Service-learning & Civic Engagement in India
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Abstract
With the increased influx of Indian immigrants and India’s recent economic boom, faculty and administrators have recognized the need to expand curricula, study abroad, civic engagement and service learning programs to increase cross-cultural understanding. At the College of William and Mary, four undergraduate students and the two authors participated in a five-week service-learning/civic engagement program in Kolkata and Darjeeling, India. Pre- and post-assessments examined students’ changes in knowledge of and attitudes toward: Asian-Americans of Indian descent, Indians, and Indian culture. Findings indicated attitudinal changes toward Asians and Asia.

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The lenses through which any nation looks at life are not the ones another nation uses. It is hard to be conscious of the eyes through which one looks. Any country takes them for granted, and the tricks of focusing and of perspective which give to any people its national view of life seem to that people the god-given arrangement of the landscape.

*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Ruth Benedict, 1989

Introduction
The tremendous influx of Asian immigrants to the United States has brought about dramatic demographic changes in recent decades. Yet, for the majority of college students, there has been limited exposure to Indian culture through either first-hand experiences or through the
formal K-12 social studies curriculum (Banks, 2008; McEachron, 2001). The authors, each of whom are involved in a School of Education and a Center for International Studies, created a service-learning/civic engagement program especially for India because of the need for opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to study in developing nations (Bhandari & Chow, 2008). In addition, we wanted to provide students an opportunity to understand an educational system that is evolving from its colonial past. While most of the educational institutions in India have been built upon the British educational system, others are emerging that have a flavor of local Indian culture, customs, and political climate. Our goal was to provide an understanding of the colonial educational system and how the political climate today has influenced current educational experiences.

With this in mind, the authors, one of whom grew up in Kolkata, developed a program and designed a research plan to investigate the manner in which students’ perceptions of Indian-Americans, Indians, Indian and American culture changed, if at all, as the result of service and civic engagement. Kolkata is situated in the center of India’s eastern industrial region and has a population of more than 13 million, making it India’s second largest city behind Mumbai. The Indian schools selected for teaching internships and service-learning reflected the variations based on traditional colonial rule and contemporary efforts to revive the dominance of Indian traditions. According to the 2001 census, India’s literacy rate was around 65%, with male literacy at 76% and female literacy at 54% (Westwell, 2007). Official figures indicate that two-thirds of eligible children are enrolled, but many children in rural areas drop out to work on the land.

All the schools where the students taught were in Kolkata, because of the need for English-medium schools. St. Xaviers is a Catholic school with an instructional program designed by the Catholic Church. By contrast, The Modern High School for Girls had been developed by Indian industrialists and has a more secular feel to it; the curriculum and activities are more in line with the local culture and customs. A third school, Kolkata International, is an amalgamation of the characteristics of the previously described schools, where the mission of the original institution was for ex-patriots living in Kolkata or the eastern part of the country. The model of the education system at Kolkata International was completely British originally, but over time it has enrolled more local students from the city and has allowed local teachers to teach in the system. Given these three schools with distinct histories, our hope was to give a flair for the local and foreign influences so pre-service teachers might grasp the complexity and variation in the Indian educational system.

To promote civic engagement, health clinics were selected by the host families and school administrators based on their unique needs. In Kolkata, the clinics we partnered with were the following: Woodlands; The Rehabilitation Centre for Children; The Park Clinic, a charitable society of the Park Medical Research Society. In the tea region of Darjeeling, we collaborated with the Goodricke Hospital in Dooars. The clinics were selected so that art created by the College of William and Mary students and Indian students could be donated for the purpose
of enhancing the clinical settings. In addition, leaders in the fields of education, law, business and the arts were selected to promote civic engagement opportunities.

