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Lagim Tehi Tuma/Thinking Together: Between Risk, Restriction, and Learning in a U.S.-Ghana Collaborative

Abstract

As U.S.-based colleges and universities seek to globalize education with experiential learning, the risk of reinforcing assumptions about Western superiority, white supremacy and the “neediness” of “developing” countries increases. This essay discusses the rationale for a program that wrestles with questions of power, communication, and creativity by engaging students from the two U.S. liberal arts colleges (a consortium) and a Ghanaian university in a summer action research project. The program takes place in part on campus in the U.S. and in part in a village in Northern Ghana in partnership with three grassroots educational organizations: a community radio station, an Internet training center, and a non-governmental organization focused on early education. Tracking key words in two languages central to the programs a way to make the different histories in play visible, I argue that the purpose of the work is “lagim tehi tuma” -- Dagbani for “thinking together,” to develop not people, countries, or cultures, but knowledge, questions, and relationships. Drawing on Apusigah’s discussion of “tullum,” an indigenous, gendered approach to development, I advance a conception of collaboration that accepts limitation, impermanence, and risk as part of sustainability.

Keywords

Ghana, Collaboration, Power Relations, Experiential Learning, Culture, Multicultural Education, Global Approach, Intercultural Education

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

This is an essay about finding words to shape experiences. In other words, it is an essay about education -- how we come to understand and communicate our own and others' experiences across contexts of time, place, and power. Some of the words are in English, "the oppressor's language / yet I need it to talk to you" (Rich, 1971, p. 15) and include *risk*; *subsistence*; and *change*. Some are in Dagbani, the mother tongue of the Dagbamba people of Ghana's Northern Region: *tullum*, meaning the artful practice of reserving capacity for agency and creativity in pressing circumstances (Apusigah, 2006); *titagya*, meaning we have changed; and *silliminga*, meaning white person and stranger. The purpose of this essay is to illuminate the ethics of collaboration in a transnational collaborative conditioned by oppressive traditions, moral risks, and fragile possibilities. The goal of the collaborative is to develop relationships and experiences that foster *thinking together*: the development of meaningful questions and struggle with their implications -- not to "develop" a country or culture as is so often the stated or tacit goal of educational-based "development" work between the Global North and the Global South.

Neither strictly a research report nor strictly a personal narrative, this essay pursues a hybrid method that threads attention to language through a discussion of program evolution, story, and reflective analysis. The essay acknowledges restricted and partial understandings -- both integral to situations where cultural and linguistic differences are prominent -- as elements of rather than barriers to learning. Like the program it describes, the essay moves between clarity and obscurity, rather than prize one over another. In the words of Schlosser, "there is a sense in which all communication involves risk. Moreover, the risk is heightened or amplified when we recognize how language is saturated with power -- in particular colonial or late colonial power" (personal communication). Like communication, education also involves risk, including risks of action, interpretation, and ignorance.

Beginning with a discussion of the ethical risks of the program, the essay goes on to trace the program's history and evolution as the context for an

analysis of key concepts: subsistence, the notion of risk itself, and "tullum." This conceptual section wrestles with the unequal privilege at the center of the collaborative and sets up a discussion of students' work in the program in the context of what I call "tullum thinking" -- an approach to social action that presumes ongoing difficulty rather than stable resolution. Finally, the conclusion offers a summary, a discussion of lessons learned, and a look ahead.

Risks of the Program

As U.S.-based colleges and universities seek to "globalize" education, students like those I teach are encouraged to pursue academic and co-curricular overseas experiences that go beyond the traditional model of study abroad. When students from the U.S. (including, in complicated ways, international students not traveling on U.S. passports) travel to countries gravely harmed by historical arrangements of enslavement, colonialism and capitalism, this introduces the risk of reinforcing assumptions about Western superiority and the "neediness" of "developing" countries. Against this backdrop, I lead a program that engages students -- from the two U.S. liberal arts colleges (a consortium) where I work and a Ghanaian university -- in a summer action research experience investigating education that takes place in part on campus in the U.S. and in part in a village in Northern Ghana. The educational institutions involved in the summer program include, primarily, a university, a non-governmental organization focused on early education, a community radio station, and an information communication and technology (ICT) center. The program also works with other institutions, including a second university and an Internet learning hub, and includes lessons in beginning Dagbani as well as study and reflection circles. I will refer to this program as a whole as Lagim Tehi Tuma, Dagbani for "Thinking Together."

