

Developing compassionate and socially responsible global citizens through interdisciplinary, international service-learning

Sara Fry Aileen Hale Christopher Bower Adiya Jaffari Kelli Soll
Boise State Northwest Nazarene University of Iceland Boise State Global Partnerships

Interdisciplinary, international service-learning provides transformative experiences that develop students' capacities as socially responsible global citizens. In this article, the authors, a team of two professors and three former students from a course with an international service-learning component, share the results of a self-study in which we explored the narrative inquiry question: How does an interdisciplinary service-learning experience influence student understanding of common human dignity, social responsibility, and citizenship in a global context? Since completing the course, the former students have pursued socially responsible international opportunities, and their reflections at the course's conclusion and 3-1/2 years after completing it serve as the main data source. Findings from this partnership between faculty and former students provide insights and recommendations for faculty seeking to develop sustainable, interdisciplinary, international service-learning experiences.

During the spring 2013 semester, the authors embarked on a service-learning experience through the interdisciplinary course "Global Citizenship and Social Responsibility." These words are more than a course name; the ideas behind the words undergirded our efforts to collaborate as a diverse team to understand global issues of inequity and identify ways to respond as socially-responsible global citizens. Students and faculty endeavored to understand global health, education, socio-economic, political, and environmental issues to develop conceptual knowledge of international service, global citizenship, and social responsibility. We actualized this theoretical knowledge during a service trip to Corozal, Belize.

Two professors of education, two health sciences faculty, and one professor of construction engineering collaboratively designed and taught the course. All faculty had previous international service experiences and had a unified vision for the inherent value in bringing together disciplines across the university that otherwise would not have interacted. Twenty-one undergraduate and two graduate students representing more than a dozen academic majors participated in the course. Philosophically, the faculty viewed learning as a social, constructivist process that requires collaboration among learners and educators. The faculty served as model learners; our collective expertise provided us with the ability to instruct on varied topics while learning from each other and our students. The students possessed a variety of skills, knowledge, and perspectives that allowed each to make unique contributions to our ambitious endeavor to develop their understanding of social responsibility as global citizens.

The authors of this article are two faculty members who designed and co-taught the course and three students who took the course. Sara is a teacher educator who specializes in citizenship education. Aileen is a bilingual educator who specializes in international service-learning. Christopher was an undergraduate pursuing a triple major in social work, philosophy, and political science, and subsequently spent a year as a Fulbright teaching assistant in Tajikistan and began a Master's degree program in international education at the University of Iceland. Adiya was an undergraduate majoring in pre-medicine and health science studies, subsequently served as a Fulbright public health research scholar in India, and will begin medical school in fall 2017. Kelly was a graduate student pursuing her Master's degree in Public Administration when she took the class and subsequently launched a successful organization that provides community members with service opportunities in Belize. The former students' commitment to global citizenship and social responsibility remains strong. Looking back 3-1/2 years later provides a powerful perspective about the lasting impact global service-learning had on their lives. Through these unique perspectives, we collectively provide insights and recommendations for faculty seeking to develop sustainable, interdisciplinary, international service-learning experiences grounded in local partnerships that enhance student understanding of common human dignity, self, and social responsibility within the context of becoming global citizens.

Related Literature

International service-learning is a pedagogical practice that includes providing students with meaningful community-based

service experiences that help them more deeply understand course content and develop a sense of civic responsibility. The term is used to describe myriad international service experiences with a range of time spent in the international setting. Nickols, Rothenberg, Moshi, and Tetloff (2013) described international service-learning as being, in part, “a complex cluster of educational opportunities that include cultural competency” (p. 97). Whether the immersion is short or long term, the goal is to help students begin the process of moving beyond ethnocentric understandings (Nickols et al., 2013). Rutgers University Center for Global Education (2010) described international service-learning as an experience that “requires students to dedicate thought, time, and ability to working with (not for) communities to confront local challenges, while digging into complicated questions of power, injustice, and inequality in a global context” (para. 2). Although international service-learning can be transformative for students, such programs are not without critics.

In a 1968 conference address, Illich famously called for the withdrawal of “volunteer armies” from Latin America. Illich (1968) noted that such volunteerism, despite the good intentions behind them, are based in paternalism and destined to fail. Although Illich’s biting critique predates contemporary conceptions of international service-learning, his warning provides a meaningful inquiry question to help students consider their intentions and preconceptions before engaging in international (or local) service-learning (García & Longo, 2013). More recent critics note the complexity of international service as a legacy of colonialism (Perold et al., 2013) and identify the shortcomings of the short-term nature of student involvement in service projects (Eby, 1998). Whitaker and Bathum (2014) indicated that, for their international service project involving Mexican immigration, university students in the U.S. were “contributing something positive, however small, to Mexican communities. The primary beneficiaries of this experience were the students and the people they influence in their lives” (p. 117). While ideally the contributions provide long-lasting benefits in the communities served, university students may gain more than those whom they serve. An important component of successful service-learning, be it international or domestic, is close collaboration with community partners to ensure community ownership of the service provided by outsiders (Berinyuy et al., 2014; Tinkler, A., Tinkler, B., Hausman, & Tufo-Strouse, 2014).

