International Community Service-Learning Experiences in a Canadian Teacher Education Program: Implications for Praxis in Pre-Service Teacher Preparation

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Abstract: Service learning as an experiential instructional teaching strategy, has increased in stature and popularity over the last two decades or so. It has become a required component in some pre-service teacher education programs. International community engagement experiences are a growing element of service-learning as institutions attempt to enrich beginning teachers' experiences and develop more rounded professionals capable of operating in an increasingly globalized educational system built around equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization. Often, we engage in service-learning activities, but we are not always sure if the intended effects are being realized (Bell, Horn & Roxas, 2007). How do participants experience International Community Service Learning (ICSL) and how can this information be mobilized in teacher education? This article reports on an investigation into the experiences of pre-service teacher candidates in an international community service-learning project. The study uses qualitative techniques to interrogate the phenomenological experiences of participants told through their stories and narratives. It focuses on what teacher candidates learn and how this experience influences their growth as young professionals, and shapes their perception of their role as teachers.

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1. Introduction

Service–learning has become a popular teaching and learning activity at all levels of the education system but particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Student engagement in community service as they pursue academic learning goals in various courses of study, has come to be widely accepted as valuable learning experience if appropriately planned and executed with meaningful follow-up. While local community service learning remains widespread, more recently there has been a sharp increase in travel abroad for academic purposes and international community service-learning opportunities have become increasingly sought after by students. This article reports on an investigation into the experiences of pre-service teacher candidates in an international community service-learning project. The study uses qualitative techniques to interrogate the phenomenological experiences of participants told through their stories and narratives. It focuses on what teacher candidates learn and how this experience

influences their growth as young professionals and shapes their perception of their role as teachers.

The paper is divided into six major sections. In the first section we provide a brief background to set the context. Next, we examine general conceptions of service-learning. The next section examines the theoretical foundations of service-learning. The fourth section looks at service-learning in teacher education. This is followed by an examination of international community service-learning generally and in the context of teacher education. The next section looks at the methods for the study. We then analyze and discuss the findings of the research before making a few concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

International Community Service learning is a growing practice among many Universities across the globe. Generally, this practice is intended to promote among other things; moral awareness and social responsibility, understanding about issues of diversity, and civic responsibility among graduate students. Due to its significance, there is a remarkable move by university students to get engaged in the International Community Service Learning. The available literature on the subject indicates that North American institutions and students have been at the forefront of this trend, but more recent and emerging literature show that this has become a global phenomenon (Gokmenoglu, 2017; Hamza, 2010; Kızılaslan, 2010). International service-learning is an element of the internationalization of education that became popular across educational institutions in North America and the global community at the turn of the millennium (Urraca, Ledoux, & Harris, 2009). According to Hamza (2010) the increase of international service learning can be viewed as a "response to the call for internationalization of higher education which is needed for the advancement of global economy" (p. 50). In the context of teacher education specifically, other scholars suggest that international experiences for student teachers promote and cultivate intercultural learning (Barkhuizen, & Feryok, 2006; Gokmenoglu, 2017; Beckford, 2020).

There is a substantial and growing body of research on international community service-learning. The literature on ICSL in teacher education is also growing. Much of this research focuses on the various ways in which ICSL experiences affect participants. This is an important area to study as institutions still find themselves having to explain the reasons for investing in these experiences to some skeptics. According to Kiely (2005) the service-learning research focus on outcomes is driven by "… institutional pressure to prove that service-learning is more than curricula fluff" (p.5). But, there has been a dearth of research about how the process of transformational learning may occur and differ for participants. Kızılaslan (2010) argues that although research indicates that an international experience positively impacts student teachers personal and professional development and enhances cultural awareness, there is far less exploration of how pre-service teachers construct understandings and make sense of their international experience.

How are students' professional selves affected? How are they changed as people? What kinds of activities influence change? What kinds of activities and experiences make ICSL meaningful? What lessons are available in terms of the planning of effective ICSL experiences? These are critical questions that will be explored in this paper. We want to go beyond the impacts of ICSL experiences on teacher candidates and explore why and how these impacts that are often described as transformational, occur and what experiences are influential (Kiely, 2004; Kiely, Kiely & Hartman, 2005). This research is critical because as educators and researchers we often know why we do things and that they work but we are not always sure how they work. As Crowder (2014) explains "…it is important for educators and researchers to have the capability to measure what is being learned, how the learning occurs, and how to support learning" (p.ii).

2.1 Conceptions of Service-learning

Service-learning may be defined as a research-based instructional strategy, which through active participation engages learners in deliberately structured service activities designed to advance specific learning goals. It is a project-based teaching and learning approach that involves participants in authentic community service activities. It is reciprocal in that students' learning is advanced, community needs are met, and students' civic and social responsibilities, sense of social justice, and leadership are evoked. A fundamental element of service learning is critical reflection by the learners (Abedini, Gruppen, Kolars & Kumagai, 2012; Bender & Jordaan, 2007; Chambers, 2009; Hadis, 2005; Butin, 2003). It links academic study with community service as students are engaged in service activities that benefit a community and reflect on their experience to enhance learning goals (Bringle, Hatcher & Muthiah, 2010; Nelson, et al.; 2010; Kayan & Gathercoal, 2005; Poulsen (1989 as cited in Riner and Becklenberg, 2001).

