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Through a Broader Lens: An Exploration of International Service Learning and Life Calling

Lauren Carter

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THROUGH A BROADER LENS: AN EXPLORATION OF
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING
AND LIFE CALLING

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business
Department of Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Lauren Carter

May 2017

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Lauren Carter

entitled

Through a Broader Lens: An Exploration of
International Service Learning
and Life Calling

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2017

Drew Moser, Ph.D. Date
Thesis Supervisor

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Steve Bedi, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

One of the many opportunities presented to college students within their college experience is the opportunity to participate in an international service learning trip. The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of international service learning on life calling. Through phenomenological research, this study examined the individual international service learning experiences of eleven alumni and addressed the following questions:

1. Does international service learning impact a student's sense of calling?
2. How would students define their sense of calling after an international service learning trip?

Major emergent themes included the experiences on a team; the broadening of life calling; impacted faith; and critical thinking about missions. Furthermore, three sub-themes emerged: reflection; community as a life calling; and being called to missions. Recommendations for practice include continued reflection upon a student's return home, careful selection of team leaders, and post-trip courses to help students in their transition back home.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Call for a Global Perspective

In an increasingly globalized world, college students are encouraged to engage in a cross-cultural experience while in college. Students “no longer can think in terms of living in a world in which [they] can or should avoid learning, meeting, and living with others with very different and potentially conflicting cultural backgrounds, habits, perspectives, customs, religious beliefs, and aspirations” (Braskamp, Braskamp, Merrill, & Engberg, 2014, p. 2). Students have both the privilege and also the responsibility to become aware and engaged cross-culturally during their time in college.

Parks (2000) described globalization as “developments in transportation, communication, and entertainment technologies, mediated primarily by commercial institutions that increasingly become international realities” (pp. 207–208). As the call for global awareness continues to increase, colleges provide opportunities for students to engage globally. According to Chickering and Braskamp (2009), “The traditional-aged college student needs to develop and internalize a global perspective into her thinking, sense of identity, and relationships with others” (p. 27). Through experiences abroad offered in college, students have an opportunity to broaden their global perspectives.

International Service Learning

One way a college student can enhance his or her global perspective is through international service learning. Colleges encourage students to gain experience in service learning, whether local or international. As students strive for a global perspective and service learning, colleges provide outlets for students to engage globally through international service learning. Traveling abroad through international service learning allows students to be challenged in their ways of thinking about the world and to see the common humanity around the world (Tonkin and Quiroga, 2004). As students travel internationally, they develop skills related to adaptability, maturity, cultural awareness, leadership, self-confidence, and spiritual growth (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Nickols, Rothenberg, Moshi & Tetloff, 2013). Additionally, Parks (2000) claimed that time abroad “may encourage emergence of critical thought [regarding personal development] as one steps out of the context of one’s own tribe and encounters the other” (p. 185). As students encounter a new perspective, they may begin to question life and their place in the world. The process of discovering this life purpose is known as vocation.

Life Calling

Asking the questions “Who am I?” and “Who am I going to be?” communicates a sense of searching for meaning and purpose. The terms *vocation* and *life calling* are often used interchangeably. Thus, the current study also uses these terms interchangeably. Chickering and Braskamp (2009) described this process as searching for “an attachment to something beyond themselves that provides meaning and significance” (p. 28). While the push for global experience benefits college students, an experience abroad might also have the power to either define or perplex a student’s sense of calling

in life. Finding a sense of purpose is vital in life, according to Parks (2000): “We human beings seem unable to survive, and certainly cannot thrive, unless we can make meaning” (p. 7). Parks further contended that higher education is the platform for young adults to question the relationship between life calling and a globalized world.

International service learning is an external experience that can impact a student’s sense of purpose in life. An experience abroad might also further confuse one’s sense of calling; individuals might return from their trip with a new sense of direction for their life. The role of vocation in a college student’s life is important, even more so because young adults likely change careers multiple times in their life. Discovering a calling in life can bring about one of the deepest forms of satisfaction (Hall & Chandler, 2005). The development of vocation occurs when individuals better understand their abilities, interests, values, and goals (National Career Counseling Association, 2011).

Purpose of Study

International service learning creates opportunity for students to develop in many areas, including their sense of vocational. For students to engage effectively in their development of life calling, research has examined international service learning and the impact of this experience on life calling. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how the international service learning experience impacts students’ sense of calling at a faith-based, liberal arts university. This study explored how this development occurs and to what extent it influences students’ future plans and life purpose. Through further study of this development in college students, higher education professionals can better understand the impact of an international service learning experience on students upon their return to campus and for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

International Service Learning

Colleges provide students with the opportunity to serve in an international context and also to experience another culture. More recently, the American Association of Higher Education has recognized service learning as an important way for students to develop skills through work experience (Annette, 2002). International service learning specifically challenges students' assumptions and ways of thinking about the world and provides an alternative outlet for students to learn outside of the classroom (Tonkin and Quiroga, 2004).

An experience far from comfortable and easy, international service learning offers students an opportunity to see the common humanity people share around the globe (Tonkin and Quiroga, 2004). As the popularity of international service learning develops and the accessibility of traveling to foreign countries arises, students increasingly take advantage of the cross-cultural experiences presented to them in college.

The evolution of international service learning. In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of service learning emerged on college campuses in the United States (Sternberger, Ford, & Hale, 2005). The lack of integration with the core mission statements of higher education institutions caused the concept of service learning to falter. In the 1980s, service learning was reintroduced to colleges, leading to a new integration of service and

learning as well as the rise of international service learning. Tonkin and Quiroga (2004) explained the uniqueness of how international service learning “combines aspects of conventional study abroad with aspects of conventional service-learning, offering an exceptional degree of integration into a target culture and an intensive experience of community service” (p. 131). Beginning as a domestic experience, service learning in higher education “can now be found, for example, in the Philippines, Singapore, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, and in Eastern and Central Europe” (Annette, 2002, p. 87). College students are, in turn, encouraged to participate in international service learning.