Focused on education in a range of formal to informal contexts, Lagim Tehi Tuma raises controversial questions about the character of education and intercultural work and who benefits from them, especially when financial resources are used to allow students to work and live in a place where financial resources are scarce. Tracking key words in English and Dagbani as a way to make visible the different histories in play, I explore the complexity of this engagement in one particular

context. Drawing on Apusigah's (2006) discussion of *tullum*, an indigenous, gendered approach to "development," I offer an approach to collaboration as that accepts the risks of reproduction, ignorance, imposition, and instability as part of the project and its sustainability. I begin by discussing four risks central to the program.

1. The Risk of Reproduction

As Mkabela (2005) notes, a central risk of collaboration in this work is that of furthering, whether or not intentionally, the "tendency to see culture in terms of the colonizer's precepts and to assess educational needs in terms of the colonizer's agenda" (p. 178). It is possible to interact without ever challenging the idea that people from so-called "first world" or "developed" countries, and white people, know better what to do and what to aim for. As an ideology, as much as a systemic pattern, white dominance holds that white people are rightly in charge, free from both accountability and vulnerability, as a basic tenet. A project such as Lagim Tehi Tuma can readily reinforce beliefs in both the U.S. and Ghana about the nature of development and progress that promote confusion about the world by calling parts of it "developed" and parts "developing."

There is one world or there are many, but there are not two in which one is "ahead" of the other when in fact the differences in access to wealth and resources result from relationships of power that encompass all. The Western idea of "development" insults the cultures and histories of people whose already well-developed existence is not patterned on Western models or expectations and whose labor and resources have, via theft, enslavement, and--less obvious but no less significant--exploitive economic policies, enabled Western dominance (King & McGrath, 2002; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). This history and the post-development theory necessary to unpack it (see, for example, Cornwall & Eade, 2010; Doane, 2014; Escobar, 1995; Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994) are not well represented in American or Ghanaian school curricula. Together with these massive gaps, the popular culture promotes the white savior complex (Cole, 2012; Kascak & DasGupta, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Stupart, 2013) and "voluntourism" as extensions of white supremacy (Coates, 2015; Hartman, 2008; Pierre, 2012).

2. The Risk of Ignorance and Misinformation

Formal education runs the risk of being isolated from the vibrancy and the complexity of lived experience, while also being complicit, actively or tacitly, in transmitting biased and ignorant frameworks for understanding cultural differences. Experiential education is offered as a corrective, but it, too, requires that assumptions be questioned.

While much has been written about mutual learning and benefit in international education and about community-based learning as an approach (Calleson & Seifer, 2005; Cooper, 2007; Danielson & Fallon, 2007; Jay, 2008), it remains a great challenge to do in a way that respects differently positioned people and their histories as equally dignified and possessed of consequential knowledge. In the present case, experiential learning is risky: even with a degree of academic grounding and preparation, American and Ghanaian collaborators are susceptible to misinformation and racialized narratives to explain what they are doing.

3. The Risk of Harm

In addition to the danger of causing and deepening cultural and political misunderstandings is the considerable risk that the collaboration could harm the local community. When foreigners come, local contexts and relationships are disrupted. When foreign money enters the picture as funding for local coordination, mentorship, language study, and field trips, it can lead to unanticipated problems. Even interactions that look beneficial one day can lead to problems another.

In the current case, one example is that while I have invited one of my main colleagues in Ghana to teach, speak, and extend the collaboration, and secured funding from the Colleges to support this as part of the philosophy of the partnership, three different times his visa application has been denied by the US consulate. This process has been painful and demoralizing to my colleague.

A second example is that over the years of the project one young lady, now a junior high school student, has been a particular friend to students and to myself, as well as a teacher and guide. This past summer, our

parting caused her distress, despite the promise of continuity and the shared acknowledgement of good experiences. The costs of such relationships are difficult to calculate, and real, even while benefits are also felt.

4. The Risk of Duration and Termination

In relation to the example above, the question of the project's duration and, on the flipside, termination also entails risk: who decides how long it is to last, and why it should change or end? Often, sustainability is set forth as a key measure of a program's merit. The assumption is often that longevity is good. From this perspective, a risk of the collaborative is that it stimulates engagements that may suddenly founder, leaving people, organizations, and relationships behind.

At the same time, it is equally possible that an engagement could go on past its interest to the local community. In a situation of vastly differential access to money and the power it gives, together with differences in languages and cultures that inhibit open dialogue, the risk of partners not voicing such questions of duration is significant. Also significant is the question of where to look for continuity and change: at the institutional and organizational levels? With respect to individuals or projects?

