Localizing Concepts of Globalization: Using Asset-Based Community Development to Promote Multicultural Learning in Central Vietnam

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Abstract: Globalization creates complex factors and impacts at a local community level, requiring new tools for engagement and decision-making. Students emerging into professional fields in this globally-connected climate need to understand the fundamental web of social, political and cultural threads that have held communities together for centuries before outside factors began to disrupt local markets and relationships. Asset-Based Community Development is a communications methodology to promote inquiry, research and understanding about place-based social, economic and environmental capital and the local relationships that govern their utility. The approaches to community development under ABCD sets a foundational philosophy for practitioners, students and visitors alike to better understand the underlying values present within a community as a means of seeing it as a whole system within itself. This paper reflects on the Global Village Program, which applies an ABCD approach to service learning and field experience in Central Vietnam through Hiroshima Jogakuin University.

I. Introduction

The Global Village Program at Hiroshima Jogakuin University began as a study abroad opportunity to enhance student awareness of their roles as citizens of the world. Towards that goal, the Global Village Program works to build the critical thinking skills of students, and give them the ability to overcome challenges faced in their own communities and eventually to serve other communities in their future careers. Hosting the Global Village Program in Vietnam has provided a set of unique cultural experiences where students are in the field in both rural and urban settings in a developing country, which is facing rapid economic growth, vulnerability to climate change and loss of biodiversity. Utilizing the Asset-Based Community Development framework helps students approach their field experiences as learners by elevating the local community leaders to be the experts and service providers.

The Global Village Program requires months of classroom preparation and follow-up in the spring and fall to build the skills the students will use in the field over a one-two week period over the summer. The Program works to mirror the ABCD approach by empowering students to take ownership of their own experience by sharing their observations, research and experience in classroom discussions, teamwork, journal writing and presenting their ideas. For example, as students begin to understand some of the historical and modern day characteristics about Vietnam--their final assignment is to present a field guide to their fellow classmates so that they can get the most of their experience. By building a community-like setting in the classroom, students begin to understand what is means to shift their awareness and conduct inquiry collaboratively. Setting these values in the classroom is the first step to having a meaningful exchange with community partners abroad.

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II. Literature Review

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a "bottom-up way of working with communities that focuses on community strengths and assets (Sustaining Communities, 2013)." The ABCD model emerged in the 1990' s as a tool for researchers and practitioners in the international development field to better approach their roles working with communities as outside entities. Credited specifically to John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann from the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, ABCD is a practical application of the principles in their book "Building Communities from the Inside Out." One of the guiding principles is to elevate local, community-based relationships to guide engagement, growth and development (Kosnoff, n.d.).

According to the ABCD Institute, "ABCD draws out strengths and successes in a community's shared history as its starting point for change (n.d.)." Without opportunities to build and share information from within, communities can be defined by the perspective of outsiders and more concerningly by outsider' s interventions whether well intentioned or not. Simply how outsiders view the character of a community can change the trajectory of its growth and determine how its unique environmental, economic and social resources are valued. Thus, communities must work proactively to safeguard themselves by identifying their own strengths and unifying around what aspects of their community are core to those shared values before outside forces intervene. When done through the ABCD approach, "Community development is a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life (Green, 2010)." Academia has a role in teaching students to be citizens of the world and providing them the tools to interact with various communities to understand local concerns and give voice to the values from within.

Setting the context for students to conduct fieldwork; through research, inquiry and service is critical to their learning objectives. ABCD provides students the tools to more intentionally obtain knowledge through observation and experience rather than a direct lecture provided through a hierarchy between student and teacher or other authority. During the process, "An extensive period of time is spent in identifying the assets of individuals, associations, and then institutions before they are mobilized to work together to build on the identified assets of all involved (ABCD Institute, n.d.)." Teaching ABCD as a methodology requires students to be in the field walking, talking and working side by side with the community where they have an opportunity to engage in discussions and apply tools that honor local knowledge and expertise. ABCD methodology steers students to see their primary role as observers and take on an exploratory attitude by focusing on their current surroundings of what they are seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, touching in an interactive environment.

Traditional development models too often capitalize on community assets by subverting local control of place-based resources and diverting profits away from local community members. When universities choose how to teach students the underlying social, political, cultural, economic values that lead to community growth and development it is important to allow community members from within to share ownership of the story of the place they call home. Otherwise, students may have a perspective limited by major political or economic factors and miss the more nuanced changes that altered the character of a community over time. Therefore, "Incorporating a variety of perspectives should include the questioning of and reflection on dominant ways of seeing the world (Burns, 2011)." By teaching tools that open students up to alternative narratives, students become better problem-solvers as they begin to ask more detailed questions about a

wider spectrum of possibilities rather than believing one linear narrative of progress.