Service-learning enhances civic values and social skills. Students with service-learning experience develop commitment to making an impact on communities (Chambers 2005 citing multiple authors), develop self-efficacy (Toews & Cerny, 2006) and experience vocational, educational, and social outcomes (Pacarelli & Terenzini, 2005). It enriches teaching and learning and bridges the theory practice divide (Boyer, 1990) facilitates reflection (Berman, 2006 as cited by Levesque-Bristol et al., 2010) and may also be transformative (Hullender, et al., 2015; Jeandron & Robinson, 2010)). The experiential

nature of service-learning makes it a powerful teaching approach.

> Experiential learning empowers students to actualize their knowledge, gain practical experience, and further apply knowledge in the field. This type of learning enhances global citizenship, civic engagement, and can provide valuable insight for future academic and professional decisions made by the student (Crowder, 2014 p.4).

2.2 Theoretical Basis for Community Service-Learning

As a growing approach of teaching, service-learning has been attributed to the works of some 20th century progressive educational reformers (Pharr Jr, 2007, p. 37). The historical roots of service-learning may be trace in the work of, John Dewey with his pragmatic synthesis of learner-centered instruction with society centered educational goals, David Kolb's theory of experiential learning and Paulo Freire's critique of the traditional teacher-student power dynamic (Pharr Jr, 2007, p. 37). As a pedagogical strategy, service-learning finds legitimacy in the Vygotskian perspective of learning through participation in social activities. It is also supported by the concept of scholarship of engagement articulated by Ernest Boyer and John Dewey's view that formal education requires experiential learning.

There are several formal theoretical perspectives that seem to support service-learning. These include experiential learning theory, social learning theory, student development theories and transformative learning theory. In the context of this paper, transformative learning theory is particularly relevant especially the notion of perspective transformation as conceptualized by Jack Mezirow. This theory coincides with the goals and objectives of our community service-learning program to enhance social responsibility, compassion, and intercultural cultural competence in beginning teachers.

2.2.1 Transformational Learning Theory

Experiential education is a valuable component in transformational learning. Transformational learning theory is a useful theoretical lens for explaining and analyzing service-learning:

> …because it focuses on how people make meaning of their experiences and in particular, how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the ways people make sense of illstructured problems, critical incidents and/or ambiguous life events (Kiely, 2005 p. 6).

Kiely posits that transformational theory is specifically relevant to service-learning as it "describes how different modes of reflection combined with meaningful dialogue leads people to engage in more justifiable and socially-responsible action" (2005 p.6). Research indicates that service-learning activities can have transformative impacts on various aspects of student development including intellectual, social, moral, personal, cultural, and political perspectives (Kiely, 2005; Kiely, 2004).

Mezirow (1978) developed a process-oriented theory of how transformational learning occurred. Mezirow coined the phrase 'perspective transformation' which he said occurred because of a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma is a significant occurrence which provides opportunity or occasion for reflection, dialogue and reassessment of ones' viewpoint and thus initiate transformational learning through rethinking previously held beliefs, assumptions, or values (Mezirow, 1978). The resulting disequilibria, or what John Dewey called forked-road dilemma, are potent in ICSL experiences where the geographical contexts are unfamiliar and different spaces where students might experience considerable discomfort. Keily (2005) concludes that the fundamental effect of transformational learning should be enhanced social responsibility, self-direction, and reduced dependence on false assumptions. In the discussion section we analyze and interpret the findings in the context of processes identified in Mezirow's transformational learning model.

2.3 Service-learning in Teacher Education

In the context of teacher preparation, service-learning can have implications for the future teaching practices of teacher candidates. It helps to emphasize the socio-political and moral imperatives of teaching. Service learning can be an effective way of increasing teacher candidates' appreciation of the diverse and complex relationships between students out of school lives and how they experience education, schools, and schooling. It facilitates beginning teachers' social engagement with marginalized/disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and populations and advances social and cultural responsiveness as desirable qualities in teachers. Through service-learning, teachers learn about and better understand the places their students come from and thus develop a greater appreciation for the types of challenges they may be facing and the types of baggage they come to school with. Learning about students helps teachers to prepare appropriate learning experiences for them.

Service-learning is an effective means of sensitizing future professionals to vulnerability and marginalization in their field (Dharamsi, et al. 2010). It may also develop civic democracy and civil diversity and the human touch, learned, and nurtured through service (Sokal, et al., 2016);

Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Bender and Rene Jordaan, 2007; Swick, 2001).

2.4 International Community Service-Learning and Pre-Service Teacher Education

International service-learning provides community service engagement in a foreign country. Here, the core principles of service–learning are applied in international contexts. International projects are becoming increasingly popular service-learning experiences. They are valuable as they provide opportunities for participants to engage with unfamiliar socio-cultural environments (Barkhuizen and Feryok, 2006). By engaging students in unfamiliar cultural and social contexts, planned international experiences are designed to among other things enhance intercultural learning.   International community service-learning supports global education objectives. Global education promotes socially and culturally inclusive and responsive pedagogies. With students engaged in unfamiliar and geographical spaces and cultural contexts, disorienting dilemmas characterized by discomfort, disequilibria, and dissonance may lead to learning that is transformative (Mezirow, 1978; Kiely, 2004, 2005).

