

## **Travel as a Ritual Toward Transformative Consciousness: Juxtaposing Che Guevara's Biography and Teacher Candidates' Narratives**

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### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the development of critical consciousness by examining the biographical-narratives in relationship to the experiential accounts on travel. Biographical narratives are important cultural texts filled with history and cultural nuances. The biography of Ernesto Che Guevara has resonated with readers and viewers from around the world. By dreaming seemingly impossible dreams and garnering triumph in the face of mounting obstacles, Che has inspired the generations that have followed him. The life of Che, which is a myth of idealism, has captivated the hearts of many around the globe. This paper engages in the process of reading student narratives along with Che Guevara's biography and diaries. The analysis reveals a common pattern of experiences. Similar to the rites of passage in human development, the themes that emerge across the two sets of texts involve intellectual growth, psychological maturity, and awakening of consciousness.*

**Key Words:** travel diaries, narratives, Che Guevara, consciousness transformation, transitional phenomena

### **Introduction**

This article discusses the development of critical consciousness by examining the biographical-narratives in relationship to the experiential accounts on travel. Freire's pedagogical praxis (1970; 1987) predicates raising critical consciousness in literacy education. Critical consciousness is derived from dialectical analysis and synthesis of social practices, relations, and structural organization. The world order, instead of being permanent, is dynamic and subject to change; the paradigm shifts provided the historical conditions intersect the personal consciousness so as the mind becomes critical. *Change*, as "a promising word" (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, p. 4) is contingent to an emerging consciousness of reality or an emerging form of being. Orozco-

Mendoza suggests that critical consciousness distilled through time and reflection can fuel potential activities of change such as “alteration, variation, permutation, transformation, substitution, or conversion” (2008, p. 4).

On the human conditions, Hannah Arendt refers to the first man-made satellite placed in orbit as “the human inventive” to transcend experience. This event both revolutionized the world and was the first step toward escape from man’s imprisonment on Earth (As cited in William, 2002). Through alternative experiences, the mind is posited in juxtaposing frames considering multiple ways of knowing and being. Hence travel assists breaking out from the ideological philosophical strong holds, and alternative political referents potentially free our attachment to the status quo and break out from the cultural habits under siege. The flight into space symbolized an advent sign of an emerging inter-planetary consciousness in the cultural trajectory in the human history.

Similarly, Garber (1995) believes that inter-cultural contacts are germane in growing greater receptivity to and respect for diverse ways of being. In that “the decentralization of one’s own culture as ‘right’ [and] will have a transferability to other cultural communities” (p. 231).

In approaching the topic of consciousness and cultural change, Block is prompted to suggest that “its answering requires leaving home” (1998). To the credits of the insight by Fuentes on historical consciousness and border crossing,

We will be able to embrace the Other, enlarging our human possibility. People and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women, with men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves (Cited in Macedo, 1994, p. 90).

During travel, “the mind thinks where the feet walk” (Betto, 1997) such that one ventures into a transitional area, a *napatla* (Anzaldua, 1987), wherein one walks toward the horizon, at the dawn of consciousness. Travel offers experiences and conditions of the liminal quality, authentic, vivid, and dramatic.

### **Che: Travel, Revolution, and a Life of Myth**

*Many will call me an adventurer—and that I am. Only one of a different sort:  
one of those who risks his skin to prove his platitudes.*

Che's letter to his parents, 1965 (Guevara, 2003)

Biographical narratives are important cultural texts filled with history and cultural nuances. Brave souls tell valuable and enchanting stories. Great storytellers live through and by the words that they tell. The biography of Ernesto Che Guevara has resonated with readers and viewers from around the world. By dreaming seemingly impossible dreams and garnering triumph in the face of mounting obstacles, Che has inspired the generations that have followed him. The life of Che, which is a myth of idealism, has captivated the hearts of many around the globe.

His early travels during his youth, the subsequent transformation of consciousness, and his call for an intercontinental unity against the hegemony of capitalism also have influenced the world of politics and community organizing. However, his image has been co-opted for commercial uses. His fierce spirit that transpires his determination to change the world is a tame representation of modern day individualism and stereotypical romanticism. The phenomenon transformed Che as “a matinee idol,” McLaren critiques, renders marginalized Che's counter hegemonic politics and revolutionary activities. In fact, McLaren emphatically states, “[Beyond] the amative imaginings that [Che's] image provokes, he stands as a powerful thinker whose understanding of Marx and other radical theorists cannot be easily separated from his life as a revolutionary actor on the stage of world history” (2010, p. 102).

