From “Knowing” to “Not Knowing”: Critical Global Citizenship Education for Engineering Partnerships

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INTRODUCTION

What do a rural farmer in Nicaragua, a school child in Cambodia, a village chief in Panama, and an indigenous medicine man in the Philippines all have in common? They have all improved the way that Villanova engineers understand and see the world. Those individuals have all helped us to improve engineering education and improve people’s understanding of the impact of engineering in a global context. So, it’s actually the opposite of what most people would expect. I think that’s probably an important distinguishing characteristic of the approach we take with all of the work that we’re doing.

*– Jordan Ermilio, Center for Humanitarian Engineering and International Development,
Villanova University*

This statement highlights ideas about what counts as knowledge, who teaches and who learns, and how students learn. In describing the program, the Director clearly acknowledges and focuses on the fact that “the community” helps him and the university to educate the engineering students.

This article was part of a larger study that explored community participants’ perspectives in Waslala, Nicaragua about the long-term global service learning (GSL¹) partnership with Villanova University’s College of Engineering (Reynolds, 2016). This article explores the question: From the community participants’ perspectives, what are their educational goals for the university engineering students in this partnership? While I intentionally centered this article on the community participants’ perspectives, I also explored areas of alignment and areas of difference between the perspectives of the different stakeholder groups in this partnership (including university participants such as faculty/ staff and students) learning and knowledge.

Motivated by student learning, the community participants and university administrators/ faculty describe their educational goals for students in this partnership focused on global citizenship education. The community participants want to serve as co-educators of the students and the university administration/ faculty acknowledge the community participants as co-educators of their students; however, before the trip the university students describe motivations that reflect the “modern/ colonial global imaginary” (Stein & Andreotti, 2015) where privileged individuals from the North have a responsibility for “helping” the poor. Community participants articulated their ideas about global citizenship education as a desired transition in students – a move beyond notions of soft global citizenship in the direction of critical global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006). Reflecting ideas from postcolonial theory, their educational goals in this GSL partnership call for a move away from charity, helping, or a responsibility for the Other and instead propose a responsibility to the Other because of our past relations in history (Spivak, 1988).

In this article, I examine how critical global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006) provides a useful foundation to pursue ethical engagements in community-university partnerships. Then, I share the methods and findings of this study before exploring the implications for both practice and theory. I hope these perspectives enable additional voices previously absent to enter the conversation, challenge assumptions, enrich the dialogue, and improve partnership planning. I argue that all of us engaged in GSL partnerships need to interrupt the false binaries of us/them and work to re-conceptualize the way that university stakeholders approach GSL partnerships in

¹ It is important to note that although Crabtree (2008) and the majority of existing scholarship specifically utilizes the term ISL, scholars have recently articulated reasons to make an intentional shift from international service-learning (ISL) to global service-learning (GSL) (Hartman et al, 2018; Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Larsen, 2016). This shift explicitly focuses on power, privilege, and community voice and draws attention to the ways in which global ethical engagement must be at the center of domestic experiences as well. I intentionally use the term GSL in this study while acknowledging that I draw from literature that uses the term ISL.

order to reach the potential of GSL to work towards sustainable community development and mutual learning.

CRITICAL GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Andreotti (2006) provides a useful framework that differentiates between notions of soft global citizenship and critical global citizenship education. In Andreotti’s notion of critical global citizenship education, power, voice, and difference are central. She argues that critical literacy provides a pathway to pursue critical instead of soft notions of global citizenship education. Critical literacy is “based on the assumption that all knowledge is partial and incomplete, constructed in our contexts, cultures, and experiences.” The table below describes and distinguishes between soft global citizenship education and critical global citizenship education in terms of: the problem, the nature of the problem, justifications for positions of privilege, basis for caring, grounds for acting, understanding of interdependence, what needs to change, what for, the role of “ordinary” individuals, what can individuals do, how does change happen, basic principle for change, the goal of global citizenship education, strategies for global citizenship education, potential benefits of global citizenship education, and potential problems (table is from Andreotti, 2006).

	Soft Global Citizenship Education	Critical Global Citizenship Education
Problem	Poverty, helplessness	Inequality, injustice
Nature of the problem	Lack of ‘development’, education, resources, skills, culture, technology, etc.	Complex structures, systems, assumptions, power relations and attitudes that create and maintain exploitation and enforced disempowerment and tend to eliminate difference.
Justification for positions of privilege (in the North and in the South)	‘Development’, ‘history’, education, harder work, better organization, better use of resources, technology.	Benefit from and control over unjust and violent systems and structures.
Basis for caring	Common humanity/being good/sharing and caring. Responsibility <i>FOR</i> the other (or <i>to teach</i> the other).	Justice/complicity in harm. Responsibility <i>TOWARDS</i> the other (or <i>to learn with</i> the other) - accountability.