III. Fieldwork Methodology

In order to open students up to the possibility of this wider narrative, both ABCD and Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches were utilized during the fieldwork process. PAR is an interdisciplinary method that is utilized in various fields. It draws upon critical and constructivist theoretical frameworks, as well as a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Baum et al., 2004). This methodological framework does not just seek to understand the world, as is the case with traditional positivist studies, but it seeks to "improve the world by changing it (Baum et al., 2004)." In PAR participants in the study often become the researchers, and work together to address key problems through a process of action and reflection. This not only gives participants the opportunity to "know" about something, but also the ability to collectively or individually reflect and take action (Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 1). Often this process is linked to a variety of factors, such as, history, culture and the local context, as well as embedded social relationships within the community or among participants and researchers. The central theme of PAR is to empower people to take action, while working to balance power asymmetry, so people may have increased control over their own lives (Baum et al., 2004). Thus, it helps to promote the tenets of sustainability to ensure a 'do not harm' approach, and is well-matched with strategies that are utilized as a part of the ABCD framework.

That is because both action research and ABCD are "based on the idea that all people (and not just academics and those who are professionally trained) have knowledge to contribute to their communities (Cameron & Gibson, 2001: 18)." In fieldwork students were empowered as researchers and not just simply participants. As a result, they were encouraged to seek out the knowledge of community members to better understand the assets of the community. This is not only illustrative of ABCD, but also action research. Furthermore, according to the ABCD Institute, both PAR and ABCD include four similar characteristics. These are comprised of:
1. Collaboration or partnerships between professionals and community members;
2. Conversation as a primary research tool, in order to listen and learn from the experiences of others;
3. Research goals that should support the creation of future community initiatives; and
4. Research that is designed to produce tangible outcomes (Cameron & Gibson, 2001).
These four characteristics outline a different approach to research that ignores positivist norms, and are relevant to this study in many ways.

For example, the fieldwork program was built on partnerships between professionals, community members, and students from different backgrounds. In fact, the program was designed based on professional partnerships with many local institutions, including, DaNang University, DaNang Institute for Socioeconomic Development, the Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area, DaNang Riverwatch, Green Viet, UCafe, and the Hoi An Women's Union. This rich array of partnerships was intentionally planned to allow for interdisciplinary collaboration, which is indispensable in action research. In addition, students were not only participants in fieldwork, but were empowered as researchers. Giving the student researchers the ability to collaborate with professionals was intended to grant them access to information from both professionals and community members through conversations carried out over the course of the weeklong program. Ultimately, this professional network of participants was utilized to support research. However,

one of the hypotheses of this project was that this network could potentially produce future community initiatives and tangible outcomes based on the student-led research framework.

In addition, fieldwork in central Vietnam also worked to create a collaborative environment for student researchers. Student participants came from Hiroshima Jogakuin University (HJU), DaNang University, and the Sarus Exchange Program. The group of approximately 20 students included people from a variety of majors and three different countries - Vietnam, Cambodia and Japan. In order to complete fieldwork exercises, students were assigned to four different multicultural, interdisciplinary teams that each included four to six members. This allowed students from contrasting cultures and varying academic backgrounds to work together to investigate local challenges and learn the basic fundamentals of community development.

On the first day of fieldwork students participated in a one day workshop on local social and environmental issues, as well as the concept of ABCD. This workshop was imperative because students participating in fieldwork came from different fields, including, social science, humanities, as well as natural and life sciences. Topics explored during the first day included:
1. Urban Development & its Challenges;
2. What is a Watershed? Why is it Important for Development?;
3. Regional Ecotourism Development;
4. Introduction to DaNang Riverwatch: A Community Based Organization; and
5. Introduction to Asset-Based Community Development & Community Mapping

The first four sessions gave international students some local context, while striving to provide rural context for a largely urban Vietnamese student population. Whereas, the last session introduced the framework that was to be used for fieldwork exploration - ABCD.

