

## **The role of international service learning in facilitating undergraduate students' self-exploration**

\*Min Yang<sup>a</sup>, Lillian Luk<sup>b</sup>, Beverley Joyce Webster<sup>c</sup>, Albert Chau<sup>d</sup>, and Carol Ma<sup>e</sup>

*<sup>a</sup>Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong, PRC*

*<sup>b</sup>Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, PRC*

*<sup>c</sup>Vice President Academic, RMIT University Vietnam, Vietnam*

*<sup>d</sup>Centre of Development and Resources for Students, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, PRC*

*<sup>e</sup>Service Learning Office, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, PRC*

Date of submission: 20 July 2015

---

\*Corresponding author. Email: myang@ied.edu.hk

# **The role of international service learning in supporting undergraduate students' self-exploration**

This paper examines the role of international service learning (ISL) in facilitating undergraduate students' exploration of their conception of self - the use of specific values and beliefs to define one's role in society and relationships with others. ISL is intentionally structured activities involving students in social services for community members in overseas settings. Existing research underscores the importance of inducting students to other-oriented (showing care and empathy for others) values in facilitating students' self-exploration. In this paper, students' development of other-oriented values in the moral, cultural and leadership domains are considered in the context of ISL experiences. Findings from interviews conducted with 48 Hong Kong students suggest the need for students to exercise critical reflection and perspective taking when engaged in ISL experiences, which facilitated their incorporation of other-oriented values into their conception of self. Implications for service learning practitioners to support students' self-exploration in ISL are proposed.

Keywords: international service learning, self-exploration, moral values, cultural values, leadership values, undergraduate students

## **Introduction**

The undergraduate years are critical for students' transition from adolescence to adulthood, during which they engage in an on-going process of self-exploration that continue to shape their conception of self (Cox & McAdams, 2012; Damon, 2004).

Conception of self can be defined as the use of specific values to define one's role in a social/cultural group or organisation and in society generally and to choose current course of action and future commitments according to such values (Jones & Abes, 2004). Past research suggests that participation in social services organised by educational institutions, NGOs, and other social organisations plays an important role in students' development of service-related values, such as altruism and care for others, which become integral to their conception of self. Seider's (2010) longitudinal research, for example, demonstrated how

a group of Harvard University students became committed to long-term social services (e.g. choosing a career of working in an NGO) as a result of running a kitchen for homeless people. One way for students to gain experiences of social service participation is through *international service learning (ISL)* (Lough, 2011; Mather, Karbley, & Yamamoto, 2012). This paper sets out to examine the role of ISL in facilitating students' self-exploration for constructing their conception of self.

*Service learning* refers to intentionally structured activities that engage students in social services to solve problems encountered by community members while developing students' values, beliefs, attitudes and competences required for service participation (Furco, 2003). Such problems range from educational and social issues, through health care and economic development issues, to human rights and environmental issues. *ISL* is a form of service learning that engage students with community members who are recipients of students' social services in overseas settings (King, 2004; Mather, et al., 2012). The uniqueness of ISL lies in its affordance of intercultural learning opportunities by exposing students to community members' customs, beliefs, behavioral norms and communication patterns. Such opportunities may enhance students' understanding of the community members' culture and their own culture and increase their competences of communicating with the community members (Mather, et al., 2012). Moreover, ISL experiences can potentially challenge students' presuppositions about community members' culture; the resulting dissonance in students' intercultural understanding can, in turn, stimulate students' self-reflection on the values and meanings that they attach to ISL experiences (King, 2004).

This paper reports on a qualitative study situated in two Hong Kong higher education institutions. Data were obtained from interviews with 48 undergraduate students at the two institutions in order to explore students' conceptions of self as a result of ISL

experiences. The data were critically examined in order to draw out implications for pedagogic support that students may need as they engage in self-exploration through ISL. Previous relevant studies have been conducted in Western countries mainly (e.g. Mather, et al., 2012). The current paper contributes to the field by investigating undergraduate students' self-exploratory experiences through ISL in Asia, an original research context for investigating this topic.

