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Evaluative Case Study of Stakeholders' Perspectives About A Service-Learning Abroad Program

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Evaluative Case Study of Stakeholders' Perspectives About A Service-Learning

Abroad Program

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother Ferida, who has always been my role model and inspiration in life. She taught me the value of persistence, hard work, passion for learning, and faith in myself and others. I am forever grateful for your unconditional love, your support, your wisdom, and your great sense of humor! I love you mom!

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ABSTRACT

The present case study evaluated a service-learning study abroad program based on the participants' perspectives. The stakeholders included undergraduate students, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad. The main data sources were semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants and descriptive observations. The purpose of the case study was to identify perceived benefits and perceived challenges resulting from participants' perspectives, and to utilize findings for future program enhancement.

Although the themes of the perceived benefits and challenges varied by stakeholder group and their respective roles in the program, some benefits such as career/professional development and exposure to diversity were shared by multiple stakeholders. Similarly, the themes of perceived challenges varied based on stakeholders' respective roles in the program. Some themes such as lack of time/ demanding schedules were mentioned by all three groups of stakeholders and others were mentioned only by one or two.

In addition to offering recommendations for future program enhancement, this evaluative case study also identified specific program elements, which were perceived to have contributed to the overall positive stakeholders' perspectives about the evaluated program. Conclusively, the findings of the present study supported the recommendation for inclusion of service-learning abroad experiences in future educational programs as these experiences have the potential to benefit all participants.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

My interest in this case study results from my extensive professional experience in the field of International Education. In my current position, Director for Global Engagement at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, I am tasked with internationalizing my institution through the development of global educational programs and opportunities for both faculty and students. Over the past few years, I also have had special interests in experiential learning and high-impact educational practices.

At the present time, the consensus is that experiential learning is defined as the basic process of learning through experience, and it is more specifically defined as learning through reflection after engaging in a learning activity. High impact practices are practices that typically require students to devote considerable time and effort, and they are thought to deepen students' investment in the learning activity.

Kuh (2008) outlined 10 high-impact practices that positively reinforced students' engagement, deep learning, gains in personal development outcomes, and retention. They were first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate

research, diversity and global learning/study abroad, service-learning, and community service, internships, and capstone courses and projects. Two of the ten high-impact practices are at the forefront of my interest and at the center of this evaluative study. They are service-learning and global learning/study abroad.

According to Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones (2011) when combined, service-learning and learning in an international setting have the potential to improve students' academic attainment, to contribute to their personal growth, and to develop global civic outcomes. Although high-impact educational practices can take different forms depending on the institutional contexts and learner characteristics, the consensus is that they increase rates of student retention and student engagement on campus. Nonetheless, the effects of these types of educational programs tend to be very personal and idiosyncratic for students. This is the reason why I decided to use an evaluative approach in order to investigate the effects and benefits of a service-learning abroad program that is the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

According to a special report by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (Wegner, 2008), higher education in the 21st century has a responsibility to ensure students are graduating with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive, global economy, and that they contribute to a democratic society as citizens who address societal needs. To meet this demand, colleges and universities

continue to increase civic engagement of students in the form of curricular and co-curricular programs. Hence, experiential programs have become increasingly popular in higher education.

As previously mentioned, there are strong indications that experiential programs (e.g., study abroad, service-learning, learning communities, and other high-impact practices) support psychosocial development in areas such as appreciation of diversity, empathy, concern for social justice, a greater sense of personal efficacy, and problem solving (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). The Higher Education Research Institute confirms that service-learning is an affirmative predictor of five outcomes that include "critical consciousness and action, social agency, integration of learning, civic engagement, and political engagement" (Hurtado, 2012, p. 12).

Despite the positive outcomes of service-learning programs, there have been very few service-learning opportunities offered to students at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee (USFSM). One of USFSM's strategic goals is to "develop well-educated and highly skilled global citizens;" however, at the time of the present study, the institution had offered only a few courses under the category of service-learning and community engagement. There had not been any opportunities for service-learning abroad programs for students. This represents a problem of practice, which the present study sought to address.

Purpose and Research Questions

In this section I will discuss the research questions that guided the present study and how the overall purpose of the study related to these questions. According to Simons (2009) the primary purpose of the case study method is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), program, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action" (Simons, p. 21).

The purpose of this evaluative case study was to assess the existing program based on the understanding of stakeholders' perspectives about a service-learning program abroad. Additionally, understanding those perspectives, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with this type of program can assist in the development of future offerings of experiential learning programs at the University. Thus, this study was designed as an evaluative and instrumental case study focusing on a single case, (i.e., one faculty-led, service-learning abroad program).

This case study was instrumental because it was thought to be a facilitator for understanding something else. In other words, the study was used as a tool to gain deeper understanding about stakeholders' perspectives of the service-learning/ community-based experiences abroad. This case was explored without expectation that it represents a wider population. In other words, "It's not a sample, it's a choice; a selection" (Thomas, 2011, p. 63).

I have chosen to utilize the case study approach, because the case study design includes an in-depth approach to study 'real-life' situations, which can provide a better

understanding of the phenomenon (Thomas, 2011). Therefore, for the purposes of my research, evaluative case study was the appropriate design because this case was not necessarily representative of a larger population, but instead it was a specific program that has clearly defined boundaries. The learning came from the case, and that understanding was investigated through the stakeholders' perspectives.

Consequently, the primary research questions for the present case study were:

• What are the stakeholders'/participants' perspectives about the program?

• What are the perceived benefits and challenges of service-learning abroad experience for different participant groups, including students, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad?

Significance of the Study

The review of the literature on the topic of service-learning abroad indicates that, although substantial research has been conducted in the area of service-learning as it relates to academics and student personal development, very few studies have identified the perceived benefits of international service-learning programs for different stakeholders (i.e., students, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad). Hence, it is anticipated that we will gain a deeper understanding of the stakeholders' perspectives about the service-learning abroad experience based on the findings of the present study.

The primary purpose of the present study was to identify the stakeholders' (i.e., students', University instructors', and community partners' abroad) perspectives about

a service-learning abroad experience by evaluating one of the programs offered by a large, public university in the Southeast (thereafter referred to as "the University").

The findings of this evaluative case study will be shared with the University that facilitated the program. Although this single case study cannot necessarily be generalized to all service-learning programs abroad, it is anticipated that practices resulting in stakeholders' benefits may inform future program development at other universities, including my own.

Definition of Key Terms

Experiential Learning. The term experiential learning encompasses a vast array of approaches to learning inside and outside the classroom that complement more conventional instruction. It is learning by doing, and the methods may include research, field trips or seminars, laboratory work, fieldwork or observation, as well as immersion in workplace settings (e.g., internships, volunteering, teaching, or paid jobs). Giving structure to the learning experience through observation, reflection and analysis is often seen as an essential element of experiential education. Experiential education may be curricular (i.e., for credit) or co-curricular (i.e., not for credit).

