International Service-Learning: Ethics in Cross-Cultural Partnerships

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Abstract

All study abroad courses require the development of productive cross-cultural relationships. Working with local service providers from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as tour guides, hotel managers, and bus drivers, can be demanding work. However, these commercial relationships are reasonably well defined in terms of consumers and vendors of services. On the other hand, the collaboration and shared goals necessary for engaging in direct service abroad require the development of meaningful partnerships that extend beyond commercial interactions. Ethical partnerships are complicated by unequal power dynamics, different cultural expectations of reciprocity, and culturally specific understandings of relationship duration. The goal of this study is to identify divergent expectations amongst students providing the service, local service coordinators, and recipients of the service. An open-ended interview guide was developed for students and collaborators in three short-term international service-learning (ISL) courses. Students wrote responses regarding their perceptions of the need for the project and the impact on all participants. Similar questions were asked of local service coordinators and members of the community in face-to-face interviews. This provided insight into the variety of perceptions of needs and outcomes. We argue that the process of aligning of mutual and individual goals and perceptions is integral to ascertaining informed consent for the participation of students, partner organizations, and community members in ISL programs. Furthermore, in striving for informed consent, the development of ethical, sensitive, and reciprocal ISL partnerships can be promoted. While it was not possible to obtain data from all groups in all three courses, this exploratory, qualitative investigation offered meaningful opportunities to maintain and further develop equitable relationships and to clarify expectations for future collaborations and coursework. We found that

students' perceptions of local needs are shaped by the mission of selected partner organizations and academic preparation. Pre-departure contact with partner organizations that are sensitive to the needs of local communities may provide for better informed student participation and the forming of complex, yet focused, understandings of how service projects address community needs. Partner organizations and their representatives indicated that their long-term goals and expectations included developing local recognition, opportunities for career advancement by building a resume with international notations, and social interactions with international guests. Interviews with the recipients of service have been limited because of language barriers, but when available provided useful feedback on the service project.

Introduction

There is considerable evidence that domestic service-learning (SL) pedagogy can have a positive impact on students. Journals such as the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning present well documented models for engaging students while bringing learning into the community setting. Myers-Lipton (1998) argues that SL helps bridge divides, such as cultural, educational, and economic differences, as well as promotes civic responsibility. SL also allows students to process knowledge from the classroom in non-academic settings, thereby deepening the student's grasp of the ideas in the course. Herzberg (1994) suggests that what makes SL a pedagogy is not simply attaching a service component to a course, but rather anchoring service in the course with sufficient background and follow up. Some factors that have been found to impact the quality of service include student preparedness and expectations, the fit of students' abilities with community needs, and the willingness of communities to accept service provided by students. Combining SL with study abroad (SA) may have great potential for creating global citizens (Jones & Esposito 2006), but the effectiveness of this mixed pedagogy and the ethical concerns related to collaborating with international partners have a limited presence in the literature.

In this paper, we consider how students, partner organizations, and target populations interpret and reflect on short-term international service learning (ISL) experiences. We begin with a brief review of evidence for the usefulness of ISL to students, of assessing community impact in domestic SL partnerships and in the international context. We consider ethics of interactions with the community in SL, and ISL, where we adapt the concept of informed consent from social science research. We present our methods based on the use of open-ended surveys with students and on recorded interviews with partner organizations and community members. The same questions regarding the service project experience were addressed to all three participant groups in three short-term ISL courses that were each led by one of the authors of this article. In interpreting the responses of some members of each of the constituent groups – students, partner organizations, and community members – we

discuss the ethics of participation for all involved. In focusing on the ethical principle of informed consent, we contend that all parties in ISL should have a clear understanding of how they and other constituents envision their participation in service activities, the short and long term goals of the collaboration, expectations of reciprocity, and meanings related to project participation. Although we were unable to interview members of all constituent groups in all courses, we were able to explore some aspects of informed consent and reveal similar interpretations of independently collected and analyzed data pertaining to each course, suggesting the validity of our approach.

Benefits of ISL to students

SA programs for North American students have been shown to yield academic maturation, in addition to a wider worldview and improved language skills (Hadis 2005). Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) argue that even short-term programs are beneficial to students. SA programs share some of the goals of SL, such as globalism (Keith 2005), suggesting a natural pairing of the two approaches to higher student engagement. The objectives and concerns of SL pedagogy are also relevant in the international context (Annette 2002). Woolf (2005) proposes that with a careful framing of the service within the academic culture of the course, and the emphasis on learning outcomes, one avoids the impression that ISL is a soft learning experience. Keily (2004) reports that all students in his study experienced some form of change in their worldview as a result of ISL, although he also raises the point that taking action on this changed perspective is not automatic.

