
Cultural Intelligence, Global Awareness and International Service Learning: An Analysis of Student Perspectives on Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

International service learning is gradually becoming an effective pedagogical approach to overseas study programs. It offers students a collection of opportunities to increase their levels of cultural intelligence and global awareness. Moreover, through fieldwork experience, they are also able to deepen their knowledge of specific domains such as public policy. This paper will discuss one example of efforts being made at a Japanese university to stimulate such development through student participation in an international service learning program in Christchurch, New Zealand. Specifically, it explicates the learning outcomes of six students who participated in the program in 2016. Through an analysis of student journals, final papers and a focus-group interview, this paper will discuss the positive learning outcomes available through the implementation of an international service learning program. In conclusion, it will provide suggestions for future development.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, curriculum pedagogy, global-awareness, international service learning

1. Introduction

Opportunities for university students to broaden their academic, linguistic and cultural horizons through overseas study programs are increasing year by year. Among the array of pedagogy available to them, international service learning is

becoming a popular option due to the fact it offers a variety of disciplines (Nickols et. al., 2013).

International service learning can be best described as a combination of service learning and international education that allows students to enhance their intercultural sensitivity and global awareness at the same time as deepening their knowledge of specific domains such as social, political, cultural and environmental issues (Bringle, Hatcher and Jones, 2011). As Kuh (2008) also states, service learning can have significant impact on the improvement of a student's academic achievements through first-hand practical use of classroom knowledge through community engagement.

With these points in mind, this paper examines the design, implementation, and student reflections and evaluations of a new international service learning program at a Japanese university from 2016 that takes students to Christchurch, New Zealand, to take part in the University of Canterbury UC Community engagement program. This paper will begin by describing the program design and goals before moving onto an analysis of the learning outcomes from the student participants' perspectives. It will conclude with a discussion on future considerations and goals for further program development.

2. International Service learning Program Design and Goals

This program was developed after the author became aware of opportunities for international students to take part in a service learning-based program run at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. Student volunteer activities at the university were developed in an effort to aid the Christchurch community after two large earthquakes hit the city in 2010 and 2011. Due to the positive impact the community engagement had on the city, these activities were made a formal part of the university's future direction. Based on the ethos established through student volunteering, the University of Canterbury has created real-life learning opportunities that stimulate bicultural competence, community engagement, global awareness, and innovation. Through what is called the UC Community Engagement Hub, students studying short- or long-term at the University of Canterbury learn and take part in community-based projects. These projects are university student volunteer group-led and have the added opportunity

to learn about public policy and community engagement in the classroom before going out into the field. The on-site field activities are numerous, including volunteer activities in residential and rural areas, as well as NPO and city council-led support services that focus on the rebuilding of the city and suburban areas (University of Canterbury, 2017).

Program Format and Flow

Using previous experience as an overseas study program developer and coordinator (see O’Connell & Cripps, 2014; 2015), the author created a program that allows students to take part in the opportunities for learning in collaboration with the UC Community Engagement Hub. As stated previously, the overall learning aims of the program focused on raising the students’ global awareness, enhancing their cultural intelligence and deepening their knowledge of public and environmental policies, through the experiences available in New Zealand. A total of six students ranging from first-year through to fourth-year signed up for the program and the author was in charge of all three stages including chaperoning them to New Zealand.

The format was split into three stages: 1) pre-departure preparation classes, 2) international service learning tour and 3) post-tour report and focus group, as shown in the tables below:

The five pre-departure classes were used to prepare the students for their international service learning. This allowed the author to work with the students to discuss goals, activities and expected outcomes.

Table 1. PRE-DEPARTURE PREPARATION CLASSES

PREPARATION CLASS	ACTIVITIES
CLASS 1	THEME: What is International Service learning?
CLASS 2	THEME: Research & Fieldwork Planning
CLASS 3	THEME: Fieldwork Interviews & Data Collection Methods
CLASS 4	THEME: Fieldwork English
CLASS 5	THEME: Presentation Skills

The first class focused on establishing a shared definition of what 'international service learning' with the students. By the end of the class, the students clearly understood what the three primary goals of the international service learning program were, and more importantly, how positive participation in volunteer activities and fieldwork in New Zealand could lead to enhancing their cultural intelligence, global awareness and policy domain knowledge.