Che's biography, in essence, represents “a politics of self-transformation.” According to McLaren, Che challenged “human capacity in the creation of the ‘new man...with the imperative of transforming the many sidedness of aggrieved and suffering humanity under the yoke of imperialist aggression through revolutionary struggle and justice from the standpoint of the proletariat in the class war” (2010, p. 107).

Today the publishing and entertainment industries have made a popular culture that capitalizes on a narrative of melodramas or tell all books by victims who seek revenge or confess in the public eyes. According to Zinsser on memoir (1998, p. 5), the culture that everyone has a story to tell is not the issue; life and its narrative come in a variety

of forms, the real issue is: Is it a good story or a bad story.

On a life worth of living as a life well-examined, Conway points out “All of us live a life history in our mind, and very few of us subject it to critical analysis” (1998, p 59). Narrative writing and analysis are of pedagogical value in raising critical consciousness as much as language and literacy are expressions of humanities and vehicles for reflection. Conway continues to stress that,

We are all storytelling creatures...we are time-bound creatures. We experience life along time continuum; things happen sequentially in our lives, we need to understand the causation. But we never really do understand it until we sit down and try to tell the story (p.59, 1998).

Che, in a letter to his children, described himself as “[a] man who acted on his beliefs and who has [certainly] been loyal to his convictions” (Guevara, 2003, p. 383). In a letter to his parents, he reflected on the changes in his life from 1955 to 1965:

Nothing has changed in essence, except that I am much more conscious. My Marxism has taken root and become purified, ...[A]nd I am consistent with my beliefs. Many will call me an adventurer, and that I am—only one of a different sort: one who risks his skin to prove his truths (2003, p. 384).

Che’s life in particular is profoundly meaningful in that it allows us to gain a deeper understanding of our own humanity. His life history also has epistemological significance because of its potential influence on educational, social and political theories and practice.

This paper engages in the process of reading student narratives along with Che Guevara’s biography and diaries. The analysis reveals a common pattern of experiences. Similar to the rites of passage in human development, the themes that emerge across the two sets of texts involve intellectual growth, psychological maturity, and awakening of consciousness.

### **Transitional Phenomena and Ritual of Liminality**

The tradition of psychoanalysis emphasizes “specific quality experiences” in the development of identity. Based on the premise that not all experiences are pertinent to identity development and capable to impact narrative pattern, people undergo

“transitional phenomena,” which Winnicott suggested (Cited in Guerra, 2006), as developing subjectivity and allowing their identities to emerge. “The manner of experience is a “determining factor to the kind of life one is to have” (Guerra, 2006, p. 69).

McLaren (1999) discusses the state of *liminality* as creating a threshold of consciousness during engagement in classroom instruction in urban school environments. His book “Schooling As A Ritual Performance” provides nuanced insights into transitional phenomena from the anthropological lens of ritual. McLaren’s work, particularly regarding resistant cultures within schooling, reveals that liminal experiences have “symbolic, historical and lived meaning, which contest the legitimacy, power and significance of culture [and hegemony]” (p. 146). In the realm of liminality, social dramas are enacted through a ritual process of “breach, crisis, and redressive action and reintegration,” (Cited in McLaren, p. 301) in which people’s subjectivities threaten to delegitimize and reposition the dominant structures. Symbolic events, performative rituals, and social dramas can be understood as transitional phenomena according to Winnicott’s conception of the term. In liminal states of consciousness, according to Guerra (2006), people undergo “the intermediary area experience in which power and identity are charged of dynamics and potentiality whereby “feeling that one is truly alive” (Guerra, 2006, p. 72). Congruent to Freire’s pedagogy (1970), education is liberatory when people discover their relationship to the world. It is in the author’s interest to attempt to en-flesh these experiential phenomena in which people transition from a perpetual state of attachment to a new state of being.