Even with the recognition of the complexity and potential difficulties that surround international service-learning, such experiences are filled with opportunity for empowering student growth and social change. Whitaker and Bathum (2014) described the process of creating and implementing international service-learning as an iterative experience, stating, “We stay in this messy and humiliating process hoping in the potential of that new growth to create understanding between peoples and compassion for our shared human experiences” (p. 117). Essential to that growth and understanding is purposeful, structured reflection. Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell (2006) explained that learning does not come about by way of experience, but rather by way of reflection on interactive experiences with others.

McKee (2016), in a systematic review of 12 prominent publications about international service-learning, underscored the importance of reflection. Specifically, reflection should be structured in ways that allow students to learn to recognize the discrepancy between what they witness in their service sites and their own lives, and “begin to question as they critically reflect on the reasons for these stark differences” (p. 6). As part of the process, Green (2003) called for faculty to help students directly unpack “difficult stories” that address race, class and privilege. Green argued that such an approach can help faculty and students “more effectively negotiate the divide between the university and the community and work toward social change” (p. 276). Ultimately, the goal of international and local service-learning needs to be action and change; therefore, the critical reflection is an essential component of any successful project in helping student unpack their experiences and the inequities they witness.

Research about conceptual change offers a resource for helping students purposely reflect in ways that can help them work past misconceptions and incomplete understandings related to international service-learning. Conceptual change is a cognitive science model used in K-16 education to facilitate students’ growth and understanding of concepts (Lucariello, 2013; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Stepans, 2008; Stepans, Dyché & Beiswenger, 1988). It is grounded in the belief that learning proceeds from the known to the new, and educators must activate prior knowledge as a platform for new learning (Wilhelm, Douglas, & Fry, 2014). Sometimes what is known is inaccurate or incomplete. Thus it is essential to guide students through a process in which they identify existing beliefs, be presented with new

information, confront discrepancies, and let new information replace incorrect prior understandings (Stepans, 2008). Hayes, Goodhew, Heit, and Gillan (2003) indicated that challenging multiple facets of a misconception is more likely to produce conceptual change than multiple efforts to challenge one aspect. Interactive discussion – including the exchange and debate of ideas – is a metacognitive strategy that can be effective in addressing student misconceptions (Lucariello, 2013). Inspired by this knowledge, co-authors Sara and Aileen paired reflective writing with reflective, critical discussions as part of the course design.

With caveats about international service-learning, critical reflection, and research about conceptual change in mind, we set out to design an international service-learning course that would foster global citizenship in ways that address the incompleteness of more general attempts critiqued in the literature. We turn to the course design and an overview of our approach.

Course Overview and Design

Sara and Aileen helped design a course that provided students opportunities to explore social responsibility from the context of integrated educational, health, and engineering approaches to developing interdisciplinary, sustainable solutions to community issues. The international service-learning experience provided students with an authentic context-based opportunity to critically reflect and discern their positions as global citizens. Combining the course content with field experience and thoughtfully guided pre-, in-, and post-service reflections contributed to personal transformations from students to civic-minded, global change agents. We used academic, personal growth, and civic engagement course learning objectives (see Notes).

We had nine weeks in which to prepare for the spring break service trip. The first three weeks of the semester focused on developing an understanding of global citizenship, social responsibility, and sustainable projects that promote social equity. Faculty provided mini-lectures about relevant topics and guided students in discussion of a shared text: Barcott's (2008) *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird*. Barcott's book tells the story of Sharon Matola's efforts to stop the Belizean government from building a controversial dam that harmed thousands of acres of wildlife habitat, including nesting grounds for an imperiled population of scarlet macaws. The book provides a heart-

wrenching example of the interplay between the three pillars of sustainability: inaccurate information about the potential *economic* and *societal* gains triumphed over *environmental* concerns. *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* provided an anchor for collective conversations that helped us all better understand the complexities of global issues and ways to be socially responsible actors in light of global inequities and injustices in Belize.

With a baseline understanding of important global issues established, we shifted focus in weeks four through seven of the semester. A portion of class time was still devoted to deepening our understanding of issues in Belize as students began to assume more responsibility for educating themselves and their peers about these issues. The majority of class time, however, was spent devoted to interdisciplinary teams that developed their service-learning projects. Through collaboration with professionals in Belize who helped organize our in-country details, we were able to communicate with leaders at our pre-identified service sites to develop projects that Belizeans requested to serve their expressed needs. Christopher, Adiya, and Kelly held co-leadership roles with other students in the following projects:

1. School Garden: Students proposed and implemented plans for an elementary school to reclaim overgrown fields on their school grounds and establish an educational vegetable garden. Co-leader: Kelly
2. Easter Camp: As our spring break coincided with the Belizean's Easter break, school administrators invited us to offer fun and educational activities for local elementary students. The camp focused on healthy lifestyles, healthy activities, art, and literacy. Co-leader: Christopher
3. Educational Trail: One team of students developed an interactive educational trail that provided engaging opportunities for children to learn about Belizean animals and birds. Co-leader: Adiya

Students selected which projects they wanted to participate in based on their interests and strengths. Each project had two or more co-leaders who shared responsibility for project design. Sara and Aileen served as school site-supervisors.

