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Service-Learning Exchange in Developed Cities: Dissonances and Civic Outcomes

Abstract

Background: The context of learning, which includes the host country, is an important variable of service-learning. Since international service-learning programs often take place in developing countries, studies about their impact and outcomes commonly draw from experiences in developing countries. **Purpose:** We investigate service-learning experience in developed, urban settings focusing on dissonances and civic outcomes, key areas of service-learning pedagogy. **Methodology/Approach:** This an instrumental case study based on a small group sample of 12 Asian student participants of a service-learning exchange to partner universities in the USA. **Findings/Conclusions:** Findings suggest that developed cities can be fertile grounds for impactful dissonances and civic learning. "First-world expectations" increased or intensified dissonances students experienced. Confronting urban poverty and other social issues in cities similar to their own led students to see domestic problems with fresh eyes. **Implications:** Service-learning exchange in developed cities can facilitate understanding of social problems particularly in the way these occur in developed countries and promises transferability of learning. However, students need prompting to connect experiences overseas to home contexts and draw practical consequences. Faculty or staff assistance is necessary to help students constructively cope with powerful dissonances.

Keywords

International service-learning, dissonance, civic outcomes, developed country, urban poverty

Service-learning – also referred to as service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) or, simply, community-engaged learning – is an experiential pedagogy recognized as a high-

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impact practice in higher education (Anderson et al., 2019). Through it, students carry out organized services for the community, reflect on experience, and channel academic knowledge and skills towards social responsibility (Zlotkowski, 1998).

Known outcomes of SLCE include increments in students' academic and professional development, personal growth, inter-personal skills, and civic-mindedness (Astin et al., 2000; Conway et al., 2009). SLCE Programs held in foreign contexts – i.e., global or international service-learning (ISL) – are known to further intensify or expand these outcomes because of cross-border experiences they entail.

Now, since ISL programs often take place in developing countries, discussions about the impact and outcomes of ISL programs typically draw from experiences in developing countries (e.g., Bamber 2016; Crabtree 2008; Kiely 2004, 2005; Larsen, 2017; Pipitone, 2018). Scholars acknowledge that the context of learning, which includes the host country, is an important variable of ISL program design, but there is little research on how contextual factors such as the host country and its socio-economic conditions affect learning outcomes (Bamber, 2016; Jacoby, 2015; Pipitone, 2018). More rare within ISL literature are studies about experiences in developed cities, although learning in such contexts is well-explored in related literature on volunteer tourism and study abroad programs with service components (cf. Chwialkowska, 2020; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Wessel, 2007).

This paper is an instrumental case study of a SLCE exchange between a university in Hong Kong and 3 partner universities in the USA, an exploratory research based on a small group sample of 12 Asian students who travelled to the USA for the exchange. We take an interpretive approach in analyzing qualitative data from program artifacts and offer rich descriptions of ISL experience in developed, urban contexts. The study focuses on two aspects of ISL pedagogy identified as crucial in literature, namely, dissonances and civic outcomes. Dissonances refer to critical incidents in unfamiliar settings which can lead to

transformative learning (Feinstein, 2004; Kiely, 2004, 2005). Meanwhile, civic outcomes are "the *sine qua non* of service-learning" (Bringle & Wall, 2019, p.1), whether domestic or international, curricular or co-curricular.

As Kiely (2005), pointed out, contextual factors of ISL programs affect the dissonances and learning that result from them. It is thus necessary to "plan service-learning programs with a clear understanding of the various contextual factors unique to (the) program" (p.15). More knowledge of potential dissonances and civic learning in developed, urban contexts can shed light on how to design, implement, and better prepare students for ISL and similar programs in such contexts.

We surmised that the program and its contexts would yield experiences and learning different in some way from ISL programs in developing settings. We hypothesized that the relatively convenient, material living conditions of developed cities would mean less sources of dissonance for visiting students. Further, given that the nature of communities and social issues in urban settings differ significantly from what ISL students encounter in rural or developing settings, we wished to examine more closely the civic outcomes which a sample ISL program in developed, urban contexts led to.

We argue that ISL in developed, urban contexts (1) can generate *less types of* but also *impactful* dissonances and, (2) yield valuable civic outcomes. We found that social realities in developed cities produced strong dissonances which were reinforced by "first-world expectations" students held about their destination cities, and that what students experienced and learned in the host cities led them to reconsider social realities in their home city.

Literature Review

ISL Definition and Foreign Context

ISL programs SLCE in foreign (usually developing) countries, SLCE exchanges, and domestic SLCE with ethnic minority groups, or "ISL at Home" (Plater, 2001, p.46). Bringle and Hatcher (2011) define ISL as,

> a structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally. (p.19)

These words highlight essential characteristics which ISL shares with domestic SLCE, namely, academic learning, service, community engagement, and reflection. Simply put, ISL is SLCE that takes place in a foreign context. Bringle and Hatcher's definition implies traveling to a "host country" and consequent enhancement of intercultural and globalized learning as distinctive features of ISL. They thus further explain ISL as a pedagogy that combines the strengths of three educational practices, i.e., service-learning, study abroad, and international education.

To compare ISL with domestic SLCE, since ISL programs ordinarily take place overseas, they tend to be shorter (e.g., 1-3 weeks), require more resources, and involve more cultural and linguistic gaps between students and the community which can make collaborative work more challenging (Jacoby, 2015, pp. 74, 248-51).

