
A Habitat for Humanity and University Partnership: Enhancing International Experiential Learning in El Salvador

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ABSTRACT: The increase in *international experiential learning* (IEL hereafter) opportunities being developed by universities in the global north requires more attention both generally and with regards to specific IEL programming objectives. This paper provides observations and assessment of a case study of university-student participation in home-builds in El Salvador over the course of three years—a partnership between Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program, and a Canadian university. The information collected is assessed relative to the key critiques and to the recommendations encouraged in the IEL literature, with the intention of incorporating these critiques and recommendations in future IEL planning for this partnership, and to inform IEL work more generally. The key observations and recommendations include the need for enhanced student preparation pre and post-trip—meaning 'critical reflection' processes and materials on privilege and personal goals themes; on specific global south context; and enhancing intercultural learning and awareness activities and processes e.g., more closely integrated host-community and participant relationship-building opportunities. These recommendations are seen as important for enhancing on this specific IEL program and its short-duration timeframe, while suggesting useful guideposts for IEL more generally, as its occurrence increases within the university setting.

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Introduction

Increasing international engagement interest and options for students—as part of the broader *internationalization* shift at universities in the ‘global north’ (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Heron, 2011)—is occurring for a variety of reasons. On the one hand we see the ‘state’ accommodating globalization and neoliberal political and economic shifts by off-loading public and community services to local-level institutions like churches, municipalities, private foundations and educational institutions, while simultaneously directing and compelling increased global integration of educational and economic activities under the internationalization umbrella (see Conran, 2011, and various chapters in Tiessen and Huish 2013 for more discussion).

On the other hand, among many factors associated with international learning and engagement at universities are those with more global social justice-oriented ambitions. These are concerned with raising the levels of understanding and action among young adults in an increasingly polarized world, so as to work towards addressing the inequities and divisions between the so-called *global north* and *global south*—constructed out of a lengthy history of colonial and imperialist activities (Pluim and Jorgensen, 2012). We draw on Cameron’s (2013) ideas of global citizenship for this research, where we examine our participants’ experiences following this author’s *thin to thick* global citizenship continuum. For us, this means that enhancing or ‘thickening’ IEL will potentially include stronger understanding of the concerns of the prevailing neo-colonial discourse of north-south relations, and for the participants to be more cognizant of their relatively privileged positions in comparison to those with whom we work in the host country of El Salvador. Albeit a complex concept (see others like Smith & Laurie, 2011; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012; Larsen, 2014), it suggests thinking about ways to deepen cultural competencies and understandings, work towards common cause, and think about north-south relations through this *thin-thick* lens. We will discuss this further in the literature and methodology sections.

This side of the internationalization agenda, and the one around which this paper on *international experiential learning* (IEL) is framed, is founded on a belief that our learning institutions must enhance their roles for equipping students with opportunities which contribute to understanding and resolution of contemporary global scale challenges of human health, global security, environment, human rights, inter-religious tensions, economic issues and uncertainties, and population growth and movement (Smith and Laurie, 2011). The paper takes as a point of departure previous concern and desire for better Canadian pedagogical models for such international learning (Benham Rennick and Desjardins, 2013; Heron, 2011).

Purpose

The paper explores a case study of three similar short-term IEL iterations that are part of an ongoing partnership between a Canadian university and the international *Global Villages* program operated by the international non-profit organization Habitat for Humanity. Our primary objective is to understand and assess the results of this case study with respect to the recommendations for enhanced IEL located in the same realm of literature that critiques extant international learning efforts. This assessment then leads to recommendations for pedagogical processes that would more appropriately shape these specific kinds of IEL program endeavors, and arguably, IEL efforts more broadly. In other words, given what is observed in this specific case study, we use the identified IEL themes to provide critical insights for both understanding the shortcomings of our international experiences to date, and means by which to enhance IEL outcomes for student-participants in the future.

Context of the Case Study

This paper presents the results from three sequential and largely identical IEL experiences regarding a university-non-profit partnership: Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program (*HFH-GV* hereafter) in El Salvador in collaboration with a university in southern Ontario Canada—Wilfrid Laurier University, over the period 2013-15ⁱ. A description of the case study experiences is provided, along with an analysis of the information collected during these three iterations relative to the objectives noted above. In doing so, the research hopes to develop enhancements on our current IEL opportunities, with a focus on global north- and global south- oriented IEL, so as to enhance student understanding and their ability to act in the world—the development of 'agency', among other long-term objectives. Observing for student motivations, insights, knowledge, and understanding through these case study iterations should provide a basis for working toward more appropriate pedagogy and organization of these experiences for the future.

The IEL experience being examined in this study has been bound by several limitations up to this point. The in-country experience is relatively short (~8-9 days), participants do not necessarily possess language or foundational skills to facilitate intercultural learning, and the partnership with the charitable organization Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program may reinforce the concept that this is an experience with northern development aid aims. On the other hand, the short duration and lack of prerequisite skills for participants has created conditions that enable diverse students from various years of study and disciplines to participate. The partnership with a high-profile charitable organization, Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program (HFH-GV), may also have stimulated a higher participation rate. Furthermore, the authors speculate that this type of introduction to IEL, done well, may have the effect of modifying student's self-perceptions such that they become more likely to consider participating in future, longer, 'thicker' IEL programs.

International Experiential Learning

Critique

IEL is one of a number of various terms used to describe international movements of volunteers that integrate some form of education and ‘contribution’—often implying movement from the global north to the global south. For example, terms like: voluntourismⁱⁱ, international service-learning (ISL), study abroad, international volunteering service (IVS), work-study, international internships, and global citizenship learning are some of the labels used across this quite diverse literature (see Tiessen and Huish, 2013; and Benham Rennick and Desjardins, 2013 for notes on this terminology). As well, there is pedagogical and recruitment language evident in some of this literature and in North American university parlance with a focus on the educational aspects of such engagement: ‘global-learning,’ ‘experiential education,’ ‘active partnership,’ ‘global education,’ and ‘educational volunteering’ for example. This paper uses *international experiential learning* (IEL), and the literature focused on global north and global south engagement is used to inform this choice.

The most broad-based and historically-situated critiques of international volunteer engagement is that it naively and/or intentionally reproduces colonial and neo-colonial outcomes and perpetuates the global inequities which ironically these IEL opportunities are often created to address (Clost, 2013; McGehee, 2012; Thomas and Chandresekera, 2013; Plum and Jorgensen, 2012). These authors claim that the lineage of cultural, political, and economic differentials in power between the volunteer participants and the host communities is evident in the perpetuation of *dependency* common to north-south relations; in the historically religious values-impositions at such north-south interfaces; in the ‘othering’ of the host-community (MacDonald, 2013); in the inequitable dynamic which sees northern participants able to choose to volunteer in the global south (a common geography of these relationships) with little or no reverse flow—the south as a kind of classroom and space for ‘professionalization’ or acquisition of social and career capital for northern volunteers (Fizzle and Epprecht, 2013; Drolet, 2013; Smith and Laurie, 2011)ⁱⁱⁱ; and in the international development or ‘development aid’ efforts and language that accompanies *developed vs developing* world constructions (Roddick, 2013). The critique associated with this last theme centres on the legacy of the ‘development’ period following decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s. Palacios (2010) says that the,

... basic conclusion of many authors that have contributed to this critical theory of development is that the Western intention of *helping* underlying the development aid goal is humanitarian as much as it is colonialist. However, it tends to reproduce the same global patterns of inequality and poverty, leaving intact—if not reinforcing—the dominant position of the North... (864)^{iv}

And with respect to the aims of post-secondary educational institutions and their IEL programming which is the focus of this research, is a core tension between the administrative and institutional directives for increased student enrolment through IEL, which some see as a kind of ‘brand’ and positioning mechanism (Cameron, 2013; Fizzell and Epprecht, 2013), and the movement for an IEL with aims rooted in global social justice. Benham Rennick and Desjardins (2013, 37) state it like this:

Those of us who work in international programs in higher education are caught between the quasi-religious aims of “doing good,” “help,” and “making a difference,” and the corporate-style institutional goal of the internationalization of education, the national aim of promoting Canada in the world, and the personal objectives of students....unless we establish and embed particular and explicit values in our programming, we are likely to perpetuate a neocolonial agenda that carries a subtext of “saving,” “helping,” and even “civilizing” partners in what is now sometimes called the Global South.

