

**Enhancing Academic, Personal, Social, Civic and Cultural Developmental Outcomes Among  
High School Youth: The Role of International Service Learning**

**by**

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**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Psychology  
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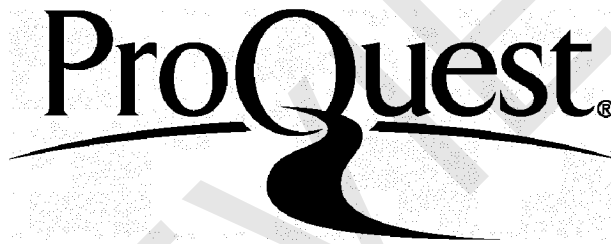
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PREVIEW

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## **ABSTRACT**

There a large body of research that examines the benefits of International Service Learning (ISL) and Domestic Service learning (DSL). However, there is gap in understanding the impact that ISL can have on high school youth and furthermore, the comparison of domestic and international and service learning. This study assessed the role that an ISL program plays in enhancing developmental outcomes (academic, personal, social, civic, and cultural) for student participants. It also explored whether internal resources (community service self- efficacy), external resources (perceived social support), and program variables (perceived level of training and opportunities for reflection) alter the strength of the proposed outcomes. A group of students who went on an ISL trip (experimental group) was compared to a sample of students enrolled in an afterschool program and engaged in local community service (control group).

The participants in the study were all high school students involved with BuildOn's afterschool program (a nonprofit agency that aims to empower high school youth through domestic and international community service). Students in the program can choose to engage in an ISL experience called Trek where they receive training and education prior to spending two weeks living in a rural community in a developing country building a school for the members of the community. Surveys were administered to the control and experimental groups at the start of the Trek process and again at the end. It was hypothesized that students who went on Trek would have greater gains in all developmental outcomes measured than those who did not go on Trek

Statistical analyses revealed that the group who did not go on Trek had a greater change in self-efficacy, civic action, intercultural competence, and community service self-efficacy than the Trek group. However, the Trek group started off with significantly higher scores in all outcomes to start. While social behavior did not change significantly more in either the Trek or Non-Trek group, it was found that those who started with higher levels of perceived social support were likely to have a greater change in social behavior than those with medium and low

levels of social support. Furthermore, those who perceived the training and level of institutional support as high were more likely to have greater gains intercultural competence.

The hypotheses that the Trek group would show greater gains in developmental outcomes than the Non-Trek group were not supported. The lack of change was likely a reflection of the lack of random assignment, the minimal room for growth among the Trek group, and the outcomes measured. These findings supported previous research that domestic services learning increases personal and civic outcomes. Furthermore, the current study shows that students who seek out ISL experiences are much higher in all developmental outcomes to start suggesting that alternative constructs should be measured to understand the true impact of ISL.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

International Service Learning programs have potential to transform individuals, shape their sense of self, connection to others, and view of the world and purpose (Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004;). Bringle and Hatcher (2011) define International Service Learning (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).

There has been tremendous growth in international volunteering over the past several years and more programs exist now than ever before (McBride & Lough, 2010; McBride, Sherraden, Benitez, & Johnson, 2004). Plater (2011), in his chapter *The Context for International Service Learning*, discussed how globalization, global interconnectedness, the desire to understand what is happening in other parts of the world, and a new sense of world engagement, have all contributed to the growing need for ISL programs. Although he was referring specifically to ISL as a pedagogy in higher education, he emphasizes the overall importance of creating educational experiences to develop globally competent citizens. ISL “occurs within the lived experience of a community and depends on bond of mutual benefit and interaction between the students and the community itself” (Plater, 2011, p.33). Higher education institutions are responding to the growing need to graduate globally competent citizens and ISL is a medium for

making this possible. U.S. News and World Report university rankings now take domestic service learning (DSL) and ISL programs into account when generating lists of best colleges around the country (Plater, 2011). Given these factors, now more than ever there is a strong need for research that evaluates the outcomes of international service learning and international volunteering programs.

The research on ISL is currently limited and there are very few empirical studies that assess the outcomes of these experiences. Furthermore, most studies that explore ISL and other international volunteering experiences tend to evaluate programs in universities that involve both undergraduate and graduate students. Most of the research on ISL has focused on the qualitative outcomes through coding interviews, open-ended questionnaires or focus groups, and often with smaller sample sizes. ISL has been referred to as a cross over between service learning, study abroad and international education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Crabtree, 2008). Given the dearth of research on ISL (Gaines-Hanks & Grayman, 2009; Nickols et al., 2013), the current study will also pull from research on study abroad programs, international volunteering and service (IVS) and other international community service research that have been implemented at a college level and above. IVS is closely related to ISL and is defined as “an organized period of engagement and contribution to society by volunteers who work across an international border in another country, or countries” (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008).