**Objectives and Purposes**

The authors' objectives for establishing a service-learning/civic engagement program in India were to: (a) provide students with teaching and service opportunities in English-medium Indian schools and healthcare facilities, (b) provide students with home stays to enable them to participate in Indian family life, and (c) provide students with opportunities for civic engagement with Indians who would share expertise in educational policy, law, politics, religion, medicine, and business. The purposes for creating these opportunities were to expand students' knowledge of Indian people, provide opportunities to reflect on images of Indian culture, and develop a broader and more informed view of the world given international teaching service-learning and civic engagement. Since three of the students were pre-service teachers and one was an upcoming graduate student in public policy, the authors' purposes in selecting these four students included the expectation that they would apply their new knowledge in educational and policy-making settings.

These goals are consistent with those of other scholars who have argued for transformative experiences for students in higher education (O'Grady, 2000). Oden and Casey (2007) articulate the more ambitious long-term goals of a reflective framework of reciprocity and community service settings by saying that such curricular goals in higher education “would contribute to a stream of social activism that would surely be effective in communities of need. Moreover, such a model could effectively transform the lives of the participating students as well as enrich the communities influenced by their efforts” (p.17). Self-discovery and transformation are heightened by mere separation from familiar environments. For DeVitis, Johns, and Simpson (1998) the opportunity to turn away from “privatistic lifestyles” (p. 15) provides the impetus for making service to the community more operative in the lives of students.

**Perspectives and Theoretical Framework**

Cross-cultural experience can provide individuals with both mirrors and windows for understanding cultural similarities and differences (Rudman, 1995). That is, by interacting with others from a foreign culture, one is presented with windows for learning about others and the world. Also, when one participates with fellow citizens in this context, there are opportunities to see one’s own culture mirrored back when collectively reflecting upon the contrasts between Indian and American culture. This process provides an opportunity for growth and for expanding one’s views of other cultural groups (Ogbu, 1992). The opportunity to experience another culture first-hand is particularly important for individuals who seek roles in teaching or shaping public policy, because it allows them to gain a more pluralistic perspective.
The process of changing one’s world view is supported by “positioning theory,” which maintains that the focus for transformation “is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 62). In contrast to an emphasis upon cross-cultural roles and traditions, positioning “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters...” (Davies & Harre, p. 43).

In this study, the authors planned for meaningful experiences that went beyond exposure to the varying roles and traditions that might typically be experienced by tourists. Instead, participants’ encounters included conversations with business executives and their families in the tea estates, tea pickers, headteachers (principals) and teachers in English-medium schools, K-12 students, a Minister of Education, university professors, healthcare providers, and social workers. Participants also heard Indian views of historical and contemporary relationships among Muslims and Hindus in the region. These pre-arranged exchanges were possible because Kolkata is the birthplace of one of the authors who has continuing relationships with families and friends in the city.

Harre and Van Langenhove (1991) describe the theoretical importance of conversations as a means for social transformation. They point out that one can initially position oneself or be positioned as powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definitive or tentative. Depending on how the conversation unfolds, second order positioning may occur whereby the first order positioning is questioned and must be negotiated. “In other words, second order positioning occurs when the first order positioning is not taken for granted by one of the persons involved in the discussion” (Harre & Van Langenhove, p. 396). Examining these dynamic forces was particularly challenging given the fact that the American students were guests in a foreign culture, establishing a relationship of mutual diplomacy. Nevertheless, with the addition of personal reflective journals maintained during the experience, it was possible to examine students’ perceptions and interpretations of interactions after they occurred.

Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh (2006) conducted a study that supports the notion of providing substantive experiences in service-learning and civic engagement accompanied by opportunities for reflection. They evaluated the relationship between integrity and types of service, utilizing a one-way ANOVA with the two components of integrity—Identity and Long-Term Commitment—as the dependent variables. There was a significant effect for service preferences on Identity, $F(3,175) = 16.14, p<.01$, and on Long-Term Commitment, $F(3,175) = 9.11, p<.01$. The college students in their study indicated a preference for charity with less interest in advocacy and social change. The research by Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh highlights the importance of direct service to others through charity and the importance of service-learning projects through community service organizations. More challenging for faculty and administrators at colleges and universities is the development of service-learning programs that engage students in politically-oriented activities that bring about social change.
For teachers and policy makers, opportunities for social change are within their grasp. There has been considerable research that has examined teachers’ roles in relation to minority groups in their classrooms and implications of their teaching strategies for social change (Banks, 2008). Having knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of students is a major factor for enhancing communication between teachers, students, and their families. Banks and Nieto (1999) suggest that educators play essential roles in the effort to break down the social injustices inherent in our educational systems due to insensitivity toward cultural differences. According to Nieto (p. 124), “to become effective teachers of all students, educators must undergo a profound shift in their beliefs, attitudes and values about differences...Affirming diversity means becoming a multicultural person.”

Given the dramatic demographic changes in America and the rest of the world, “it makes eminent good sense to educate all our students to be comfortable with differences” (Nieto, 1999, p. 125). “In 2003, 40% of the students enrolled in grades 1-12 in the public schools were students of color [students of African-, Asian-, Hispanic-, and Native-American descent]. It is projected that students of color will make up about 48% of the nation’s school age youth by 2020” (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. iii). The cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in our schools reflects the diversity of American society, and therefore “provides an excellent context for students to acquire the multicultural understandings and skills needed to function effectively in their local communities, the nation and the world” (Banks & Banks, p. iii). It is hoped that the more that policy makers and teachers can learn about the cultural backgrounds of students, the more effective they can be in enhancing cross-cultural awareness and international understanding.

**Methods and Modes of Inquiry**

The study employed multiple measures of inquiry, utilizing principles of good practice for combining civic engagement, service, and teaching: engaging people in actions for a common good; opportunities for reflection; clear goals; sustained organizational commitment; training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation; and participation with diverse populations (Calderón, 2007). The authors interacted with the participating students prior to, during, and after their experiences in India. Interacting with students in class, traveling with them, and being part of their planned activities throughout the five-week program, afforded a level of familiarity that was conducive to both observation and inquiry. Data collection included interviews and written instruments. The pre-assessments and training were conducted during the first week of the program, journal prompts and interviews dispersed throughout the five weeks, and the post-assessments, evaluation and recognition were collected during the last week on campus.
Participants
Students were invited to apply for participation in the first College of William and Mary service-learning/civic engagement project in India. After reviewing the applicants’ essays and resumes, three women majoring in education, and one man beginning a graduate program in public policy were invited to participate out of approximately 20 applicants. Participation in the research study was not a condition of acceptance into the program, however, all four selected for the program also agreed to participate in the study. Two female participants were Anglo-Americans (Students A and B) and one was of Anglo- and Hispanic-American heritage (Student C); the male (Student D) was an Asian-American of Bengali descent.

Instruments
Questionnaires. Bringle, Phillips, and Hudson (2004) argue that service learning has unique aspects of pedagogy that warrant additional resources, such as scales that allow for reflection. In this study, a questionnaire was administered as a pre- and post-assessment examining four areas. These areas included knowledge of and attitudes toward Asian-Americans of Indian decent, Indians, American culture, and Indian culture. The questions relevant to others asked students to describe valuable insights about Indian culture based on relationships or interaction with designated individuals. Questions relevant to knowledge of and attitudes toward American and Indian culture were divided into the following dimensions: political, economic, religious, ethnic, social, geographical, biographical, artistic, literary, and musical.

Reflective journal entries and personal interview. Students were asked to respond to five prompts provided: prior to going to India (1), while in India (3), and after leaving India (1). Personal interviews were conducted with participants prior to leaving for India and while in India. Upon returning to campus for the final week, students gave a presentation to members of the campus community, describing what they had learned throughout their teaching, service learning, and civic engagement.