Many professional schools have adopted international service learning as "a key competency for students" (Riner & Becklenberg, 2001, p. 234). According to Kızılaslan (2010) many countries around the world are incorporating international service learning in teachers' programs because they believe this is a means by which they can incorporate critical global perspectives. Almost 70 years ago, Keyworth (1952) as cited in Stachowiski (2001) argued "because the teacher is the keystone of any educational enterprise, participation in the international programs will enable educators to develop skills, insights, and knowledge needed to be effective, world minded teachers" (p. 348). Indeed, as service-learning research and praxis continue to unfold, the benefits of well-designed international community service-learning become more evident.

International service-learning for teachers continues to grow. Rapidly increasing demographic diversification of student populations creates a need for a more culturally inclusive and sensitive teacher (Mahan & Stachowiski, 2002). So too the effects of globalization and modern technology, which have increased human mobility. Colleges and universities as realizing the need to examine the pre-existing human tensions in the global village (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008) and international service-learning is one of the approaches that teachers need in interdependent global times (Kızılaslan, 2010). Teachers need such skills and dispositions to understand the diverse cultural characteristics, abilities, and interests of their students, which is necessary for effective learning and

teaching (Mahan & Stachowiski, 2002). International service learning empowers teachers with skills and knowledge that will enable them to integrate global perspectives in their teaching (Kızılaslan, 2010). International service learning for beginning teachers may also enhance intercultural competence by immersing them into other cultures (Stachowski, 2001). Wilson (1993) as cited in Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006) posits that international service-learning experience for teachers is a means of promoting intercultural learning experience, which is critical in a responding to globalization. It is an opportunity for aspiring teachers to engage with unfamiliar international sociocultural environment thereby promoting cultural awareness and understanding to reduce ethnocentrism or cultural superiority (Kambutu and Nganga, 2008, p.94). It is a viable approach for "student teachers' development of knowledge and skills necessary in these interdependent and global times" (Kızılaslan, 2010, p. 108).

2.4.1 Impact of International Community Service Learning

International service-learning if done properly, can be transformative (Miller, Dunlap, & Gonzalez, 2007; Miller & Gonzalez, 2009). It may improve flexibility, patience, and the ability of teachers working in diversified schools (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). For example, during their experience of international service learning, teachers are led to step outside their comfort zone and to reflect on their reactions to their experiences. Such experiences enhance pre-service teachers' adaptability and reflectivity (Pence, & Macgillivray, 2008). It prepares participants to function in an international and intercultural context (Hamza, 2010). Kızılaslan (2010) posits that international service-learning can be a means of improving personal and professional development of teachers.

Service-learning may play a significant role in enhancing the learning climate (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp & Fisher, 2010). International service-learning experience can lead student teachers to personally gain new knowledge, new skills, and renewed appreciation of cultural differences and similarities and become socially responsible (Pharr, 2007, Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). It could transform participants into culturally responsive agents of social change. The experience equips them with knowledge, skills, and new perspectives needed for effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). As participants advance in positive cultural awareness, they can overcome possible apprehension, which may have been due to stereotypical notions, which may have been held unconsciously (Hamza, 2010; Kambutu and Nganga, 2008).

Kambutu and Nganga, (2008) qualitative study which employed narrative inquiry methodology as a means of gathering the experiences of 39 pre-service American teachers who were in Kenya for 2-3 weeks for the purpose

of service learning, provides a powerful model/description of how service learning can transform the minds and lives of student teachers. In addition, the study presents a good example of how to organize international service-learning. Their findings summarized into three major themes, demonstrate how international service-learning revolutionizes both cognitive and cultural mentality of student teachers. First there was:

Apprehension. Pre-visit data showed that student teachers were apprehensive about the trip to Kenya based on negative stereotypes about quality of food, civilization, strange diseases and so on. Post-visit data showed that these apprehensions were dismissed. The second area was education. The pre-visit data showed that the participants doubted whether formal education existed in Kenya but learned instead that education was highly valued in Kenya. The third area related to modern amenities. According to pre-visit data Kenya was associated with poverty caused by laziness. By the end of their service-learning experience, the students had learned that the poverty in Kenya was a result of many factors including external forces of a global political economy.

International service-learning experiences that allow students to come face to face with extreme poverty often triggers emotional reaction of the participants thereby leading them to reflect on their strengths and critique their weaknesses (Beckford, 2020; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Shultz, 2011; Kiely, 2005). In addition, participants obtained self-efficacy as well as development (Adan, 2018; Dharamsi, et al., 2010).

2.5 Context of the International Community Service-Learning Program

The international service-learning project reported here is implemented through the service-learning program at the University of Windsor, Faculty of Education. Every teacher candidate in the program is required to take a service-learning option. The program is the Global Community Engagement Program (GCEP) which is the experiential learning component of the service-learning course 'Vulnerability, Marginalization, and Education'. VME emphasizes the relationship between students' out of school lives and how they experience school and schooling. Its ethos is that we teach students, not subjects. The GCEP provides hands-on experiential opportunities for teacher candidates to learn these lessons through service engagement. It provides teacher candidates with opportunities to actively participate in service-learning projects in the local community but also internally in Jamaica (TeachJamiaca) or Tanzania (TeachTanzania). As part of their pre-service teacher education program, the GCEP seeks to enhance teacher candidates' confidence and competence in using service-learning as an instructional strategy in their own classrooms. It also advocates and emphasizes the political and moral imperatives of teaching and the need for socially and culturally sensitive characteristics in teachers. The course and project are designed to help develop teacher candidates' appreciation of the political, social, and moral imperatives of teaching in a globalized world. Through the GCEP, teacher candidates are provided opportunities to gain international and inter-cultural experience working in developing world contexts. Graduate students are also involved, and several have or are pursuing master and doctoral research based on the program.