On the other hand, ISL's foreign context make it more apt for promoting global outlook and cultural literacy (Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011; Plater, 2011). Gmelch (2004) has also argued convincingly that student travel programs contribute to personal development by increasing the adaptability, self-reliance, and communicative abilities of students coping with unfamiliar surroundings. ISL shares similar outcomes with study abroad and other global education strategies (e.g., personal growth, global outlook, intercultural skills, and professional competence), and

improves or expands on these outcomes through “experiential immersion of students into international communities” (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p.15; cf. Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2011).

Effective ISL Program Characteristics

Mere travel or exposure to a foreign context does not guarantee substantive learning. Literature on global education therefore discuss program characteristics that can make short-term plans impactful for students (e.g., Chwialkowska, 2020; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Wessel, 2007). Characteristics of effective programs include: pre-, during-, and post-trip activities that equip students with pre-requisite knowledge and attitude; integration of coursework with experiential learning; faculty or staff facilitation and accompaniment; in-depth immersion through regular, face-to-face interactions with diverse persons; good relations with peers and community partners to help students cope with challenges and develop solidarity; and, finally, reflective exercises lead students towards deep learning (cf. Anderson et al., 2019; Crabtree, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kiely, 2005; Larsen, 2017; Plater, 2011). To rehash the last item, Whitney and Clayton (2011) note that in the radically changed settings of ISL programs, “everything is reflection-worthy: few if any details are too small or insignificant to have meaning” (p.155). Besides service and course work, peripheral events such as daily routine, casual conversations, and leisurely activities can contribute to learning (Bamber, 2016; Pipitone, 2018; Wessel, 2007).

Displacement and Dissonance

ISL and study abroad practitioners attach pedagogical value to physical displacement and disorienting experiences in foreign settings. They articulate this, for instance, in terms of “first-hand exposure to other cultures" (Bamber, 2016, p.9), or of temporary removal from comfort zone and habitual influences which enables students to process experiences in more personal manner (Chwialkowska, 2020; Eyler, 2011; Feinstein, 2004). Displacement, in other words, affords students more *direct, full-time,* and *intense* experiences of other people and places, making learning potentially “deeper, richer, and more enduring” (Plater, 2011, p.33).

ISL scholars find in Mezirow's (1991, 1994) Transformative Learning theory a useful framework for understanding how disorienting experiences in host countries can lead to deep learning. According to Mezirow, fundamental changes in perspective and discovery of meaning occur precisely when adults encounter realities inconsistent with their worldview and reflect on these. Foreign contexts generate potentially stronger and varied disorienting experiences – also referred to as "dissonances", "critical incidents", or "disruptions" in ISL literature – because they present travelers with a host of nuances in food, climate, customs, culture, etc. (Crabtree, 2008; Feinstein, 2004; Kiely 2004, 2005; cf. Festinger, 1957).

Dissonances *per se* do not constitute learning but are valuable springboard for critical reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Larsen, 2017). They can lead to changes in perspectives as students confront unexpected or unfamiliar social realities in the host country, seek to understand reasons behind these, and consider what they can do (Eyler & Giles 1999). Applying Mezirow's theory to longitudinal studies analyzing ISL's impact on students, Kiely (2004, 2005) found that although students undergo important perspective transformations, these did not necessarily translate into meaningful action:

> there is often a disconnect between what students want to do and the actions they actually take… a transformation in one's worldview is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for changing lifestyle, challenging mainstream norms, and engaging in collective action (Kiely, 2004, p.16).

Kiely identified 10 forms of dissonances which differ in type (cultural, technological, environmental, social, economic, etc.), duration (short-/long-term) and intensity (low/high). Accordingly, low-intensity dissonances (which often stem from differences in culture, technology, or physical environment) help make students more adaptable to new contexts. Meanwhile, high-intensity dissonances (which often stem from social, economic, political, or historical issues) tend to elicit stronger affective reactions and leave lasting marks. They provoke changes in worldviews, choices, and habits, signaling "the start of students' transformational learning…, a repositioning process in which they begin to rethink their…assumptions" (p.12). O'Malley et. al (2019) present a simpler,

four-fold categorization of dissonances (i.e., environmental, sociocultural, intellectual, and personal) from a study abroad program in a developing country.

Civic Learning through ISL

Crabtree's (2008) comparison of ISL with conventional study abroad bears out the centrality of civic learning in ISL: unlike study abroad whose direct beneficiaries are the students, ISL intends

> to reciprocally benefit communities and students, (and its) benefits to students are articulated in more civic terms, such as enhanced civic participation, social responsibility, and commitment to community service (p. 20, abridged)

Civic learning associated with SLCE comes in different forms, e.g., greater awareness of social issues and their complexity, empathy, prejudice reduction, intentions for community involvement, and social action (Erickson, 2009). Bringle and Wall's (2019) Civic-Minded Graduate scale summarizes common civic objectives that can be used to evaluate curricular and co-curricular service programs. These objectives encompass knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behavioral intentions that enable students to "contribute to the public good during their lives and careers", for instance, knowledge of volunteer opportunities, communication and listening skills, valuing community engagement, and self-efficacy.

Examining how dissonances lead to civic learning, Kiely (2005) coined the term "personalizing" to describe how affective reactions to social problems in host countries compel ISL students to assess themselves, learn, and connect more with the community. He explained, "interactions with people who are suffering from social problems, (lead) students (to) no longer see poverty as an abstract and detached image… Rather, poverty is connected to real people with names, faces, and hearts" (p.12, abridged). Kiely advocates a holistic approach to understanding transformative learning through ISL, one that values emotional experiences and social processes (e.g., informal interactions, building relationships) alongside academic learning and rational reflection (cf. Bamber, 2016; Larsen 2017).