Procedures
The service-learning and civic engagement program in India spanned five weeks, three of which were spent in Kolkata and Darjeeling, India. The pre-departure week on campus was devoted to team building and information sessions about Indian culture. When in India, students taught in three schools, St. Xaviers (K-8), Modern High School for Girls (K-12), and Kolkata International (K-12). In addition, students participated in Paintfests, which were service opportunities for students in the previously mentioned schools to paint on canvases that were donated to health clinics and hospitals, particularly ones that had limited resources. Paintfest kits were made available through generous donations from The Foundation for Hospital Art introduced to the authors by the Associate Dean of the School of Business. The Foundation for Hospital Art is a world-wide community organization that has sponsored such programs since 1984. The Paintfests, visits, and donations to health clinics integrated the teaching and service-
learning projects for the College of William and Mary students. They also gave Indian students an opportunity to provide service to the local health clinics and hospital.

In addition, the author who had lived in Kolkata arranged for a variety of civic engagement opportunities with individuals who were civic leaders. In addition to the home stays with his family’s business associates in the tea production industry, meetings were arranged with Kathak dance performers, an attorney, a university instructor, and a Minister of Education. The participants were free to ask questions about their roles in Indian society.

Data Sources and Evidence
A content analysis was conducted for the assessments from the instruments and journal entries, noting change or stasis in the knowledge and attitudes toward Indians, Asian-Americans, and Indian and American culture. A graduate assistant prepared data tables to record changes per participant for each of the instruments’ questions. These and transcriptions of journal entries were analyzed by the authors. Interpretations were made based on the previously stated organizing themes: Knowledge of and attitudes toward Indian-Americans of Asian descent; knowledge of and attitudes toward Indians; knowledge of and attitudes toward American culture; knowledge of and attitudes toward Indian culture.

Presentation and Analysis of Results
Principles of positioning theory were applied to the findings, focusing on the dynamic aspects of encounters and how participants negotiate new positions. Given the volume of data collected, it is not possible to present each student’s response in every category. Therefore, data will be reported by presenting salient experiences for each of the broad objectives previously described: (a) teaching and service learning, (b) home stays with Indian families, (c) civic engagement with Indian leaders, (d) roles and immigrant challenges of Asian-Americans, and (e) Indian culture, specifically, reactions to the disenfranchised. Within these broad categories, data sources will be incorporated from the following categories: Knowledge of and attitudes toward Indian-Americans of Asian descent; knowledge of and attitudes toward Indians; knowledge of and attitudes toward American culture; knowledge of and attitudes toward Indian culture.

Teaching and Service Learning
Given the contrast in the availability of curriculum materials in India and the U.S., the American students were quite baffled when they encountered Indian students who conveyed a strong commitment to learning. The Indian students’ expansive thinking was difficult to comprehend in the absence of the extensive infrastructure and resources that students were used to in the United States. For example, when observing a third grader, who was reciting limericks in a student assembly, our students remarked that they didn’t know if 8-year olds in the U.S. knew
what a limerick was. In addition, 8- and 9-year olds were engaging our students in questions about the terrorist attack of 9/11. Students were surprised at the level of understanding that Indian students had about the world. Given these two examples, our students were challenged to think about how someone who lives in such an economic environment may have such an expansive learning experience in comparison to someone of the same age who lives in a developed nation. The students were grappling with the fact that achievement perhaps has less to do with infrastructure and more to do with the environment in which learning is taking place at home and at school and the cultural ethos that exists to foster that learning. This discovery is indicated in students’ comments below:

[Student D]: We observed a class 4 history class (age 9), where they were in their second week of studying archaeology; and a class 6 history class (age 11), where they were learning about the Renaissance period. Towards the end of our day, we observed a group of class 8 (age 13) students in their economics class. ....Some general impressions about the school: (1) The faculty far out-match the facilities in which they teach, (2) The fans and heat, not to mention noise from adjacent classrooms would seem to make it difficult to pay attention, but the students seemed fine.