### **The Investigation**

This study examines college students’ personal narratives or autobiographical essays. Following approval from the Human Subject Review Board (2010-2011), writing samples were gathered as part of a regular class assignment. On the first day, students who enrolled in the course entitled “Foundations in Bilingual Education” were asked to write an autobiographical essay and submit it during class two days later. There were no additional instructions provided; the students were only told that they should write a good story. There was no length requirement.

The students' narratives were first identified using the following screening questions: "What types of experiences are recounted that resonate across the narratives on emerging self-identity? Is there an account of the self and other relation or interactive dynamics between the self and the experience? How is the 'self' revealed in the biographical narrative? Is there a renewed subjectivity due to the experiences described or an apparent reorganization of objectivities? What actions or perceptions are driven by the experiences described?" Particular narratives were selected for use in an analysis of the development of critical consciousness in relation to travel.

The students' descriptions of their significant experiences in the selected narratives were instrumental to our understanding of the "quality experience," a term that Winnicott coined in psychoanalysis but thought was "indescribable" (2006). The "quality experience" here is *travel*, which may catalyze fundamental transformations in biographical narratives. *Travel* common across the identified narratives of the students and writings of Che's is further decoded into the themes: "the lonely planet," "parallel universes," "from rising in the obscurity," "inter-subjectivity," crossing borders and shifting horizons," and "solidarity."

## **Discussion**

The process of reading the students' narratives and Che's writings, texts that changed history, revealed a set of generative themes related to the changes in consciousness that can occur due to travel. Notwithstanding the obvious temporal and contextual differences between these two sets of writings, certain strands of continuity did emerge between them.

### **The Lonely Planet**

Denise's narrative expresses nostalgia for her childhood. Denise describes her happy younger days as filled with naiveté and innocence: "I was a huge girly girl! I loved to play dress-up and Barbies; having tea parties with my stuff[ed] animals was the highlight of many days." A quality world experience differs from a foreign tourist's exotic view of the "other" in which the former is the subject and the latter is the object of the gaze. This naïve lens is egocentric because it imposes one's gaze on others. Denise perceives herself as culturally neutral because "[b]eing very white (and never being able to get tan!) with light hair and eyes, I thought I did not really have a

[cultural] background.” Before a missionary trip, Denise’s view of travel to faraway places such as India or Africa had no contextual dimension to substantiate her own being. Through travel, the world from which one originates and the world to which one travels mutually reflect, confirm, consolidate and distinguish themselves from one another. Without this type of juxtaposition, both worlds are only metaphysical, not material. Existence is a solitary act, an unheard inner monologue. Being is accidental, not deliberate.

Melinda’s narrative reflects these sentiments. Melinda describes feeling content while blending into a desert background. She wrote the following:

Yavapai county, Arizona is my backyard. I know every wash, every Indian site, and cave there. I know how to drive on boulders without scraping the oil pans of the trucks and how to drive ATVs without hurting the environment around us...I have a love for the desert that most people really have no understanding about.

Melinda declared that she knew everything she needed to know and that she was sure of what she would become. She recalled that “[l]ike the rest of the family, I planned on working in the mines or in the forest service. I dropped out [of high school]...and started working on the farms and in the local restaurant.” In retrospect, Melinda considered her “life as a destiny” to be a solitary path although the rest of her family had traveled the same path. Her description of that time period emphasizes the appeal of isolation, yet her personal sense of agency is not prominent or clear in the narrative. These internal contradictions reveal a form of fatalism.

### **Parallel Universes**

Denise’ and Melinda’s writing reveals that their later experiences from travel pose a distinct juxtaposition with their early life perspectives. During travel, the feeling of being out of place heightens the sensitivity to nuances and to details. A changed location geographically and culturally initiates the mind to senses of wonder. The body and the mind are in accord existing between two worlds. This moment is truly the first light of consciousness.

Denise’s first missionary trip to Mexico was what first made her recognize that her world was one of many. Similarly, Melinda recalls that “[it was not until] I turned 18

[and] left for China with a youth group that I realized there was a world outside of my little town.” A new, highly significant form of consciousness emerged from these students’ experiences, providing them with a sort of transitional subjectivity. Another student, Luce, succinctly refers to ontological encounters as revealing “parallel universes” that she “marveled [at]”:

[I realized that] parallel universes could exist where the people were fundamentally the same as me, but they spoke different languages that shaped their unique ways of perceiving and sharing life. I struggled to communicate and get around in these parallel universes, which gave me insight into some of the challenges face by immigrants in the United States.