Program History, Description and Evolution

My closest colleagues in Ghana are residents of Dalun, a rural community of about 4,000 people. Dalun is 18 miles southeast of Tamale, the regional capital. While I work with academic colleagues and education officials, my chief partners are community people: local leaders, social entrepreneurs, and individuals doing grassroots work. My connection to Dalun began in 2009 with an invitation from Titagya, an early education project in Northern Ghana co-founded by an alumnus of my institution and two Ghanaian partners. Established in 2008, Titagya is a non-governmental organization of five preschools and kindergartens in three communities. Like the state education system in Ghana, Titagya focuses on fostering bilingual, interactive learning for school readiness and persistence. Titagya is also a hub for teacher professional development, and is beginning to collaborate with the Ghana Education Service.

My roles in Titagya have included co-creating with teachers in Ghana several teacher professional development workshops; working with undergraduates in curriculum co-design and internships; and, since 2013, serving as a member of the international board of directors. Since beginning with Titagya, I have come to work with a group of other educational organizations, which I discuss below. I am an educationist specializing in literacy studies; in building this program I have inclined towards a cluster of organizations dedicated to education in a range of ways. I have deliberately kept the focus on education, but broadly so, preferring to create cross-contextual dialogue and keep open questions of where and how teaching and learning occur and how they may be supported.

Through two College-sponsored visits to Dalun in 2013, the community where Titagya began, I created a transnational team to work on a summer program in which six students from my US institutions come to Dalun to work and learn. The model, now heading into its fourth summer, has changed each summer with lessons learned from past experience. For the first two summers, students spent 10 weeks in Dalun with pre-departure orientation and post-travel workshops. During the summer of 2015, our students were not permitted to travel due to the Ebola epidemic, so I redesigned the model as a distance/Internet-based exchange combined with an intensive reading and discussion program stateside. This shift allowed program commitments to be upheld and progress on partnerships, particularly with a Ghanaian university, to be made despite the need for a change in course. The program included three students from the Ghanaian university, and began establishing budgetary support for the Ghanaian students' participation. Supported by a program leadership team including myself, the Dalun coordinator, a team of local mentors, and a U.S. student assistant who had been a past Fellow, the U.S. and Ghanaian Fellows worked on teams on a series of small action research projects (e.g., historical studies, work on Dagomba and Ghanaian history, a radio podcast, the creation of Dagbani study resources and early education curriculum, and the study of selected texts in Ghanaian literature). Each Ghanaian student worked with one U.S. student within a consultative framework in which the entire group supported one another's work, with guidance from the local mentors and with weekly online Dagbani lessons. The U.S. group also functioned as a study circle, working with me and also taking leadership to choose, read,

and discuss a range of texts (print and video) on aspects of the histories, struggles, and aspirations in focus, in Ghana, in the U.S. and more broadly. These readings, together with critical reflection on program texts and experiences, inform the academic scaffold for the program going forward.

In fact, one of the first texts for study this summer will be the program budget, which I plan to make available to participants as an entryway into questions about resources, relationships, power, and ethics. Lagim Tehi Tuma is funded by three campus units in the two U.S. institutions in which I work. Two of them, one of which funds 60 and one 90 summer internships for undergraduates, split the cost of student travel and orientation and standing program expenses, including, in Ghana, compensation for the local coordinator, orientation and speakers, language instruction, internship mentors, and cultural experience (a field trip and a performance). The third unit funds room and board for three Ghanaian students as part of an institutional partnership between the college and their university. My own compensation is now, for the first time, a course release; at times the colleges have also funded my travel or portions of it. An entire paper could be written about the history and character of this budget, and I hope in time to do just that, tracking the funds from their sources to their outflow, and asking critical questions all along the way. In fact, this coming summer a former student now completing a Master's Degree in Public Service will be attached to the program to do a study of perspectives on its resourcing in relation to other work of its kind.

Based on lessons learned from the foregoing, and with renewed permission for student travel, this summer the fellowship will engage six U.S. fellows in a two-week intensive study I will lead (with much support from a range of stakeholders and speakers) stateside, during which they will read in the history of colonialism, development theory, and the role of racialization in Ghanaian and American histories. This will prepare them to join with Ghanaian partners in study circles and a Dalun-based daylong conference that I hope to build into the program in which portions of these texts are discussed. Students will also participate in intensive team building to engage issues of identity and personal history and to develop communication, reflection, action research, and conflict resolution skills. They will meet their Ghanaian partners and the local team in Dalun online

and begin learning Dagbani. Then they will travel with me to Ghana, beginning with a stop at the University of Ghana-Legon (where one of the colleges where I work has established a partnership) for an introductory workshop by faculty there. Then we will go to Dalun for six weeks of continued study, combined with internships, Dagbani language lessons, reflection (group and individual), and field trip experiences. Three Ghanaian university students will join the U.S. students in residence at the hostel and conference center where they stay and participate equally in all aspects of the program in Dalun. For them, this experience fulfills a requirement that they complete a professional internship the summer before their third and final year of studies.