### **Characteristics of ISL**

Three key characteristics can be identified regarding ISL for undergraduate students. First, like other forms of service learning such as community involvement in academic courses, ISL presupposes students' *moral intention* for taking part in service activities, namely the objective to promote the betterment of the condition of community members' lives by solving social problems (King, 2004). ISL also emphasises *reciprocity between community members and students*: while community members receive service that meets their needs, students acquire service-related values, beliefs, attitudes and competences that assist in their learning and development (Lies, Bock, Brandenberger, & Trozzolo, 2012). It is a recurring theme in the literature that some students come to recognise their moral obligation to help others in need as a result of realising their own socio-economic and cultural privilege compared to community members (Cox & McAdams, 2012).

Nonetheless researchers raise caution against certain students' possible reinforced prejudice toward community members (Erickson & O'Connor, 2000), which points to the need to provide students with support in moral values clarification, to which the current paper aims to contribute.

The second characteristic of ISL, as explicated earlier, is the exposure of students to *intercultural learning experiences*, which aid in their intercultural understanding and

communication (Yang, Webster, & Prosser, 2011). An essential part of such experiences is students' unlearning of their previously-held cultural misconceptions; stereotypical cultural beliefs may often arise from students' memberships in predominant social or cultural/ethnic groups (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Studies in ISL indicate that individuals' commitment to the common good of community members from different social and/or cultural backgrounds than one's own stems from a sense of being emotionally related to community members (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010), often following prolonged intercultural contact with community members (Antonio, 2001; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Understanding how intercultural learning experiences in ISL can facilitate students' sensitivity to, and empathy with, community members' cultural traditions and customs (Bennett, 2008) is an important objective of the current paper.

The third characteristic of ISL relates to the *peer-group based feature of ISL activities* (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010), which entails some students playing leadership roles while others collaborating closely with peers to fulfil service tasks. It is also not rare that student leaders (students holding office in student associations) actively seek collaboration with academics and student affairs officers in promoting service initiatives (King, 2004). Although previous studies offer considerable evidence on how service learning supports students' development of leadership skills and attributes (Litzky, Godshalk, & Walton-Bongers, 2010), to date limited studies (e.g. Seider, 2010) have concentrated on how service learning – and ISL specifically – influences students' conception of self as leaders who promote and uphold long-term benefits for community members and their peers as well, which is an area into which this paper aims to probe.

### **Values associated with ISL**

Given the aforementioned three characteristics of ISL, for students to serve and act effectively in ISL they need to incorporate relevant values into their conception of self.

Such values may include: (1) *altruistic moral values* – a willingness to care and help members of disadvantaged social groups (Hart, 2005); (2) *multicultural values* – empathy with members of other cultural groups and sensitive adaptation to their cultural beliefs and behaviours in social interactions (Gurin, et al., 2002); and (3) *transformative leadership values* – a willingness to lead and/or work with others in a team toward shared visions and objectives (Seider, 2010). It may be argued that these values are essentially *other-oriented*, expressing a sense of care for and empathy with community members (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001). The above is not inclusive of all the values to which students may be exposed in service participation; and other values, for instance aesthetic values and professional values, are equally important for students' self-exploratory development. For the purpose of this paper the above three categories of values are explored in relation to students' self-exploration experiences through ISL.

While moral and cultural values have been discussed in detail, transformative leadership values merits some elaboration. A notion borrowed from organizational research, transformative leadership (as opposed to transactional leadership) is a form of productive leadership characterized with the leader acting according to one's values, leading by shared visions, and catering to others' interests (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Carroll & Levy, 2010). In ISL settings it is reasonable to expect transformative leadership values to be geared toward the betterment of conditions for community members and the society as a whole.

### **Research context**

At Hong Kong higher education institutions there has been a considerable increase in the provision of service learning programmes, some of which send students to overseas communities exposing them to a variety of ISL situations (Ma, Chan, & Chan, 2013). The growing attention to service learning is a response to Hong Kong's recent undergraduate

curriculum reform aiming to nurture students' all-round capabilities and sense of social responsibilities (University Grants Committee, 2004). The two institutions under study are a comprehensive research university and a liberal arts university, labelled here as University X and University Y. At the two institutions ISL programmes are offered by student affairs office and service learning office respectively in collaboration with academic departments and/or student associations.

### **Methodology**

The study described in this paper is informed by a phenomenographic perspective (Marton, 2000). Phenomenographic researchers have found qualitative differences or variations in individuals' understandings: while some individuals see the various aspects of a phenomenon as an interrelated whole, others are only aware of fragmented parts of the phenomenon; the former understanding is more complex and coherent than the latter. The methodology requires the researchers to engage empathetically in students' lifeworlds (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). This is achieved in the current study by the researchers' self-inspection and setting aside personal understandings and theoretical interpretations (Trigwell, 2000) about students' self-exploration through ISL.