The ABCD approach utilized in fieldwork was adapted from the seminal work of McKNight and Kretzmann and the ABCD Institute. Students were instructed to use a nested approach, which first focused on personal assets. These not only included material assets, but also knowledge, skills and abilities. This allowed students to begin to assess their own strengths, and it was designed to give them the opportunity to get to know their groups. After individual and group assets were understood and reflected upon, students were instructed on how to conduct a community asset map and to think about who and what is connected. Students were given different ideas for asset mapping. These included: geographic community maps, traditional asset-maps and unstructured interview techniques, in order to conduct community walks to learn about local communities and collect information throughout the week.

At the conclusion of fieldwork students were responsible for developing projects based on local assets in the communities we visited in central Vietnam. In order to do this, team members were responsible for developing and utilizing a framework to capture information on local assets, based on the information they were given on day one. Student strategies for data collection mainly focused on community walks, unstructured interviews of community members, and community mapping. This demanded that students engage with community members to learn about the local strengths of the community, and ultimately allowed them to begin to think about regional assets in central Vietnam. However, instead of just focusing on one specific community, students designed asset inventories for the regions surrounding DaNang City and Hoi An. This was intended to allow participants to begin to understand the social, environmental

and economic linkages between urban and rural areas. Students designed and conducted asset-maps for DaNang City, Hoa Boc Commune, the San Tra Peninsula, Coastal areas between DaNang and Hoi An, Cham Island, and Hoi An Ancient Town.

This culminated in a daylong workshop in which students combined their asset-maps to begin to reflect upon and understand the strengths of the region, as well as their groups (Figure 1). After students worked throughout the morning to develop a regional asset-map. They were then asked to randomly choose assets from the map. After each team had their assigned assets, students were instructed to spend the afternoon developing a community project based on the assets they had at their disposal. This was intended to emphasize how to use assets in community development, and to give students a creative opportunity for action based on their morning reflections.

Figure 1: Regional Asset Map
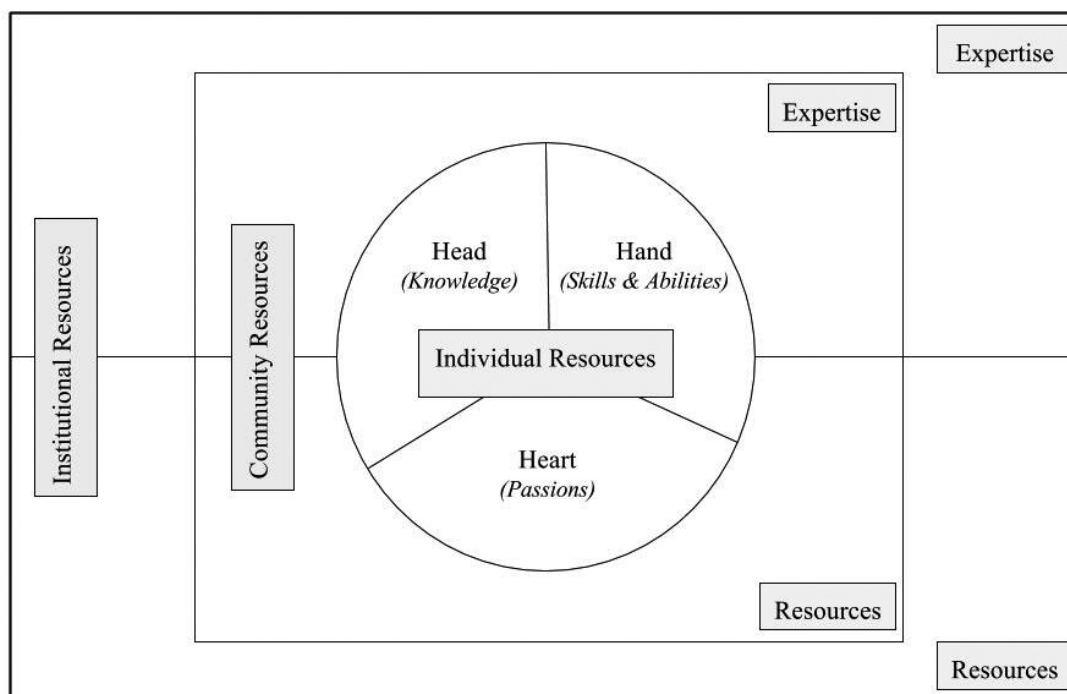

Adapted from: Kretzmann & McKnight 1993

This strategy is illustrative of the PAR approach because it concluded by giving student researchers the opportunity for reflection and possible action. In theory, this is the first step in the iterative process of action research. Fieldwork was evaluated based on student project ideas, fieldwork evaluations, and how ABCD was used by both student researchers and professionals that took part in fieldwork. In action research it is important to reflect upon what was learned, in order to create opportunities for transformation within communities and among all participants (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 5-6). Therefore, the subsequent sections will focus on what was learned throughout the fieldwork experience, as well as outcomes.