Service-learning. While varying definitions of service-learning exist, there is consensus that service-learning programs include activities in the community, particular rendering of a service, attainment of curricular credit, application or development of skills, and practice of structured reflection in the form of journal

responses and/or a final report (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Wessel, 2007). In service-learning programs, the service component is not an additional requirement or course add-on. Rather, the key ingredient is integrating the students' service with their learning (Pariola, 2006). This integration also is found in international service-learning programs.

Study Abroad. Study abroad is synonymous with Overseas Study or Foreign Study and it is a subtype of Education Abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student's home institution. The duration of study abroad program can range from two weeks to a year-long program. This meaning excludes the pursuit of a full academic degree at a foreign institution.

International Service-learning. This term is synonymous with service-learning abroad, and it refers to a specially designed experience combining reflection with structured participation in a community-based project to achieve specified learning outcomes as part of a study abroad program. The learning is given structure through the principles of experiential education to develop an integrated approach to understanding the relation among theory, practice, ideals, values, and community. International service-learning programs share many similarities with traditional study abroad programs. However, a distinguishing component is the emphasis placed on community-based service activities (Mooney & Edwards, 2001). In the section that

follows, I provide the conceptual framework for the study. This framework comes from Kolb's theory of experiential learning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this case study connects Kolb's theory of experiential learning (1984) and international service-learning educational programs. The background information on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is based on the concept that individuals use a combination of experience, reflection, observation, and action as they process information and determine actions. According to Kolb, experiential learning method is "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38), which includes activities such as field work, internships, practicums, clinical sessions, and/or volunteer projects.

Therefore, based on what Kolb said, one can speculate that the experiential learning practices, (i.e., international service-learning) have the potential to maximize educational benefits for students. Both study abroad and service-learning educational programs engage students to a greater extent than traditional classroom-based instruction because they enable students to experience, reflect, conceptualize, and even test what is being learned (Kolb & Kolb 2005). Based on what has been said, I would expect this type of experiential learning to result in positive perceived benefits for stakeholders participating in the program.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review the research in order to convey a greater understanding of service- learning abroad experiential programs and the perceived benefits they afford to students. In order to achieve that goal and to better understand the experiential nature of these programs, this chapter will provide a brief history and overview of service-learning programs, a brief history and overview of study abroad programs, a brief overview of international service-learning programs and background information on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

Overview of Service-learning

For a long time, service-learning programs have been viewed as a possible means of improving educational experiences for students. One of the first promoters of experiential learning, John Dewey, believed that students would learn more effectively and become better citizens if they engaged in service to the community, and if this service were incorporated into their academic curriculum (Dewey, 1938). Nonetheless, according to the Corporation for National Service (1999), incorporating service-learning into curriculum did not begin until the early 1970s. It is only in the 70s that the federal legislative reform in the United States brought about massive changes. Those changes

initiated an increasing national emphasis on students' involvement with their local communities and on linking service to academic curriculum through service-learning.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 provided support for service-learning activities in elementary and secondary schools. According to the National Service (1999), this support was facilitated through the Serve America program and through the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Following these changes, the federal government offered opportunities to high school graduates, college students, and recent college graduates to serve local communities in exchange for stipends and payments of educational loans. These stipends and payments were available to students for postsecondary education through AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and similar programs. These programs were administered by the Corporation for National Service, a federal organization, which also created by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, service-learning has been performed in nearly one-third of all public K-12 schools, one-half of all high schools, and up to 88% of all private schools (Genzer, 1998). Likewise, according to Eyler and Giles (1999), faculty and students in higher education also had equally strong participation in service-learning programs. Similar to community service, service-learning requires students to serve their communities; however, service-learning takes community service one step further by incorporating the service experience directly into student curriculum (Eyler and Giles, 1999).

Despite varying definitions of service-learning, there is a consensus among

researchers that service-learning programs include activities **in the community**, the rendering of a particular service, attainment of curricular credit, application or development of skills, and practice of structured reflection, in the form of journal responses and/or a final report (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Wessel, 2007). In service-learning programs, the service component is not an additional requirement or course add-on. Rather, the key is integrating service with learning (Pariola, 2006).

The consensus is that service-learning pedagogy enables instructors to integrate classroom learning into the community. This incorporation of experience and learning also enables instructors to tackle the complexities of students transitioning from education to training and employment. Therefore, service-learning provides a significant impact on student learning because it links service in the community with an academic course or program.

In their summary report of the "Learn and Serve America, Higher Education Program," authors Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras (1999), break down the two components of service-learning. The "service" component can be defined as any unpaid activity that is intended to address a societal need surrounding individuals, families, organizations or communities (Gray et al., 1999). The "learning" component encompasses organized efforts to promote personal development of the individual volunteers. This can be achieved through various outcomes such as acquiring new skills or knowledge or reaching a deeper understanding of social problems (Gray et al., 1999). The direct connection to the academic curriculum of the sponsoring university is what sets service-learning apart from community service (Rhoads, & Neururer 1998).

The literature review indicates a consensus in that there are three main components which are considered essential to enhancing outcomes of service-learning. These components include reflection, confirmation that a community need is being met, and adequate training or orientation prior to the service-learning experience (Cauley, Canfield, Clasen, Dobbins, Hemphill, Jaballas, Walbroehl, 2001; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005; McCarthy & Tucker, 1999; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Robinson & Barnett, 1996).

The first component that enhances service-learning outcomes is reflection. Reflection assists participants to investigate the relation between their participation in service activities and their academic learning in the classroom. In that way, reflection deepens the students' "social, moral, personal, and civic dimensions" (Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004, p. 39). The component of reflection gives students and faculty an opportunity to better understand how the service-learning experience has impacted and challenged a participant's values, how course content is connected to the experience, and how a community need was addressed (Largent, 2013).

According to Jones and Abes (2004), reflection results in the notable shift in students' motivation from external reasons (e.g., participating to fulfill a course requirement and resume-building) to internal motivators (e.g., a desire for continued community involvement, developing a sense of self, and a more genuine interest in putting needs of others before their own). Reflection comes in many forms and may include journals, essays, class presentations, poster boards, sharing questions, group

discussion, guided activities, art, drama, dialogue or other expressive acts ("Service

Reflection Toolkit"; Largent, 2013).

The second component of an effective service-learning experience focuses on

meeting a community need. According to Hart (2015), this can be achieved by

researching the community, by establishing relationships with community partners,

and by identifying potential community needs. It is also important to set mutual goals

and to define measurable outcomes (Voss, Matthews, Fossen, Scott & Shaffer, 2015)

with community partners to ensure needs are being addressed. Community

organizations can include government agencies, civic organizations, non-profits, and

other educational institutions.

Finally, effective service-learning experiences need an orientation component.