### ***Data collection***

The study involved 12 individual interviews and 10 group interviews with 48 full-time undergraduate students from the disciplines of arts, business, social sciences, law, science, and engineering at the two institutions. Students who were unable to attend group interviews were interviewed individually. The students were from various origins, including Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland, Japan, India, Canada, and Sweden. The interviews were conducted in English, Cantonese or Mandarin depending on students' preferences, and were transcribed verbatim into English. To enhance trustworthiness of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994), all transcripts were emailed to students for member

checking.

The data encompass students' experiences in 10 ISL projects undertaken by 7 project teams (information about the projects and interviews is presented in Appendix 1). The students quoted in the Findings section were coded anonymously according to their teams' labels (e.g. A1 was a participant of Team A). The projects' objectives ranged from education for children/youth, advocacy for environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, to rural development. The projects' service trip destinations included Thailand, Indonesia, Mainland China, Ghana, and Denmark. Just two projects were organized by university, while the remaining eight projects were organized by five student voluntary groups with the support of university funding. Student-initiated projects entailed the service team leaders to assume greater responsibilities than in staff-organised projects. Similar to staff-organized projects, funding schemes for student-initiated projects typically required project teams to specify service and learning goals as well as evaluate service and learning outcomes for community members and students. Fifteen students took leadership positions in their teams, such as planning service activities, managing resources, recruiting group members, liaising with student affairs / service learning offices and community organisations.

A semi-structured interview protocol was employed to tap into students' self-exploration through ISL experiences:

1. What were students' prior service experiences and reasons for joining the project?
2. What were their role and tasks and how did they collaborate with others in the project team?
3. What were their everyday activities in the service site?
4. What were their relationships with others (peers, community members, and university / community organization staff) like?
5. What was the impact of the project on community members and themselves and how might such impact be sustained?

6. What were their future plans for service participation?

A constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) was employed, so that emergent issues or themes from initial interviews were followed up in subsequent interviews, which made the interviews constantly responsive to ISL situations experienced by students.

***Data analysis***

The transcripts were treated as a collective data pool in identifying the qualitative differences in students' conceptions of self as a result of their ISL experiences (Trigwell, 2000). In the analysis, two researchers independently coded a sub-set of the transcripts with marginal notes, from which initial categories were generated to capture the meanings that students gave to their experiences. The researchers then discussed these initial categories, subsequently creating a set of codes for analyzing the remaining transcripts. The codes were derived by describing each category with a short phrase, such as 'care for community members'. Once the coding was complete, the initial categories were further synthesized into a set of three categories with which to describe the qualitative differences in students' conceptions of self. The resulting categories were arranged in a hierarchical order, representing the levels of coherence of students' understandings.

**Findings: qualitative differences in students' conceptions of self**

In accordance with the critical literature review students' conceptions of self were analysed in three aspects, namely the *moral, cultural, and leadership domains*. *The moral domain* was examined in terms of whether and how students used altruistic values to define their role in ISL activities. *The cultural domain* was explored in terms of how students experienced social interactions and relationships with community members. Lastly, *the leadership domain* was analyzed regarding how students perceived the

leadership role of themselves, peers, and influential others in ISL activities. All students were included in the analysis of the leadership domain, since previous research indicates that youth tend to perceive leadership as available to anyone, not those with leadership positions (Mortensen, et al., 2014).

The three categories of qualitatively different conceptions of self that emerged from the analysis are as follows:

- Conception A: *Transactional – present oriented*
- Conception B: *Transformational – present oriented*
- Conception C: *Transformational – future oriented*

The remainder of this section presents a detailed analysis of each category with selected student narratives illustrating the qualitative differences between the three types of conception of self. A summary of the key aspects of each conception is presented in Appendix 2.

### ***Conception A: Transactional – present oriented***

This conception captures a one-way transmissive manner of experiencing service and social relationships and viewing the roles of community members, team leaders, members and influential others in delivering service. Students expressing such a conception generally demonstrated altruistic values, positive attitudes toward the cultural exposure in the community, and a willingness to work with others for community changes.