Another gap in the research is the impact that ISL experiences can have on adolescent well-being and development. However, there are a large number of high school students who spend time volunteering internationally. One may choose to volunteer internationally “to gain a broader perspective on the world, to contribute to society and help others, have an adventure, take a break from school or work, meet people and have fun, acquire skills, enhance a resume, or get a job” (Sherraden et al., 2008, p.399). In contrast, there are a plethora of research studies on the developmental outcomes of DSL and community service for high school youth. Service learning “embeds teaching and learning in a social context larger than the classroom” and has been found

to have positive effects on adolescent academic, personal, civic and social development (Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Simons & Cleary, 2006). “Building on earlier findings around positive outcomes associated with domestic service-learning, researchers are now interested in investigating the potential changes that students experience when service learning is combined with study abroad to create international service learning” (Gaines-Hanks & Grayman, 2009, p.74). This study will add to the existing literature by exploring the impact of ISL on high school student’s developmental outcomes (academic, personal, social, civic and cultural) by comparing the outcomes of students who participated in an ISL experience with those who engage in local community service.

PREVIEW



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **International Service Learning versus Domestic Service Learning**

Case study designs and qualitative analyses of student reflections have demonstrated that ISL programs have a transformative impact on individuals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; Kiely, 2005, Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). Transformational learning theory is a theoretical framework that has been used to describe the change that occurs as a result of ISL (Bamber, 2014; Bamber & Hankin; Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; 2005; Webster & Arends, 2012). Mezirow's (2000) conceptual framework poses that "learning requires examination of one's assumptions in relation to new knowledge, leading to reconstruction of meanings through reflection and dialogue that serves as the basis for action" (Crabtree, 2007, p. 27). Mezirow (1997) states that:

"Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—association, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses — frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences." (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

Kiely (2005) conducted a longitudinal qualitative case study analysis to explore whether Mezirow's theory on perspective transformation applied to ISL. She analyzed 22 college students' experiences on a month long ISL trip to Nicaragua through open-ended questionnaires, on-site observation, document analysis, and semi structured interviews with the same participants 3-5 years later. Each student displayed some form of perspective transformation on one of six dimensions: Political (social responsibility, local/global citizenship), Moral (mutual respect with

local culture), intellectual (question previous assumptions), cultural (rethink cultural values and norms), personal (rethink self-concept and personal choices), or spiritual (deeper understanding of self and greater good). In addition to the emerging transformative themes, Kiely highlights the complex nature of returning to the United States following such a transformative experience and the struggle participants confronted finding their place in society with new feelings of global consciousness. Overall, “the results of this study break new ground by confirming the existence of multiple forms of perspective transformation that result from participation in ISL” (Kiely, 2004, p. 17).

While transformation learning theory has been an effective framework for explaining the change in adults’ experiences as a result of ISL, it is a conceptual model meant for adult learning and does not necessarily apply to adolescents. In one noteworthy study, Wilcox (1998) assessed the impact of a program entitled International Youth Leadership Institute. The institute sent Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic high school students overseas to learn about international issues, develop leadership skills, experience a different culture and learn the local language. The program had many components similar to an ISL program structure. Wilcox (1998) evaluated the impact of this program by surveying students and conducting focus groups involving 109 fellows and alumni. One of the general constructs she assessed were the youths concept of adolescence. She found that most of the participants interviewed characterized the time they were on the trip as a period of “transition, growth, and self-discovery.” Many also noted that they were forming goals about life, exploring future career paths and experimenting with different personalities. Overall, the experience was “a time to engage in essential academic and social experiences that promoted their learning and growth” (Wilcox, 1998, p.4). While ISL programming may produce vast developmental changes among high school students, this study highlights the difference in developmental stages and provides evidence that adolescence may not be ready for the transformational learning that Mezirow is implying based on his research with adults.

The complexity of international service learning can produce tremendous growth opportunities for students as they confront the ambiguities of life presented in dissimilar cultures (Mather et al., 2012). “ISL exposes students in deep, transformative ways to culture and nations other than their own, resulting in a much richer understanding of the contexts in which a life of engaged citizenship must be carried out” (Brown, 2011, p. 57). Bringle and Hatcher (2011) refer to a phenomenon of ISL called the *intensification effect*. As mentioned above, because of the nascent stage of ISL research, they often pull from study abroad and service learning literature to predict outcomes. The researchers proposed that ISL intensifies the impact of study abroad and domestic service learning, to produce stronger learning outcomes in a variety of areas. These areas include those consistently documented in domestic service learning literature (social, personal and academic) but also outcomes related to intercultural skills, understanding of global issues, and greater transformation (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). More specifically, “cultural immersion is also considered a key ‘intensity factor’ that accentuates the outcomes of intercultural experiences” (Lough, 2011, p. 253).