Guided reflection and journaling supported student learning and growth during a week-long service-learning trip to Belize. While in Belize, we offered opportunities for structured reflective

discussions in the evenings. In addition, each student developed a reflective journal, which included daily observations, insights, and reflections connected to course topics, specific project experiences, cultural excursions, and personal insights. Reflection is essential because it serves to consciously connect the service with the learning.

Upon return to the U.S., students reviewed their journals to help them complete the two culminating course assessments: (a) a reflective essay on growth and learning related to course objectives and field experience; and (b) participation in collaboratively designed presentations about the results of their international service-learning projects. The presentations were offered to multiple public audiences. Journals and student essays served as data sources for this article; we describe our methods in the section that follows.

Methods

We used a collaborative, multi-layered self-study to investigate the narrative inquiry question: How does an interdisciplinary service-learning experience influence student understanding of common human dignity, social responsibility and citizenship in a global context? Self-study is a qualitative approach to critically examining one's educational practice. Pioneered as a research method for teacher education, Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) explained the relationship between self-study and more widely used methodologies: "*narrative* (a look at a story of self), *auto-ethnography* (a look at self within a larger context), and *self-study* (a look at self in action, usually within educational contexts)" (p. 17, emphasis in original). Self-study is an effective methodological choice for educators looking to critically examine teaching practices that are of interest to the practitioner or researcher and to the greater educational community (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; LaBoskey, 2004). While more commonly used as a research method for individual practitioners or a team of educators, our multi-layered narrative inquiry self-study included two faculty members (Sara and Aileen), one graduate student (Kelly), and two undergraduate students (Christopher and Adiya). Consistent with self-study, we all served as participants and authors.

Initial data sources consisted of student journals, including daily field entries while in Belize and reflective essays written after returning to the U.S. Sara and Aileen also kept reflective notes about the course and international service trip, which provided additional data points. Three and one-half years

after completing the course, the student authors reflected again on how their understanding of common human dignity, social responsibility, and citizenship in a global context has grown since completing the interdisciplinary course. They wrote these new reflections without reviewing their writing from 3-1/2 years earlier.

For the initial data set following the course, faculty and student participants/authors collectively analyzed the data to identify cogent themes. Specifically, we reviewed the written data sources and "highlighted significant quotes that provided an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61), which for this study meant understanding social responsibility, global citizenship, and human dignity. We developed grounded codes to describe these significant ideas in the data (Gibbs & Taylor, 2010). The codes, and later themes, emerged from the participants' experiences. We analyzed the post-course reflections using a priori codes: those developed with the initial data set. The later findings provide insights about the lasting effects of the initial experience. We identified three major themes that describe sustained student growth as a result of the course: recognizing the essential contribution of service-learning in a comprehensive college education; jump-starting conceptual change through immersive experiences; and learning to value interdisciplinary perspectives and collaboration.

Findings

The formal reflective processes that we facilitated, and the informal ones in which students engaged, helped students deepen their understanding of human dignity, global citizenship, and social responsibility. The themes that follow provide insights into how students' global perspectives developed.

Recognizing the Essential Contribution of Service-Learning in a Comprehensive College Education

When faculty design educational experiences that go beyond the walls of a classroom, truly transformative learning can occur. Adiya reflected on how it seems as though most undergraduate classes focus on building a strong foundation for one's chosen profession. Prior to taking Global Citizenship and Social Responsibility, her coursework served to build the background she needs to one day enter medical school. She reflected:

Classes such as physics, organic chemistry, cell biology, and genetics will surely expand the horizons of knowledge and prepare one for the workforce. However, to what extent do they expand

the realms of the human heart? These classes, although very important, don't really touch on some of the most important concepts of the world such as human dignity, social responsibility, and citizenship. Classes that are built on such concepts are harder to find. It is classes like these that tend to mold our hearts and minds in ways that will forever stay with us.

Adiya's reflection mirrored other students' beliefs that campus-based experiences don't always push students to reach their potential in the way the international service-learning experience did. She explained,

I was not aware of all that I was capable of until I went on the service-learning trip to Belize. It pushed me out of my comfort zone so that I may work towards self-actualization, to recognize and reach my full potential and strive towards being the very human being I wish to be. The class was truly priceless. It is almost unjust that there is not one like it in every educational institution that wishes to inspire growth and passion within its students.

The fact that Adiya used the word "unjust" to describe the importance of this kind of learning and education provides a strong testimony in support of international service-learning.

Adiya underscored a shared belief: education serves a greater purpose than developing a skill-set for a specific disciplinary area of focus that ultimately serves the workforce. We share a commitment to holistic teaching for the development of individuals who exemplify compassion, wisdom, and socially responsible engagement (Wilhelm et al., 2014; Wilhelm & Novak, 2011), with the overarching goal of helping our students develop a sense of agency as participatory global citizens.

As faculty who engage students in international service-learning, Sara and Aileen recognize the importance of setting the stage for such learning through carefully selected readings; creative and thoughtful written and oral reflections; and guided class discussions. The importance of facilitating critical thinking during pre-, in-, and post-service reflections and discussions cannot be underestimated. These discussions and reflections are what prepare students for their experience intellectually and emotionally; facilitate the depth of their processing of the experience while serving; and move students to new perspectives, depths of critical thinking, and ultimately personal and life transformations.