Such uncritical intentions by institutions and by extension the students who volunteer, are associated with concerns about images of the ‘exotic’ and fascination projected onto other cultures—forms of ‘*othering*,’ and in this context, participant voices claiming a desire to ‘give back’ through such IEL experiences (MacDonald, 2013). It is suggested that these kinds of attitudes can come from a place of, “... cultural imperialism and voyeurism; [and] homogenize the citizens of a country, thus erasing the cultural diversity and heterogeneity of a nation; and reinforce “the helpless victim” narrative of people in the Global South” (Thomas and Chandresekera, 2013, 94). The advent and growth of many forms of IEL are often criticized as mere adjustments to the neoliberal agenda which increases polarity between the global south and north, under the auspices of a ‘market embedded morality’ (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011), and associated neoliberal processes which compel “the rolling back of the state” (Smith and Laurie, 2011, 547).

The history of such north-south engagement is lengthy and though this paper cannot go into much depth here, suffice it to say that, “... it is difficult to evade the colonial undertones of the historical movement of people (and benefits) from the centre to the elusive peripheries and back to the centre” (Pluim and Jorgensen, 2012, 28), and this context must be taken into account in current international educational engagement forays (Benham Rennick, 2012). Colonial history and the contemporary globalization dynamic sometimes housed under the *neoliberalism* label^v, provides a critical context within which current education, collaborative assistance, and international charitable and social justice relations are developed. It is appropriate to point out that navigating these complex discourses, with hopes of achieving a configuration of recommendations and hence appropriate learning outcomes in an IEL context, are both difficult and necessary. Also, though there is strong experiential U.S. and other northern country IEL writing, the paper draws notably from a contemporary literature that appropriately informs our own post-

secondary Canadian research context. The next section shifts to a focus on what this literature recommends for appropriate IEL ‘engagement’ in close association with our case studies, and which is considered most pertinent for attending to concerns of the foregoing critique.

Directions and Recommendations

Without thoughtful preparation, orientation, program development and the encouragement of study, and critical analysis and reflection, the programs can easily become small theatres that recreate historic cultural misunderstandings and simplistic stereotypes and replay, on a more intimate scale, the huge disparities in income and opportunity that characterize North-South relations today. (Grusky, 2000, 858)

This paper advocates for an IEL pedagogy that recognizes the importance of movement towards global social justice. As post-secondary institutions become more globally-integrated, both intentionally and by dint of various external state and market pressures, there is a corresponding need to incorporate IEL concepts and objectives that are aligned with this normative stance (Drolet, 2013). Our paper recognizes the often complicated, contentious, and messy character of such work (MacDonald, 2013) while pulling together some of the key categories of pedagogical objectives into a recommendations framework for understanding what the case study in El Salvador reveals and what this can suggest for enhancing such IEL programming.

The intent with the recommendations objective is to advance this specific, ongoing program toward a ‘thicker’ conception of IEL programming. Framed in this way, current IEL programming can be positioned in terms of Cameron’s (2013) spectrum of *thin to thick* global citizenship, with the idea that enhancing or ‘thickening’ IEL will provide learning opportunities which: are critical of the dominant neo-colonial discourse of north-south relations; can provide spaces for intercultural learning and for students to question their positionality relative to those they encounter in El Salvador; and the possibility to continue learning and acting in ways that contribute to global social justice.

IEL Recommendation Categories

Participant Preparation: The means employed to assist students in appropriate inquiry and thinking around their volunteering efforts in these international situations, commonly termed ‘critical reflection processes’ (Lough, 2011; Travers, 2013), are seen as central in IEL. As Tiessen and Huish (2013, 9) submit, “International experiential learning that is carried out without critical reflection and ongoing self-analysis has the potential to entrench stereotypes of “others” rather than promoting enhanced cross-cultural understanding...”, a position held as well by Benham Rennick and Desjardins (2013). Participant preparation is emphasized through all phases of the IEL, and this can mean readings and discussion on the cultural history and economics of the destination country,

journaling processes, and reflection practices pre, during, and post-trip on such themes as privilege, intercultural skills, awareness and adaptation, etc. All three of these phases benefit from specific forms of participant engagement associated with each, like close cultural contact in-country, while experienced facilitation throughout the phases can help challenge the status quo as opposed to normalizing it (Thomas and Chandreserka, 2013; Travers, 2013).

Volunteer participants in enhanced IEL must reflect critically on some key aspects of themselves, and of the contexts associated with both the specific geography of their volunteering destination, and of the broader structural narratives that circumscribe their IEL event. The espoused themes of such reflection commonly include: personal goals, concepts of privilege, and associated understanding of the north-south power relations tied to the current and historical context of the host-country, etc. Given this kind of learning framework, it is believed that “A university is in many senses a better candidate to run volunteer programs than a single travel agency; it is more likely to provide accountability, reflection and learning outcomes” (Palacios, 2010, 862). At the same time, it is useful to ask: “Is this critical reflection merely a form of critical thinking designed to generate better citizens, better neighbours, and better volunteers, or is it designed to generate a deep sense of reflexivity that is connected to action that is constantly engaged in challenging power relations and the status quo?” (Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2013, 57) The following examines the sphere of *participant preparation* relative to the themes noted above.

‘Goal Setting’ – good preparation can contribute to participant goals of personal growth, cultural awareness, language-learning, identity formation, and previous studies list goals like confidence, self-worth, leadership, skills enhancement, and creativity as common and worthy motivations and objectives (Pluim and Jorgensen, 2012; Bailey and Russell, 2012; Ong et al., 2011; Sin, 2009). Critical reflection processes can help students set and articulate personal goals, and assess the importance of these in their lives. At the same time, personal goals cannot be the sole objective of IEL, as using the global south as a form of ‘classroom’ for obtaining individual objectives merely replicates and exacerbates old patterns of domination and the reinforcement of inequitable relations and perspectives (Fizzell and Epprecht, 2013).

‘Privilege’ – participant preparation is also important for examination of the concept of *privilege*, which is generally associated with attributes of race, gender, class, etc., and to help situate a person relative to various levels or systems of access and mobility that are legacies of historical-social construction and unequal power, and commonly unexamined. Though not easy to ‘unpack,’ the concept and reality of privilege is increasingly recognized as a core aspect of participant abilities and understandings of self with regards to IEL work. When appropriately engaged, processes assisting with reflection on privilege can assist an IEL participant to rework and understand the ‘helping narrative’ (MacDonald, 2013) or ‘helping imperative’ (Heron, 2007) common to IEL participant framing of their perceived roles and contributions. This kind of preparation can help shift participants to

move towards what Thomas and Chandreseker (2013, 103) label the *authentic ally*—a figure that “... understands, acknowledges, and engages in self-reflection regarding the power and privilege that they wield in the world.”

Desired processes are those that facilitate personal goals at the same time as developing consciousness of self as interdependent and implicated in various ways with the larger global system. Preparation can focus on diminishing the risk that participants will perpetuate uncritical assessment of their experiences, and thereby reinforce the separation of groups into those privileged and living in the global north from those supposedly benefitting from such ‘help’—the “underdeveloped rest of the world” (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011, 123). This is the binary that Conran (2011) notes must be consciously addressed given the kind of ‘benevolent imperialism’ it reinforces (Fizzell and Epprecht, 2013, 120).

Related concerns located between goal setting and privilege are raised around volunteer voices that claim to ‘*learn from them*,’ and the ‘orientalist’ discourse that this suggests. This ‘discourse of reversal’ (McGehee, 2012) seems to arise as an unconscious means of reconciling observed inequities, and a ‘*They’re poor but happy...*’ refrain can suggest an uncritical rationalization that normalizes the status quo. This is evident as well when IEL participants voice sentiments around host-communities as dominated by ‘close community ties and kinship,’ and a kind of innocence and happiness perceived to be missing in the participant’s hectic lifestyles in the global north. The ‘friendliness’ and ‘intimacy’ narrative^{vi} described in the literature is seen by some observers as masking a kind of *moral superiority*, and a form of ‘othering’ (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011).