The components and duration of an orientation can vary by program, but generally and

orientation will include the following: an overview of the service project, activities to

help participants better understand the community they are serving, and an

opportunity to answer questions or concerns presented by the participants. It is

important to note that effective communication and active listening skills are often part

of service-learning training (Katz, DuBois & Wigderson, 2014). Additionally, many

programs utilize activities that focus on team-building and leadership (Foukal,

Lawrence, & Williams, 2016).

Literature review demonstrates a consensus among researchers that service-

learning experiences of any duration have a positive impact on students. One of the

largest research studies on how undergraduate students are affected by service-learning

experiences was conducted by Astin and Sax (1998). They surveyed over 3,000 students from 42 higher education institutions. According to Astin and Sax, service-learning programs are achieving their desired outcomes by "enhancing students' academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility" (p. 251). Similarly, according to Hurtado (2012), the Higher Education Research Institute confirms that service-learning is an affirmative predictor of five learning outcomes for students. Those outcomes include "critical consciousness and action, social agency, integration of learning, civic engagement, and political engagement" (Hurtado, 2012, p. 12).

Overview of Study Abroad

Study abroad is another educational experience which involves an experiential learning practice. Similar to service-learning, study abroad have significant impact on student learning and development. Stearns (2009) provides a brief history of study abroad, and reports that the most prominent goal of study abroad experiences is the development of global competencies, "which broadly consist of tolerance for ambiguity, intellectual flexibility, and an ease of conducting affairs in multicultural contexts," (p. 67).

Although most of the study abroad programs are focused on language acquisition (Stearns, 2009), additional research suggests that the goals and benefits of personal growth and career development are vital for globally competent individuals in the 21st century (Vatalaro, Szente and Levin, 2015).

Research conducted with two universities, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (UMTC) and University of California at San Diego (UCSD), revealed that the five-year graduation rates of study abroad participants were higher than their non-participant counterparts. Specifically, UMTC study abroad students had a 90% graduation rate compared to a 58.6% graduation rate for non-participants. Similarly, UCSD study abroad participants had a 92% graduation rate compared to a 72% graduation rate for non-participants. (Dwyer, & Peters, 2004).

Additionally, students benefited in other ways from studying abroad. According to Dr. Mary Dwyer, President and CEO of the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), study abroad positively and unequivocally influences the career path, worldview, and self-confidence of students (2004). The IIES surveyed alumni from participants of their study abroad programs from 1950 to 1999 and confirmed Dr. Dwyer's assertion. According to the survey, over 95% indicated an increase in personal development, including an increase in self-confidence, a lasting impact on worldview, and serving as a catalyst for increased maturity. Moreover, studying abroad increased students' academic commitment. From the survey, 87% reported studying abroad influenced subsequent educational experiences. Also, 76% of those surveyed indicated they acquired skill sets that influenced their career path (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

Moreover, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) identified study abroad and service-learning as a "high impact educational practice" that can lead to increased rates of student engagement, can prepare students for their future professions

and for life in our global community, and can increase student persistence and success in college (Kuh, 2008).

Overview of International Service-learning

The review of literature on the topic of international service-learning shows that this is an increasingly popular pedagogy. One basis for the popularity of international service-learning programs is that they provide an alternative to traditional study abroad programs. Furthermore, they also offer students with an expanded learning compared to domestic service-learning settings. In addition, the international settings for these kinds of educational programs, present students and faculty with new and unique opportunities for learning. This is especially true in regard to international education opportunities for students.

Bringle, Hatcher, Jones, and Plater (2006) identified the following three characteristics of international service-learning:

1) It is experiential.

2) It is reflective.

3) It is multicultural and multinational.

The 'experiential' nature of international service-learning directly links Kolb's theory of experiential learning with practice in communities in which such citizenship is an essential skill that can be practiced. The experiential learning opportunities within international service-learning have been described as "transformative" for students (Grusky, 2000), in that the experiences available to students in an international setting

stretch students in both predictable and unanticipated ways. This is especially true about international settings which do not offer familiar infrastructure in relation to language, physical comforts, culture, and/or belief systems for students.

The second characteristic of international service-learning is that it is reflective. The literature review recognizes reflection as one of the most significant aspects of this pedagogy. Reflection facilitates connections between service engagement experiences and curricular content for students. Furthermore, structured and critical reflection about student experience in an international setting is an essential element of any international service-learning program.

According to Rama and Battistoni (2001), reflection process, through class discussions, reflection journals, or feedback from instructors, helps students make meaning of their community engagement experiences and assists them in drawing connections to course learning goals while developing critical thinking skills, communication skills, leadership, a sense of civic responsibility, and multicultural understanding.

Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones (2011), describe international service-learning as a unique pedagogy that incorporates the domains of service-learning and international education, but with the added dimension of intercultural learning opportunities. The definition of international service- learning by Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones (2011) is as follows:

> "A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding

of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally (Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011, p. 19).

The review of literature on international service-learning also recognized a few crucial design elements of international service-learning programs. One of those elements focuses on pre-departure activities, which may lead to deeper learning outcomes for students. Although preparation is normally a key component to any study abroad or (domestic) service-learning experience, preparation for international service-learning requires greater attention to both academic work, (such as reading about host country's political, social, economic, cultural and historical issues), and attention to logistical elements of the student experience, (such as travel, finances, visa requirements, packing, etc.).

Another important design element of international service-learning programs spotlights the importance of thoughtful program development. The literature warns us that without a cycle of awareness, planning, and preparation, international service-learning programs would run the risk of being viewed as organized excursions for students and faculty.

Finally, the most prevalent theme in the reviewed literature on the topic of international service-learning programs focuses on the range of educational benefits for student participants. Jacoby (1996) and Morgan and Streb (2001) identified a number of benefits for students involved in international service-learning programs including, promoting broader civic engagement, fostering students' inclination to enact positive change in the society (Jacoby, 2009), creating a value system aligned with those of

society (Bringle &Hatcher, 1996), increasing appreciation of diversity (Morgan & Streb, 2001), increasing student retention, and promoting student learning and development (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hunter & Moody, 2009).

In summary, literature review illustrated that students who engaged in service-learning and study abroad programs overwhelmingly attribute academic, social, personal, intercultural, and professional growth to these experiential learning experiences. According to Kuh (2008), these types of programs enable students to broaden their cross-cultural competence, and to develop the ability to successfully integrate themselves into communities and work environments at home and abroad. Hence, blending service- learning and study abroad together into international service-learning experiential programs clearly provides multiple learning and personal benefits to students.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning is often associated with Kolb's theory of experiential learning. Kolb was influenced by the ideas of another educator John Dewey (1859–1952), who was considered a pioneer in the field of experiential learning theory. Building on the earlier work of Dewey, Kolb developed a model of experiential learning based on the concept that individuals use a combination of experience, reflection, observation, and action as they process information and determine actions. In developing his experiential learning model, Kolb employed experiential learning theories, which suggest that individuals learn best according to their own experiences.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model combines two related modes of *grasping experience* and two related modes of *transforming experience.* This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner "touches all the bases": experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. This learning cycle takes place in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situations and to what is being learned. (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p.196).

