

The Intended and Unintended Consequences of International Service-Learning

Robbin D. Crabtree

Abstract

Previous research on service-learning in international contexts tends to focus on the benefits and outcomes for students and educational institutions. This essay is intended to provoke further examination of issues related to university-community engagement in global contexts, particularly in terms of the consequences for host communities. In order to explore complex issues surrounding international service-learning, the author offers a composite scenario in a series of snapshots gleaned from projects organized by U.S.-based organizations and universities in partnership with host country organizations and communities. Revealed are a variety of typical outcomes—intended and unintended, positive and negative—for students, faculty, organizations and their staff, and the communities that host visiting service-learning teams. A framework for analysis is offered along with recommendations for ways to mitigate potential unintended negative consequences of international service-learning.

Introduction

There have been significant responses to and outcomes from the calls to internationalize higher education (Angell, 1969; Annette, 2003; Kenny & Gallagher, 2002), to produce civic learning in students (Barber, 1992; Boyer & Hechinger, 1981; Dewey, 1916; Erlich, 2000; Freire, 1998), and to bring the resources of universities to bear on urgent social issues at home and around the world (Ansley & Gavena, 1997; Boyer, 1990; Brown & Tandon, 1983; Reason, 1991; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Whyte, 1991). Most institutions of higher education now have vibrant study abroad programs, extensive community service networks and service-learning courses, and a growing number of faculty members who conduct research in partnership with, or for the benefit of, communities near and far. Arising from these varied streams of educational philosophy and the instructional trends they spawned, recent publications herald a coming of age of international service-learning as a subfield of international education and service-learning. For example, *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research* (Bringle, Hatcher, & Jones, 2010) and other recent volumes (Gelmon & Billig, 2007; Porfilio & Hickman,

2011; Tonkin, Deeley, Pusch, Quiroga, Siegel, Whiteley, & Bringle, 2004) chart the history, identify best practices, and formulate the future of this community-engaged model of teaching and learning.

International service-learning programs now can be found across higher education institutions of all sizes, involving several types of partner organizations (e.g., nonprofits and community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, government agencies) in communities abroad and in the United States. Arising from these engagements, scholars across disciplines are studying practices related to international service in higher education. The growing body of literature reflects a relatively recent merging and cross-pollination among the perspectives of various fields that study development and cross-cultural contact, as well as student learning and related phenomena.

This essay is intended to encourage further examination of issues related to university-community engagement in global contexts. Snapshots from actual international service-learning experiences evoke discussion of a variety of typical outcomes—intended and unintended, positive and negative—for students, faculty, and staff in community-based organizations, as well as for the communities that host visiting teams from U.S.-based universities. Discussion invites readers to engage the ethical dilemmas this work can sometimes induce regarding mixed and varied consequences, and introduces a framework for anticipating and analyzing project impact. The essay concludes with recommendations for mitigating negative consequences.

A broad range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary literatures informs this essay (for an in-depth review, see *Crabtree, 2008*). With academic training in international and intercultural communication and over 25 years experience in practice, research, and program administration in international service-learning, the author seeks to understand what happens when faculty members and students from North America engage with developing communities in projects organized in collaboration with U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations in host countries. Related work has explored project and course design issues and how they should be informed by participatory development theories and practices (*Crabtree, 1998, 1999, 2007*), dynamics within communities and broader contexts that create conditions for successful collaboration (*Crabtree, 1998; Crabtree & Ford, 2006; Crabtree & Sapp, 2005*), and how to utilize academic literatures to inform international service-learning practice and research (*Crabtree, 1997, 2008; Sapp & Crabtree, 2002*). Research notes, photographs, journals,

and continued reflections from educational, service, and research immersions in El Salvador (in 1992, 1993, 2010), Nicaragua (in 1997, 1998, 2004), and Kenya (in 1998, 2002, 2004) inspired the collection of illustrations offered here for discussion.

A Composite International Service-Learning Scenario

The following composite scenario, organized in 11 parts, reveals some intended and unintended consequences of international service-learning. Each part is, in a sense, a snapshot of a different moment in an international service-learning experience. The scenario is offered to promote discussion and analysis leading to the recommendations later in the essay.

Snapshot #1: A community has learned from one of the many new community-based organizations working in the region that a U.S.-based organization wants to bring a team of university students to its village to build something. Host country staff work with local community leaders to consider a number of project ideas. Some community members advocate for a dignified housing project given the destruction wreaked by the last two hurricanes, but there are concerns that too few families would benefit and it could create jealousies. They decide to build a community center that could benefit all. Students on the university campus in the U.S., meanwhile, are excited to do something meaningful with their spring break; they also hope they will have some fun in this tropical locale. The opportunity to help those less fortunate is part of their university's mission, and this work will look good on their résumés.

Snapshot #2: Students find the village smaller and more impoverished than they had imagined. At first, some students regret coming on the trip, particularly those who experience diarrhea and other travel-related health issues. But once work is under way, most students find the construction energizing and they feel good about themselves at the end of each long day and begin to sense growing bonds with each other. They also enjoy playing with the local children, who seem to flock around them, and practicing their Spanish. Some community members also work on the construction site, though there are

not enough tools for everyone to use at the same time. A few students dialogue with some of the local men about politics, history, and improvisational construction techniques to use when proper materials are not available. Local women appear at mealtimes to serve the visitors.