The concept of ‘global citizenship’ may be a means for seeing these two aspects of participant preparation relative to one another. The literature parses this concept along a continuum from ‘thin’ to ‘thick’. The *thin* end focuses on themes of employability, CV-building, the university ‘trophy course’ goal, and career opportunities in a globally integrated world (Cameron, 2013)—mirroring the personal goal(s) subtheme. This version sees the global south as a kind of classroom for northern aspirations “... driven by superficial global citizenship ideals...” (Tiessen, 2013, 88). The *thick* end of global citizenship focuses on developing a consciousness where IEL participants shift their focus to work towards a more equitable and just world where notions of solidarity and engagement are central values, beyond ‘doing good’ and personal growth hopes^{vii}, to ‘doing justice,’ which is how this is interpreted in the literature. When the objectives of personal goal setting include work on privilege, movement towards *thick* global citizenship is said to occur.

In terms of recommendations for critical reflection processes that address these themes, writers like Travers (2013) espouse practices of preparation that can help to raise awareness of such positions and sentiments, and this would mean in a broad way, “... acknowledging how we experience the world, [and] ... understanding our role in the global

social justice project, ...” (Thomas and Chandreseker, 2013, 97). The goal here being that participants are more capable of seeing how their positions in the global north implicates them in this global dynamic.^{viii} This kind of recognition can help participants move toward enacting “the fulfillment of moral duties” (Cameron, 2013, 28). This has resonance with the next sub-sphere—intercultural skills and awareness.

‘Intercultural Skills and Awareness’ – participant preparation themes also include processes which help IEL volunteers learn *intercultural skills and awareness*. Plum and Jorgensen (2012, 27) define it like this:

Cross-cultural or intercultural education exposes students to different ways of thinking and being in the world and fosters their abilities to better understand international issues, to think through multiple perspectives and to build relationships with people from different backgrounds.

IEL attributes that figure in intercultural awareness outcomes include: service duration, reflection processes and intercultural contact or encounters. Participant supervision, in-country support, pre-departure preparation and post-trip reintegration processes, and sending organization roles can all help shape and integrate intercultural awareness for IEL participants. Themes that might be included in such learning could be: basic economic and socio-political systems of the host-country, cross-cultural perspectives on themes of traditions, values, and family systems (Drolet, 2013), and mutually beneficial intercultural activities (Lough, 2011). These can help disrupt existing beliefs that reinforce old perspectives (Bailey and Russell, 2012), and at the very least ensure that IEL ‘does no harm’ (Cameron, 2013).^{ix}

It is useful to note as Dean (2001, 624) contends, “... that the concept of multicultural competence is flawed,” instead arguing that we are better off “... maintaining an awareness of one’s *lack of competence*” (italics added, 624), from an attitude that recognizes culture as “continually changing” (625), and seeing cultural values “... in relation to the larger system in which they are embedded” (626). Dean’s perspective suggests that IEL learning not fixate on a static end-point, but rather position cultural awareness as a process based on humility and openness. Intercultural skills and awareness can be developed through forms of interaction, including ‘close cultural contact’ based on respectful and reciprocal interaction between the volunteers and the hosts (Palacios, 2010). This might be thought of as looking for appropriate ‘volunteer encounters’ (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011).

Duration of the IEL experience is closely associated with this theme as: “... students’ intercultural growth and competence have been significantly correlated with *duration of the experience*” (Lough, 2011, 453). This suggests that because increased exposure and connection with other cultures enhances learning, respect, and acceptance between participants and host communities, that duration of the IEL experience be understood as an

important aspect of this theme. Given the short duration of the case study iterations of this research, we look to participant preparation which can help to ameliorate duration issues that might reinforce pre-existing beliefs and stereotypes, and focus on only goal-setting for example (Roddick, 2013). Lough's (2011, 454) views that "... guided reflection may moderate the relationships between the duration of the service and ICC [intercultural competence]" informs the thinking here.

In this vein, examination of the roles of the sending organization partner relative to IEL enhancement is also important. Given that there are a variety of sending organizations involved with international engagement activities—"private companies, non-governmental organizations, charities, universities, conservation agencies, religious organizations and governments" (Guttentag taken from Ong et al., 2011, 298)—then observing them for their roles (or lack of) needs to be part of this IEL enhancement effort, even if somewhat tangential. It is held that the sending organization must play at least a partial role in providing conditions for some of the outcomes for enhanced IEL, and that this is best done in a collaborative partnership with the educational institution involved. The roles suggested for a sending organization can include: provision of some of the intercultural learning and awareness contexts for the participants, forms of orientation regarding cultural, political-economic, and environmental histories, and on-the-ground means by which the volunteers and host-country members might find mutually respectful ways to interact and learn from one another.

Though this research is not focused closely on the *sending organization* aspect of the IEL experience—in this case HFH-GV—it is useful to note that the sending organization is an obviously significant entity in the IEL mix. This usually means, as noted above, playing a role in the provision of positive host-community inclusive strategies and relations, logistical movement of resources (materials, transportation, lodging, food), participant orientations in-country, and perhaps assistance in pre- and post- IEL briefing and debriefing for the participants (see Ong, et al., 2011; and Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004, for their thoughts on appropriate sending organization roles).^x

'Reciprocity & Contribution' – Examining IEL case studies tells us that the kinds of experiences to which volunteers devote their efforts can be significant for a range of reasons, often under the umbrella of the *efficacy* of their efforts and attention to the desire for reciprocity of interactions. Aside from the broader concern about replicating colonial patterns of inequity and north-south polarity, is the need to ensure that the participant activities of such volunteering on the ground are not ineffectual—as in doing work that has little purpose, may actually be detrimental, and/or can be more effectively done by the people in the host-country—hence, not reciprocal. Part of the work of IEL effort and development of appropriate pedagogies and partnerships which best serve the various stakeholders involved—the students, host-communities, and the international sending organization—is also about the actual content or character of the work performed by the volunteers (Palacios, 2010). This in turn has bearing on the objectives of such north-south

intersections given that the skills debate and concerns in the literature are commonly about the inappropriate assigning of global north volunteer activities when they bear little resemblance to their actual abilities or skills.

The kind of concerns raised in IEL studies and the recommendations made in association, create the framework of interrelated variables grouped below: Figure 1: Recommendations Framework – Towards Enhanced IEL. The information collected from the case study iterations are qualitatively examined for their fit or alignment with these spheres of recommendations.

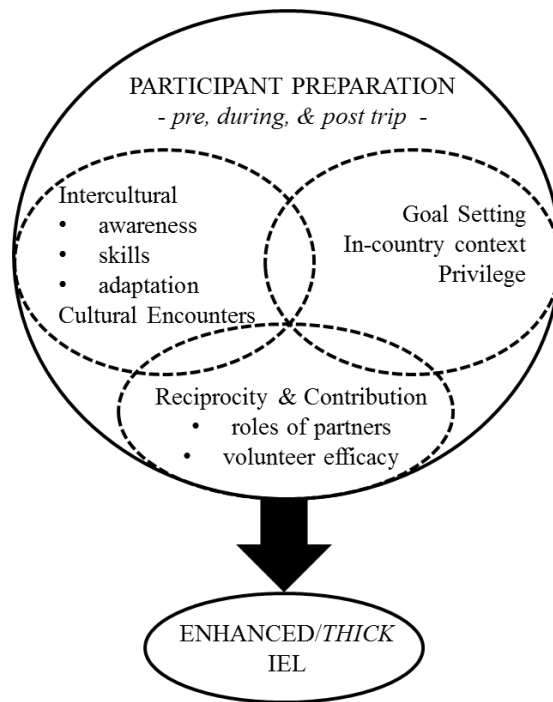


Figure 1 Recommendations Framework – Towards Enhanced IEL

This framework captures some of the key pedagogical tenets that Benham Rennick and Desjardins (2013) believe universities need to incorporate in their IEL development, and which are reflected in many writings (McGehee, 2012; Grusky, 2009; Palacios, 2010). Examining means and directions for enhancing existing IEL efforts, builds on Benham Rennick’s (2013, 8) beliefs that, “When done well, these experiences bring extraordinary perspective and understanding of ourselves and the Other.” That is, by incorporating such ideas in a carefully considered volunteer experience —‘adequate preparation’ (Clost, 2013), it can catalyze shifts in the ways by which global north participants see themselves and the world in which they live, and in some, perhaps incremental ways, contribute to structural shifts over the long-term at the north-south interface (Conran, 2011).