2.6 The International Community Service-Learning Project

This paper focuses on TeachTanzania. The Tanzania ICSL project is based in the region of Singida in the East African Republic of Tanzania. The main goal of the project the improvement of the living conditions and education of most vulnerable children (OVC). To this end the project has focused on orphaned and vulnerable children, homeless children and youth, the girl child and under-resourced public Primary and Secondary schools. Project initiatives includes a textbook project to provide curriculum specific books; a project to provide benches, desk, and chairs for students; a Girls Leadership and Empowerment Program for secondary school girls and female teachers; primary school feeding initiatives; development of public educational resources (posters, brochures, newsletters) on topics like rights of the child, rights of women and girls, bullying, and culturally relevant social justice topics including accessibility. We have also been engaged in projects to improve school infrastructure including the construction/renovation of classrooms and building a female friendly and female only washroom at a primary school. Teacher candidates and graduate students also teach in Tanzanian schools and conduct workshops with teachers and student teachers in Tanzania. Social justice projects include outreach to hospitals with sick kids, working with people suffering from albinism and distribution of mosquito nets to needy families and hospitals. Our project adheres to the philosophy that children's educational needs and aspirations cannot be separated from their basic needs.

Cultural engagement is a critical component of the GCEP. In addition to engagement in the local community where we work, participants also have opportunities for hands-on interaction with indigenous peoples of Tanzania such as Maasai and Hadzabe. The project is structured as an international teaching experience for participating teacher candidates who are supervised by faculty members. Participants have daily debriefing and reflect on their experiences in journals and nightly team meetings. The project has a research component with graduate school students conducting their research.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative approaches grounded in narrative, ethnographic and phenomenological techniques. The study examines the subjective ways in which teacher candidates experienced an international service-learning program in Tanzania and so an in-depth qualitative inquiry is used to elicit rich and authentic accounts of students' experiences. In terms of ethnography, the researchers spent considerable time with each respondent working closely with them for periods of two to four weeks during their time in Tanzania and several months before during the preparations for the trip. Preparation activities start in September each school year with weekly meetings and the trip takes place usually in April/May. This means that students and supervisors spend a lot of time together. The respondents are former teacher candidates who were members of one or more travel teams to Tanzania between 2017 and 2019. Because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, no GCEP trips were undertaken in 2020 and 2021. The researchers had opportunities to observe these respondents while sharing in many of the activities and experiences they reported on. Phenomenology is explored as respondents provide accounts of the ways in which they experienced the ICSL project. Respondents were asked to focus on the meanings they made and continue to make of their ICSL experiences and how these experiences have shaped, formed and transformed who they are as teachers and persons.

Data were collected mainly through written submissions from participants. Some of these submissions came from a feedback form that was completed; others were excerpts from journals that participants had kept, while others came from reflective paragraphs written by participants. The statements were analyzed to identify commonalities and trends from which categories and themes could be formed. The students' submissions often reflected their narratives or stories about how they experienced the Tanzanian Project. This provided very authentic and rich data as it spoke to their personal stories or lived experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narrative enquiry as a way of gathering data from peoples' stories arguing for its value in studying human experiences.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section we analyze the findings from the study. We begin by discussing briefly the enduring impacts on the participants before turning to a more detail discussion of the experiences and activities that shaped the meanings participants made. We present students' accounts of their experiences through their stories and narratives as reflected by excerpts and statements from their reflective journals.

4.1 Impacts on Participants

Participants in the ICSL project were influenced personally and professionally**.**

4.1.1 Personal Factors

A common theme throughout the data was the ways in which participants were personally impacted. Several students in their journal talked about learning about themselves. Participant A a past member of the team had this advice for new team members

> My experience is one of a kind. There is no guarantee on what your experience will be, but there is a guarantee that you will come back changed. You will come home a better person, teacher, daughter, son, husband, wife, mother, father… You come back a new you, a better you.

Participant B wrote:

> … I can't even begin to explain how much I learned about myself!!!

Participant C said:

> "I know that I can teach! That was an important thing I found out about myself on this trip."

According to Participant D:

> "I was drawn to this opportunity because I wanted it to change me; change me as a citizen, an educator, a mentor... and since returning I can firmly state that I am a changed person! I no longer look at things the same way"

Participant E wrote:

> "The Tanzanian global initiative, with its beautiful intentions, has taught me some of the most profound and life altering lessons. I am no longer the same person I was prior to the trip. The trip has changed me into a better individual and teacher. The benefits of my trip were un-measurable as I am still having frequent epiphanies after 6 months of being home."

Other instructive comments include Participant F who

offered:

> "I came back a new [person]. My life views and values quickly altered which was evident for my family and friends to see. The most evident change, or enhancement rather, was my compassion. I became more a compassionate citizen in my everyday dealings with other people".

The experience also impacted attitudes toward service with several participants reporting a greater commitment to service and humanitarian activism. The following two statements from the journals of Participants G and H respectively emphasize this.