Nonetheless they perceived community members as passive recipients of their service, showed limited sensitivity to, and empathy with, community members' cultural customs, and did not consider service to be integral to their conception of who they were. They also experienced a hierarchical relationship with peers and influential others and rarely considered how to extend the impact of their service beyond their current project. The

majority of the quotes discussed below were selected from interviews with members of ISL project teams; the exceptions are two quotes from D1 who was a team leader.

The following quote illustrates students' positive attitude toward service participation, which was however mixed with an instrumental perspective on service participation as a means to meet one's personal needs.

We just thought that setting up a service team could be a good thing, because our members can have some new experiences for their résumé for future employment and see Africa's scenery and cultures, while helping local people at the same time. [D1]

The students expressing this conception focused mainly on current service tasks and rarely discussed how to carry their service forward, implying that they showed no intention for future commitment to service.

I may visit this country (Ghana) again but will not join service next time. The other reasons for doing service are improving myself and knowing more about other countries and their cultures. [C2]

Students with this conception reported their knowledge learned about the culture in the overseas community and the privilege they felt about their material resources at home, showing that they had started to engage in self-reflection on cultural differences between themselves and community members.

I've got a lot of good teachers, photocopiers, and a lot of other resources (back in Hong Kong). Compared with the students in Thailand, I'm fortunate and I shouldn't have taken it for granted. [B4]

On the other hand, they expressed a somewhat superficial understanding about the local culture and showed limited empathy with community members' lifestyles and cultural customs.

In Ghana people have abundant resources and raw materials and agricultures and they do not have winter. *So they do not feel the urge to work...* [D1]

The students also tended to experience hierarchical relationships with others. The roles of leaders and members in their service team and influential others (e.g. NGO staff members) seemed clear-cut in their eyes: team members were not supposed to have a role in decision-making; and team leaders in turn had to accept influential others' advice or decisions.

Without a team leader, we (team members) would not know or understanding the things we were working on. He could coordinate with the NGO staff and tell us our duties... I didn't communicate much with the NGO people, 'cause it was the leader's responsibility to communicate with them. [C2]

We (team leaders) asked them (NGO staff) whenever we didn't understand the situation. Jane and Sue (NGO staff) would make a final decision for our plans and actions. [G4]

To sum up, Conception A remains limited in both coherence and complexity regarding how students integrated relevant moral, cultural and leadership values necessary for self-exploration through ISL. It should be noted, however, that students with this conception of self possessed a number of valuable qualities, such as appreciation of community members' cultures, and willingness to work with others, that are conducive to their self-exploration.

### ***Conception B: Transformational – present oriented***

This conception represents a two-way interactive manner of perceiving the impact of service and social relationships in ISL, as well as the roles played community members, students, and influential others respectively. Students in this category critically reflected on cultural differences and experienced a warm relationship with community members.

They considered it important to build peers' capacity to serve and to involve all team members in decision-making. Influential others were seen as mentors assisting in their capacity building and decision-making in performing service tasks. They lacked, however, a vision of enhancing community members' own capacity to sustain community development. In the quotes presented below, some were taken from team leaders (D1 and D2) and the rest were from team members of various projects.

The following quotes indicate how students with this conception perceived service participation as a way to change the community and showed a considerable level of commitment to service.

By interacting and playing with village school pupils, we wanted them to have a better understanding of the wider world, to know they should learn more. For the world is not confined to their village. [G1]

In the short two weeks, we taught the village children health care such as hand washing. Maybe such habits can last. We also taught them some English words and phrases. The most important thing was to trigger their interest in learning English. [G2]

The quote below showed these students' critically reflection on their cultural differences compared with community members and their warm relationship with community members.

After living in Ghana for some time, I started to understand the life of the locals and their modes of thinking and started to think of the reasons behind it. [C6]

Their living condition in the village was poor and had few choices about their ways of living. Although we have more choices, we are less happy. They are much happier although they live a hard life. It makes me think about the way I'd like to go in the future. [G4]

The quote below shows that these students experienced shared leadership and horizontal relationships in their team, which echoes Mortensen and associates' (2014) findings of adolescents' understanding of leadership among peers.