[Student B]: I believe that Kolkata is so rich in its history, and yet, there is no effort to preserve historical monuments and buildings. It’s also disappointing to find out that the monetary distribution to different departments in schools is so uneven, with the administration benefiting from this money more than the students. One of the most difficult things to understand is how schools with such high standards have such small libraries with such out-dated books.

[Student A]: It is also remarkable how similar some things are which reminds me of another moving event. Working today with the children and, in particular, watching [Student D] interact with students was great. Kids all over are the same. They just want approval and love, and it was apparent today that all children are incredible and so innocent, no matter where you are.

Student A focused on the similarities among children in cross-cultural settings. In addition to the observations noted above, she also prepared and taught a lesson that made these similarities more explicit. During the week prior to departure to India, Student A became excited about her research on universal themes in children’s literature; Student A took *Puss in Boots* (Light, 2002) with her from the United States, knowing that she would be able to draw parallels between its main theme and the theme in the Indian folktale *Sivalu the Matchmaker* (Crouch, 1980).

In addition to the overall desire to find literary connections, Student A could not escape stark contrasts. Toward the end of her stay in Kolkata, Student A revealed the reality of being physically different no matter how one might prefer to focus on cultural universals. In her journal she noted, “As a young, white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, American woman here in
Kolkata, I think I have never been more aware of my physical attributes. I think that since I have always been part of the majority I have never truly considered skin tone and its effects on behavior. It is strange and still interesting to be part of the minority. It makes me realize how I blend in back home.”

Home Stays with Indian Families
Second order conversations (Harre & Van Langenhove, 1991) such as negotiation and challenging one another’s assumptions occurred more frequently with host families, suggesting that a certain level of trust and intimacy may be conducive to probing cultural assumptions and beliefs. For Student D, political discussions with members of host families proved to be poignant, as indicated in his remarks below:

“It’s interesting how with so many people, your perception of them changes dramatically shortly after meeting them and interacting with them...Mrs. J and I started talking immediately about politics...[I]n America, I would say it is relatively rare for me to find others who are interested in politics.....In America, we take our democratic political system for granted. Our standard of living is so high that the average American simply does not care for politics in the same way as an Indian would. I did not meet a single educated Indian that was not politically aware.

When I asked Mrs. J about this, we began to discuss how the nature of the political system in India requires the vigilance of educated citizens. Corruption is rife at all levels of Indian politics...It is really interesting how even when you are with someone continuously for three weeks, it is still possible that you may not know them that well. ....It is safe to say that she is an extremely opinionated woman. As such, I found many of her views to be quite extreme, but generally well-informed. Mrs. J was no fan of the Communists in West Bengal...I also broached the topic of the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] Hindu-nationalist government which currently controls India. Mrs. J was no fan of this government for practical reasons, but to me, it seemed that she was not entirely willing to admit the extent to which Hindu nationalist fervor was sweeping cross India, especially among the uneducated masses. To someone of her class, the BJP was more a non-Congress party. All of this being said, she still did not like the BJP, nor did she care for Hindu nationalism.

Finally, I had built up the courage to ask her about the India-Pakistan issue, and I must say, I was shocked to some extent. Given Mrs. J’s progressive views on so many subjects, certainly she must see that there are two sides to this issue. But her family’s military background, I believe, contributed to her ostensibly stern views on this matter. In her words, Pakistan’s mission is to spread Islam, plain and simple.

For Student D, the conversation with Mrs. J supports second order positioning theory whereby conversations unfold that probe for deeper levels of understanding and cultural exchange. This was affirmed by Student D’s concluding journal entry remark which stated, “I am sure Mrs. J
was not deficient in her study of history, but I guess our views differ partially because she has lived this history, and I have just read it.” As someone headed to graduate school in public policy, Student D was participating in civic engagement in an international context, hopefully learning valuable lessons in diplomacy and cross-cultural understanding.