Student reflections indicated that in addition to deepening their understanding of – and questioning of – the purposes of education, their comprehension of what it means to engage in service also developed in compelling ways. Aileen introduced the class to a framework for understanding the goals of engaging in service-learning. Her explanation that the meaning of service "referred to helping when and how requested and not imposing" made a lasting impression. Kelly realized that this meant "we must do what is asked of us and not what we want to do when it comes to our curiosities and service experiences." Service becomes sustainable when it is developed in the context of developing partnerships and relationships, based on *listening* to service "needs."

Feedback suggests that, overall, our service was perceived by Belizeans as being respectful and in the spirit of solidarity that we intended. For example, the Vice Principal at one of the schools where we served stated:

[Our faculty and students were] given full respect. [University] students and faculty always asked for our ideas and permission before doing things. The interactions [led] both [groups – Belizeans and U.S. teachers and students – to] learn new stuff. It develop many of my skills and opened [my eyes to] new ways of seeing and doing things. I personally learned a lot. It also helped in developing my values. It was a moment of sharing skills, knowledge and techniques.

The Vice Principal's reflections speak to the reciprocity of the experience – both groups came together and learned.

Kelly, however, remained troubled by one decision that her group made for the garden project that was not grounded in listening to service "needs." She explains, "We had a great conversation with parents and teachers from the school about the garden and which seeds they would like to have planted. They specifically requested that we plant corn, squash and beans." However, in the complex interactions that unfolded within her team that led the garden project, the only requested seeds they purchased were beans, along with other seeds team leaders thought would be better. Kelly disagreed with the decision, and "It has bothered me ever since we left Belize. I felt we returned to the U.S. having purchased seeds that we wanted to plant without the major consideration of the Belizean requests." Six months after our return, school leaders sent a picture of the thriving garden – with corn plants growing in abundance.

The picture provides a motivating reminder of the importance of serving in solidarity *with* our international service partners (Fry, 2012).

The memory of not listening to local voices propelled Kelly in her continued connection to Belize. She now leads groups of U.S. high school students, college students, families, and professionals on service trips to Belize. Kelly emphasizes the development of long-term, sustainable relationships with her partners in Belize. Local input is essential to her work and the future of her organization.

With the exception of the seed purchase, the group, understanding that our service needed to be provided in solidarity, supported a collective mindset of openness and willingness to listen to and learn from our Belizean partners. Our goal was sustainability – as Christopher wrote, “not to aimlessly supply a donation of items and assume members of ‘served’ community would innately know what to do with what we left them.” This goal galvanized action: we invested time and resources in substantial clean-up efforts, hiring a local community member who owned a tractor to serve with us by hauling away roots, debris, and other waste products that resulted from our garden building efforts. Sustainability also limited our actions; we made the hard decision not to plant any seeds or plants. We had hoped to leave with the garden started, but the school leader expressed concerns about plants being watered during upcoming school vacations. Listening to her led us to limit our intended actions and do what was requested. Christopher explained,

Our approach will actually yield long term results that the Belizean people will not only be able to utilize, but are empowered to take advantage of, as they had just as much of a role in all of it as any of us did.

This outcome, in and of itself, should be the ultimate aspiration in all service trips.

Education should serve a deep, humanitarian purpose and service should be undertaken with a mindset of solidarity and sustainability. When we achieve these goals, the impact on students and service partners, is long-term. As Kelly reflected:

This course and experience transformed me from a graduate student to a civic-minded change agent. The experience inspired me to continue the act of global citizenship – in Belize and throughout the rest of the world – for the rest of my days.

That kind of deep transformation is what is needed to manifest and develop lasting change

as socially responsible global citizens. As Adiya concluded:

Issues of poverty and social inequity do not have overnight fixes or one solution. Transformation is a gradual process that takes the participation of each and every one of us. It takes time and commitment to open-mindedness, tolerance, and working to understand one another.

In Aileen’s experience leading international service trips, many students conclude their experience without this level of introspection.

Adiya’s recognition of the need for time and commitment, as well as ongoing learning, reflects how our students approached conceptual change through their international service-learning experience. Sara and Aileen, as professors, attribute much of this growth to: (a) the caliber of students the interdisciplinary course attracted; (b) the level to which the stage was set for student engagement in pre-, in-, and post-service reflections; and (c) the extent to which reflections were processed through a community of learners who shared and discussed global issues for deeper insights.

Jump-Starting Conceptual Change through Immersive Experiences

Christopher, Adiya, and Kelly self-identified ways in which their most poignant learning involved coming to understand how much they misunderstood and did not know prior to this international service-learning experience. Christopher explained:

It had always been so easy for me to clamor on about my already held global perspectives as being supposedly so well grounded, heartfelt, and sound, but after actually participating in tangible efforts to practice such principles, I now see that it is much easier said than done. Where I grew most, is in how I now have a more healthy understanding of what it means to work across greatly differing cultural lines.

He came away with a greater understanding of what it takes to work effectively in another culture as well as the commonalities we have as human beings, no matter what cultural background we come from. Strategically guided and facilitated reflection enhanced the depth of Christopher’s critical reflection and overall learning.

