

The Role of Critical Reflexive Analysis in a Service-Learning Course in Agricultural Communication

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Abstract

Agricultural communication professionals today must have a continually evolving set of skills related to digital technology and media convergence, as well as a keen sense of establishing communication strategies that reach globally and demand cross-cultural engagement. The authors designed a service-learning course focused on food insecurity to examine the effects of teaching cross-cultural communication and engagement using applied ethnographic and autoethnographic methodologies. Seven students majoring in agricultural communication participated in an eight-week course that integrated volunteer activities at local food pantries, practices of critical reflexive analysis (CRA) and narrative co-construction with food pantry clients. The authors utilized grounded theory to analyze journal entries and class discussion, resulting in three emerged themes related to the process of student learning: 1) Recognizing disconnect through evaluation of self; 2) seeing complexity in the bigger picture; and 3) redefining responsibility in writing. The process of CRA challenged the students to shift their thinking from interviewing just the client to simultaneously interviewing the client and self for the purposes of developing a co-constructed story.

Keywords: agricultural communication, ethnography, autoethnography, critical reflexive analysis, grounded theory, narrative co-construction

Introduction

Food, agriculture and the environment permeate today's salient and often controversial issues. As a result, industry expectations, consumer demands and community responses contribute to a constant flow of information, ongoing debate and disparate truths. All, of which, lead to a critical need for strategic communication. Therefore, the demand of an agricultural communication professional is two-fold. First, such a professional must have a continually evolving set of skills related to digital technology and media convergence. In addition, this professional must have a keen sense of establishing communication strategies that reach globally and demand cross-cultural engagement. To achieve this, the agricultural communication student must first be challenged in education and training to understand and put into practice this often contested intersection of communication technology, cross-cultural engagement and complex issues.

The quality of student learning is a single variable among many that must be addressed and improved if higher education is going to meet the demands and complexities of this world (Kuh et al., 2005). The catalyst for student achievement in this area begins with the instructor and targeted curriculum development.

This article discusses a service learning course that was designed to examine the value of teaching cross-cultural communication and engagement using applied ethnographic and critical reflexive methodologies in classroom and community-service settings. Seven students majoring in agricultural communication at Purdue University participated in an eight-week course in the spring of 2014 that culminated in the students'

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production of two written articles and one video of local food pantry clients. These finished pieces were then provided to the local food bank for an annual fund raising event. Food insecurity, which is defined economically and socially as having limited or uncertain access to adequate food (Economic Research Service, 2014), is a reality that students are exposed to regularly through the perspectives of the agricultural industry and scientific initiatives, but rarely from perspective of those who are food insecure. Therefore, the intent for this course was to immerse the students into discussions and the lived experiences of those often identified as food insecure at the local level, ultimately creating a multi-faceted lens through which food insecurity is defined and understood.

Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature

“The world in which today’s students will make choices and compose lives is one of disruption rather than certainty and of interdependence rather than insularity. To succeed in a chaotic environment, graduates will need to be intellectually resilient, cross-culturally and scientifically literate, technologically adept, ethically anchored and fully prepared for a future of continuous and cross-disciplinary learning.” (National Leadership Council, 2007, p. 2)

Service-learning programs in higher education are significant; and with that significance comes the debate as to what educational practices fall within the framework of service-learning (Waterman, 2013). The Commission on National and Community Service established program parameters that challenge students to critically examine the service performed, utilize new skills and knowledge, move learning outside of the classroom setting and invest themselves in an experience that meets one or more community needs (Waterman, 2013). In addition, the National Leadership Council (2007) recommends that faculty-led, field-based opportunities, such as service-learning, need to incorporate some form of reflective forum so students can learn collaboratively and systematically, specifically as it relates to varying degrees of worldviews in the classroom and in the field that are different from their own.

Many service-learning courses and programs in agriculture direct students through some form of journaling as a learning tool (Kessler and Burns-Whitmore, 2011; Morgan and King, 2013; Stephenson et al., 2012). Such practices of journaling can be advantageous in building richness of discussion, allowing students to identify questions as they thoughtfully consider what they are about to take part in, or what they recently experienced. Reflective journaling focuses attention on an external object, where students are asked to contemplate, categorize and ultimately explain the phenomena being observed (Cunliffe, 2004). This is a critical skill that students are expected to learn and master in higher education. However, Cunliffe (2004) challenges object-focused reflection and advocates for strength in critical reflexive analysis (CRA).