**Civic Engagement with Indian Leaders**

Student A was deeply affected by the universal aspects of teaching and learning after her interactions with Indian professors who were also teacher educators:

*Being here and experiencing India has enabled me to look more at the universal aspects of human nature—in families and even in the schools. Tonight we had the incredible opportunity to speak with well-respected women in education. The instruction of pre-service teachers is amazingly similar. They take a majority of the same classes we do. Education here also seems to have the same problems and areas of growth. I was amazed by the similarities in literacy struggles, technology, and inclusion. These three topics seemed to dominate my classes in education over the past year [in the U.S.]. In addition, most of the programs in our schools (free lunch, mandatory schooling) are also here but due to the masses of people, they are not as successful. So we know they can work, but how can we adapt them to work for such an overpopulated place?*

For Student A, Rudman’s notion of *mirrors and windows* was reflected in her examination of cultural differences and similarities.

While it is true that the professionals demonstrated very high levels of education, the authors noticed a disparity between their levels of attainment and the ability to network professionally. That is, there seemed to be a shortage of professional organizations and professional journals through which the professionals could continue their growth once they had attained high administrative educational positions. To the authors, it seemed logical that the administrators at each of the schools could provide leadership opportunities through exchange with each other; yet, the very nature of their competition for students made this suggestion seem impractical.

Clarkson (2008) made similar observations regarding the state of teacher education in India, stating that teacher education in India has changed slowly despite the economic boom. Comparing India and the United Kingdom based on service learning for U.K. students, Clarkson maintains that economic success can happen organically as evidenced in the U.K. during the nineteenth century; “there was no specific educational curriculum provided that stimulated the economic expanse in industry” (p. 9). Clarkson’s research paralleled our findings regarding Anglo-Indian perceptions. Like the U.K., U.S. Anglo perceptions may be “dominated by the memory of E.M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling...of floods in rural India,” but as Clarkson points out, we should not “underestimate India’s current growth and its return to its former strong economic position” (p. 4).
These insights into teacher education are offered to illustrate how cross-cultural discoveries are typically revealed to those faculty members and administrators who are organizing and participating in service learning, another benefit that is seldom made explicit when attempting to highlight the experiences of students. Additional insights obtained by the authors as a result of their joint participation are presented in the next section.

Roles and Immigrant Challenges of Asian-Americans
Of all the selected topics and objectives, this one was perhaps the least developed in terms of student-recorded journal entries and instrumentation through pre- and post-assessments. Part of the reason for this is that the author, who became a U.S. citizen in 2004, was one of the first Asian-Americans from India that the students had ever known. The authors felt that it would be more informative to include a question/answer session that took place upon our return to the U.S. as a means to summarize the various conversations with students about Asian-Americans. Our remarks are presented below:

[Author One]: Can you characterize what it was about being an Asian-American of Indian descent that the students in our teaching/service-learning program appreciated the most?

[Author Two]: That is a tough one to answer. I think I know where the students started to click in their mind about me and that was in the evening [in India] when they would wait to talk with you privately [for data collection] and I would be sitting outside, keeping them company, and that is where I think it was hard for them, and sometimes for me. They would try to categorize and synthesize in their minds, then they would go and relay that in discussions with you. Specifically, I think that they learned that they have to appreciate the Asian-American who understands that the Asian individual who is from among the privileged class has an obligation to help his or her fellow men and women who are the have-nots in their society, and there aren’t enough haves who are looking after the multitude of have-nots that exist there [India]. We [Indians] don’t value human life because it is in abundance in India; it is going to be the most populous nation so it is the largest democracy. We don’t treat humans well enough; I think that we treat our own people worse than we treat our guests there, and I think that that is the biggest tragedy. So, if anything, I think that perhaps the four students came back with a perception of me that represents a lack of sensitivity with my own people, with the Indians there, now that I am an American. We in the U.S. provide a model for the rest of the world. We value human life perhaps more in the U.S. than they do in India. We treat people with much more dignity than the Indians do to one another. Because there are laws, because there are fewer people existing in the U.S.; there is no reason for the way we [Indians] treat each other; there is no excuse for that.