It is powerful to note that 3-1/2 years later, he demonstrated even more sophisticated insights that indicate his successful ongoing journey to responsible global citizenship. One of Christopher’s international service experiences since Belize included the opportunity to teach

with a social action organization in Bangalore, India. He reflected that his cultural adjustment in India was different from the one in Belize, where the U.S. students and faculty had dinners together and enjoyed comfortable hotel rooms. In India there was no

“Westernized pocket” in the place I returned to in the evenings. However, the tools I had gathered from Belize about reflecting on experiences as an intercultural teacher were comforting and made the experience a lot more beneficial for myself and the students.

Christopher connected his experience to Korthagen et al.'s (2006) ideas: learning does not come about by way of experience, but instead by way of reflection on the interactive experiences with others. He recognized how the opportunity to reflect each night on what had worked and not worked helped him recalculate his thoughts so he could meet his students where they were, making him

evermore ready to return and teach in ways that advocated respectful exchanges. Though my personal assumptions about the world may have been different than those of the students, we all grew -- as a group and as individuals. Furthermore, when a cultural clash was about to occur, I was quicker to remember that it is all a process in which we grow together, not one in which any person has a monopoly on what it means to be socially responsible.

Christopher also noted that, looking back on the formative experience in Belize, “I recognize it as the moment that everything changed for me.”

The experience in Belize was transformative on a uniquely deep and personal level for each student. The journey began as early as the first class meeting. Kelly explained,

I had a general understanding of the issues surrounding global citizenship, but it was shocking and difficult for me to discover the raw facts on poverty, health issues, and education during the first evening of class. I wanted to jump out of my seat, run straight for the airport and start making a difference immediately.

The service trip to Belize provided Kelly with her first experience witnessing the extent of socio-economic inequities, which are rarely experienced at the same level in the U.S. The experience had a profound impact on her. She took the class “purely for personal growth and to fulfill curiosities, yet it has had the deepest

impact on my goals, ambitions and global perspectives during my academic career.” While enrolled in the course, she was pursuing a master’s degree in public administration and already held a bachelor’s degree in geology. Kelly had intentions of entering a professional career related to environmental and natural resource policy. Her experience in Belize proved so transformative that her professional goals shifted. In the months that followed the course, she created the aforementioned organization that provides service opportunities for students, professionals, and families that focus on English language and literacy development in Belize. More than three years later, the organization is thriving. With each service opportunity, Kelly continues the conceptual change process and undergoes the realization that service-learning is a boundless experience that motivates individuals to live curious, mindful lives.

A desire for more knowledge has motivated us all in our subsequent undertakings. For example, Christopher, who had never left North America prior to his Belize trip, has subsequently pursued freelance international service-learning opportunities in Colombia and Venezuela, served with an organization in India, and served as a Fulbright teaching assistant in Tajikistan. Christopher and Adiya both returned to Belize for service during their 2014 spring break. Sara’s service-learning in Belize and elsewhere continues through her ongoing involvement with the non-profit Belize Education Project and scholarly endeavors (Fry, 2012; Kirchner, Tzib, E., Tzib, Z., & Fry, 2016-2017). Our ongoing commitment to be global citizens and deepen our understanding of what it means to do so in socially responsible ways was shaped by the connections we made in Belize.

Additionally, words like compassion, joy, and happiness were common in students’ journals and discussions, further indication of the transformative nature of the service-learning experiences. Adiya, who was born in Afghanistan, explained the profound nature of her experience,

When I came back to the hotel after a day at the school, my clothing damp from sweat and covered in dirt from working in the garden, I had never felt that kind of happiness to that extent before. I realized that this very feeling is not specific to a certain region or people; I realized that it doesn’t matter whether I am in Kabul, Belize, or anywhere else in the world. We all live under the very same moon and stars and are all just human. Getting to know another corner

of the world and its people, experiencing that we all smile and laugh in the same language that we cry, learning the importance of leaving our hearts and minds open and letting love and wisdom find their way inside of us, it is well worth the journey to any distance. I learned a great deal about myself and the kind of person I am and strive to be.

Adiya's words reflect her deepening understanding of the concept of human dignity, something that can be difficult to grasp. Edlund, Lindwall, Post, and Lindström (2013) described "dignity is a concept that is only applicable to human beings and implies being whole as a human being, as an entity of body, soul and spirit" (p. 9). Deepening understanding of human dignity affected Adiya's understanding of how human connections transcend academic disciplines and international borders.

Learning to Value Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Collaboration

Our interdisciplinary course, with a breadth of perspectives that were shared from the faculty's varied backgrounds of engineering, education, and health science, as well as the students' myriad academic interests, provided a rich opportunity for students to develop understanding and global perspectives. Transcending disciplinary understandings began in our U.S. classroom. Students formed service-learning project teams, and began the process of developing projects that reflected their varied knowledge. Christopher, for example, was part of the Easter camp team. He collaborated with two nursing majors to develop a three-day sequence of interactive instruction and activities about healthy lifestyles. He reflected that the process helped his perspective to grow and change:

It was an imperative and catalyzing ingredient to have input come from all different angles. Having both faculty and students representing interdisciplinary areas of higher education in the shared class setting made sharing perspectives, formed through different lenses of academic experiences, more accessible in both the planning and implementation processes. It was consistently rejuvenating that our group in particular had such inviting attitudes towards and about everyone's innovative thoughts.