Methodology

The three iterations of the HFH-GV and Laurier International partnership in El Salvador—the *case study* of this research, were approached from the beginning with a set of information- collection mechanisms in mind. These included participant surveys both prior to and following the experience, facilitated discussions both in-country and following the experience, and notes from the researcher’s participant-observer role throughout. Ethics approval for the research was received for all three iterations (the years 2013-14-15), and participants chose for themselves the nature, if any, of their participation in the study. Reflexivity in the sense of being ready for potential shifts in the focus and objectives of the study were built-in, though the parameters of the study changed only slightly from its initial direction. Response themes tracked through the three phases of the research were not all hypothesized in advance, though given the short duration of each iteration, the character of the kinds of outcomes seen in other studies, and the longevity and experience of the non-profit international partner, there was a basic sense of the range of potential participant perspectives and commentary.

Following similar information-collection intentions as those of Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011), the basic purpose of the survey and facilitated discussions was to examine for: *motivations, expectations, impacts, and consequences*, with both open and close-ended questions, allowing for the students to expound in their chosen directions on these themes. In more detail, the information-collection process consisted of three interconnected *phases*: a pre-trip survey, facilitated discussions on-site, and a post-trip phase that included both a survey and a group discussion, though the latter was only possible in the last two iterations of this research (the 2014 and 2015 experiences). The *first phase* consisted of a pre-trip survey asking questions about reasons for participating, associated hopes regarding the nature of their contribution(s) in volunteering; expected learning outcomes; speculation on the benefits and drawbacks of this kind of experience—for selves, for the home-recipient Salvadoran families, and/or communities there; and anything else that they viewed as important. This pre-trip package phase also included a package of accessible notes on global engagement with a quote on international service learning – ISL:

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 ... 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. (Crabtree, 2011, 19)

It also included an excerpt from Benham Rennick (2012), which focused on the Canadian historical antecedents for this kind of international experience, and a paper on this kind of global engagement by Grusky (2000).

The *second phase* focused on the facilitated group discussions carried out in El Salvador. These discussions were conducted in ways to safeguard student concerns about sharing in an open format with the other participants, with confidentiality and information-use assurances that were facilitated to be as safe and clear as possible given the conditions of group sharing. The on-site discussion questions were similar to the pre-trip survey questions regarding hopes for learning and contribution expectations, with allowance for opportunities to speak to any shifts in understanding or insights given the in-country experience up to that point. This phase of the information-collection also included the participant-observer's journaling notes that compiled insights, feelings, and observations with respect to the in-country phase of the IEL.

The *third phase* of information-collection occurred after leaving El Salvador. This included a written survey, inclusion of each student's transcribed conversations following the in-country team discussions (an opportunity for each student to take a look at what they said in-country and to edit if desired), and in the second and third iteration of the case study, a facilitated discussion hosted by the researcher and personnel with the university's Internationalization Office. This post-trip survey aligned with the first and second information collection phases, by asking the participants how their experience looked in hindsight, with opportunities to reflect on shifts in their perceptions regarding aspirations, expectations, contributions, and impacts. This allowed for post-trip insights about self, learning moments, and where or how this experience might affect future decisions and directions. Though small refinements in the information-collection process emerged from the first iteration of this 3-year case study, this generally amounted to less redundancy and hence fewer questions posed in the pre-, in-country-, and post-trip data collection phases for the last two iterations. Essentially, the same procedures and methods were followed. The next section provides the results of the case study, with an eye to how what transpired fits or not, with the recommendations framework developed for qualitative assessment of this IEL venture.

Results

Three 8-10 day IEL trips were carried out in El Salvador in the San Miguel 'Department' of El Salvador (see Figure 2: El Salvador and Build-site Villages near San Miguel) during the university's February winter-break periods in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The three experiences were generally identical in their organizational format and planning, and in their objectives. A total of 44 students participated over these three trips, with the faculty researcher conducting information collection and participating in all three iterations: nine students in 2013, 20 students in 2014, and 15 students in 2015. In addition, there were two other non-student participants over the course of these trips, a facilitator/mentor from the Internationalization Office of the university on the first trip, and a member of the local affiliate of the sending organization—Habitat for Humanity—on the third. As is common in IEL, there was a gender mix that was overwhelmingly female: 41 women participants and three male participants over the course of the three iterations.

Researcher-participation involved work on all of the builds while providing some level of mentorship for the students. The actual building time allotted for each iteration was roughly five days, with a half day set aside both before and after for formal introduction to the home-recipient families, for celebration activities held by the HFH-GV affiliate office (food, certificates-awarding, speeches by and for the recipient families, workers, and participants, children’s activities and dancing), and a day and a half for what is referred to as R&R—downtime at a local beach resort at the end of the volunteering period prior to return to Canada, a cost paid for separately by the participants.



Figure 2 El Salvador and Build-site Villages near San Miguel

There was little opposition to participation in the information-collection processes. The generally non-intrusive character of the study aspirations and the pre/during/post phases of discussions, and simple survey questions, both open and closed, seemed initially to garner overall acceptance and participation. The in-country participation in the facilitated discussions would suggest this (with 39/44 taking part; the five declining for reasons of disinterest and/or inhibition). The Table 1: *Participation Rates Across Information-Collection Components* (see Appendix) indicates participant involvement levels in various aspects of the information-collection process.

As can be seen, student recruitment for feedback was generally less positive both pre- and post-trip, with the speculation that in-country discussion saw high commitment given excitement levels and lack of common *normal life* distractions. A number of the students, though having expressed interest in participating in the pre-trip survey, found it difficult to do so given time-constraints associated with ongoing university obligations. When asked about expectations for the trip, one of the students responded:

Like a few of us who are really busy and coming out to this trip—and everyone asks me “Like are you excited?” and I am just focusing on my

work right now, and before we knew it we were on the plane and at Pearson [*airport in Canada*] leaving for here. And I haven't ever done a Habitat build before, or ever been to Latin America, so I didn't really know what my expectations were, or what really to expect, other than just hearing some stories about last year.

Similarly, upon returning to Canada for the last half of their winter program, interest in and/or time to attend the facilitated discussions post-trip along with completing the post-trip survey, was sporadic for the participants. This second phase saw almost full participant 'buy-in' across all iterations, and it is surmised that the small size and pilot-character of the first iteration of this IEL (2013), affected positively the pre- and post-survey rates of participation. While full commitment by all students to all three phases only occurred with 12 students, the majority commonly completed three out of four of the information-collection components, indicating that there was more than sufficient information collected from the three phases to examine for the 'fit' of this case study relative to the assessment framework.

About 100 pages of single-space transcripts were generated from the in-country and post-trip facilitated discussions. These discussions and written surveys form the basis of the qualitative assessment of their fit with the IEL Recommendations Framework while the participant-observer journals were used for context and anecdotal assistance. The Results section moves through the various components of the Recommendations Framework, with its focus on Participant Preparation themes discussed earlier.