Research Framework and Questions

Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory as applied to ISL experience informs our research (e.g., Feinstein, 2004; Kiely 2004, 2005; Larsen 2017). Bearing in mind the instrumental role of dissonances in ISL pedagogy, the question arises about the impact ISL could have when held in developed cities. On the one hand, such settings have relatively convenient living conditions. Visiting students from similarly developed places may thus experience less dissonances, particularly high-intensity ones which Kiely observed from ISL in developing countries. On the other hand, even the most developed places in the world have their share of social issues and disadvantaged groups.

Although studies about ISL in developing host countries are a reference point for our research, we do not intend here to directly compare ISL experiences between developing and developed contexts. Instead, we focus attention on ISL in developed contexts. Two research questions guide our investigation:

> (Inquiry 1) *What kind of dissonances did students experience in developed cities?*
>
> (Inquiry 2) *What civic outcomes did the program yield? What within the program and its setting led to civic outcomes?*

Case Study of an ISL Exchange Program in Developed Cities

Program and Research Context

Hong Kong is a bustling city whose level of development ranks close to the USA in terms of GDP ("World Economic Outlook Database", 2019). Generous support from public and private entities afford undergraduates many opportunities for educational travel. Close to 8% of undergraduate students participate in semester-long exchanges in one year ("University Grants Committee Annual Report", 2018-19). The percentage is more impressive when short-

term programs like ISL are counted. In [withheld], a publicly-funded research university and host institution of this research, SLCE became mandatory in the undergraduate curriculum in 2012 [withheld]. To fulfill the SLCE requirement, students enroll in an academic, credit-bearing SLCE subject of their choice. Approximately 70 SLCE subjects are offered by different departments each year, a third of which are ISL subjects. Apart from these curricular SLCE subjects, there are also optional programs for students interested in advanced SLCE experiences. The Global Leadership and Civic Engagement (GLCE) program is an example.

The GLCE Program

The GLCE is a co-curricular, non-credit-bearing SLCE exchange program. It aims to develop global mindedness and civic engagement through immersive learning experiences overseas and enable knowledge exchange for developing SLCE in [withheld]. [Withheld] students who have completed the mandatory SLCE subject requirement – whether domestic or ISL – are eligible to apply. Selection is based on academic performance, previous service experiences, and non-academic achievements. Selected students commit to (1) attend pre- and post-exchange activities, (2) submit written reflections, (3) actively participate in program components arranged by university partners (e.g., faculty-supervised activities, service work, field visits, social research), and, (4) fulfill 40 additional hours of service in Hong Kong within a year from their return from the exchange. GLCE was launched in 2018. The data base for this study pertains to the second cohort of 12 participants in 2019 when the program and its procedures were more established. All are Asian women (majority of applicants were women), between 20 to 24 years old. Eight are Hong Kong locals, the rest from neighboring Asian countries. Participants' details are shown in Table 1.

[insert table 1 here]

The 3 partner universities of the exchange ("X", "Y", "Z") have campuses in cosmopolitan cities in the USA. They provided SLCE education to our students and arranged for their lodging and service placement in non-profit organizations (NPO) in their respective cities. These universities have established SLCE traditions and employ different models. University X's program is a two-month service internship in a designated NPO during which students are mentored by faculty. The programs of Universities Y and Z have shorter durations of 3 to 4 weeks, during which students combine faculty-organized activities with 20 hours of weekly volunteer work (e.g., administrative, kitchen, tutoring tasks) in one or more NPOs. Program arrangements by the partner universities are shown in Table 2.

[insert table 2 here]

These SLCE arrangements may be described as "well-integrated programs that maintain a social justice pedagogy" (Kiely, 2004, p.8) in that they are designed to lead students to critically confront social issues (e.g., through class discussions, assignments, research) even as they directly witness groups afflicted by these issues (e.g., through service, field visits, panel discussions).

Data Collection and Authenticity

The study was approved by [withheld]'s Human Subjects Ethics Sub-Committee (Ref. no. HSEARS20190514004). Program participants gave voluntary consent to participate in the research. In line with literature about effective ISL programs and our own experience, ways to engage students in continuous reflection were built into the program. Students submitted weekly reflections during their time overseas and a summative completion report within a month from their return to Hong Kong to the program coordinator. The latter also carried out pre- and post- exchange interviews with each participant. These interviews were semi-

structured dialogues conducted in English or Chinese, according to student preference. Pre-exchange interviews focused on students' background, motives, and expectations from the program, while post-exchange interviews followed up on experiences, insights, or plans they reported from the exchange. These written and oral reflective activities gave rise to the student artifacts comprising our data set, shown in Table 3.

[insert table 3 here]

To facilitate reflection, prompt questions were prepared for the weekly reflections and completion reports. However, the program coordinator encouraged students to write what they wished without feeling obliged to answer these. The prompt questions, listed in Table 4, are based on Ash and Clayton's (2004) DEAL model, DEAL being an acronym for *describe, evaluate,* and *articulate learning* – a step-by-step process of thinking through experience.

[insert table 4 here]

Since our partner universities in the USA were directly responsible for SLCE program design, the role of the program coordinator in Hong Kong was limited to managing logistics and communicating with students. She maintained cordial relations with them throughout the program and earned their trust. We believe that this together with the co-curricular nature of the program (i.e., essays and interviews were not graded) helped towards authentic self-reports.

Research Method and Process

We employed a combination of methods to manage researcher bias and validate data interpretation. The two principal researchers are the program coordinator and a second who

had no connection to the program and its participants. The two independently studied the data set and conferred at crucial junctures of the research process to compare findings and resolve differences. We held regular, critical discussions about the study's results and progress over the course of a year with senior members of our research team. Other means to ensure credibility were keeping an audit trail, parallel coding, and member checking with two program participants. All of us authors belong to the SLCE unit of [withheld] and acknowledge our desire to see favorable outcomes from programs we are responsible for. However, we are just as keen to improve SLCE pedagogy and are eager to share our experience.