Service learning. Any program that attempts to link academic studies with a service experience can be considered service learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). According to Bringle and Hatcher (1996), “virtually all universities are interested in committing their resources to develop effective citizenship among their students, to address complex needs in the communities through the application of knowledge, and to form creative partnerships between the university and the community” (p. 236). Not only does service learning provide an opportunity for the university to connect with their community, but it also has a positive influence on student participants.

Research indicates that students who participate in service learning have an increased awareness of the world, an increased sense of personal efficacy, an increased awareness of one’s personal values, and an increased engagement in the classroom experience (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). In addition, students have reported positive effects in their academic performance, leadership skills, choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college. Service learning is influential because it is experiential, a style of learning that universities try to incorporate

into academics. Experience “enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 8). Service learning provides universities with the dual benefits of community engagement and experiential learning.

The challenges of reentry. A common challenge to university service learning programs is a lack of support for students who have participated in international service learning as they transition back into the United States. Tonkin and Quiroga (2004) studied a group of students who participated in an international partnership program and found that “many alumni returning to the United States felt the transition was more difficult than leaving” (p. 142). Alumni felt consumerism was one of the largest struggles to face in the United States after witnessing cultures that could barely afford the essentials to survive.

Students in this study also had difficulty finding a place to connect with others about their experience abroad. Alumni reported feeling cut off from the people they know yet unable to find the community they needed to help process what they had just experienced abroad. Kiely (2004) described this as the “Chameleon Process,” as students “learn how to translate their emerging global consciousness into action upon reentry into the internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms, rituals, and practices in the United States” (p. 15). As challenging as it is for students to enter into a new culture, they surprisingly feel a greater challenge upon their reentry into their home country. Nonetheless, it is important that students have a supportive environment to process their emotions and experiences with on campus.

The importance of reflection. One way for students to cope with reentry is to reflect on their experiences. Astin et al. (2000) believed in the power of reflection “as a

means of connecting the service to the academic course material” (p. 3). Time for reflection before, during, and after a student’s experience abroad is crucial for his or her personal development and emotions.

Nickols et al. (2013) conducted a study that examined the internal challenges, coping processes, and competence developed during international service learning. This research indicated the purpose of reflection through journals and focus groups “[for students] to express their personal anxieties and doubts, make observations about other participants and group dynamics, explore their feelings about the relationship with local participants, and consider the development of their intercultural competence and ability to cope” (p. 114). Reflection can also take place in small group discussion, directed writings, and class presentations. The integration of reflection and debriefing with international service learning is a key component to ensure students explore their emotions regarding their experience abroad.

Strengths developed. Reflection aids in students’ development as they serve internationally. The benefits students gain from international service learning include personal development related to adaptability and maturity, cultural awareness, leadership, self-confidence, and spiritual growth (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Nickols et al., 2013). As students travel internationally, they encounter a culture different from what they know, witness a different way of life, learn from the service they do, and develop strengths that remain with them long-term.

As student participants serve their host culture, they have the opportunity to interact with the indigenous people of that country. Nickols et al. (2013) noticed that

participants in cultural activities, such as joining in the dances of a local performance group, provided opportunities for the student to immerse themselves in other aspects of the culture, and in so doing develop a sense of competence and solidarity. (p. 114)

A study conducted by Eyler and Giles (1999) found that students who participated in service learning believe that “service learning helped them to become more competent as leaders” (p. 44) and also that service learning “contributes to greater self-knowledge, spiritual growth, and finding reward in helping others” (p. 55). The opportunity to participate in a service learning experience in an international context allows students to learn more about themselves: their strengths, weaknesses, worldviews, and beliefs.

Global perspective. In a world full of diversity, it is more necessary than ever for individuals to develop a global perspective because they must think and act while living in a world in which they interact with people from very different backgrounds from their own (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009). An international experience “can make a particularly powerful contribution to an individual’s knowledge and perceptions of the world” (Wilson, 1993, p. 21). International service learning provides students with the opportunity to gain a global perspective through exiting their comfort zones and entering into a country as the minority.

Students who participate in international service learning opportunities can view, perhaps for the first time, the United States from another perspective. In a study by Tonkin and Quiroga (2004), students learned that the rest of the world saw the United States as dangerous. They describe this as the “mirror effect . . . in which an individual examines his or her own construction of the Other by being immersed in the Other and

looking back at his or her own cultural reflection” (p. 141). American students learned how to interact with other cultures and saw that non-Americans treated them fairly and did not have a negative opinion of the United States (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004). Gaining a new perspective is an important component of becoming globally aware.

Upon a student’s return to the United States, she or he may or may not feel compelled to act upon their global consciousness, which could include “rejecting previous habits, ending relationships, changing jobs, engaging in counter-hegemonic practices, and resisting aspects of the dominant norms and rituals of mainstream U.S. culture” (Kiely, 2004, p. 16). Students might also gain new interests such as politics after serving internationally. This could result from witnessing a country far more affected by politics than the United States (Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, & Weaver, 1992).

Through interactions with host cultures, students gain a sense of intercultural competence, a goal of many undergraduate universities (Deardorff & Jones, 2006). Intercultural competence is the knowledge of other cultures and the development of one’s skills and attitudes in successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds. International service learning provides an opportunity for students to gain a global perspective while in college.