The course was the first time Christopher, Kelly, and Adiya had taken a class that brought together faculty and students from different academic disciplines. Like Christopher, Kelly

believed the varied perspectives were influential in her growth. She wrote:

The beauty and benefit of this interdisciplinary course were the various perspectives and approaches each instructor provided before, during, and after the service-learning experience. I greatly feel the various contributions of all instructors involved positively impacted the service-learning experience more so than having taken the course from one instructor.

Interactions with her team members, whose academic majors included environmental studies, public administration, and civil engineering, were influential as well. She explained, "Collaboration among people from different disciplines and with varied interests – academic or political -- changes the world. I have learned that we all must have the best interest of others at heart." When Kelly's professional goals shifted from a career in environmental policy to providing international service-learning opportunities for others, she felt inspired to continue the act of global citizenship – in Belize and the rest of the world – "for the rest of her days."

Looking back on the experience 3-1/2 years later, Adiya identified the importance of the collaborative nature of the project and the "security of being with a familiar group of classmates." She explained further that we were empowered by what we could accomplish through our service learning projects, fueled by the love and connection of serving alongside others. Many of us reframed our priorities in life and went from a concern for our happiness and well-being to a larger concern for the well-being of others as well.

The professional goals each of the participant co-authors have pursued provide support for Adiya's insights.

Returning to the reflections written immediately after the service-learning trip, Adiya and the others expressed a deepened understanding of the bonds that connect people, while also making them unique. These insights provided some of the most compelling evidence of students' transformation. Pre-departure for Belize, Adiya had wondered if what she "would be exposed to in Corozal, Belize would not have as much impact, because I had visited my home country of Afghanistan less than two years prior. A visit to Kabul, Afghanistan leaves a mark on one's soul." Instead, the experiences helped her in understanding commonalities and differences,

for “Although Corozal and Kabul may have a lot of similarities in terms of poverty and social inequity, I found they also have much that is very unique to them individually.” These varied experiences helped her reflect on and deepen her understanding of human dignity, global citizenship and social responsibility through personal connections. She wrote,

Going to Belize, building a garden, and putting on an Easter camp and a community fair were not the things that touched my heart. It was opening my heart and mind to the people of Belize, especially to the children, that expanded my knowledge of yet another group of souls and another beautiful corner of the world. All the while, I peered inside the window of my very own identity.

This kind of personal growth, critical thinking, and heightened understanding is at the heart of what Aileen strives for when designing international service-learning experiences that take students out of their “fish bowls” to peer inside their own identities, as well as those of others, in discovery of our common human connections.

Adiya’s awareness of the humanness that connects people all over the world have been enhanced through her continued international service, most recently as a Fulbright public health research scholar in India. She reflected that in places like the U.S.:

Individuals are granted more comforts than many other places around the world. People can become isolated and immersed in their everyday hassles. Many take basic human rights for granted. It is not until we step out of our comfort zones into regions unknown that we can compare our lives to those of others.

Through immersive intercultural experiences, Adiya developed a keen awareness of the disparity that exists in our world. Such awareness demands

reflection on the privileges we have grown up with and taken for granted: the access we had to opportunity. Upon reflection, we have a chance to reevaluate our priorities, values, and principles. Perhaps we grew up thinking that going to school was something we had to do, and we perhaps even at times faked being sick so that we could skip school.

Over time, Adiya’s appreciation deepened for how service-learning allowed her – and others – to be “active participants of cultural exchange

and mutual understanding” and become better able to be “more conscientious citizens, both locally and globally. These changes can produce a ripple effect as these students share their experience with their peers both verbally through their narratives and nonverbally through their actions.”

Students also began to develop a profound understanding of the financial opportunities and costs of seemingly simple choices we make in the U.S. A guest lecture from a Belizean Ministry of Education leader helped our students understand school funding. Although education is compulsory and intended to be free, the government lacks revenue to completely support schools. At the primary school level, government funding is limited to teacher salaries, which necessitates individual schools levying a school registration fee in order to cover other expenses such as building upkeep and water. A subsequent lunchtime conversation with the school’s Vice Principal helped our students appreciate how school fees, which vary between \$5 and \$20 U.S. dollars a year, represent a substantial expense for many families living near or below the poverty line. Christopher reflected,

Due to this staggering information, we were motivated to make cash donations to help cover student registration fees. Even being a last minute call to action within our group, we raised \$127.50 U.S. At this school that charges \$5 U.S. for registration, we were able to fund 25 students’ educations for an entire year. This had me pondering: if most of us, even “starving students,” make about \$10/hour back in the U.S., after only 13 hours of work from one person, we can send 25 deserving students through an entire year’s worth of empowering educational development. Put into perspective, I was left inquisitive as to how far a dollar really can go if I am willing, even once monthly, to not purchase a fancy and very unnecessary coffee, or if I were to shop at a thrift store for clothing instead of a name brand outlet. It is now difficult to justify not abiding by this simplistic plan.

His words reflect his deepened understanding of social responsibility – it is about the actions we take and the choices we make at home as well as when we are engaged in international service.