Through travel, an isolated existence intersects with another world, culture, and community. The transitional subjectivity during the contact is on the rise into the threshold of an inter-subjective consciousness. Being subject to the juxtaposition of “parallel universes” or parallel objectivities marks the inception of a new cultural paradigm.

### **From Rising in the Obscurity**

Travel is potentially performative *ritual* which possesses functional attributes in forming a cultural paradigm. When the mind of a traveler is situated in the intersection of multiplicity or possibility, the ritual of travel, “‘as a model for’ can anticipate, even generate, change; ‘as a model of’, that ritual may inscribe order in the minds, hearts, and wills of participants” according to Turner (Cited in McLaren, 1999, p. 45). Che’s travel initiated his transformation by allowing him to cross the dimensional borders of history. Che’s childhood best friend recalled the following when bidding farewell to Che, who was leaving for another Latin American journey by train:

With the eyes of remembrance, I look back at the leave-taking from [Che’s] family and friends. They did not understand his reasons yet went through the kind of formal goodbye given to a member of their group or class leaving in search of new horizons....I see him dressed in the “fatigues” of the Argentine Army: tight trousers, rustic shirt, and boots with the laces certainly undone, not as a sign of carelessness, but in keeping with a scale of values in which external show is not the most important. Hanging from the second-class compartment with a broad smile on his face, holding his half-shaven head straight up, he pulls out of Buenos Aires station and enters history (p. viii, 1998).



In order for the “quality experience” to be transformative, it must subject the individual to the experiential juxtaposition of shifting realities. One entry in Guevara’s diaries describes him as completing quotidian tasks before setting off on his travels. In October of 1951, he “...began the monotonous business of chasing visas, certificates and documents...” while simultaneously anticipating his eventual return (2004, p. 33). He wrote, “my most important mission before leaving was to take exams in as many subjects as possible” (2004, p. 33) to begin the medical practice for which he had prepared for years. However, Che’s trajectory toward becoming a medical doctor was interrupted by a loss of gravity in his universe as he sensed himself drowning in the oppressive sea of human misery.

Travel affords the experiential intensification of consciousness, creating a sort of anarchy by revealing a world order that includes multiple definitions of reality, sensitivity, and propriety. Che’s transformation came about when he experienced an acute sense of powerlessness in treating the most basic illnesses inflicted by poverty, exploitation and greed. His quest for a real revolution against oppression was motivated by his personal contact with peasants and the poor, those who were in the bottom caste of humanity and had been oppressed by European imperial colonialism as well as capitalism. Che recorded the plight of one patient in his diary:

There isn’t much I can do for the sick woman. The poor thing was in a pitiful state, breathing the acrid smell of concentrated sweat and dirty feet that filled her room, mixed with the dust from a couple of armchairs, the only luxury items in her house...It is at times like this, when a doctor is conscious of his complete powerlessness, that he longs for change...In circumstances like this, individuals in poor families who can’t pay their way become surrounded by an atmosphere of barely disguised acrimony; they stop being father, mother, sister or brother and become a purely negative factor in the struggle for life...the healthy members of the community who resent their illness as if it were a personal insult to those who have to support them (2004, p. 70).

The illness was beyond medical treatment. The illness was the oppressive hopelessness, the humiliation to the humanity and the assault to the dignity of the wretched poor.

During his travel, Che emerged from a murky landscape of humanity. Che developed his profound ethical identity as a revolutionary doctor whose vocation was to heal those who were suffering from oppression and to combat the system of exploitation. Seeing, feeling, walking, and enduring, his travels acted as a catalyst to Che's transformation. In his travel diaries, he wrote that "the person who wrote these notes passed away the moment his feet touched Argentine soil. The person...[me], is no longer, at least I am not the person I once was" (2004, p. 32).