In the initial stage, we performed content analysis on the data set giving prime importance to written reflections since these tackled matters more directly related to the theme of inquiry. To investigate dissonances, we initially tried coding using categories from literature (i.e., Kiely 2005; O'Malley et al., 2019). After trial rounds with three sets of weekly and completion reports yielded samples that did not neatly fit into the category sets, we turned to inductive coding to better capture and represent dissonances as these emerged from the data set. Following the nature of dissonances described in literature, we marked as dissonances accounts which (1) were about events described as inconsistent with previous ideas or experiences, and (2) elicited affective reactions. We also watched out for (3) changes in thought, attitude, or action as indicators of dissonances being impactful or transformative. We first gathered samples of dissonances from weekly reports, the most detailed among artifacts. Grouping similar items together, we established appropriate labels and definitions for each group. Once agreed on a scheme, the two principal researchers carried out parallel coding.

To track civic outcomes, the principal researchers compiled and conferred about extracts from the data set which contained verbal expressions of learning (e.g., "learned",

"realized", "discovered") or improvement (e.g., "became more", "decided to") in response to social issues they confronted during the exchange.

To safeguard anonymity, we assigned a random letter for each participant. Substantial quotes we present are abbreviated, grammar-edited extracts from student artifacts.

Findings

Dissonances in Developed Cities

Five categories of dissonances emerged from the data set: *socio-civic, academic, cultural, personal*, and *physical*. Although these categories are logically distinct, in reality, some experiences produced mixed dissonances. For example, visiting a homeless community led to both socio-civic and personal dissonances in several students. We classified mixed dissonances according to what students emphasized in their accounts, e.g., homelessness as a *social problem*, or as a *personal challenge* to one's character or mindset. Table 5 shows the categories and examples of dissonances from the data set.

[insert table 5 here]

We counted over 50 examples of dissonances. These are many in *number* but fewer in *type* compared to ten categories listed by Kiely (2005). The vast majority of dissonances were either socio-civic or cultural, each having at least 20 items compared to only about a handful in the other three categories. Table 6 is a concise summary of dissonances from the data set.

[insert table 6 here]

That there were fewer types than Kiely's may be due to the smaller size of our sample group, as well as to the absence of certain types of dissonances which tend to occur more in

ISL programs in developing host countries, i.e., those stemming from economic or technological disparities between students' origin and destination. Notwithstanding, there were evidences of impactful dissonances from the SLCE exchange in developed cities, as we shall see.

We found examples of low-level dissonances, described by Kiely as leading to "instrumental and communicative forms of learning" and foster adaptability (2005, p.11). One student learned to fend for herself, another to adjust her commuting routine:

> I found myself more independent after this exchange… Without my family, I had to cook and take care of myself. –Z
>
> We missed a bus and waited for more than two hours… The transportation system here is challenging for me because (in Hong Kong) we have mobile apps for the bus schedule, there are more transportation options, and I am used to taking the subway. This experience taught me to do better path planning and to look up scheduled bus routes. –C

These examples confirm how travel and exchange experiences to developed countries can occasion challenges and "discomforts" which students can learn from (Chwialkowska, 2020; Gmelch, 2004).

Socio-civic Dissonances

In line with our focus on civic learning, we paid particular attention to socio-civic dissonances. As shown in Table 6 above, socio-civic dissonances numbered most with 24 examples reported by 11 out of 12 participants. Many of these examples (17/24) were linked by participants to home realities. A smaller number (7/24) were explicitly linked to changes in perspective, attitude, or action.

It was clear from examples of socio-civic dissonances that *urban poverty* in the forms and effects witnessed by students in the host cities of the exchange (e.g., homelessness,

material destitution, substance abuse, mental disease, social isolation) caused real shock. Interestingly, students who had ISL experience in developing countries compared poverty there with what they saw during the exchange. They described poverty in developed cities as more complex and disturbing, to some extent initially harder to "empathize with." The following are reactions from visiting or working in homeless communities:

> I was so shocked to find a community of homeless… The hygiene there is I think as bad as in some developing countries… So many flies, homeless eating leftover bread and searching bins. I became aware that there are many disabled people among them. –T
>
> This really tested my ability to empathize and understand people… I couldn't help but think that the situation was partly their fault… I thought only mentally ill people and children deserve to be helped, adults are responsible for their own situation. –I
>
> In that (developing country) people were underprivileged even though they had jobs because of low income and the country's history. Generally, they were poor but not "hungry", and more stable… What I saw here made me extremely sad and upset, and is harder to empathize with… Aggressive behavior, mental health, drug abuse… their problems were so complicated. It scares me to think, if a well-developed country does not have the answer to this problem, then other countries probably do not have the answer to it either, even if they have a lot of resources and development. –Y

These extracts evidence strong emotional reactions which took students both time and help to process through peer and faculty support and follow up conversations with the program coordinator. By the end of the exchange, students initially repulsed by urban poverty or inclined to harshly judge adults in such situation reported revisions in perspectives or attitudes. In-depth learning about social problems through lectures, research, and conversations with homeless clients during the exchange helped the first to overcome

"assumptions that the homeless are lazy and choose to rely on financial aid from the government" (T), the second to discover that she was operating on an "individualistic philosophy" (I), and the third to "start to change (her) mindset a little by understanding the root causes of poverty", sincerely admitting to "absorbing everything as knowledge while the heart still has difficulty accepting" (Y).

Circumstances that led to changes in thinking and attitude towards poverty in these examples – lectures, research, and reflection, immersion and conversations – remind us of characteristics of effective programs discussed in ISL and related literature.