Goal setting: IEL studies commonly report on participants emphasizing goals related to learning, self-awareness, confidence building, etc. In this study it is evident that '*personal goals*' is a prevailing theme with common aspirations in the pre-trip surveys including: learning about 'self' and 'personal strengths,' about 'new cultures' and the 'third world,' about 'challenging myself,' and about 'helping,' 'giving back,' and 'making a difference.'" The participants wrote also about gaining: 'independence,' 'connections,' 'global experience,' 'team-building skills,' crossing items off of a 'bucket-list,' 'leadership skills,' and a 'life-changing trip.'" Information collected pre-trip, in-country, and post-IEL saw these key phrases repeated and confirmed. Lengthier comments like 'pushing myself beyond my comfort zone,' 'learning about a different place in the world,' 'providing experiences to share with my future classes,' experiencing 'something bigger than myself and getting my priorities back in order,' and 'contributing to my full capabilities,' add some nuance to the above goals. One participant responded to the question about reasons for going on the trip like this:

I just really want to improve myself. I know that I am really good at making relationships with others, and just being personal with others—so I just basically wanted to improve myself and my ability to connect with others.

As expected, the ‘*helping narrative*’ came up quite commonly as a response to *reasons for going*, with 30 of the 44 participants suggesting something along the lines of: ‘I just really want to help,’ ‘I just want to give back,’ ‘do something meaningful for the people,’ ‘the satisfaction I get when I help others,’ ‘to give of myself,’ and ‘to be able to provide help to others who are in conditions and circumstances who may not be able to do so themselves.’ What is useful to observe from all three iterations, is that this ‘helping narrative’ theme, diminished in terms of its prominence both in-country and post-trip—suggesting that the experience itself shifted somewhat from what many of the participants imagined to be a core goal for themselves prior to going, with one of the participants saying it like this:

I think that the best way to learn about a culture is by actually living with them, working with them, and seeing how they do things. I think you really go into this trip thinking I’m helping out a family with less than me, but that’s really not the case at all. They have so much to give to you.

The second phase of the information-collection process in-country allowed for participants to share new insights, learning, and observations about what they were experiencing that was either expected and/or unanticipated. This phase was dominated by what Conran (2011) calls the ‘intimacy’ experience, which included observations and feelings about: new connections, special encounters, and sentiments regarding the El Salvadoran people both generally and specifically. Research in Antigua described how the participant-volunteers in that case study, “... developed an emotional connection to their project, mediated through the relations they developed with the beneficiaries and organization staff” (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011, 117). This very closely mirrors the sentiments shared by the participants of this case study. That is, observations around the ‘friendliness’ of the home-recipient families, the development of ‘close connections’ and intimate encounters with neighbours and workers on the build-site, and with the sending organization staff, dominated the discussions both during and following the IEL event.

The across-the-participant spectrum *intimacy narrative* is seen in comments like: “And to come here to the site every single morning and see their faces, and have them greet us with big smiles on their faces—and genuinely happy to see us. It’s a great feeling...”, how ‘kind and giving’ they are to us, ‘but the non-verbal communications with them—the smiles, and gestures overcame the connections problems,’ coupled with a multitude of stories about the close personal bonds felt to have been made with various members of the Salvadoran cohort involved in-country. It appears as noted by Conran (2011, 1460), that the participants were open and perhaps looking for, ‘something shared’—an *aesthetic of attachment* experience that meant to them some form of positive relationship and connection. Upon their return to Canada, often the most compelling memories were of those kinds of ‘intimacy’ encounters. As one participant shared on looking back at the experience:

I would like to think that it has changed my appreciation for what I have, but at the same time it kind of opened my eyes to how much the people in El Salvador truly do have. For example, the feeling of community and family that I felt while building the house was something that I rarely see in Canada. These feelings, to me, seem to be much more important than all of the material things that we tend to focus our attention on in industrialized societies.

And,

Anyway, I was putting my bag away, and [*woman at build-site*] put her hand on my shoulder, and it made me feel that I was like family. And I really appreciated it, and I felt so close, almost like she was my grandmother. And it was amazing... just like that simple touch, it really affected me.

Privilege: Prevailing emphasis on themes of ‘intimacy’ in their experiences, with the associated continual references to the many Salvadoran people with whom we had close contact, ‘as poor but happy,’ tells us something of the level of the analysis held by the participants. However, this does not mean that a larger political understanding was non-existent. The following comments indicate that at least some level of recognition of both the participants’ status as members of the global north, and the implications of this for IEL endeavours was voiced—though irregularly. Comments like: “I want to be a better advocate for change,” were accompanied by concerns raised when the question about potential negative outcomes from such endeavours was posed across all phases of the inquiry. Though many participants wrote *not applicable* on the survey—as in they could not foresee negatives associated with this work nor did they see any in hind-sight, occasional notes were made on: potential ‘neighbor jealousy’ and ‘white elitism,’ host-members possibly holding “a feeling of helplessness that foreign people need to come help,” “possibly disrupting their culture,” and that volunteers might be seen as “trying to force our western ideals on them.” There were also observations that suggest an understanding that the north-south narrative has its own shape in Canada. Three of the participants raised the concern that issues around poverty and homelessness are present in Canada as well:

I think the only negative thing that I can think of, is that there are so many people in our own community that need help, and we’re spending so much money to go out to El Salvador or wherever, to help other people ...

There was also the notion that this kind of international work suggests potential future direction for a few of the participants, one of them noting how the history talk shared in-country about Habitat in El Salvador was eye-opening: “I really liked learning that part of it, and I think for me Habitat is going to be kind of like something that I want to be doing

for the rest of my life.” The next few quotes capture some of the participants’ hopes and questions about the experience as it relates to their long-term aspirations:

I really want to continue in not-for-profit work. I truly enjoy it, I found four days way too short. I made a promise to myself that I would do a yearlong travel-abroad term, doing builds, and spending three months at a time at four different locations. And so this has shown me that I can meet really amazing people, and I can do more of this. That’s what I want to continue.

And,

My kind of career goal is to like, do curriculum development for an NGO or non-governmental organization... and through this [experience], it just sort of reaffirms that this is where I want to be... and working with individuals who just by sake of random luck, happen to be born into that sort of situation of having much more difficult lives than what we have...

And,

I think my biggest challenge is, how am I going to learn from this, and how am I going to apply this to my everyday life back at home? I think that is the biggest question. How am I going to make this change me, and how am I going to use this to motivate and inspire me to do more of this kind of work to help out other families as well as other developing countries?

Finally, there was a broader perspective shared by just two of the participants that captured some sense of the concerns of privilege and how these can manifest themselves unconsciously in our attitudes related to this kind of IEL work. This one was the most articulate:

There is always an air of the “white savior” complex where we, as privileged individuals, feel that we have “done good” by helping some poor people building a home, when in reality, they may not have needed as much help as we like to think. There is also the *exotic* factor, seeing them as the “other” and the judgment that one can’t help but bestow on people whose actions and methods of doing certain things are foreign to us. I believe many students who do trips like these will give themselves a pat on the back, and return to Canada without ever thinking of it.

Intercultural Skills and Awareness: aspirations regarding ‘cultural learning’ was shared in minor ways by almost all of the participants, at some point voicing or writing about hopes to: learn ‘about a different culture,’ ‘understand and appreciate diversity,’ ‘perhaps learn some Spanish,’ ‘see a different place in the world—culture, language, life style,’ ‘be

immersed in their culture,’ and stating things like, “culture and diversity are celebrated within my schooling [education], both of which the team will be embracing,” and “languages are the doorway to the world... what better way can I learn than to be fully immersed in a different culture?” Of note, particularly because it was not common, were comments by two students who shared that this theme of intercultural awareness was fairly central to their overall IEL goals prior to the trip:

I really want to observe and experience what the food tastes like, what clothes people wear, see the differences between the North and the South... (it’s) an opportunity to expand my critical thinking by exposing myself to a new foreign culture...

And,

As a language student, culture is something very meaningful to me. The sense of community and relationships with people—communicated through their languages—is of utmost importance in today’s global society. It’s crucial to spread understanding, rather than ignorance.

And after being in-country, at least a few of the participants gained a different sensibility about how important proximity and some level of immersion are to learning and cultural awareness:

... yes, you are able to go to China Town and Little Italy [*in Toronto in Canada*—but it’s not the same thing. Being able to make those connections with people who are actually practising their religion or their culture is really even more beneficial because then first-hand you can really see it.