Snapshot #3: After a 10-day community center construction project ends, the visiting team prepares to go home, satisfied with making a substantive contribution to this community. Many participants feel empowered by the new skills they learned—few of the students or community members had used power tools before, let alone built large structures with their own hands, or managed a construction site. Children in the community enjoyed helping as well as playing with the visitors after each long day of work. The local youth, in particular, are awed by the material possessions students take for granted; some receive small gifts from the visitors (e.g., a flashlight, bandana, T-shirt, small toy, photograph). The community prepares a final celebration, at which alcohol is served for the first time during the engagement. Speeches, games, and dancing go well into the night. The community center is not quite completed, and local people plan to finish up over the coming few weeks.

Snapshot #4: Despite recommendations to the contrary, some students leave their dirty clothing and other belongings behind to make room for souvenirs in their backpacks, confident that their jeans, T-shirts, and boots will find use among community members. Some community members hoard the students' discarded belongings for their families. A few community leaders try to develop a plan for distribution of these things in the community, and a few others are insulted by the gesture of leaving dirty and heavily worn clothes for them. The visitors also left all the tools and building supplies needed to complete the community center project.

Snapshot #5: For most of the community, there is a new sense of absence they have never felt before. The visitors had created palpable excitement and an emergence

of community spirit in collaborating on the building project. A small handful of local men work every evening after leaving their fields to complete the project, but it is not the same without the visitors. Most of the community members see North Americans as benefactors, a view accentuated because these have been the first benefits of development projects most of them have experienced directly and personally. Within a few weeks after project completion, some community members begin fighting about project leadership and decision making; as it turns out, there was not a prior consensus about how the community would use the center. The project seems to exacerbate conflict in the community, some of which relates to the upcoming elections and some of which is a manifestation of interpersonal conflict between individuals or age-old family rivalries.

Snapshot #6: Most of the visiting students are grateful for the experience, which gave them new insights into a joy that is based on personal connections rather than possessions. Some now romanticize village life. Many students continue to see the “third world” as inherently poor, needy, and undeveloped, even while most have new and, in some cases, increasingly complex and sophisticated understandings of the root causes of poverty and unjust global relations. Some feel a more personal connection to a world in need, and have a deeper consciousness of their own place within global inequities and, perhaps, of their power to produce change. None of the students knows that the community center has produced conflict and has yet to be put into use.

Snapshot #7: During the project, some community members developed a heartfelt sense of personal connection to the visitors with whom they worked most closely, hoping to keep in touch and perhaps meet again. A small number of the students maintain contact for a month or a year. Some students send money and gifts to their host families from time to time. One faculty member becomes comadre to a child born to the family of one of the community leaders during the visit. She eventually pays most of the expenses related

to the child's primary education. Though education is free, she learned that students need money for supplies, uniforms, and transportation to and from school.

Snapshot #8: Within a year of project completion, the community finally decides to use one half of the community center for a sewing cooperative, and the other half for a daycare center. Local women develop small income streams from these activities. Some people in neighboring communities wonder why no one has come to help their villages; some begin to organize their communities so that they, too, might receive a brigade of volunteers or perhaps even develop projects on their own. Meanwhile, the national government continues to rely on international nongovernmental organizations and visiting solidarity workers instead of being more responsive and accountable to the development needs in the country, particularly needs in the poor rural communities. The community center, built with the visiting students, is heralded by the regional government as an outcome of its own administration and policies.

Snapshot #9: Since the project ended, some community members have emerged as leaders for the first time, finding that they have skills and abilities that had not been tapped before. They continue to work and organize on behalf of their community, and several valuable projects result (e.g., a tool co-operative, community garden, successful advocacy for a paved road). Some of the youth renew their commitment to complete secondary school and begin to aspire to higher education. Others, now more acutely aware of the deficits in their own community, long to emigrate to the United States. The staff members of the host country regional community-based organization have developed professional skills through these partnerships, and these skills position them well for new job opportunities in their country. Many bring the ethos of community development to positions in other organizations, for the government, and for a few, to advanced degree programs. As well, many of the host country staff members increasingly adopt North American organizational and communication styles, dressing and acting (and maybe thinking)

more and more like the visitors as they facilitate many collaborative projects over time.

Snapshot #10: Of the two faculty advisors on this trip, one develops a research agenda related to international service-learning and ends up publishing several articles on the subject connected to her discipline, earning tenure at her university. The other is finding that the enormous work of organizing and facilitating these types of learning experiences distracts her from her unrelated research agenda. Moreover, her departmental colleagues do not value or do not know how to “count” this engagement in their promotion and tenure processes. She is worried about her tenure prospects.

Snapshot #11: When the students return to their lives on campus, most find it difficult to share their experiences and insights with peers and family members who were not on the trip. Some of their friends tire of the stories or dismiss what they hear as liberal rhetoric. The project becomes one of many college experiences for these students, and few find ways to keep the experience alive in their studies or other aspects of their daily lives, though many of the friendships they made with other students on this trip last for many years. Most of the students pursue postgraduate employment with little apparent divergence from their original path of or toward privilege. A small number pursue postgraduate service and solidarity experiences (e.g., Peace Corps, Teach for America), and a few of these students veer toward jobs or graduate degrees in fields related to development or sustainability or global policy issues.