"First-World" Expectations

One important observation from accounts of socio-civic dissonances is that these were often linked to expectations or stereotypes (at times bordering on naivety) about developed countries. Note the following examples (italics added),

> I was surprised that the immigrants did not learn English. I thought there was better integration in the *host country*. –R
>
> I never thought these injustices take place in a *well-developed and strong country*. –L
>
> It is unfair that in a *country of strong economic status*, people are suffering from lack of money, education, abuse. –I
>
> I never knew the homeless situation could be so severe in *one of the richest cities* in the world. –J
>
> I do not know how I should feel when I see these things happen in such a *developed country*. –T
>
> I watch a lot of American TV shows and influencers in YouTube, and these made me have huge expectations. I feel uncomfortable because I thought a *developed country* should not have problems with homelessness. –Y

These statements evidence pre-conceptions students had about their destination. We identified "first world expectations" as a subjective factor which caused or intensified dissonances students experienced during the exchange.

We also noticed isolated examples of socio-civic dissonances influenced by one-sided views students heard during the exchange. The following two examples concern racism and gentrification:

> I was shocked to realize that there is still strong racism against Black people in the country… even more shocked (to learn) that racism is a common issue in the university. A Black student shared her experience with us privately about how she was treated. She said that discrimination still happens in the university. She was not invited to join certain events and may not be student leader for some clubs. –C
>
> We had a community walk in the district to explore the issue of gentrification, guided by a community activist fighting for racial equality and social justice – we learned a lot. The district was monopolized by a university… In the name of developing a nicer community, it gets funding from the government and exploits the community, introducing chain stores, profiting from these, and expelling the original residents who cannot afford rising prices… As our guide said, this was not an urban renewal project, but a community REMOVAL project! –Z

In both examples, the students appeared to indiscriminately adopt views of particular persons without considering other aspects of complex issues. Examples of these were few but worth noting. Fortunately, students often expressed more circumspect, constructive views, as we shall see from evidences of a promising pattern and civic learning.

A promising pattern

Dissonances are valuable insofar as they stimulate critical reflection and lead to transformative learning. We thus watched for indications of dissonances that led to changes

in perspective, attitude, or action. An example of a fruitful dissonance came from a nursing student who learned a valuable lesson for her profession from observing homeless clients and discussing the experience with attending faculty:

> One of the most memorable scenes from volunteering was the amount of food wasted after the homeless finish lunch. I thought they would treasure food since they cannot afford it. Besides, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the most basic human needs are physiological ones, which include food and water. What I saw did not match my assumption. We shared this with the Professor, and he explained that some may not want to eat because of their psychological state. I realized that there are different reasons behind people's actions. To understand their behavior, I need to talk to them and understand their circumstances. Empathy is important for healthcare professionals. When working in the hospital, apart from applying our knowledge and skills, we need to let (patients) feel they are understood and cared for. –N

An important pattern that emerged from the data set was the spontaneous, recurring tendency of students to relate dissonances they experienced in the host cities to Hong Kong, in a way that led them to recognize or re-consider home realities. Note the following examples:

> Exploring the issue of gentrification in Baltimore caused interior struggle. Gentrification also happens in Hong Kong. My first thought was, this is very bad, the developer should not do this. However, I do want more modernized communities, cleaner streets, and popular shops, and I think some buildings in old parts of the city should be renovated. But considering the interest of the poor who cannot return to their original home, should I still support re-development? Is there a balance that can be struck? I do not have an answer to this yet. –L

> Hearing about Hurricane Matthew and the discussion about socio-political issues hit me hard. I felt ashamed coming from a privileged country. We consume too much energy and cause irreversible damages to the earth, global warning, extreme weather, and natural disasters... Developing countries that consume less suffer most. I want to lessen use of plastics, reduce my carbon footprint, and influence my family and friends about this. –C
>
> Homelessness is not limited to L.A. but is a challenge that many cities face. Knowledge I gained from this program can somehow be applied to the homeless situation in Hong Kong. Both cities share similar causes of homelessness, such as high housing prices. –U

As one student reflected, the program's developed, urban setting produced resonances distinct from her previous ISL experience in a developing country:

> The service locations brought different influences to me. Service-learning in Cambodia made me understand the importance of using academic knowledge to help people in developing countries. Service-leaning this time made me aware of social issues in developed countries, not only the United States, and reminded me to serve my own community in Hong Kong. –T

Students evidently perceived similar socio-economic conditions between their host cities and Hong Kong, referring to both as "capitalized metropolitans", "cosmopolitan cities", "commercial world", or simply, "developed" or "privileged" places. From the similarity, they made analogical inferences which connected insights from the exchange to their origin. We consider the matter important as it suggests the *relevance* and *transferability* of dissonant experiences abroad to their home city.

Although this was a recurring tendency observed from program artifacts, students did not always recognize similar problems occurring in Hong Kong. Racism, for instance, was a

major topic explored during the exchange. While most students realized, on reflection, that racism also exists in Hong Kong – e.g., in the form of "discrimination against non-local Asians" which is "not often discussed" (C) or even "ignored" (R) – a few students who reacted strongly against it did not go on to consider racism in Hong Kong. One seemed to overlook the matter, thinking "it is hard to comprehend racism because the society where I come from has lower diversity of races" (A).

Civic learning

Examples of socio-civic dissonances which led students to reconsider social realities at home and to positive changes in thinking and attitude can be considered civic outcomes of the program. In this section, we discuss other forms of civic outcomes that emerged.