The Ghanaian and American students intern at three education sites: Titagya, the Simli Community Radio station, and the local Information and Communications Technology Centre. They will engage in regular reflection sessions, and study circles in which US and Ghanaian interlocutors discuss texts (print or video) pertaining to the histories in play. The U.S. group will then return home for a final week of debriefing, report writing, and planning while the Ghanaian group completes that work in Tamale, with support from project staff and the professor who supervises their internship (which fulfills a graduation requirement for them). The following semester, the U.S. students will each take one of a set of recommended courses (or propose one in its place) in order to continue and deepen their learning, as has been the practice.

Learning Northern Ghana, Unlearning Subsistence: Situating My Education

The coast of Ghana held one of the largest ports for the transatlantic slave trade. The Northern Region of the country, where Dalun is located, was strategically isolated and denied infrastructure by the British during the colonial period so as to create a ready supply of cheap and enslaved labor. To this day, Northern Ghana is not afforded equal resources in education, healthcare, and transportation as other parts of the country. Southern Ghanaians sometimes regard the North as inaccessible and less advanced (Mahama, 2013). Of course, that is not the case. While the road is not always good, once you arrive you are in luck to be welcomed in a beautiful place.

Once, while visiting at Titagya, I sat for a while one morning with one of the teachers. A distinguished man of about my (middle) age, a former elected official, community radio host, and the head of a large family, was saying that he had recently begun working towards his teaching degree (now completed), having taught as what is called an “unqualified teacher.” In Ghana, such teachers are employed on completion of secondary school, but their status, job security, and pay are lower than those who complete tertiary education. It had taken time, he explained, to gain the opportunity to focus on his career given many responsibilities. “We Africans,” he said, “have a lot to look after.”

A significant way that outsiders misunderstand communities like Dalun is by entering with a simplistic view of their agriculture. As an American child growing up in the 1960s and 70s, I learned along the way about people called “subsistence farmers.” I got the picture that far from “here” (though agricultural work in this pattern could be found in the US through the 1950s) people lived by scratching their existence out of the bare ground. To “subsist,” I gathered, meant barely to make it, forever: a life of endless, profitless effort. Fulfillment, agency, and vision were not components of subsistence. I came to see later that this picture was both a cause and an effect of “arrogant perception” (Lugones, 1989, p. 4): the experience of others as inferior, a hallmark of white privilege. Arrogance formed a knot that most of my subsequent experiences only tightened. I thus gained the belief that work “without surplus” occupies a low rung on a ladder that somehow ranked human endeavor.

In fact, the word “subsistence” is defined variously. Yes, it can mean to exist with the minimum needed to maintain life. But it can also mean to exist, period. Even in my school lessons, I could gather that it meant something like self-sufficiency, though this kind of self-sufficiency looked like a default, not a desire. Capitalism doesn’t want us to be too self-sufficient. Subsistence, then, means something whole and it means barely enough.

In between these two senses of the word is where I feel myself to be with colleagues in Dalun. The imaginative spaces we share are both whole and barely enough. Temporary and delicate, they are at the same time informed by other parts of our identities that undermine them. Language is a prime example here. Operating in English or via translation is enough

in that we can exchange and create things. But in another way, operating in English is barely enough, because as Dagomba people, my Ghanaian colleagues never only operate in English; they operate in Dagbani, and often in other languages; Ghana is home to more than 100. To converse with me, they power down from this linguistic universe. To them English is never all, and often irrelevant. Many in their community exist with minimal English and many with complete English. To me, with an aspiration in time to learn Dagbani, for now English is the only option. Of course, I will never speak it as my interlocutors do, even if I manage to advance in it at all. They know this immediately – just as we all know, though differently, the violent role of English in Ghana’s colonial history.

Such restrictions are not to be pushed past. They are part of the process, like the glaring differences in our respective access to money and all that it provides (including plane tickets and anti-malaria medication). These go beyond being just huge problems: they issue from entire ways of life. How to think about engaging here? Again, there is risk. In such circumstances of inequity and fragmented communication, plans and utterances easily go astray or miss the mark. The mark, too, must be cultivated, and remains vulnerable.