As this composite scenario shows, the outcomes of international education and service experiences can often be mixed, may meet only short-term goals, and sometimes result in the opposite of what participants hope to accomplish. As well, the outcomes and impact of international service-learning can be complicated and wide-ranging for individuals and groups of participants. In the scenario, for example, outcomes include student learning and attitude changes that indeed map well to the goals of international service-learning, such as increasingly sophisticated understandings of poverty and historical global relations for the students,

and community organization and skills that translate to greater self-determination and continued development for community participants. Also resulting, however, is potential reinforcement of attitudes that international service-learning is designed to challenge for students and community members alike, such as the belief that developing countries are inherently poor and Americans are all rich, or a persistent normalization of paternalistic/colonial relations.

Further, for students, in addition to the learning that these kinds of experiences are designed to facilitate, outcomes can include changes to their belief systems, identities, loyalties, outlook, and professional trajectories that they, and their friends and parents, may find troubling. We should recognize that student learning outcomes sought by faculty might at the same time disrupt students' own prior hopes or those that their parents, families, and friends have for them. This outcome may have long-term implications for students beyond the increased knowledge and broader consciousness we hope to produce (*Kiely, 2004*).

Similarly, for community members, outcomes may include a disruption of community relations, potential conflict, disappointment, or disaffection with home, in addition to some positive outcomes. In some cases, the relationships between communities and visitors can constructively disrupt historical dynamics among those situated differently in global relations. This can come about when, for example, students and community members dialogue about politics and history while working side by side on a project and sharing meals together. As well, there are examples of the manifestation of hoped-for ancillary effects of community development, such as greater leadership and organization within the community applied to new self-determined projects. At the same time, some ways that short-term visits can disrupt community dynamics also are illustrated, in particular the community's sense of loss at the end of the project, and the emergence of conflict related to the project itself, or exacerbated by it.

The composite scenario reveals that the beneficiaries of international service-learning include local project leaders and the faculty who manage the experiences, whether through the development of useful new knowledge, skills, and networks, or through access to other resources such as friendships, data, contacts, and ongoing material support. These individuals may realize unintended consequences as well, including personal and professional risks. For example, the implications of community-based teaching and research may affect faculty members' professional trajectories (*Wood, Banks, Galiardi, Koehn, & Schroeder, 2011*). For community

leaders, increased post-project social status may also bring alienation or jealousy from neighbors or similar disruptions in social relations in the community.

The outcomes of international service-learning also occur on the organizational level. For example, partnering community-based organizations may gain more political capital than others, as these projects affect factors such as an organization's visibility, legitimation, and access to future resources. There are often broader impacts to consider vis-à-vis the host nation, such as the ways projects can get implicated in national or local politics. International service-learning projects and similar bi-national volunteer development engagements may catalyze—or may substitute for—national development commitments. The presence of service-learning projects in local communities may also bring needed—or unwanted, even dangerous—government attention to those communities and their leaders (see *Crabtree, 1998*, for discussion of the case of a local mayor's arrest after a university team's departure).

The positive outcomes of international service-learning engagements are widely discussed in the published literature. Indeed, some of these outcomes are in line with our intentions, and some may even exceed our expectations by being broader or more transformative than we might have hoped. For example, on a project in El Salvador (reported in *Crabtree, 1998*), ex-combatants who fought on both sides of a protracted armed conflict shared their *testimoniales* with students in evening reflections designed to help students gain deeper understanding of the context where they worked each day to rebuild a school that was bombed. These story-telling opportunities produced a remarkable catharsis for community members, which they found healing and empowering, though the intent was to augment the students' educational experience. Relationships built between a few of those students and community members continue two decades after that project and have shaped the careers of a couple of the students, one of whom now runs the U.S.-based organization that co-sponsored the original project. Similarly, one project in rural Kenya served as a catalyst for future projects in the area, inspiring self-determination among observers from nearby communities. This outcome was beyond the intent of the small-scale project to renovate a community well. Thus, there is value to visitors' mere presence in remote areas, including the power of accompaniment and witness (*Morton, 1995*), and these experiences may produce profound impacts on both sides of the global divide.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that the impact of our work is not all positive, regardless of our intentions.

International service-learning is, after all, not a panacea for community development. Outcomes beyond the immediate goals of and engagement with the project can be related to long-term and intractable community dynamics, which can affect project outcomes in unanticipated ways. The snapshot of the community center sitting empty while the community debated its use provides one illustration. Thus, understanding the broad and multifaceted contexts of this work is critical and should inform program development at our institutions, operational choices of partners and sites, management of the dynamics of an international service-learning project as it unfolds, and the study of outcomes.

A Framework for Analysis

Based on this discussion, a series of questions can be posited to guide international service-learning project design and partnership development, to inform the facilitation of on-the-ground experiences, and to guide analysis of project dynamics and outcomes. The following questions serve that purpose.