Nickols et al., (2013) suggests that “ISL is an expansion of the learning processes available in domestic service learning” (Nickols et al., 2013, p. 98). To date, there have been very few studies that compare ISL to domestic service learning. In one noteworthy study however, Miller and Gonzalez (2010) compared teachers in training who engaged in a DSL teaching program and those who participated in an ISL program. All participants engaged in a pre-service program were enrolled in the same school, and both opportunities involved language development and literacy skills for school children. Those who were teaching in the local setting had classes comprised of culturally and ethnically diverse children and those in the international setting were based in China and had classes made up on Chinese children. The domestic service learning group taught in South California and was comprised of 81 females and 6 males. The ISL group was comprised of 4 males and 31 females. All participants completed the same pre and

post survey that measured civic, career and cultural outcomes via open and closed-ended questions.

Specific civic, cultural and personal outcomes will be discussed in more detail in a later section but there are some important findings related to the overall experience of both groups. First, 80% of ISL participants rated their overall experience as extremely positive compared to 20% of domestic participants. Second, both groups reported changes related to career outcomes such as teaching approaches, interest in working with different populations and career based skills but the groups differed in which areas changed and the ISL group experienced greater change in their perceived competence of treating different populations. Third, the ISL group reported cultural competency outcomes and personal development outcomes that were not found in the domestic service learning group. Overall, even though this study was somewhat limited due to the small sample size, it was unique in providing promising results for the positive outcomes of ISL when compared to DSL (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010).

Overall, there is a considerable amount that ISL can learn from previous research on DSL (Eyler, 2011). “Research on domestic service learning programs provides a solid base for future ISL research” (Eyler, 2011, p. 237). Experiential learning theory is one of the most frequently cited theories in the service learning literature (Conway et al., 2009; Eyler, 2011; Gershenson-Gates, 2012; Waldstein & Reiher, 2001). Experiential learning theory, first developed by Dewey (1938) and expanded by Kolb (1984), poses that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.38). The theory assumes that learners grasp concepts through experience and reflection which ultimately makes the ideas learned more personally meaningful (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning can take form in a variety of ways and can include: DSL, ISL, wilderness experiences, volunteer service, formal internships and more (Wessel, 2007). “Service learning should work because it supports the construction of knowledge through student reflection on experience, development of new conceptualization, and experimenting with the new conceptualization” (Conway et al., 2009, p.

233). Experiential learning theory can be considered as useful framework for understanding DSL and ISL outcomes.

### **Developmental Outcomes of Service Learning (Domestic & International)**

The following section provides a comprehensive overview of existing research related to the impact of DSL and ISL on developmental outcomes. Given the limited research conducted on ISL programs, the service learning research provides a foundation for understanding international service (Eyler, 2011). Developmental outcomes related to both types of programs will be discussed below. A few noteworthy meta-analyses have compiled service learning literature to explore different outcomes related to various types of programs, program variables (e.g., duration, intensity, age) and moderators. Common outcomes discussed have been school engagement, other school based variables (test scores, GPA, attendance), social competence and behavior, personal outcomes (self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept), civic outcomes and cultural outcomes (Billig, 2004; Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011; Conway et al., 2009; Yario & Ye, 2012).

Conway and colleague's (2009) meta-analysis encompasses a wide range of service learning programs. In addition to including programs that followed a traditional service learning model, they also included studies that evaluated volunteering and community service programs. Only 103 studies that used a pre- and posttest design, had identical measures at Time 1 and Time 2, had sufficient sample size, and provided adequate information about the measures were included. Overall, 19 studies (N = 1,195) assessed academic outcomes (Knowledge/GPA/grades, cognitive outcomes, academic motivation/ attitudes), 58 studies (N = 6,103) assessed personal outcomes (self-evaluation, volunteer motivation, moral development, alienation/deviance, well-being, career development), 37 studies (N = 3,271) assessed social outcomes (skill, understanding and tolerating diversity, beliefs/attitudes/knowledge toward people served and marginalized people in general) and 55 studies (N = 7,384) assessed citizenship outcomes (personally responsible, participatory, justice-oriented or a combination). The researchers also considered

moderators of reflection (defined by whether there was a reflection component as part of the program being evaluated) and intensity/duration (based on the length and hours of service).