Grounds for acting	Humanitarian/moral (based on normative principles for thought and action).	Political/ethical (based on normative principles for relationships).
Understanding of interdependence	We are all equally interconnected, we all want the same thing, we can all do the same thing.	Asymmetrical globalization, unequal power relations, Northern and Southern elites imposing own assumptions as universal.
What needs to change	Structures, institutions and individuals that are a barrier to development.	Structures, (belief) systems, institutions, assumptions, cultures, individuals, relationships.
What for	So that everyone achieves development, harmony, tolerance and equality.	So that injustices are addressed, more equal grounds for dialogue are created, and people can have more autonomy to define their own development.
Role of ‘ordinary’ individuals	Some individuals are part of the problem, but ordinary people are part of the solution as they can create pressure to change structures.	We are all part of problem and part of the solution.
What individuals can do	Support campaigns to change structures, donate time, expertise and resources.	Analyze own position/context and participate in changing structures, assumptions, identities, attitudes and power relations in their contexts.
How does change happen	From the outside to the inside (imposed change).	From the inside to the outside.
Basic principle for change	Universalism (non-negotiable vision of how everyone should live what everyone should want or should be).	Reflexivity, dialogue, contingency and an ethical relation to difference (radical alterity).
Goal of global citizenship education	Empower individuals to act (or become active citizens) according to what has been	Empower individuals to reflect critically on the legacies and processes of their cultures, to imagine different futures and to

	defined for them as a good life or ideal world.	take responsibility for decisions and actions.
Strategies for global citizenship education	Raising awareness of global issues and promoting campaigns.	Promoting engagement with global issues and perspectives and an ethical relationship to difference, addressing complexity and power relations.
Potential benefits of global citizenship education	Greater awareness of some of the problems, support for campaigns, greater motivation to help/do something, feel good factor.	Independent/critical thinking and more informed, responsible and ethical action.
Potential problems	Feeling of self-importance and self-righteousness and/or cultural supremacy, reinforcement of colonial assumptions and relations, reinforcement of privilege, partial alienation, uncritical action.	Guilt, internal conflict and paralysis, critical disengagement, feeling of helplessness.

METHODS

This article was part of a larger study that explored community participants’ perspectives in Waslala, Nicaragua about the projects and long-term partnership with Villanova University’s College of Engineering (Reynolds, 2016). The depth of understanding called for in this study was facilitated through the use of a qualitative case study. The case study approach encouraged a deep exploration of the complex nature of the GSL partnership with particular attention to the importance of and influence of context (Lather, 1986). As stated by Flyvbjerg (2011), “the main strength of the case study is depth- detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance” (p. 314).

Research aims to produce knowledge and seeks to apply that knowledge elsewhere. This partnership in this context is unique – as is every context – and therefore this study does not allow broad generalization. I utilize Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) idea of *transferability*. Instead of a focus on broad generalization, they employ an idea about sending and receiving contexts and place responsibility for transferability on the person seeking to apply the findings in a different context. They call the person who wants to apply the findings to a new context to seek “contextual similarity” and the original researchers to provide adequate description of the context

to allow these comparisons. In this study, my pursuit of transferability lies in thick description and providing enough data to enable future researchers to compare this specific context to another context in which they are interested (see Reynolds, 2016). This notion of transferability again draws attention to the importance of context as espoused by case study methodology and post-colonial theory.

“The case” – Villanova & Waslala

Although the College of Engineering (CoE) has numerous GSL partners, they describe their partnership with Waslala as their “most successful partnership.” It is their longest continuous partnership (initiated in 2002) and over 250 CoE students and faculty have travelled to Waslala. The partnership includes several different departments in the CoE and several local community organizations in Waslala so it is not heavily dependent on one person.

The participants were composed of members of both the University at Villanova and the Community in Waslala. The participants of the study included: university administrators (3 participants), faculty (3 participants), students (12 participants), community organization representatives (11 participants), and community residents (15 participants).

This study utilized multiple sources of data to explore the community participants’ perspectives of the projects and partnership: participant observation, interviews, and document review. Reynolds (2016) provides a more detailed description of all methods including interview protocols and code lists. All observations and interviews were conducted during the fall semester 2012 at Villanova University and in Waslala, Nicaragua. Although I initially planned to conduct member checks after initial analysis, when I returned to Waslala to do so, this process led to much more in depth conversations with community organization representatives that developed into co-analysis that shifted my thinking on certain initial findings and added depth to the findings overall (see Reynolds, 2019, for an in-depth description of the participatory analysis process and how it led to revised findings).