And,

I think what I’ve gained is being more open-minded and not judging things I guess. Because even today we were talking to [a Salvadoran translator], and she was talking about things that we do that they just don’t do here. Like women don’t usually drink, or like she said she doesn’t dance because it’s against her religion. But she made sure she said that she understands that we do that in our culture and that it is totally fine... so I kind of think that it’s like we should do the same thing towards their culture, like other cultures, and not judge them right away, and accept the different things they do.

The opportunities for the participants to interact with the host-community took many forms as noted earlier: daily connections with the drivers, the masons and workers on-site everyday with the participants, the families—usually including children, mothers, grandmothers, etc. with whom the team ate lunches and had breaks, and the HFH-GV

affiliate staff who had more formal engagements with the team, providing historical and geographic background on two evenings of each week of the trip, and translation roles throughout. There were also outings to culturally significant features like the first theatre and the central Catholic Church of San Miguel.

Importantly, as perhaps one third of the participants noted at the end of the trip, the *short duration* of the volunteer experience (8-9 days) made it difficult for them to feel like they could fully engage and learn. Though this next comment was shared by a participant in relation to the poverty he witnessed and how it relates to his life in Canada, the key point was about the potential of an IEL that was longer in duration:

... [I can see] how little our problems are compared to someone living down there. And I feel like I got a glimpse of that, though it's only a week; but I feel I want to get more of that, being more inclusive in that kind of environment, so you get the bigger effect. So being there for a longer period of time and actually living in that house or living in those kinds of conditions [would be what I want] so you can see how it really is.

And with a focus on IEL duration, this was said,

I find that the biggest thing is that there is not enough time to truly experience the culture, to really get to know the family, to do anything in that aspect. I feel like I am only getting a taste, and it's not satisfying in that sense.

And though not commonly voiced, this comment about the importance of honest cultural relations and of seeing our presence in a different kind of light than as the dominant 'helping narrative' provides at least some counter-perspective that could be built on:

...but what I think is really important for us, is the example that we set here as the privileged group. Because as you have all probably noticed, they don't speak a lot of English, they get not as many TV channels as we would, and especially out in places like Chinimeca where we are... these rural areas. And so they have a very skewed image of North Americans, just like we probably have a skewed image of Central Americans. And I think it's important that they gain a good perspective of us so that we are not always like the privileged stereotypes to them—because I think it's important that they know that the imbalance between cultures and ethnicities does not always have to be that way. And that we are here to lend a helping hand and to be equals. We are not coming here to 'save them.'

Reciprocity and Contribution: The work performed by the student participants basically met the simple-skills description of HFH-GV work: carrying cinder blocks, mixing concrete, tying rebar (with simple training from masons on site), digging, moving soil, sand, and gravel, etc. This meant that though there was a diverse mix of student participants, the roles were basically quickly learned and interchangeable. The short-term character of the volunteer part of the build, the simple labour orientation of the work, and the monetary contributions by the volunteers are central to the building of the homes. Local contractors, masons and their assistants are employed because of these resources, and would not be there otherwise.

In terms of the roles of the partners in this IEL experience, HFH-GV closely aligned with its claims (see HFH-GV, 2015)^{xi}. Observation over the three iterations of the study, with special attention to the affiliate office in San Miguel, El Salvador where the builds occurred, verified this. The affiliate office ensured that the following kinds of conditions were met: initial meeting and integration of volunteers with the recipient families prior to the home-build period; ensured participant lodging; transportation within country to lodging, work-sites, and to cultural and historical sites (brief forays during the evening); adequate food; orientation and learning discussions regarding historical and cultural attributes of the country; and a final post-build celebration inclusive of all host-country HFH-GV affiliate staff, families, workers, and the participants. Though *sending organization* attributes are not central to the research, their roles in providing the above logistics and processes are important aspects of IEL. All of the participants were generally content with the role of the sending organization, with one participant offering this:

So, especially since going on this trip, and with [rep from a Canadian Habitat affiliate] on the trip, and learning from her about what Habitat is doing in Brantford back home, it has helped me see that what I really like about this organization is that they are not just one of those organizations that “works in other countries”—like in 3rd world countries—in the sense that they are doing things for other people. I like that they are also based here (at home). So it’s not just something like where they are going, “well we’re going to help all of those poor people in other countries”—and a lot of organizations do that... run trips for groups and for students, that are specifically for ‘helping’ other people—what I like about this is that there is the acknowledgement [by Habitat] that there are lots of people here [her own city in Canada] that need homes and help as well.

To iterate, HFH-GV has affiliate offices in the region of the IEL builds that are staffed by local residents, creates volunteer work that is labour-intensive with no pretense concerning global north expertise, and carries out similar work in the global north as well. This last fact was revealing for a few of the participants as noted earlier, with this volunteer saying:

Organizations like Habitat have really inspired me. I don't know, I think it's that I find it so amazing that people just help other people. Why this relates to this is because I think I want to do that for the rest of my life. I think I always knew that I wanted to, but now this helps me to know that I can do it through an organization like this.

The *HFH-GV Handbook* (2015) provided some base preparatory themes for the participants, and this asked for at least some level of self-reflection by the participants on the nature of their involvement, along with guidelines regarding cultural sensitivity practices when in El Salvador such as clothing choices on-site related to both work and climate, and with respect to after-hours activities and behavior around drinking, and gender issues that need to be considered out of respect and understanding of cultural difference.

The next section examines these results in an effort to understand how they align with the IEL concerns outlined in the literature, how this case study might suggest directions for enhancing this specific university IEL program, and what it might suggest for IEL more generally. The various spheres of the Recommendations Framework are explored in turn, as they were in the results.

Discussion and Recommendations

The critical analysis that takes place in the pre-departure phase shapes the nature of the placement abroad and also the messages that are transmitted upon our return to the Global North. (Tiessen and Huish, 2013, 17).

Goal-setting and Privilege

The personal goal(s) emphases shared by the participants around self-awareness, on wanting to 'help,' and especially with respect to the 'intimacy' sentiments that arose with the case study, provide important feedback for imagining future IEL preparation and organization. Firstly, it is appropriate to support the contention that such IEL opportunities allow for and support personal goals around fostering confidence, development of independence, of leadership, and of sense of individual accomplishment—all with respect to how these self-awareness attributes can help a student confirm and clarify future personal and career development directions for instance.^{xii} And, such IEL needs to do more than this, especially in the realms of understanding the concept of *privilege* and its bearing on their participation.

This case study revealed results similar to those that Palacios (2010) observed with respect to volunteering voices emphasizing *helping* and *gratitude* sentiments. And in close association, the results also revealed the prominence given by the participants of those stories mirroring Conran's (2011) *intimacy* narrative. Both the helping and the intimacy narratives it would appear, held by most of the participants, in important ways mask or neglect a broader analysis (Heron, 2011), of which only a few volunteers were able to raise

some concern and apprehension regarding our presence in the global south. For Conran (2011, 1455) "... the focus on intimacy overshadows the structural inequality on which the encounter is based and reframes the question of structural inequality as a question of individual morality." He goes on to say this means that without participants being aware of or recognizing it, "... supports the continued expansion of neoliberal cultural ideologies and economic policies." Certainly the political repression and structural inequality that mark El Salvador's colonial history and the ongoing impact of neo-colonialism have bearing on this type of program, and the potential for this problematic relationship to be reinforced through north-south programming.

In terms of *privilege*, the volunteers are seen to hold some fledgling consciousness about notions of class division at the global level, and perhaps some understanding of the power differential that shapes their world relative to the one in El Salvador, though these appear superficial. That is, occasional comments were made on the visibility of material differences and poverty relative to that in Canada, and on how 'western' or 'white' elitism might be at play, but for the most part, there was little in terms of our own complicity in the global north and south context and the negative outcomes (asked in the surveys) that might be part of this IEL. And, though there were occasional references to housing needs for those in similar circumstances in Canada, and of the sometimes taken-for-granted material prosperity the participants enjoy in the north, these were not prominent themes. This incomplete or partial picture held by the participants, means generally that they do not see "... the ongoing role people living in the Global North have in perpetuating poverty in the Global South" (Roddick, 2013, 273), and that as Clost (2013, 235) suggests, an important recommendation for better IEL should include helping participants "... understand the historical, social, and political-economic influences that shape our ways of seeing."