There may also be significant differences between SA and SL that need to be considered. Parker and Dautoff (2007) argue that SL and SA differ in four ways. First, in SA programs, students are the primary beneficiary (specifically in regards to personal growth) while the goal of SL is learning and growth for both students and community members. Second, SL results in more feelings of "social responsibility" compared to SA which tends to result in more "personalized outcomes." Third, whereas both SA and SL focus on content learning, SL goes beyond cultural understanding and additionally focuses on the impacts of "cultural interactions." Fourth, teaching methods often differ considerably for SA and SL courses, since SA does not have the same history of focusing on issues of social justice and building partnerships with non-profit organizations.   Overall, SA courses without a service component do not necessarily require the same active and attached learning that is inherent in SL pedagogies. Therefore, by adding SL to SA there are significant changes in expectations. Students in ISL courses are expected to not only contemplate the structural inequalities that affect the lives of people in the host country, but to actively engage in solutions to these issues.

Parker and Dautoff (2007) illustrate the positive impacts of SL and ISL on students. Among these is what they refer to as "course content learning." Course content learning often begins with examples and then introduces course terminology, inverting traditional forms of learning

where professors introduce course terminology and then provide examples. This form of learning theoretically empowers students by allowing their experiences to shape course content, increasing students' willingness to engage in problem-solving and critical thinking (Ingraham 2003).

Other positive impacts include "affective learning" where, in addition to academic growth, personal/developmental growth occurs (Eyler, 2002). "Connective learning" happens when students experience a "personal connection" beyond their peers and a new found willingness to become an active agent for change in regards to community problems, and students develop a broader world view where they begin to see their connection to others who are involved in different life experiences (Parker & Dautoff 2007). Overall, Crabtree (2008) notes that at its best ISL "merges civic education, cross-cultural immersion and relationship building, community development work, shared inquiry for problem-solving and change, and powerful learning experiences grounded in critical reflection" (p.28). We contend that a core component of critical reflection and constructive change is considering and responding to imbalances in the power dynamics and impacts of services between the students, partner organizations, and community members. Striving for informed consent in ISL, as defined in this paper, is a useful way of developing these habits of mind and practice.

Assessing domestic SL partnerships and community impact

It is important to be mindful that the goals, expectations, perceptions of addressable needs, and meanings of service of university students, partner organizations, and community members are not automatically, nor necessarily, aligned. Untangling the web of dependencies and benefits is needed in order to fairly assess the usefulness of the service that students provide. It is important to consider to what extent student service benefits the community itself apart from the partner organization.

Several studies have attempted to evaluate the impact of SL on the community served by partnering non-profits. Ferrari and Worrall (2000) report on a study of 30 community organizations where supervisors are asked to evaluate students' contributions. The response of these supervisors is generally positive and the authors claim that asking the community organization is an effective way to evaluate students. The caveat noted is that the organizations may not want to jeopardize the relationship with the university, thereby may shy away from providing feedback which puts students' contributions in a negative light. Worrall (2007) also reports on interviews with 12 community organizations to assess the usefulness of the SL students to the community. Confirming the complexity of the SL partnerships, the author finds that the organizations appreciate the influx of new ideas and that they are willing to adapt their ways to make use of the students. Additionally, the reason for which the organization entered into a partnership with the university can change over time – in one particular case from access to the resources of the university to more of a partner in education.

For the purpose of our study we take from these sources the notion that interviewing partner organizations, or their representatives, can shed light on the usefulness of service.

Other studies take a more direct approach to evaluating the impact of student service, for example Jorge (2003) evaluated an SL program that provides Spanish language (and new immigrant culture) immersion while helping Hispanic families navigate their new society. Interviews with the women involved in the program demonstrate a positive impact on their lives and on their families. Of particular relevance to our study, this article demonstrates that interviewing members of the community receiving service can yield an assessment of the SL program. Occasionally, it may be possible to quantify the benefit of the SL program on the community. Schmidt and Robby (2002) report on improvement of test scores in children who have been tutored in a SL program compared to the reference group, which did not receive such service. Generally, though, standardized tests are not available and one has to accept more qualitative methods for assessing SL impact on the community, as we do here.

The benefits of SL, however, are not without cost (Tryon, Stoecker, Martin, Seblonka, Hilgendorf, and Nellis 2007; Worrall 2007). In the former study, representatives of partner organizations are interviewed and the authors identify several challenges, which apply especially to short-term student commitments. For instance, organization's investment into training students may take away resources from other needs, without the pay-off of a long-term volunteer. Organizations may need to work around the schedules of students, who may themselves be less than enthusiastic in a short-term time frame. There is an unequal power dynamic between the partner organizations and the university, so that SL tends to be structured to fit predominantly the latter. Without sufficient attention this power dynamic may be exasperated when SL is shifted into an international context.

Assessing ISL partnerships and community impact

Woolf (2005) raises the question of whether the impact on the clients in the ISL relationship is necessarily positive, which may be challenging to determine in the international context. From the point of view of the community, Crabtree (2008) points out several possible challenges to ISL. Community members can come into conflict over project ownership, as collaboration with a foreign university brings prestige and power. Focusing on one community leaves the neighboring communities without help, thereby disrupting the normal societal structure. ISL projects may also enforce the notion that development is primarily dependent on external agents rather than on the cohesive action of the community, with the help of the local government structures.