[Author One]: What do you think the reaction of friends, family, and fellow Indians would be to your statements? Do you think they would feel that you were betraying your Indian culture?
[Author Two]: Most would consider it to be a betrayal, but I would find solace in the fact that they have not had the life experiences and the cultural contact that I have to base my views on, so I am completely content with that part. I base my observations on having had the opportunity to see whenever I have traveled in Asia, Europe, and North America. If somebody counters, that is based on their own experience, so I will disagree with them but will respect them for their differences.

I believe that education is the key to the Indian elevation (how Indians treat one another). The only thing that can combine all the groups is education. The emancipation of the population depends on education. If people do not know how to think or the skills to analyze things, to write their own names, to read, unless we can provide those opportunities to people en masse, things might improve for a small group economically but not for the whole mass. We are not allowing the population to progress for the large group.

For the authors and the students, the relationship between standard of living and quality of life are strongly influenced by formal education.

Reactions to Disenfranchised Indians
Our students were taken aback with what they saw as abject poverty, and the treatment of people in very backward social and economic standing. It was heartbreaking to see the nature of the interaction between the have and the have-nots in that local environment. These were some of the continuous discussions that we had. The students’ transforming experiences are addressed in (e) Reactions to the Disenfranchised.

[Student B wrote]: Something that has moved me while in Kolkata is the children. My first encounter with children was with the begging children on the street. They are so persistent, and I am heartbroken that these children must spend their days on dirty streets begging for money. …Their faces stick in my mind. When I stop and think how callous I have become to the beggars, especially the child beggars…how I have learned to wave my hand at them and ignore them instead of having compassion, it makes me stop and question my own heart. I usually think I am a genuinely compassionate person, but here I have quickly become hardened to these beggars’ pleadings. There is no way that I could help all of the children who are beggars, but I haven’t helped even one beggar. My ability to give money is great, but I have chosen to keep my wallet closed. I feel selfish for walking past these poor people and into a souvenir store to buy frivolous things, when there are children who are hungry and wearing tattered clothes looking at me from the other side of the store windows.

Aside from the children who beg from me everyday on the street, the most intense and moving experience I have had was our visit to Mother Theresa’s home for children. I didn’t know what to expect, nor did I attempt to envision what I might see in the 30 minutes we
were there. What I saw will be forever embedded in my conscience and has moved me so deeply that I will never forget how I felt in those moments in time.

It was humbling to walk into this almost sacred space. Walking barefoot, following one of the nuns, we were led to the room where deformed, disfigured and disabled children, abandoned by their parents, lay helpless in metal cribs. As I silently looked at these children and thought of their conditions, my heart broke. Yes, I was amazed at the compassion of the Mission of Charity Sisters and volunteers and thankful that all of these children were being taken care of, but tears of sadness overwhelmed those thankful thoughts. I passed by the crib of a small baby whose head was swollen to the size of a pumpkin. It was a grotesque sight. I am assuming that this child is a hydrocephalic. In America, this condition can be fixed, in most cases, with surgery to implant a stint in the head to drain the fluid. It was so terrible to think that this child would soon die, alone in its sterile surroundings, and that it wouldn't have to die if medical care could be had.

Both the children on the streets and the children in the orphanage have moved me greatly. I feel that these experiences will affect me as a woman, a future teacher, and eventually when I have children of my own. I hope that from these experiences I can become a more selfless and compassionate individual, and that by sharing my memories of children in India with others, I can help them to see things in a little different light as well.

The journal entries, informal conversations, and interviews provided the greatest depth of information for each individual. In fact, the contrasting experiences recounted by the students underscore the powerful nature of the cross-cultural civic engagement provided by Indians. Having been transported out of one’s cultural comfort zone, political, economic, medical, educational, and other social conditions in India came flooding in, thereby challenging the students to reexamine long-held assumptions about themselves and others.