In CRA, the object is taken out of direct focus, where it is then transformed into an entry point by which the students can then turn and analyze their personally constructed realities. This form of analysis is derived from foundational works in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972); and social constructionism (Goffman, 1959) related to emotional, physiological and cognitive spontaneous responses (Wittgenstein, 1980). It is within the framework of social constructionism that Cunliffe (2004) has challenged students to critically examine the impact of personal assumptions and actions in creating reality and knowledge. The process of critical examination focuses on three areas: Existential (Who am I? What kind of person do I want to be?), relational (How do I relate to others and the world around me?) and praxis (How do my assumptions effect self-conscious and ethical actions?) (Cunliffe, 2004).

To incorporate the process of critically examining self is to bring in elements of ethnographic fieldwork, specifically autoethnography. Where ethnography is the examination of the other through “direct and sustained social contact” (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p. 5), autoethnography is the practice of examining self through autobiographic practices that depict the crossroads of self and culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2003). Doloriet and Sambrook (2009) describe autoethnography as the intersection between self and research, where the researcher continually turns back to self for the purposes of ultimately constructing and giving meaning to lived experiences. In this instance, the researcher is the researched. The subsequent work, then, is an attempt to capture subjective reality for the purposes of positing it within personal epistemology.

Often associated with ethnographic fieldwork is the formulation of personal narratives. In autoethnography, the researcher is pressed to continually return to the ongoing collection of critical self-examinations for the purposes of ultimately constructing the collective whole of self (Doloriet and Sambrook, 2009), gaining a deeper understanding of subjective reality from the existential, relational and praxis points of view, leading to what Cunliffe (2004) describes as the personal aha! or struck by moment. When fieldwork involves the researcher and the researched, narrative co-construction becomes a simultaneous examination of self and other. In this case the researcher is continually pressed to place personal sovereignty and knowledge as secondary to that of the research participant (Benson and O’Neill, 2007).

Purpose

Cross-cultural communication and engagement involve complex processes of understanding other and self (Gopal, 2011). Therefore, in order to consider the applicability of ethnographic and autoethnographic methods in applied communication practices, students were introduced to CRA, challenging them to transform reality by thinking subjectively about the impact of one’s actions and interactions with others (Cunliffe, 2004). The practices of CRA were ongoing throughout the course

as students worked collectively to write and produce co-constructed narratives of local food pantry clients and their lived experiences of being food insecure. The following research questions guided the course development and subsequent study:

How do modified practices of critical reflexivity, derived from ethnography, affect student learning of and practices in cross-cultural engagement?

What effect, if any, does CRA have in the students' process of co-constructing food pantry client narratives?

Methodology

The authors designed and taught the eight-week course as a preparation to a two-week service-learning study abroad program in Romania. In Romania, the students would live with and produce written and video narratives of host families who were also Heifer International beneficiaries in a dairy project. These produced materials would then be turned over to Heifer Romania for use in communication efforts with domestic and international stakeholders. As a global organization, Heifer International's primary focus is addressing hunger and poverty, starting at the local community. Therefore, in order to prepare them for the work abroad and to begin the dialogue and co-construction of stories regarding food insecurity, the preparation course included service-learning opportunities at food pantries near campus. Like the subsequent work with Heifer Romania, the students' produced materials at the local food pantries were then provided to the regional food bank for use at an annual fundraising dinner.

This preparation course had three objectives: (1) Introduce students to CRA and encourage a deeper and more critical examination of self in unfamiliar community settings; (2) provide students with the opportunity to volunteer at two local food pantries; and (3) walk students through the process of co-constructing narratives regarding the lived experiences of food pantry clients.

Students were introduced to CRA journal writing at the onset of the course. During the first few weeks, the authors held in-class discussions and exercises that differentiated the CRA style of journaling to other common forms of journaling. To complete a journal entry, students were directed to critically examine self in relation to others, specifically considering existential, relational and praxis areas of focus (Cunliffe, 2004). Journal entries were required after each of the following activities:

- Week 4 – Volunteering and interviewing clients at two local food pantries.
- Week 5 – Volunteering and interviewing clients at two local food pantries.
- Week 6 – Debriefing (in-class focus group) – guiding questions developed from CRA journal entries from Weeks 4 and 5.
- Week 8 – Final exam (final CRA journal entry) – guiding questions formulated from emerged and working themes of Weeks 4, 5 and 6.