Further along cautionary lines Porter and Monard (2001) describe the notion of a reciprocity relationship, which exists in an Andean culture, and which is particularly relevant to an ISL program in this location. One needs to take into account local parameters under which help is exchanged among members of the community. In particular, the relationship may be less

suited to a commercial transaction approach but more to a long-term pairing among parties. This is relevant to promoting an equitable sharing of contributions and benefits in an ISL project, where the local conception of a partnership must be taken into account to avoid an undue burden on the community. Chisolm (2003) also considers the balance in the ISL relationship; while she recognizes the potential benefit of SL in SA, she questions whether short-time commitments are of real service to the community and partner organizations. The fact that there are fewer professionals in the developing world requires an even greater sensitivity to the time partner organizations invest in setting up students in their projects. Cross-cultural communication barriers are of particular concern when designing an ISL course. For example, even the words "service" and "partnership" can take on different meaning in different cultures.

Ethics of interactions with the community

What makes for an ethical involvement of students in the community? Himley (2004) suggests that parallels exist between SL and ethnography and that participants in both academic pursuits should check for unequal power dynamics between the university and the community. Students potentially overestimate the importance of their service, as it is related to their academic assignments, just like ethnographers potentially are uncritical of their "informants." In both cases a "need" relationship can cloud judgment, where as a clear assessment of the interaction is the first step to avoiding ethical dilemmas. Students and ethnographers entering a community affect the usual community relationships. Students are generally more upwardly mobile where as the community members are generally in some need, tilting the natural power balance in favor of the students, similarly to the ethnographer's power of ownership of the intellectual product. Ethnographers have developed ethical standards to help them to assume more critical insights into the role of participants and investigators and to create transparent, fair and clear expectations of what the goals, risks, benefits, and products of research might be. Developing this mutual understanding of what is to happen and what it means is often referred to as attaining "informed consent". We argue that the analogy of informed consent for ISL is the aligning of goals for the interactions that all parties have for each other.

Along similar lines McCabe (2004) suggests that tools of anthropology can help students navigate power structures in the communities they serve. The author identifies the role of the partner organization as distinct from the community it serves, each with its own set of goals and aspirations. She suggests the need to evaluate power relationships among the players in the SL relationship by evaluating mutual perceptions. This idea is the basis of our approach to evaluating the ethics of ISL interactions, as outlined in the Methods section.

Informed consent in ISL

ISL programs combine two experiential pedagogies (SL and SA) to deepen learning through the process of developing face-to face relationships with international communities of public or private social service. The potentials and challenges of such experiences are culturally specific and dependent on the cultural norms of multiple constituent groups and nationalities. The institutional culture of a university is determinant in the priorities and processes by which SA programs are supported and promoted institutionally. Institutions that value experiential learning may be more likely to embrace SA as a valuable pedagogy for exposing students to the material, linguistic, and social cultures of "other" places. Likewise, these same institutions may value experiential pedagogies in which students are encouraged to practice volunteerism and social caretaking in the context of public and private service organizations through SL pedagogies. These experiences expose students to "others" as well, but in the context of their own national culture. Students in a university that promotes the transformative nature of mentoring students, such as the home institution of the authors, are exposed to people of lower class statuses and guided through how social institutions attempt to address problems associated with socio-economic deprivations. Incorporating SL into SA programs that explore the social issues and problems of societies in other nation-states may decrease the cultural distance between the student and local participants and relies on the same methodology of immersion.

The methodology of immersion as a means of increasing one's understanding in cultural contexts different than one's own is essential to the discipline of anthropology and related social and humanistic sciences that rely on ethnography as a key methodological contributor to the qualitative toolkit. Anthropological theory regarding the method of coming to know and understand "others" by becoming a participant in the activities of a different social group or culture was a building block for the practice of the field throughout the 20th Century. It continues to be celebrated within and beyond the discipline, especially in feminist studies and research designed to empower social groups that have been marginalized or stigmatized (Glesne 2006).

Considering the historical importance of developing ethical practices in cross-cultural studies in the discipline of anthropology, we can look to the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics, available on its website (http://aaanet.org/about/policies/), as a valuable resource for orienting our approach to developing SL partnerships in SA programs, while maintaining ethical postures developed in more proximal cultural contexts in our own nation (Myerhoff 1978). By transferring our notions and development of best practices in ethnographic studies of our own culture and combining this with lessons learned in the methodological development of the discipline of anthropology, we can aspire to begin developing best practices in cross-cultural SL and attempt to avoid some ethical conundrums in the process.

Perhaps one of the most essential ethical principles in social studies with human subjects is the concept of informed consent. This principle can be applied to the various constituent groups involved in ISL. The groups of cultural actors that can be considered in such programs are the faculty and institutional culture, the students and student body culture, the partner organizations with their institutional culture, and the clients of these service organizations and their culture. Applying the concept of informed consent in meaningful ways to each of these factions is a complex process and a duty that lies in the hands of the leaders of such programs.

Let's consider the home base cultures and the responsibility of a course leader to establish informed consent of these factions. The university uses its intellectual and financial resources to standardize and prioritize the development of programs that realize the institutional vision of valuable pedagogy as defined by the education market and by the intellectual resources available to an institution of higher education. The university therefore sets institutional standards and goals that normalize and regulate the culture of SA programming, and professors who develop SA courses within these parameters have their courses approved by institutional colleagues and administrators. Students form their expectations of SA programs through the informative materials distributed by the SA office, from students who had participated in such programs in the past, and from the professors who lead them. So, student expectations also conform to parameters inherent in the culture of the student body within the institutional culture of the university. Course leaders therefore are called upon to set clear learning goals, expectations, and specific activities with both of these constituents.