FINDINGS

The community participants want to serve as co-educators of the students and the university administration/ faculty acknowledges the community participants as co-educators of their students; however, before the trip the university students describe their motivations as “helping,” “applying their skills and talents,” and “giving back.” In contrast to the motivations of community participants and university administrators/ faculty, the student comments about their motivations reflect the “modern/ colonial global imaginary” (Stein & Andreotti, 2015) where privileged individuals from the North have a responsibility for “helping” the poor.

My findings indicate that the community participants hope for a transition in students related to ideas about learning, knowledge, and their role in engagements with the Other. Community

participant perspectives describe a desired shift in students from “knowing” to “not knowing,” from helping/ teaching to learning, from responsibility *for* the Other to responsibility *to* the Other (Spivak, 1988). The community participants’ perspectives illuminate the importance of post-colonial theory in informing and shaping this partnership and highlight critical global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006) as a useful framework to understand the community participants’ educational goals for students.

Global citizenship education: Student transition

In this partnership, the community participants’ perspectives on what they want to teach the students related to critical global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006) with emphasis on complicity and humility. Describing his motivations to pursue this GSL partnership, one community organization representative commented,

The consciousness and the relationships from having known, known with your own eyes and your own hand, will give you more motivation to support, to support and to understand the Other, right? It is a manner to respect us also. Afterwards someone might be interested in Waslala and others head to Africa and other work within the United States...but it is the same mentality.

This comment situates student learning and development in history, North-South relations, and ethical engagement with the Other.

Community participants articulated their ideas about global citizenship education as a desired transition in students – a move beyond notions of soft global citizenship in the direction of critical global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006). Reflecting ideas from postcolonial theory, their educational goals in this GSL partnership call for a move away from charity, helping, or a responsibility *for* the Other and instead propose a responsibility *to* the Other because of our past relations in history (Spivak, 1988). The community organization representatives described their educational goals for university students related to global citizenship as a desired shift from “knowing” to “not knowing,”

If you come here with an attitude that I’m a big bad engineer and I have all this knowledge and I’m going to come here and help all these people. I hope these experiences kind of change that perspective a little bit in that they see the difficulties of working in this kind of context. That in spite of formal education, you don’t necessarily have all the answers, and I hope the experience can be kind of humbling.

This shift from knowing to not knowing or a call for humility reflects a move from soft global citizenship to critical global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006). Another community organization representative provided a cautionary example from past experiences with students from the university,

You have to be careful about the manner in which you enter other countries especially if we are talking about “developing countries” then...you can create a false expectation on the part of the student that they are there to teach something...it seems to me that the

example is [X] who arrived with the idea that he was here to help and not to learn. So, I think it was important to turn that upside down and orient the student. Students from other countries need time to understand things and cultural mediators to understand.

Alongside humility, I heard a call that students and international volunteers recognize and acknowledge their own complicity in past relations as a means to pursue ethical engagement. An understanding of history, culture, and politics represents a means to understand complicity.

The most important considerations in selecting volunteers to visit Waslala, according to one community organization representative, are “that they have historical, socio-cultural, economic and political knowledge about Waslala and Nicaragua.” This knowledge is considered more important than any technical skills or knowledge related to the work or projects. In another statement, this same community organization representative commented on the importance of shared austerity (Bergdall, 2003) and accompaniment (Griffin & Block, 2013) for students to learn about structures or history and the influence on current circumstances in Waslala. He stated,

In the sense that [the students] will never forget the experience they had, til the last day of their lives they will remember that they were in Nicaragua, that they dealt with challenges, that they walked in the mud, that they stepped in cow poop and that people need someone to share with them because they were not born in the same reality, they did not have the opportunity to have a good job, they did not have the opportunity for a quality education and it is not their fault.

This comment reflects Spivak’s call to acknowledging complicity and Andreotti’s (2007) related explanation of learning about not only human rights, but also “human wrongs.”

Another community organization representative commented about the U.S. role in the history of Nicaragua, specifically the Contra war, and the importance that Villanova students understand some of that history. Echoing the desire for student volunteers to learn about history, culture, and politics before coming to Waslala, s/he stated,

I think it would be good if it is not just an experience with a water system or with a group of health leaders, but also related with some of the history. It helps to understand that it was a war financed by the U.S. and it is hard when people come from the U.S. to talk about the past and the role of the U.S...but the U.S. has had a fundamental role in the history of this country.