Understanding social realities

Scholars consider direct and sophisticated understanding of social issues to be an important civic outcome of service-learning as it leads to overcoming stereotypes and developing active concern for marginalized groups (e.g., Bamber, 2016; Crabtree, 2008; Jacoby, 2015). We found recurring examples of this in written reflections. Students attributed this outcome to personal interaction with service clients and hearing their stories firsthand. Faculty-guided discussions and research were also instrumental in helping students to understand macro factors and root causes of poverty. For instance,

> I have a much deeper understanding of social, cultural, economic and political factors behind social issues, especially poverty… I used to see unemployment as a personal issue and think, 'Don't be lazy, get a job!' We seldom pay attention to why people quit the workforce, like mental illness, or family responsibilities… (In the NPO), I overheard a client expressing lack of confidence due to limited work experience. I neglected the fact that they need help to re-join the workforce… to write resumes, practice for interviews, or choose professional attire. –A

> My understanding of homeless people has changed dramatically. I was sure that an adult who ends up in this situation is doing something wrong and not working hard enough… but explanations and discussions raised in class… the data and statistics introduced by the professor made me question my point of view. –I
>
> I struggled about why poor people rely on government aid and not find a job or work harder to improve their lives? Many Americans have this struggle as well. This exchange reminded me how macro factors can affect individuals. In Hong Kong, we also tend to blame the poor and seldom try to understand how the environment can hinder people from escaping poverty. Poverty in Hong Kong is worth looking deeper into. –L

Prospects for community engagement

The exchange also opened up prospects for better community engagement back home. Examples students saw from individuals (especially local volunteers) and institutions during the exchange inspired not a few practical ideas or insights for engagement. Below are examples which also show the value of "informal interactions" in ISL experience (Kiely, 2005, p.14):

> The volunteer coordinator explained the right attitude to help. I had this misconception that we can give needy people anything as long as it is still functioning. I learned that we need to ensure the quality of items… and serve with dignity as they have already gone through the worst in life. Any stained or dilapidated item should go to the overflow. –A
>
> I wondered about the motivations of local volunteers and interviewed them during my duty. A young man who works full-time comes three-times-a-week to relieve stress. A retired tailor enjoys helping others. A freelance actor rehearses at night and is free at daytime. In Hong Kong, professionals work 44 hours each week. Hong Kong and this

> city are both metropolises, yet the volunteers here squeeze their time for voluntary work? I am graduating soon. I could also volunteer during my free time. –M
>
> I worked in the kitchen with a chef who had been homeless himself… I asked why he insisted on cooking different dishes instead of giving out donated food like sandwiches. I learned from him that offering options to the homeless gives them a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy, and thus promotes psychological well-being. A simple greeting like "Hi! How're you today?" can also initiate conversations and make them feel cared for. –U

The social engagement of their host universities also enlightened students about possibilities back in Hong Kong. For example,

> I saw that (the NPO) provides comprehensive services. They have a health center supported by a university's School of Nursing, and dental care provided by another university's School of Dentistry. I never imagined universities could work with NPOs to provide health care… I am thinking whether it is possible to do the same in Hong Kong. We nursing students have clinical placements in hospitals or community health centers (but) the school doesn't work with any specific organization for the needy. –N
>
> I was so surprised to see homeless people on campus, and using its facilities: Wi-Fi, aircon, lounges… The university does not kick them out, and the professors politely talk to them and try to know more about them. I think [withheld] does something similar – student canteens are open to the public during some periods, so people can get cheaper food… But maybe [withheld] can go further. –Z

Social Relevance of Academic Learning

Helping students understand "how their education can contribute to their future civic life" (p.8) is another important civic outcome of service-learning (Bringle & Wall, 2019, p.8).

Among the civic outcomes of the program were connections students made between their academic or professional learning and service experience. For health science students, close interaction with marginalized groups nourished capacity to care, a valued attribute in her profession:

> I am going to be a physiotherapist. I cannot fully comprehend the sufferings (the homeless endure), just like I will not fully comprehend the pains of my future patients because I do not live their anguish. How can I express care? Listening and acknowledging their pain is important. It can relieve clients' sufferings. I want to apply what I learnt in this exchange into clinical practice, to be aware of my patients' distress even in times of overwork. –A

> The on-site visit to Skid Row allowed me to integrate my nursing knowledge into service work. The homeless easily suffer depression because of unmet needs and poor social networking. This reminded me that mental well-being should not be overlooked. Communication and interpersonal skills are important. Apart from verbal communication, non-verbal cues and gestures are sometimes what they need. –U

Another example of this type of outcome is from a Computing student who realized from service internship in a NPO the usefulness of information technology for civic causes. The realization led to a specific action, i.e., committing to help the NPO from Hong Kong.

> I discovered the significance of media visibility and internet presence for NPOs to attract volunteers and donations, promote civic engagement, create public trust, and reach potential partners. Since they do not have a full-time programmer nor designer, I decided to maintain the website for them and create posters after the exchange. –R

Discussion

In answer to Inquiry 1, students experienced *less varied* though *many* dissonances in developed cities, most of which were either socio-civic or cultural. Based on the fact that social issues in the urban contexts of the exchange elicited strong affective reactions and often led students to reconsider home realities, some socio-civic dissonances seem impactful. In answer to Inquiry 2, the exchange yielded various civic outcomes, in the form of (1) socio-civic dissonances which led to reconsideration of home realities or positive changes, (2) in-depth understanding of social realities, (3) prospects for better community engagement inspired by individuals and institutions they encountered, and (4) discovery of the social relevance of academic learning.