Similar considerations to SA programs apply to the case of domestic SL courses. Additionally, for SL, within the culture of the United States and in communities that host institutions of higher education, there are certain universal understandings of volunteerism and service work by students as part of pedagogical practicum that provide a base of understanding between faculty, students, and university administrators of such programs.

However, by taking our SL approach to less proximal cultural environments the relationship to partner organizations and the target populations for the service becomes far more complex. The United States norms and expectations cannot be assumed to exist when negotiating the activities of students in foreign contexts. Explicit objectives, collaborative processes, and educating host cultures regarding the home institutional and student cultures, become essential to ethically acquiring the informed consent of constituents in the hosting cultures and service organizations. For example, the proximal and long-term meanings of the period of contact need to be established in ways that make sense within the cultural norms established in vastly different histories and sets of values, beliefs, and priorities.

Informed consent may serve as just one example of how ethical principles developed in ethnographic studies of human participants in faraway places geographically or socio-culturally can be applied to the development of best practices in ISL. We would hope that informed consent could be demonstrated by students, partner organizations, and community members, all sharing a common vision of the goals, meanings, and expectations related to the

collaborative service project before, during, and after the experience of actual collaboration. We would argue, however, that considering these factions in establishing informed consent is the base rather than the tip of the iceberg in considering the ethics of ISL, especially if it is to be developed in a model distinct from that of mass tourism (Gmelch 2003; Gmelch 2004). By fostering conversations between groups, establishing rapport, supporting a project culture of transparency and shared responsibility, and attaining informed consent, other ethical considerations potentially come into perspective. By laying the groundwork of open conversations regarding primary and secondary motivations for participation for all involved, informed consent is an important first step in developing highly ethical, reciprocal, and relevant service and shared investment in community dictated goals.

Methods

This study utilizes a multiple case-study approach to better understand the ethical ramifications of student, partner organization, and community perception of ISL projects. Creswell (1994) describes the case study design as seeking to understand a phenomenon bounded by time or place and involves the collection of detailed information by utilizing triangulation (i.e., a variety of data collection procedures) during a sustained period of time to better understand the phenomenon under investigation (see also Creswell, 2003). Forms of data collection included participant observation, individual semi-structured interviews, content analysis of community partner websites where available, and open-ended survey responses. All data collection focused on understanding perceptions toward the needs of the community, how well the needs were being met by the ISL project, what students gained by participating in the project, what the partner organization gained, and in what ways the community was impacted by the project.

Seven questions formed the basis of data collection in this study. These were:

1. What are the needs of the community?
2. What needs are being addressed by the service project?
3. How well does the project address the needs?
4. What does the community gain by participating in the project?
5. What does the partner organization gain?
6. What do the students gain?
7. What challenges does the community experience while participating in the project?

The same questions were addressed to the three groups – the students, the partner organizations, and target populations. Each of the authors led a different ISL program and analyzed the responses to the questions he or she had administered, to one or more of the groups of interest, and contextualized these results within his/her experience of the course and the specific perspective of reported findings. We aimed to investigate various points of view

and thereby highlight the extent to which the different groups articulate the same goals and understandings of the ISL projects.

There was some variation in how the questionnaire was applied in each ISL program, for site-specific reasons. This suggests an independent analysis for each course's data sets. It also allows for drawing parallels among the themes that emerge in the distinct ISL contexts.

Findings

The ISL cases explored in this study included three-week courses to Guatemala, Brazil, and India. The Guatemala and India courses took place in January, had two faculty leaders, and were capped at twenty-five students. The course to Brazil took place in July, had one faculty leader, and was capped at ten students. Students in all courses were from the home institution of the authors and each author was the leader or co-leader of one of the courses. All courses included pre-departure meetings to familiarize students with logistics of the course and some course content. The number of pre-departure meetings varied. The Guatemala course had four pre-departure meetings, the India course had six two-hour meetings, and the Brazil course had two, two-hour, face-to-face meetings and six, one-hour, on-line meetings. In what follows we provide some course specific details, the extent to which it was possible to obtain data based on the seven questions, and discuss course specific results of the study.

Guatemala course: comparing student experiences with three different partnering organizations

For the purpose of illuminating the range of experiences with different non-governmental organizations (NGOs), this analysis focuses on how the perception of the needs of the community served were affected by the degree of the partnership between the students, faculty, partner organizations, and community members. The leaders of the Guatemala course, including Peeks, one of the authors of this paper, worked with several agencies including Habitat for Humanity (Habitat), Dom's Place, and Curamericas to develop short term projects suitable for students to participate in. The level of pre-departure contact and community participation varied between organizations, affecting the extent to which students could develop informed expectations for their multiple experiences.