Intercultural Skills and Awareness

The lack of incentive to step more consciously into the IEL preparation processes hampers longer-term outcomes around intercultural awareness and understanding. Though this IEL aligns with Cameron's (2013) position that such forays should "do no harm," it is the case that the brief duration of the trips in the manner that they are organized at the moment, impedes an appropriate level of connection and interaction, from which deeper intercultural awareness might emerge. The results are not negative, as they suggest some level of both interest and ability on the part of the volunteers to step more genuinely into this kind of learning. However, stronger volunteer engagement in both pre- and post-trip efforts could help to deepen the meanings and possibilities of the interactions that occur, while developing the skills for such learning to happen effectively.

In-country interactions might include accommodations within the communities and with the families where the build-sites happen, as a more direct means to create social and cultural interaction with greater depth and possibility for mutual learning. In our case, the

formal and informal interaction with the masons, the family members (children and parents), with the translators and other sending organization members, though "... more than simple isolated accounts of amiability..." (Palacios, 2010, 872), were generally somewhat superficial. Therefore, some strategic restructuring of the elements of this program to include a higher degree of close cultural contact, perhaps through host family stays, longer duration and closer proximity to the build site, complemented by critical pre-during-post reflection would help to increase desired learning outcomes. Of course, the brief duration of the IEL is a central issue in this case.

However, this kind of IEL program enhancement may be developed in incremental ways, while acknowledging the limitations. It was observed in this case study what Conran (2011) saw in her work in Thailand regarding an '*emerging social consciousness*' potential. That is, a remark made by one of the team-leaders on the second iteration, about the duration of her team's IEL experience: "Yes it was short, but the taste we get from this experience will push us to bigger things" may be a point of departure for the potential inherent in these short-duration IEL events. Such thinking takes us at least partly out of the quite 'debilitating position' that IEL cannot contribute to structural change, even in incremental ways.

Reciprocity and Contribution

This program positions the students as volunteers aiding with the construction of housing for a local family, yet as a condition of their participation students are also required to contribute a significant monetary donation to the Salvadoran Habitat affiliate. It is likely that this financial donation is a considerably more significant contribution to the local cause of alleviating poverty housing than the short-term provision of unskilled labour. Despite this, the volunteer participation serves an important function in satisfying the student demand to help in a concrete way, providing a context that enables the students to depart from the established tourist experience, and perhaps most significantly, providing the context for close cultural contact between the students, the family members and the masons to occur.

First, the accessibility of simple tasks on the build site enables students from diverse backgrounds to feel involved and effective immediately with little orientation or training. Second, it can be argued that the short-term character of the build means that local workers have not been displaced by this kind of volunteer effort. In this vein, some hold that the monetary contributions made by the volunteers are a central reason that homes are built in the first place, and that local contractors, masons and their assistants are employed because of these resources, when they would not otherwise be. Third, the dynamic established on the build site is one in which the local masons are firmly positioned as authorities and as teachers while the northern visitors are positioned as learners and unskilled labourers (the masons are provided with training and skills to support the supervision of this unusual group of novice foreign builders). This construct diminishes the potential for a perception

by local community members that the foreign volunteers have arrived with superior western knowledge (Palacios 2010; Conran, 2011).

Given all of this, there is still some concern about whether HFH-GV can do more with respect to enhancing on the IEL outcomes for the participants, and indirectly then, for the host-country itself. This might include some effort to deepen the cultural encounters and awareness potential during this short time frame, and perhaps to ensure that the recipients of the volunteer contributions are fully aware that the volunteers do not come with any specific skills or expertise, thus helping to diminish any of the attribution of expertise which might be occurring given the presence of those privileged enough to volunteer from the global north; this can also have effects on the attitudes of those who are part of the IEL event in the global south.

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that there are a number of shortcomings associated with this IEL experience and how it has been organized thus far. It would appear, and participant outcomes and voices (or *lack of* in a number of instances), indicate that the non-credit character, of this IEL—with the first and second iteration lacking even *co-curricular* potential^{xiii}—affected participant involvement in pre- and post-trip information-collection processes, and importantly, in the lack of ability/interest in reading of the pre-departure literature provided by both the researcher (the package referred to in the methodology section and the international service learning reading by Grusky (2000)), and by the sending organization (HFH-GV, 2015). As Langdon and Agyeyomah (2013) noted in their own work, students are less likely to take part if this kind of ‘embedding’ of the IEL in university coursework does not happen. One of our own participants alludes to this in her remark,

I don’t think I’m going to completely forget it or anything, but once we actually get back into our normal routines of being in school, exams and assignments, and being with all of our friends again, and having all of our comforts, I think that just maybe, it might not be something we think about as often.

It follows from the above that a key recommendation for future IEL and this partnership, is that an increased level of preparation and a corresponding set of incentives is required in order to ensure deeper levels of student awareness of their presence and their ‘privilege’ while taking part in this kind of international experience^{xiv}. In this light, a question posed by Fizzell and Epprecht (2013, 129) might then have much more resonance for the participants: “*Why are volunteers in the Global North in the position to volunteer or ‘serve’ those in the Global South to begin with?*”

Conclusions

This work assessed qualitatively, relative to IEL critique and recommendations, the outcomes of a case study of IEL based on three short-duration iterations of a university-

HFH-GV partnership in El Salvador. It would appear, as Cameron (2013) might proffer, that this kind of IEL volunteer work best fits into the ‘thin’ end of the global citizenship continuum. That is, the participants may have reached some level of personal goals regarding attributes like confidence, self-awareness, and leadership, likely some utilitarian outcomes contributing to CV and career development, and a taste—perhaps some momentum—for further exploration of this kind of IEL experience. However, it was less likely to contribute to the ‘thick’ global citizenship attributes that recognize north-south inequality for instance, and lead to forms of observation and political action in the global north or south, which further social justice and equity objectives; exposure does not necessarily lead to activism in these realms nor to ‘unseating’ stereotypes (Heron, 2011). There were some participant voices reflective of such ‘thick’ understanding, but they were the exception.

The core question that arises with this case study is about how to enhance on the IEL experience both for this specific university–HFH-GV partnership, and for IEL learning more generally. Can such experiences for example, foster incremental movement towards deeper learning, especially in light of the short duration of this specific case study, and likely an increase in similar IEL forays by post-secondary institutions generally? At some level, it is believed that these kinds of experiences begin international understanding, perhaps only a ‘taste’ as noted by one of the participants, but at least some level of appreciation and connection on a personal level with people in very different cultural, political, and economic contexts.

The hope of this research, given the potential observed with the participants in the case study, is that appropriate IEL and long-term outcomes regarding global social justice can occur, but this can only happen by strengthening the participant preparation at all phases of this kind of experience. This is not profound of course, and it was imagined at the outset that such results were likely. However, and we are not sanguine here, the findings suggest of some potential in the realms of longer-term volunteering arising out of such ‘tastes’ (Palacios, 2010); where enhanced participation and consciousness-raising are seen as possible, *if* the experience is carefully crafted (McGehee, 2012); and that “thin or “soft” forms of global citizenship may also provide opportunities to promote something thicker...” (Cameron, 2013, 36).