The second and third classes focused on fieldwork planning and data collection methods. Only one of the six students was a senior and familiar with qualitative and quantitative research methods and ethics. The remaining five students still had an insufficient level of research methodological knowledge, so these two sessions proved vital in helping them plan their fieldwork research. Once their goals were clearly established, the students then learned the basics on how to collect data properly and conduct interviews in an unbiased and ethical way.

The last two lessons were used to prepare the students for English language related activities. Common interview-style question technique, general fieldwork communication protocol as well as frequently used expressions unique to the New Zealand culture were the main features of the fieldwork English class. As for the final class, the main focus was placed on how to present in English in an engaging and clear-to-understand way. The author felt that this type of session was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the students were required to present their findings in English at the University of Canterbury before they returned to Japan.

Table 2. INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING TOUR

TOUR SCHEDULE			
DAY 1	Depart Japan	DAY 8	Data Analysis
DAY 2	Arrive Christchurch Program Orientation (UC)	DAY 9	On-Campus Lectures
DAY 3	On-campus Lectures	DAY 10	Student Volunteer Project 3
DAY 4	Quake-City & CBD Tour	DAY 11	Student Volunteer Project 4
DAY 5	Student Volunteer Project 1	DAY 12	Data Analysis
DAY 6	Student Volunteer Project 2	DAY 13	On-Campus Presentation
DAY 7	Data Analysis	DAY 14	Return to Japan

Secondly, as English and Japanese presentation styles tend to be vastly different regarding the role of the presenter and the way information is delivered, the author saw this as an opportunity for the students to improve their intercultural communication skills. As a result of taking the time to prepare the students before departure, each student seemed confident that they could gain new and valuable experiences during the program.

As shown in Table 2, the schedule was both intense and varied so that the students could experience service learning in the field and deepen their knowledge regarding community engagement in Christchurch. It was also important to provide them sufficient time to make sense of what they were learning and experiencing through data analysis sessions with the author. After arriving in Christchurch, the University of Canterbury classroom was used as the central meeting point. Students were assigned to different homestays for the entire two weeks, rather than using the student dormitory, in order to allow them more opportunities to interact with the local community.

During the actual service learning, care was taken to provide them with the necessary background knowledge in the campus lectures regarding how and why the University of Canterbury engages with the local community through student volunteer activities. The students were then able to experience student volunteer activities ranging from on-going post-earthquake community clean-up activities through to assisting in volunteer urban farm projects that make use of earthquake-stricken land in the central business district to grow vegetables that are sold to local restaurants. Additionally, they were also able to meet and discuss the role of the university student volunteer with the leaders of the student volunteer army that has been established at the University of Canterbury.

Upon return to Japan, as shown in Table 3, the first task at hand was for the students to take what they had learned, experienced and presented on at the University of Canterbury and transfer them into a four-page final report. The goal behind this was to give students sufficient time to reflect on the overall program before articulating those experiences on paper.

Table 3. POST-TOUR REPORT AND FOCUS GROUP ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	CONTENT
Final Report	Four-page report in English or Japanese reflecting on experiences and learning outcomes. Submitted within one month upon return to Japan.
Focus Group Interview	Interview to follow-up on themes extracted from student reports.

Once these reports were collected and analysed by the author, the group met again for a focus-group session in the fall semester in 2016. This session was used to probe deeper into their experiences and to make sure the author understood what they were attempting to convey in their reports.

3. Methodological Approach

This study used a qualitative approach based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009) and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) as the main tool to extract themes from the data. The central aim of this study was to shed light on the extent of international service learning as an effective pedagogy to stimulate global awareness, cultural intelligence and policy learning. In other words, it sought to understand the students' development in the areas of global awareness, cultural intelligence and specific domain knowledge. Data was collected from three main sources—student journals, final reports and the focus-group interview. All sources were used to analyse for themes that characterised the student reflections with relation to their experiences.

