CANADIAN YOUTH VOLUNTEERING ABROAD: RETHINKING ISSUES OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Master of Arts. 2012 
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Abstract 

Since the 1960s, over 65,000 young Canadians have participated in volunteer abroad programs (Tiessen, 2008). Lately, the media and academia have questioned and criticized the benefits of volunteerism as development. This study highlights how issues of power and privilege extend beyond the individual, and reaches into institutional structures. The research design uses Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a method of inquiry, and maps out the social relations between the experiences of seven former youth volunteers and field staff, and their organizations. The aim is to explore how to improve individual and organizational pedagogy in the field of international volunteering, so that equity becomes a commitment by everyone in the development of sustainable and just communities.
Acknowledgements

My reflection is simply a mirror image of those I have loved in my life. I would like to thank everyone who has supported me, including family, friends and soul mates. With special gratitude to: my mom, the wind beneath my wings and the first person to teach me about unconditional love; my brother, who remains my rock; my dad, who has always pushed me towards higher education; my thesis supervisor Roxana Ng, whose belief, patience and dedication in me during this process has been a feather on my shoulders; and my second reader, Kiran Mirchandani, whose efforts in editing my thesis are immensely appreciated. I would like to thank everyone I have met in my 10 years of international volunteering – it has been a journey of self-development, worldly discoveries, and life changing epiphanies. Thank you to Bay Ngo, who is no longer on this Earth in physical form, but continues to inspire me through her spirit of love, gentle heartedness and bright smiles – she constantly reminds me that volunteering has the power to create and motivate peace via the people we meet.
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Preface

Take up the White Man’s burden –
   In patience to abide,
   To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
   By open speech and simple,
   A hundred times made plain,
   To seek another’s profit
   And work another’s gain.

Take up the White Man’s burden –
   The savage wars of peace
   Fill full the mouth of Famine,
   And bid the sickness cease.

(Kipling, 1899)

Almost 10 years after my first international volunteering experience, I hold close to my heart the people I have met in the communities I have worked in. What I have learned from those people who I have interacted with while overseas has led me to write this thesis with their voices constantly on my shoulder. Volunteering is not to provide a voice for people, but to listen to what groups have to say and learn how to work as allies. In an attempt to contribute to a field that requires more equity, capacity building and empowerment towards the communities it serves, I have begun with my own experience. In true Institutional Ethnographic form, the structure of this research equals in importance to the content. The process of Institutional Ethnography consists of trusting the data to reveal institutional relations and powers. As a result of this work, I have been challenged to lay aside my assumptions and analyze power and privilege from a perspective that involves a complex system that includes the influences of politics, education, international development, language, technology, organizations and
individuals. I encourage those who are dedicated to working with vulnerable populations to constantly question their methods and thinking, so that we can emerge from the language of victimization and move towards a more open, socially-just and cooperative world where all people hold the key to their own emancipation.
Introduction

Since the 1960s, over 65,000 young Canadians have participated in volunteer abroad programs; this number continues to expand each year as young people travel to developing countries for a variety of reasons that range from self-discovery and adventure, to the desire to make a difference (Tiessen, 2008).

As the number of young volunteers going abroad grow, so do their impacts on the communities in which they engage. International development critics have resurfaced terms such as ‘Western imperialism’ when it comes to discussing the problematic outcomes of volunteering overseas. The question ‘is volunteering another form of colonization?’ permeates voluntourism research as Western countries provide funding for their youth to travel to low-income countries to become “active, global citizens”.

The research on international voluntary service (IVS) indicates that volunteers consciously and unconsciously contribute to issues of power and privilege in international volunteering. Power exercised by volunteers on the community can include economic, racial, heterosexual, gender and political privilege. Yet there are also individuals in IVS who do not want to contribute to a system that reproduces colonization, and who do make a concentrated effort to counter hegemonic perspectives that youth volunteers have the reputation for bringing with them.

This thesis uses Institutional Ethnography to explore the challenges faced by Canadian youth volunteers trying to engage as “global citizens” in international development and cross-cultural exchanges, with a specific focus on those who seek ways to address power and privilege in their placements. This thesis will focus upon how the problematic of youth volunteers’
challenges are linked with Canadian institutional structures in the international voluntary services sector; it will outline the networks of relations that shape IVS, and commit to a vision of sustainable, and equitable community partnerships. Promoting equitable partnerships is seen as a requirement for broad structural change in volunteering, which can be supported by Canadian youth volunteers as they navigate their way through their volunteering experience overseas. The thesis will also use seven case studies which ask questions related to institutional power in order to highlight the opposing ideas that pervade individuals who try to address power and privilege in their volunteering experience.

The thesis is structured in the following way: the rest of the chapter will introduce Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a method of inquiry, and start from an IE approach by presenting the problematic and the disjunction of volunteers who have difference experiences in short and long-term volunteer abroad programs. The theoretical lens, research method and participant data will follow. Chapter Two provides a brief history of international volunteering in Canada, as well as the experiences of Canadian volunteers and field staff in the sector to extract institutional relations and processes. In Chapter Three, the interviewees’ stories will be interwoven with academic research to connect the institutional complexities that are embedded in the IVS section. Finally, Chapter Four concludes with a discussion on rethinking issues of power and privilege in international volunteering for Canadian youth volunteers, and provides recommendations for young volunteers and its organizations, while always retaining the potential to promote sustainable and equitable partnerships with and between communities.
For us, the struggle was as much within ourselves, with what we knew how to do and think and feel … Indeed we ourselves had participated however passively in that regime … Starting with our experiences as we talked and thought about them, we discovered depths of alienation and anger that were astonishing … Talking our experience was a means of discovery. (Smith, 2005, p. 7)

Institutional Ethnography (IE) starts from the standpoint of everyday experiences and the institutional ethnographer “works from the social in people’s experience to discover its presence and organization in their lives and to explicate or map that organization beyond the local to the everyday” (Smith, 2005, p. 11). The analysis also begins with social experience and returns to it to explain how the experience came into being (Campbell, 2006). The actualities of people’s lives and their relations to social organizations need to be clearly explained and emphasized that “the main analytic notion to hold on to … is the idea of social relations at the heart of research interest” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, p. 85). IE draws upon people’s experience as data to help anchor the research in the actualities of people’s lives and connect it more to the real world (Campbell, 2006). I will therefore start from the standpoint of the individual’s story as my entry point into exploring issues of power and privilege in international volunteering.

The Individual’s Story

A Method of Inquiry: Institutional Ethnography

In order to understand the encounters of Canadian youth volunteers who try to engage as active, global citizens and attempt to address issues of power and privilege in their international volunteering work, I used aspects of IE as my method of inquiry. In the classical sense, IE has
always been a radical sociology because it gets to the roots of matters (Carroll, 2006). In terms of thinking of IE, it is a social justice based, activist-oriented research, George Smith describes IE as a reflexive materialist approach that uses the creative concept of politico-administrative regimes, or otherwise “provides a ground work for grassroots political action … and begins from the standpoint of those outside ruling regimes … [and] its analysis is directed at empirically determining how such regimes work” (Smith, 2006, p. 48).

IE is inspired by Marx’s method of unmasking capitalism through action and reflection and the “fundamental assumption … that reality is an internally related whole” (Carroll, 2006, p. 235); in order to change the world one must understand it first. Marx uses a dialectic social analysis that enables the research to make connections and to unmask the underlying relations that feed social injustices (Carroll, 2006, p. 236). IE specifically uses a social analysis that requires an ontological shift that the social is the ground for analysis (Smith, 2005). The ontology of the social is what is used to do the looking, not what is looked for. IE seems appropriate for my research, as a young Canadian volunteer’s reality can arguably be based purely on social experiences.

IE is a fundamental resource that “recognizes the authority of the experience to inform the institutional ethnographer’s ignorance” (Smith, 2005, p. 138). In relying on direct experiences from the people, one is able to tangibly translate how texts become activated, how ruling relations work in local contexts, and how the social is always in motion (Diamond, 2006).

IE’s influences draw from Marx and uses social analysis, but it is also shaped from positivism and feminist movements which gives it the “potential for marriage of scholarly research and political motivation” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 14). IE takes the standpoint of those on the outside of the ruling regimes (Campbell & Gregor, 2002); in other words, the people
it is doing research for, as it should “help to form a subject’s political consciousness related to equitable decision making” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 128). I follow George Smith’s notion of politico-administrative regimes, and even though the volunteers typically represent dominant populations in society, they are still products of the ruling regime (i.e., volunteer sending organizations) because they go through a selection process to volunteer directly with marginalized populations (who are definitely outside of ruling regimes). I use IE as a method to uncover the ruling relations in international volunteering, and as a tool that can help me to explain to volunteers and field staff how their experiences are connected to a wider set of institutional power. In addition, volunteers and field staff can improve their practices in the field if they understand they role they play in affecting vulnerable populations such as local communities in developing countries, as well as comprehend how the political nature of volunteering institutions shape a volunteer’s experience around issues of power and privilege and assist them to move more towards a notion of political consciousness in equity that Campbell and Gregor (2002) mention.

The theory behind IE can be compared to Richard Darville’s framework on literacy instruction, which resides on the premise that students learn how organizations use written materials to re-instill forms of domination (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). For example, the websites and brochures of volunteer organizations often use images of Caucasian volunteers smiling among a group of Black African children to recruit volunteers. The visuals of Caucasian individuals helping Black Africans reinforces notions of a superior colonizer assisting Southern victims in need of “civilizing”. Volunteers have the ability to become political actors by learning about organizational literacy and that volunteers can “learn the skills to engage successfully with dominant forms of literacy, and even draw upon their own experiential knowledge … when they
do they too can insist that organizations serve them rather than just manage them” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 13).

My intention is to instill in Canadian youth volunteers and those who are working with them an understanding and ability to critically analyze how outside networks of relations (e.g., organizations, funding agencies and cultures) can shape their work and experiences.

**Author’s Standpoint**

IE guides the analysis of my data, so I would like to also briefly outline my standpoint as it is a starting position from how I approach my research. I take on the volunteer’s standpoint, but specifically from a person of color, female, middle-class, able-bodied perspective. As Smith (2005) states standpoint should be viewed “not [as] a given and finalized form of knowledge but as a ground in experience from which discoveries are to be made” (p. 8).

As a Vietnamese Canadian I was raised, for the majority of my childhood, in a middle-class, suburban neighbourhood. I come from the typical struggle of the immigrant experience where my parents worked menial jobs upon their arrival in Canada; my mother was a chambermaid in a hotel and my father was a taxi driver. We lived in low-income housing project until I was 5 years old, and though my father did not finish his university degree until I was in my late teens, my mother finished her bachelor’s degree when I was 5, and we moved to a middle-class house in the suburbs. The stories of poverty and hardship are an oral inheritance from my parents, and I am not quite sure if that experience of poverty counts because I was so young. I remember being a bit more unruly, being a latchkey kid, stealing a few things here and there, mainly from my parents’ convenient store when we owned one, and the neighbor’s house; but mostly I have good memories of people always coming in and out of our house, loud voices, social gatherings, and a sense of community. I grew up in a household with multiple perspectives
in religion and class. My father grew up in a low-income household, had a split family, engaged as a street kid, and joined the war to escape poverty; he sought a lot of refuge in Buddhism and lived periodically at the temple in his town. He experienced physical and verbal abuse. My mother, on the other hand, came from a middle-class, religiously Christian family; she was well behaved, at the top of her class, and a favourite in her family.

By sharing my standpoint I can locate the lens that guides me in an institutional order (Smith, 2005). My upbringing that always took into account multiple standpoints of religion and class, combined with my experience as an overseas volunteer outlines reasons why I believe in the required involvement of local communities for sustainable development, and what drives me towards a political commitment of encouraging more equitable partnerships and interactions between volunteers and the locals in developing countries. My ability to have a political stance on volunteerism is a way of grounding myself and ensuring my responsibility to my research (Smith, 2005). Overall, I am personally invested because I feel that the people I interact with as a volunteer are not simply objects, or products of poverty. As a woman of colour I feel the effects of power and privilege acutely because I am both implicated in the process of exercising it, and in the process where it is exercised upon me.

The Problematic: Establishing My Anchor

In this sub section I will state the problematic, otherwise known as a point of entry, that leads to exploring how the lives and experiences of Canadian youth volunteers are put together, and relate to each other through power relations (DeVault, 2008). I would like to note that the nature of my research followed IE’s open-ended process of discovery (Smith, 2005), and as I collected my data the discoveries of what I thought I would be writing about have shifted, which I will elaborate more upon in Chapter 4.
The problematic created a project of exploration that led to many questions I had not thought about through my own experience as a volunteer. I would never have imagined the complexity of social relations that interplay in a volunteer’s experience, which include government funding, international relations, volunteer services and agencies, South-North partnerships, etc. Campbell and Gregor (2002) also stressed that IE researchers often begin with reflections of their own knowledge because they are part of what they know and what they learn about in the world (p. 23); therefore I begin with my own experiences in interacting and being a Canadian youth volunteer, and throughout the thesis will continue to interweave my 10 years of experience as a volunteer and then an employee in the IVS sector. After the description of the problematic, there will also be exploration on how my first youth volunteering experience propelled me to become more aware of issues of power and privilege in youth volunteering contexts.

My problematic begins in the everyday experiences of young Canadian volunteers who go overseas on short- and long-term development projects organized by secular not-for-profit organizations. Short-term placements are considered to be 2 to 10 weeks, while long-term placements are over 10 weeks. After 9 years of volunteering abroad and interacting with other volunteers, I have heard many of their stories. Although volunteers have many unique perspectives and learning, they also share many common emotions and discoveries, which I will touch upon with the recount of my own experiences.