IV. Results of Fieldwork

Participatory action research mandates that there must be time for learning, reflection, and action. Therefore, the last day of fieldwork was spent on reflection and action, since most of the week beforehand focused on learning about community assets while in the field. Students produced a Regional Asset Map based on what they discovered on community visits (Figure 1). Following the morning session of reflection students were then asked to randomly take assets from the board, and develop a project using only those assets. Students groups then worked together to develop project proposals, and present them to fieldwork participants (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Student Projects Based on ABCD
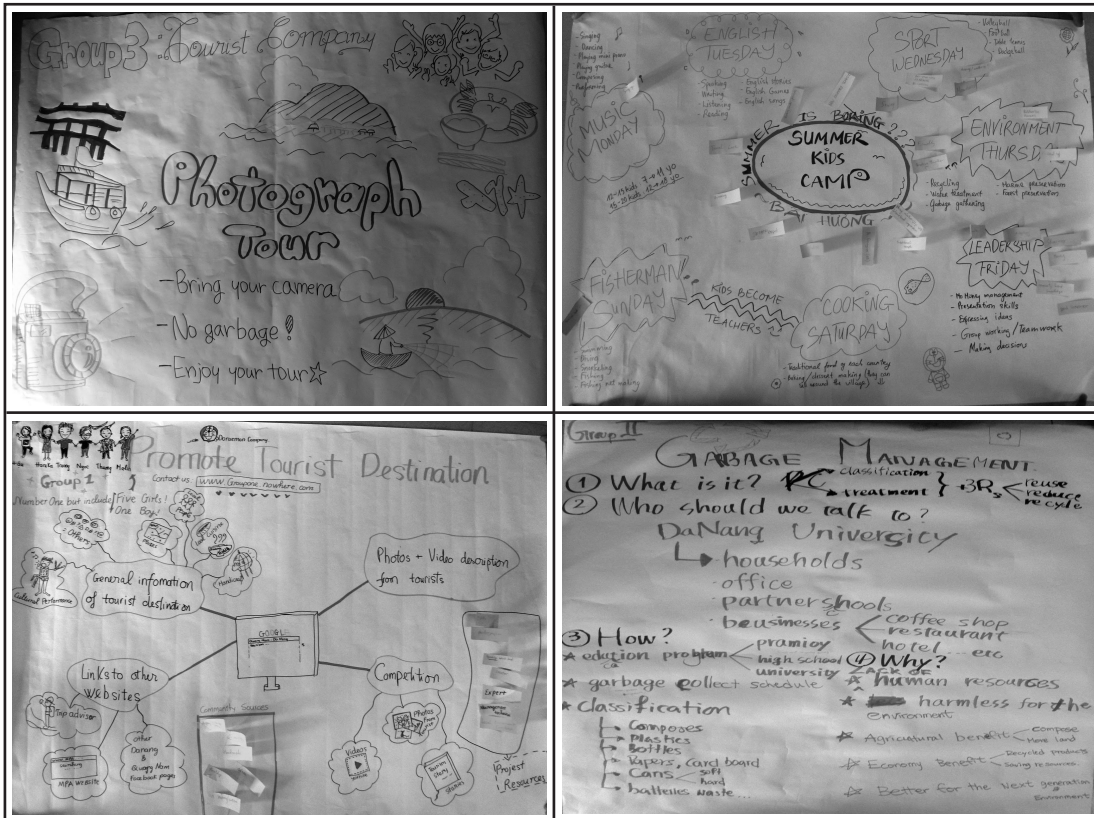
The student generated projects and presentations were in the fields of tourism, education and waste management. Three out of four of these presentations included a strong understanding of the ABCD method, and built upon resources to develop their projects. One group focused their project on the future vision of the community, in addition to a limited number of resources. This demonstrates that they were able to ask community members about strengths, and deduce the community's vision based on their limited interactions. However, it is unclear if they understood how to apply asset mapping to project development and action.