Dom's Place is a small non-profit organization that works with local indigenous communities in Guatemala to provide children with education. Service through education included spending four days in an indigenous community providing English language training to young children via a Math, Reading, and Art lessons. One day was devoted to assisting with school start-up tasks such as moving desks and ensuring supplies were available. In this community, schools are flexible structures that exist within a family home or backyard, where the family receives a small stipend from the organization. Due to Dom's Place being a small NGO, and being

situated solely in Guatemala, pre-departure meetings did not include a representative speaking with the class.

Habitat primarily focuses on home construction for those in poverty. Those who apply for a Habitat home participate in its construction while also repaying a relatively inexpensive loan. Families seeking a Habitat home find out about the NGO via word of mouth as the organization spends little money on advertising or promoting its services. Work included building three homes at three different sites: two were adjacent to one another in a rural environment, whereas the third was in a more urban area. Our group was split into three teams, one for each site. While Dom's Place did not participate in pre-departure meetings because it could not financially afford to do so, Habitat did not participate because it could not find a person to come and speak with the students.

According to its website, Curamericas seeks to primarily "help our partners meet community needs." This means that its projects vary considerably depending on the needs of the community. Previous projects included educational, health care, and water treatment facilities. The project specific for the January 2010 course involved building a birthing center for indigenous women. Because Curamericas has its United States office in Raleigh, NC, which is one hour away from Elon University, sending a representative was convenient but also consistent with its goals which are to bridge the gap between service provider and community served. In fact, Curamericas sent the actual representatives who would travel with the students to Guatemala. This not only established rapport between the two parties but also provided students with the opportunity to learn from people who have been to the community where they would be volunteering.

While acquiring data from the community members served by these organization was difficult due to language barriers (many community members speak only Chuj), data from students was relatively easier obtained although response rates varied. Once students completed the course, and after their grades were submitted, a voluntary open-ended survey was sent asking them the research questions (see Methods section). Each student respondent was asked to complete three sets of the seven questions, one for each of the NGOs with which they conducted a project during the course. Students were asked to respond anonymously via an online survey site or via e-mail if they were not concerned about their responses being linked to their name.

Students were not exposed to all the workings of a partner organization and therefore interpret the community's needs based on the particular activities prepared for them to engage in and on their observations while at the site. In the case of Dom's Place, students reported that the top two needs of the community were food and education respectively. This is not surprising considering that their first day at Dom's Place was spent preparing the school to be opened and the successive three days consisted of providing English lessons based on the topics of Math, Reading, and Art. The structure of the school consists of a one-hour session in the morning followed by a twenty-minute break where children can play and more

importantly obtain a nutritious snack (e.g., fresh fruit). This is then followed by another one-hour session and concludes with a healthy lunch. While Dom's Place primarily exists to provide education, providing the children with nutritious meals is also noted by the partner organization.

While these two needs being listed is not surprising, the order of importance is surprising. In preparing students, the instructors emphasized that we would be there to provide educational services. This was further reinforced by students preparing lessons and learning activities for the children. Nonetheless, after students spent time with the children for four days, they realized that nutrition was the most pressing issue. As one student noted, "A child cannot focus on Math if their stomach is in need of food." While recognizing the educational needs of Guatemalan children was a primary learning goal of the service experience, the connection between education and nutrition was clarified by experiential learning on site. This reinforces Parker and Dautoff's (2007) claim that ISL provides for "course content learning" where more traditional forms of learning are inverted.

In addition to food and education being listed as needs of the community, fourteen other needs of the community were also mentioned by students but all were equally mentioned and none were mentioned enough to be considered a pressing need of the community. Students also recognized a wide variety of community needs being addressed by Habitat, ten in total. As Habitat promotes itself as an NGO that builds houses, it is unsurprising that housing was the primary need mentioned most by students. But unlike their Dom's Place experience, students did not recognize complex connections between the primary need being met by service through Habitat and other basic needs of the community such as nutrition.

When responding to questions regarding the needs of the community served by Curamericas, student responses were much more consistent. Every student noted that health issues were the primary concern facing the community. Secondary issues surrounded these health concerns, with childbirth and nutrition being noted by the majority of students. While both Dom's Place and Habitat had numerous community issues mentioned, Curamericas had three issues mentioned by students. This may be a consequence of Dom's Place and Habitat not having representatives at the pre-departure meetings. Curamericas provided a three-hour overview of its program during one of the pre-departure meetings. Its emphasis on women's health-care supported the required readings on women's healthcare in Guatemala. Once we arrived on site, students built a women's healthcare facility, provided assistance to local nurses, and visited local facilities that medically assisted both females and children. This indicates that the participation of partner organizations in pre-departure meetings may help establish clearer understandings of not only the central task of service but also the connections between needs that make service necessary.

Another important difference between Curamericas and the other two NGOs mentioned is that Curamericas specifically asks the local community what it wants, and provides its services only if there is a good fit with its organizational resources. This suggests that Curamericas knows

the specific needs of the local community that it is capable of addressing through student service, and it can communicate these needs better to their volunteers than the other NGOs who are not community specific. Therefore, this partner organization has already negotiated informed consent from the community members. Like its participating in pre-departure meetings, the heightened spirit of collaboration and team building appears to encourage the development of ethical partnerships for its ISL projects.