- What are the relationships among communities, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other social institutions in the countries where we work and within the larger geopolitical contexts, and in relation to the dynamics and material consequences of historical and contemporary globalization?
- What are the features of the projects and interventions we design and how were they developed? What are the intergroup and interpersonal dynamics that unfold during the project related to both project execution and to intercultural contact more generally?
- What factors influence the intended and unintended, positive and negative consequences of this work for the engaged participants, as well as for those on the periphery of our interventions (e.g., neighboring communities)?
- What is the long-term impact of international service-learning on the communities where we work, the surrounding communities, and the larger development process in the countries where we engage?

- How can this work contribute to broader, deeper, and more lasting consequences for all participants, as well as productive conversations about and meaningful enactments of global relations?

These are some of the many questions that persist, and that service-learning scholars have begun to address in the literature. Answering these kinds of questions involves complex consideration of the contexts where we work, project design and pedagogical choices, project assessment in the near term and in longer range time frames, and the dynamics of interactions before, during, and after international service-learning encounters. Discussion of these and related issues follows, drawing from recent work on participatory community-based research (*Belone et al., 2012; Wallerstein et al., 2008*).

Context

Distal and proximal contextual variables affect international service-learning projects in massive seen and unseen ways. These variables include the socioeconomic and cultural environment of the host country, national and local policies, historical sociopolitical relations between the home and host countries, participants' prior experiences with collaboration and cross-cultural contact, and the multifaceted capacities of the community, the university team, and any partnering organizations. The scenarios provided in this essay and subsequent discussion of them elucidate several contextual variables that may affect project dynamics and outcomes, such as political dynamics among segments of citizens within the host community, and the ways the different participants are situated in historical global relations.

Partnership Dynamics

Analysis of the partnership and its dynamics may include issues such as the structural equity of the partnership, project complexity, and the unfolding competence of the participants as they formally and informally interact with each other. Also important are characteristics of group dynamics, such as leadership, power sharing, and the distribution of tasks. Individual values and beliefs, cultural identities, language, and the interpersonal and communication skills of participants additionally influence the partnership. Prior to the encounter, these dynamics operate during the planning phase in the community and at the university. They also unfold during the project itself in day-to-day interactions, and may continue to be salient in various ways after the project and encounter have come to a close.

Project Design and Implementation

Advanced considerations about or analysis of the project itself could include whether the process for project selection was participatory, use of shared knowledge to inform project design, the degree of reciprocity the project produces, and the quality of execution. As well, unforeseen circumstances that unfold during the project, such as inclement weather, a health crisis, a local holiday, or other unexpected situations, which could be positively or negatively valenced for participants, should be considered in terms of their impact on the project and the collaboration. In the composite scenario, for example, the birth of a baby in the community during the encounter was a bonding experience. The minimal visibility of local women during the project, and then mainly in food preparation and serving the visitors, was another factor worth interrogation as to its impact on the community and on student learning.

Outcomes

Outcomes relevant for analysis may include changes in attitudes, behaviors, policies, structural inequities and disparities, and so forth, whether these are intended or unintended, positive or negative. Multiple methodologies can be used, including surveys, focus groups, student journals and other written artifacts, interviews, and observational methods. Outcomes can be studied immediately following a project, and revisited at various intervals after the project. Outcomes for students and faculty, staff at partnering organizations from both the home and the host country, and individual community members as well as for the collective community should be considered. Ideally, some assessment of the perspectives of host country neighboring communities or governments might also be sought.

Clearly each set of issues in this framework influences each of the others. As well, one project's outcomes will influence the context for future projects, and similarly will influence participants' future service engagements and collaborations.

Recommendations

Identifying the consequences of international service-learning would be insufficient without including recommendations for mitigating unintended negative outcomes. By no means exhaustive, the following list of recommendations is intended to help program directors, faculty members, and administrators make decisions in the selection of partnering organizations, sites, projects, and pedagogies.

Attend Deeply to Partnerships

Faculty members and other project leaders should carefully consider project partnerships, as well as the ways partnerships are operationalized at various points in the project. This consideration may include the choice to build the capacity of social justice organizations that are already operating, and to work with partners that are well integrated with local community leadership. Partners in developing nations should have meaningful ways to identify and advance their needs and ideas in relation to the project, through which areas of common interest can be identified. Dialogue that seeks understanding between each set of participants about their respective motivations and goals can unfold before, during, and after a project.

The literature on university-community partnerships, derived primarily from domestic service-learning contexts, can be instructive. Kecskes (2006), for example, used a cultural studies framework for thinking about partnerships, drawing upon national models, such as Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, to illustrate how a deep understanding of partnerships influences outcomes. Basinger and Bartholomew (2006) studied partnerships from the perspective of agencies and organizations that host student volunteers and that link to service-learning courses. Their data highlight the interests of agency personnel, such as enhancing the image of the community, helping students learn, and the desire to foster a positive relationship with the university. Worrall (2007) found that most community partnerships are more cooperative than reciprocal, particularly when knowledge, resources, and power are not shared equitably. Dorado and Giles (2004) studied the evolution of partnerships over time, finding that only longer term partnerships develop the features of trust, alignment of interests, and shared commitment that characterize sustainable partnerships. These and other studies (such as Simonelli, Earle, & Story, 2004) can inform engagements in international settings. Increasingly, published research illustrates that the nature of our partnerships and the quality of collaboration that develops throughout the project will make the difference between merely creating short-term international education and service opportunities for students, and educating and empowering men and women, at home and abroad, as agents of change.