> "I used to be satisfied with helping local charities by donating money but because of this experience I want to do more-I don't just want to give- I want to be actively involved."

> "I came back motivated and encouraged to make a difference. I volunteered at local organizations that were geared towards the betterment of lives here in Canada. I also put time and effort towards fundraisers for Tanzania and other deserving countries in need."

4.1.2 Professional Growth

Participants reported that the experience profoundly affected their professional outlook and teaching. Participant D said:
> "I was actually wondering if I really wanted to teach. I had a lot of doubts about my teaching ability. After coming here and teaching in an unfamiliar setting with communication problems I know that I can teach! That was an important thing I found out about myself on this trip."

> They go on to explain that "The experience has strongly affected me as a teacher and person."

Participant I made this insightful comment:
> "I am fortunate to have gone on this trip, because not only can I expose children to global initiatives, but also I can tell them about my experience, which will be authentic and meaningful to them. My class makeup is very diverse, and many children come from various countries around the world. When I told my students about my trip, they were glued to their seats quietly listening and extremely interested. All expressed concern of how they could help! They all wanted to help make a difference. My job as a teacher is to help raise respectable law-abiding citizens that not only make ends meet for themselves but give back to the community and world at large. I think that by involving my students and exposing them to the realities of the real-world, and the realities that some students face is equipping them with a humanitarian skill-set that each individual should have."

A major theme in this area was a greater appreciation of the impact of external factors on students' ability to learn. Participant J said:

> "How children perform in school reflects their home life. If they come to school hungry or tired, it is reflected in their performance."

Participant B wrote:
> "This experience has taught me that situations in children's everyday lives can have a great impact on their school lives. Although teachers tend to be only concerned with what happens in a child's school life, we should also take the time to learn about their everyday life."

Other statements mark this as a major area of learning for participants. Participant K suggested that:

> "An effective teacher must be able to empathize with the children's home life because of the direct correlation it has with their school life."

Participant E wrote:
> "This experience has taught me that you can't put children's everyday lives and their school lives in separate buckets. In order for students to be able to focus on their studies, the simple things that we often take for granted here such as basic needs must be met."

4.2 Intercultural knowledge

Several studies of international community service-learning projects have reported that enhanced cultural knowledge is a major impact reported by participants (Beckford, 2020; Nurbatra, 2018; Tinkler, Tinkler & Reyes, 2018; Gokmenoglu, 2017). This was also an important theme in this study.

Participant L reported that:

> "This experience has opened my eyes to my own cultural biases. Sometimes I feel that I have been so entrenched in my own ways of life that sometimes I am not aware of how deeply my own biases posses me. The biases I hold were very apparent to me while I was in Tanzania."

Participants often referred to changes in their perceptions of Africa. Some and their families had apprehensions about them going to Tanzania and reported that they often felt pressure to change their minds about going. Participants had questions mainly about food, water, diseases, and crime and violence. Some of the excerpts from their journals and written statements speak to this. According to Participant M

> "The mainstream western media does such a great injustice to Africa. All the preconceived notions I had based on images from the media were dispelled on this trip. Africa is anything but the wild, dark dangerous place it is often

portrayed to be. There are no lions or wild animals running around everywhere. Yes, there is poverty but the frightening images we see of starvation and malnutrition that we see so often were not apparent to me in Tanzania."

They go on to say:

> I will take pleasure in educating my friends, and students about the positive aspects of Tanzania. There is far too much focus on negatives and the positives are neglected.

A major source of apprehension for participants and their families was their safety. Participant C observed that:

> My folks were so worried about me going to Tanzania. At no time did I feel unsafe while in Tanzania. There I was walking through the market with thousands of local (people sticking out like a sore thumb with my blonde hair, fair skin and blue eyes) and I never felt that I was in danger.

> "Taking part in the Tanzania Project changed everything about my own worldview. I had always been interested in global issues and cultural enrichment but spending time in Singida challenged all of those prior beliefs and allowed me to truly experience how individuals in that part of the world live each day. As a female, I was most impacted in learning how few young women complete school and what limited employment opportunities are available for females. This learning experience has truly impacted my everyday life and I am grateful to be a part of this amazing initiative." (Participant F)

> "The trip has no doubt given me a new perspective on the world around me and has inspired me to ignite and encourage a passion for social justice in my students, so that they believe they have the power to make the world a better place." (Participant N)

> "This was a tremendous learning experience for me. I felt helpless when I was not able to communicate with the children most of whom did not speak English. I realized for the first time just how new non–English speaking immigrants to Canada must feel. I will never forget that." (Participant F)

> "Traveling to Tanzania with the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor was a life changing experience. Meeting and learning from the children… have made me a better educator who has a unique understanding of the challenges and roadblocks students face to achieve an

education. The trip has no doubt given me a new perspective on the world around me and has inspired me to ignite and encourage a passion for social justice in my students, so that they believe they have the power to make the world a better place." (Participant O)

4.3 Profound Experiences are the Key

A recurring theme throughout the data and among participants over the years has been descriptions of the trip as being "life changing? Content analysis of journals and other statements by participants found key descriptors including, *life changing*, *eye opening*, *unforgettable*, *incredible*, *invaluable*, *amazing*, *educational*, and *inspirational*. Participants said that the international community service-learning project was '*an experience of a lifetime*', '*has changed my life forever*', '*I will never forget this experience*', '*definitely the highlight of my education so far*' and '*the experience has had a tremendous impact on my life.*' Participants said that they came back "*a new person*" "a different person" '*a better teacher and person.*" These were just some of the ways the experience and its impacts were described. But what activities or experiences influenced these feelings? We discuss these in this section.