Travel initiates a ritual in which one wanders the world and "crosses over" to another plane of being. The ritual is a process of rebirth or a hybridization of consciousness. Guevara explained to his readers that travel changed him fundamentally; his ambitions, his understanding of success, his desire for life, and his individual successes were all reoriented as he began to strive for the collective liberation of humanity and for justice. To fight for liberation is to struggle against numbing oppression, the grotesque injustice of poverty and greed, violations of ethics and the abuse of power. Che declared, on his quest "[t]o be a revolutionary doctor, one needs to be a revolutionary first." He conceptualized liberation as coming from within, such that one, in order to assist liberation, is first liberated from oppression and then can work to shift the existing, abusive power structure.

### **Inter-Subjectivity**

Travel is a critical catalyst, as revealed in these students' narratives. Merleau-Ponty describes inter-subjectivity as a condition in which "the individual human being can locate himself or herself reaching backwards and forwards in time" (As cited in Greene, 1977, p. 123). Denise's reflection provides insight into this state of transition between two worlds, she said,

I was like my world was flipped upside down...It was an eye-opening experience to be on the outside looking in...to be able to be a part of two different cultures at the same time.

Through travel, Denise inserted herself into a new community. Previously an outsider, she was now a member. Her inter-subjective consciousness developed. According to Arendt in a liminal space of inter-subjectivity one is to "affirm and re-affirm [the] recognition of one another as equals, from which [he/she] is able to draw a sense of

identity and rootedness in the world” as a member of the community (As cited in Williams, 2002) .

Through the experiences that Che recorded in his diaries during nine months of travel through Latin America, “Che” Guevara (the revolutionary) and “Ernesto” Guevara (the medical doctor) came to know each other well. Che’s travel diaries reveal his internal dialogue about his experiences and personal developments. Che’s inter-subjective consciousness generated an intimate knowledge of himself as he would say, “entendámonos,” or “now we know each other” (2004).

Jenny described a similar sense of self-knowledge as developing during her study-abroad experience:

Last year, I went on exchange to Austria. I wanted to go to a foreign country, learn about the culture, the language, and make friends around the world. While I was there, I learned a million things about myself, my country, and my culture as well.

For both Che and Jenny, a new level of consciousness emerged from a dialectic of worlds, replacing the traveler’s previous subjective worldview with a hybrid perspective.

An inter-subjective lens sets one free from the bondage of egocentrism and ethnocentrism. To develop inter-subjective consciousness is to possess a second soul. This is evident when Luce describes her inter-cultural and inter-subjective identity.

Williams describes inter-subjective consciousness as being “laden with imminent potential,” stating that “the potential consequences for people engaging in this activity are limitless” (2002). Che embarked on a similar inter-subjective trajectory that allowed his critical consciousness to develop. Where one travels is what one becomes. In a 1960s speech to a new generation of medical doctors, Che discussed the development of his critical consciousness during his Latin American travels:

Through special circumstances and perhaps also because of my character, after receiving my degree I began to travel through Latin America and I got to know it intimately...[I]n the way I traveled, first as a student and afterward as a doctor, I began to come into close contact with poverty, with hunger, with disease, with the

inability to cure a child because of lack of resources, with numbness that hunger and continued punishment cause until a point is reached where a parent losing a child is an unimportant accident, as often happens among the hard-hit classes of our Latin American homeland (Guevara, 2003, p. 112).

Che's outrage at the injustice and oppression he witnessed compelled him to the quest for an authentic revolution. In speaking of his second Latin American trip, which took him north through Guatemala, Guevara referred to the young "Ernesto," describing his own internal changes – ones that had resulted from his personal experience with the short-lived Guatemalan revolution, which came to disintegration in 1954:

And I began to see...However, I continued being, as all of us always continue being, a child of my environment...I have already traveled a lot—I was then in Guatemala, the Guatemala of Arbenz—and I had begun to make notes to guide the conduct of a revolutionary doctor...Then, I realized one fundamental thing: to be a revolutionary doctor or to be a revolutionary, there must be a revolution. The isolated effort, the individual effort, the purity of ideals, the desire to sacrifice an entire lifetime to the noble ideals goes for naught if that effort is made alone, solitary, in some [ ] corner, fighting against hostile governments and social conditions (Guevara, 2003, p. 113).