Future Directions

There are many potential directions for research in this realm especially given the escalation in internationalization and related issues that have been identified. Without simplifying this quest for future research directions, some general areas are flagged here in no particular priority. This might include examining the dearth of males involved in IEL and what this suggests in terms of gender and masculinity questions with respect to global service and learning experiences. Further work could also examine more closely, means for raising the level of inclusion of host-country stakeholders and participants—drawing

out frank discussions and voices from the host-communities about what they see as the benefits and costs of these IEL experiences. It might also be useful to examine the role of the disciplinary variable in IEL, from what disciplinary perspectives participants are coming, and do we see more ability and potential for IEL enhancement outcomes?^{xv}

Other possible future directions of research: reciprocity in the context of this volunteer program; the influences and motivations that are driving the demand for this type of experience; the specific characteristics of the partner organization that support ‘enhanced IEL’; longitudinal impact on the volunteers—exploring longer-term volunteer aspirations, etc. And finally perhaps, the global social-justice aspirations of IEL literature might benefit from research that works towards north-south engagements that ensure some form or quality of sustainability, continuity or momentum over the longterm. That is, the ability to evolve and continue in the absence of northern participants might include advocacy “... to involve locals as extensively as possible, creating employment and the conditions for long-term viability by ensuring that projects have the expertise and the infrastructure in place to enable them to continue, even without the contribution of volunteers” (Tomazos and Butler, 2009, 208).

Endnotes

ⁱ The university partner in this case study has developed various forms of educationally-oriented international opportunities over time: Business School internships in Europe; Global Studies ‘learning abroad’ opportunities and ‘field trips’; Human Rights and Human Diversity internships in Ghana; History battlefield-tours; and affiliations like WUSC – World University Services Canada; CUSO – Canadian University Students Overseas; and Students Without Borders. However, educational experiential partnerships with international non-profit organizations doing work in the global south are only just emerging. At this juncture, short-term trips are seen as a form of stepping-stone experience in international learning for students.

ⁱⁱ While some researchers position a good proportion of these kinds of north-south volunteer experiences under the *voluntourism* label, others claim a clear demarcation between a volunteer tourist experience, and those in which humanitarian, educational, and/or development aid efforts transpire—especially those where there is an affiliation with a learning institution. This has some bearing on the utility and context for the literature that informs the study here (see Zavitz and Butz, 2012 for example for their avid critique of the tourism adoption/appropriation of volunteering experiences). The ‘commercial’ orientation of such international engagement has a multitude of labels: volunteer tourism, social/moral/educational/responsible tourism, service-based and/or mission vacations, goodwill tourism, pro-poor tourism, justice tourism, etc. (Tomazos and Butler, 2012; Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004), with diverse rationales espoused, and equally diverse outcomes—exploitative, benign, appropriate, etc. This paper draws on this literature when the ideas and critiques help inform the examination of this specific IEL work.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zavitz and Butz (2012, 416) iterate the specific concern regarding north-south flows of volunteers, which then allows for: “... essentialised and dualistic distinctions based on an imagined geography that populates the global South with a variety of development needs, and the global North with young people who are willing, able, and entitled to meet these needs through volunteer work.” This is the neoliberal interpretation and experience of development practice of which Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011) ask us to be aware.

^{iv} See Benham Rennick and Desjardins, 2013; and Tiessen and Huish, 2013, for recent edited critical volumes tying IEL to these various themes associated with ‘development’ writ large.

^v Some authors suggest “... that neoliberalism is in danger of becoming an over-used, almost redundant shorthand in much scholarly work...” (Smith and Laurie, 2011, 547), though as a means of describing the broader trajectory of political-economic forces and beliefs at the global level, it has its merit.

^{vi} “Intimacy is understood here as an embodied experience that arouses a sense of closeness and a story about a shared experience” (taken from Berlant in Conran, 2011, 1459).

^{vii} This identity-seeking, self-awareness project of personal growth, is described by some writers as a “neoliberal project of self-realization” (Fizzell and Epprecht, 2013, 121)

^{viii} This kind of power difference, usually hidden within the prevailing discourses of such global engagement, can be made more visible using concepts like *chains of causal responsibility* where examples like climate change and realities around how: “... individuals in the Global North do indirectly benefit from unfair global trade rules through access to cheap food and material goods at the expense of individuals and communities in the Global South” (Conran, 2011, 31) can be used to develop understanding of global social and political patterns.

^{ix} The concept of “do no harm” (Cameron, 2013; Drolet, 2013) can be thought of as a minimal bar set to prevent more long-term dependency and exacerbation of inequities.

^x The voluntourism concepts and critique from which some of the literature review was drawn, needs to be understood relative to the specific partnership between the international non-profit Habitat for Humanity and its Global Village program – HFH-GV and the university, and the actual work carried out by the volunteers. Some would suggest that it fits the voluntourism category because of its international character, and the rest period of 1-2 days following the build period at a seaside resort in El Salvador (see Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004 where HFH is the research focus and positioned as a sending organization within the realm of volunteer tourism). The personnel in the international offices of HFH-GV would say that they are not a voluntourism organization, but rather an international humanitarian one. As Ong et al. (2011) note, a sending organization is not automatically a commercial tourism entity, and both the university and HFH-GV do not identify themselves in this way.

^{xi} In regard to stated objectives of HFH-GV, it sees itself as an organization working for social justice through the provision of shelter as a means to alleviate poverty, doing so in ways which meet the needs of those in the communities that they serve, and provide a means for those in the global north, to both learn and to contribute in ways which influence long-term sustainability of the families and their communities. These specific objectives cannot really be assessed here given the focus of the study, and yet, the basic minimum conditions and criteria for structural shifts, perhaps minor, are being met by providing housing to those who would not otherwise have it, and in ways which allows for the circulation of the low-interest payments—the so-called ‘revolving funds’—Fund for Humanity (Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004), into further housing efforts over time in those communities. In this vein, questions about the IEL and its outcomes are useful, while believing that at a minimum the building of shelter for the recipients has long-term outcomes that are well-documented. It is useful to point out however, that such non-governmental interventions are argued to be ‘apolitical’, and hence undermine those who believe this detracts from the roles that state governance systems should perform—housing for instance, and that having non-profit international organizations organizing this service, does not address the underlying structural conditions of poverty found at both the state and the global level.

^{xii} As students acknowledged with some candor, the CV reference, a certain kind of caché with friends and relatives (and perhaps a ‘profile update’ on Facebook—said with some humour—though it is a well-known critique) are sometimes the proffered outcomes of IEL.

^{xiii} *Co-curricular record* is a student experience that has official sanction in a post-secondary institution, i.e., membership and involvement in such matters as university student clubs, and/or a community contribution of some sort, which is accorded weight by the institution legitimating its addition to a student CV ‘record.’

^{xiv} It is interesting to note that for those participants that did share concerns about the possibilities of negative outcomes from such interventions like this program, their home disciplines at this specific university were in global studies, education and contemporary studies, law and society, and women’s studies. These suggest something about the larger picture provided by such programs, and what it might suggest for better preparation for IEL.

^{xv} This research anecdotally noted that there were differences in the perspectives of the students, likely related to the university programs to which they were attached, with students over the three iterations coming from Education, Kinesiology, Contemporary Studies, Global Studies, Languages, Women’s Studies, Business, Criminology, Human Rights and Human Diversity, etc.

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Author Biographies

Robert Feagan's teaching and research over the last 20 years fit generally within the sustainable community-development sphere, with a focus more specifically on social and environmental justice—creating community engagement and learning opportunities for both himself and his students. Such university-community engagement efforts focus on those who are marginalized and/or underserved due to issues of class, disability, race, educational achievement, age, gender, etc. This undertaking consciously works to ensure that such engagement is both learner and community-partner centred. More recent efforts are on creating international learning and humanitarian opportunities for students, working towards understanding privilege and north-south social justice issues, while engaging in intercultural learning.

Mike Boylan is a Coordinator of Global Engagement programming with the Brantford campus of Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. This means that his work is devoted to creating opportunities for students to become more involved with and critically reflective on international learning, international partnerships with universities and non-governmental organizations, and on processes that develop mutually supportive connections among different student groups on campus, and with students from countries outside of Canada. Prior to this position, he worked for many years in international development and with organizations like Outward Bound.

Appendix

Table 1 Participation Rates Across Information-Collection Components

Information-Collection Components	El Salv - 2013	El Salv - 2014	El Salv - 2015	Totals
Pre-Trip Survey	8/9	10/20	13/15	= 31/44
In-Country Facilitated Discussion	9/9	15/20	15/15	= 39/44
Post-trip Facilitated Discussion	7/9	9/20	13/15	= 22/35
Post-trip Survey	7/9	1/20	9/15	= 17/44