As Charmaz (2009) stresses, constructivist grounded theory is ideal when looking at social constructions that are in some way influenced by the position, perspective and interactions of the researcher who seeks to study a process or situation using an inductive, comparative and open-ended approach. This approach is ideal in this situation as the author recognises this to be the case in this international service learning program considering the fact that the author has designed, implemented and chaperoned the program.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection began with a review of the six students' journals and end of program final report upon return to Japan. In addition, transcriptions were made of the focus group interview held in the fall semester after initial coding of the journals and reports had been completed. At each stage of the data collection, students were informed that all submissions of data (journals, reports and transcripts) were voluntary. They were also promised anonymity and all students signed a consent form for the use of data in this paper.

3. Findings

Thematic analysis of the six student journals, final reports and focus group interview transcripts revealed four main themes: 1) improved cultural intelligence, 2) heightened global awareness, 3) motivation to use new knowledge and 4) desire to encourage more service learning in Japan. Accordingly, this section of the paper will discuss what was discovered within each of the themes.

Theme 1: Improved Cultural Intelligence

One of the most noticeable themes to emerge from the data analysis was a shared sense of cultural intelligence among all six students. As explained in the *Program Flow and Structure* section, all students were allocated to separate homestays during the two-week program in Christchurch. This was done to allow students the opportunity to communicate regularly with Christchurch citizens so that they could experience New Zealand family culture and gain first-hand accounts of how the earthquakes and subsequent changes in the city had changed peoples' lives in the city. Naturally, being able to experience daily New Zealand family life proved beneficial regarding how to behave, communicate and function appropriately in the host culture.

The following extracts are representative of the shared sense of improved cultural intelligence:

“When I talked about my program experiences with my host family, they helped me prepare questions to ask the people I was volunteering with. I learned how to communicate in a way that New Zealand people felt comfortable with.” (Student #1)

“I have never had to interview people before or do this kind of fieldwork, so every day was a big challenge. But by the end I became more confident and was able to communicate my questions and my opinions with many New Zealanders, including my host family. It was great to be understood and to get many helpful opinions from them.” (Student #3)

“At the start, I was really shy. But my teacher, the volunteer groups and my host family said to me to just ask anything. The more I did, the more relaxed I became. I was very nervous to begin with, but at the end I really enjoyed all the communication I accomplished.” (Student #5)

“I learned that communication in a new culture isn't just about being able to speak the language. You really need to understand the lifestyle and customs too. This experience helped me become more aware of that.” (Student #6)

From these four examples, it is clear that the students gained more confidence by the end of the program. The numerous opportunities to communicate with the local Christchurch citizens provided them with challenges that simulated their intercultural communication skills. Interestingly, all of the examples show that students had a deeper awareness of the connection between language and culture, which is fundamental to improving cultural intelligence.

Theme 2: Heightened Global Awareness

The second major theme to emerge from the data analysis was a clearly heightened global awareness. As one of the major program aims, it was satisfying to see that all six students felt they had been able to enhance their awareness of global issues. This was particularly evident in data collected from their final

reports and the focus-group interview conducted in Japan. As is shown from student comments below, participation in this international service learning program stimulated them cognitively in relation to global awareness:

“The lectures and volunteer activities really made me think more about how post-disaster activities and support are conducted in Japan.” (Student #2)

“I think Japan can learn a lot from how things have been done to help the city recover here in Christchurch. It would be a good model for places like Tohoku and Kumamoto in Japan.” (Student #5)

“Many students from other countries come here to study service learning. I think this gives people chances to compare their own situations. By exchanging opinions and experiences, you can learn many different ideas.” (Student #6)

These three comments show how the combination of learning about and experiencing service learning and community engagement can not only stimulate thought but also influence the way one’s own country systems are considered. Naturally, the exchange of experiences and opinions between students from different cultural backgrounds led the students become more globally aware.