 According to Kolb, experiential learning method is "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This transformation of experience can include activities such as field work, internships, practicums, clinical sessions, and/or volunteer projects. As previously mentioned, both study abroad and service-learning educational practices engage students to a greater extent than traditional classroom-based instruction (Kuh, 2008), because they enable students to experience, reflect, conceptualize, and even test what is being learned (Kolb & Kolb 2005). Hence, the conceptual framework of this case study connects Kolb's theory of experiential learning (1984) and international service-learning educational programs.

CHAPTER THREE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate the existing, service-learning study abroad program based on the participants' perspectives about the program and their experiences. The findings of the present study are expected to enhance the existing program and to promote the development of additional service-learning programs. This chapter describes the existing service-learning abroad program (thereafter referred as the 'program'), its purpose, its elements, and its structure.

The Service-learning Abroad Program: Purpose, Structure, and Elements

The program that was the focus of the present study is a service-learning abroad opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students in education at the University. All undergraduate students in the program were required to spend time in schools as part of the requirements for their elementary education major. It is expected that the time spent in the field/classrooms will prepare students for the future educational environments they will encounter as professional educators. Undergraduate students participated in these practicums/service-learning experiences as part of their degree program. The students had the option to meet this graduation requirement either domestically or internationally by participating in programs led by University's faculty.

Because enrollment in summer courses was required for all undergraduate students in elementary education at the University, program participants were eligible for financial aid, loans, and institutional scholarships. However, in addition to their regular course tuition and fees, they also needed funds to pay for their flights, in-country housing, meals (except for breakfast), and other individual expenses.

The program was a faculty-led study abroad program, which had more than a decade-long history at the University. The program evolved over the years, and at the time of present study, it included a four-week (June/July), summer internship/service-learning experience at elementary schools in the U.K. The host city is located one hour from London (by train) and has a truly unique appeal, history and beauty. The host city can be described as a storybook setting of beautiful buildings, winding streets, numerous bookstores, and phenomenal range of world-class events. These include theater, museums, musical productions, and many more. The host city is also well-known for its university with unique, centuries-old architecture.

Undergraduate students who participated in the U.K. program underwent extensive orientation and preparation before travel abroad. The orientation consisted of mandatory group meetings organized by the program director and by the University instructors/coaches who helped facilitate the program. In addition to orientation and meetings, undergraduate student participants were required to complete learning modules in Canvas. They were also expected to participate in a variety of activities intended to prepare them for the experience abroad.

The group meetings and activities provided a general program overview, anticipated daily agenda abroad, general and cultural information about the host city, information about travel, planning, and packing, about roommate preferences, technology abroad, public transportation in the city and safety abroad.

Since students received academic credit for their participation in this international teaching and learning experience, the meetings also provided academic expectations for program participants. Those included expectations about professional participation in pre-departure seminars, expectation for students' active engagement in elementary school daily experience (once abroad), expectation for timely completion of student co-teaching surveys, completion of roommate assignments, etc.

Additionally, during the group meetings and orientation sessions, undergraduate students were informed about course assignments. Those included assigned readings, teaching-charts, Instagram-posts, participation in small and large group seminars, and multiple coaching assignments. This information was communicated to students during the six mandatory pre-departure meetings, which took place months before the travel abroad.

In addition to the program-specific meetings and orientation facilitated by the program director and instructors, there were additional orientation requirements by the University's study abroad office. The study abroad office required that all undergraduate student participants complete their general health and safety orientation via Canvas modules in order to receive clearance for travel.

Another program requirement for student participants was that they complete the pre-departure orientation meetings facilitated by the program director and by the instructors/coaches who accompanied students on this experience. In addition to general travel abroad preparation topics, the pre-departure meeting also focused on use of technology and group communications abroad.

Once students began their program abroad, they were housed in a centrally located, family-owned Bed & Breakfast hotel in shared accommodations with private bathrooms. Upon arrival, students were expected to work in small groups on a scavenger hunt of important landmarks and services in the host city. This was one of the first group activities for students and it was intended to help them explore the city and learn about public transportation. In addition to the scavenger hunt, the program offered a variety of icebreaker and social activities intended to prepare students for a month long stay in the local community. These welcome and cultural orientation activities took place in the first few days upon arrival in the host city.

Once the program abroad officially began, the students spent most of their workdays teaching and learning in the local elementary schools (Monday thru Friday each week). Students had free weekends to explore the city or travel inside and outside the U.K. They were expected to communicate their weekend plans to their instructors/ coaches by Thursday of each week. The instructors/ coaches collected student travel data (flight/train schedules, hotel info, etc.) as well as general info about weekend plans from students who decided to stay in the host city over the weekend.

During regular work week (Monday through Friday), all students were expected to arrive on time and stay in their assigned schools until the end of school day. In addition, students were expected to participate in planning meetings with their instructors/coaches after school, complete all course assignments, participate in small-group, debriefing seminars, and actively engage in the coaching cycle. This meant working in small groups (one-on-one meetings with their instructors and meetings with their assigned local mentor teacher) and working in large groups (with the entire group). Students were also expected to co-teach with their mentor teachers in the local schools, participate in planning meetings, and execute lessons using a variety of teaching strategies. The overall goal of this teaching and community-engaged learning experience was for students to gain teaching experience, and to increase competence and their own teaching effectiveness.

The four U.K. schools that hosted students were elementary schools. Each school was assigned a liaison/instructor by the University. The University instructors were also responsible for mentoring student participants and for providing support at their individual local school site. The instructors/coaches were generally doctoral students in teaching graduate assistantship positions at the University. In addition to their liaison role, they observed student teaching formally and informally. They also collaborated with the host elementary school teachers on weekly agendas, logistics and related matters affecting students. The University instructors/coaches were available at local school sites Tuesday-Thursday each week. They participated in the large group meetings on Mondays as well as in the planning meetings on Wednesdays each week.

The University instructors/coaches were also responsible for ensuring that students participants followed the established timetable and agenda for their assigned local school site, that they uploaded their assignments to Canvas in timely fashion, and that they participated in their small group seminars and coaching sessions.

Additionally, as school liaisons, the University instructors/coaches were responsible to communicate with all students at their respective local school(s) about all and any school-related matters. They were responsible for collecting weekend travel and activity schedules from students and for providing logistical support inside and outside the classroom. The University instructors/coaches had a very important role in that they helped apprentice students into the profession of teaching, but they also mentored them and helped them make sense of the experience abroad.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of the present study was to evaluate the existing, service-learning study abroad program based on the stakeholders' perspectives on their experience. (i.e., students, instructors, and community partners). The findings were expected to be shared with the University that offered the program. This chapter will discuss the methods used to study stakeholders' perspectives and the rationale for the chosen data collection and analysis methods.