> 'I like the fact that it's not a safari, you know. You hear of Africa, and you start thinking about animals immediately. People start to tell you to take pictures of lions and such. This project was work- meaningful work. I felt like we were able make a difference in a short period of time and that's what makes it meaningful to me. I learned so much about the country and the people and the education system. I can't even begin to explain how much I learned about myself!!!' (Participant M)

4.3.1 Relationships with Orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC)

The relationship developed with people especially students was a major and recurring theme emerging from the teacher candidates. This had profound effects on them. There were many comments about learning from the children especially their resilience, dignity, and happiness in the face their challenges. The following excerpts from participants' reflective journal demonstrate this.

> 'They kept saying 'don't forget us'. I wish they knew that their smiles, laughter, faces are stamped on my heart. I can't forget them. I don't want to forget them... We had blank shirts and we all got to sign messages on each others' backs. They all signed as 'your brother' or 'your sister'. They really consider us to be part of their family. I am so honoured and blessed. They let us into

their lives and they let us love them, and they loved us back.' (Participant C)

'… He broke my heart today. I could not hold back the tears…his story of his hungry was heartbreaking. He told me we are friends. He asked me to never forget him. How could he think I would forget him, or any of the kids? They are amazing.' (Participant D)

Participants found the teaching experience in local primary and secondary schools to be a beneficial exercise. This caused a lot of stress and anxiety because of lack of preparation, lack or resources, and language barrier. Participants lacked the confidence and were unsure of themselves at the beginning. They had very few resources, and the absence of technology was stressful. However, most of the participants developed some level of comfort after the initial jitters and found the experience enlightening and informative. They spoke about how it made them appreciate Canadian schools with the resources, environment, and access to technology among other things. They spoke of the resilience of the Tanzanian students and their thirst for knowledge. Teacher candidates said they had a greater appreciation for the challenges faced by students and teachers to be successful in the conditions in which they had to work and study.

'Today was the first day we went to the schools to teach. I was soooo nervous! It was nothing like my placements. It was far more exhilarating, and I actually **felt** like I was a teacher. I had 60 pairs of little, beautiful eyes on me. I wanted to teach them. I wanted to empower them. I wanted to change their lives. I wanted to tell them that they were changing my life. I wasn't sure if they would know what I meant, so I didn't. But I will pray to God, that something I said or did will resonate with them forever.' (Participant L)

'The teaching experience on the trip was truly amazing. I admit I was very nervous walking in, considering I did not speak Kiswahili and I was a fresh graduate from the Faculty of Education. However, I would not trade what I experienced for anything. The experience has strongly affected me as a teacher and person. I am currently a 3rd grade teacher, and one of the character traits the school tries to teach the students is responsibility. Responsibility for themselves, for their learning, for their personal belongings, for their school and for their fellow peers inside and outside the school. We participate in local initiatives like coat drives or food banks. However, global initiatives are lacking in both public and private elementary schools.' (Participant G)

'Teaching in Tanzanian schools forced me to

think out of the box- be creative.' (Participant L)

'I realized that I do not need technology to teach.' (Participant E)

Participants were asked to synthesize their experiences and identify their most memorable. This proved difficult for many but almost every respondent mentioned the relationship, interactions, and connections with the children they encountered as the centerpiece of their experiences.

'The most memorable experience in this project for me was the time I spent working with the children at the orphanage.' (Participant A)

'I loved seeing the smiles on every single child's face everyday even when they were hungry or tired.' (Participant B)

'The most memorable experience in the project was the connections made with the children.' (Participant E)

'My most memorable experiences involved working with the children, hanging out with them, helping them with homework and studying.' (Participant F)

'Seeing the children smile and giving them the opportunity to be children made the trip for me.' (Participant D)

Teacher candidates reported how they were moved by 'Their spirits, life perceptions, happiness, humility and dignity.' One participant wrote:

'These children will open your hearts, your minds, your soul and your perceptions of life itself… they will empower you with courage and compassion.' (Participant N)

Other candidates said:

'I learned from the children… to never hang my head regardless of how bad my situation may be. These children live in conditions that most people cannot even comprehend. Yet they are up bright and early ready to face and conquer another day. Their will to survive and move forward is like nothing I have ever seen before, and it has made me rethink what is really important in life.' (Participant O)

'The children at the Center taught me to appreciate the smaller things in life and to be grateful for simple things like running water and electricity.' (Participant C)

'One key lesson that I saw firsthand in Tanzania

was that children are simply children. Regardless of race, religion, financial situation, or geographic location children all want the same things, they behave the same ways and most importantly they all have dreams.' (Participant P)

'I can now never forget the hope I saw in the eyes of those children…, who have suffered greatly, and yet still manage to have a smile on their faces-something that will remind me to keep smiling and hoping through my struggles'. (Participant B)

"The great thing about this experience is that everyone takes something different from it. Whether it be becoming more passionate, more sensitive to other cultures or being more aware of one's own biases. [But] *Everyone will be changed by this experience!"* (Participant Q)

4.3.2 Firsthand experiences

Several participants spoke to the importance of 'being there' and having the personal experience. They described this as being invaluable. As one person said in speaking with new prospective participants:

> "…a textbook could never have taught me these things. There is a Chinese proverb that! Says: 'Tell me and I forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand'. I could try to tell you about this trip, but you will forget. We can show you pictures, and you might remember. But join us, and you will understand where our love and passion for our students in Tanzania, and our North American classrooms comes from; experience Tanzania for yourself and you'll understand." (Participant J)

Another participant wrote about the authenticity with which she was able to use this international experience in her Canadian classroom. The wonder in students' eyes when they realized she was actually there was unquantifiable. This gave her credibility and made the lessons more real for her students.