Vocation

Vocation is a complex term defined in many ways. According to Clydesdale (2015), 52% of college students use the terms vocation, calling, or purpose. While many college students use the term *vocation* when describing their life purpose, the influences on their sense of vocation might be internal or external. Internal influences “originate within the individual, whereby individual satisfaction represents the primary motivation”

(Duffy & Dick, 2009, p. 31). External influences are “someone or something outside the individual, whereby the satisfaction of some external factor or criteria represents the primary motivation” (p. 31). These influences might stem from family needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, or the desire to serve others. A multitude of external and internal motivations influences a student’s sense of vocation.

Clydesdale (2015) noted a lack of conversation about vocation as purpose. College students feel pressured to find a financially prosperous career but lack the support to explore vocation as a sense of fulfillment and meaning. College students focus on surviving economically rather than positively impacting the world or living a life beyond the paycheck. The internal and external influences a student encounters might impact their career choices, however, colleges should encourage students to explore vocation as a sense of purpose rather than a means to make money in life.

Hall and Chandler (2005) argued that “one of the deepest forms of satisfaction or psychological success can occur when the person experiences work as more than a job or career—when it is a *calling*” (p. 160). Hall and Chandler defined calling as “a work that a person perceives as his purpose in life” (p. 160). At the age of 17, seniors in high school “are pressured into developing a major on their application forms” and may or may not seek “advice from books and consultants about choosing a career [and] going after that perfect job” (Veith, 2002, p. 47). In college, students explore Vocational Identity Achievement (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012), which is the conscious awareness of one’s occupational interests, abilities, goals, and values. This identity is the mediator between calling and life satisfaction, and individuals must achieve this identity to positively influence their career outcomes.

Faith-based expressions of vocation. The term *vocation* has had a significant role in Christianity for centuries, and the meaning takes on different forms over time with varying denominational perspectives. The term *vocation* comes from the Latin root *vocare*, to call, and means the “work a man is called to by God” (Buechner, 1993, p. 95). Neafsey (2006) argue, “People often associate vocation either with the call to ordained ministry or vowed religious life or with the popular secular understanding of vocation as being synonymous with a job, occupation or career” (p. 79). Neafsey viewed these as valid, yet incomplete understandings of vocation. A mysterious connection lies between the will of God and our own heart’s desires and can be a struggle for students to uncover while in college. Perhaps the most widely known definition is from Buechner (1993): “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s hunger meet” (p. 95). Garber (2014) distinguished the difference between vocation and career:

The word *vocation* is a rich one, having to address the wholeness of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighbors, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this and more is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being, living my life before the face of God. It is never the same word as *occupation*, just as *calling* is never the same word as *career*. (p. 11)

Establishing the differences between occupation and vocation is an important step for college students to determine a career path.

Research has explored the meaning of vocation over the years. Kauffmann et al. (1992) presented vocation as “not simply an occupation or a career; it is that sense of purpose which occupies us- a summons to be our unique selves, a summons to do the

work indicated by the human context to which we are committed” (p. 138). Vocation is enjoyable work for an individual and is more than a paycheck; vocation is self-fulfillment (Schuurman, 2004). With the belief that vocation is predestined for mankind, students are in search of this God-given calling (Veith, 2002). Palmer (2010) describes, “Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am” (pp. 4–5). To determine one’s vocation, they must seek God’s direction for their life and uncover a purpose deeper than a career could satisfy.

International Service Learning and Calling

College is a helpful environment for students in search of meaning for their personal life path. The National Career Counseling Association (2011) believes a vital part of the career development process is “helping individuals increase self-understanding of their abilities, interests, values, and goals” (p. 1). Through the many opportunities presented on campus, students can test their strengths, challenge their beliefs, and expand their knowledge. Research reveals that international service learning opportunities cultivate a sense of calling in a student’s life. Little research and literature connect these two trends. Still, despite this lack of research, Marcia’s (1980) identity statuses and co-curricular experiences can aid in understanding the relationship.

Marcia’s identity statuses. As college students explore their sense of vocation, important questions of identity emerge. These questions intersect with key identity development markers, signifying challenge and choice. Marcia’s (1980) identity statuses explain the various reactions an individual might have when faced with a crisis. The statuses are (a) foreclosure, (b) moratorium, (c) identity achievement, and (d) diffusion.

During a state of foreclosure, individuals “are currently struggling with ideological positions, but these have been parentally chosen rather than self-chosen” (p. 161). In the status of moratorium, individuals face an identity crisis and lack commitment to a decision. Identity achievement is the ideal status, described as “individuals who have experienced a decision-making period and are pursuing self chosen occupation and ideological goals” (p. 161). Lastly, when in the state of diffusion, an individual cannot firmly commit to a decision, also known as “go with the flow.” While there are four different responses to a crisis, individuals unknowingly form their identity as they navigate through a crisis. Students who participate in international service learning encounter a crisis as they navigate how to interact with an unfamiliar country and culture. This moment of crisis thwarts students closer to identity achievement.

Co-curricular experiences. Co-curricular activities provide students with important opportunities for involvement (Astin) and engagement (Kuh). These experiences offer students personal and social challenges and encourage them to develop more complicated views on personal and academic matters (Kuh, 1995). Kuh (1993) measured the outcomes of students who participated in out-of-class experiences. One outcome frequently mentioned by students was the learning they gained by interacting with another race, ethnic, and culture. This study concluded that “experiences outside the classroom are an important venue where students not only develop an appreciation for people from different backgrounds from their own, but also cultivates skills that enable them to relate personally to such students” (p. 297). International service learning provides students with an experience to learn outside of the classroom and to engage with people from a different culture or background.