Research Paradigm

According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), a research paradigm is defined as "models or frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence… that guide how a community of researchers acts with regard to inquiry (2006, p. 1). The present study utilized the constructivist paradigm because the primary purpose of the study was to evaluate the existing program based on deep understanding of stakeholders' *perspectives* of the service-learning abroad program in which they participated.

Constructivism is a paradigm that assumes people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through life experiences and reflect upon

those experiences (Crotty, 2003). The constructivist paradigm is often used by researchers who want to gain an in-depth understanding of an experience or a subject matter from the perspective of individuals who have experienced that experience firsthand (Patton, 2002).

Constructivism is the appropriate paradigm for this evaluative case study due to the overall nature of experiential learning and service-learning abroad educational programs. As previously mentioned, outcomes of experiential learning are varied as learners play a critical role in assessing their learning through reflection. Reflection is one of the key components of a successful experiential and service-learning abroad programs. During reflection, participants synthesize their community interactions, service, and learning that took place inside and outside the classroom. Hence, stakeholders' perspectives about the program and their reflections on their experience will be constructed by the stakeholders themselves. This study will utilize the insights obtained through stakeholders' perspectives as bases for program evaluation and recommendations for future program enhancement.

 Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I observed and gathered information with the intention of understanding and evaluating the program. I was the instrument for data collection and analysis, and I evaluated the existing, service-learning abroad program based on the participants' perspectives about the program and on their own experiences. This evaluation was conducted through the descriptive nature of

reporting. The overall goal of the present study was for the findings to enhance the existing program and possibly to promote the development of additional service-learning abroad programs at the University. Nonetheless, I am fully cognizant that my professional experience in the field of International Education and my special interests in experiential learning may have shaped my thinking about the program.

Why Evaluative Case Study?

The present study employed qualitative mode of inquiry, because by conducting qualitative research, I was able to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions associated with the program, and then to interpret the understanding and meaning that individuals brought to them. Stake (1995) defines qualitative research as the process in which the researcher is the tool for naturalistic inquiry to collect data around the intricacies of a specific phenomenon in its natural state. Furthermore, qualitative research methods have been effective in studying education programs (Stake, 1995).

Several researchers (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998) characterized qualitative research by the interest in meaning from the participants' point of view; the naturalistic setting or context in which the research occurs; the role of the researcher as the instrument for data collection and analysis; and its descriptive nature of reporting. Hence, qualitative methods provided an ideal forum to explore the questions of the current study, which focused on understanding participants' perspectives and gaining meaning from their point of view.

The evaluative case study approach was selected because an exploration of what is common and what is unique about the case was investigated. This case was not necessarily representative of a larger population, but instead was an investigation of a specific program that has clearly defined boundaries. In other words, "It's not a sample, it's a choice; a selection" (Thomas, 2011, p. 63).

Furthermore, due to the focus on understanding the stakeholders' perspectives in the program, this case study was instrumental in nature (Stake, 1995, p.3). This meant that the case was explored with the purpose of developing an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' perspectives about the program, without expectation that the findings represented a wider population. As already mentioned, the effects of experiential educational programs have the potential to be very personal and idiosyncratic for participants. Hence, this case study used an evaluative approach in order to investigate the effects and benefits of the program for its participants. It was an in-depth look into the participants' perspectives, rather than a study conducted to generalize the results to other programs in other places.

In the realm of qualitative research, this study took the shape of a case study that was evaluative and instrumental. Hence, the case study approach was the appropriate design for this study, because the learning came from the case, and an understanding could be gained from the stakeholders' perspectives.

Context and Participants

The focus of this evaluative case study was a service-learning abroad program facilitated by a large, public university in the Southeastern region of the United States (thereafter referred to as "the University"). According to its website, the University, at the time of this research, was home to more than 48,000 undergraduate and graduate students and it was classified in the top tier of research universities (RU/VH) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a distinction attained by only 2.3% of all universities.

One of the University's strategic goals was to "develop well-educated and highly skilled global citizens". Hence, the University placed strong emphasis on study abroad and experiential learning opportunities for its students. According to its website, the University was intentional in its efforts to focus attention on global experiences and issues, to bring international speakers to campus, and to promote study abroad and field work opportunities in a variety of locations abroad.

The present study was an evaluative case study of the University's service-learning abroad program (thereafter referred to as "the program"). The program was open to both undergraduate and graduate students in education. The students who were interviewed in this case study, were all undergraduate students, and the graduate students who were interviewed were all graduate assistants/instructors.

During the time of the present study, there were 17 undergraduate students and 4 graduate students participating in the program. The faculty program director announced to the program's undergraduate participants that I would be conducting an

evaluative study of the program. Undergraduate students who were interested in volunteering were invited to participate. Nine of the 17 (53%) undergraduate students volunteered to participate in the study. The final sample included 1 male (11%) and 8 females (89%); 1 African American (11%) and 8 White (89%) students. Although a direct question about previous experience traveling abroad was not asked during the interviews, 4 students voluntarily mentioned that they had no previous experience traveling abroad.

The program had 3 female instructors, 2 of whom (67%) volunteered to participate in the present study. Both were University graduate assistants in education and were White.

Finally, out of 4 community partners, 2 (50%) volunteered to participate in the study. Both were White males who held school principal positions.

The evaluated service-learning abroad program included a 4-week experiential component in elementary schools in the U.K. It should be noted that these schools included children who were 4 years old. Based on individual programs of study, undergraduate students received academic credit for their participation in this international teaching and learning experience.

During the program, the students worked with local school (mentor) teachers, collaborated in small and large groups, and actively engaged in planning and execution of the lessons using a variety of teaching strategies. These teaching strategies were developed with the purpose to actively involve students during their time abroad.

Each of the host schools in the U.K. was assigned a University liaison/instructor, who provided support to students who were assigned to that site. The University liaisons/instructors observed student teaching, both formally and informally throughout the school-based experiences. Undergraduate student participants received one-on-one field teaching experience in another country while they learned new cultural norms and values.

In collaboration with the University program director and instructors/coaches, the community partners abroad facilitated student experiences both inside and outside the classroom. The University program director and university instructors/coaches also facilitated students' cultural interaction with the local community.

Case Selection

Stake (1995) suggests that in case study research, "the researcher should have a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions. 'Best' usually means those that best help us understand the case, whether typical or not" (p.56). Therefore, I chose this particular case because the stakeholders with 'first-hand' experience in the program would be able to help us to understand the case. Another reason for selecting this particular case was a great openness of the program participants to my inquiry.

Finally, this case represented a well-established study abroad program with a substantial service-learning component, and that type of program was the focus of my inquiry. As previously mentioned, the program attracted undergraduate and graduate students who traveled abroad for 'hands-on' teaching and learning experience in

elementary schools. The program provided the students with the unique experiential learning opportunity in a different cultural and educational context during the four-week period. Thus, given the purpose of this study, this case selection was made because of the uniqueness of the program, its service-learning program component, its well-established program base, and the stakeholders' openness to my inquiry. For these reasons, this case seemed to provide the maximum opportunity to learn from a case.