International service-learning experiences provide unparalleled opportunities for students to learn in ways that promote deep understanding, develop collaboration skills, and

foster what Wilhelm and Novak (2011) called compassion and wisdom. These experiences help students recognize that they can actualize Margaret Mead's resounding words: "Never doubt what a small committed group of citizens can do to change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" (Institute for Intercultural Studies, 2009).

Recommendations

The findings from our narrative inquiry self-study identify a myriad of ways that interdisciplinary, international service-learning experiences influence students – and faculty – in profound and meaningful ways. This pedagogy can help transform students into compassionate and socially responsible citizens with what is called an activist mindset (Wilhelm et al., 2014). As a result of our experiences and analysis of student learning, we offer the following recommendations for faculty considering developing interdisciplinary, international service-learning experiences for students.

Think big: Our collaborative experience of writing and researching the impact of this project as a team of faculty and students provides powerful longitudinal insights into the power of international service-learning. In the early planning stages, we encourage faculty to imagine the best-case long-term learning outcomes for their students as they plan courses. Likewise, work towards an undergraduate curriculum in which all students are required to take one interdisciplinary international service-learning course. These educational experiences can be particularly eye-opening for students majoring in disciplines with highly-structured degree requirements leaving few opportunities for electives and pursuits that, as Adiya put it, "mold hearts and minds in ways that will forever stay with us."

Use in-country logistical support for sustainable partnerships: Developing an international service-learning trip requires substantial planning. In-country support is essential to successfully actualizing both logistics and service. For this course we used a U.S.-based non-profit for logistics. We recommend faculty carefully consider who they partner with, as this is a vital part of a quality experience for all. In our case, the non-profit we used hired North Americans to do the logistical work in Belize, rather than Belizeans. Although expatriates living abroad or North Americans traveling to the country of service may offer a more familiar way of planning and project development, in retrospect, we regret this decision and recommend hiring local citizens in order to support local economies. Locals can

provide insights that outsiders cannot. Using local hires promotes the sort of close connection to community partners Tinkler et al. (2014) and Berinyuy et al. (2014) advocated. It also creates a more sustainable financial structure in which additional resources go directly into the service community instead of through a U.S.-based organization. Local connections are crucial to developing sustainable partnerships.

Provide substantial faculty support: We highly recommend having one faculty member per 10 students. This ratio helps faculty to support students in delivering high-quality service and facilitating their learning. Equally important, faculty need to liaise with the community members being served to ensure the service is well-delivered and meets identified needs.

Keep service-learning class size manageable: We recommend careful consideration of class size, with a cap of 20-25 service participants. If a group is too large, it can "take over" the service site, move at a slower pace, and limit instructors' abilities to tailor experiences directly toward students' interests. Because of our low faculty-to-student ratio, we were able to provide nursing students with opportunities to shadow local nurses who provided healthcare in isolated rural health clinics. Given the importance of critical reflection discussion and writing in promoting student learning, small class sizes also promote regular feedback with faculty.

Be flexible: The unexpected will inevitably happen on international service-learning trips. Unlike the teaching and learning that occurs within the "safety" of a college classroom, students and faculty can never be fully prepared for what will develop in the field. Flexibility and time for guided reflection during the service-learning experience are crucial so students and faculty can thoughtfully modify plans as necessary.

Clearly distribute faculty responsibilities: When faculty from different academic disciplines come together to design and teach an international service-learning course, it is essential to clearly define responsibilities in order to maximize the potential of the course. We encourage faculty to work closely as a team, uniting their visions and goals for developing students as global citizens.

Conclusion

International service-learning opportunities provide the essential components of developing the whole person to better prepare individuals for far more than the workplace: a lifetime which includes a global perspective, civic-minded activist mindset, and desire to serve as global change agents. As educators, we can teach our

students in formulaic ways specific to our disciplines or we can make much more of education opportunities through intentionally designing these types of interdisciplinary, international courses to ensure learning develops in the core of each human being—our hearts and our minds.

Through this unique self-study about the experiences of faculty and former students, we demonstrated the potential for international service-learning to have a lasting impact on students' lives. While it is impossible to isolate the impact the course had on Christopher, Adiya, and Kelly's life choices from other factors, it is noteworthy that all three have continued to contribute as global citizens in socially responsible ways and attribute the course as being a crucial part in their development.

Our pedagogical choices allowed us to extend existing knowledge about the importance of critical reflection (Green, 2003; McKee, 2016). By applying theories from cognitive science/conceptual change to enhance reflection, students had multiple opportunities to confront potential misunderstandings through interactive discussion (Hayes et al., 2003; Lucariello, 2013). Our results suggest that pairing conceptual change research with critical reflection promotes meaningful learning. Because this outcome was not the focal point of our study, we recommend future research using control/experiment groups, designed to explore more fully how the conceptual change model can enrich international service-learning educational outcomes.

In conclusion, interdisciplinary, international service-learning provides opportunities for unparalleled student development – personally, academically, and (pre)professionally. The next step towards a more just and democratic world filled with socially responsible global activist citizens begins with interdisciplinary international service-learning ventures such as this one. Guided by a well-informed and enthusiastic faculty, coupled with curious, intentional, and humble students, this shared progress awaits anyone willing to undertake the action.