The catalyst that propelled me to explore dilemmas around organizations and international volunteering came from my interactions with a Canadian organization and its youth volunteers that went on short-term development projects. In 2007, I attended a popular one-day youth-run conference held by the organization, and I came to realize and recognize the intense
power of organizations to mobilize masses towards a consistent, public message of the ‘global citizen’. The term ‘global or active citizen’ seemed to be frequently used by organizations to entice individuals or groups to contribute to their international projects without actually engaging the volunteer in a complex dialogue of what it meant to be a citizen of the world. I was disturbed because the conference was held by a well-known Canadian youth organization that promoted “international development” to thousands of Canadian students, and had celebrities and multi-million dollar corporations as their spokespeople and sponsors. This organization also had a program for young Canadians to fundraise and go on two-month long trips to build schools in Africa. I spoke with a friend who went on one of these trips and asked her what her experience had been like. I asked her if she knew what happened to the schools once they were built or if the volunteers were given a background as to why that community needed a school. She answered that her two months in Kenya were spent as a large group, building a school, without questions as to how the school would be sustained or followed up once the volunteers left. At this conference, the organization promoted people in developing countries as victims, with students in Toronto being recruited as leaders capable of making change in those communities. Shortly thereafter, at a global issues workshop, I met a by-product of this educational approach: a 15-year-old girl who said her dream was to raise money and go on one of these volunteering trips when she reached Grade 12. She told me that it was her dream, but she was afraid she would cry the whole time she was there because the people would be living in deplorable conditions. I recognize how important it is for young people to move away from apathy, and that international volunteering placements can jumpstart a person’s interest in giving to the world. However, if these youth sending organizations do not address issues of power and privilege such as classism,
racism, and sexism, then volunteers who come with good intentions of charity are simply repeating cycles of imperialism and colonialism on local communities.

**The Disjuncture: A Set of Larger Relations**

Dorothy Smith brought up how people in the same experience can experience different realities, otherwise known as disjuncture, which can often be part of the problematic (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). In 2008 I spoke with an intern who went on a long-term, 6-month placement in Bangladesh. She told me she no longer felt comfortable with international community development, and that she thought herself to be more useful in Canada. She told me that she believed effective community development depended on a familiarity with the people, their language and their surroundings. She wondered how she would feel if foreigners came into her community without knowing the language or history, and began to implement recommendations and changes. Her reality on international development did not mimic the missionary complex. Her perspective on building local capacity for sustainable development was more insightful and critical than some of the youth I spoke with from the 2007 conference; her awareness around issues of power and privilege were quite developed.

Initially, it seemed that short- and long-term volunteer placements developed different abilities of critical analysis among youth volunteers. However, because the problematic offered a point of entry into the everyday experiences of Canadian youth volunteers, the data from my interviews to uncover an explanation proved to be more complex than the length of time that volunteers were overseas as there was a larger set of relations that influenced their lives. Smith (2005) explained that disjuncture occurs between “the artificial realities of institutions and the actualities that people live” (p. 187). Smith continues to write that disjuncture can be explored through regulatory frames, as they are imposed onto people’s actualities. Regulatory frames can
include theories, policies, laws, and plans that guide institutional power (Smith, 2005). The disjuncture and the notion of regulatory frames will be further explored in Chapter 3.

**Issues of Power and Privilege**

The meaning of power and privilege can be nebulous even though the terms are ubiquitous in the not-for-profit sector. I use Peggy McIntosh’s well-known essay *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (1988) as an entry point into power and privilege while acknowledging that the meanings of these two words are evolving, encompassing and complex. McIntosh describes that “white privilege [is] an invisible package of unearned assets … white privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (1988, p. 1). For example, men work from an unacknowledged privilege and they maintain their oppression unconsciously (1988, p. 1). McIntosh writes that system “work systematically to empower certain groups” (1988, p. 5) and privilege can be seen as dominance in a system due to one’s race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, physical or mental ability, etc.

When I was 19 years old I decided to go on an independently organized trip to Vietnam. During my interactions at a government-run orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City, I experienced power and privilege so powerfully that I could not ignore it the way I had in Canada. The local workers did not treat me the same that they treated Caucasian volunteers, and I felt like I had to work harder to prove myself as an equal group member. I spent every second day eating lunch, doing the dishes, folding clothes and performing the same tasks the other women did. I wanted to earn their respect and prove to them that I was not just a spoiled, Western woman that had lost my Vietnamese heritage. The women came to feel comfortable around me, banter with me and relax in my presence. In contrast, I noticed that when a Caucasian person arrived, the women
gave them a lot of respect and they smiled more, but spoke less and were not as relaxed. I realized that many foreigners could not get to know the people of that orphanage with depth; there were many speculations around this such as language barriers, or a lack of understanding around local culture and poverty. In Vietnam I began to realize power and privilege contained many layers such as class, race and gender; I did not have the vocabulary when I was 19 to know that I was encountering inter-sectionalit.

When I came back to Canada, I experienced many emotions that new volunteers recount: becoming more conscious about poverty, realizing the generosity and resiliency of people who live in poverty, and the naive astonishment that poor people can feel happy even when they are materialistically deprived. I also realized that I had two cultural identities and that people would always see my physical appearance first. I felt the oppression from Vietnamese men as a Vietnamese woman. I felt saddened at seeing my own people throw themselves at the feet of someone because they were Caucasian, and I saw and heard how foreigners could disrespect local customs and culture, and that sometimes they only wanted to experience Vietnam as tourists. In my localized situation I had witnessed a complex, multilayered systemic set of power and privilege issues. I had suddenly become aware of myself as a spoke in the wheel, as someone who received and exercised the spiral of power. At 19, I realized that power and privilege existed in individuals who took part in international youth volunteering; however, I could not yet even imagine the actual complications, workings and interconnectedness of IVS as an institution.

Multiple Stories: Introducing the Participants

The participants were five former alumni volunteers and two former field staff from two different organizations, all of whom had been in the field in 2009. I interviewed the volunteers and field staff with two sets of questions. For the alumni they were asked to describe the work
experiences as volunteers, and the field staff had to describe their experiences designing and implementing the work experiences. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to one hour.

**Methodology**

This section is based in the main on qualitative research I have gathered from interviews conducted from March to June 2010, with seven individuals who have participated in the Canadian youth volunteering sector. My method of inquiry was shaped by Institutional Ethnography (IE). Throughout the data collection I kept in mind that IE can analyze ruling relations between individuals and institutions on two levels: the first level of information provided local accounts of experiences volunteers living the everyday problematic, and the second set of data pertained to explaining these experiences in a broader setting (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Therefore my approach to the research entails conducting interviews and posing questions to extract the experiences of young Canadian alumni volunteers, with an emphasis on their descriptions of how things worked as opposed to solely their perceptions and emotions. Next, I conduct a brief historical overview of international volunteering in Canada in order to better understand the history of Canadian organizations sending young volunteers overseas. The literature review is interweaved into Chapters 2 and 3 to tease out the issues that presently pervade IVS (e.g., the public messages of IVS portrayed to Canadian youth). Afterwards, I reintegrate the primary evidence gathered from my interviews into my study, and analyze it using an IE approach. I also provide a more in-depth look at the qualitative data and connect it to the broader setting of institutional and individual power. In the final chapter, I offer my theoretical framework as a possible solution in designing and improving equitable exchange programs for youth sending abroad organizations, and is drawn from Westheimer and Kahne’s framework of active citizenship as well as Dei’s framework on anti-racism education.
frameworks address Canadian youth volunteers as part of a larger institution of international development that includes the reproduction of power and privilege in community partnerships.

Each participant received a project description (see Appendix A), with an idea of the interview questions. Due to the scattered locations of the volunteers, they had the option of doing the interview by email, face-to-face or on the phone. Once they read the project description, and were invited to participate, interviewees signed a consent form (see Appendix B) that indicated their anonymity in order to protect the privacy of the organizations involved; two out of seven individuals gave permission to use their first names.

I tailored two sets of questions according to the volunteers who were interviewed: five former volunteers and two former field staff (Project Supervisor/Country Program Manager). I interviewed them individually, and informed each person that their interview had set questions that would be a guideline (see Appendix C), and they were free to diverge from the questions if they chose. At the beginning of the interviews, I asked the individuals to describe to me what they actually did and how things worked on the ground, as opposed to a rendition of emotions and feelings. This helped me to conduct a proper IE inquiry that could focus on processes rather than perceptions. Once data were collected, I transcribed each interview and extracted common themes and experiences and used the IE method to analyze my findings. Results, including analysis and discussion on the volunteers’ experiences within the framework of an IVS institution, will be provided in Chapter Three.

**Interview Design**

I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with seven participants. Single interviews can be used to explicate social relations between the individual and the institutions (McCoy, 2006). My first level of information focused on two sets of participants: those who had
volunteered and those who supervised and managed short-term volunteer placements. The answers that arose out of the interview analysis contributed to my second set of data (i.e., textual analysis of organizational marketing). The secondary information assists in explaining these individual experiences in a broader setting (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). The individuals I interviewed served as a point of investigation of the institutional process, rather than a sample of a population of Canadian youth volunteers sent abroad. As Smith (2005) says, “No Institutional Ethnography is a case study; each is an investigation of the ruling relations explored from a given angle, under a given aspect, and as it is brought into being in people’s everyday work lives” (p. 219). The purpose of the interviews was to analyze how IVS institutions shape youth volunteers’ experiences and their ability to navigate around issues of power and privilege.

The interviewees were recruited from two Canadian youth volunteer sending organizations that I had volunteered for in 2009 and 2010. In the initial process of volunteer recruitment, I contacted four alumni from an organization I had volunteered overseas with in March 2009; the subsequent three individuals were recruited from an organization I had conducted anti-oppression and climate change workshops for a course credit in fall 2009. I have grouped the participants into two categories: volunteers and field staff. Field staff refers to those who worked directly with the volunteers on a daily basis during the program, and not to staff hired to recruit, select and organize volunteer orientations and re-entry.

**Summary of Information on Participants**

I worked with seven individuals who ranged between the ages of 20 to 35 years old. All had recently participated in a short-term volunteering (STV) program; five were volunteers and two were field staff. Table 1 summarizes the background information of the volunteers, and Table 2 for the field staff:


Table 1

*Background Information on Volunteers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Previous IVS experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Background Information on Field Staff*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field staff</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years with organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30-35 years</td>
<td>Incomplete Bachelors</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 outlines the length of program and the participants’ experience in IVS at the date of interviewing (May and June 2010).

Table 3

*Summary Information About Volunteers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Length of program</th>
<th>Date of program</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Method of interview</th>
<th>Prior IV experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Yes (10-week program with same organization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Yes (7 months as a CIDA intern and 4 months as a researcher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>September 2009 – March 2010</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>September 2009 – March 2010</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the category Length of Program, I am specifically referring to the programs participants had recently taken part in. All volunteers had come back from short-term volunteer programs, even though approximately half had experience in long-term volunteer projects. Table
4 summarizes the field experience of field staff. In comparison, volunteers and field staff have different levels of critical analysis in terms of working in partnership with local organizations. However, even though field staff had more awareness that organizations impacted their work, both sets of respondents could not specifically identify institutional processes as a formal impact on their experiences.

**Table 4**

*Summary Information About Field Staff*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field staff</th>
<th>Date of program</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Method of interview</th>
<th>Role of participant</th>
<th>Prior IV experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2007-2009</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>Yes (2 years as Program Manager and 1 year as a CIDA intern)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2002-2011</td>
<td>30-35 years</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Project Supervisor</td>
<td>Yes (9 years as a project supervisor and 2 years as a volunteer)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Lens of Post-Colonialism**

Post-colonial theory examines the impacts and continuing legacy of post-European colonialism on non-European peoples, lands and structures. In my work on rethinking issues of power and privilege in international volunteering for young Canadians, post-colonialism becomes a theory that can be used to analyze and give context to institutional structures in the volunteering industry. The potential to promote sustainable and equitable partnerships with and between communities occurs authentically when we become aware of the historical context from which international volunteerism arose. I draw upon Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism to give the reader a background on post-colonial theory, and how volunteerism can unconsciously repeat the concept of ‘Other’.
In summary, Orientalism critiqued the romanticization, as well as the false assumptions conjured by Westerners of the Orient and its people (Said, 1993). He argues that preconceived notions of the ‘Other’ are not based on facts, but on representations (1993). For example, in European literary works “the people of Africa, and especially those Arabs, are just there; they have no accumulating art or history that is sedimented into works. Were it not for the European observer who attests to its existence, it would not matter” (Said, 1993, p. 193). In volunteerism, the communities which youth are sent to also have no active history or present. In addition, the ‘Other’ including the notion of the ‘Noble Savage’ who needs to civilized by Westerners, is constantly reinforced by political conquests such as World War I and II, the war on terrorism, and the AIDS plight of Africa. Said (1993) points out the relationship between colonizer and colonized have only been internationalized by global bodies such as churches, the United Nations, the United States; in other words Western forces have exacerbated the hero archetype through media at the expense of dehumanizing and victimizing the ‘Other’. In images of youth volunteerism, images of Caucasian youth with Black African children dominate websites. Interestingly, there has been an emergence of a culture of resistance from those of colonized nations (Said, 1993). For example, the scars the colonized bear from their history of imperialism and colonization are demonstrated in literary works; writers of the South share a pull towards “a more integrative view of human community and human liberation” (Said, 1993, p. 216). In comparison, in the discourse of international development, community locals have pushed towards a language of equity and sustainability as an attempt towards healing the impacts of decolonization, as well as increasing collaboration between people.