Summary

Through an understanding of how international service learning experiences can shape a student's sense of calling in life, higher education professionals—specifically those working in service learning, career development, and global engagement—will be prepared to construct programs necessary to aide in a student's service learning experience. The present study utilized a qualitative method to further examine this intersection of calling and international service learning. Without a doubt, international service learning will continue to have a role within higher education and will aide in students' development.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To understand the essence of students' international service learning experiences with regards to vocation, this study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenological research seeks to "explore and understand one single phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 130). This study required personal insight and lived experiences, as "it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event" (Smith, 2007, p. 53). Phenomenological research finds patterns in the accounts of a small sample of interviewed individuals with similar experiences. These experiences are lived and retrospective. As calling and experiences serving internationally are lived experiences, a phenomenological method was a fitting approach for this research study.

Research Questions

Through a phenomenological approach, this study explored two primary research questions: "In what ways does international service-learning impact a student's sense of life calling?" and "How would students define life calling after an international service learning trip?" The researcher conducted semi-structured, in-person interviews with students who have participated in an international service learning experience.

Participants

In January 2016, nearly 200 students of the 1,900 students from a small, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest participated in service learning in another

country. Students must apply to this institution's international service-learning program, but they do not get to choose the country in which they serve. Once applications are received, Student Affairs professionals overseeing the service-learning program place students on their country specific teams. The service-learning trips last three to four weeks and require students to participate in a semester-long course prior to the trip. This course educates students on the culture of the country they are entering. Each student is responsible to raise enough money to cover his or her fees associated with the trip.

Eleven students participated in this study. The researcher interviewed students from each country visited through the institution's January 2016 international service learning program: Indonesia, Ethiopia, Poland, and Spain. At the time of interviewing, participants were two months past their service learning experience, allowing time for them to process the experience and consider their callings in life.

Procedures

The director of the international service-learning program sent an email to all January 2016 participants to ask if they would participate in this research. The director offered to buy a drink at the campus coffee shop for each student who participated in the research. Eleven students volunteered to participate in the interviews. The researcher found at least one or two students from each country visited to represent a broad range of international service-learning experiences. The researcher also interviewed students of both genders and from multiple class years. Upon purposeful sampling, the researcher obtained written consent from participants regarding their involvement in this study.

The interviews consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions so that "the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the

researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 218). The themes of interview questions included vocation, international service learning (see Appendix A). The researcher attempted to approach these interviews without any preconceived notions. These in-person interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were encouraged to be as honest and open as possible. With the permission of the interviewees, the researcher recorded the interviews and also wrote notes throughout each interview. The interviews were transcribed, followed by an exploration of the data to obtain a general review of the findings. The researcher coded the interviews and searched for themes and patterns within the data.

Summary

Through the results of this research, directors of universities’ international service learning programs have a better understanding of the impact an international service learning experience has on a student’s sense of purpose in life. This research prepares career development offices for conversations with students who participate in international service learning. A question to consider is if the university must take any steps to transition students effectively back into their culture and to understand better the students’ senses of calling.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of this study highlight the impact of international service learning on the participants' life calling. When the researcher analyzed the data collected from the qualitative interviews, four themes emerged: experiences on a team; broadening of life calling; impacted faith; and thinking critically about missions. Furthermore, three sub-themes emerged: reflection; community as a life calling; and being called to missions. Most students returned from trips with their life calling challenged through shared experiences with their team, nightly reflections, or a desire to continue to participate in mission work. Additionally, all participants felt challenged in their faith, and likewise, all thought critically about international service learning.

Experiences on a Team

Participants indicated their shared experiences with teammates influenced their life callings. Through a team environment, participants shared intense experiences together. Being immersed in a different culture, living in uncomfortable situations, and witnessing marginalized people groups influenced their life callings as they shared these experiences with one another. Eight of the eleven participants expressed gratitude for their team and believed the experience would not have been the same without them.

Traveling with a team created a bond that many students appreciated. As teams navigated challenging tasks, they grew closer to one another. For example, the Spain

team found traveling to other countries a challenge and also a unifying experience.

Participant 2 shared:

I had experienced community in a much fuller sense [on the trip] because we were trying to manage the bus system and travel to France for the afternoon, like all these really hard things and we still did community really well. Like how frustrating it was when I came back.

Participant 2 felt upset when she returned to her friends from home because she missed her Spain team. She feels more connected with her team because of the difficult experiences she shared with them. The challenges participants faced with their teams allowed them to experience community in a new way.

Two participants indicated how their team helped cultivate self-awareness and prompted them to act more graciously toward others. Participant 1 shared, “I think anytime you’re in a team environment there's always the opportunity to learn how to be more gracious and like more humble and just more loving of people.” Similarly, Participant 3 believed she became more courteous after serving alongside a team. She learned to extend grace to her teammates and recognized how God meets everyone differently, according to their needs.

After spending time with a team, Participant 11 shared how she gained a new perspective on herself. She stated:

Interacting with a small group for an extended period of time reveals a lot of flaws in your own character. So I started noticing the way I would respond to people or that my motivations in conversation I just didn’t like, trying to make

myself look good, or um yeah just like the way I phrased things most the time I was just trying to make myself look good.

Overall, eight participants enjoyed their time as a team and would consider it a critical component to their time serving abroad. Participants had the chance to make new meaning of community, different from their current communities at their undergraduate institution. After serving on an international trip, these eight students felt called to be more intentional with the communities they live in. The experience also caused them to reflect on their own character and personal motives behind friendships.