Each outcome was evaluated based on effect size using Cohen's  $d$ . Academic, the highest among the four outcomes, had a moderate effect size ( $d = .43$ ) and was statistically significantly larger than personal and civic outcomes but not social. Personal ( $d = .21$ ), social ( $d = .28$ ) and citizenship ( $d = .17$ ) all had smaller effect sizes but social outcomes were statistically significantly larger than personal and citizenship. Overall, all four categories were shown to have a statistically significant positive change as a result of service learning. They also found that reflection played a significant role in predicting changes in personal, social and citizenship outcomes. Duration of the service did not produce stronger outcomes in any of the areas (Conway et al., 2009, p. 238). They also explored age and education level and the difference in social, personal and civic outcomes. Personal and social outcomes were higher for the K-12 age range when compared to higher education students or adults. Citizenship outcomes were stronger for higher education students and adults. Overall this compilation of studies provides valuable information related to the positive outcomes of service learning, specifically among grade school students and when reflection was included (Conway et al., 2009).

A meta-analysis conducted by Celio, Durlak and Dymnicki (2011) also measured personal, academic, social and civic outcomes however, inclusion criteria was much more strict. Studies conducted after 2008 that fit the definition of service learning (meaning an academic curriculum supplemented the service activity), involved students in postsecondary education or younger, had a control group, contained enough information to calculate effect size, and the main goal of the study was to evaluate service learning were included in the analysis. The overall analysis included 62 separate programs that involved 11,837 students. The researches considered participation features (grade, ethnicity, SES), program features (link to curriculum, youth voice, community involvement, and reflection), and outcome features (attitude toward self, attitude toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skill and academic achievement). Similar to

Conway's (2009) findings, the five outcomes examined had a statistically significant impact, with effect sizes ranging from .27 - .43. Again, academic achievement produced the highest influence, meaning that when compared to the other four groups, academic outcomes had the highest effect size (.43). When they accounted for characteristics that define domestic SL programs, they found when at least one of the four program features was included (listed above), there were significantly greater outcomes than when service learning programs did not have any of those features. When the program included a link to the curriculum, youth voice, community involvement and reflection, the mean effect size for overall outcomes was .33 compared to a mean effect size of .17 when there was none. "These findings bolster the views of educators who posit that service learning programs can benefit students at different education levels in several ways" (Celio et al., 2011, p. 175).

#### Academic

Academic outcomes of service learning have included: retention, attendance, grades, engagement, test scores, GPA and other intellectual skills. As discussed above, while there is a dearth of literature on how academic outcomes are influenced by ISL, there are a wide number of studies that demonstrate the significant impact DSL can have on academic outcomes. In fact, the academic outcomes are the most robust finding in DSL literature (Billig, 2004, Gallini & Moley, 2003; Scales et al., 2006; Schmidt et al., 2012).

Scales et al. (2006) conducted a study that examined the academic impacts of service learning. Furthermore, they aimed to determine if SES predicted academic outcomes and if length of service plays a role in the outcome. Their sample included 217,000 students from 1,799 schools in grades 6-12 across the United States. Each student was administered the Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior Survey (PSL-AB), which measured developmental assets (e.g. empowerment, positive identity, social competence), risk behavior patterns (e.g. substance use, sexual activity), developmental deficits (e.g. violence, TV behavior) and thriving behaviors (e.g. success at school, good health). The impact of service learning was measured by asking

school principals' their perceptions of how service learning impacted various academic outcomes, social development and their school climate. They were asked to rate these outcomes as "very positive impact," "somewhat positive impact" or "little to no positive impact." Poverty was measured based on the number of students that received free or reduced lunch. Academic outcomes included: attendance, grade and commitment to learning (defined as achievement motivation and school engagement assessed by items from the PSL-AB).

Results showed that the principals of urban, high poverty schools were more likely to judge service learning as having a higher impact on academic outcomes. However, all school principals, regardless of school type, were likely to report that service learning had a positive impact on academics and school climate. On an individual level, students who did not engage in community service had lower scores in the realm of achievement motivation, school engagement, bonding to school, homework and reading for pleasure. Overall, the results of this study not only demonstrated the positive academic engagement outcomes of service learning but the benefits for urban, majority non-white, and high poverty schools (Scales et al., 2006).

Gallini and Moely (2003) hypothesized that students enrolled in a service learning course on a college campus would score higher on an academic engagement scale, rate their classes as more challenging, and have a higher rate of retention. This hypothesis was tested by administering a survey to 333 students at the end of a semester. Half of the students were enrolled in a service learning course and the other half were not. Academic engagement was operationalized through a 12 item self-report scale with items like "I have come to feel more connected to my studies," or "I feel positive about the quality of instruction at this university." To assess academic challenge, participants rated the course they took in terms of intellectual challenge, extent of learning and difficulty. To assess retention, students responded to three questions about their likelihood to continue on in the university as a result of the service learning course. (Community engagement and interpersonal engagement were assessed as well.) Service learning participants scored higher on all five of the measures than non-service learning