Data Collection

Merriam (1998, p. 20) defined a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources". Keeping this definition of case study approach in mind, this case study utilized descriptive observations and semi-structured interviews with program stakeholders.

Additionally, a variety of program documents (course syllabus and pre-departure instructions for students) were utilized in order to understand the program model and program design. The current study had the human subject approval from the University's Institutional Review Board and the permission from the Principal Investigator, (PI) for the collected data to be used for the purpose of the doctoral dissertation.

Semi-structured Interviews. The semi-structured interviews with the program

stakeholders were conducted over the period of one week. The individual interviews

with program participants lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews were

conducted with nine student participants, two University instructors/liaisons, and two

community partners abroad who were also principals of the local elementary schools.

The following interview questions were asked of all participants.

1.   What is your general perspective about the program?

2.   How does this experience help link theory to practice?

3.   What perceived benefits does participating in this program have for you?

4.   What challenges do you/did you face in this program?

5.   How does this program increase your cultural sensitivity?

6.   What opportunities do you have for reflection on the program?

7.   In what ways can the program be enhanced in the future?

8.   Is there anything else you would like to share with me in today's interview?

During the data collection phase all interviewees were provided with detailed

information about the study at the beginning of their semi-structured interviews. I took

the time to build rapport with interviewees and obtained their permissions to record the

interviews. My focus during the data collection phase was on listening and taking

descriptive notes. I listened to the recorded interviews before the conclusion of the

program and conducted member checking while on-site. Additional questioning

strategies such as elaboration, wait time, and probing (e.g., asking clarifying questions)

were utilized during the interview data collection phase.

Observations. The second data source for this study was descriptive observations collected during the formal and informal interactions among the program stakeholders. The observations included observations of the formal (classroom) interactions while students participated in their fieldwork experience; observations among the stakeholders during their weekly, program-related meetings, and observations of the program outside of the classroom setting (i.e., in group housing and group social activities).

The observation contact sheets recorded the location, participants, description of the activity taking place, the overall atmosphere of the interaction and any notable comments, side conversations etc. A sample observation contact sheet is included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

This section discusses how the collected data were analyzed and interpreted. It is important to note that my understanding of data analysis was influenced by learning from the graduate-level university courses in qualitative research. Additionally, the understanding resulted from my own circular process of thinking, analyzing, and refocusing ideas and themes that emerged once the data analysis began.

I recognized that it was challenging to put aside my own personal and professional experiences in international education. The constructivist paradigm assumes people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world

through life experiences, and they reflect upon those experiences (Crotty, 2003). Hence, I recognized that my own life experiences, my personal experiences of studying and working abroad, and my, over a decade long professional experience in international education may have affected opinions and assumptions I made. For this reason, the concept of reflexivity was very important, because I was considered a part of the instrument for this study.

One way that was helpful in dealing with my own subjectivity was debriefing myself daily and discovering intuitive feelings I had during the data collection process. The following paragraphs describe the data analysis process for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The present study included semi-structured interviews. This type of interview allowed for flexibility to change direction, follow emergent issues, probe a topic or deepen a response, engage in a dialogue with participants, or get the interviewees' explanation of something that was observed (Simons, 2009). This study focused on semi-structured interviews as one of the data sources, because the purpose of this type of interview was to document the interviewee perspectives on the topic and to promote active engagement and learning for the interviewer and interviewee in identifying and analyzing issues (Simons, 2009).

Therefore, although the interviews began with a set of questions, additional questions might have emerged from what an individual participant said. I transcribed the audio recorded interviews and took notes while conducting interviews in order to create a detailed record. Following that process, the analysis of semi-structured

interviews focused on identifying major themes based on participants' verbal responses and based on my notes collected during the interviews. The list of interview questions is included in the Appendix A.

Observations. The present study utilized descriptive observations on participant interactions during the program and data collection period. These observational field notes were divided in two-columns, using one side to keep a record of the sequence of events that took place, and the other side to keep a record of my own reflections, questions, and perceptions. I utilized the second notes column for writing down evolving themes and patterns observed. This close and descriptive observation approach enabled me to better understand the context of the program, and to better address the study's research questions.

I utilized contact sheets in analyzing observational field notes. Miles and Huberman (1984) describe contact sheets as "a rapid, practical way to do first-run data reduction - without losing any of the basic information (the write-up) to which it refers" (p. 51). Contact sheets were filled out during each observation because they served as an index for what happened during participant interactions, and because they served as a journal of the researcher's reflections about how the study progressed. I took the observational field notes during data collection and while the jottings were still fresh in my mind. A copy of the contact sheet is included in Appendix B.

The main data analysis of this study utilized "categorical aggregation" (e.g., coding as described by Stake (1995). During the data analysis, I looked for repetition of

phenomena and pieced together snippets of information until I was able to identify themes in participant responses. This approach was not a sustained, objective, and standardized aggregation of data, but rather a way to use categorical aggregation to make meaning (Stake, 1995 p. 75).

I reviewed the data from each stakeholder's data record individually and looked for emerging themes within that record. Following that process, I also looked across data records (student participants, University instructors'/coaches', and community partners' responses) for commonalities among them and for any uniqueness from participant to participant. Once that process was completed, I reported overarching themes and recommendations for future program enhancement.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, I used informed consent and tried to protect the confidentiality of participants. I relied on Simons' advice [Chapter 6, Case Study Memo 13 (Simons, 2009, p. 99)] for:

• Establishing and maintaining trust

• Ensuring ethical principles and procedures are met (relationships between researcher, researched, and audiences).

• Informed consent

• Giving voice and participant control

• Confidentiality and anonymization

- Complex integrity

I also recognized that the stakeholders were participants in the current program. Therefore, I understood that they may not have been comfortable sharing some of the challenges associated with the program, because of my own mentor-mentee relationship with the program director. However, this limitation was minimized by the fact that I was not officially part of the program and its administration. I was not teaching the course to undergraduate students, I was not in the position to evaluate students' academic performance, nor was I serving in any support services role for participants. My sole role was the evaluator of the program, and I provided all study participants with detailed introductory information about evaluation's purpose at the beginning of semi-structured interviews.

I made every effort to build rapport and to address this limitation by being open throughout the interview process and during outside of classroom interactions. In doing so, I wanted to ensure that the intention and purpose of this evaluative case study were clearly communicated to all participants. It is also important to note that my data collection took place during the third week of the program. Therefore, the program participants already had established relationships with other program participants and mentors.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

This chapter will present findings resulting from data analysis of the semi-structured interviews and observations. The present evaluative case study focused on semi-structured interviews as one of the main data sources, because the purpose of this type of interview was to document the interviewee's perspectives on the topic and to promote active engagement for the interviewer and interviewee. It is important to note that data analysis was across data records (student, instructor, or community partner responses) for commonalities among them and for any uniqueness from participant to participant in the program. Based on that process, a few major themes emerged from data analysis for students, for University instructors/coaches, and for community partners. The following sections elaborate on these themes based on the stakeholders' perceived benefits of the program, on perceived challenges of the program, and overall perceptions about the program.