Conclusion
This study illuminates the dramatic and subtle influences that teaching, service, and civic engagement in an economically emerging nation can have, especially when the nation’s political, religious, and economic history are in contrast to that of the United States. The service, teaching, and civic engagement mediated the first and second order constructs from positioning theory and these opportunities facilitated individual growth and cross-cultural awareness. The growth varied based on student backgrounds, identity, and future goals. Given opportunities to develop more significant relationships with Indians and Indian culture through homestays, teaching internships, and service-learning, students were able to broaden their perspectives beyond academic coursework learned in their country of origin.
Educational Significance of Study
The value of first-hand, cross-cultural experiences cannot be underestimated. Prior to departure the students’ knowledge of and appreciation for Indian culture, often characterized as Third World, relied on academic approaches, e.g., study of classic texts and famous people such as Mother Theresa, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. Once in India, however, the important but limited academic way of learning about others was replaced with face-to-face exchanges with Indian people. Students witnessed remnants of the “Guru Kula, an education for children who worked on the land in agriculture” (Clarkson, 2008, p. 12), contrasted with the modern system of English medium schools that have emerged over the past twenty years. The students learned about the ways in which Indian culture was being restored through curriculum development. For example, the vice-principal of Modern High School introduced us to Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a philanthropist who was admired for his contributions to education, women’s rights through the Widow-Remarriage Act in 1856, and political moderation in relation to the extremism of Hindu society between 1854 and 1855. This was just one illustration of the integration of Indian thought into curricula that had become dominated by British influence, with India’s ancient origins (circa 2500 B.C.) and diverse empires relegated to lesser importance.

Students also noted the relationship between contemporary educational gains and an economy that was outpacing many developing nations where education lagged. As a result of these changes, the students returned to America, seeking new courses on topics relevant to Indian culture, and reflecting upon some of their more challenging experiences based on class, political and religious differences. The impact of the service learning, teaching and civic engagement in this study supports the findings of Stocking and Cutforth (2006) who argue that community based research projects often deepen connections to broader social issues through additional coursework or employment.

The female students pursued teaching careers upon their return, enthusiastically sharing knowledge of Indian culture with their students and fellow teachers. The male student returned to a graduate program in public policy, and eventually took a policy position in Washington, D.C. An examination of the long-term effects of these knowledge and attitudinal changes and their effects on identity, work, and interpersonal relationships would be an important area of future research. Fortunately, the benefits of this first teaching, service, and civic engagement program at the College of William and Mary have helped to sustain additional opportunities for students and faculty in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Goa.

One way that the results of the current study could have been strengthened would be through systematic interviews and the administration of instruments with the Indian representatives in the schools, health clinics and host families. This kind of reciprocity is a standard sought by scholars of service-learning and community partnerships (Sandy & Holland, 2006). While perhaps more easily attained in local communities, such international exchanges can be enhanced by technological connections such as the internet when time spent abroad is
constrained by time and resources. At the same time, the benefits of service-learning and community partnerships can be jeopardized when face-to-face interactions are compromised, so seeking the proper balance is an important consideration in the research design.

Looking back, it is both daunting and rewarding to think that during the three weeks spent in India, in the hot, monsoon season of July, the students visited eight schools and taught in three; conducted six Paintfests; visited four health clinics where the Paintfest artwork was donated. In addition to these commitments, students still had opportunities to visit sites such as Mother Theresa’s Orphanage, the Tollygunge Club established in 1895, and various museums, historical landmarks, government buildings and cultural events such as Kathaka dancing. While this required a great deal of organization, donations, and planning, we think that the widespread support for collaboration underscores the eagerness for citizens in both countries—whether students, professors, administrators, business personnel, doctors, social workers, or members of families—to reach out to international guests whose cultural backgrounds may be different. Of all the lessons learned, this openness to embrace those who are similar and different in unique ways offers the ultimate hope for cross-cultural understanding through teaching, service, and civic engagement.

References