Brazil: recognizing secondary expectations of partners for short and long-term benefits

A key difference in the culture of Brazil and the United States with regard to partnerships or collaborations may be the expected duration and consequences of the collaboration. An emphasis on a market and capitalistic economic mode in the United States underlines the importance of short-term relationships that foster the immediate exchange of goods and services. Knowing the temporally present and full value of the service or good you offer is essential to success in having your resources perform in the market. Being underpaid or paying too much are risks associated with not maintaining an awareness of the value of goods and services you produce or want to purchase. Making your work of high quality or your good appealing to the market is ideally rewarded in a system that espouses a marketplace free of corruption, coercion, and socio-political maneuvering. While the reality of our society may not match these values, they are embedded in the cultural ideals of an American nation based in individualism and freedom from monarchical powers. Based on this, we, as Americans, would naively tend to consider that providing physical resources, the payment of participation fees (if applicable), and the labor received are the primary ways in which the ISL project is benefitting the partnering organization and the community.

However, in the case of Brazil, partnerships may exist in the alternate cultural context of relationships, and where ethics of personal power and social relations has developed in a different historical and social context. While Brazil shares a history of European colonization set off by the "discoveries" of Columbus and other representatives of the European states, it remained under a European monarchy until the end of the 19th Century, and has had transient experiences with democracy and military rule since that time. The importance of social relations in the context of class divisions in Brazil should be considered in interactions with partner organizations. Academic representatives, especially program directors, coming from institutions in the global North are inscribed with high class status due to their ability to travel internationally. This situates them in the position of "patron" within social class relations in Brazil, especially in less developed geographic and economic regions of the country.

Jones, one of the authors of this article, led an ISL program in Montes Claros, a frontier city between the industrialized South and underdeveloped Northeast of Brazil. Rural to urban migration to this regional capital has necessitated the development of many public and private social service organizations to meet the needs of poor migrants and the surrounding rural populations. The course focused on social development and was conducted with the collaboration of personnel from the Master's Degree program in Social Development at the

State University of Montes Claros, whose professors offered several lectures on social development to the Elon University students. Students in the course worked with an NGO on a playground reform project outside of the pediatrics ward at the free public university hospital. Three individuals from local partner organizations served important roles in the project, and all three were graduates from the university's Master's Degree program. They were the local logistical coordinator, the director of Laborearte, an NGO that rehabilitates at risk adolescents through creating art out of recycled materials, and the director of the center for the "Humanitization" of the hospital.

The summer following the program, Jones returned to Montes Claros to record interviews with these three individuals regarding the expectations they had for the collaboration and how these expectations were or were not met. The seven questions outlined in the Methods section served as the basis for the interviews. All three participants expressed how their expectations for the experience of receiving the Elon University students was not limited to short term goals such as the project of reforming the playground, but to longer term goals and more specifically to the development of social and professional networks.

For the local logistics coordinator, the opportunities to exchange ideas and enhance her ability to communicate in English were key motivating factors. Additionally, her experience leading a component of the ISL project strengthened her resume, as she was a seeking a career as a university professor in Montes Claros. For the director of the NGO, the participation of the organization in the project garnered attention in the local media and the participation of academics from the Unites States added to local interest in her organization. She specifically mentioned that following the summer project, her NGO had been commissioned by the mayor's office to produce the Christmas decorations for the "Avenida", the wide meridian that divides the main avenue where most of the higher end restaurants and clubs are situated in the city. Lastly, the director of the center at the hospital explained his desire to work collaboratively on projects with international academics, to develop his career and academic credentials for future employment at the university and to continue his education through a doctoral program. In these ways each of these local partners had their own expectations and project-related goals that may be difficult to predict when initiating an ISL program. Meeting these goals necessitates a longer-term interaction than that of a single program, as expectations of future exchanges and collaborations may be stronger in a culture where social relations are valuable cultural capital that may be called upon in the future. This may be problematic in university system where there is no guarantee that a course will be repeated in subsequent years.

The experience of this service-learning course in Brazil, and follow-up interviews with project partners, indicates that in negotiating informed content with all groups involved it may be especially important to consider temporal differences in the expected period of association between the host and guest contingents. Questions such as the probability of future programs or academic exchanges may need to be discussed openly with administrators, faculty, students, and partner organizations. The transient or not so transient nature of programs should be

discussed, and the importance of providing opportunities for leaders of the partner organizations to travel to the host institution to understand the local context and culture from which the students are coming may also be an important consideration, especially if such programs are not going to model international inequalities in resources for international travel.

Recognizing ethical concerns can help us conscientiously consider the needs of ISL partners from regions and institutions without the financial resources to support international travel. With these concerns in mind, the Brazil course leader secured partial university support for the travel of two of these partners to visit Elon University for one month periods. During this time they participated in classes, workshops, collaborative research, and conferences, where one of the partners presented on the playground reform project. The experience of these individuals in the United States has given them further insight into the difficulty faced by cultural and linguistic outsiders who intend to meaningfully engage with people and communities abroad, enriching their ability to work with American students. It also addresses the partners' hopes to develop international contacts that would further their social and professional networks. As in the case of Guatemala, the participation of partners in on campus activities appears to enhance the ability of all parties to negotiate mutually beneficial exchanges and co-develop appropriate expectations and goals for ISL projects.