Perceived Benefits of the Program

All study participants shared numerous perceived benefits resulting from their participation in the program. However, the themes varied based on the stakeholder group and role in the program. The section that follows will describe themes which

resulted from student, the University instructor/coaches, and from the community partner respondents.

Students

The most frequently identified perceived benefits for undergraduate students in the program fell within four categories: 1) participating in the program resulted in student perceived personal growth and development, 2) the program facilitated students' application of theory and practice, 3) the program developed students' career and professional skills, and 4) the program exposed students to diversity.

Personal growth and development. Personal growth and development were major perceived benefits of the program for students. One respondent stated that the program took her out of her "comfort zone," challenged her to be more independent, and showed her what teaching looks like in real life. Another respondent stated: "I am 18 years old and I just started living by myself a year ago, so being able to live independently and intern abroad gave me some real-life perspective on how that works. Plus, I have to navigate a whole new country. So being more independent is definitely one of the benefits."

Another respondent stated: "On a personal level it is being more of a global citizen, not being close-minded but seeing way more things that go beyond of what I know, trying new things, being open to new experiences and understanding other people." This response also complemented the student's view on exposure to diversity,

which she also considered as benefiting her personal growth.

Most students stated that participating in this program developed their confidence, both about themselves as well as the work they were doing. One student stated: "I was very nervous at the beginning; I had many doubts in myself and how I will perform. I guess it was because of my speaking skills, but now I feel they have become much better. Now I can go up in front of my peers and my class and feel confident about myself."

Finally, a few students stated that the program, the model of living together in the group housing, and working in small and large groups also improved their inter-personal/social skills. Some student respondents stated that living in a shared-room, group accommodations 'stretched' their social skills because of different circumstances they encountered over the four weeks. For example, they had to work as a team and agree on the schedule about usage of communal kitchen, laundry facilities, cleaning etc. Some students felt that the living arrangements helped to establish a close-knit university community, which promoted their sense of teamwork, learning, and collaboration.

Application of theory and practice. The next theme which emerged from student responses was that the program facilitated students' application of theory and practice. This theme was frequently identified in student responses. All participants agreed that one of the major benefits of the program was that it facilitated their application of theory and practice. Respondents stated that they were able to apply theories they

learned (in the classroom) to practice (real life situations) in the local classrooms. Students frequently used the phrase "real life" when discussing this benefit.

One student stated: "I have been in college for three years now and I go to class, take notes, study, get ready for the test, take the test… and it's just kind of one class after another. But this is like a reset! I am learning in a whole different way and I like it!".

Another student commented: "This experience allows me to learn how to teach and how to apply the principles we learned in the classroom to a real-life situation, to my own classroom. This gives me a new perspective on teaching itself."

Another student stated: "I see theory converted to practice when working with my MT (mentor teacher). I am able to identify what I see in practice and understand the reasoning behind it based on the principles we learned in class. This is also helping me use a more professional language… and, my coaches (University instructors) also help me link the two in our small-group seminars because we have to reflect on what we learned."

It is also important to note that for majority of students, course assignment opportunities for reflection on their daily experiences were reported to be extremely valuable in connecting theory and practice. The majority stated that the small-group seminars and teaching-charts were beneficial in their learning. Both of those assignments are required course-assignments on which students were evaluated by the university instructors/coaches.

A few students reported that in addition to these required course-related

assignments they kept a personal journal about their daily experiences inside and outside the classroom. One student reported that she was keeping a journal, so she could remember the amazing experience later.

Career/skills development. The third identified theme based on student responses was career/skills development. All student respondents reported that the engagement in the community/local schools was very beneficial for their future career and for skill development as teachers.

One student stated: "This (program) is just a lot more authentic way of learning. I feel more confident in my ability to teach, because I feel that I am learning how to teach instead of just learning what to teach. The small-group seminars make us think about our teaching because when we reflect and analyze our videos, we are analyzing practice, not ourselves. It's great!"

Another student stated that in addition to career benefits and new skills she felt that participating in the program also helped with the dispositions that were necessary to be successful as an educator, (e.g., being patient, understanding of students and their individual needs, being able to manage the classroom etc.).

Several students shared their conviction that participating in the program will be a great resume builder, and that the experience might set them apart from other job candidates upon graduation. One student stated: "It will be great to talk about this experience during my job interview. I can say that I studied abroad and have a unique experience teaching in classroom. I have my Instagram photos and posts and reflections

about it to share."

Another student stated: "I feel this experience is really preparing me for the career of teaching… I am learning different strategies to use in the classroom and learning from my MT (mentor teacher) on how to implement lessons, how to apply them to real world examples… I can feel the growth and I think about how I want my own classroom to feel for students. I can also say that at first I was very nervous to teach, but now I feel confident that I can be successful."

Another student stated: "I see things that I want to bring back to my classroom, and I would not have gotten that experience unless I participated in this program. I do think it is helping me develop as a future educator. The major benefit for me is getting a new perspective on teaching itself. Totally positive, I like being here!"

Students' exposure to diversity. Finally, the fourth theme was that the program increased students' exposure to diversity. All students commented that the daily experience in the local schools as well as the local community abroad increased their awareness and exposure to diversity. They felt that participating in the program abroad helped them to develop their global citizenship skills, helped improve their communication with and ability to get along with people of different backgrounds. The students frequently used the phrase "open minded" in their responses.

Some students reflected on their increased awareness of diversity based on their daily experiences in another country, travel throughout the country, trying new foods, interacting with people from different backgrounds. Others commented on exposure to

diversity in teaching and what they learned about the diversity of the schools to which they were assigned.

One student stated: "Personally, there have been a lot of cultural differences between the U.S. and the U.K. that I had not been aware of… I did not realize how diverse this city was and the students in the classrooms are very diverse too. My (local) school has a wall in the hallway that has a world map and each student's picture is placed with the language that they speak at home and there is an arrow pointed to their place of origin. I think this is great to show in schools, and it is beneficial to me because as a teacher, I will have diversity in my classroom."

Another student commented: "I feel more open-minded and more comfortable to work with diverse children in the classroom. I understand better what will benefit them, what resources they need if they are a new English learner and what they need to be successful."

The opportunity to have the 'first-hand' experience in teaching was the primary perceived benefit for students and in some ways student comments also overlapped with comments about the program increasing students' exposure to diversity. For example, one student stated: "This program broadened my views about teaching and the world! If I read the article about the UK educational system before and after this experience it would not have the same effect on me before and after this experience because actually experiencing it living in this country, doing it in person makes all the difference. I had to step away from the American mindset of teaching and become more open-minded about my views and teaching itself."