Che's travels crystallized his quest and his political vision through revolution, even if his perspective was tainted by the rosy lens of romanticism that is typical to travelers. In Mexico, Che finally connected with the Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. In his writing, he described his perspective on the Granma expedition:

There existed a possibility of triumph that I had considered very doubtful when I signed up with the rebel commander [Fidel Castro], whom I had from the beginning ties of romantic adventurous sympathy and of shared belief that it was worth to die on a foreign beach for such a pure ideal (Szulc, 1986, p. 357).

Che, who was an Argentine national by birth, nevertheless thought of Cuba and Cubans as his country and his people. Where he traveled and dreams realized there made Che who he was. In his farewell letter to Fidel, he spoke of his attachment to Cuba and his participation in the Cuban Revolution:

Feeling that I have done my part in the Cuban Revolution, I bid farewell to you, to my revolutionary compatriots, and to your country, which is now my country too (Guevara, 1997, author's own translation).

Beginning as a traveler and then living the life of a revolutionary and a guerrilla fighter, Che transgressed political borders and dismantled the shackles of colonial capitalism. Fidel Castro, Che's revolutionary comrade and his intellectual peer, knew Che intimately due to their years in the Sierra Maestra fighting the guerrilla revolutionary war. About Che, Castro wrote the following:

National flags, prejudices, chauvinism, and egoism had disappeared from his mind and heart. He was ready to shed his generous blood spontaneously and immediately, on behalf of any people, for the cause of any people (Fidel, 2006, p. 97).

### **Crossing Borders and Shifting Horizons**

Inter-subjective consciousness breathes air into the still world of objectivity. From her trip to China, Melinda discovered that she in fact required an education although she had thought that she knew everything she needed to know. Changes in one's consciousness compel the subsequent changes in one's life trajectory. Melinda originally followed the life path for which she thought she was predestined by working at restaurants after dropping out of high school. Traveling and teaching English in China had a catalyzing effect by allowing Melinda to take steps forward and seek out more distant horizons. Reminiscing about discovering the existence of parallel universes 'outside her own backyard,' she said the following:

Now, eight years later, I am towards the end of my school journey...and have never given up on my dream to return to teaching ESL in Asia. One thing that I do know about my life is that life doesn't have to be mundane. My boys will know life outside of video games and television. Even if it takes me eight years of college to get them there!

For Che, travel represents biographical themes of vision and development of political consciousness and activism. Che's speech to medical students and health workers in 1960 uses *travel* as a metaphor for the foreseen struggles ahead and an uncertain path towards idealism and revolution for collective wellbeing

[W]e know the direction in which we have to travel, then the only thing left for us is to know the daily stretch of the road and to take it...[I]t is what he will do every day, what he will gain from his individual experience, and what he will give of himself in practicing his profession, dedicated to the people's well-being (p. 120, 2003).

Travel, which shifted Che's biographical trajectory, as a transformative ritual initiates the rebirth and renewal of consciousness through experiential procession such as "intensification, revitalization, redress, integration, and conformation" (McLaren, 1999). In the context of the Cuban revolution, the struggle for collective transformation encoded in the metaphor of travel had enlisted the popular support to persevere against the international hostility toward socialism and assisted to sustain Cuba's revolutionary life in the national re-construction process. Evoking the metaphor that revolutionary life as a national spiritual narrative, Che told "nobody can note that stretch; that stretch is the personal road of each individual" (Guevara, 2003, p. 120). Galeano relates travel to the concept of "utopia" (2011) as follows:

"[t]he utopia is on the horizon. Even when one takes two steps forward, [the utopia] remains two steps away, and the horizon shifts ten steps farther beyond it. So what purpose does the utopia serve? It makes us travel" (Galeano, 2011, author's own translation from Spanish).

In her writing, Luce enthusiastically described how her outdoor activities and international travels had enlightened her. She opened her narrative by saying, "My life is better than fiction. I don't need to invent any outlandish details..." Luce's narrative is about rebooting her passion for life by traveling, which she stopped doing when she began working after college: "Then, my travels were put temporarily on hold when I joined the public relations department...I left the [job] after only three years to continue my world travels. I spent the next three years traveling, living and working [on three different continents]." Luce's activities exemplify how the quest continues as the horizon continuously shifts.