Our findings thus suggest that developed, urban settings can be fertile grounds for dissonances, just as scholars of related global education strategies claim (e.g., Chwialkowska, 2020; Gmelch, 2004). Further, our findings indicate that developed, urban settings can yield valuable civic learning comparable to outcomes ISL scholars observe from programs in developing countries (e.g., Crabtree, 2008; Feinstein, 2004; Kiely 2004, 2005, etc.). In many of the quotes, students mention details of the circumstances that triggered dissonances and learning, e.g., service and immersion in the community, personal reflection, class-based or faculty-led activities, likewise informal or random events such as commuting, conversing with others, and observing persons and surroundings. These confirm the varied sources of learning discussed in ISL literature, which includes not only academic or planned elements, such as service work, academic activities, and structured reflection (cf. Ash & Clayton, 2004; Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011), but also non-academic and random events, i.e., “daily life” (Wessel, 2007), “emotional experiences” (Larsen 2017), “social processes” (Kiely, 2005), and “relationship building” with marginalized persons (Crabtree, 2008).

Alongside positive findings, the study brought to our attention matters of concern indicative of how the program can be improved from our end as institution of origin. We lay these out now as practical implications that can inform educational activities which, like the GLCE exchange program, involve foreign participants serving in urban locations.

First, although the program and its contexts produced powerful socio-civic dissonances, students did not always recognize social issues overseas as problems that also occur to some extent or in some form in their home city. Besides, only a small portion of dissonances were explicitly linked to concrete changes in perspective, attitude, or action. As Kiely (2004) noted, there is often a disconnect between what students discover and actual changes they make. It is thus necessary to help students intentionally consider the relevance of learning from the exchange to their home context and to draw practical consequences from this. During pre-trip debriefings, relating their experiences overseas to home can be set forth as an explicit challenge. Suitable prompt questions can also be added to reflective activities, e.g., *Are they aware of similar issues at home? What did they learn during the exchange which they can apply back home?*

Second, since immersion in urban poverty and other social issues provoked strong dissonances during the exchange, students could benefit from better emotional support. Post-trip interviews with the program coordinator was a good opportunity to follow up powerful or unresolved dissonances as well as resolutions from the exchange. In future, mid-trip conversations could be arranged for each participant at least once during the exchange (through virtual channels, if necessary), ideally with the program coordinator or a faculty member from the home institution who is familiar with the students, their habitual context, and native tongue.

Third, we found that “first world expectations” contributed to dissonances and noted too occasional unbalanced views on social issues based on limited perspectives they heard

during the exchange. Students could be forewarned about these tendencies during a pre-trip debriefing. Faculty or staff-assisted group reflection in a post-trip gathering could also give participants the opportunity to exchange ideas and hear different perspectives.

Conclusion

This study based on the GLCE exchange program explored an under-studied type of ISL experience, that which takes place in developed, urban settings, and raised suggestions for improving student learning. Although we explored a special type of ISL, our findings are relevant to ISL programs in general (in as much as developing and developed countries share common problems), and to study abroad or exchange programs with service components and developed locations.

The study has a number of important limitations. It is a *single* case study of *one* such program in *one* institution. The sample size is small and homogenous in terms of regional culture and gender (Asian women). Proofs of learning outcomes rely on self-reports. We had hoped to use post-exchange service work to further gauge the program's efficacy, but students' plans and communication were hampered by the Covid crisis in 2020.

Particular characteristics of the program and its participants which have bearing on the outcomes should also be taken into account. All participants completed mandatory SLCE subjects (most of them ISL) prior to the GLCE program. This would have prepared them for more community engagement (Chan, Ngai, & Lam, 2020), and facilitated learning and transformation from the exchange. The English-language ability of participants is also an important factor. In principle, all participants were proficient in English, English being a basic requirement and medium of instruction in Hong Kong universities. However, some were not used to or did not feel confident about speaking with native English speakers. Fluency and confidence in the destination's language would enable outbound students to benefit more from lessons and conversations during the exchange.

In future research, it would be interesting to do more direct comparisons of ISL outcomes between developing and developed settings, likewise between different models of SLCE programs. We did not have access to data from participants' previous ISL experiences in developing countries to do such comparison. As for comparing SLCE models, no clear differences emerged in terms of dissonances and civic learning, and we hesitate to draw conclusions from our small group sample.

To end, urban poverty and social problems in developed cities deeply impacted ISL students. Although socio-civic dissonances were fed by subjective expectations about their destination, ultimately, the dissonances were roused by the harsh realities that also exist in economically developed societies. Reality is, after all, "the single most important determinant" of dissonances, and it demands a response (Festinger, 1957, p.10). Two important doubts raised about ISL as civic pedagogy are whether serving overseas might lead students to "bypass a sense of responsibility within their own local and national communities" (Bamber, 2016, p.74), and whether students will be able to "integrate or transfer their ISL experience" to their home contexts (Kiely, 2011, p.260). A special advantage of a SLCE exchange like the GLCE program is that it facilitates understanding poverty and social problems *particularly* in the way these occur in developed settings. While ISL programs in developing countries potentially expand participants' concerns beyond those of the "First World", ISL exchanges between developed cities can result in learning that is highly relevant to home. The combination of tried and tested ISL program components, physical displacement, and analogous contexts between home and destination can help students see with fresh eyes real problems of economically developed societies, likewise real possibilities for confronting these.