Notes: Course Learning Objectives

1. Identify and articulate topics and issues surrounding global citizenship and social responsibility. [Academic & Civic Engagement]
2. Describe the strategic issues and social responsibilities involved in developing global sustainability projects related to education, healthcare, and

infrastructure solutions. [Academic & Civic Engagement]

3. Describe ways they as individuals can be involved to promote sustainability and social equity. [Academic & Civic Engagement]
4. Develop and implement projects that promote sustainability and social equity. [Academic & Civic Engagement]
5. Evaluate challenges and opportunities involved in implementing collaborative multi-disciplinary team projects. [Academic & Personal]
6. Develop teamwork and conflict resolution skills. [Academic & Personal]
7. Identify and think critically about personal values (ethic) on perspectives regarding global citizenship and social responsibility. [Personal]
8. Practice and develop oral and written communication skills. [Academic]

References

- Barcott, B. (2008). *The last flight of the scarlet macaw: One woman's fight to save the world's most beautiful bird*. New York: Random House.
- Berinyuy, C. M., Eilerts, H., McDaniel, M., Chapman, D. F., Pendlebury, S., Ford, C. J., & Swap, R. J. (2014). The adaptive cycle as a lens for service learning – community engagement partnerships. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5(2), 152-177.
- Bullough, R. V., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 13-21.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). New York: Sage.
- Eby, J. W. (1998). Why service-learning is bad. Retrieved from <http://bonnernetnetwork.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/54644691/Why%20Service%20Learning%20Is%20Bad%20Eby.pdf>
- Edlund, M., Lindwall, L., Post, I., & Lindström, U. (2013). Concept determination of human dignity. *Nursing Ethics*, 20(8), 851-860.
- Fry, S. W. (2012). From charity to solidarity. *Kappan*, 93(8), 76-77.
- Garcia, N. A., & Longo, N. V. (2013). Going global: Re-framing service-learning in an interconnected world. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 17(2), 111-135.

- Gibbs, G. R., & Taylor, C. (2010). How and what to code. *Online QDA*. Retrieved from http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php#top
- Green, A. E. (2003). Difficult stories: Service-learning, race, class, and whiteness. *College Composition and Communication*, 55(2), 276-301
- Hamilton, M. L., Smith, L., & Worthington, K. (2008). Fitting the methodology with the research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1), 17-28.
- Hayes, B. K., Goodhew, A., Heit, E., & Gillan, J. (2003). The role of diverse instruction in conceptual change. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 86(4), 253-276.
- Illich, I. (1968, April 20). To hell with good intentions. Retrieved from http://www.swaraj.org/illich_hell.htm
- Institute for Intercultural Studies. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/faq.html>.
- Kirchner, J., Tzib, E., Tzib, Z., & Fry, S. (2016-2017). From pen pals to global citizens. *Educational Leadership*, 74(4), 72-73.
- Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2006). Developing fundamental principles for teacher education programs and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 1020-1041.
- LaBoskey, V. K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey, & T. L. Russell (Eds.), *The international handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 817-869). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Lucariello, J. (2013). How do I get my students over their alternative conceptions (misconceptions) for learning? Removing barriers to aid in the development of the student. *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/misconceptions.aspx?item=8>.
- McKee, R. L. (2016). International service-learning: Common goals and issues among programs across disciplines. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, 5(1).
- Nickols, S. Y., Rothenberg, N. J., Moshi, L., & Tetloff, M. (2013). International service-learning: Students' personal challenges and intercultural competence. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 17(4), 97-124.
- Perold, H., Graham, L. A., Mavungu, E. M., Cronin, K., Muchemwa, L., & Lough, B. J. (2013). The colonial legacy of international voluntary service. *Community Development Journal*, 48(2), 179-196. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bss037>
- Pintrich, P. R., Marx, R. M., & Boyle, R. A. (1993). Beyond cold conceptual change: The role of motivational beliefs and classroom contextual factors in the process of conceptual change. *Review of Educational Research*, 63(2), 167-199.
- Rutgers University. (2010). Center for Global Education. Retrieved from http://studyabroad.rutgers.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Link_ID=459_3FF15-ED36-68EA-D602557B0503D8F1.
- Stepans, J., Dyche, S., & Beiswenger, R. (1988). The effect of two instructional models in bringing about a conceptual change in the understanding of science concepts by prospective elementary teachers. *Science Education*, 72(2), 185-195.
- Stepans, J. (2008). *Targeting students' science misconceptions: Physical science concepts using the conceptual change model* (3rd ed.). Saint Cloud, MN: Saiwood Publications.
- Tinkler, A., Tinkler, B., Hausman, B., & Tufo-Strouse, G. (2014). Key elements of effective service-learning partnerships from the perspective of community partners. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5(2), 137-152.
- Whitaker, J., & Bathum, M. E. (2014). Bridging borders with Mexico: Creative strategies to promote engaged international service learning. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5(2), 104-121.
- Wilhelm, J. D., Douglas, W., & Fry, S. (2014). *The activist learner: inquiry, literacy, and service to make learning matter*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wilhelm, J. D., & Novak, B. (2011). *Teaching literacy for love and wisdom: Being the book and being the change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.