India: comparing the responses of students, partner organizations, and community members

In January 2009, Kamela, one of the authors of this article, and a colleague, led Elon University students in an ISL class in Kerala state, India. The main goals of the course were to compare science pedagogy in India and in the United States, and to consider how education affects development. Additional goals included students' mastering certain science/math content, appreciating Indian/Keralan socio-economic structure and aspects of the local culture, and students' personal growth as travelers, learners, and observers. The course was anchored by the traveling science center (TSC) ISL project. In it, eleven interactive science exhibits were brought to India, displayed in schools in large auditoriums, monitored by Elon University students with the help of local high school students, and visited by middle school children in small groups. Altogether 10 days of exhibition took place in 6 venues, reaching about 3000 Indian students. The partner schools varied from a well-equipped international school to a school with relatively few resources in the countryside.

The three participant groups in the ISL project were identified as follows. First were the children in the school, the recipients of the service. Second were the teachers, school administrators, and the school as an institution, who helped to make arrangements for the TSC taking place in each location. This second group corresponds to "service providers" or the partner organizations in other SL settings. The third group was comprised of the Elon University students.

Interviews based on the seven questions from the Methods section were recorded with a teacher, an administrator, and several Indian high school students. The questions were emailed to and completed by three other Indian high school students and by another teacher. Five Elon University students responded to an anonymous survey asking the same questions after the course grades had been submitted. The goal was to compare perspectives on the same questions among the parties in this ISL project to assess the extent to which there was informed consent. Even though the number of interviewed/surveyed individuals was not high, it is possible to recognize patterns of similar and divergent interests and perspectives, as summarized below.

All three groups identified two main needs of the schools: a lack of resources and a need to improve/modernize teaching methods. This indicates that all three groups have a similar understanding of the state of education, and further, that the context of the survey related to the TSC may affect the perception of need in all three groups, similarly to what was noted in the Guatemala course.

All three groups identified hands-on science experiences, cross-cultural interactions, and enjoyable activities as the main contribution of the TSC to the school children. Interestingly, in one school, both the student respondent and the school administrator recognized members of the Elon group as potential role models for the students, where as no such perception came from the Elon University students themselves. The responses to the survey questions can highlight opportunities for deepening of learning; by considering their role-model status, Elon University students in future iterations of the course are encouraged to think about professionalism in education.

All three groups mentioned three themes in responding to what teachers/administrators/schools gain in the ISL project: new approaches to science education, cross-cultural interactions, and prestige/promotion for the school. Beyond that the teachers/administrator wrote that hosting the TSC promotes school cohesion and serves as a form of professional development for the teachers – a theme similar to what was found in the Brazil course. So to improve on informed consent the future iterations of the TSC should address the professional development needs of teachers more directly. The teachers/administrator also underline the establishment of a partnership between the university and the schools, which puts the project in a longer time frame than is seen by Elon University students or the school children. This is again similar to the case of Brazil, and it has ethical ramifications as it indicates that the effort exerted by the school to participate in the project is predicated on the expectation of a longer-term commitment from the university.

All three groups identify that Elon University students enjoy the cross-cultural experience in the schools. Both the children and the teachers/administrator suggest that Elon University students learn the process/content of science while presenting it to the children, and informal interactions between the course leader and the students in the field confirm this impression. Both the teachers and Elon University students identify a sense of self-worth and

accomplishment due to providing the service, as well as various dimensions of personal growth, on the part of Elon University students.

The question on challenges to participating in the project is where the points of view seem to diverge the most, but they are both related to concerns regarding the capacity of the TSC to serve about 300 children per day, a number much lower than the school populations we visited. Elon University students predominantly identify an organizational challenge to hosting the exhibition: "The largest challenge experienced in every school was allowing the appropriate number of students to see the exhibits". On the flip side both the school students and the teachers/administrator focus primarily on the short length of the interaction as the main challenge to the TSC project. "Many others were disappointed in being not able to view the exhibits and we have promised them that their turn will come when you come back the following year!" writes one teacher. The teachers/administrators had to select certain classes to participate in the TSC, which inevitably left many children disappointed. To keep this disappointment to a minimum, teachers may have maximized the number of children who participated. This in turn may have left the Elon University students with the impression that the schools were not well organized because they were pushing the limits of the capacity of the TSC.

The above responses revealed the need to maintain an on-going dialog about the structure of the project in the schools, to address the concerns of all involved, and thereby to increase the degree of informed consent of all the parties. In the subsequent running of this course, in 2010, the Elon University team stayed two days at the schools where it had previously spent one, and it left some of the exhibits with some schools in order to expand children's access to the TSC materials beyond the exhibition days. Still further discussions are in order, in part to improve on the alignment of the goals for the ISL project. Whereas the exhibits are built with the middle-schooler in mind, the schools seem to view the TSC as an opportunity to encourage interest in science in a wider age group of students, and also for all ages to benefit from interacting with young adults from a different culture. The very process of conducting this research has had an applied effect in opening the dialogue about how to best serve the schools by encouraging them to define the meaning of the service within their institutional and local cultures. By restructuring repeated ISL courses to enhance reciprocity, we can react to Chisolm (2003)'s caution to minimize the burden on service organizations by diminishing the necessity of the host institution(s) to adapt to logistical parameters developed by faculty and administrators at the sending university.