Living Risk

When he was 10 years old, one of my first friends in Ghana starting growing rice in front of his house so that he could sell it and use the money to go to school. This is not the first thing I learned about him, of course. Our dialogue started a couple of years earlier, when he invited me to learn more about an organization he and a group of his old friends were creating to help vulnerable children, like they had been, to gain access to school. When my friend told me about his own schooling history, he referred to himself a student. But he never called himself a subsistence farmer.

Children working independently to fund their own education were not pictured in my school lessons on subsistence farmers. In Ghana, education is state-sponsored through the US equivalent of grade 9, but even then, there are still expenses, including a school uniform, transportation, and lunch. There was nothing in my education that taught me about my friend’s childhood. Or better: there was something,

and it caused me to believe, subconsciously, that it was about lack, while mine was about abundance. This is one of the hallmarks of privilege. Another is the tendency to believe that to be meaningful, human actions have to be efficacious; that we should expect to win before we invest.

In *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, Sharon Welch (1990) argues that the "moral and political imagination" of middle-class Americans "is shaped by an ethic of control, a construction of agency, responsibility and goodness which assumes that it is possible to guarantee the efficacy of one's actions" (p. 14). Welch criticizes this "particular construction of responsibility, the ethic of control," and argues "for an alternative construction of responsible action, the ethic of risk" (p. 10). Her claim is that, from literary texts written by contemporary African American women, we can learn to be responsible without feeling that we have to control outcomes. Her initial example has to do with the activist movement against stockpiling nuclear weapons, but she supports her argument with several test cases from novels: stories of people who act responsibly in the world while knowing that the outcomes of their actions are always in doubt, and usually under threat. Without an ethic of risk, Welch argues, we would never act with aspiration; we would not fight powers we deemed too great, or take on challenges that stretch the limits of our imagination. Risk makes us vulnerable to failure but it also helps us re-define failure and success in very different terms than the rationalist ones of prediction and control.

Risk is the very basis of subsistence farming. In an evocative turn of phrase, Tawney (1966) notes that "there are districts in which the position of the rural population is that of a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him" (p. 77). The vulnerability that Welch shows to be intolerable to the privileged mindset of an "ethic of control" is a fact of life in subsistence economies, where a bad season, storm, or road means the difference between life and death. An orientation to risk does not mean, of course, that people are reckless. It does mean that they do not confuse their plans and intentions, or their faith, with an expectation of outcome. They have long experienced, in Paul Farmer's terms, "fighting the long defeat" (Kidder, 2004, p. 217). They don't prefer defeat, but they don't premise their aspirations on the big win. As Paul Farmer says, neither should people working with them.

The Challenge of Power Sensitivity: "Stay with your riots at home"

As a white, middle class, American academic, I am obliged to make my study of "patterns of power" (Cole, 2012, para. 17) ongoing, and to integrate this study into my work as a professor of Education and into the rest of my life. I must be vigilant in tracing my complicity--and that of the institutions with which I associate--in histories and institutions that benefit me by, not only while, harming my Ghanaian colleagues. Ongoing sensitivity to power and culture is needed, together with ready critique and self-critique informed by ongoing study and relationship.

Illich (1968) writes: "Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theater of the world: the teacher, the volunteer, the missionary, the community organizer, the economic developer, and the vacationing do-gooders" (para. 16). As someone caught in this net, I respect Illich's demand for responsible action:

If you have any sense of responsibility at all, stay with your riots here at home. Work for the coming elections: You will know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how to communicate with those to whom you speak. And you will know when you fail. If you insist on working with the poor, if this is your vocation, then at least work among the poor who can tell you to go to hell. It is incredibly unfair for you to impose yourselves on a village where you are so linguistically deaf and dumb that you don't even understand what you are doing, or what people think of you. And it is profoundly damaging to yourselves when you define something that you want to do as "good," a "sacrifice" and "help." (1968, para. 35)

It could well be said that from 50 years ago, Illich is speaking directly to me, "the teacher." I am not sure that the people I work with in Dalun would tell me *no* when they deem it important, or turn me out when I am out of line. They are quite practiced at dealing with foreigners, many of whom have set a low bar for their own performance. I also can't be sure how often I will get the other people that I have engaged with this project involved in "suspending damage" (Tuck, 2009, p. 423) – turning away

from deficit-based understandings of historically marginalized people, even when the deficits are pointed out in order to argue for redress. The critic's voice, then, is crucial all along the way. Is it possible to heed it without letting it stop the conversation? Is it possible to integrate Illich's and Cole's warnings with Welch's? How can I guard against failure and also against a conception of failure that itself re-inscribes privilege and denies the chance of something newly possible, albeit fraught?