> 'We heard a lot about the children, and the Center and the schools from [Faculty Supervisors] but now of that really prepared me for what I saw and experienced. Seeing how the kids lived, teaching in Tanzanian classrooms, seeing the limited resources, children sitting on the floor, hornets flying around… And teachers teaching and students learning in this environment was a priceless experience.' (Participant K)

4.4 Discussion

Applying Mezirow's perspective transformation learning concept, we analyzed the stories and narratives of the participants to identify disorienting dilemmas, which through creation of disequilibrium and dissonance might explain transformational learning. To do this we draw on specific aspects of the profound experiences discussed in the preceding section.

4.4.1 Language and communication

Kiely (2005) described language barriers experienced by students in a foreign country as low-level dissonance. This is because most students typically adapt pretty quickly to compensate for or mitigate this adversity. However, we found that the language barrier here created high intensity dissonance for many participants. The inability to communicate effectively had a profound effect. Participants expressed discomfort in not be able to understand the conversations that were going on around them generally. They were especially put off by the constraint that this placed on them when they taught in Tanzanian schools (especially Primary Schools where the children generally spoke only Kiswahili), tutored the children at the Children's Center and interacted with them generally. They felt that their impact would have been greater if not for the language barrier. Participants expressed frustration in always needing a local chaperone to translate in critical situations such as shopping in the local market and visiting the hospital.

Our analyses indicate that the language barrier and the implications for communication was a source of dissonance too because it contributed to their status as minorities. It marked them as being outsiders. Even though we had diverse groups with diasporic Africans, their inability to speak the local language marked them as foreigners. This was extremely disorienting for students who were the racial majority in Canada. While some Black students also felt marked in this way, they did not seem to experience the same level of discomfort. Their minority status in Canada perhaps made them better equipped to deal with this discomforting situation. What is instructive here though, is that upon reflection, life-changing lessons can be learned. As one student suggested he could now better empathize with new non-English newcomers to Canada because he now had an idea of how they might feel.

4.4.2 Experiencing Being a Racial Minority

Beckford and Lekule (2018) discussed the role of cognitive disequilibrium and dissonance in effective service-learning designed with perspective transformation in mind. Some students reported high intensity dissonance regarding their skin colour. For the first time in their lives White Canadians were a racial minority. Many suggested

that it was a strange and uncomfortable feeling. They did not like 'sticking out'. This discomfort was exacerbated when on occasion, they might be referred to by local people, (children usually), as mzungu the Kiswahili word for 'European' or 'foreigner'. The word has become synonymous with 'White' and is often taken as offensive by some White visitors. In our preparations for the trip the origin of the word and its meaning and use are explained to the participants. However:

> 'Even though we were educated about the term and its connotations it was still uncomfortable to be called 'mzungu'. It made me feel like an outsider, different. I did not like that feeling at all.' (Participant P)

That statement by one student synthesizes the disequilibrium felt by many white students. However, this disequilibrium is exactly the kind of experience that leads to transformative learning. This is indicated by the next statement by another participant:

> 'Being the minority in Tanzania was a new and different experience. But it gave me an opportunity to walk in the shoes of some of my Black or Asian friends back home. I had difficulty living with it for three weeks. They live like that all their lives.' (Participant R)

Adan (2018) discussed this discomfort of White teacher candidates at length in his study of service-learning experiences of teacher candidates in Tanzania. At the same time some White participants saw a particular irony in the situation.

> 'I was still privileged. The fact that I am White made me a minority but also made people treat me a particular way- I was different but special I guess. I felt really bad when they wanted to serve me before people ahead of me in the market'. (Participant S)

Another said:
> 'We went to the hospital with two of the children who had malaria and there were all these women and children waiting but we were able to just go straight to the front and see the doctor. I felt uncomfortable seeing the mothers looking at us while their children cried. I wondered what they were thinking- how they were feeling.' (Participant I)

These kinds of uncomfortable situations forced the participants to assess their own status and position and how other people might make meaning of certain experiences. The same participant commenting on the hospital experience said:

> 'Our kids from the Center are not used to getting special treatment. If they had gone by themselves or with [the matron] person they would have had to wait for hours. So now they experienced something they were not used to. I keep wondering how this made them feel.' (Participant B)

4.4.3 Poverty

Our selection of Tanzania as a service-learning destination was thoughtful and intentional to provide an operational context that facilitated the actualization of the learning goals of the program (see Beckford, 2020). Our Singida site in Tanzania was selected with this in mind as well. Like all countries, Tanzania has unequal distribution of income. There is affluence mixed in with abject poverty especially in more marginalized and isolated places like our Singida base. Our students got to see abject poverty and the impact on children, and this was perhaps the greatest source of disorientation and dissonance for them. Kiely (2005) categorized poverty as an element that causes high-intensity dissonance and our study bears this out. Participants were moved by the stories and experiences of hardship and poverty by the children at the Center many of whom are former street children. They were disturbed by the thought of the children eating just a simple meal each day if at all. They were deeply moved to see children in tattered uniforms in some schools. The sight of students sitting on the floor of classrooms or putting together pieces of wood for seating was traumatic for many. The general state of many classrooms and schools- bare staffrooms and administrative offices and the lack of teaching resources were noted. The suffering of women and children waiting for attention at the local hospital was traumatic for many of the respondents.