All CRA journal entries, as well as the transcribed focus group, were collected data and, thus, were analyzed and coded using grounded theory, which requires constant comparative analysis as data is collected (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, immediately following the first two journal entries, the authors coded and analyzed the collected data, which led to a working collection of frequent open codes. These codes directed the development of a short list of guiding questions that were brought to the focus group discussion. Data collected from the focus group discussion and the subsequent journal entry were analyzed and then compared to the first two initial journal entries. The result was a final short list of open-ended questions that would probe deeper into the preliminary themes that had emerged. This final list of questions guided students through the final journal entry for the class, which also functioned as a semi-structured written interview. This study was deemed exempt by the Purdue Institutional Review Board.

Results

Seven students, all of whom have been given pseudonyms for anonymity, took part in this eight-week preparation course, as well as the subsequent study abroad program. All students were female and either finishing their second or third year in the agricultural communication program.

Throughout the duration of this class, the students followed a series of steps that included talking about food insecurity, volunteering at local pantries, observing pantry clients and interviewing these clients regarding their personal experiences. As a result, their critical reflexive journal entries, along with the group discussion, began to reveal a critical synthesis of collected observations on their part. Through constant comparative analysis of each subsequent journal entry and the group discussion transcript, three themes emerged that addressed the students' engagement and work with food pantry clients. These themes are: (1) Recognizing disconnect through evaluation of self; (2) seeing complexity in the bigger picture; and (3) redefining responsibility in writing.

Recognizing disconnect through evaluation of self

Early on in the field visits to the pantries as volunteers and then interviewers of food pantry clients, the students revealed in their journaling a self-proclaimed disconnect between themselves and the reality of food insecurity in the local community. Through the practice of CRA, students often placed their observations back on themselves as they tried to make sense, not only of preconceived notions regarding food insecurity, but also the shifting reality that was beginning to transpire as they crossed paths with food pantry clients throughout the duration of the course. The journaling revealed the students' personal process of not only understanding food insecurity at the local level, but also realizing the existence of food insecurity. Students would often identify a disparity between themselves and the food insecure.

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For example, Nora wrote, “I was struck by the notion that there is this whole reality that I don’t see, hear, know, or even think about... and it goes on every day.”

Because all of the students come from a financially secure household, many of them shared that they seldom thought about food insecurity. For instance, Morgan said, “Even though I had been exposed to food insecurity, I always placed the problem somewhere in the back of my mind. It was convenient for me to just pretend it wasn’t a problem.” Related to disconnect, this was a common shared perception among the students, which surfaced in many journal entries throughout the duration of the class. However, as the discussions and the experiences progressed, the entries revealed a deeper level of making sense of what was discussed as a group, what was experienced in the pantries and, ultimately, what they began to observe on their own within their own community. For instance, Rachel said in her final journal entry:

Before this course I thought of food insecurity only occurred [sic] in other places. I didn’t think of Lafayette, Indiana. I never thought of even Indiana! I pictured the commercials you see on TV of the skinny children running around in dirty areas, where the commercial asks you to send money to feed them. I did not know that it just happened in my back door [sic]. One particular thing that has stuck in my head is the man that worked at Lafayette Transitional Housing that had a beard. I thought he was just a volunteer that was helping. That same week I saw him sitting on a bench at like midnight all by himself downtown [sic] Lafayette. That moment I knew he was homeless and just worked so that he could have food. I never thought about it from that standpoint.

It is unknown whether or not this man Rachel observed outside of the pantry was actually homeless, or whether he worked for his food at the local pantry. Regardless, food insecurity and, indirectly, homelessness, became a realized phenomenon in her own community. Nora shares a similar viewpoint, but draws upon a working understanding of how personal realities are shaped by active personal experiences and a dynamic social structure:

Our realities are influenced by our experiences, past and present; our thoughts, ideas, opinions; and our family and friends. And our realities are dynamic – they constantly shift when we experience or come across some new information. For me, my reality has been opened up to a larger picture with this class and our food pantry experiences thus far. I have been able to see and talk with people I normally wouldn’t interact with - I don’t mean this in a snobby way – it’s just a fact that our paths/realities wouldn’t have crossed if it hadn’t been for this class. And now, I’m left wondering about the fate of the people I met and those I just saw through the window.