Prepare Participants

The issues explored in this essay can be used as part of pre-departure preparation of participants: faculty members, students, organization staff, community and other in-country leaders, local community members, and project beneficiaries. Readings related to the disciplines of the specific university participants are common in pre-departure orientations, as faculty and students of language, sociology, natural science, education, agriculture, and other fields have different reasons for engaging in international immersion and service, and they bring different expertise, background, and academic learning goals. Also typical in pre-trip orientation are encounters with news accounts, films, and other information about the host country. Participants also should read and discuss articles related to international service-learning, including pointed critiques (*Illich, 1990*). Other readings might explore cross-cultural contact and adjustment, participatory development, and community-based learning. It is also possible to access the expertise and contacts of host-country community-based organizations for details on the historical and contemporary context for the engagement. The Center for Global Education, for example, provides speakers in many locales to help orient visitors about globalization, the historical and contemporary political dynamics of the host country, and relevant U.S. foreign policy history.

In addition to readings and development of pre-trip knowledge, one university with a long-running international service-learning program, for example, incorporates team-building exercises, case studies, and other experiential learning over the course of the semester prior to immersion. Readings and exercises might explore group dynamics and models for collaboration and decision-making. A composite scenario like that provided in this essay, or similar case studies, can be used in pre-departure orientation to promote discussion of goals and to raise awareness about possible unintended consequences. Overall, the goal of preparation should be both deep—in terms of relevant academic disciplines and issues such as personal health and safety—as well as broad—considering diverse aspects of the host context and also of collaboration among differently situated partners.

While it is the responsibility of the community-based organizations to ensure that community participants are prepared, learning what kinds of preparation the community members received prior to the engagement is also prudent. This might include understanding how the community is organized to host the visitors, how the project was determined, and how the community will engage

visitors in routine tasks such as meal preparation and clean-up. Information about the specific participants—university, students, faculty members—can be shared in advance with the community and vice versa. Exploration of issues discussed here in relation to context, partnership dynamics, project, and outcomes also might be introduced in pre-trip orientation. Some university programs incorporate site visits and shared orientations for the community and student leaders in advance of the project.

Engage in Layered Reflection and Dialogue

Reflection is increasingly identified as the critical component of effective service-learning (Eyer, 2002). Indeed, many scholars argue that it is only through structured and critical reflection that learning occurs. Kiely (2005), for example, uses Mezirow's theory of transformational learning in order to illustrate the power of reflection in service-learning. Pusch and Merrill (2008) similarly discuss the importance of reflection to achieve goals such as reciprocity in international service-learning.

A program of on-site reflections can guide students through the experience as it is unfolding, and focus their attention on specific aspects of the engagement (e.g., their first impressions, dynamics on the work site, observations of community life, connections to prior readings). In order to engage the question of intended and unintended outcomes, for example, a set of snapshots like those offered in this essay could be shared among participants to stimulate dialogue and reflection about a project and its potential outcomes. Some opportunities for community members to reflect with the students also should be created. Student leaders, faculty members, partnering organization staff, and community leaders might develop these encounters together in order to ensure the activities will be inclusive, accessible, and congruent with the goals of various constituencies. Activities that produce dialogue between visitors and community members can serve to build relationships away from the work site and beyond playing with the children. Activities can be developed that require little speaking when there are too few bilingual participants. On one project in El Salvador, for example, structured home stays, organized soccer games, and cooking lessons brought participants together for social interaction away from the project site.

Faculty members also should engage in ongoing critical reflection about their teaching and research related to international service-learning. The same values and principles that guide international service-learning might inform and transform faculty

teaching and research (*Ansley & Gaventa, 1997*). Research designs can incorporate the perspectives of community members, and outcomes studied should go beyond student learning to consider short- and long-term community impact, as well. Further, and as much as possible, faculty leaders should reflect upon how they might integrate their disciplinary research agendas with their international service-learning experiences. For example, in Nicaragua during a 3-week service-learning project, one faculty member conducted door-to-door surveys in the community related to his research on potable water and economic development in partnership with local water rights advocates. Another worked with local lay community health workers to catalog plants growing in the surrounding area that could be used medicinally.

Integrate the International Service-Learning Experience

Cross-cultural re-entry is a distinctive experience and often involves a culture shock more intense and lasting than that experienced during the initial immersion (*Martin, 1984*). Peter Adler's work in the 1970s and 1980s on cross-cultural adaptation might be applied to international service-learning and other immersion experiences in terms of their short-term and long-term effects on participants (*Adler, 1975, 1985*). He discussed psychological risks such as the feeling of rootlessness and disaffection with one's own culture, and long-term effects on cultural identity and psychological equilibrium. Bringle and Tonkin (*2004*), Kiely (*2004, 2005*), and Merrill and Pusch (*2007*) also discuss many psycho-emotional outcomes for students. These outcomes occur immediately upon returning to the home country, unfold as students re-adjust to campus life, and have effects that linger or morph over time as students encounter situations that may cause them to reflect on their experience in light of a new decision or relationship.