As Canadian youth embark on their journeys, and volunteer sending organizations engage in pedagogies and practices of training with their staff and volunteers, there is a need for
consistent inquiry into whether volunteering institutions are integrating their origins and positions of power into their work. Without acknowledging the post-colonial history from which international volunteering in Canada comes from, there is danger of perpetuating the single story and concept of ‘Us’, while repeating cycles of colonization and imperialism. Finally, volunteers and organizations need to be increasingly sensitive to working with, and not for, the people as we work towards decolonization, reclamation and reconciliation from the long standing weight of colonization.

Chapter Summary

In summary, I introduce my problematic and use the disjuncture of volunteers in short-term and long-term programs to commence my exploration around the challenges that youth volunteers and Canadian institutional structures in the international voluntary services sector encounter; I also commit to a vision of sustainable, and equitable partnerships as I believe the overseas community needs to benefit equally, if not more, to the volunteers. I use an IE method of inquiry, as its creative approach to politico-administrative regimes is suited to explore volunteering institutions. George Smith describes IE as social-justice based and activist-oriented research, and this research method is appropriate to analyzing IVS education approaches since the volunteers interact with vulnerable populations. Moreover, IE’s social analysis approach complements a sector where experiential learning predominates, and social interactions provide a vehicle for learning (e.g., volunteer and organization, volunteer and partner organization, volunteer and local community). The IVS sector is a rare institution where one can see and feel theory come alive on a daily basis. Also, as Canadian organizations that send youth abroad become more development focused, a political based research is required as there is a need to recognize the politicization of a service that affects developing communities. IE can also provide
volunteers a better understanding on how to locate their positions of power and privilege and strategically look at how to positively impact vulnerable populations. I use Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) definition of power and privilege as a guide to how volunteers might affect communities.

Consistent with an IE inquiry, I state my standpoint as a middle-class, woman of colour. My location serves to explain in part my belief towards equity in the IVS sector. In addition, I describe the problematic that lead me to research international youth volunteering, as the disjuncture of a youth volunteers’ experience leads to important questions about institutional structure (e.g., length of program, method of marketing and recruitment, objective of organization, and funders). Next, my interviews informed me on what challenges arose in a Canadian participant’s experience and connected their struggles to a set of larger, institutional relations. Finally, the anti-colonial theory gives context to the ongoing reproduction of power and privilege in international volunteering.
Chapter 2:
Experience as Data:
The Social Analysis

Students may learn anti-racist and anti-oppressive tenets and practice them faithfully but they may not have learned to recognize the historical conditioning and continuing institutional enforcement of their knowing that stems from living in their own bodies in specific places and under specific conditions in the world. (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 23)

This chapter delves into the experiences of seven Canadian youth and examines their stories in international volunteering while maintaining the notion of institutional complexities. I have also specifically focused on the participants’ interaction with power and privilege as defined in Chapter 1. I will provide a historical background of Canadian IVS in order to contextualize the starting point of volunteering abroad in Canada, and how the participants’ varying experiences are potentially impacted by origins in institutions and their processes. The answers of the participants have been broken down into two categories: youth volunteers and field staff. I interviewed five volunteers and two field staff so that I could have the opportunity to explore how volunteers describe their work placement, as well as how field staff experience the design and implementation of a volunteer’s program. In addition, I looked for whether participants were aware of the presence of, and how they contributed to, issues of power and privilege, and contrast it to where organizational frameworks intersected with individual experiences. The experiences of the interviewees are given importance; however, “it is the aspects of the institutions relevant to the people’s experience, not the people themselves, that constitute the object of inquiry” (Smith, 2005, p. 38). Finally, I will briefly explore the organizations’ best practices around recruitment and public engagement and provide institutional context to the participants’ social experiences as volunteers and field staff.
History in Brief

**Canadian Volunteer Sending Organizations: A Brief History**

At the end of World War II the United Nations (UN) officially came into existence as the first internationally governed non-governmental organization (NGO) that aimed to promote international cooperation and peace. In the post-UN era, as volunteering became recognized as a form of international development (Lewis, 2006), Canadian NGOs in Canada flourished in the late 1950s and 1960s, and during this time they also began to send adult volunteers overseas. The message of promoting peace spread and the peace movement influenced people such as Dr. James Robinson, an American preacher who founded Canadian Crossroads International (CCI). He believed that “people are fundamentally more similar than dissimilar and that by living and working together, we can create a crossroads of cultural experiences that ultimately will support positive individual and social change” (Canadian Crossroads International, 2008). CCI, CUSO-VSO, and World University Service of Canada (WUSC) were among the Canadian organizations that gained official status as charities during the 1950s and 1960s. In the early 1960s these organizations spread the new volunteer movement to Canadian universities (CUSO-VSO, 2009), and going overseas in order to gain cross-cultural understanding would only increase in momentum for Canadian identity and politics as Canada earned a reputation as international peacekeeper in events such as the 1956 Suez Crisis, and as the Government of Canada established the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in 1968.

**Canadian International Development Agency**

The Government of Canada established CIDA in 1968. One of their roles was to administer Canada’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) program. Currently, it concentrates its bilateral aid with a specific focus in 20 countries such as Afghanistan,
Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Pakistan, Peru, and Vietnam. CIDA’s Aid Effectiveness Agenda includes “concrete, sustainable results” and aims at “development for results” (CIDA, 2009). Its mission is to “lead Canada’s international efforts to help people living in poverty” (CIDA, 2009). CIDA also has a focus on Canadian youth to “be more active global citizens” and “make a difference in Canada and abroad” (CIDA, 2009), and currently funds two of the largest Canadian organizations that send youth abroad. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the potential impact this might have on the volunteer organizations, its youth volunteers and their public messaging framework.

**Canadian Youth Volunteers Overseas: An Emergence**

Tiessen (2008) provides the statistics that over 65,000 young Canadians have participated in volunteer abroad programs, and numbers continue to grow each year as young people travel to developing countries to learn about global issues. In the 1970s, as the diversity of the Canadian population grew, multiculturalism became a popular focus for the Canadian government. Pierre Elliott Trudeau established the multiculturalism policy in 1971, which became highly criticized by anti-racism activists in the 1970s and 1980s for its originsations in a bilingual framework that excluded pluralism (McCaskell, 2005). Significantly, the policy also set the stage for an increase in funding to programs that encouraged citizen participation, and cross-cultural exchange. The emergence of organizations focused on youth volunteers originated in 1971 when Jacques Hebert, a close friend of Trudeau, founded Canada World Youth (CWY). CWY is a youth volunteer sending organization funded by CIDA that prepares young people ages 17 to 25 for an international education program that includes community development projects in Canada, as well as international development projects in the South. Nine Canadian participants are paired up with nine participants from a “host” country. The aim of CWY is to prepare Canadian youth to be participatory citizens and to “cultivate tolerance and resolve conflict in constructive and
peaceful ways” (Canada World Youth, 2003). Another youth sending organization had its birth in the 1970s, when former Canadian and Australian participants, who had taken part in the initiated Royal British program Operation Drake in 1978 and Operation Raleigh in 1984, founded Youth Challenge International (YCI). YCI became a permanent organization in 1989 and currently is funded by CIDA. Youth volunteers go on short-term international development placements that last between four to ten weeks in developing countries. Today there are more Canadian youth organizations, such as Free the Children, that promote volunteering abroad as a quest to develop global citizenship.

The Youth Volunteers

Initially, I wanted to explore why Canadian youth volunteers produced issues of power and privilege. Even though Lewis (2006) and Simpson (2004) were some of the few researchers who explored volunteerism as an institution, the majority of academic literature concentrated on critiquing volontourism and youth volunteers in the overseas community. However, after interviewing the volunteers, I realized that three out of five were conscious of power and privilege, and grappled with the dilemma of navigating around these issues. The interviewees were unique because they were a mix of individuals who had never volunteered or been overseas before, to those who had experience in development projects or working internationally as interns. I analyzed my interviews with an institutional ethnographic lens, as this approach allowed me to assess a participant’s knowledge and presence of power and privilege in their volunteer placement, while simultaneously examining where and how institutional processes influenced their outlook on the experience.
Motivations

In congruence with academic research, the motivations of the volunteers I interviewed ranged from personal to professional development. For example, Lough et al. (2009) found the motivations of volunteers varied from an increase of knowledge in global education (which they did not feel they could gain at home), career growth, self-growth, and “giving back” because of their privilege. Table 5 lists each volunteer’s motivations for joining his or her program.

Table 5
Motivations of Volunteers for Joining Their Short-Term Volunteering Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>To work with youth and build meaningful relationships with people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>To take a month off work and go on a program that fit a short time commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>To get more professional experience and exposure in the development field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>To gain experience in travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>To work cross-culturally and with a program that fit her age group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the group had motivations that ranged from personal to professional; however, only Volunteer 3 specifically mentioned international development in her motivations. The participants between the ages of 25-30 years old did discuss their concerns with issues that were problematic in the IVS sector:

I didn’t want to be going overseas to be building stuff because I feel like, you know, it doesn’t make sense for someone to fly overseas to build something when there is certainly a capacity to do that in terms of labour in another country already … Also, the focus on working with other young people … it wasn’t going
to be working with 17 year olds. The other people that had a bit more experience under their belt, and that I wouldn’t essentially be a babysitter or something. (Volunteer 1)

I think it was the second group I went there with, there was less of people assuming they were on vacation … People sign up and, oh it’s a vacation and whatever project people want to do is secondary, to just being there and experiencing Ghana … yeah, I’m here to work on things whereas just be there for three months overseas. (Volunteer 2)

The participants between the ages of 20-24 years did not seem concerned with the complex, multi-dimensional problems that came with volunteering and traveling in developing countries as Volunteer 1, 2 or 3. One young volunteer responded that his motivation primarily revolved around adventure:

Ever since high school I wanted to travel and I kept putting off traveling … I was always afraid to travel on my own, I didn’t know where to begin. Um, there’s a few programs out there that get you started but I thought I need something where I’m constantly being around people and you know someone else is taking care of my flights and everything. (Volunteer 5)

Overall, the length of the program and the opportunities to travel and meet others were prime motivations that showed up in the volunteers’ answers. Only one person indicated gaining more experience in international development as their reason for participating; however, when asked what attracted the volunteers to the particular program, two individuals between the ages of 25-30 years old elaborated on the importance of organization’s pedagogy (i.e., sustainable projects). The next section will explore the interplay between the participants’ perceptions on development issues, their overseas experience and issues of power and privilege.
P-Cubed: Perceptions of Power and Privilege

Expert Kate Simpson (2004) poses the question: is volunteering another form of colonization? I found in my data that not all volunteers wanted to contribute to a system that reproduced colonization; however, many felt limited by the requirements of the project, program or organization. Within the context of volunteerism, colonialism can manifest itself in different ways. The partnership between North and South organizations can reproduce systems of dependence because of funding, and this can trickle down to the work of the volunteers. The volunteers can have more ‘voice’ than the locals as they are the ones producing the workshops. At times, in short-term projects there is no needs assessment done by volunteers as they only have a limited time to meet deliverables; or groups may duplicate each other’s work if there is no knowledge or proper orientation on the history of the organization in the area volunteers are working in. An older volunteer explained his challenges in his role of teaching employability skills to youth in Ghana:

I think trying to teach students about their own … elements of their own country – when I had only been there for a week and a half. That was a huge challenge. Um, that challenge of, I don’t know if this would be a philosophical challenge – sort of, acknowledging that the work we were doing was meaningful in the present sense. We’re giving the students an experience they will benefit from – at least I hope they did – but concerns about the sustainability of the project. That made it a challenge to find meaning in what we were doing because why weren’t we working with teachers or helping to build capacity … I also think that coming to terms that being in Ghana for a month, you do what you can and it’s just the way the project is. You have to come to terms with that and I think that was a challenge. (Volunteer 1)

An experienced volunteer described her struggle with one of her novice group members:
I know that a couple of people were feeling the way I was feeling – was feeling that this wasn’t a very well-conceived project, and this wasn’t the best use of resources. But I think that other, I think that there were definitely some people in the group who thought they were ah, they were changing the world. [Laughs]. Who thought that they were sort of, the solution to all of Africa’s problems … I found it very patronizing and very uncomfortable. It’s about what they say development being neo-colonialism, was right in front of me. (Volunteer 3)

The youth volunteers came from two organizations. While both organizations emphasized youth leadership, one program focused heavily on the work project in their recruitment strategy, while the other concentrated on cross-cultural learning. The volunteers from the work-focused program engaged in more critical reflection about their work placement, while the younger volunteers from the intercultural-focused program had a lot of observations and analysis on their personal development and relationships, and did not have an analytical overview of the program structure:

I liked the work placements. I don’t feel like I necessarily learned a whole lot from them. But just working with people in the community I found very rewarding. You get to - especially in the kitchen - you get to know the women a lot. And it’s just really interesting to sit and converse with them and see what their lives are like. (Volunteer 4)

When it came to challenges, all volunteers shared challenges around internal group conflicts. However, the older volunteers also stated project sustainability as an area of learning, while the younger volunteers from another program specified language, values and beliefs and integration:

I guess in the Kenyan phase was the whole language barrier. That was hard … But when you have to have someone to interpret things for you, it’s discouraging
at times and frustrating especially if you have never experienced it before … and beliefs and the way they do things. (Volunteer 4)

I would say language barrier was a bit of a challenge … maybe just, like, um trying to integrate into the community being obviously not from there was a bit of a challenge. I thought it was also a huge learning experience on how to work cross-culturally. (Volunteer 5)

In the program focused on inter-cultural skills, volunteers were mostly those who had never traveled overseas or done community development before. For these youth, the largest skill gained seemed to be personal growth in a group context, as well as learning how to adapt cross-culturally; perhaps this was a reason that many did not reference their work placement as important.