Nora’s statement becomes a departure point for all of the students and the way in which they work to make sense of their surroundings and the lens through which they view it. Through such lenses, it was evident

from each subsequent journal entry that the students wrestled with the attempt and sometimes the inability to relate to food pantry clients. Rianne wrote, “Until I live through something, I will never fully understand... I have no idea what it’s like to wonder where my next meal will come from.” Looking further into everyday experiences, Alexis wrote, “I do not come from a broken family. I do not wonder where my next meal is coming from or if I am even going to have a meal. I go home every day to a roof over my head and a full refrigerator and still often times ask myself ‘what is there here to eat?’”

In addition, once students had established a sense of trust with the instructor, as well as with their peers during group discussion, they would also share personal stereotypes of what they observed. For Morgan, there was an admittance to stereotyping, which was then changed through observation, leading to an unexpected ability to make food insecurity personal. She wrote, “When I think about soup kitchens, I usually picture single mothers with a baby on their hip or scruffy Vietnam War veterans. Not teenagers. Not people who I could have easily went to school with.”

Morgan’s experience and observation was not unique. In fact, the act of volunteering and interacting with the food pantry clients challenged students’ common stereotypes or preconceived notions. Like Morgan, Annie admits that the experience at the pantries created a shift in her perceptions, as well as an opportunity to critique herself more directly:

I actually saw food insecure people and saw what they look like, their moods, etc. It’s like I asked ‘What do you have to say for yourself’ and they answered. What I saw were nice people trying to hold everything together and they really didn’t look all that unhappy. Most looked pretty content... The people I saw were not unlike myself in many ways and I guess that’s not what I envisioned. I expected them to all be more depressed-looking, which is probably a reflection on myself and how I would be wimpy if it came to that.

Critical reflexive analysis challenges the individual to turn the critical lens back on self for the purposes of better understanding personally held meanings. The use of a critical lens became more evident in the last two journal entries—post-group discussion journal entry and final exam—as students often turned to interviewing self when attempting to work through a complex reality. The act of volunteering became a necessary personal critique when considering individuals roles. For instance, Morgan wrote, “I then asked myself questions, about what it meant to truly serve others.” Rianne further explored what motivated her to volunteer:

Once I realized the uniqueness of my actions I started probing myself with questions like, ‘What is it about this place that makes you excited to come back?’ and my answer came a lot quicker than I thought it would: the people. I loved the people that worked at St. Ann’s and wanted to go back and see them and help and be around that atmosphere. It’s refreshing and rewarding. I never thought about it as being selfish of

me until someone else had mentioned something about it but even still I don't really know that I care.

Students often admitted held personal judgments. However, through the CRA process, students demonstrated an attempt to more carefully contemplate such judgments from a subjective standpoint, rather than an objective one. For example, Taylor described seeing a man with his dog asking for money. She struggled placing meaning on such a request when, perhaps his dog was requiring extra resources he did not have – “*I know that we can't understand why people place value on certain things, but it just doesn't make sense to me.*” Similarly, Alexis explained that it was sometimes frustrating to see clients in line at the food pantry with smartphones in hand. Rather than validating her judgment of their action, she actually turned the lens back on her own tendencies and subsequent thoughts:

Instead of me being so quick to accuse them of being ridiculous, (which I often feel to be honest) I need stop, step back and go through my head that everybody has a story and their story shapes the person that they are and the life that they lead day to day. That has been my biggest moment/lesson throughout this class.

Seeing Complexity in the Bigger Picture

As the course continued, the students spent more time discussing specific nuances and characteristics of food insecurity that they were not aware of prior to the class. Their journal entries suggested a complexity in food insecurity that they previously did not realize existed. Following interviews with food pantry clients, journal entries revealed the students personally challenging their pre-established objective realities, which had focused only on food insecurity. Rather, students such as Taylor began to use food insecurity as a departure point for contemplating the deeper struggles behind it, specifically the desire of some families to stay on governmental assistance programs. Following one of the client interviews, Taylor wrote:

When we were talking to [food pantry client], she mentioned that when her husband got a better paying job it actually made paying the bills harder because they could no longer rely on government assistance which helped with the groceries and also with infant care.