### **Solidarity**

Jenny wrote emphatically of her study-abroad experience, commenting that "Austria has formed a huge part of my life, invigorating my passion for language and culture..." Jenny's identity in relation to others evolved through her relationships. In her writing, she narrates a story of transcendent love, characterizing this type of relationship as something that she learned about during her journey. Her relationships with others and her self-concept are anchored in love. However, this sensibility of love is particularly enhanced by the experience of solitude. As a solitary traveler, Jenny experienced a new type of solitude amidst the masses of humanity. She states,

“I learned that I could love a family as much as my own, no matter how far away that they are, and how much a home can mean to somebody who feels alone.”

Denise’s travel experience lends her a power of reflexivity, a privilege of being both an insider and outsider that is acquired through crossing the cultural psychological border. Denise now critiques the cost of maintaining a certain lifestyle at home and the economic divide between her home country, the United States, and the community she visited in Mexico:

The year after I came back from Mexico I went to N. University in K-Land. That was another cultural shock because I had been living in a third world country and now was living in the same zip code as Bill Gates! Everything seemed too frivolous and expensive to me.

Travel and the quality experience constitute a break from history. After her travels, Denise recoiled against the first-world culture of consumption and materialism, which contradicted her newly learned truth of life. She discovered her distaste for an expensive, wasteful lifestyle and decided to avoid living such a life. As a result, she made the decision to transfer to another school. She said, “I knew that this is not where I wanted to finish my degree. I moved back home to finish my AA and transferred to C. University....” An awakened consciousness compelled Denise to live in a different neighborhood, to join a different community, and to commit to a different profession. These decisions resulted from the love and self-love that arose from Denise’s intimate participation in a new community.

Ethics and love were central to Che’s armed struggles. The imminent potential of revolutionary consciousness can transform the “love of living humanity into actual deeds” (Guevara, 2003, p. 86). He said,

[I]t is not a matter of how many kilograms of meat one has to eat, or of how many times a year someone can go to the beach, or how many pretty things from abroad you might be able to buy with present-day wages. It is...making the individual feel more complete, with much more inner wealth and much more responsibility (Guevara, 2003, p. 225).

Che assumed a position of solidarity with oppressed groups around the world.

Overcoming oppression is a collective task that relies on a shared sense of reality that

people can identify with and believe in. According to Che, solidarity extends beyond good intentions; it is not merely “a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression.” Instead, one must share his fate; “one must accompany him to his death or victory” (2003). In discussing these matters, Che’s life story departs from his accounts of his travels and armed struggles.

The dominant theme of “life as travel” in Che’s revolutionary life and the narratives of the college students mutually illuminate and affirm one another. Reading narratives that describe people’s transformative experiences is instrumental to shaping the relevant professional discourse. In this case, juxtaposing Che’s Latin American travels with the narratives of the teacher candidates reveals that Che’s life, as a change agent, was emotionally and intellectually similar to the lives of the teachers. In selecting a career path and preparing for a profession, one should be motivated by one’s love for humanity and one’s perception of one’s social responsibilities. The task of education for liberation should depart from recognition “teaching as a ritual performance” (McLaren, 1999) to engage learning/teaching in dialectics of border-crossing and parallel universes.

## **Conclusion**

Che led the Cuban revolution before he was 30 years old. As time passed, he continued to lead guerrilla armies in Latin America and assisted in wars in which Africans sought independence from European colonialism. Che’s work to unite the oppressed peoples of the world in an armed struggle posed an increasing threat to the hegemonic power structure. Che was captured during a guerrilla battle in 1967 and was executed by Bolivian soldiers, who were instructed to kill him by the American government. Che was 39 years old at the time.

The young Che was characterized as a “daredevil” by biographer Jon Lee Anderson (2010). Che said that “the taste of fear” was one of the few experiences that make you value life” (2004, p. 163). He wrote candidly about fears, his fear to get in the water at night. He described how his courage almost failed him when he was in the high mountains in blinding darkness during his Latin American travel, the baptism of fire after the Granma landing, etc. His deeds manifested his courage through his guerilla activities and his determination to sacrifice his life for the cause of liberation. Che



was an eager volunteer when dangerous tasks were required, especially during his time in the Sierra Maestra. In fact, Fidel Castro commented that he felt it necessary at times to help to protect Che from over-exposure to high-risk tasks that other fighters were equally capable of accomplishing (Castro, 2006). Che's bravado and ascetic discipline redoubled. On the road, he encountered extreme natural environments and dangerous health issues, from bone-jarring cold at night and skin-cracking heat in expansive, high deserts to physical exhaustion and violent asthma attacks. The lack of food was also challenging when Che and Alberto, his travel companion, passed "through the center of Peru" (2004, p. 126). Che recorded in his diary that "hunger was like a strange animal, living not just in one particular part but all over our bodies...(p. 127)."