**The Field Staff**

I interviewed field staff from each organization, and their answers reflected that they were aware of equity issues, but had to negotiate their personal beliefs and working styles to accommodate and incorporate the organizational mandate and program framework. Specifically, organization recruitment strategies, pedagogy and funding requirements were hurdles for the field staff’s ability to implement and design an equitable program. Field Staff 1 explained how the selection of volunteers presents hurdles around designing and implementing a program experience:

The biggest challenges in this are mostly focused around the individual capacity of the volunteers, which can vary drastically. Some have a breadth of useful experience – both work and travel – that really allow them to adapt to the culture quickly and operate effectively in a very short amount of time. Others have virtually no experience working in relevant areas, no travel experience, and a
general unawareness of their competencies and how they can be utilized to make a real impact. In the case of the latter, much more direct intervention is required from the CPM [country program manager], in terms of direct programming assistance and micro-management of the volunteer experience. Volunteers of this nature have varying expectations and are far more subject to health, cultural, and emotional challenges. (Field Staff 1)

Field Staff 1’s response demonstrates her understanding of how volunteers with unrealistic expectations have trouble adapting to the country and work project, and on the importance of what type of volunteer enters the program.

There is also a conflict with what field staff wants a program to be, and what the program actually allows. This is reflected in Field Staff 1’s answer on what the process for designing a volunteer’s program entails:

While the organization’s mission is generally focused on developing youth globally, the lack of specificity allows for great interpretation on how that is translated into programming. Personally, as a CPM [country program manager], my planning focuses around creating a mutually beneficial experience for the host community and volunteers while attempting (sometimes in vain) to make an impact for all parties involved … I want the host community to feel that the education and programmes made a difference to the local youth, and met an addressed need of their region. I want host organizations in-country to feel like they were an integral part of some high-quality programming. (Field Staff 1)

Okay, so it happens on a number of different levels. So the first level that it happens is like a protocol agreement, and that happens at the management level and I’m less involved with that … like right now we have a 5-year commitment with them and that protocol is drawn up. That protocol talks about the main educational objectives of the program, it talks about the funding of the program … so policy-based agreements between the two organizations. But in terms of the
volunteer’s actual day-to-day experience, there is a training continuum for field staff that includes certain learning that myself and my counterpart would go through about program design. And then we design collaboratively with our counterpart … but what happens realistically is that the Canadian supervisor is designing the Canadian phase of the program with a small amount of input from their counterpart and a small amount of input from the members of the team … so it does end up being heavily designed, if the Canadian phase happens first, it’s heavily designed by the Canadian project supervisor, in collaboration but with less access to the design by the supervisor and the volunteer youth. (Field Staff 2)

Field Staff 2 wants to reduce power and privilege between her organization and the local partner by including her counterpart in program design. However, as field staff do not have input on policy, there is a clear separation between the program framework design, the field staff’s project implementation and volunteers’ experiences.

Though the field staff from each organization demonstrated critical thought when it came to power and privilege in their programs, they still faced challenges around effectively running an equitable program because of program design (i.e., volunteer selection and organizational frameworks). The next section speculates as to why there is a division between program framework, program implementation and design and a volunteer’s daily experience. I examine specifically the public representation of two STV programs and how they promote themselves (i.e., professional versus cross-cultural STV youth programs), and how recruitment strategy can influence the types of volunteers who apply, and the youth’s daily experiences.

Organizational Practices

Canadian volunteer youth sending organizations are moving towards a development framework while maintaining the practices of the traditional volunteering model. One of the
benefits of a volunteer model is being able to reach out to young people whose knowledge expands beyond development. Therefore, the representation and reputation of an organization to reach out to a wide public is important when it comes to the sustainability of volunteering as an institution. Most notably, expanding on who can raise funds to participate in overseas placements remains critical to the survival of an organization. I asked my participants how they chose the organization they went with. Many of them concurred that they chose their international volunteer placement based on reputation:

I had a friend who had seen a posting and I was working at a job where I … I was looking for something else to do. (Volunteer 1)

Yes. I had a friend who participated in it and she really gave – she really enjoyed herself and she recommended it … I wanted to get more work experience and it was more a logistic fit than anything else. (Volunteer 3)

I chose the organization that I went with because of the fact, um well mainly I had a friend that had been with the organization a few years ago so I checked things out, found out that they were reputable, received some funding from the government. So you know them receiving government funding they should be legit. (Volunteer 4)

I’d known about the organization for a few years and I’d heard a lot of positive feedback from other people that had done the program, and I just liked the idea of working with cross-cultural team and spending time in both Canada and the other country too. (Volunteer 5)

All the interviewees indicated that their friends’ recommendations helped them make their choice. The website was also a key tool for the volunteers in informing their decision. When I refer back to the responses of the volunteers’ to their motivations for joining, only one indicated
development. In comparison, Simpson (2004) finds that in her research on the gap year, where British students take a year off after high school before entering college or university and usually go volunteering overseas, there are “many allusions, but few direct references to ‘development’” in the marketing and discussion of British volunteer sending organizations. Rather, a language of ‘making a difference’, ‘doing something worthwhile’ or ‘contributing to the future of others’, predominates” (p. 683). In accordance with Simpson’s findings, the websites of the Canadian youth organizations also used language that highlighted change, global citizen, and making a difference, and only briefly mentioned development. None of the participants in the interviews brought up researching how their organizations or past alumni carried out development projects; most seemed more excited about the idea of adventure, personal or professional growth. Also, the website did not contain any information on the approach to development, and emphasized young people as their primary vehicle for change.

The complexities around development and international volunteering are numerous, and if word-of-mouth as well as websites are the only two accessible communication tools for volunteers to research organizations, then young people cannot be held solely responsible for not asking the right questions when they lack access to the appropriate information. The marketing of youth volunteer-sending organizations brings up questions about best practices.

**International Development or Cross-Cultural Exchange**

If organizations require young people to maintain funding, then the goal of the organization may be unable to focus on carrying out international development projects as their goal. The increase of youth volunteer-sending organizations and voluntourism means more competition for youth and the number of volunteers who ineffectively contribute to development projects (Lewis, 2006), as young people do not have the skills, knowledge or experience
necessary to work internationally (Lewis, 2006). Youth volunteers have been arguably seen as individually gaining, as opposed to contributing to, the collective. Even if youth did have the experience, there are questions about whether the structure of a volunteer project allows effective results for the host community. One experienced volunteer shared her realizations about the design of her ‘development’ work project:

I was going to say that I think in terms of the organization, um granted the workshops were held very close to one another, they were sort of back-to-back and there wasn’t enough time to go back to them and debrief, and figure them out … I mean the biggest problem was that the program was ill conceived on a number of different levels that made it difficult … I think the partner’s engagement was predominantly for financial benefit … there was no needs assessment at all … I think once we got there and started looking at the sessions, or after the first morning we looked at the students and the level of what was happening, we realized that a lot of the things we had planned for just didn’t really make sense. (Participant 3)

She realized that her project, which had been advertised as development, was actually a volunteer experience, as no proper mechanisms for development had been put in place. Volunteer 2, who had been on the same experience as Volunteer 3, explained the difference between her work project and the other placement she had been on:

It was different … the first one that I went was just a basic volunteer experience, and everybody that was on that one had very different backgrounds and no experience overseas. So it was everyone’s first time. Like some of us had traveled before but in terms of working overseas, when they screened people it was more the first timers; and when I went back this time it was the people … all had a little more experience. But even just in general, a little more life experience … it was easier to hit the ground running when people are like, yeah I’m here to work on things whereas just be there for three months overseas. (Volunteer 2)
Even though Participant 2 saw her work project as more than a ‘basic volunteer experience’, there was a disjuncture in her daily experience and that of her other group member. Her first ‘basic volunteer experience’ and her current volunteer placement differed only in the life experience of the individuals who participated, while the group still encountered development obstacles similar to Participant 2’s first group, such as group dynamics, lack of project sustainability and local involvement in workshop design.

The organization’s focus on cross-cultural exchange versus international development appears in the participants’ responses on how they were prepared for their international placements:

I was sent a lot of friggin material from the organization. To be honest a lot of the information I did not go through and I know that like, we were supposed to go through it but at least for me I was working a full time job … But it was a lot of stuff to go through … I mean we were sent this cross-cultural learning module thing that you completed and got stamped on this electronic passport … I think there was sort of an online community that was set up that I didn’t use because it was another thing that I had to go online and check. I mean there were a fair number of emails that were floating back and forth between other volunteers. (Volunteer1)

I don’t think there was any! Sorry, my memory is terrible. I think that we had interviews, that we sent some introductions explaining ourselves. Um, I think we all did some personal research on some very superficial reading of Wikipedia of Ghana, and some employability things … Maybe a few small emails or a few small things going back and forth, but nothing substantial. (Volunteer 3)

The e-mail communication to orient volunteers to a project presents as problematic, as not everyone has access to technology and the bombardment of information can overwhelm and
disorient youth who have never before been exposed to development or the country they are visiting. The online module that volunteers had to complete focused on cross-cultural, as opposed to development, competencies. The preparation for volunteers concentrated primarily on building team dynamics, as opposed to educating the volunteers for their work project:

I remember in [location] before – I don’t know if I should mention the city – but there was an orientation where we talked about what strengths we could bring to the project and what weaknesses. (Volunteer 1)

There were also challenges on executing a development project in a country where the volunteers had no prior knowledge or very little experience:

Yeah. I couldn’t say I had a very strong understanding of Ghana before I went. Like I said I’d spent time in Kenya, so [laughs], I didn’t have a strong understanding of Kenya either before I went but I learned pretty quickly … But I didn’t know much about West Africa … I didn’t have an understanding of the history or the current politics of Ghana; just an understanding of what my Canadian friend had experienced … (Volunteer 3)

When I found out I was going to Kenya, Africa wasn’t my first choice. But I was like okay that’s cool. When I heard Kenya the first thing that came to mind was giraffes … But then uh, I guess I started to look up things on Africa and I got as far as looking up that, finding out that Africa has 37 million people. It’s about the size of Texas; the two official languages are Swahili and English. And that was about it. (Volunteer 4)

Very little really. I knew where it was and that was about it. I didn’t really know about the people or the culture. But yeah, in [Canadian location] I learned a ton about even just being around Kenyans. (Volunteer 5)
Development seemed to be the focus of one organization, but the pedagogical approach used by both organizations was influenced by a multicultural, rather than an anti-racist education, as volunteers commented on the benefits of a cross-cultural exchange as opposed to the work project:

> I think the opportunity to socialize with co-volunteers cannot be underestimated. We all went in there to do work and stuff, but in terms of what I took away, I think the informal conversations and the friendships were far more valuable than informing the working relationship. (Volunteer 1)

Multicultural education approaches represent racism issues in a way that are non-threatening to dominant Canadian groups (McCaskell, 2005), and focus on appreciating differences without critical analysis on institutional systems. Interestingly, the two young volunteers who embarked in the same program had similar responses that reflected the program’s multicultural values of tolerance, as opposed to an ability to offer critical insight into development:

> Now I’m not saying Canada is a better country. We have more rights and privileges you know, but who am I to say that we’re any better than anyone else right? In a way I have that thought and opinion because this is where I am from, and most people have respect and an appreciation of where they are from. (Volunteer 4)

> It’s all about what sort of social values there are and what values allow for there to be order. And in Canada equality is sort of the value that we treasure, whereas in Kenya it’s um, not equality; it’s sort of an order. Like a social order where everyone knows what they do and why they do it rather than the necessity of everyone being equal. It’s a different of operating that doesn’t make it better or worse, it just makes it different. (Volunteer 5)
The programs emphasized cross-cultural values. However, the project did not go un-scrutinized by a more experienced volunteer:

We just need to be more clear about what it is exactly that we’re doing, and not claim that we’re doing development when we’re not … I think it would be a great thing for the world in general I think that one of the best things we could is understand each other and where we come from. The majority of people don’t have the opportunity to travel. It’s great for people to go and see another country, but it’s also great for people in that country to see someone from a new country that they might not be able to go in their life and learning something about their country through them. I would promote any type of exchange between cultures. (Volunteer 3)

Volunteer 3’s observations are not entirely negative, as her response demonstrates the program was able to indirectly teach her how to further explore the role of Western countries in development. STV programs, with proper execution and the appropriate selection of volunteers can offer young people a critical reflection on development. Another example of learning comes from 1, who was able to examine issues of power and privilege through friendships and informal conversations with his more experienced group members. 2 was also able to ask analytical questions about development:

I had a really good time, but I think both my volunteer experiences have really – given that I want to continue in the development field – I think both of the experiences has made me question whether the volunteer overseas experience is better … for us or the actual people we are trying to help? Or the actual participants? I think it’s a better experience for us, but the other side of that is it really made me like working overseas. So it’s led me down a career path and hopefully as I get better at these development things, we will do things like take into account our counterparts’ ideas. (2)
In general, volunteers shared that benefits of the program revolved around individual growth, as well as cross-cultural exchange. Those who did mention their development projects were critical about its gains for local people. As youth volunteer sending organizations increasingly move towards a development framework, while still working in a youth volunteering model, researchers and practitioners must assess which practices could be the most effective to contributing to the overseas and community partners, while being conscious of the growing competition for projects and funding for Canadian youth volunteer sending organizations.