Reflection. Each team had the opportunity to meet and reflect during the international service-learning trip. Team leaders often led the reflection times, but ultimately, it was up to the students to participate in team reflections. Some participants indicated that team reflection time on the trip largely influenced their development of life calling. Together, they asked hard questions, shared feelings, and discussed assigned readings. Participant 7 stated:

I appreciated my team members, we had a lot of debriefing every night, and we would ask questions like ‘is this really effective work?’ and ‘is what we’re doing really making an impact?’ ‘Are we hurting more than we’re helping?’ and things like that.

Together, each team wrestled through challenging topics and shared thoughts with one another. This reflection time allowed students to engage with emotions they experienced throughout the trip, which formed a bond among teammates and team leaders.

Participant 5 discussed how he engaged with his emotions on the international trip more than he ever had. He said, “I feel like totally a different person after that

[experience].” Beginning to recognize that he has continued to put personal challenges on the backburner, Participant 5 stated, “I don’t know how I lived my life ignoring everything I felt.” The group reflections and discussions on the trip allowed him to engage with his own emotions he had not dealt with in the past few years.

Reflections created intentional space for the team to gather, reflect, and share emotions throughout the trip. A few participants believed time to reflect kept them from going through the trip mindlessly, and they felt thankful for the shared time to engage with emotions. The time of reflection created a space for students to ponder their life callings and process future plans with the team.

Community is a life calling. Five participants expressed how the team experience left them with a life calling to live intentionally in their communities. After engaging in a shared experience with their peers and team leaders, they saw value in a close community. Participant 5 explained,

A subcategory [of my calling] is like what community looks like, or like the importance of that. Coming back [the team] has been my closest friends because of shared experiences and [now] I am just craving a community, like I feel very much like called to a community rather than called to a job. I feel called to a Christian community rather than like what job is going to give me the most comfortable living situation.

Participant 11 also learned more about herself through the interactions she had with others in a close environment. Participant 8 gained a new perspective on the community at his undergraduate college. He stated, “I think that one of the big things [the trip] did, it made me realize the value of constant Christian community.” He expressed how his

friendships in college lacked the effort his team put into community. He said, “When you're in a situation where [everyone] is like ‘we’re going to make a conscious effort as a group and we’ve all agreed to this,’ to fill into the community, there's this synergy that can happen that's really special.”

Participant 4 also felt called to community. After experiencing living life in constant community, he hoped to incorporate community into his life calling. He felt called both to his job as well as the community he lived in. He said:

Rather than just life calling in the sense of a job and providing for a family, [I view life calling] to be more of the way that I want to live my life holistically, or like be involved in a community, or be involved in a church, or have my family sort of act or live in a community, alongside a job, as well.

Participants felt their life calling now included both a job and a close community.

Participant 3 shared the ways she planned to change her interactions and attitude when relating with others. She hoped to be more intentional in conversation, curious, and loving toward other people. Her experience in Spain caused her to look “bigger picture” and consider how her relationships intertwine with her life calling.

The participants who believed they were called to live in community expressed gratitude for their experience with a team, as well as living intentionally in the community in which they served. Their idea of life calling shifted from solely seeing life calling as a job to incorporating how they interact with the community they live in. The experience participants shared with their team gave them the opportunity to live in intentional community.

A Broadened Life Calling

Ten participants felt a sense of calling prior to the international service learning experience. However, these participants reported that their international service learning experience broadened their sense of calling. Their life callings were expanded by challenges they faced during their time spent serving abroad. These challenges included career choices, views on money, and future involvement in missions.

Participant 10 valued time to share with his teammates about general feelings of confusion regarding the future. Prior to the trip, he felt confused about his life calling. The opportunity to process his future with teammates helped in discerning his life calling. As a result of this trip, he stated:

So, I think I've just been a lot more open minded in my thinking about where God is calling me. . . . I wouldn't say there is anything from [the service learning experience] that has called me to that except for maybe openness to other opportunities.

Serving abroad gave Participant 10 the space he needed to think about his future. His view of life calling broadened from thinking narrowly about his life calling to being more open to where God wants him.

Participant 2 shared about how her calling was challenged on her trip in Spain. The Spain team spent time with Spaniard college students, and, prior to the trip, Participant 2 had always felt called to work with college-aged students. Participant 2 hoped her time in Spain would affirm her calling. She stated:

It really was harder than I expected because of like the language barrier and not feeling that connection with the students all the time like I had perceived I would

beforehand. It didn't deny my hope of working with college students at all, but it did definitely asked me to think about why I wanted to.

What she thought was going to be an easy connection with college students proved otherwise. The trip made her question the life calling she had felt from God. Through this experience, Participant 2 was challenged in what she thought was her life calling. She still hoped to work with college students but felt more prepared for the challenges of working with this demographic of students after her unexpected experience in Spain.

As a transformational result of the trip, Participant 5 felt called to being himself rather than doing something particular in life. Prior to the trip, he applied to be a Resident Assistant in his residence hall, feeling as though he needed to fit a certain mold to fulfill such duties. During the trip, however, he became more confident in who he is as an individual. He said:

So when approaching the role of RA next year, I feel called to be myself rather than feel called to do PA stuff, and put an emphasis on just living into the person that God has created me to be rather than a checklist mentality. So I think that's been transformational in the way that I am less task-oriented and I'm feeling much more like just being myself in whatever situation I'm in.

The trip in Southeast Asia gave Participant 5 a chance to learn more about himself and recognize the outside pressures influencing who he desired to be. After the trip, he felt freer to be himself and even considered this a calling for his life.

Participant 11 went on the trip to Spain and, as a Spanish speaker, could utilize her skills by translating for others during the trip. She found a great amount of joy from

this opportunity, describing it as “a superpower” and ultimately considering ways to use this skill in her life calling.