Discussion

We have attempted to ask the students, the partner organizations, and the community members themselves, questions related to the needs of the community, the benefits to each group from the ISL project, and the challenge the community experiences related to its participation in the project. Comparing these points of view exposes the space of potential

divergent interests, which can serve as a launching point for follow up discussions and programmatic adjustments to improve on the level of informed consent for all involved in the ISL project. It also suggests discussion points that can deepen the learning experience for the participating university students. We claim that what makes ISL ethical is the process of aligning of mutual goals, that there is tendency toward informed consent for parties in the project. This way all parties benefit from the interaction, and no one party suffers excessive burden to participating in the project.

We argue that informed consent is enhanced by early contact between partners, by partnering with agencies that are informed by the expressed needs of local communities, by understanding what the partnership means in the larger context of the partner organization and the lives of its representatives, and by attaining a better mutual understanding of how the individuals in the partner organization may find participation challenging within the structure of their institution. We argue that informed consent regarding short and long term needs, goals, and expectations in an ISL project should be an objective for all parties involved.

In the Guatemala course, students' perceptions of community needs were affected by whether the partner organization has pre-departure contact with the students and had developed the particular project in response to the needs expressed by the local community. Curamericas seems to be unique amongst the three main partnering NGOs in that it tailors itself to the community that it is addressing and was the only organization prepared to send a representative to a pre-departure meeting. These differences appear to coincide with the achievement of a higher level of informed consent in the project with Curamericas, as demonstrated in the understandings students appear to gain of the needs addressed by their service. Students recognized fewer and more consistent community needs when working with Curamericas and many more community needs when working with Dom's Place and Habitat for Humanity. By increasing communication and interaction both with students and community members, this organization has facilitated a greater degree of student understanding of the needs being addressed by the service.

In the Brazil course, the expectation for the length of partnership between the ISL program and the community organization exceeds the more transactional relationships common in North America. This indicates that in order to assure that the needs and expectations of partner organizations are met, faculty and university administrators need to not only discuss the logistics of the course, but the expectations for long term benefits. For example, community partners may want to use photos or essays from the course in their publicity materials or expect faculty to grant interviews with local media stations during or after the course. Partners may also hold expectations for future relationships. The probability of a long-term commitment must be fully discussed and faculty need to be clear about the potential for future partnerships or assistance. In order to attain informed consent in this cross-cultural context, discussions regarding the time frame and sustainability of relationships must take place resulting a mutual understanding of expectations. Both the Guatemala and Brazil findings may demonstrate the importance of securing financial support to bring partners to campus to

participate in pre-departure course activities and to enhance their understanding of the cultural context of students, as this may cultivate clearer mutual understandings of ISL coursework and help achieve a higher level of informed consent for all participating sub-groups.

In the India course there was a high level of informed consent as determined by the similarity of responses to the survey questions among the sub-groups. Still, the question of challenge to the community from the ISL project yielded a difference in understandings of the costs of service to the host institution. Thus further discussion and programmatic adjustments took place to improve on informed consent and make sure that the parties are not unduly stressed by the ISL project. This difference in perspectives will also serve as a discussion point for students participating in future iterations of the course, thus deepening the learning experience.

The greatest limitation to the current study comes with determining the community perceptions. In the case of Guatemala, the language barrier proved to be significant. In Brazil, the community receiving service was rather broadly defined, as the reform of the playground ultimately served children in the hospital, but also impacted numerous hospital workers and clients of the participating NGO. In India, the community was comprised primarily of younger school children; only older school children had the language ability and maturity to respond to the questions in this study. Still, even partial assessment of the community point of view can be very beneficial to determining how to improve an ISL program and to guard against unintended negative impact. Working with the partner organization to map out the community perspective may be taking a step in the direction of improving informed consent.

Do all three parties in ISL need to be on the same page regarding goals and the burden of the project to the community? Is it an ethical issue? We answer these questions in the affirmative. Understanding that each side has its own expectations and justly and transparently negotiating the respective goals is akin to informed consent in ethnographic research. This we claim is the standard by which ISL relationships should be judged.

We end with a question to colleagues considering or adapting similar pedagogies. For the purpose of the survey in this study we identified three stakeholders in ISL: the students, the partner organization, and the community itself. We recognized that each party has its own goals and reasons for maintaining the ISL partnership, and hence mutual understanding is key to informed consent for the project and for promoting an equal power dynamic among the parties. But we also acknowledge that the university, the academic structure, and the instructor are essential players in ISL. In our analysis we have put the course leader at the top of the pyramid, as the disinterested convener of the service, and immune from his/her own ethical deliberations. But shouldn't the instructor and the university really be the fourth corner of the partnership rectangle? Are the goals of the instructor and the university subject to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and therefore worthy of scrutiny by all parties? We hope to spur an interest in this question and look forward to future discussions.

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