Intentional programs can guide students through re-entry, perhaps through a series of encounters at different time intervals after returning. Reuniting the team to engage in local community service may provide an opportunity for collective reflection, as well as for connecting conceptual issues as they were encountered during the immersion experience with the ways they manifest for local communities. Inviting and preparing faculty members across the curriculum to incorporate students' study abroad and international service-learning experiences in subsequent courses also can create opportunities for students to integrate what they learned. By stretching out the experience long after return, students can

resist compartmentalizing their personal and intellectual insights. An international service-learning immersion can be more than a short-term experience; it can be integrated as a particularly transformational moment within the fuller educational experience, one that continues to resonate with students' academic and co-curricular programs.

Integration of international service-learning includes institutionalization of the structures and resources needed to support it. Developing opportunities for administrators to get involved may cultivate allies for institutionalizing international service-learning programs, for sustaining partnerships over time, and for recognizing faculty members for their community-based teaching and research. Motivating university marketing professionals to move beyond "helping" and "charity" language in campus publications and promotional materials can also be important; staff from these areas of the university should be included in direct experience and related educational and consciousness-raising programs. Creating periodic international service-learning experiences solely for faculty members, staff members, and upper administrators also may build a sense of shared enterprise among university constituencies with sometimes-conflicting goals, provide an opportunity to deepen employees' commitment to the university mission, and galvanize support for international service-learning programs in these challenging economic times for higher education.

Conduct Research on Outcomes for all Participants

Most published research about international service-learning still tends to focus on the concerns and interests of program staff, faculty, students, and administrators at U.S. colleges and universities (this issue is explored, for example, in *Crabtree, 2008; Cruz & Giles, 2000*). Even though there is considerable and growing awareness of the larger ideological and theoretical dimensions of international service-learning, research still tends to feature the fundamentals of program design and the logistics of facilitating the student experience from the faculty perspective, and to focus on student attitudes and learning outcomes. Extant research situates international service-learning within college curricula, links learning outcomes to institutional effectiveness measures, and explores aspects of risk management related to the various forms of international immersion experiences in higher education (*Jones, Kamela, & Peeks, 2011; Saltmarsh, 2010; Strand et al., 2003*). This tendency relates logically to the immediate nature of these concerns

for members of university communities who lead or manage programs. Faculty members and administrative staff for programs are expected to answer to curriculum oversight committees, respond to the needs and facilitate the learning experiences of students, and placate concerned parents. However, this tendency also may be due to the complexities involved with project impact research, with any cross-cultural research, and with sustained and longitudinal research, in particular.

To further complicate matters, faculty members who choose to facilitate international service-learning, while motivated by a variety of attitudinal factors and intellectual expertise, may not have deep academic preparation in comparative development theory and ideology, cross-cultural communication and psychology, transformational learning theories, and other relevant fields. In some cases, when faculty members have training in one or more of these areas and conduct related research, they may lack deep expertise on specific geographic regions, countries, or communities where projects unfold. That is, few experienced teachers interested in community-engaged pedagogy have sufficiently broad or sufficiently sophisticated expertise in key theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand the wide range of factors influencing an international service-learning engagement, particularly from the perspectives of host communities.

Given the number of potentially consequential contextual variables (as introduced earlier), it is not surprising that research on the impact of international service-learning for community members and host countries is lagging, particularly regarding the unintended consequences of this work. Contextual variables have a tremendous influence on what happens during a relatively short visit (*Camacho, 2004; Galiardi & Koehn, 2011*). Fortunately, the expanding body of literature on this topic includes case studies, qualitative and quantitative research, and a growing number of monographs and edited collections providing guidelines and models for effective practice.

Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, and Kerrigan (1996) developed a framework for research and assessment procedures that account for the impact of international service-learning on all participants. Through the use of interviews, observations, surveys, focus groups, and student writing assignments, we can learn about the variety and levels of learning and personal transformation arising from international service-learning experiences. As much as possible, research on outcomes in communities should be designed and implemented collaboratively with local communities. Participatory research models can be particularly useful, as they promote research design

and methodologies consistent with international service-learning best practices (*Belone et al., 2012*). Similarly, research findings can be distributed through a variety of mechanisms. Scholarly publications, higher education newsletters, and similar venues inform future practice and research. Additionally, reports can be created for partner community-based organizations and host community newsletters or radio broadcasts.

The relational aspects of international service-learning and community-based learning experiences also warrant more attention in research (*Driscoll et al., 1996; Porter & Monard, 2001*). This gap includes appreciating the power of witnessing, the catharsis of sharing stories, the ability of our presence to draw attention to forgotten places and situations, the way one project can be a local catalyst beyond our visit and unrelated to our intentions, and the deep significance of accompaniment through living and working side by side (*Cruz, 1990; Prins & Webster, 2010; Quiroga, 2004; Simonelli et al., 2004; Yonkers-Talz, 2003*). After all, the material aspects of our service are, for the most part, only symbols of or vehicles through which we animate a new relationship and practice a potential new consciousness for all participants.