Che was drawn to the mystery of life itself. Travel was one way to explore the murky myth of humanity, and Che's quest for revolution would prove the immense potential of life to triumph over the impossible. Learning about himself, challenging himself, and working alongside countless down-trodden beings prepared him to struggle against oppression. It is the warm-blooded formless spirits as he described the leper patients in the San Pablo leper colony in Peru, whose affection he had received connected him to the greater humanity. On his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, Che was inspired and responded with "a quintessentially Pan-American speech" (2004, p. 154) although his words were "unrelated to the theme of the toast." Below is part of his speech:

[O]ur insignificance means we can't be spokespeople for such a noble cause, we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of [Latin] America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race, which from Mexico to the Magellan Straits bears notable ethnographical similarities. And so, in an attempt to rid myself of the weight of small minded provincialism, I propose to toast to Peru and to a United Latin America (2004, p. 149).

Che saw through the obscurity of cultural isolation to generations of human beings whose struggles, affection, warmth, and tenacity had allowed them to fight against violent conquest for five centuries. The history of oppression in Latin America made him deeply conscious of the collective identity of the continent. Che's revelation came from the growing intensity of his desire to join and help the wretched poor. As his intense experiences gave way to persistent reflections, these distilled quality

experiences built on each other and eventually reached the critical threshold that was necessary for him to experience a fundamental paradigm shift. For us, as it was for Che, travel can act as a performative ritual in which we begin to see our own humanity in the lives of others. His diary entry approaching the end of his first Latin American travel recorded a peculiar encounter with a traveler. He wrote the following.

Our interlocutor was, in fact, a very interesting character. From a country in Europe, he escaped the knife of dogmatism as a young man, knew the taste of fear...and afterwards he had wandered from country to country, gathering thousands of adventures, until he and his bones finally ended up in this isolate region, patiently waiting for the moment of great reckoning to arrive (Guevara, 2004, p. 163).

This encounter foreshadowed Che's revolutionary narrative, in which he would proclaim "the ultimate *mea culpa*" (Guevara, 2004, p. 165). Che's great reckoning was similar to that of this European traveler, who had waited for his own moment of reckoning:

I...will die knowing my sacrifice stems only from an inflexibility symbolizing our rotten civilization, which is crumbling. I also know...that you will die with a clenched fist and a tense jaw, the epitome of hatred and struggle, because you are not a symbol...but a genuine member of the society to be destroyed...You are as useful as I am, but you are not aware of how useful your contribution is to the society that sacrifices you (p. 164).

When one encounters one's ethical self head-on, one begins to perceive the direct consequences of one's involvement in the world. It becomes clear that one's action or inaction has moral ramifications. An ethical collective society and an ethical private life can only result from one's moral decisions.

The analysis in this paper merely provides a glimpse of how consciousness develops through travel. Travel has the profound potential to transform a personal narrative, providing both a literal and a metaphorical journey. In exploring Winnicott's understanding of "transitional phenomena," this paper has revealed that travel generates access to liminal spaces between multiple worlds and to multiple dimensions of consciousness, including the temporal, ethical, and ontological.

The life of Che Guevara shows how human agency can be used in an idealistic quest to transcend ordinary human existence. The life of Che has generated a transformative mythology about ethical emotions and the work of overcoming obstacles and enduring hardships through discipline and self-sacrifice. As Che's daughter Aleida Guevara March said, "What poor people need is not so much [Che's] scientific knowledge as a physician, but rather his strength and persistence in trying to bring about the social change" (Guevara March, 2004). The type of conviction that Che displayed in battling the raw reality of poverty has the power to transition passive and despondent spirits from the comfort of apathy to the heights of compassion that Che reached. We can discover the path to a transformative life and a changed world if we are put to the test. Like Che, we are immersed in the grand experiment of truth. Our first step must be to take risks and de-mystify ourselves.

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