An Indigenous Approach to Challenge: *Tullum*

I find an answer to this question in the writing of educationist Atia Apusigah, Dean of Education at University of Development Studies in Tamale, Ghana. Apusigah argues that thoughts and actions about "development" must be grounded in women's indigenous knowledge. She advances the concept of *tullum* as a model for understanding "development" that recognizes the strengths of communities, particularly informed by the capacity of elder women to practice artful survival in difficulty.

Tullum, Apusigah emphasizes, defies easy definition. To equate it simply with challenge or even with something like resourcefulness is too simple. In order to speak of it, Apusigah offers "challenge" cautiously, as "a preferred approximation." It may well be that to keep it secret would be preferred, yet the importance of representing indigenous ways of knowing is too great. Here, Apusigah models the kind of risk I have sought to understand.

Tullum is found in the languages making up the Gur family, of which Dagbani is one. Apusigah emphasizes that its translation is neither simple nor inconsequential, as protecting it is important. It is important to track the meaning of *tullum* closely. Apusigah writes:

As a derivative of "tuooo (connoting its bitter characteristics) and tulga (connoting sweet characteristics)," "tullum" reflects a unique condition. This results in the connotation of dealing with challenge. Its "tuooo" derivative in the form of the bitter before taste points to the harsh realities of the every day. Yet, joined to a sweet aftertaste, "tullum" also connotes ability and/or potential to surmount difficulties. These potentials are nurtured in creative

energies for moving victim-creating situations through the harnessing of victor-converting energies for reaching assertive-responsive agencies. By so doing, it becomes possible to redefine the self in ways that foster the reclamation of lost identities and forging of new ones. (2006, p. 5)

Tullum is thus both an experience and an approach. Rooted in difficulty, it is responsive and creative. Through *tullum*, women work with challenge in such a way as to remain artful subjects, not victims:

Challenge becomes a preferred approximation of “tullum” and a reduced translation of an African indigenous concept rich and deep in meaning. Reduced as an expression of challenge, “tullum” steers away from a state of hopelessness. Instead, it suggests possibility for change. It offers opportunity for turning bad or difficult situations around; an opportunity for demonstrating creative abilities and potentials. (Apusigah, 2006, p. 5)

Apusigah goes on to discuss the strategic rather than simply reactive quality of *tullum*:

“Tullum” expresses more than an emergency response situation. For, “tullum” has more exactitude in response than emergencies require. It connotes a high measure of criticalness in decision-making, a political agency that is liberatory and responsiveness to practical situations. It connotes a preparedness and capacity to deal with and overcome challenging situations. (2006, p. 5).

Tullum means more than vigilance, and more than an emergency reserve. It is a matter of awareness and skill. Hope via *tullum* persists as part of thriving, not simply as escape from hardship. The concept of *tullum* holds open a trajectory from bitterness to a sweet aftertaste, allowing time for working through straitened circumstances with agency, even desire. Deep need and deep reserves are together in play as *tullum* reflects women’s power to respond creatively to difficulty.

In *tullum*, then, there is an indication of what is possible: a discipline of hope, struggle and risk grounded in but not dominated by restriction, alternative to the “ethic of control” so dominant in and on account of

the West, where something's value increases with its size. Here, a small size signifies power, albeit never exponential. Of course, I am not happy that these energies are often engaged by situations of truly grave exigency. I do not mean to romanticize, but neither do I want to ignore the creative power of *tullum*.

Thinking with *Tullum*

It is useful to consider students' projects in Lagim Tehi Tuma in light of *tullum*, and to invite them to do the same. While it is beyond the scope of this conceptual paper to detail past projects, I will offer a few brief examples in order to illustrate how student work engages with the risks, restriction, and learning at the heart of Lagim Tehi Tuma. I hope readers will find in these examples useful images of practice I hope to elaborate in subsequent work. The first two of the projects, radio broadcasts and a computer literacy workshop, were direct fulfillments of students' internship activities. In other words, they were designed as summer goals by the internship mentors. They were of a piece with the daily work of the internship. The second two, Family Day and the Black is Beautiful Workshop, represent projects that arose without prior planning or design, as a result of interaction, and a degree of tension that students and community partners sought a way to make generative. Interestingly, both Family Day and the Black is Beautiful workshop have since been reprised at the impetus of colleagues in Ghana -- Family day at other times of the year based on the school calendar, and the Black is Beautiful Workshop at another time when U.S.-based Fellows were in Dalun. An important question here is how to balance design with emergence, and how to allow for repetition and refinement of projects together with projects that come and go as interest and focus shift. *Tullum* thinking means something must be kept by in order to fuel future sustenance. Perhaps this range of projects shows something of the range and variation of what is kept by.