As the composite scenario illustrates, our relationships with institutions, organizations, communities, and people in international service-learning contexts can both disrupt and reproduce inequitable power dynamics and historical global relations. International service-learning research is just beginning to grapple with the complex intended and unintended consequences of our work with and in host communities. Increasingly, we should be able to articulate the likelihood and nature of predicted and beneficial outcomes in relation to possible risks to participants using multiple levels of analysis.

Conclusions

This essay explored issues related to university-community engagement in global contexts, particularly in terms of the consequences for host communities. The composite scenario offered here, gleaned from several projects organized between U.S.-based non-governmental organizations and host country community-based organizations, reveals a variety of typical outcomes—intended and unintended, positive and negative—for students, faculty members, organizations and their staff, and the communities that host visiting teams from U.S. universities. Subsequent discussion explored the intersections of these consequences, and introduced

a series of recommendations for analyzing and mitigating negative outcomes. This essay is intended to inform and deepen the conversation about international service-learning project design, pedagogical decisions, analysis of actual engagements, assessment of student learning, and evaluation of broad project outcomes for all participants.

Acting justly in an unjust world and honoring the people who share their lives and communities with us requires a commitment to education for solidarity within a truly reflexive practice (Crabtree, 2007; Freire, 1998; Yonkers-Talz, 2003). Utilizing best practices grounded in the best of intentions will not necessarily eliminate unwanted negative outcomes in international service-learning engagements. Honest assessment includes individual and collective exploration of the injustices that are encountered in and revealed by our work together, as well as of the injustices our work may unintentionally produce.

References

- Adler, P. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 15(4), 13–23.
- Adler, P. (1985). Beyond cultural identity: Reflections upon cultural and multicultural man. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 389–407). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Angell, R. (1969). *Peace on the march: Transnational participation*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Annette, J. (2003). Service-learning internationally: Developing a global civil society. In S. Billig & J. Eyler (Eds.), *Deconstructing service-learning: Research exploring context, participation and impacts* (pp. 241–249). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Ansley, F., & Gaventa, J. (1997). Researching for democracy & democratizing research. *Change*, 29, 46–53.
- Barber, B. (1992). *An aristocracy of everyone: The politics of education and the future of America*. New York, NY: Ballantine.
- Basinger, N., & Bartholomew, K. (2006). Service-learning in non-profit organizations: Motivations, expectations, and outcomes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 12, 15–26.
- Belone, L., Oetzel, J., Wallerstein, N., Tafoya, G., Rae, R., Rafelito, A., & Thomas, A. (2012). Using participatory research to address substance abuse in an American-Indian community. In L. Frey & K. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Communication for social change: Vol. 3. Struggling for social justice amidst difference* (pp. 401–432). New York, NY: Hampton.
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation.
- Boyer, E., & Hechinger, F. (1981). *Higher learning in the nation's service*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

- Bringle, R., Hatcher, J., & Jones, S. (Eds.). (2010). *International service learning: Conceptual frameworks and research*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Bringle, R., & Tonkin, H. (2004). International service-learning: A research agenda. In H. Tonkin, S. Deeley, M. Pusch, D. Quiroga, M. Siegel, J. Whiteley, & R. Bringle (Eds.), *Service-learning across cultures: Promise and achievement* (pp. 365–374). New York, NY: International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership.
- Brown, L., & Tandon, R. (1983). Ideology and political economy in inquiry: Action research and participatory research. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 19, 277–294.
- Camacho, M. (2004). Power and privilege: Community service learning in Tijuana. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 10(3), 31–42.
- Crabtree, R. (1997). Service learning and the liberal arts: Restructuring for integrated education. In T. Jennings (Ed.), *Restructuring for integrated education: Multiple perspectives, multiple contexts* (pp. 17–37). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Crabtree, R. (1998). Mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning: Lessons in communication and social justice from projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 26, 182–209.
- Crabtree, R. (1999). Communication and social change: Applied communication theory in service-learning. In B. Murphy & D. Droge (Eds.), *Voices of strong democracy: Service-learning and communication studies* (pp. 125–136). Washington, DC: American Association of Higher Education.
- Crabtree, R. (2007). Asking hard questions about the impact of international service learning. *Conversations: On Jesuit Higher Education*, 31, 39–42.
- Crabtree, R. (2008). Theoretical foundations for international service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 15(1), 18–36.
- Crabtree, R., & Ford, L. (2006). Community activist and/or communication consultant: Managing the dialectics of outsider-within status at a sexual assault recovery services center. In L. Frey & K. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Communication for social change* (pp. 235–271). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Crabtree, R., & Sapp, D. (2005). Technical communication, participatory action research, and global civic engagement: A teaching, research and social action collaboration in Kenya. *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*, 4(2), 9–33.
- Cruz, N. (1990). A challenge to the notion of service. In J. Kendall & Associates (Eds.), *Combining service and learning: A resource book for community and public service* (pp. 321–323). Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education.
- Cruz, N., & Giles, D. (2000). Where's the community in service-learning research? *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7, 28–34.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Dorado, S., & Giles, D. E. (2004). Service-learning partnerships: Paths of engagement. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 11, 25–37.
- Driscoll, A., Holland, B., Gelmon, S., & Kerrigan, S. (1996). An assessment model for service-learning: Comprehensive case studies of impact on faculty, students, community, and institution. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 3, 66–71.