**Chapter Summary**

In Chapter 2, I found that the participants’ motivations for volunteering on a short-term project ranged from personal to professional. One program seemed to emphasize skills in cross-cultural work and adventure, while the other program focused on professional development. The youth volunteers varied in their perceptions around power and privilege. Some volunteers held few observations on issues of sustainability and development in their volunteer placement or community; they did experience challenges with language, values and integration but no one connected it to anything systemic. Others held many criticisms and insights into their work project, which ranged from colonization, long-term development and leveling out power in the community. All volunteers had challenges with team dynamics. Field staff that managed the volunteers directly in the field was conscious of issues of power and privilege, and attempted to incorporate an education plan that would allow volunteers to explore and confront these topics. However field staff had to negotiate their beliefs around equity to fit into the organizational framework, and experienced conflict and struggles with what they wanted their program to be, and what the design actually allowed.
Organizations played a large role in the volunteer experience on various levels, such as recruitment and selection of youth volunteers, program preparation, and how the development project framework is introduced in the host community. The increasing trend towards development in youth volunteer sending organizations also produced similar problems that have been debated in international development, for example reproducing colonization, building community capacity and moving towards sustainability. Finally, I examined that the development framework youth volunteer sending organizations have adopted conflict with the traditional volunteer model, as the objectives of a cross-cultural exchange are different than those of a development project. Organizational practices such as volunteer selection, recruitment, preparation and program framework design contributed to the challenges experienced by volunteers. The length of the program and how organizations described the program impacted the kind of youth who applied, and their perceptions around power and privilege. Both programs used a development framework, but emphasized a cross-cultural educational approach.

In IE, interviews can help to generate questions about institutional realities through people’s everyday experiences (Smith, 2005). Even though I had initially assumed that volunteers reproduced issues of power and privilege in their placements, I realized that many of participants did not want to reproduce colonialism. IE allowed for me to analyze the interviewees’ standpoints “not as a given and finalized form of knowledge but as a ground in experience from which discoveries are to be made” (Smith, 2005, p.8). My interviews with former volunteers and field staff allowed me to commence exploring where their experiences could be influenced by institutional processes. The next chapter examines how institutional relations manifest and limit organizational practices and frameworks, and why individuals who are committed to equity find themselves confined in complex issues that pervade development.
Chapter 3:
Disjunctures, Tensions and Contradictions

The sociologist cannot know her world from outside, but only from inside its social organization. (Smith, 1990, p. 47)

The origins of international volunteering in Canada highlights the peace spreading intentions of Canadians who have wanted to offer their services overseas to less-than privileged communities, or to promote cross-cultural exchange that strengthens understanding between diversifying multicultural Canadian societies. As the history of international volunteering evolves, the involvement of multiple beneficiaries and actors complicates the infrastructure of volunteer sending organizations, and the experiences of those who participate in these organizations. Academic research on exploring the outcomes of international volunteering for volunteers remains relatively new. Little is known about the actual impacts of volunteering, and the lack of understanding continues as research struggles to catch up with the rapid expansion of diverse programs and organizations (Grusky, 2000; Lewis, 2006; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insight into how international youth volunteering is subject to a variety of institutional complexities that are rarely explored. While the majority of research focuses on international youth volunteering as an individual act, this chapter provides a platform for re-examining institutional structures and practices in IVS. I incorporate and interweave existing IVS literature with the experiences of the Canadian youth participants from Chapter 2, with a reminder that “for Institutional Ethnography (IE), the social as the focus for study is to be located in how people’s activities or practices are coordinated” (Smith, 2005, p. 59, italics in original). Furthermore, I extract how people’s everyday knowledge
intersects with institutional processes, and after examining the actualities of people’s versus institutional realities (i.e., the disjuncture), the reader will be able to contextualize the youth volunteers and field staff’s experiences with the institutional relations that pervade international volunteering.

**The Invisible Knapsack**

“I think I have not yet felt the full impact of what I have learned; that will be distributed over the span of my readjustment back in Canada. I think the fact that the experience continues to impact me in a long term way is a valuable gift in itself” (Ngo, personal communication, 2007). My span of years with international volunteering has undoubtedly been a part of my personal, intellectual and social transformation. I discovered my confidence as an individual, and learned how to harness my strengths and weaknesses by adapting to and problem solving around different environments, cultures and people. I learned how to be more critical with international development and gained skills in working cross-culturally and in local capacity building. I have become more environmentally and socially aware around social injustices abroad and in my own country because of volunteering. The reflections after my volunteer service have been invaluable to understanding what I had learned. As an echo to the email I had sent my family and friends in 2007, the volunteers I have stayed in touch with after programs have had positive effects on a personal level; this individual growth is notable for most people that take part in IVS.

Consistent with existing literature, Grusky (2000), Lewis (2006), Lewis and Niesenbaum (2005), Lough et al. (2009), and Raymond and Hall (2008) have found the overall outcomes for volunteers have the potential to contain many teachable moments, and have benefits that include language enhancement, transformative learning, building contacts between individuals and communities, developing cross-cultural understanding and working across difference. Other pro
arguments for volunteering overseas include travel, and being able to reduce conflict and ‘reconciliation tourism’, which gives an opportunity to former colonizing country participants to rectify damage (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Lough et al. (2009) conducted a survey with 680 randomly selected alumni from two volunteer sending organizations with different IVS models, and they found that even though the organizations had different goals, the outcomes for volunteers were similar. Outcomes for volunteers included a positive effect on the volunteers’ cross-cultural understanding and career direction, and the volunteers’ belief that they had a good impact on the host organization and communities (Lough et al., 2009). Seventy-five percent of the study’s respondents “claimed that their cross-cultural encounter was a transformational experience” (Lough et al., 2009, p. 33). Also, the interactions with other volunteers can be invaluable:

I think the opportunity to socialize with co-volunteers cannot be underestimated. We all went in there to do work and stuff, but in terms of what I took away, I think the informal conversations and the informal friendships were far more valuable than informing the working relationship. (Volunteer 1)

However, Volunteer 1’s response on what he learned in his overseas experience leads to concerns around impacts on the local community. I look back at myself as a volunteer, and I wonder what my footprints were on local communities. As a field staff for an organization that sends young people abroad, I witness countless thoughtless acts by volunteers that negatively impact what should be the gains of community development. The question I keep wondering, and that a few alumni whom I have interacted with, and who have had many years away from their first volunteering service have asked, is: how has the local community benefited, and what happened to the project carried out by volunteers? In my personal experience, the answer to those questions often remains a mystery. For example, after my long-term internship in
Bangladesh, I entered back into my Canadian life. The personal relationships I formed with community members remained strong for the short-term, “the relationships I have formed here have been intense ones. Perhaps they are not long lasting in the Western world, but they have certainly implanted themselves into my memory. During a time that I have gone through immense internal changes, there have been people I have been on this ride with all along the way” (Ngo, personal communication, 2007). However, five years after I wrote that entry I have lost touch with most of the locals I became friends with. I also have no idea how the capacity building project that myself and another intern started in Bangladesh is doing. These questions around sustainability of projects and long-term community benefits have repeated themselves through my volunteering services – from when I was an independent volunteer in Vietnam, to when I was an intern in Bangladesh, to being a participant with an organized group in Ghana. In addition, if youth volunteers are a form of development work, then they may be unknowingly carrying out ignorance and harms on the local community through their inexperience or lack of knowledge. More specifically, I am reflecting on the issues of power and privilege Western volunteers have reinforced in host communities around national self-esteem. For example, when I was a volunteer in a Vietnamese orphanage, I had insight into the inferior complex Vietnamese locals had with the ‘superiority’ of Western volunteers; as an intern in Bangladesh, the local staff I worked with often referred to themselves as a ‘poor people’ in comparison to Westerners. Western volunteers, who are unaware of the damage caused by colonization on a people’s national identity, have the potential in reinforcing old wounds of colonization, instead of healing them.

Although there is research that provides an optimistic view of voluntourism programs (VTPs), more specifically that these programs assist in developing cross-cultural understanding,
VTPs can lead to misunderstandings and reinforcement of stereotypes. Research indicates that cross-cultural understanding is not always a natural consequence of VTPs, but needs to be a purposeful pedagogy (Raymond & Hall, 2008). For example, though some volunteers in Lough et al.’s (2009) research reported on language as a barrier, cultural misunderstandings and power differences between volunteers and local staff, most of the volunteers surveyed believed their services were desired and that their presence did not cause problems in the communities. In addition, 25% of volunteers believed that a local staff member could have offered the services if volunteers had not been present, but only 11% believed a local staff could have done it effectively (Lough et al., 2009). The finding that only 11% of volunteers believed a local staff could have offered the same skills leads to concerns around the power and privileges produced by volunteering.

**Volunteering as International Development**

Volunteering has been seen as a form of international development work since the United Nations emerged as an organization post-World War II (Lewis, 2006). However, IVS in Europe can be located back to the changing role of church and state and the activities of charitable societies; notably, IVS was also part of missionary service during the colonial period (Lewis, 2006). The term “development” appeared only after World War II and since then has taken on several meanings that remain debated today (Lewis, 2006). Part of international development means building capacity for vulnerable populations. For Eade (2007), building capacity means enabling the marginalized to represent and defend themselves. Eade (2007) argues, however, that NGOs are about retaining their own power and that capacity building has become a buzzword in the development field; Eade states the word ‘building capacity’ is now used for a “neo-liberal … kind of economic and political agenda” (2007, p. 632). While partnership refers to building
opportunity between local organizations and communities, encouraging co-development is often more difficult because of the multiple actors in the international arena that include government and funders. As a result, partnerships can sometimes be based on one-way transfers and have only one-way accountability (Eade, 2007), as NGOs struggle to stay afloat and become more knowledgeable about business-rights than human-rights. Volunteer 2 reflects the challenges around co-partnership when she describes the local partner’s involvement in planning the activities that were carried out by volunteers on the ground:

The counterpart? You mean our partner organization? I don’t think that they were involved at all … in terms of what we wanted to develop I don’t think they had any say at all.

There is a disjuncture between the field staff’s perception of integrating partners and the field staff:

My partner organizational counterparts are viewed as equals, offering local knowledge and a different skills set than my own. My two key to-go guys within the organization’s local partners were as skilled as anyone I have worked with. (Field Staff 1).

Even if cooperation happened at a higher level and behind closed doors (in this case between program manager and local organization), there remains an important gap in the program, as volunteers do not have the chance to practice how to work in partnership.

Positively, international volunteering can promote international understanding, solidarity, and global responsibility and can be “an arena of development activity … because it potentially humanizes what is often left as a technical or managerial process” (Lewis, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, volunteers can potentially “bridge the gap between the professionalized world of development
experts and organizations and the ‘non-specialized publics’ who engage with the ideas and practices of development” (Lewis, 2006, p. 3). However, in conjunction with the complexity and debate that surrounds the term development, international volunteering as a definition also varies and becomes privy to the same scrutiny as the term development. What can be said is that as understandings and practices change, and idioms such as developed and less developed, as well as the shifting relations between North and South are contested, there is a growing recognition that international volunteering is imbued with complications, and media and academics have started to backlash against voluntourism (Lewis, 2006).

As more stakeholders become involved in the international volunteering business, institutionally more difficulties develop. IVS veers away from its “good Samaritan” intentions, and becomes more politicized and imbued with expectations from the private and public sectors. The United States currently uses the term international service or international development education, while the United Kingdom uses international voluntary services (IVS). Volunteering has changed drastically over the last few decades, where volunteers were once fresh out of school volunteers; whereas now volunteering also attracts highly professionalized, older volunteers (VSO, 2009) in short-term and long-term volunteer placements. Short-term volunteering projects (STV) range from two weeks to six months, while long-term volunteering projects (LTV) are six months to a number of years (VSO, 2009). As volunteerism becomes a more recognized institution (Simpson, 2004), a new form of voluntourism programs (VTP) that includes volunteering combined with tourism has sprung up (Lewis, 2006, Raymond & Hall, 2008; Simpson, 2004).

Voluntourism is figuratively the fast-food version of more traditional long-term volunteering. Sin (2009) defines voluntourism as a form of tourism where the tourists volunteer
in local communities as part of travel. Lewis (2006) states, “volunteer-tourism may privilege the needs and desires of the server over the served, and act as a powerful and influential framing mechanism for the social construction of ideas about development, poverty and the ‘third world’” (p. 8). The rise of voluntourism aimed at young volunteers means organizations engage in a selection process with lowered expectations as they try to reach a higher number of volunteers; this can also imply the recruitment of more inexperienced and ignorant participants, which I described as challenge in managing my volunteer program:

> I had a lot of faith in the participants in terms of their learning – probably because I thought they’d be like me when I was a volunteer (keen, passionate, observant). However, I realized that is a small percentage of my volunteers. I thought I could start at step 5 with them (anti-oppression, critical thinking, etc.) but actually they are quite “babies” in the sense of intercultural learning. (Ngo, Personal Journal, 2010)

The next section outlines the role and impact of volunteers with more depth, as well as explores the benefits and consequences of short-term volunteering (STV), long-term volunteering (LTV) and voluntourism (VTP) programs and how this can affect the local communities and best practices of organizational pedagogy.