Participant 3 realized how much she enjoyed studying other cultures since experiencing a new culture in Southeast Asia. Prior to the trip, she felt called to medicine but, after returning from the trip, has been thinking about “the possibility of going into a career [in cultural anthropology, international relations], as opposed to medicine.” The opportunity to experience a new culture opened Participant 3’s eyes to a larger world and a desire to study the beauty of it as a life calling.

Participant 4 was introduced to a Muslim community while in Southeast Asia and has been greatly impacted since the trip. He cared deeply for the Muslim community as a whole and felt called to incorporate advocacy for Muslims into his life calling. He stated:

I have a desire to be some sort of activist or advocate in Muslim affairs, especially in the US. I’m really excited about pursuing some sort of refugee work after school. I think [the trip] had a large impact at least pointing me towards that path of considering something along the lines of Muslim work and refugee work.

Having also lived with impoverished people in Southeast Asia, Participant 4 felt called to live a simple lifestyle without the desire to make a lot of money in his future career.

The international service learning experience challenged participants’ life callings in a variety of ways. The unique experiences each trip offered prompted an assortment of questions from participants. Whether the students discovered a new passion or felt responsible to care for the culture they served in, international service learning broadened the majority of participants’ life callings.

Called to missions. The international service learning trips visited Christian mission organizations around the globe. Students witnessed the lives of their hosts, full-time missionaries, giving them a realistic picture of such a lifestyle. Three of the eleven participants returned from their time serving abroad feeling called to serve in the field of Christian missions after they graduated from college.

Participant 9 shared how she always desired to live outside of the United States, not necessarily as a missionary but as a means to minister to other cultures. After she returned from Poland, she missed the people and the culture immensely and felt a strong desire to move there some day. She said, “I have a hard time explaining why I miss it. I just miss all of it. I think Poland has been a very pivotal moment for my future, just thinking like, ‘I think I want to live here.’” She fell in love with the Polish culture and developed a strong relationship with the missionaries they visited. After her trip, Participant 9 felt called to return after her college graduation to serve in some capacity.

Participant 7 always considered teaching somewhere overseas after graduation in the form of missions. During her trip in Ethiopia, she had the chance to talk with the full-time missionaries who led her team. Hoping to grasp a sense of what life is really like as a missionary, she asked them hard questions about missions. She said, “[It was encouraging] seeing that even they have struggles and their ministry isn’t perfect. [Prior to the trip], I was like how in the world am I supposed to make any kind of difference in missions?” Engaging with missionaries gave Participant 7 a realistic understanding of mission work. She learned to expect tribulation, yet also saw the value in mission work. After her experience in Ethiopia, she hoped to pursue mission work as a full-time career after graduating from college.

Participant 5 hoped to live in an inner city some day and work in ministry. Even if ministry were not his full-time job, he hoped to be a witness to his neighbors and live in community with them. He said, “I think missions, whether formal or informal, it’s going to be something my entire life will revolve around.” Although he does not plan to serve as a full-time missionary, he considered missions work as a part of his life calling.

Witnessing the lives of missionaries was a valuable experience for participants who felt called to mission work. The experience gave them the opportunity to engage with missionaries by asking hard questions and understanding the realities many missionaries face.

Impacted Faith

All 11 participants indicated their faith was somehow shaped during their time serving abroad. Each participant considered his or her faith a personal calling in life, and the time serving abroad helped to shape each one’s personal relationship with God. After serving in Southeast Asia and experiencing a Muslim culture, Participant 4 said:

What’s awesome is I think there’s a lot to be gained within the Christian faith of looking at other faiths. With Buddhism, the value on meditation. With Islam, the reverence for God, the amount of respect they have is huge. Looking at that has really developed this sort of idea that yeah I know God is my friend and he loves me, but also, he’s the supreme creator of the world and deserves reverence.

Participant 4 left the trip with a wider perspective about his faith and other faiths in the world. The exposure to different cultures and faiths influenced his perception of God.

Participants 10 and 8 both traveled to Spain and, upon returning from their trip, felt more confident in sharing the Gospel with others. Because the trip was

apologetically (an evangelism method) driven, they spent time talking about hard questions, such as the problem of evil, the interaction between science and faith, and other various topics that Christians are often afraid to engage. After their month abroad, they felt more confident in engaging with others about those topics.

Participant 5's views of God completely changed while he was in Southeast Asia. He shared:

I came onto the trip having a theological box that I put God in. In that way I feel like my view of God is more accurate now than ever before. I feel like before [the trip] it was very arrogant and now it's much more reverent or true humility where that was something I always struggled with. My view of God is totally changed. Kind of similarly God feels like an ever increasingly large question mark that I'm drawing closer to, but realizing the gap is ever broader between us.

The participants gained a new perspective of God after living in a different culture for a month. The experience in a culture not predominately Christian impacted their faith in different ways.

Thinking Critically about Missions

The program that equipped the participants for their international service learning trips required students to engage with the question, "How can we help without hurting the communities we are serving in?" The institution is accredited by the Standards of Excellence (Standards of Excellence in Short Term Missions, n.d.), an organization that holds high principles in the implementation of short-term missions. The institution equips students to engage in short term missions in a way more helpful than hurtful. Eight of the 11 participants indicated they thought critically about mission work. The

students engaged with this topic throughout their time serving abroad and believed it equipped them to avoid unintentionally hurting the community in which they served.

Participants 11 and 3 indicated they felt skeptical about short-term missions prior to the trip. Their previous experiences with short-term missions did not reflect the Standards of Excellence (Standards of Excellence in Short Term Missions, n.d.). After experiencing a well-led missions trip, they saw the value in them. Participant 3 shared:

This J-term trip even, through the first few weeks of class, I was pretty unsure whether or not I was going to stay with it, just because I had never really seen [missions] done well. And I think that the way that our hosts in Southeast Asia run things is done really well. So I think I will probably be involved in them in the future.