We asked our group mates' opinions first and did what the majority voted for. I would treat NGO staff as senior friends; they were more experienced than us. The NGO staff took care of us; and we had a harmonious relationship. We would discuss the arrangements together. [D2]

I think cooperating with local NGOs was appropriate, because we did not have in-depth knowledge about the local situation. They planned tasks, while we mainly made adjustments, since they knew better what kinds of activities might bring about positive outcomes. [D1]

Compared with Conception A, students who expressed Conception B were more able to articulate self-reflective and empathetic views about cultural differences and were more committed to meeting community members' needs. They also shared a participatory view on leadership that is congruent with transformative leadership values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Nonetheless, they did not articulate a forward-looking view on maintaining the impact of service beyond their current project.

### ***Conception C: Transformational – future oriented***

Similar to Conception B, Conception C represents a two-way interactive manner of perceiving the impact of service, social relationships, as well as the roles played by community members, students and influential others. Students in this category went beyond a mere present focus by building fellow students' and community members' capacity to sustain long-term community development. They tended to express an emotional attachment to community members and had horizontal relationships within their team. They also forged strategic partnerships with influential others in promoting positive

community changes.

Similar to students whose conception of self fell into Conception B, those who held Conception C showed a strong sense of being committed to service.

Actually, we can't say our contribution was great, but we hoped to help them (local teachers of English) to think from a different point of view in their teaching. When we were teaching, we sang songs, watched short films and gave students oral practices, and the teachers would pick up these alternative methods for their teaching. [A1]

Students in this category went further than those who held Conception B by showing a strong sense of emotional attachment to community members, so that their friendships with community members became an essential part of their conception of self.

Thailand is like my second hometown. ...My relationship with the young refugee (at the border of Burma and Thailand) is so close and it would be a pity if I could not visit them anymore. [B3]

When I went back, we stayed in the (refugee) camp with the kids; and we sat all night and sang songs. That's a lot of fun... I went back in December and stayed in the camp with the kids. And I went back in summer with Kitty (a member of her team). We had a surprised birthday party with the kids. We watched a movie at night. It was a lot of fun. [B2]

For these students, the relationships between team leaders and members and between students and influential others were mutually supportive.

One of our roles (as team leaders) was helping our peers (team members) to see things differently. [F4] If they want to do it (a service task), they just sign up to it ... [F1] They actually come to meetings on the issues they are interested in. [F2]

Distinctively their service engagement had a future orientation with a view to achieve sustainable community changes. They did so by seeking close partnerships with

influential others and by building their peers' and community members' capacity for long-term community development.

We have very few resources, but we want to have the biggest impact, so we teach (English) teachers and hope that the teachers would then teach the students. [A1]

I think the most important thing is sustainability; like if we donate money to them, we shouldn't just make one-off donations. We have to make it sustainable or we should help the community members self-sustain. [Student B5]

The crucial thing is to find a way of generating funds from different sources to make sure the children (suffering from AIDS) will get their medicines and school fees. That's the sustainable goal; that's how you can measure our success. [C9]

In summary, Conception C is the most complex and coherent among the three conceptions, since all aspects of students' conception of self were aligned to a sense of care for community members. Similar to Conception B, students with Conception C demonstrated commitment to service, empathy with community members, and critical reflection on the impact of their service on community members' lives. However, they went beyond the qualities of Conception B by making efforts to sustain the long-term impact of service on community members' lives through collaboration with community members, peers, and influential others.

Interestingly, all the quotes in this category are taken from team leaders' interviews, implying that students with leadership responsibilities were more likely than others to hold this conception. A possible explanation is that the majority of the team leaders had one year or longer experiences of service participation, while most team members were first-time service participants. This coincides with previous finding that long-term service participation can assist students' integration of other-oriented values into the self and strengthen their commitment to service (Seider, 2010). This temporal

aspect would be interesting to explore in future research into student leadership development in ISL.

It should be noted that the distinctions made between the three categories serve to analyse the qualitative differences in students' conceptions of self. Such distinctions in students' self-exploration experiences are, nevertheless, not clear cut (Trigwell, 2000). Although most aspects of a student's conception may be classified into one category, certain other aspects may fall into another category. For example, student C8, a leader of Project C, demonstrated a mixture of characteristics in Conceptions A and B. He prioritized service tasks and experienced a friendly relationship with the locals (Conception B), although he experienced a hierarchical relationship with NGO staff (Conception A):