**To Volunteer or Not to Volunteer**

The goal of international service learning, or what the program is trying to accomplish is an important component (Grusky 2000; Raymond & Hall, 2008), as it sets a backdrop for the organizational pedagogy and the practices used to recruit volunteers. Without an appropriate goal to reduce power and privilege, inequities remain more pronounced than ever (Lewis, 2006). International development education programs can easily “become small theatres that recreate
historic cultural misunderstandings and simplistic stereotypes” (Grusky, 2000, p. 858), or “privilege the needs and desires of the server over the served, and act as a powerful and influential framing mechanism for the social construction of ideas about development, poverty and the ‘third world’” (Lewis, 2006, p. 8), as well as exacerbate already existing North – South economic disparities. Simpson (2004) studies the United Kingdom gap year, and how the phenomenon of voluntourism has emerged as a professionally recognized institution. Simpson (2004) explores what young people learn about the ‘other’ while doing this type of program, and criticizes STV programs that take place in the third world. Simpson argues that gap year produces one face of public development and reproduces notions of other and third world, as well as “perpetuates a simplistic ideal of development. This ideal in turn legitimizes the validity of young unskilled international labour as a development ‘solution’” (Simpson, 2004, p. 682). She continues to determine that the gap year reinforces the ‘mythology’ of development, and encourages travel that enhances individual and not collective advancement. Overall, the gap year experience lacks pedagogy for social justice (Simpson 2004).

In the interviews I conducted, the analytical approach of IE offered clues to how organized processes shape people’s experiences around power and privilege, as “people’s knowledge and actions are already organized before they talk about them” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 78). Interestingly, all the participants regardless of their age and education described an institutional experience, even though some of them lacked the institutional vocabulary:

Well, when we first arrived to Ghana we had a coordinator. And I remember that everything is based on this results-based management where it is a very objectively defined document where x amount of money has to give x amount of outcomes. So, we had to make sure that the indicators were met in terms of participation groups. And then in terms of content, the objectives for the content I
think that we sort of through research had to identify what we thought were the most important needs for a basic training course. (Volunteer 3).

Volunteer 3’s illustration of how volunteers knew what goals to accomplish demonstrate an experience guided by a regulatory frame as defined by an institutional process.

I also found that there was an absence of a consistently critical, anti-oppressive approach in the programs. For example, Volunteers 4 and 5 communicated that they had learned tolerance and respect, which demonstrated their program had taught them multicultural educational values, whereas Volunteers 1, 2 and 3 learned to question the role of volunteering in development:

I had a really good time, but I think both my volunteer experiences have really – given that I want to continue in the development field – I think both of the experiences has made me question whether the volunteer overseas experience is better for us as Canadians or the actual people we are trying to help? (Volunteer 2).

Um, yeah and also just the ability to work in a cross-cultural context. The work with people that don’t necessarily have the same values as you but still able to respect each other and work together … it’s a different way of operating that doesn’t make it any better or worse, it just makes it different. (Volunteer 5).

The educational approach of an international volunteering program, therefore, can facilitate important reflection and learning on equity issues for volunteers. In addition, field staff mentioned the burden of certain volunteers, and emphasized that the kind of young people who are recruited are equally critical. Individuals who want to learn and adapt to a foreign country are more likely to succeed than those with unrealistic expectations. If youth sending organizations are increasingly working in a development framework while using a volunteer model, then
organizational practices need to adjust to select volunteers who are not prepared to do development.

The benefits of STV and LTV placements are a simple one for the individual, as time is the largest factor:

Well, I heard about the project when I was in Ghana on the first project I did with [volunteer organization] … I wanted the month off of work. So I applied to that one because it was a shorter one than the one I did, because it was less of a commitment. That’s how I chose it. (Volunteer 2)

Long-term volunteers acknowledge they get more than they give, while short-term volunteers believe they have positive impacts (Roberts, 2004). However, it was found the length of time (weeks or months) became key to how volunteers formed connections with local people (Raymond & Hall, 2008). The ethical dilemma of STV programs such as gap years or VTP is that developing countries become training grounds for Western volunteers (Roberts, 2004).

The incongruity around the positives and negatives around international volunteering leads to open questions around the impact on host communities and practices of organizations. There are currently less research findings available on outcomes for organizations and host communities, sustainable development and equitable partnerships (Grusky, 2000; Lough et al., 2009). According to Grusky (2004), the potential of IVS is precisely at this juncture “where experience meets study, critical analysis, and reflection” (p. 861). The transformational impacts on a young person due to these programs cannot be denied, and their desire to serve and change society should not be dismissed. If organizations could harness a volunteer’s discomfort and help bring “bring them to a clearer understanding of the fundamental necessity for profound social change” (Grusky, 2004, p. 866), then IVS could be a powerful tool for cross-cultural
understanding and reduction in North-South disparities. Ideally organizations need to research how their programs can become more sustainable for host communities and educate their volunteers on issues of inequity. Overall, organizations have been found to rely heavily on chance to produce citizens who can critically assess institutional structures (Grusky, 2000), and lack a commitment to integrating anti-racist methods into their development work.

**Assessing Program Structure**

Academia and media recognize that “certain types of VTPs may represent a form of neo-colonialism or imperialism, in which volunteer tourists inadvertently reinforce the power inequalities between developed and developing countries” (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 531). While the majority of the literature emphasizes the positive and negative effects of international volunteering for the individual, more exploration on volunteering as an institution is required. Since one of the factors for conflict in IVS includes multiple and conflicting goals of the actors involved (e.g., sponsors and community partners) (Grusky, 2000), research could focus more on the best practices used by volunteer sending organizations, aid recipients and host communities. A social-justice pedagogy becomes equally as important to consider as agencies set roles for successful partnerships between host communities (Roberts, 2004), and play a role in facilitating preparation and analysis for volunteers prior, during and post program (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Research conducted by Raymond and Hall (2008) sought to look at the roles organizations play in developing international understanding through VTPs. Practices that volunteer-sending organizations needed to be more aware of included: being conscious of the skill sets of their volunteers and the type of work volunteers would be doing; making sure to develop programs with local people; giving the opportunity for volunteers and community members to interact; and having volunteers work alongside locals. Organizations could also be more deliberate in the
contact with the ‘Other,’ as it could not be assumed that interaction meant a development of
cross-cultural understanding for volunteers; in some cases interaction without proper analysis
could reinforce volunteers’ stereotypes as they could mistake their experience as authority.
Overall, cross-cultural understanding was not found to be a natural occurrence of VTPs,
therefore organizations have an important role to play in the volunteers’ analysis of their
experience.

Improving organizational pedagogy is not a simple task; criticisms include the
organizations’ “proximity to wider political and policy processes” (Lewis, 2006, p. 7). One
interviewee shares how her organization’s practices for providing pre-orientation to volunteers
became limited due to funding:

The organization did offer Canadian-based, in person training to volunteers but
phased this out due to costs. Instead, volunteers complete a series of online
modules to prepare them for their experience. (Field Staff 1)

Agencies have also been criticized for their reliance on the production of Othering to appeal to
young volunteers (Simpson, 2004), and inadvertently perpetuating the construction of the ‘Other’
through careless programs that require large numbers of volunteers to demonstrate their
organizational impact through statistics (Sin, 2009). Also, the challenges of combating the
negative effects of international volunteering remain difficult because the individual’s
motivations are so diverse. Motivations range from self-development, altruism, adventure
tourism, or being part of a team (Sin, 2009). The paradoxes in voluntourism include the
individual’s resistance to learning (Sin, 2009). Moreover, tensions to perform are exacerbated as
organizations have multiple actors and beneficiaries to satisfy, and are pressured to work in a
development framework while using a volunteer model.
Regulatory Frames

The youth volunteers as well as the field staff were subject to regulatory frames, or the wide varieties of conceptualizations, theories, policies, laws, plans, and so on ... “frames, established from positions of power in the institutional regime, control facticity; they control and are specified as the categories and concepts that come into play at the front line of building institutional realities.” (Smith, 2005, p. 191)

The field staff and some of the youth volunteers’ descriptions of their experiences seemed to cause discomfort as their actual realities differed with the institutional realities. Smith (2005) indicates this as the disjuncture. She claims that “disjunctures between artificial realities of institutions and the actualities that people live are not avoidable ... in that process there is a transfer of agency from caller to institution that is integral to how the institution assumes the capacity to act” (Smith, 2005, p. 187). In other words, disjunctures serve as crucial points of entry to examine how institutional processes are at play in people’s everyday experience. For example, the disjuncture (i.e., the ability to provide insightful answers on issues of power and privilege in development) that existed between the older group of youth volunteers and the younger ones seemed relational to age. However, as I looked deeper into the data, I found that both sets of youth volunteers had challenges with team dynamics and individuals in the group who manifested power and privilege. I realized that the type of program the youth volunteers participated in, as well as how organizations advertised the programs seemed to be the distinct difference in the type of youth that the program attracted. The STV program that had older volunteers had been advertised as a development project for professional youth, while the other STV program had been marketed as a cross-cultural learning program for youth between the ages of 18 to 24. Though both programs worked within a development framework, and had volunteers
who reproduced power and privilege, one program wanted significantly older youth who had life experience and professional exposure to development while the other did not require youth who had worked.

The organizations’ website and brochures are examples of regulatory frames, or coordinating texts that affected my participants. Most of my participants relied on researching their organization through word-of-mouth or the website, so organizations need to re-assess their public message, methods of orientation and preparation. In reference to public image, young people with no knowledge of international issues can learn about how an organization carries out development through the website or at orientation. Field Staff 1 indicated in her interview that individuals who performed negatively in a program were those with unrealistic expectations. If volunteers do not understand how a volunteer program operates, how development works, and how projects can impact communities, it is difficult for them to have realistic expectations. For example, one field staff shared her frustration around participant recruitment:

All in all, there is only so much a volunteer will listen to before they enter the host country. Much is dependent on the individual partaking in the experience, which is why the screening process of volunteers should ensure that participants are culturally ready with realistic expectations PRIOR to the organization accepting them on project. (Field Staff 1)

Her response also demonstrates how layers of institutional power affect different levels. For the program manager, the priority is to recruit individuals to fulfill the organization’s funding requirements and this pressure might impact the screening process. As field staff, the recruitment influences their ability to produce successful results with project partners and volunteers. While on a daily basis, the volunteer may feel obstacles in cultural adaptation, maintaining physical and mental health, as well as an ability to feel useful. As international volunteering rapidly expands,
the pressures from the competition of volunteer sending organizations also mounts. Agencies have responded to the globalization of IVS by marketing an image of the global citizen; this response has also been influenced by the beneficiaries involved in the volunteering industry. The infrastructure of volunteering still encompasses a regulatory frame of volunteering as good intentions, at the same time that it has been pressured to move towards a development frame from its funding agencies. In an innocent quest to be the “good Samaritan”, people unknowingly find their experiences constrained by an institutional system. The ruling relations that coordinate Canadian youth volunteers’ lives remains complex as the institution expands. For example, Lewis (2006) finds the foreign policy objectives of Peace Corp influences the goals of those who become volunteers. Volunteering has become an industry where institutions shape volunteers’ learning and choices through the way in which information is communicated.

**Language as Coordinating**

Kate Simpson (2004), a researcher on the impacts of international volunteering states,

> By avoiding the language of “development” many organizations may be trying to avoid the questioning of such an agenda. However, whether the language of development is used or not, the agenda is there, thinly disguised in notions of “disadvantaged communities”. (p. 684)

Without using the term development, organizations are able to attract a variety of young people to their programs. This also has negative effects on the host communities, when volunteers who perpetuate power and privilege are allowed, or are ill prepared to engage, in a project.

When it comes to practices in the British gap year, Simpson (2004) found that the experience lacks pedagogy for social justice. As Simpson reveals in her case study, a British youth volunteer speaks about her experience as authority:
More interesting however is the basis upon which she asserts that people ‘don’t mind’ not having televisions. Without discussing this with local people, and there was no evidence that she had, she is left merely asserting the assumptions she arrived in Peru with, only now with the added authority of ‘experience’. The limited critical engagement within gap year projects means that students are able to confirm, rather than challenge, that which they already know. Hence the rhetoric of ‘poor-but-happy’ can be turned into an experience of ‘poor-but-happy’, presenting few questions about the nature of, or reasons for, poverty. This in turn allows material inequality to be excused, and even justified, on the bases that ‘it doesn’t bother them” (Simpson, 2004, p. 688).

When it comes to Canadian youth-sending organizational practices, clarification is required around the educational outcomes of each program. The approach of the cross-cultural model to achieve a development outcome creates a dilemma for volunteers on how to engage host communities in a capacity building manner, how to incorporate partnering organizations’ voices, and how to avoid contributing to a system that reproduces colonization. The division between the program framework design and some of the participants’ discomfiting experiences with power and privilege challenges the social justice pedagogy of the organization.

Westheimer (2008) argues that Canadian schools churn out personally responsible citizens while participatory democracy requires social justice oriented ones. In other words active citizenship is a buzzword because in actuality governments want passive citizens (Westheimer, 2008). Westheimer (2008) asks, “What would be different about teaching and learning in Canadian schools than in the schools of a country governed by a one-ruling party dictatorship?” (p. 6). If program outcomes actually focus on teaching multicultural values of respect and tolerance, and issues of power and privilege are informally learned through peer relationships, then organizational practices remain problematic. Ideally, organizations need to commit to equity and aim for the social justice oriented citizen, instead of depending on happenstance that such volunteers will be produced.
Different actors (e.g., media, NGOs) influence the public development image of organizations. Organizations have been assessed by academics like Simpson (2004) as exploiting industrializing countries. Simpson (2004) writes that

the notion of the ‘third world’ is highly important … Indeed, the very legitimacy of such programmes is rooted in a concept of a ‘third world’, where there is ‘need’, and where European young people have the ability, and right, to meet this need. (p. 682)

Whereas there is no actual language pertaining to development a language of *making a difference, doing something worthwhile* or *contributing to the future of others*, dominates (Simpson 2004). This use of language (or absence of) indicates the presence of complex ruling relations in the international volunteering field, as activist George Smith writes, “in every instance, language was social organization” (Smith, 1990, p. 66).