1. Radio Broadcasts

At the community radio station of Northern Ghana, students learned how the station worked, accompanied radio staff on an assessment project, and were eventually invited to create three programs on the topics of race and development that were hosted and translated by

radio staff. Speaking on these topics allowed students to connect their experiences in Dalun and their studies of sociology in the US. They talked in one program with the host about the history of race as an idea. Mindful of the risks of imposition and ignorance (their own of the context), the students nevertheless sought to create conversation with and among local people that referenced race as a social construction and locus of power in historical context, rather than a birth trait of individuals or groups.

Having heard while in Dalun Western development praised as a model and wishing to share another way of thinking about it, in another segment the students discussed development as a political process rather than a technological one, encouraging listeners to think about development in historical context. Defining words as well as translating them proved central to these endeavors. Each radio program included a call-in component, so after the students presented some of their ideas, they engaged in dialogue (also via translation) with listeners. Some callers agreed with their slant on the topics and others took a less critical view. The point was not to persuade but to converse.

Transcripts of these shows by a colleague in Dalun have become available for reading and analysis toward further transnational dialogue in thinking together about race and development, and about the role of the radio for this purpose. It can be difficult to open the call-in and translation lines to the voicing of painful thoughts about natural superiority or advancement, and with highly uncertain and uncontrollable results. At the same time, to start a dialogue creates material for future work and study, potentially refined by the heat of *tullum*. Here, the risks of harm and sustainability are also operative. It is possible that hard dialogue causes stress and conflict that might not otherwise occur. And while students hoped to plant seeds that could grow in time, the ongoing sustainability of their nurturance is limited by distance and the interval-based character of the Lagim Tehi Tuma program.

2. Girls' Computer Literacy Workshop

Two fellows working in the Dalun ICT Centre created a 4-week workshop for junior secondary school girls to gain basic computer experience and

literacy with guidance and support from their mentor and the director of the Centre. With 16 computers, and thus spaces, 32 girls applied to participate. The Fellows led one section and the Centre director offered a second section. During breaks, the Fellows and the group of girls would step outside the Centre into the courtyard of the Dalun Youth House and the girls would lead games and dancing. Here, the initial threat of scarcity gave way to capacity, and one participant asked and was permitted to continue studying in the Centre after the workshop series was done.

Here, *tullum* may be used in order to think about sustainability. Yes, there easily developed abundant, even unexpected room, *tulga*, sweetness--but the series passed. Does the sweetness then give way to bitterness, or did the project create something to keep for future creative action? Is it acceptable, even desirable, for some projects to come and go? Do they enter into individuals' experiences to be fuel for further experience? How should their opportunity and other costs also be considered?

3. Family Day

With the goal of fostering greater school-family connection, Fellows worked with Titagya teachers, following a joint brainstorming session about summer activities, to plan and host a day for parents and guardians to visit their wards' classrooms, see students at work, and enjoy student recitations and performances. This is a setting for "*tullum* thinking" in that formal education has often alienated parents and guardians, especially when they themselves were not well-served by it (Dehyle, 1995; Lareu, 2003) and when their knowledge was not respected by it. There is bitterness here, as well as in the very character, often violent and disrespectful, of western schooling (Grossan, Hurst, Marlens, & Black (2010); Willinsky, 2000). At the same time, at the depth of this bitterness, there is love and yearning: love for the child; yearning for something beyond what is known and what is past. Family Day was well received with strong, joyful attendance, the teachers planning for every guest to take home a piece of work by a child, and a radio broadcast of the children's recitations. It has since been repeated several times in all three of the Titagya schools when Lagim Tehi Tuma Fellows have not been present.

At the same time, *tullum* thinking suggests that Family Day is not a complete solution to a problem. The problem is more unwieldy than that. But the sweetness of interaction that follows the bitterness, cyclical as it may be, is also real, and may energize further work and new questions. For example, how might Titagya broaden still further its interactions with family and community? Might Family Day be followed by a community conversation hosted by the parent-teacher organization about ways to inform, improve, and support the school? Are other schools in the area doing it differently?

4. Black is Beautiful Workshop

Sometimes, as is to be hoped, projects go in a beneficial direction not anticipated in advance. At summer's end in 2014 two Fellows teamed up with two local youth leaders to create a workshop held in the Dalun Youth House on "Black is Beautiful." Sparked by seeing skin lightening cream for sale in the local market and seeing light-skinned people (including the peers in their own group) at times given greater attention in public, the students, themselves African American, co-planned an interactive, bilingual workshop with two colleagues in Dalun to challenge colorism and affirm the beauty and power of Black people. Clearly this is an example of *tullum* thinking -- getting close to the intensity and bitterness of skin color hierarchy and the ways it is capitalized, and fanning that heat into a warm, bright inquiry. While there isn't scope to detail the workshop here (and I hope its authors will write about it), it is important to note that as it went on, already well attended, participants literally called their friends and told them to come right away. It too was recorded and aired later on the radio.