Following the concluding workshop, students were given open-ended evaluations to reflect on what they learned throughout the week. When students were asked 'what was your favorite part of Global Village Field Experience?' many different students talked about ABCD. In fact, six out of 20 respondents talked about the ABCD framework being their favorite part of Global Village, while others discussed different

rural villages and people that we visited throughout the program. For example, one student reflected, "One of my favorite parts of GVFE were the community walks, as I was able to ask many questions and talk directly to the local people." This demonstrates how students were able to interact with the community, and how as student researchers they felt empowered to do so during fieldwork. Whereas another student stated:

> "I loved the idea of focusing on the positivity during brainstorming and collecting information for the project. I wonder if we focus on the positivity (assets only) if the problems will be solved naturally. I will use this method for later projects and for personal development. In addition, learning about this method through experiencing the life at the community is very helpful."

This demonstrates how students' thinking began to change from a needs-based approach to an assets-based approach, and the reflection also demonstrates how it may lead to action in the future.

Furthermore, when asked 'what was your least favorite part of Global Village Field Experience?' or 'what would you change about Global Village Field Experience in the future?' very few responses were negative. In fact, none of these responses talked directly about the ABCD method, which may mean that most students had a positive view of the framework and may use it again in the future.

Lastly, since Global Village Field Experience ended in August 2015, a couple of local participants have reported using what they learned in the workshop in their work in Central Vietnam. First, one student attempted to use the ABCD framework to conduct thesis research in one of the villages visited during the study - Cam Thanh. The student's goal was to empower local community members to develop their economy and protect natural environmental assets. In addition, one of the local fieldwork facilitators from the Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area has started to use this framework in his own work in various villages in the Quang Nam Province and Hoi An City. This demonstrates that fieldwork did not just empower students, but has also made local residents think about what they learned during fieldwork and take action in different communities that were visited.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

There are many critiques of the validity and reliability of PAR and ABCD, and this study is no different. However, those that advocate for this post-positivist framework would maintain that "institutions of normal science and academia, which have created such a monopoly on the knowledge making process, place a primary value on pure research, the creation of knowledge unencumbered by practical questions (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 5-6)." Both ABCD and PAR are based in practicality, and are not designed to produce or critique theoretical or empirical knowledge. Despite this assertion, this study was limited by the amount of information gathered, and would have benefited by more systematic measurement, data collection and coding over an extended period of time. For example, a follow-up session with students may help inform how the knowledge gained during fieldwork has been used. Furthermore, the data collected during the week of fieldwork was helpful, but has left the long-term implications of this project relatively unknown. However, this exploratory study offered interesting insight that can be used in the future to improve fieldwork, and better develop the ABCD methodology in central Vietnam.

Despite these shortcomings the implications of this case study are clear. By the end of the week students had demonstrated leadership skills within their groups, and clearly taken ownership over different aspects

of the data collection and project formulation processes. This was seen as students worked together to creatively solve problems. For example, in the first village the group visited - Hoa Bac - students began to actively figure out how to ask local community members questions and document their findings. In turn, this also demonstrated multicultural communication and understanding between team members in different groups. This may have been especially true for foreign students that were reliant on their Vietnamese counterparts, in order to gather information from community members. These three learning outcomes, improved leadership, problem-solving and multicultural communication, were seen in student work throughout the week, and especially apparent on the last day of fieldwork when students developed and presented their projects.

Moreover, the focus on basic environmental and watershed literacy, which was based on a livelihoods approach, helped guide the inquiry of students towards a systems thinking narrative. For example, facilitators posed questions to students about an upstream construction project, and how it might impact the village downstream. Students were able to begin to think about this connection, and ask community members probing questions to understand how this development was connected to the changing character of the community. As a result, students started to see first hand how environmental, social and economic changes are interlinked, both within one community and between neighboring communities. This is the first step to begin to understand globalization, and the web of social, political, economic and cultural threads that underlie all communities and their development.

The goal of the ABCD methodology is to empower citizens within their own communities to take action. It is a powerful framework because it balances power asymmetries by valuing everyone as a learner, rather than only relying on outside expert knowledge. For foreign students, this proved to be a beneficial tool to allow them to begin to evaluate and compare community dynamics in Vietnam to their own home. However, fieldwork may have even had a more profound and immediate impact on Vietnamese students and professional participants, which is evident in the results of this study. Not only did it provide an opportunity for learning and reflection, but in some instances those lessons have already been translated into action. In the future, it may be beneficial to foster more opportunities for co-learning between participants to further cultivate relationships beyond the last day of fieldwork. This may provide additional inspiration to students that are nervous about taking a more active leadership role within their own communities. These lessons demonstrate that fieldwork may be the first step in providing a platform for students to become empowered in a globalized world, and this study illuminates many lessons for the future.

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