When it comes to regulatory frames, good intentions are used to market the recruitment of youth, as opposed to specific objectives and theory of development. The marketing strategy means that young people with very little knowledge of development are engaged to carry out development activities. Parallel to the equity issues of power and privilege that pervade international development, the concept of poverty becomes marketable and something adventurous for the volunteers to encounter. Poverty is ‘out there’ and there is emphasis on the differences instead of the commonalities between develop and developing countries (Simpson 2004). Change is seen as based outside of local communities (volunteers are the change). In other words, the volunteers are perceived as the only agents of development (active participation becomes the individual and not the community), whereas organizations need to champion the communities as opposed to the usefulness of volunteers (Simpson 2004). In order for capacity building and sustainability to occur for host communities, it is arguable that volunteers need to
offer higher levels of skills. The contributions of unskilled volunteers remains debatable when there are levels of skills required for the usefulness of international service. How organizations present their message portray their approach to development, which remains rooted in colonialism when only the volunteer benefits and gains status, authority and social/professional standing (Lewis 2006).

Interestingly, Canadian volunteer-sending organizations have mission statements and values that use similar language as their funding agencies. Canadian Crossroads International (CCI), CUSO-VSO and Canada World Youth (CWY) use ‘active’ or ‘global citizenship’. While other organizations such as Youth Challenge International (YCI), and World University Service of Canada (WUSC) do not use ‘global citizenship’, they use variances of it. For example, WUSC’s values include an aim to “foster human development and global understanding through education and training” (World University Service of Canada, 2007); YCI encourages ‘active participation’ as a way for youth to create positive change in their communities. However, it remains ambiguous by what ‘partnership’ means and who will be changing ‘their communities’. One common message that all of the organizations envision are individuals who can “change the world”. Similar to Simpson’s findings (2004), the organizations in my study draw upon the language of the individual’s ability to affect change through his/her own actions. Again, from an international development perspective, there are inherent issues around power and privilege that are not spoken about in these mission statements and values. The organizations present a simplified message for a set of complex development issues.

Today there are also more youth organizations, such as Free the Children (FTC), that promotes changing the world with ‘global citizenship’, while depicting photographs of the White volunteer with African children. Organizations use phrases such as “educating for global
citizenship” without defining the implications of it. For example, the main marketing strategy of FTC seems to tap into the guilt of young people in their quest to become inspired as youth leader by victimizing locals from developing countries. Organizations may be educating for global citizenship, but I question on whose terms is global citizenship being defined.

The Global Citizen: Furthering Our Understanding of Regulatory Frames

With the increasing enthusiasm for global education in classrooms, “the question for education is how to come to grips with the changing nature of citizenship in a globalizing world” (Davies & Reid, 2004, p. 72). As the most recent form of citizenship education have been influenced by international developments, and has its own origin and focus, there is an overlap with both types of education (Davies & Reid, 2005). However, when global education is examined in conjunction with citizenship education, these two types of education possess conflicting ideologies. Citizenship education emphasizes community participation or classroom reflection and concentrates on the nation state, while global education sees global interconnectedness and goes beyond the nation state (Davies & Reid, 2005). Since the 1980s, global education has become more supported in Canada (Mundy 2007), and has been integrated alongside the teaching of citizenship education. Yet, academics recognize that citizenship and global education have different origins, and there is a need to form a hybrid of a new global education (Davies & Reid, 2005; Desforges, 2004). The notion of global citizenship emerged from global education; it has been a term widely used by education and political actors, and can be seen as the emphasis of the individual participating in political institutional processes at global levels (Desforges 2004).

The term “global citizenship” contains “vastly different understandings of what global citizenship entails” (Schultz, 2007, p. 249). While global citizenship education has become an
important component of the state and educational agenda in preparation of its citizens for the
global economy, “the very tensions that have defined theories of citizenship that respond to
cultural diversity within nations continue to emerge along with new issues within a discourse of
globalization” (Pashby, 2008, p. 7). Global citizenship should not be confined to a specific,
simplistic notion as there are a variety of models and it is more than “international do-goodery”
(Davies & Reid, 2005, p. 72). Desforges (2004) argues that contemporary citizenship has
changed in the face of globalization, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs)
are now playing a role in offering their version of global citizenship. The increase of INGOs and
their interconnectedness means the nation state still exists in building citizenship. However
INGOs are more influential because aid and development are being delivered by INGOs, and the
state’s perspective is that INGOs offer “participatory democracy” appropriate to the changing
face of citizenship education for young people.

As public engagement becomes a higher focus for INGOs because of public funding,
global citizenship becomes a more well-known term in classrooms. As an institution, the INGOs
formulate the global citizenship agenda, while “the role of the public in organizations is therefore
structured by the institutional and financial imperatives of core funding and core funding ratios”
(Desforges, 2004, p. 560). For example, Desforges (2004) focuses on British INGOs such as
Oxfam and how they form relationships with the public and how INGOs are mediators in the
formation of global citizenship; however they are limited by their own institutional imperatives.
Desforges (2004) argues that we are in a state of “post-citizenship” where individuals perceive
themselves as more than the nation-state and operating at a global scale, and therefore “global
citizenship is … a form and scale of citizenship which could be characterized as in formation and
open to contestation” (p. 553).
If volunteer-sending organizations want to engage young Canadians in sustainable and equitable programs and achieve the programs’ full potential, there needs to be a continuous evaluation of whose position is global citizenship adopting, as well as “substantial discussions on democracy and active citizenship” (Sin, 2009, p. 496). In the meantime, there still remain questions on how to integrate the citizenship and global citizenship agenda, and whether global citizenship is just another form of imperialism over the Global South.

**Chapter Summary**

The history of IVS in Canada dates back to WWII. International volunteering emerged as a form of development and became mainstream in order to develop messages of cross-cultural peace and understanding. As Canada’s reputation as an international peacekeeper grew, the Canadian International Development Agency emerged in the 1960s to provide foreign aid. Jacques Hebert, a close friend of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, established the first government-funded organization to send youth volunteers abroad in 1971. With the emergence of global education in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the organizations and funding agencies sending youth abroad began to adopt the term global citizenship. Hebert’s organization was inspired from Trudeau’s ideals on an emerging dialogue on multiculturalism. Other similar organizations increased in the next few decades, and ranged from short-term to long-term to voluntourism programs. Anti-racist activists criticize organizations influenced by the multicultural educational approach, as it demands the question of what type of citizen is being produced by these programs. According to the literature, STV, LTV and VTPs have a variety of institutional complexities. Firstly, if volunteering is development, then IVS is prone to similar, difficult issues that dominate development (i.e., co-development and equitable partnerships are multiple-ways because so many beneficiaries are involved). Moreover, the bulk of research findings on international
volunteering show that the positive effects concentrate on promoting cross-cultural understanding and working across difference; this is a problem if international development means building capacity for vulnerable populations. The actual outcomes of volunteering seem to conflict with the desired goals of development. In addition, the rapid expansion and types of volunteer programs exacerbates the power issues that already exist in international volunteering. For example, the capacity building of host communities is put at risk as organizations design more programs that aim to recruit a wider array of young people (i.e., STV and voluntourism). STVs and voluntourism, especially, lack a social justice pedagogy and can therefore reinforce stereotypes and reproduce issues of power and privilege left over from colonization. Organizational pedagogy and practices, therefore, remain important to combating the negative outcomes of volunteering, as programs can be crucial to a young person’s critical reflection on equity.

However, it is not simple for organizations to ensure a critical, social-justice based approach when they are competing against numerous other volunteering-sending groups for development results and funding. Moreover, volunteer sending organizations have adopted regulatory frames that have been influenced by every beneficiary except the populations they claim to be doing development for. This presents a danger of reproducing colonialism by ‘othering’ and rendering powerless the populations they claim to be empowering. Groups need to revise their equity framework, while young Canadians should be encouraged to research organizations before selecting one. Canadian youth volunteering abroad could become a better learning ground to address issues of power and privilege, if organizations and volunteers asked more critical questions around development and ‘global citizenship’, and on whose terms are we doing it for. Moreover, if volunteering is development then education and politics shape the way
the institution delivers its volunteer program. Therefore, young people who participate in these programs no longer have the luxury to think solely of themselves as benefactors of a program, as institutional relations and processes impact their daily experiences. The accountability to a variety of beneficiaries, specifically the local community and partners, has to become a crucial factor in the educational practices of an organization, its staff and its volunteers.
Chapter 4:  
Looking Forward:  
A Process Towards Transformation

The reality is that changes are coming … they must come. You must share in bringing them. (Hersey, 1946)

Lewis (2006) asks the question: “Can international volunteering produce ‘win-win’ outcomes in which both the sender and the receiver can benefit, and if so, in what measure?” (p. 9). This chapter moves towards the process of transformation by summarizing key findings and offering recommendations for Canadian youth and organizations involved in volunteering abroad.

**Rethinking Power and Privilege**

The supply of young Canadians volunteering abroad as part of their personal and professional development is large, and organizations that are sending youth have responded to this demand. It is not a realistic solution to stop volunteering abroad, so the question revolves around how to work to improve organizational practices. Volunteering has been criticized as imperialistic and colonialist, because volunteers for the North have the reputation of exercising power and privilege on communities in the South in negative ways. Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a reflexive-materialist method of inquiry exposes politico-administrative regimes, and serves as a ground for grassroots political activism that individuals and organizations can use to further their understanding of volunteering impacts. IE is a social analysis where the social is real and validates the volunteer’s experience as a vehicle to exploring institutional powers. IE begins with the volunteer’s experience and returns to it to explain how it came into being, so that young Canadians and organizations can move towards political consciousness.
My multiple standpoints and my interest in working with communities stem from an exposure to two socio-economic statuses and religions from my own upbringing. My problematic arose from the disjuncture experienced by young Canadian volunteers who have participated in short-term and long-term development projects. This thesis challenged my notions and assumptions that individuals were the sole exercisers of power and privilege. I realized that systemic racism and the reproduction of colonialism originate from a long-standing Canadian history of IVS. IVS is embedded in political, missionary and peace-building origins. As a result, government responded with programs for building peace in a growing multi-cultural society. Approaches to youth international volunteering have evolved, as Davies and Reid (2005) wrote, “the global context for approaches to the multiculturalism of the1970s was replaced by the anti-racist education of the 1980s which in turn now seems to be replaced by intercultural education” (p.77). The traditional volunteering model has become imbued with complications that pervade international development, as volunteer organizations are more pressured to produce development results without the delivery of a consistent anti-racist educational analysis in their programs.

Within the sector of international volunteering, there are many outstanding individuals who do not want to participate in the existing system of power and privilege, but grapple with dilemmas that are related to institutional processes. Regulatory frames and the many layers of power, such as results-based management frameworks, volunteer selection process and preparation have limited the capacity for organizations, its staff and volunteers to work in true partnership with local organizations. Organizational practices, therefore, are crucial to the ability of IVS to carry out effective partnership and community-based results that benefit the people. Mundy’s (2007) report illustrate the need for global education to be social justice-oriented, with
intentions to respect diversity, equity, active citizenship and critical thinking. Volunteer programs need to distinguish their objectives: is their focus and model a development or cross-cultural exchange, or both? This conflict needs to be resolved if volunteering is to be beneficial for the individual and the community it works with. The types of programs matter, specifically volunteer orientation and preparation, selection and educational approach of the project and its staff. In a study by Robins, Cornwall and Von Lieres (2008) the concept of ‘active citizenship’ has become controversial because of its normative convictions are garnered from institutions and not the everyday experiences of people. The term ‘global citizen’ has also become a buzzword and privileged object within citizenship education discourses (Robins et al., 2008). The normative values in citizenship are being further disputed by the complexity of new and alternative identities, or “multiple and over-lapping loyalties” (Pashby, 2008, p. 2). Inclusion within citizenship becomes complicated when those excluded of its definition begin to struggle against traditional norms. The win-win situation can only occur when transformation takes into account the needs of the individual, and more ultimately the local community those volunteers serve. As a field staff, I reflected on how organizations could promote better practices of equity in community development:

I realized that volunteers, host families and myself and my counterpart have to get used to the program’s culture before even beginning everything else … To continue once everyone is aware of program culture the next step is teaching basic communication skills because many of them [youth] lack those. On the program they have to learn how to resolve conflicts, compromise, be direct and assertive and all of this is done cross and inter-culturally. There are so many layers to unpack throughout the program … both sides are learning how to work with one another. Power and privilege is dangerous to apply too early on because it takes away responsibility from overseas volunteers. We have to be careful not to paint any one side as the victim, while still extracting very real power and privilege
issues. I think as a Canadian it’s easy to carry around the ‘African as Other and victim’ complex. It’s quite dangerous, especially in a bilateral exchange when volunteers should be learning how to equalize the value of themselves. Giving African and Canadian youth self worth is key – and deconstructing the South versus North complex … how do we go about achieving that goal [Canadian youth learning how to create more space for their Southern counterparts] without perpetuating stereotypes and issues of power and privilege? … I guess it means a step-by-step approach … all within the context of the program’s structure. (Ngo, Personal Journal, 2010).

I have begun to rethink that the traditional ways of educating people on anti-oppression, or more specifically power and privilege can dangerously reinforce the Other as victim. If programs adopt an understanding of power and privilege into their educational approach, there needs to be sensitivity around the delivery and divulgence of how people are educated on power and privilege. The lens of anti-colonialism is necessary. However, as a woman of colour, I feel strongly there has to be an empowering piece integrated into the education as well, where power is multi-faceted and is exercised by multiple actors. In my experience, the effects of colonization have manifested itself into many forms of power, which includes the power that ‘victims’ have learned to manipulate in their own favour upon the oppressor. At present, the onus is placed directly on the individual to recognize their own privilege, while systems of colonization and oppression are left out. The lens of power and privilege initially boxed my own research into a confined space because I perceived power as one-dimensional and exercised by the oppressor upon the oppressed. This lens left me focused on the youth volunteers while the institutional processes escaped me. IVS is a sector that cannot be examined as a single entity; other systems, such as education and politics, interact with this wheel as well. In the next section, I propose two
theoretical frameworks that organizations can apply to their programs to ensure equity is implemented for the communities it serves.