All our wants like travelling around, visiting local markets etc., should not be prioritized. We went there (in Ghana) to serve, to do something good by helping others to help themselves... We were always close to our host family, watching TV and played cards together. Our relationship with the NGO staff was good but a little bit distant. When talking to them, I felt as if I was talking to our bosses. [C8]

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The preceding section reports on the findings regarding the qualitatively different conceptions of self among students as a result of their ISL experiences, which include: Conception A. *Transactional – present oriented*; Conception B. *Transformational – present oriented*; and Conception C. *Transformational – future oriented*. The analysis of interview data shows that these conceptions are hierarchical, with the more coherent and complex conceptions encompassing the qualities of the less coherent and complex ones. Based on the findings, four main conclusions can be drawn regarding the undergraduate students' self-exploratory experiences in ISL.

First of all, the findings provide evidence that ISL is capable of inducting students to altruistic values, educating them to appreciate the cultural differences between different cultural and ethnic groups, and enabling them to collaborate with peers and others toward positive community changes. These qualities were displayed by most students in the current study. Notwithstanding these positive effects of ISL, the qualitative differences in the students' conceptions of self (e.g. some students' instrumental use of ISL experiences to enhance their CVs), alert service learning practitioners to the need for a balanced approach to cultivating students' characters and values on the one hand, and equipping them with skills for future professional work on the other hand (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001).

Secondly, students' moral, cultural and leadership values were closely related, because students expressed their values in these aspects in a generally consistent manner (c.f. Jones & Abes, 2004). In the context of ISL particularly, these values are centred on the care and help for culturally diverse community members (Seider, 2010). Hence service learning practitioners may give students guidance in critically reflecting on their values in relation to ISL experiences using such critical self-reflection tasks as regular group debriefing and reflective journal writing (Lough, 2011), which are probably more effective than formal workshops on relevant knowledge and skills (Antonio, 2001).

Thirdly, in view of the qualitative differences in students' ability to empathise and establish mutually trusting relationships with culturally diverse community members, service learning practitioners should not only put students in frequent contact with community members through ISL activities, but should also educate them to understand and respect community members' customs and cultural beliefs and behaviours, including the historical roots of their socio-economic and political conditions (Gurin, et al., 2002).

Last but not least, given the finding that those students holding Conception C – the most coherent and complex conception of self – were mostly student leaders in this study, it is likely that taking a leadership role in service teams is conducive to students' self-

exploration through ISL. It would require further research to explicate the dynamics and processes of how ISL facilitates self-exploration among students, particularly those student leaders who strive to sustain the benefits of service for community members and their peers as well (Seider, 2010). Quantitative methodologies such as surveys (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010), and qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory (Komives, Mainella, Longorbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006), phenomenology (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005), and narrative inquiry (Cox & McAdams, 2012) may be employed flexibly to provide a holistic picture of how students construct the conception of themselves as leaders in the ISL context.

In conclusion, students' self-exploratory experiences through ISL experiences have attracted researchers' attention in recent years (Cox & McAdams, 2012; Mather, et al., 2012). The findings of the current paper show that ISL has potential for supporting students' self-exploration by giving them opportunities to incorporate service-related moral, cultural and leadership values into the self through service participation. Another important implication of the findings is the necessity to entrust students with leadership responsibilities in serving culturally diverse community members (Seider, 2010). By raising fundamental issues for service learning practitioners and posing new questions for future research, this paper adds to our existing knowledge about how ISL can facilitate students' effective self-exploration in higher education.

### **References:**

- Antonio, A. L. (2001). The role of interracial interaction in the development of leadership skills and cultural knowledge and understanding. *Research in Higher Education*, 42(5), 593-617.
- Ashworth, P., & Lucas, U. (2000). Achieving empathy and engagement: A practical approach to the design, conduct and reporting of phenomenographic research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(3), 295-308.
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181-217.
- Bennett, J. M. (2008). On becoming a global soul: A path to engagement during study abroad. In V. Savicki (Ed.), *Developing Intercultural Competence and*

- Transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education* (pp. 13-31). Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Carroll, B., & Levy, L. (2010). Leadership development as identity construction. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24(2), 211-231.
- Cox, K., & McAdams, D. P. (2012). The transforming self: Service narratives and identity change in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 27(1), 18-43.
- Damon, W. (2004). What is positive youth development? *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591(1), 13-24.
- Erickson, J. A., & O'Connor, S. E. (2000). Service-learning: Does it promote or reduce prejudice? In C. R. O'Grady (Ed.), *Integrating service learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities* (pp. 59-70). Mahwah, N.J. ; London: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Furco, A. (2003). Issues of definition and programme diversity in the study of service-learning. In S. H. Billig & A. S. Waterman (Eds.), *Studying service learning: Innovations in educational research methodology* (pp. 13-34). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1999). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (2nd ed.). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 330-367.
- Hart, D. (2005). The development of moral identity. In G. Carlo & C. P. Edwards (Eds.), *Moral motivation through the life span* (pp. 165-196). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2004). Enduring influences of service-learning on college students' identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 149-166.
- Kezar, A., & Rhoads, R. A. (2001). The dynamic tensions of service learning in higher education: A philosophical perspective. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 72(2), 148-171.
- King, J. T. (2004). Service-learning as a site for critical pedagogy: A case of collaboration, caring, and defamiliarization across borders. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 26(3), 121-137.
- Komives, S. R., Mainella, F. C., Longenbeam, S. D., Osteen, L., & Owen, J. E. (2006). A leadership identity development model: Applications from a grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(4), 401-418.
- Lies, J. M., Bock, T., Brandenberger, J., & Trozzolo, T. A. (2012). The effects of off-campus service learning on the moral reasoning of college students. *Journal of Moral Education*, 41(2), 189-199.
- Litzky, B. E., Godshalk, V. M., & Walton-Bongers, C. (2010). Social entrepreneurship and community leadership: A service-learning model for management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 34(1), 142.
- Logue, C. T., Hutchens, T. A., & Hector, M. A. (2005). Student leadership: A phenomenological exploration of postsecondary experiences. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 393-408.
- Lough, B. J. (2011). International volunteers' perceptions of intercultural competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(4), 452-464.
- Ma, C., Chan, C. M., & Chan, A. (2013). A Hong Kong University First : Establishing service-learning as an academic credit-bearing subject. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* 6, 178-198.

- Marton, F. (2000). The structure of awareness, eds. Phenomonography. In J. A. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), (pp. 102-116). Melbourne: RMIT University Press.
- Mather, P. C., Karbley, M., & Yamamoto, M. (2012). Identity matters in a short-term, international service-learning program. *Journal of College and Character*, 13(1), 1-14.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Miller, K. K., & Gonzalez, A. M. (2010). Domestic and international service learning experiences: A comparative study of pre-service teacher outcomes. [Article]. *Issues in Educational Research*, 20(1), 29-38.
- Mortensen, J., Lichty, L., Foster-Fishman, P., Harfst, S., Hockin, S., Warsinske, K., et al. (2014). Leadership through a youth lens: Understanding youth conceptualisation of leadership. [Article]. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(4), 447-462.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2011). *When groups meet: The dynamics of intergroup contact*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Seider, S. (2010). *Shelter: Where Harvard meets the homeless*. London: London: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Trigwell, K. (2000). A phenomenographic interview on phenomonography. In J. A. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 62-82). Melbourne: RMIT University Press.
- University Grants Committee. (2004). Hong Kong higher education: To make a difference, to move with the times Retrieved February 11, 2009, from [http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/ugc/publication/report/policy\\_document\\_e.pdf](http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/ugc/publication/report/policy_document_e.pdf)
- Yang, M., Webster, B., & Prosser, M. (2011). Travelling a thousand miles: Hong Kong Chinese students' study abroad experience. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(1), 69-78.