This alludes to Spivak’s call for recognizing complicity when engaging the Other in the developing world. Spivak calls for a responsibility to the Other not to help, but a responsibility because of our complicity in past relations in history.

Student transition: “How am I helping right now?”

Before the break trip, the university students described their motivations for participation as: (1) have a new and different experience, (2) help others, and (3) apply what they are learning in the classroom. Students commented about “the chance to go somewhere [they’d] never been before,

experience something that [they’d] never really experienced before” and referred to “the international travel part.” Students also described their desire to “help others;” however, in numerous comments the students seemed to focus on themselves. They said things like “I wanted to do something good, you know, feel good about myself” and talked about how “trying to help them out is really rewarding for me.” University students expressed a desire to apply what they are learning in the classroom and talked about “trying to apply [their] skills and talents and interests to do something tangible” and the goal to “use something that I learned in the classroom and [be] able to give back in more ways than just my time.”

While the community organization representatives focus on their desire to help teach students which shows they are confident that they have knowledge to teach students and the university administration/ faculty directly acknowledge the community participants as teachers, before the trip the students do not seem aware that the community has knowledge to teach them. The students’ comments indicate ideas about knowledge and learning that seem to align with a positivist epistemology where knowledge is constructed in the mind and can be scientifically applied. Students indicate a view that they possess knowledge and skills that have been developed through coursework in the university and can apply that knowledge to “help” those in the community instead of “learn” from the experience. In SL and GSL research, there is concern about recognizing local knowledge and the community as ‘knowers’ because of the positivist orientation of higher education. Before the trip, university students’ comments, related to applying their knowledge and skills they had learned in the classroom to “help others.”

One day during the trip, we had returned from a particularly grueling hike and we met our ride back along the roadside. When one of the engineering faculty members asked the students how the day went, one student replied, “Today undid me and then rebuilt me...It just, tore me down. I didn’t have any strength. I was just like, how am I helping right now?” This comment describes learning and knowledge with uncertainty through doing and results in students changing their perspective of their role, what they know, and what they are able to do.

Before the trip, students expressed the desire to use their skills and learning to help others; however, after the trip they talked extensively about their own learning and were stumped when asked what they think the community might have learned from them. When I asked the students what they thought the community learned, overall students were stumped and even surprised by the question. Several responded with comments like, “it’s hard because I didn’t even think about them learning from us. I don’t know...”, “that’s a good question,” “I don’t know. That’s a toughie. What would they learn from us?...I don’t know...I’m trying to think about it,” and “that’s a tough one. I don’t know.” When they took a few minutes to think about it, most of them concluded that the community learned that “we care.” These comments indicate that the university students did transition from knowing to not knowing and from helping to learning from the trip experience.

In interviews after the trip, students also specifically commented on their learning related to history and seem to move in the direction of acknowledging complicity as called for by postcolonial theory. The students specifically referred to learning about another perspective about the role of the U.S. in the world. Students commented,

I think it’s an eye-opening experience for students to finally realize that the U.S. isn’t the only country in the world. That we influence other people, that we have an effect on other parts of the world that none of us normally see.

Another student referred to the historical context of relations between the U.S. and Nicaragua. The student commented,

I thought [about] what I miss being an American. We only say the Iran-Contra part of it, but then actually getting to hear [a Waslalan’s] part, it’s like “wow, there’s a whole different side of this.” It was really interesting to be able to hear that.

The community participants described their educational goal for the university students to learn critical global citizenship and transition away from ideas that reflect the “modern/ global imaginary” (Andreotti). Even during a one-week trip, the university students change their ideas about learning and seem to move away from a desire to “help” and instead begin to understand this GSL partnership and engagement with Other with emphasis on humility, complicity, and history.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Both community participants and university administrators/ faculty describe their educational goals for students in this partnership focused on global citizenship education. Although global citizenship surfaced in interviews with both community and university participants, the community participant perspectives push farther than the university administrators/ faculty and call for critical global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006). The community participants’ perspectives on what they want to teach the students related to critical global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006) with emphasis on complicity and humility.

Community participants called for students and international volunteers to recognize and acknowledge their own complicity in past relations as a means to pursue ethical engagement. The most important considerations in selecting volunteers to visit Waslala, according to one community organization representative, are “that they have historical, socio-cultural, economic and political knowledge about Waslala and Nicaragua.” This knowledge is considered more important than any technical skills or knowledge related to the work or projects.