Proposing Theoretical Frameworks

Active Citizenship: Justice Oriented Citizens

Historically, the idea of citizenship in Canada “was based on the concept of membership in a homogeneous cultural group, and focused on duties pertaining to the well-being of that group” (Government of Canada, 1993). Today, citizenship has become complicated due to citizenship education emerging from traditionalist, progressive, advanced and critical democracy approaches. Over the last few decades, democracy and citizenship have evolved as theorists and educators argue on which concept of citizenship is best in promoting an effective democratic society. Contemporary citizenship education in Canada exists to promote civil, political and social rights. Schugurensky (2003) acknowledges that citizenship education can be used for the purpose of maintaining the status quo; however, it can also be a tool for empowering individuals and groups to struggle for emancipatory change.

Canadian institutions such as schools, not-for-profit organizations, and government have borrowed the idiom “active citizen” from citizenship education, and the term has interweaved itself into Canada’s multicultural growth. Active citizenship focuses on the “individual and collective capacity to influence change” (Schugurensky, 2003, p.78). The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) defines active citizenship as “citizen activism … not against the state … [but] for a strong state and for deepening democratic governance … the new democracy is about the participation of citizens” (1999, p. iii). Schugurensky proposes that citizenship education should move from passive to active citizenship to revitalize democratic, public life (2003, 2006). According to Schugurensky (2003), “the development of informed citizens is a
necessary but insufficient condition for the development of democratic societies. Citizenship education should nurture well-informed citizens who are also caring, responsible and engaged, and have critical thinking skills” (p. 3). However, active citizenship and participation is susceptible to being influenced by a normative, predominantly white, middle-class stance, and active citizen is loosely used without definition. Active citizens are still defined by the hegemonic majority, and participation continues to be controlled by the middle class. There is an assumption of a one-dimensional national identity within citizenship that causes difficulties for state and school agenda (Pashby, 2008). As new social movements in Canada that include women’s movements, gay rights movements, and Indigenous movements diverge from the normalized version of citizen (Pashby, 2008), there is an increasing need to critically analyze programs which promote “active, global citizenship”.

For the purposes of this study, I will draw upon Westheimer and Kahne’s framework on citizenship as a method to address the complex interplay of power relations that puts into question what kind of citizen is being promoted in organizations that send Canadian youth volunteers abroad. Westheimer and Kahne (2003) aim to order the varied perspectives around citizenship by posing the question: What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society? They take into account that teaching citizenship is always political and “the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy doesn’t reflect arbitrary choices or pedagogical limitations but rather political choices with political consequences” (p. 49).

Westheimer and Kahne (2003) believe that citizenship produced by education can fall into three (though not mutually exclusive) categories: responsible, participatory and justice-
oriented. Table 6 highlights the three types of citizens as described by Westheimer and Kahne (2003).
### Table 6
*Kahne and Westheimer’s Three Kinds of Citizens (2004)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Personally responsible citizen</th>
<th>Participatory citizen</th>
<th>Justice oriented citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts responsibly in his/her community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts</td>
<td>Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works and pays taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up an environment</td>
<td>Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obeys laws</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knows how government agencies work</td>
<td>Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycles, gives blood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core assumptions</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample action</td>
<td>Contributes food to a food drive</td>
<td>Helps to organize a food drive</td>
<td>Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ideal citizen for promoting effective democracies and active citizenship according to Schugurensky’s definition would be the justice-oriented citizen. The justice-oriented citizen is encouraged to “critically assess social, political, and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, p. 54). Social activists practice justice-oriented
citizenship through participation in their community while having the skills to critically analyze the roots causes of injustice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003). Westheimer and Kahne (2003) state that considering the politics that surround the different conceptions of citizenship, justice-oriented citizens allow us to have a choice in the society we create; this point is especially noteworthy, as I have dedicated my commitment to supporting equitable and sustainable community partnerships. The next section will describe how using an anti-racist discursive framework is compatible with the active citizenship framework that describes critical, justice-oriented citizens, as well as complementary towards IE as a method of inquiry.

**Anti-Racism Theory**

Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) active citizenship framework describes three types of citizens, with a focus on the kind of citizen who advances democratic societies and analyzes social injustices. I would like to propose Dei’s (1996) anti-racism practice and theory as a lens that active citizens can use to critically assess institutional injustices. If justice-oriented citizens believe that patterns of injustice occur in a society, and healthy democracies entail the full participation of active citizens to question and change established structures, anti-racism praxis is a lens that can be used by justice-oriented citizens to deconstruct institutional systems and ensure action against the patterns of injustice that reoccur in society. The antiracist framework reveals embedded racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism (Dei, 2009).

Theory around racism and education exploded in the 1980s as a response to multiculturalism education (McCaskell, 2005). Multicultural education skipped over racism issues in a way that could be digested in a non-threatening way to dominant Canadian groups (McCaskell, 2005), whereas
Anti-racist education, on the other hand, conceptualized the issue of racism not as a human failing, a misunderstanding, or a lack of awareness, but as a problem of ideology, of a worldview that categorized people on the basis of ‘race’ and justified and reinforced power imbalances between groups. (McCaskell, 2005, p. 74)

Anti-racist education emerged from struggles of minorities against colonialism and imperialism (McCaskell, 2005) and as a new critical lens for viewing and questioning the way the traditional methods of academia (Dei, 2009). Anti-racism differed from multicultural education because it went beyond cultural differences, viewed institutional racism as the inherent issue and criticized the status quo (McCaskell, 2005). Paulo Freire inspired anti-racist pedagogy in the 1970s and 1980s (McCaskell, 2005); however, similar to IE, the simplistic concept of Freire’s duality became replaced by Foucault’s notion of power in order to address the complexity of race relations between oppressor and oppressed, and among oppressed (McCaskell, 2005). In conjunction with IE, an antiracist framework sees institutional structures as vehicles for dominating values principles and traditions localized in everyday experience, and treats texts as a “complex narrative that relates how researcher and subject are socially and politically located, situated and positioned” (Dei, 2009, p. 249) as opposed to mirroring what is real; texts are activated and able to reveal ruling relations.

Dei (2009) defines anti-racism as an action oriented strategy to implement institutional change. It treats differences as socially constructed; this is compatible with IE as the method of inquiry offers a way to perceive and deconstruct institutional relations. Moreover, if active citizenship theory is the framework for citizen action, then antiracism is the framework to design strategic action. Anti-racist framework is “an interrogation of both structural barriers to, and social practices for, systemic change” (Dei, 2009, p.254); it acknowledges the reality of racism,
questions the marginalization of groups and challenges “valid knowledge”, as well as societal institutions.

According to Dei (2009), anti-racism also has an academic and political agenda “to problematize and deal with how schools function to reproduce white (patriarchal) dominance” (p. 250). This aspect is particularly useful because I can analyze organizations that send Canadian youth abroad and how power and privilege might be reproduced in community development through their organizational structure. My commitment to equitable community partnerships also aligns with anti-racism’s political agenda of social transformation and challenge of the status quo through political activism (Dei, 2009). Like anti-racism theory and practice, the aim of this study is to focus on the effects of the action rather than the intentionality (Dei, 2009). This thesis does not analyze power and privilege as individual actions; rather, they are treated as an intersecting, institutional wheel. Active citizenship and anti-racism have the ability to address racism at multiple points of entry.

Conclusion

Canadian youth volunteers have a lot to offer because of their passion and energetic enthusiasm, and before embarking on their adventures can do a lot of their own education to ensure they are engaging in ethical volunteering. To learn the true art of giving is a way young people can help to promote equitable partnerships. Tommy Akulukjuij, an Inuit youth who writes a blog on his personal observations of Souther Canadians, wisely wrote:

Volunteering is for people, I think, and especially in the south, that are to me, trying to win compassion points, if you will. And I might be making a generalization, but I'll take the risk, they are usually rich people that feel they need to "help" the community. I am not saying they should stop, but I think they help for the wrong reasons.
As for living up here, they just do it. It amazes me to hear it on the radio for people to say "pick up food from my place" and the do it for anyone because they have been told by their parents or grandparents to do so. People don't consider this volunteering but it is. It is helping people and people don't need organizations to be nice up here. (Akulukjuk, Blog, 2011)

This young man shows that without even traveling to another country, there is also a lot to learn within one’s backyard. As we learn how to live with others in a cross-cultural context, there is still a need to build cross-cultural peace within Canada. The focus on overseas exchanges could overshadow our youth’s ability to recognize the social injustices occurring within our own country. Overall, as youth return from the field, I would recommend that they continue to reflect on their experiences, not as a single truth, but as a small step towards it. In addition, I would recommend that they keep in mind the one-sidedness of their experiences, that numerous perspectives exist within the wheel:

As I grow older and get to live in more countries, the more I appreciate how much there is to learn … [however] a person who thinks they know all can never thrive – part of becoming wiser is learning that one does not know it all … much to learn from both sides, at all times. I hope I never forget that. I never want to be blinded by my own experience. (Ngo, Personal Journal, 2010).

As researchers, organizations, and young volunteers embark on the process to improving international voluntary services, we remember that there is no set formula, and “the only big answer is that there is no Big Answer” (Easterly, 2006, p. 382). The goal for ethical volunteering can only be reached if we maintain our vision for equitable partnerships, so it is the local people that hold the baton to their own emancipation. In volunteering, learning takes place mutually and
beneficially from both sides, with the idea that ultimately in an empowered community it is the “leaders and people … [who] create the guidelines of their action” (Freire, 2007, p. 181).
References


This Masters thesis begins with the problematic of the young, Canadian global citizen: How do Canadian youth volunteers who engage in short-term, secular international volunteer placements come to understand international development? This study brings together adult learning and international education with a specific look at volunteering abroad. The study is designed to explore power and privilege embedded in the social relations between young Canadian volunteers, their organizations and their counterparts. The study explores how young Canadian volunteers’ placement experiences may deepen their understanding of international development.

The following questions serve as guidelines: 1) How did you choose CWY/YCI as your international volunteer placement?; 2) How did you understand your relationship with your international host country prior to the project/placement?; 3) Did it change over time? How? 4) What were you responsible for in your project/placement?; 5) What were some of the challenges that you experienced while you were being placed?; 6) How did you, your organization and your counterpart address these challenges?; 7) What kinds of support might have been useful in helping you to address these challenges?

The study will involve face-to-face, phone or email interviews with 8 participants (6 youth participants and 2 supervisors). The interviews will be approximately one hour. The interviews will allow the participants to reflect on their experiences.

The study is strictly voluntary and anonymous unless the participant gives permission to use his/her name. Any identifiable information will be disguised to protect the identity of the participant. The participant is free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time up to and during the data analysis phase. The participant’s data will be stored, encrypted, and password protected on the researcher’s computer. Participants will receive a one-page summary of the research findings, and the completed thesis available via email upon request. If you have any questions, I can be contacted at:

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March 1, 2010
Appendix B

Canadian Youth Volunteering Abroad:
Rethinking Issues of Power and Privilege

Consent Form

I, _______________________, agree to participate in the study of “Canadian Youth Volunteering Abroad: Rethinking Issues of Power and Privilege.” I understand that I will be interviewed once at a mutually agreeable time according to my preference via face-to-face, phone or email. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate. I further understand that I can terminate the interview or withdraw from the study at any time during the data analysis process.

I understand that my experiences, responses and comments given will be anonymous unless I specify that you can use my name in connection to specific facts and instances. I further understand that my name and workplace will be kept anonymous unless I give you permission to do otherwise. **I understand that I have the right to not answer questions that I do not feel comfortable with.**

I understand that the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the tapes, transcripts and emails pertaining to this interview, and that these materials will be kept in storage at the researcher’s house in a locked cabinet. Electronic data will be stored in a password-protected computer and encrypted. I understand that these tapes and emails will be deleted three years after completion and dissemination of the thesis. **I understand that if I choose to withdraw, data will be destroyed immediately after my withdrawal.**

I understand that my participation is on a voluntary basis.

I understand that I will keep a copy of this form and I will receive a one-page summary of the research findings upon the completion of the thesis.

Signature: _________________________ Date: _________________

For questions please contact:
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March 1, 2010
Appendix C
Interview Guide

N.B. Make sure that participants tell me what they actually did and how things worked on the ground (as opposed to only feelings and perceptions).

Questions for volunteers:

1. How did you choose CWY/YCI as your international volunteer placement?

2. How did you understand your relationship with your international host country prior to the project/placement?

3. Did it change over time? How?

4. What were you responsible for in your project/placement?

5. What were some of the challenges that you experienced while you were being placed?

6. How did you, your organization and your counterpart address these challenges?

7. What kinds of support might have been useful in helping you to address these challenges?

Questions for the Project Supervisor/Program Manager:

1. What kind of framework do you or your organization work in when designing and implementing the volunteer’s experience?

2. Describe the process of designing and implementing a volunteer’s experience.

3. How much of your planning is connected to the mandate of your organization?

4. What are the successes and challenges to this process?
5. How do you understand your relationship with the volunteers? With the counterparts?

6. What kind of support does your organization offer in addressing the challenges that volunteers face in their placements? (Prompt for what additional support should be offered).