Participants appreciated the preparation they received from their institution regarding international service learning. The institution strove for positive short-term missions experiences for both students and the communities they visited.

Conclusion

International service learning greatly influenced the participants' lives. From their spiritual lives to their future careers, students felt challenged and supported during their time serving abroad. The participants saw the value in community, thought about short-term missions critically, and felt their life callings shaped by their time serving in an international country. While the trip may have only lasted four weeks, the students have been impacted for a lifetime.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research explored how participation in an international service learning trip can influence life calling. Current literature—such as Chickering and Braskamp (2009) and Parks (2000), who explored vocational development, and Tonkin and Quiroga (2004), who researched the international service learning experience—show the value in considering the intersection of vocation and international service learning. Along with the literature, the results of this research help paint a picture of a student’s vocational development from participating on an international service learning experience. The following discussion uses the themes of this research study and relevant literature to discuss implications for practice.

Searching for Purpose

Vocation is a complex term defined in many different ways. The Latin root *vocare* means “the work a man is called to by God” (Buechner, 1993, p. 95). Among the numerous definitions of the word *vocation*, many people agree they seek some purpose in life. The literature suggests that, during college, students explore Vocational Identity Achievement (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012), the conscious awareness of one’s occupational interests, abilities, goals, and values. This study’s participants moved toward Vocational Identity Achievement as they explored a new culture, shared experiences with a team, and witnessed different lifestyles from what they were

accustomed to in the United States. The participants' experiences serving in other countries caused them to reflect on their personal vocations and return with new perspectives on their life callings.

Reflection. Participants in this study found times of reflection to be influential on their life calling. Similarly, Palmer (2010) said, "Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am" (pp. 4-5). The time for reflection allowed participant's space to listen to their lives, ask questions, and think deeply about their life callings, just as Palmer described. One participant viewed the time for reflection during his trip as transformational. Time for reflection gave him the space to engage with emotions that his busy schedule back home does not allow.

In a study on the power of reflection during an international service learning experience, Nickols et al. (2013) found reflection vital "[for students] to express their personal anxieties and doubts, make observations about other participants and group dynamics, explore their feelings about the relationship with local participants, and consider the development of their intercultural competence and ability to cope" (p. 114). The participants expressed gratitude for their team reflection time during the trip and viewed as helpful in the development of their life callings. The group reflection time bonded participants together as they shared challenges and emotions throughout the trip.

Life calling was broadened. Ten of the eleven participants indicated their personal life callings were challenged because of their international service learning experience. Kiely's (2004) research discussed students' immediate changes after an international service learning trip: "rejecting previous habits, ending relationships,

changing jobs, engaging in counter-hegemonic practices, and resisting aspects of the dominant norms and rituals of mainstream U.S. culture” (p. 16). Participants in this study experienced similar results, from career paths adjustments to lifestyle changes. As stated in Chapter 4, one participant felt called to simply be himself:

So when I approach the role of PA [residence life position] next year, I feel called to be myself rather than feel called to do PA stuff, and put an emphasis on just living into the person that God has created me to be rather than a checklist mentality.

The participant’s understanding of life calling shifted from fitting into a job description to focusing more on who he was as an individual. Other participants returned from the international service learning trip feeling called to be more gracious towards others, to live a life with community, to serve as a missionary, or to advocate for marginalized people groups. Participants reported having a sense of calling prior to their international service learning experiences, but afterwards, this sense of calling was broadened.

Out-of-Class Experiences

The literature suggests out-class-experiences create holistic development in students. Kuh (1995) stated, “out-of-class experiences influence student learning and personal development” (p. 124). All participants in this study experienced development in some way while serving in another country. The students learned how to immerse themselves in another culture, how to interact with teams, and how to think critically about short-term missions. This study revealed that, through these out-of-class experiences, participants developed their sense of life calling.

International service-learning. According to Chickering and Braskamp (2009), “the traditional-aged college student needs to develop and internalize a global perspective into her thinking, sense of identity, and relationships with others” (p. 27). The international service-learning trips provided this study’s participants with the chance to develop a global perspective. This perspective influenced the participants’ life callings.

“For many undergraduate students, the international service-learning experience marks an important transformational event in their lives, one that will forever shape their sense of self, lifestyle, connection to others, view of global problems and purpose in life” (Kiely, 2004, p. 5). Participants indicated the impact of serving abroad on their sense of purpose, feeling challenged in their sense of life calling upon returning from their trips.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

This study addressed the impact of international service learning on college students’ life callings. There are implications for future research topics to continue the discussion of international service learning and life calling. Additionally, this research provides Student Affairs practitioners with implications for best practice.

Future research. First, conducting a longitudinal study on alumni of the international service learning program would be beneficial. In order to assess the long-term impacts of international service learning, a research study should be conducted years after the short-term missions experience.

In addition, future studies could focus on the value of continued reflection for participants after they return from their international service learning trips. Reflection played a key role in the development of life calling during the participants’ experiences

and should be practiced upon their return. It is valuable for teams to have further reflection times to unpack their experiences and explore the question, “Now what?”

Similarly, future research on the training of trip leaders would benefit the field of international service learning. A theme in this research was the value of reflection led by the team leaders. Leaders can encourage thoughtful team reflections during the trip, and they also have the opportunity to engage with participants as they wrestle with questions about their life callings. Assessing the qualities of a positive team leader would be helpful for the development of international service learning trips.