The interviews were open-ended, allowing the food pantry client to lead the discussion with what they felt was most important and relevant, specifically as it related to their experiences at the food pantry. For instance, one client shared her pantry experience by describing her appreciation of the lasting friendships she had established over time while waiting in line. Following this particular interview, Alexis was struck by this continual shift in the conversation from food insecurity to social ties. In her follow-up journal entry, she wrote, “*I have come to a more clear realization that food insecurity has a much greater meaning than someone just literally being food insecure.*”

Similar realizations, associated with the value of social ties, transcended into the students' volunteer

efforts during the same visit. Like Alexis, Annie began to look past the act of receiving food. In her follow-up journal entry, Annie admitted she was only scratching the surface of the various realities that existed among every individual standing in line, writing, “*I saw three generations of one family there—a man and his parents and his wife and kids. What a family outing. There's just so much I don't know, I'd like to learn more.*”

This emerging theme of complexity revealed an additional held meaning on behalf of select students during the group discussion, where students shared some of their reflexive thoughts outside of the required journal entries, demonstrating a frustration between making sense of the complexity they observe and their previously held realities. For instance, Rachel said:

I think some people use the food pantries correctly. But my mom is a teacher in a town that has a lot of poverty and our tax dollars pay for their kids' lunch. And they get all these free benefits and yet their parents come in with brand new nails, brand new car, Coach Purses. But, yet, my, our tax dollars are paying for their lunch, their school books. And, then my mom has to fork out a \$500 check for my brother's books.

Rachel offered her transparent thoughts during the group discussion, but her wrestling with the realities of low-income families continued. They moved beyond a blanket stereotype and extended into the individual lives she encountered. In her final journal entry for the course, Rachel described an interaction she had with a gentleman and his grandson during the second visit and volunteer session at the pantry:

The older gentleman was decked out in older Harley gear and had all sorts of different tattoos and a lot of missing teeth. The boy had mismatched clothes on and you could just tell they did not have a lot of money. That aside they... had the most positive attitude out of all the people we helped that day. He was telling us how to make cinnamon apples and just smiled and made jokes with us the entire time he was selecting his fruits and vegetables. He was a delight to talk to... This really struck me because if I saw them at the grocery store I would make quick judgments about them and assume things about them by their outside appearance. But after talking to the older man he was just a good ol grandpa like mine.

Rachel contemplated these individual lives and then critically turned back on herself as she considered her flux of judgment depending on the environment and context in which she crosses paths with people. In Annie's final entry, she also acknowledged her tendency for judgment by also juxtaposing it with the complexity of the issue. She wrote that it bothered her to see overweight and obese people at the pantry. She said, “*This is hard for me to understand... I found myself judging them, which is wrong because I don't know their specific situations, but I couldn't help it. I just didn't understand.*”

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Redefining Responsibility in Writing

Recognizing the existing disconnect and the complexity of issues as students uniquely immersed themselves in volunteering and co-constructing stories with food pantry clients, their final journal entry (the final exam) revealed a newly emerged theme that addressed the students' re-evaluation of themselves as writers and storytellers.

Through the acts of volunteering and interacting directly or indirectly with clientele of the pantries and then interviewing individuals for the purposes of developing a co-constructed story, the students explained that telling the story of someone they are still working to connect with is a delicate process and a large responsibility. This became evident as students wrote about how they considered the individuals with whom they worked to develop a story. Rianne wrote, *"To tell the story of someone who is food insecure is to harness their situation and portray it in a way that is not demeaning to their life."* Morgan touched upon this same notion of "harnessing their situation" for addressing the importance of building a relationship with them. She wrote:

The only way for us to be able to tell the stories of the needy is for us to build a relationship with them. The first part in building this connection is understanding the difference between our lives and the lives of our interviewees.

As students were often challenged in their understanding of the clients with whom they interacted and worked, they were equally challenged in their story development—continually being reminded of the varying exercises of co-constructing the story, rather than simply collecting the information and imparting their own interpretation of it. As the instructors continually talked with and engaged the students about their roles as writers, it was evident that the students considered this in their own way as communicators. For instance, Alexis wrote about the importance of telling the other person's story. But, she emphasized that the story extends beyond what is seen from the outside. She wrote, *"The real story that should be told is the story that comes from the inside out. Specifically for someone who is food insecure, I believe it is important to tell their story including how they ended up in that situation..."*

To others, with story development came a heightened sense of responsibility. Annie wrote, *"Telling the story of someone who is food insecure is an honor to me."* In addition, Morgan wrote:

... telling the story of someone who is food insecure is a process. It takes time and practice to impartially and earnestly be the voice for the hungry. To me, it's a large responsibility to speak on behalf of these people. It is our responsibilities as communicators to share an accurate message that reflects the truth of the day-to-day lives of the food insecure. It's a delicate process and it's a challenge, but it is so important.... In the grand scheme of things, people in the communication industry can get caught up sharing corporate stories. I think a lot

of people forget that we can share stories for the hungry, too. It's a much more noble job.