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Table 1

Participant Details (N=12)

Year level	Senior	11
	Junior	1
Discipline	Engineering	4
	Health Sciences	5
	Language	1
	Social Work	2
SLCE Experience prior to GLCE program	ISL	8
	Domestic	4

Table 2

Program Arrangement & Distribution of Participants (N=12)

Host University	University X	University Y	University Z
Duration of exchange	9 weeks	4 weeks	3-4 weeks
Service	Internship in an NPO	Volunteer work in an NPO	Volunteer work in three NPOs
Target group	Caribbean immigrant community	Low-income families	Homeless
No. of students:	2	4	6

Table 3

Data Set from GLCE Program Participants

	Written		**Interviews**	
	Weekly Reflection (maximum 800 words)	Completion Report (maximum 1500 words)	Pre-Exchange (30-40 minutes each)	Post-Exchange (30-60 minutes each)
University X Group	18 essays	2 essays	2 audio files	2 audio files
University Y Group	16 essays	4 essays	4 audio files	4 audio files
University Z Group	16 essays	6 essays	6 audio files	6 audio files

Table 4

Prompt Questions for Written Reflections

Weekly reflections	1. *Describe*: What did you do this week? Tell us one thing you would like to share most, an exciting, uncomfortable, or challenging experience. 2. *Evaluate*: How did you feel about this experience/incident? 3. *Analyze*: Why did you feel that way? What does this tell you about yourself or assumptions you may have? 4. *Learn*: What can you learn from this experience/incident? Is it important to you? Why or why not? 5. (*After Week 2*) Follow up on last week's reflection: How is that experience going? Any update, change of view, or new understanding?
Completion report	1. What have you done and achieved in this exchange? 2. Describe a typical day for you during the exchange. 3. Apply "DEAL" model for critical reflection to share your experience in the following aspects: civic, cultural, personal, academic/professional. 4. Did you encounter anything in this exchange that was surprising or unexpected? What, how, and why? 5. How would you compare your previous service-learning subject experience and its influence on you with this service-learning exchange program? Elaborate.

Table 5

Categories of Dissonances

Code	Sample
Socio-civic -problems and issues in society, its organization, politics, and economy	"It shocked me when I realized (that there) is still strong *racism* against black people."
Academic -about university learning, persons, or institutions	"I realized the *local students* read about politics. I hate to admit that I am indifferent to it. I decided to read more articles about politics."
Cultural -observed characteristics, beliefs, and way of life/doing of people in the host country	"It was my first time to closely encounter *another religion*… I was surprised to hear that misfortune made their faith stronger when I would expect contrary reaction."
Personal -related to participants' specific character, views, background	"I have *difficulty empathizing* with the homeless. My parents got out of poverty through hard work, (so I think) I should not pity the poor."
Physical -material environment and set up, including infrastructure	"We missed a bus and needed to wait for more than two hours… The *transportation system* here is challenging for me."

Note: Dissonance-causing phenomena or events are in italics.

Table 6

Summary of Dissonances Reported by Participants (N=12)

Type	Themes of dissonances (accompanying emotions*)		Count
Socio-civic	C†	-racism, discrimination (shock)#	
		-wasteful consumption & environmental problems caused by developed countries (shame)#@	
	R	-racism, discrimination (sad)#	
		-immigrants' lack of integration (surprise)	
	A	-poverty & homeless problem@	
		-gentrification & racism (upset)#	
	M	-mass incarceration#	
		-racism, linked to poverty & crime (surprise)	
	Z	-racism & slave history (sad)#	
		-gentrification & racism (angry)#	
		-incarceration system, linked to racism (shock)#	
		-low voter turnout in elections (surprise)#	
	L	-homeless problem (sad)#@	
		-racism, linked to poverty, crime, gentrification (shock)#@	
	N	-homeless community (uncomfortable)#	
		-racism & homelessness	
	J	-veterans' plight#	
		-homeless community#	
	Y	-homeless community (stressed)	

		-effect of poverty/homelessness on children (uncomfortable)	
	T	-homeless community (shock)#@	
		-low voter turnout (surprised)#	
	U	-homeless community (shock)# @	
		-effect of poverty/homelessness on children (helpless)#@	=24
Academic	C	-local students' political knowledge & outspokenness#@	
	R	-learning more self-directed, less instructional	
	A	-university facilities used by homeless (curious)#	
	Z	-university facilities used by homeless (impressed)#	
	N	-Psychological theory incongruent with observed behavior#	
	Y	-learning is more self-directed	
	U	-interactive, self-directed class learning (admiration)	=7
Cultural	C	-gun ownership common (worried)	
		-slow, inefficient operation at work (frustration)#@	
		-communication difficulties & differences with supervisor (challenged)@	
		-mutual help between competing organizations (curious)	
	R	-disorganized workplace (anger)@	
		-jaywalking common (surprised)	
	M	-language shift (embarrassed)@	
		-friendly conversations between strangers (surprise) #	
	Z	-language shift (worried)@	
		-faith of ex-homeless speakers (stunned)	
		-locals readily converse with & praise others (appreciation)#@	

	I	-religious motivation of local volunteers/institution#	
	N	-gun possession common (unsafe)	
		-disagreement with practices of other staff/volunteers (surprise)#	
	J	-relaxed/unsupervised work atmosphere (lost)@	
	Y	-language shift (fear)	
		-disagreement with other staff/volunteers (angry)	
	T	-disagreement with other volunteers (disappointed)#@	
		-cultural identity mistaken by locals (discomfort)	
	U	-disagreement with other volunteers (frustrated)#@	=20
Physical environment	C	-different transportation system (challenged)#@	
	Z	-disorderly work place (confused)@	=2
Personal	R	-overcoming timidity (challenged)@	
	I	-difficulty empathizing with poor due to individualist view, family history#@	
	Y	-difficulty empathizing with poor due to family history (conflicted)@	
	T	-inexperience with manual chores (repulsed)#@	=4

* Emotions *explicitly* stated by participants.

† Letter codes for participants.

Dissonances related by participants to *home city.*

@ Dissonances linked to *changes in perspective, attitude,* or *course of action.*