL teaching. Although Liz was not able to teach as much English as she had hoped due to the demands of María’s pregnancy, she still managed to spend a fair amount of time teaching. In so doing, she honed her skills and developed her philosophy of teaching, helping her to prepare for her chosen profession. She experienced authentic
community (cf. Erickson & Anderson, 1997) by having a sustained placement in the home of someone from another country, allowing her experience diversity firsthand (Cochran-Smith, 1999). She had the opportunity to develop a caring disposition (cf. Noddings, 1999). She developed the ability to think critically and solve problems (cf. Darling-Hammond, 1999). In all, her experience with María probably played a role in her development as an ESL teacher.

*Friendship.* The theme of friendship emerged from Liz’s data as a “teacher tool”—she believed that having her student perceive her as a friend would help the student lower the affective filter (cf. Krashen, 1982) to allow for better language acquisition. However, as the semester continued, a deep friendship developed between Liz and María. Their friendship was initially based on María’s need for cultural mediation regarding her healthcare, but it eventually emerged as a reciprocal relationship based on mutual concern, caring, affection, trust, and respect.

*English acquisition.* At the beginning of the semester, María hardly knew what to expect from CTB; she only knew she needed to learn English to communicate with people in the Anglo world. Her pregnancy preoccupied her for most of the semester, but she still managed to learn enough English to feel empowered with her ability to communicate at work.

**Salient Factors in the Development of a Reciprocal Relationship**

The following themes emerged as salient factors in the development of a reciprocal relationship between Liz and María: commonalities and similarities, privilege and power, advocacy and solidarity, and CTB as catalyst for reciprocal relationships. Each of these themes to some extent affected the development of their reciprocal relationships.

*Commonalities and dissimilarities.* At the beginning of the semester, Liz commented on the differences between herself and María, mostly focused on matters of financial resources. Liz made continual comparisons of what she had compared to María. However, as time went on, she changed, adopting the perspective that although her parents were wealthy, she was not. She learned they shared many things in common, ranging from an interest in each other’s cultures to “girl talk.” They both enjoyed going
shopping and driving around Roanoke. In other words, they shared common interests, and enjoyed spending time together. In all, they shared affection, respect, and trust. By the end of the semester, they cared deeply for each other.

Privilege and power. From the beginning, Liz was bothered by the concept of charity, not wanting to create situations in which her actions could be perceived as belittling and degrading. She self-identified at the beginning as upper class, positioning herself in the hierarchy of society as the possessor of goods and power (cf. Ransford, 2000), but at the same time, she did not want to perform acts that would be hurtful to others whose hierarchical position was of a different order.

At the beginning of the semester, Liz was comfortable in her role as a member of the dominant culture, enjoying all of life’s privileges that money could buy. As she grew to care deeply about María, she moved away from wanting to participate in the class only for what it could do for her; she came to regard María’s needs as important. Her sacrifice of time was phenomenal. The relationship she built with a member of a different ethnic group, language group, educational level, and socioeconomic status blurred the otherness that had set her apart (cf. Collins, 2000; Fine, 1998).

Although Liz remained a member of the dominant culture, she crossed the border to appreciation of other people in other domains. Liz continues to possess the attributes that grant her access to places that María may never be able to enter (cf. Ransford, 2000), but my guess is that Liz will occasionally help her to gain access.

Advocacy and solidarity. Liz became María’s advocate for her healthcare in a most spectacular way, joining her in solidarity against a society that she deemed discriminatory and unjust. After I came to know María well, I realized that she is an extremely strong and independent young woman, so more than likely she would have found a way to figure out what was going on in the doctor’s office, but I expect it would have been difficult, and perhaps costly. I have interpreted for enough pregnancies in which the woman has diabetes to know the danger involved, so I am not sure what would have been the outcome of the pregnancy if Liz had not been present to demand care for María.

In an in-class journal writing exercise, Liz called herself a “lifeline—a connection to the outside world for her [María].” In the same journal, she said, “I am trying to equip
her with the skills she needs in English to survive. . . . I am helping her try to make sense of the world around her.” The two women seemed to be providing insight for each other into their own cultures in a reciprocal way. Liz’s referring to herself as María “lifeline” demonstrated overtones of dominance, but I do believe it might have simply been her way of articulating the responsibility she felt for helping María obtain the best healthcare possible.

Both Liz and María showed changes in perspective in the course of the semester. Liz recognized María’s “funds of knowledge” (Greenberg & Moll, 1990) that she brought to the relationship. María changed her opinion about U. S. citizens, realizing they were not all racists as she had assumed before. Their association with each other helped them develop an appreciation for each other’s culture (cf. Collins, 2000).

**CTB as a catalyst for reciprocal relationships.** Liz summed up this theme when she said that CTB provided the opportunity for her to interact with someone she would never have had the opportunity to meet without the course. She stated that they had different types of jobs, lived in different parts of town, and traveled in different social circles, all of which was the case. Without CTB, there would have been no relationship.

**Wrapping It Up**

It was evident that a close friendship had developed between Liz and María; based on conversations with each of them in the time since the semester ended, I would imagine the friendship will continue for some time, perhaps until the usual constraints of geographical separation and time commitments might interfere.

They developed a closeness based on María’s healthcare needs which forced them to spend an unusual amount of time together. Liz’s comment that they were almost forced to “become close girlfriends” sums up the relationship I observed between them. Apart from the fact that in a normal friendship not tied in any way to a research project there is no analysis of the relationship on the part of either friend, this friendship seems like any other that develops over the course of a semester contextualized in circumstances requiring an inordinate amount of time spent together.