Recognizing the responsibility and claiming the honor in story co-construction was clearly evident, but there was an additional hurdle in the story actually coming to fruition. Because the students were divided into two teams to create the written story and the video narrative of a given food pantry client, they were then placed into a situation in which they not only had to contemplate their struggles to connect with and overcome assumptions between themselves and the client, but they were also forced to deal with the unique assumptions and understandings of their respective team members. To co-construct the story of a client, it was then placed into the lenses of three or four student lenses collectively. Nora addresses this in her final journal entry:

I was critical of my group and group members when trying to create the one-pager. I felt like I could see some putting their own spin on a food pantry user's words or interpreting in a way different than what [sic] it was meant. And that bothered me, because we were supposed to be telling the food pantry user's story, not our interpretation of their story. Some parts of the story were overlooked or even tossed aside as unimportant at first. But as we progressed, I feel like I was better able to make my point of telling the user's story, personality and experience. It's okay to use a narrative form for some stories, but for me it was a better idea to use the user's quotes and details to tell the story and use less of our words.

Discussion

By the time the course concluded, the students had demonstrated the three areas of critical reflexive analysis in their journals and subsequent class discussion: existential, relational and praxis. Throughout much of the journal entries, students maintained a primary focus on relational and praxis, where they often examined personal assumptions and relations. In addition, they also began to more deliberately contemplate the depth and breadth of food insecurity, as it related to social ties, family structure and overall complexities of life circumstances. Often, such contemplation juxtaposed and challenged their previously maintained assumptions. However, it was not until the final journal entry that students began to transfer such understanding to the existential side of their professional communication responsibilities. They began to develop a deepening sense of responsibility for the development of the communication pieces.

Over the course of the eight weeks, critical reflexive analysis was not without consistent challenges. While reflexive practices are part of the natural examination and response to the observations and experiences within the surrounding environment, the shift to critical reflexivity takes significant and ongoing effort as it entails a willingness to deconstruct self. Such practice is not a natural component of reflexivity. For all of the students this was a new and challenging way to think about their

own personal lived experiences as subjective reality, specifically as it related to the intersection of the food pantry clients' subjective reality.

Through the autoethnographic lens, Doloriet and Sambrook (2009) examine the contested intersection between researcher and researched versus researcher is researched. There is a fine, but necessary, line between the two for the purposes of capturing realities and held meanings. Such an approach is also applied to the students as aspiring communication professionals for the purposes of developing a responsibility in writing and storytelling. Here, the contested intersection that is examined is that of interviewer and interviewee versus interviewer is interviewee. The process of CRA challenges the students to shift their thinking from interviewing just the participant to simultaneously interviewing the participant and self for the purposes of developing a co-constructed story.

Conclusion

While only an n of 7, this study revealed the value of CRA in teaching cross-cultural engagement in a service-learning class. Evoking the practice of CRA with students after each community-based experience created a greater self-awareness regarding personal disconnect with the food pantry clients, leading to a greater sense of responsibility in the development of a co-constructed story.

The value that this form of service-learning brings to the emerging professional in agricultural communication is critical. Cunliffe (2004), who discusses critical reflexive analysis from the perspective of educating and training management students, argues that "managers and administrators influence others – individuals, communities, societies and the environment. They find themselves dealing with accelerating rates of change, uncertainty and ambiguity and often work in politicized organizations where they have to deal with a wide variety of ethical issues" (p. 408). Such a statement becomes quite applicable as it relates to agricultural communication professionals. The field is ever dynamic, where technology and cultural intersection lead to controversial issues in agriculture, food and the environment. Layer this environment with the processes and models of communication and the result is a complex network of negotiated meanings.

Communication professionals who are tasked with creating messages, sharing information and liaising among multiple stakeholders, are faced with the same accelerating rates of change, uncertainty and ambiguity in the area of food, agriculture and the environment. In this instance, food insecurity may have been the entry point, but gaining a broader sweep of understanding the complexity of food insecurity by first examining it through the personal subjective lens is critical.

The authors recognize that a semester-long course and increased number of visits to the food pantries could more systematically instill the practice of CRA in multiple

narratives. In addition, they recognize that students' learning styles are different and some students prefer reflecting with their peers in the group discussion over the written journals. In the future, researchers could compare oral and written critical reflexive analyses, as well as narrative development over a series of writing assignments. Researchers could also investigate how students would use their learned skills with international audiences where dialogue translation is required and how critical reflexive analysis could aid in co-constructing narratives with those audiences.

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