Theme 3: Motivation to Use New Knowledge

In any learning environment, the issue of motivation is always an important area of consideration. As stated previously, another goal of this program was to deliver content and experiences that allowed students to deepen their knowledge of public and environmental policy domains. In relation to this, interestingly, the predominant theme to appear was connected to motivation to use the new knowledge they had acquired as shown in the following student comments:

“I was able to see first-hand how local city office policy regarding public transport, use of land and citizen NPO support services were carried out. I want to be able to use that as a

reference for my study here at university.” (Student #5)

“Being able to experience how Christchurch city, university and community work together to make new things happen to better their city after the earthquake made me want to research how effectively it is or could be done here in Japan.” (Student #1)

“The way in which SNS tools such as Facebook and Instagram are used to inform people of volunteer needs and to share information on changes in public or environment policy in the city was something I want to compare in Japan. I think it’s important to use this knowledge to think of new or better ways of sharing important information like that in areas that need support in Japan such as the Tohoku and Kumamoto areas.” (Student #6)

“I don’t want to waste the new knowledge I gained in New Zealand. For example, I think there should be more information-sharing about volunteer needs in Japan and better management of that support to help the public when a disaster happens.” (Student #3)

As can be seen from the students’ comments, the underlying theme of motivation to use the new knowledge acquired is noticeable. Not only is it apparent that the students were able to learn something new in relation to the domains of public and environmental policy, but more importantly, there is a strong motivation by the students to use that knowledge to further their studies in Japan. The majority of student comments point to a strong motivation to use their new knowledge of what is happening in Christchurch to compare and research more about what is happening in similar situations or contexts in Japan.

Theme 4: Desire to Encourage More Service Learning in Japan

The final major theme to appear relates to the students’ desires to encourage more service learning in Japan. As Takeda (2011) points out, the number of universities that are now adopting service learning as learning pedagogy is

increasing, but still rather sporadic. For the six students that participated in this program, it was the first time that they had heard the term ‘service learning’. Nevertheless, due to the positive learning outcomes, there was an overwhelming desire voiced by them to provide other students at this university with the same opportunities. Examples of this desire can be seen in the following comments:

“Before I did this program, I didn’t really know what student-learning meant. I think that university students at our university as well as other universities should look for opportunities to do this in Japan too. I certainly plan to do more because it helps me understand my studies better about public policy and how it helps communities.” (Student #6)

“I strongly think that we should use the UC Community Engagement model to do more in Japan. I really want to try to create a similar kind of student volunteer group at our university. There might be big organizations to join, but there isn’t enough information for us right now. I intend to investigate that and see what we could possibly do on campus.” (Student #2)

“I will definitely recommend this program to my friends, seniors and juniors at university. Going out into communities that need volunteer support after natural disasters occur is a great way to think about how public and environmental policies for towns and cities should be designed and implemented.” (Student #3)

“This was the first time for this program to be done and we only had participants from our faculty. I think it should be promoted more throughout the university departments so that more people can learn and experience what we have. It’s not only important for our study, but I feel it helps us grow as people and learn what our social duties are regarding helping others when disasters strike.” (Student #1)

These comments distinctly show the impact that the program had on the students

who participated. It was pleasing to see that all of the students felt that this opportunity should be made available to more students and that they wanted to promote the learning benefits. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows that the students want to use this experience to further develop their service learning knowledge in Japan. Secondly, the attitudes shown will hopefully have a positive influence on future participants through word-of-mouth among other students at the university.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the potential impact of international service learning as an effective pedagogy to stimulate global awareness, cultural intelligence and policy learning. When examining pedagogical effectiveness, more often than not a focus on the design and aims of programs becomes a subjective analysis by the teacher. Therefore, to fully comprehend the effects on students taking part in international service learning programs like this, an analysis of their personal reflections and evaluations is paramount as it allows for an objective evaluation through the eyes of the participants.

As shown in the findings, all six students recognized multiple benefits from the program participation. It is clear to see that all three areas—global awareness, cultural intelligence and policy learning—were positively affected among all participants. Conversely, one area in which this study is limited in its findings is an insufficient focus on the challenges and coping strategies employed by the students to navigate their way through the program. This will be a future area of focus to allow the author to improve program content and quality of instruction. It is hoped that by doing so, the students will become better equipped to prepare for the cultural and academic challenges that await them in New Zealand.

The interactive nature of this program had numerous positive effects on the students' learning outcomes as shown in their reflections and evaluations. This is evident in the four themes extracted, but most importantly shown by the fact that all students suggest that this program should be made available to a wider audience. Accordingly, the future development of this program will not only concentrate on maintaining and improving course content quality, but it will also look into ways to opening up opportunities for students from all departments and

faculties campus-wide.

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