Lastly, the participants in this study visited a variety of countries for their international service learning trips. The countries and cultures impacted students in different ways. Future research could be conducted on just one country, focusing on how a single country influences a participant’s sense of life calling.

Practice. Implications for Student Affairs practitioners emerged from this study. First, there must be an awareness of the challenges participants face from an international service learning experience. As this research study showed, many students return from their trips asking “Now what?” Student Affairs practitioners should be aware of the difficult transition students experience returning from international service learning involvements. Practitioners should encourage students to reflect upon their experience and, when appropriate, listen to students as they verbally process.

Additionally, offering a post-trip course for students to learn how to communicate the skills developed on their trips would be beneficial. Students developed strengths during their time serving abroad, and, as the literature says, a global perspective is important for students’ future careers. Offering a course on how to communicate the

skills they developed while abroad would benefit students. This course could continue discussions from the international service learning trip, prompting students to further discern their sense of life calling.

As stated in chapter 4, reflection and experiences on a team played a large role in the development of participants' life callings. An implication to these findings is the intentional selection of team leaders. They should be carefully chosen because of the major influence they can have on international service learning participants. Team leaders have the potential to play a role in the development of a student's life calling and therefore should be aware of the responsibility this entails. Team leaders must be willing to engage with students on the topic of life calling and should encourage a healthy team atmosphere and reflection time.

Lastly, there must be a continuation of pre-trip and post-trip courses for students. The pre-trip courses, similar to the ones in this study, would prepare students for their international service learning experience by pondering how to help other countries without hurting them. The post-trip course should cover topics such as post-trip culture shock and the transition back home. The additional courses could allow students time to continue reflection and discerning life calling as they transition back home.

Research Limitations

There are three limitations present in this study. One limitation is the variety of international service learning locations and participant demographics, including academic year, when they served abroad, current age, and life experiences. These factors may have influenced their responses. For example, someone in his or her last year of study could

have different results of how he or she felt impacted by their experience because of maturity. Similarly, the various countries visited could have yielded different results.

Another limitation was the ambiguity of the variable *vocation*. During interviews, the term was not defined so as to allow each participant the space to determine their own thoughts on vocation. The varying definitions of vocation produced a variety of answers on the subject. Some participants believed vocation means “job,” whereas other participants defined vocation as “lifestyle.”

Lastly, a general limitation of qualitative research is that participants’ experiences cannot be measured objectively. The researcher has personal service learning experience and therefore holds a degree of bias impossible to fully disconnect from the data.

Conclusion

The results of this study supported the belief that an international service learning experience is transformational and significantly impacts one’s life calling. The experience offers participants the opportunity to learn more about themselves through times of reflection, interactions with a team, and experiences in a new culture. These factors contribute to challenges in discerning one’s future calling, a healthy tension that prompts students to think deeply about their purpose in life. Institutions must proactively prepare their students for trips that have the potential to deeply influence students’ life callings. Such preparation is accomplished by offering culturally diverse destinations, pre-departure and post-departure education and debriefing, recruiting effective team leaders, and focusing on life calling development. The implementation of these factors equips students to enhance their sense of purpose and life calling. International service learning trips play a significant role in the development of students’ life calling.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. What country did you travel to?
2. Was this the first time you traveled outside of the country? To an underdeveloped country?
3. What did you do while in _____ country?
4. How has the trip shaped who you are?
5. How has the trip impacted how you live out your faith?
6. What questions about your life calling were raised?
7. How did serving impact your sense of life calling?
8. Did your definition of vocation change before and after your experience serving in _____ country?
9. How would you define vocation?
10. Do you foresee yourself participating in future mission trips? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Section C: Informed Consent checklist

When using humans as research subjects you must first obtain their informed consent. Use this checklist to effectively create an informed consent form.

1. Project Title
Through A Broadened Lens: An Exploration of International Service Learning and Life Calling
2. Introduction of Researcher(s)
Lauren Carter is a graduate student earning her Masters of Higher Education and Student Development at Taylor University. Her assistantship is overseeing the Global Outreach cabinet within Taylor World Outreach. The students she oversees range from freshman to seniors.
3. Purpose of Research
I am conducting a semi-structured qualitative research study on the impact of international service learning on vocation through the Lighthouse program at Taylor University.
4. Explanation of Procedures
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be completing a face-to-face interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes. You will be one of 8-12 participants in this study.

5. Risks and Benefits

I do not anticipate any foreseeable risks or discomforts other than the inconvenience to you in completing the interview. If there are any risks that do occur, the counseling service at Taylor University will be contacted. This study will benefit you by allowing you to verbalize the impact an international service learning experience had on your vocation. This research will also benefit me in my understanding of the impact an international service learning experience has on student's understanding of life calling.

6. Safeguards of Data

I will not identify you during my thesis or in my research paper in general. Your name will be changed to protect your true identity. Data will be published and your information will be shared with my authorities, but I will not use your real name in the final thesis/presentation when I defend. The data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

7. Freedom to withdraw from the study

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the information gathered at that point will be destroyed.

8. Third Party Referral

Should you have any questions regarding this project at any time, please contact Lauren Carter at lauren_carter@taylor.edu or at 317-412-0879. My faculty sponsor's name is Drew Moser. Please contact him at drmoser@taylor.edu

9. If you have any questions regarding this research, your interview, your rights as a subject, or any other aspect of the search as it relates to your participation as a subject, it can be directed to Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of the IRB, Susan Gavin at 765-99805188 or ssgavin@taylor.edu

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Subject's Printed Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

If the study involves children who will be providing their assent on this consent document, rather than on an assent document, use the following signatures:

Printed Name of Parent: _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Date: _____