- Ehrlich, T. (2000). *Civic responsibility and higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx.
- Eyler, J. (2002). Reflection: Linking service and learning—linking students and communities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(3), 517–534.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Galiardi, S., & Koehn, J. (2011). Strategies to mitigate the negative and accentuate the positive impacts of international service-learning on host communities. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement*, 2(1), 1–12.
- Gelmon, S., & Billig, S. (2007). *From passion to objectivity: International and cross-disciplinary perspectives on service-learning research*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Illich, I. (1990). To hell with good intentions. In J. Kendall & Associates (Eds.), *Combining service and learning: A resource book for community and public service* (pp. 314–320). Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education. (Original work published 1968)
- Jones, K., Kamela, M., & Peeks, A. (2011). International service-learning: Ethics in cross-cultural partnerships. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement*, 2(1), 3–28.
- Kecskes, K. (2006). Behind the rhetoric: Applying a cultural theory lens to community-campus partnership development. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 12, 5–14.
- Kenny, M., & Gallagher, L. (2002). Service-learning: A history of systems. In M. Kenny, L. Simon, K. Kiley-Brabeck, & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Learning to serve: Promoting civil society through service learning* (pp. 15–29). Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.
- Kiely, R. (2004). A chameleon with a complex: Searching for transformation in international service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 10(2), 5–20.
- Kiely, R. (2005). A transformative learning model for service-learning: A longitudinal case study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 12(1), 5–22.
- Martin, J. N. (1984). Communication in the intercultural re-entry: Student sojourners' perceptions of change in re-entry relationships. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 8, 115–134.
- Merrill, M., & Pusch, M. (2007). Apples, oranges, and kumys: Multiple methods, matrices, and models for research on students doing intercultural service learning. In S. Gelmon & S. Billig (Eds.), *From passion to objectivity: International and cross disciplinary perspectives on service learning research* (pp. 21–40). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Morton, K. (1995). The irony of service: Charity project and social change in service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2, 19–32.
- Porfilio, B., & Hickman, H. (Eds.). (2011). *Critical service-learning as revolutionary pedagogy: An international project of student agency in action*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

- Porter, M., & Monard, K. (2001). Ayni in the global village: Building relationships of reciprocity through international service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 8(1), 5–17.
- Prins, E., & Webster, N. (2010). Student identities and the tourist gaze in international service-learning: A university project in Belize. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 14(1), 5–32.
- Pusch, M., & Merrill, M. (2008). Reflection, reciprocity, responsibility, and committed relativism: Intercultural development through international service learning. In V. Savicki (Ed.), *Developing intercultural competence and transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education* (pp. 297–321). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Quiroga, D. (2004). Beyond the comfort zone. In H. Tonkin, S. Deeley, M. Pusch, D. Quiroga, M. Siegel, J. Whiteley, & R. Bringle (Eds.), *Service-learning across cultures: Promise and achievement* (pp. 131–145). New York, NY: International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership.
- Reason, P. (1991). Three approaches to participatory inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 324–339). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Saltmarsh, J. (2010). Changing pedagogies. In H. E. Fitzgerald, C. Burack, & S. Seifer (Eds.), *Handbook of engaged scholarship: Contemporary landscapes, future directions: Vol. 1. Institutional change* (331–352). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Sapp, D., & Crabtree, R. (2002). A laboratory in citizenship: Service-learning in the technical communication classroom. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 11, 411–431.
- Simonelli, J., Earle, D., & Story, E. (2004). Acompañar obedeciendo: Learning to help in collaboration with Zapatista communities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 10(3), 43–56.
- Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., & Donohue, P. (2003). Principles of best practice for community-based research. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9(3), 5–15.
- Tonkin, H., Deeley, S., Pusch, M., Quiroga, D., Siegel, M., Whiteley, J., & Bringle, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Service-learning across cultures: Promise and achievement. A report to the Ford Foundation*. New York, NY: International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership.
- Wallerstein, N., Oetzel, J., Duran, B., Tafoya, G., Belone, L., & Rae, R. (2008). What predicts outcomes in CBPR? In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (pp. 371–392). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Whyte, W. (Ed.). (1991). *Participatory action research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wood, C., Banks, S., Galiardi, S., Koehn, J., & Schroeder, K. (2011). Community impacts of international service-learning: An analysis of focus groups with program leaders. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement*, 2(1), 1–23.
- Worrall, L. (2007). Asking the community: A case study of community partner perspectives. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 14, 5–17.
- Yonkers-Talz, K. (2003). Educating for international solidarity. *Conversations: On Jesuit Higher Education*, 23, 25–31.

About the Author

Robbin D. Crabtree is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of communication at Fairfield University. She was the inaugural director of the Office of Service-Learning at Fairfield University and has worked for three decades with non-profit agencies as a volunteer, consultant, and board member as well as through community-based teaching and research.