> 'This experience was physically and emotionally exhausting. I was bothered by the obvious poverty I saw every day. I don't know what it feels like to not know where my next meal is coming from. I can't imagine what it feels like to go to school hungry. How can these children be expected to learn?' (Participant L)

> 'The conditions in which the children lived was distressing for me. It made we appreciate what we have and how blessed I am.' (Participant E)

> 'The hardships the children have endured and continue to endure and their hope, spirit and resilience despite this was a great life lesson for me.' (Participant G)

> 'Education is so important to these children. They constantly say that 'education is the key of life'. This experience taught me that the hope and dreams of children are no different here than in Canada.' (Participant H)

'I have learned to be less judgmental about students. Their behaviour, attitude and performance have a lot to do with their out of school experiences. Teachers have to be sensitive to this.' (Participant Q)

But it was a tremendously beneficial learning experience despite the discomfort. Another said:

'…you can't separate student's school lives and home lives. They are much related.' (R)

Participants developed appreciation for the struggles for a decent quality of life and a sound education and a greater sense of their own privilege.

Despite the positive reports from participants in this study, we would caution the importance of not overstating perspective transformation because of international community service-learning. There is still not enough evidence outside of self-reported data that students do experience transformation. How this would even be measured is also still an open question. Furthermore, it should not be expected that every participant experience service-learning the same way or is affected similarly. Some might demonstrate perspective change soon after. For others it might take longer- months perhaps years for the experience to have meaning. The service-learning experience should also be seen as just one event or step in a process of transformational learning. It should be preceded and followed by carefully structured learning experiences. International service-learning has positively impacted students but is not a panacea (Larsen & Searle, 2017; Locklin, 2010).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Literature on International Service Learning indicates that students experience enhancements in social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competences (see Nurbatra, 2018; Larsen & Searle, 2017; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Carnicelli & Boluk, 2017; Regalia, 2017). The findings of this study support that sentiment. The international community service-learning project had profound self-reported impacts on participants. Participants were impacted personally and professionally, and many reported experiencing fundamental shifts in their worldview. Many expressed a commitment to community service and humanitarian activities as a result of their experience in this project. Many participants refer to their experience as "life changing". We wanted to know what exactly that meant. Based on his research we define life changing as profound experiences that stimulate enduring lessons and learning and precipitate fundamental and monumental shifts in their knowledge, thinking with implications for their personal and professional practices. In other words they are transformative. Disorienting experiences were at the heart of this transformation. Participants experienced discomfort and dissonance from many of the experiences.

These forced them to rethink previously held assumptions about themselves, their countries, and their culture vis a vis their hosts.

We found that experiences that stimulated emotional responses were powerful as they triggered the highest intensity of dissonance. The effect of the children and their life stories and experiences for example, were significant in this regard. More generally, the abject poverty that as witnessed created a crisis of conscience in many of the participants. Experiences by which participants could compare Canada and Tanzania were also powerful. Being in Tanzanian schools, classroom and hospitals and seeing the wide disparities between with what they are accustomed to was instructive. Participants were also moved by the openness and acceptance of the Tanzanian people and questioned attitudes to visitors and immigrants to Canada. Some were affected by their new minority status but noted the level of privilege they still experienced in Tanzania by virtue of being white.

An interesting point we would like to raise that was not discussed at length in this paper is the different ways in which people experienced the ICSL project. We found that there were some very interesting perspectives from participants who were racialized minorities who expressed different views and feelings about some of the things they experienced than their White peers. Being Black or Muslim in a predominantly Black and Muslim country and based on their backgrounds and life experiences which often included marginalization and poverty had unique challenges and opportunities. This is a subject ripe for further research.

Furthermore, our work with teacher candidates provides strong indication that the nature of the ICSL project is a key factor in how teacher candidate participants experience it. Our focus on social justice and equity and enhancing intercultural competence is important to all our participants. Tinkler, Tinkler, and Reyes, (2018) describe this as critical service-learning and their research showed that it was a highly effective strategy for engaging teacher candidates.

We close with an important qualification for international service-learning as a pedagogical experiential learning strategy. Done poorly, service-learning will have poor outcomes for both students and communities (Beckford, 2020; Darby, Ward-Johnson, & Cobb, 2016; Larsen & Searle, 2017). Beckford (2020) discusses some key characteristics of effective international service-learning for beginning teachers. Clear learning goals for students and outcomes for communities must be established and intentionally linked to the service-learning activities. Intentional selection of service-learning sites, thoughtfully designed activities, and robust reflection must be skillfully interwoven into the goals and objectives. It is also important that a distinction is made between volunteering

and service-learning. Conflating these two things is at the heart of many of the problems of service-learning.

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