Question: If community participants are motivated to engage in this GSL partnership because they want to serve as co-educators of the university students, in what specific ways are community participants involved in determining educational goals for the students in coursework, pre- and post-trip preparation/ reflection, and assessment of learning goals? How are community participants positioned (or not) as co-educators in GSL programs and partnerships?

Recommendation: Recognizing the limited ways that relatively inexperienced engineering students can contribute to development projects, we might want to consider “development training camps” (Nieusma & Riley, 2010, p. 54) or programs where students “act as apprentices

to community members” (Riley & Bloomgarden, 2006, p. 57). These ideas formally recognize the knowledge that the community partners and residents have and encourage a two-way transfer of expertise.

Question: Are the faculty of the departments/ disciplines that facilitate these GSL programs prepared themselves to pursue critical global citizenship educational goals for students?

In comments about critical global citizenship education, the community perspectives focus on the importance of understanding the history, politics and culture of Nicaragua and Waslala as the key qualification of engineering volunteers as opposed to any technical qualifications. Interestingly, this finding reflects the idea that the students’ contributions to technical development outcomes may be negligible, or at the very least, are not the focus of the community participants. The community participants do not focus on the technical qualifications of the student volunteers because they may not depend on the students or university presence for development projects – instead they want to educate the university students. This idea echoes ideas of post-colonial theory with cautions about ahistorical work and a move away from technocratic solutions to the world’s problems and draws attention to the importance of program facilitators’ background in the history, culture, and politics of Nicaragua and Waslala.

Recommendation: The silo effect (Thorpe & Goldstein, 2010) is still present in higher education and often results in GSL partnerships that are housed in one discipline, department, or college. In this case, the partnership is with the CoE despite community participants calling for attention to history, culture, and politics. It is important to pursue ways to build interdisciplinary work in our institutions in order to increase focus on history, culture, and politics in GSL partnerships and incorporate these areas into pre- and post- trip planning and reflection and associated coursework. Seek ways to incorporate community partners and faculty from other disciplines (i.e. economics, history, sociology, language departments) into GSL partnership planning, coursework, and pre- and post- trip preparation and reflection.

Theoretical Implications

Andreotti (2006) provides a useful framework – *critical global citizenship education* - that differentiates between notions of soft global citizenship and critical global citizenship education. The community participants described their educational goal for the university students to learn critical global citizenship and transition away from ideas that reflect the “modern/ global imaginary” (Andreotti). Community participant perspectives describe a desired shift in students from “knowing” to “not knowing”, from helping/ teaching to learning, from responsibility *for* the Other to responsibility *to* the Other (Spivak, 1988). Even during a one-week trip, the university students changed their ideas about learning and seemed to move away from a desire to “help” and instead begin to understand this GSL partnership and engagement with Other with emphasis on humility, complicity, and history. The community participants’ perspectives illuminated the importance of post-colonial theory in informing and shaping this partnership and highlight critical global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006) as a useful framework to understand the

community participants’ educational goals for students, but also as a framework to shape coursework and pre- and post-trip student preparation and reflection in future programming.

CONCLUSION

In describing critical global citizenship education in this study, the community participants call for humility; however, this educational goal seems to work directly in opposition to the common narrative of SL/ GSL in which U.S. university students “help” or “teach” the Other in a developing/ Third World country. Unfortunately, this narrative or the “modern colonial global imaginary” is often perpetuated by universities’ marketing messages to students and parents and, often, by administration/ faculty as well. If we want our GSL partnerships to be community-driven in order to pursue sustainable community development outcomes and impacts (Hartman, Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2014) and our community partners are calling for humility and the reversal of the common narrative of “helping,” then we as universities, as both individuals and institutions, need to acknowledge complicity, unlearn privilege and learn to learn from below (Kapoor, 2004). As university administrators/ faculty, we must first (hopefully), but at least concurrently engage in these types of learning in order to pursue ethical international engagements and to enter these engagements with the humility called for by our community partners.

If the facilitators of the GSL programs and partnerships and the institutions for which they work hold onto the image of themselves as the “helpers,” “teachers,” “developed,” or “problem solvers,” then it is not surprising that our university students enter these experiences with ideas reflecting a new colonialism. They do not enter and approach the experience as learners. But, that is not their fault. Too often, they have been sold the idea of the “single story” and their responsibility to “help” and “save” the Other. This study, by intentionally privileging the perspectives of community participants, seeks to shed light on the multiple stories in this GSL partnership, other community-university partnerships, and international development.

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