In this example, American students took the risk of imposition to bring forward a discourse from their home, "Black is Beautiful," and also challenged local norms rather than accepting them. Without trust and interest from the community, this event could have gone very wrong. Instead, one of the co-planners and co-leaders in Dalun, a young teacher, planned to keep the project going and has outreached to an incoming group of Fellows to continue it with him. The color hierarchy and its racist capitalization are worldwide issues; the young people are talking about how this project could grow. Perhaps it will become central to the evolution of Lagim Tehi Tuma. It seems important that this project

emerged in the local context informed by individual students' experiences and perspectives, and in collaboration with local partners, centered directly on questions of race and racism. This suggests that this collaborative, and perhaps others like it, there needs to be room for social action to emerge. It also suggests that it is important to define education broadly so that participatory work such as this is squarely understood as part of it.

Conclusion: "We Are Changing"

In this essay, I have tracked the risks inherent in a transnational education collaborative that rests on grievous inequities, past and current, among the participants. With the view that risk is integral to learning, teaching, and communication, and in particular, contextual ways, I have highlighted the limitation and fragility of collaboration the takes place *between* different languages, purposes, and relationships. I have also attended to the possible power of fragile and limited things with reference to the concept of *tullum* -- seeking to do so by situating my work with reference to my particular standpoint. Thus, I have sought to take account of this standpoint while at the same time being alert and open to alternatives. Perhaps this is the basis of what it means to "think together."

I hope that this essay will contribute to the thinking of others in this work. We are really just at the beginning of conceiving of education as collaborative rather than didactic, and of wrestling with the powerful role that didactic education has played in, and in concealing, oppression. Lagim Tehi Tuma integrates these two new endeavors. Is it worth it? I hope this essay suggests the complexity that attends an answer. "At the end of the summer," a U.S.-based student said in a reflective assessment, "one Dalun leader's son got really sick and he needed money to spend on his kids' treatment. Should we as Fellows give our program money instead of spending it on ourselves? We didn't want this to be Westerners coming in and bearing presents—it might silence them in our work on projects, create inequality in the community. For that person's son, how much is fair pay? There are no clear answers."

One over-arching lesson, affirmed by an external assessment of the project I commissioned last year, is the importance of recognizing difficulty and strain as inherent, and developing an organization that learns from mistakes. A Bryn Mawr alumna who was an international student from Ghana and has been a friend and advisor to Titagya and Lagim Tehi Tuma said:

We can't operate without inequality, hitting its scars, ripping it open—like an interracial marriage—you're going to see color, deal with it on daily basis . . . Because you're committed to the long-term, the mistakes aren't as painful...both sides are investing, but in context of power and equality, you make mistakes in the short-term but you benefit in the long-term.

The question of who benefits, how, and at what cost must be perpetually open. As I have said, in Dagbani, *titagya* means "we have changed." When I hear this, I think that "we" encompasses everyone who brings about the school project. I like to think that *titagya* means that we all change when we work across and, when possible, outside of the construct of haves and have-nots--whether with respect to geography or generation.

In a moment that seriously challenged these assumptions, a colleague in the NGO told me what *titagya* meant to him: "Before now we had negative beliefs about Western education. Now the story is different and we have accepted formal education as the way out of poverty to liberation." While I hear the "we" as inclusive of all of the partners, U.S.-based and Ghanaian, my colleague uses "we" to refer to Africans. This statement may be read to demonstrate the force of Western domination. This reading reminds me once again how readily my work may be cast, and appropriated, in its terms. This challenge is not soon to depart, and it is steep, suggesting despair of engaging outside of it.

And yet. In the voice of globalization, "we have changed" sounds like a concession to Western dominance. But in the voice of *tullum*, the acceptance is strategic, and agentic. "We" may be read not as isolated or resigned, but as spoken in solidarity. Now the story is different, as the speaker said. To "accept" formal education -- to change the story of what it is and can do -- is not necessarily equivalent to ceding authority over

what it is or is for. As *tullum*, the prospect of liberation is preserved, not surrendered, in my colleague's statement. *We* have changed - I hear my colleague saying, about and for his own people -- and liberation remains *our* aim.

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