**Appendix 1 Information on participants' ISL projects and their interviews**

<b>Project teams</b>	<b>Organizers</b>	<b>Project objectives</b>	<b>Destinations</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Language of interviews</b>
<b>Projects undertaken by students in University X</b>					
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteer group</li> </ul>	Two projects in villages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing teaching development for English and IT teachers</li> <li>• Promoting cultural awareness among ethnic minority youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both in Yunnan, Mainland China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One individual interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese (spoken by local Chinese students from Hong Kong)</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic staff members</li> </ul>	Two projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching English to young people in refugee camps at the border of Thailand and Burma</li> <li>• Teaching English to school pupils in an earthquake affected village</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mae Sot, Thailand</li> <li>• Sichuan, Mainland China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four individual interviews</li> <li>• One group interview with 2 students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese or English (the latter was spoken by non-Chinese students)</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteer group</li> </ul>	One project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting sexual assault prevention workshops for junior high school pupils in a suburban district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kumasi, Ghana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 individual interviews with 9 students (2 students were interviewed twice)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese or English</li> </ul>
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteer group</li> </ul>	Two projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting agricultural development (via community banking) in villages</li> <li>• Teaching young people computer skills in villages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wa, Ghana</li> <li>• Hainan, Mainland China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One individual interview</li> <li>• Two group interviews with 7 students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putonghua (spoken by students from Mainland China)</li> </ul>
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteer group</li> </ul>	One project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental protection advocacy at an international conference on climate change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copenhagen, Denmark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One group interview with 3 students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese</li> </ul>
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteer group</li> </ul>	One project with two sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to school pupils in earthquake affected areas</li> <li>• cultural exchanges with villagers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Sumatra, Indonesia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One individual interview</li> <li>• One group interview with 4 students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese or English</li> </ul>
<b>Project undertaken by students in University Y</b>					
G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service learning office</li> </ul>	One project with two sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching village school pupils subjects such as health care and English in villages</li> <li>• Investigating rural economic development issues in villages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yunnan, Mainland China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three group interviews with a total of 17 students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cantonese or Putonghua</li> </ul>
Total	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eight student-initiated projects</li> <li>• Two staff-organized projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ten projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five projects in Mainland China</li> <li>• Two projects in South Asia</li> <li>• Two projects in Africa</li> <li>• One project in Europe</li> </ul>	48 students interviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twelve individual interviews</li> <li>• Ten group interviews</li> </ul>	

**Appendix 2 Students' conception of self in moral, cultural and leadership domains**

	<b><u>Conception A</u></b> <b>Transactional – present oriented</b>	<b><u>Conception B</u></b> <b>Transformational – present oriented</b>	<b><u>Conception C</u></b> <b>Transformational – future oriented</b>
<b>1. Moral domain</b>  <i>How students understood the self in relation to service activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service was experienced as external to one's identity – it was seen merely as a means of enhancing one's capabilities and CV.</li> <li>• Service was considered a way to change the community; i.e. something done by students to community members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service was experienced as an integral part of one's identity.</li> <li>• Service was perceived as a way to change the community.</li> <li>• Enhancing students' capabilities was considered important for enlarging the impact of service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service was experienced as an integral part of one's identity.</li> <li>• Service was seen as a way to change the community in a sustainable manner.</li> <li>• Enhancing students' and community members' capabilities was believed to be important for enlarging the impact of service.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Moral and cultural domains</b>  <i>How students understood the self in relation to community members</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members' lifestyle and culture reminded students of their own privileges and were seen as a possible source of social problems.</li> <li>• Inadequate interactions with community members giving rise to occasional doubt about community members' competence and credibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members' lifestyle inspired students' reflections about their own values and preconceptions about local cultures.</li> <li>• A warm and trusting relationship with community members was experienced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong emotional bond with community members was experienced and sustained.</li> <li>• Such an emotional tie gave rise to a personal meaning about doing service.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Cultural and leadership domains</b>  <i>How students understood the self in relation to peers in their service team</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team was seen as hierarchical.</li> <li>• Leaders were viewed as responsible for key decisions.</li> <li>• Insensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity and lack of transparency in communication led to occasional suspicion of peers' competence and credibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team was seen as horizontal.</li> <li>• Leaders were seen as responsible for key decisions, while team members also participated in certain decision making.</li> <li>• Cultural differences among peers were bridged by mutual care and the use of a common language such as English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team was viewed as horizontal.</li> <li>• Leaders viewed it important to facilitate peers' growth as potential co-leaders in service.</li> <li>• Team members viewed leaders as co-workers sharing similar vision and values.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Leadership domain</b>  <i>How students understood the self in relation to influential others (e.g. community organization / university staff)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential others were viewed as experts whose advice should be followed regarding the team's capacity building and decision making.</li> <li>• Inadequate interactions between students and influential others led to occasional suspicion of the competence and credibility of influential others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential others were seen as mentors who assisted.</li> <li>• Influential others did not dominate the team's capacity building and decision making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential others were seen as mentors and partners in service.</li> <li>• The team elicited support from influential others in enlarging their capacity, resources and social networks, and optimizing their strategies.</li> </ul>