University Instructors/Coaches

Study participants who served as the University instructors/coaches commented that participating in the program resulted in numerous perceived professional benefits for them. The University instructors/coaches remarked that the program was transformational both for students and for them, because all participants 'evolve as teachers' during the program. The two major themes that resulted from the University instructors' feedback. They were perceived benefits of professional development and mentoring experience.

Professional development opportunity. The University instructors/coaches agreed that one major benefit of the program was professional development. They referenced leadership, the importance of working together, mentoring, and conflict resolution as 'value-added' skills that will be beneficial to their own future career goals.

One instructor stated: "Participating in this program is a great professional development opportunity for me. We as coaches make assumptions about teaching and learning, and when we come together in a space like this, we have to learn new skills and let go of old ideas. We let go of the things we've been holding onto and form new tools and new ideas."

Another instructor mentioned that part of her role is a support role for students living in the house. She saw her increased duties and responsibilities as beneficial for further development of her own time and project management skills. She stated: "I

wear many hats and have multifaceted roles of a coach, researcher, instructor, and mentor for students and although that is sometimes challenging it is a great professional development experience for me."

Mentoring experience. The second theme of benefits resulting from university instructors' feedback was the mentorship opportunity. Instructors agreed that participating in the program was beneficial both for mentoring they were receiving from the program director and for mentoring they were able to give to student participants.

One instructor stated: "For me, the opportunity to be professionally and intentionally mentored by our program director, is amazing… as a doctoral student people don't always have a mentor intentionally share their expertise with you. And, the opportunity to experience such a wide variety of pre-service teachers who have different personalities, different levels of knowledge etc. is a great professional development opportunity. I get so much practice learning how to respond to them (students) in ways that clearly communicate how to teach. I think these are primary benefits of the program for me."

Another University instructor/coach remarked: "I come from a different background and was in administration before teaching. It was a whole different field, and so I bring that life experience to the program, but I am also learning either about myself or about my abilities; my misconceptions but also my expertise, and I think this is a good opportunity for me because I need to acknowledge both. Over here we

constantly hear the language of having confidence and resilience and recognizing my own expertise is important. Another benefit is that I also developed in my role as a coach as part of this program."

In terms of mentoring benefits resulting from the individual relationship with the program director, one University instructor/coach shared the following comments: "Our program director does not do things for us. She will mentor us but will not "save" us in unusual situations. She is masterful at that, and it communicates to us that we are the professionals who need to handle some of these situations we encounter with students. That is the transformative piece for me."

Community partners

Community partners, who were principals of the local U.K. schools, reported overwhelmingly positive perspectives about the program. Their answers suggested that the University program was very well organized, unique, and beneficial for all participants including their local teachers and local students.

One school principal stated: "The program is very rich and a great opportunity for American students to visit a lovely place, get benefits of the local culture, and experience teaching in a different setting. This is a powerful opportunity (for students) to hear people talking about their passion for teaching, for their school, and what they do, and experience it first-hand."

The two major themes identified based on U.K. community partners' feedback were: perceived benefits of the program as a professional development opportunity for

the local teachers, and the benefit of exposure to diversity for the local students. Each of these themes is elaborated in the sections that follow.

Professional development opportunity for the local teachers. Community partners agreed that having American University students and instructors in their schools provided their local teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice, an opportunity to often use new technology in their classroom, and a welcome opportunity to exchange ideas with University students and instructors.

One community partner stated: "Our teachers need to be able to successfully interact with interns and experience different viewpoints and ideas. This can increase their own job performance and allow them to learn new skills, concepts and so on. It truly is a professional development opportunity for our teachers."

Regarding the usage of new technology, one principal gave the example of American students giving a presentation to the local school and teachers on a free, web-based video discussion platform called "Flip-Grid." During the illustration portion, "Flip-Grid" was used to introduce students to each other and this was well received by the local audience. The principal stated: "Our local teachers were introduced to a new technology they can use in their classroom in the future; something as simple as intro to "Flip-grid" has the potential to build our community and enhance assignments and it may not have been used if we were not partnering with the American University on this program."

Another principal referenced research collaboration with the University program director as an amazing professional development opportunity and the opportunity to connect with others who are interested in developing curriculum and improving student learning. He stated: "Working with the program director has added another layer to our relationship with students that have come over the past few years because our school has a unique approach to curriculum development and is a high-energy place. So, when American students come, they get a unique experience and our teachers and students do as well."

Exposure to diversity for the local students. The second theme in terms of perceived benefits resulting from the program collaboration was the exposure to diversity for the local students.

One school principal stated: "Our students benefit from American team here as well. We are the kind of school that is dynamic and having American students exposes our students to diversity. They get to ask questions about the United States, interact with a diverse group of people, with younger teachers, and better understand the world we live in."

Another principal stated that interacting with American students exposed his students to other cultures and diversity, because the student group was diverse, and every year different students participate in the program. Based on the overall feedback, the collaboration with the University and the program resulted in multiple perceived

benefits for the community partners, and their overall perspective on the program was positive.

Perceived Challenges of the Program

In addition to the perceived benefits, study participants also shared their perceived challenges about participation in the program. As previously mentioned, the themes varied based on the stakeholder group. The sections that follow will describe themes which resulted from student, University instructor/coaches, and community partner respondents. First, the three challenges perceived by students will be elaborated.

Students

The most frequently identified perceived challenge for undergraduate students in the   program fell within three categories: 1) program cost/affordability, 2) program logistics, and 3) time/schedule demands while abroad. Each of these themes is elaborated in the sections that follows.

Program Cost/Affordability. The majority of the respondents reported that the cost of the program was relatively high primarily because it does not include meals abroad (over the four-week period). One student stated: "Money was an issue for me... I had to work to pay for the program, so I could not attend all the meetings when I had

schedule conflicts. Don't know if there are scholarships students could get, but for me the program was kind of expensive."

Another student stated: "I wish the tuition and some extra meals were included in the cost because it is pricey. We have to pay for the program before leaving, and some students take out loans to pay; plus, you have more expenses once you get here, and a lot of us would like to travel and explore Europe, so it adds up!"

Program Logistics. The second theme that emerged from student responses was program logistics. One frequently referenced challenge for students was unreliable Wi-Fi internet connection in the house. Students expressed overall dissatisfaction about this issue and commented that they are used to uninterrupted internet access in the United States.

One student stated: "It is very frustrating not to be able to use Wi-Fi when needed, because the internet network was overwhelmed when everyone was back in the house, doing homework, streaming videos etc. This is something that should be fixed for future students."

Another student stated: "I sometimes would go to fast-food places or Starbucks just to use the public Wi-Fi, because I did not have patience to deal with the connection in the house".

Another logistical challenge identified by the students was transportation and initial familiarity with the host city. Although the post-arrival activities and orientation included a scavenger hunt and tour of the city, some students felt they needed more

time to learn their whereabouts. Others elaborated on this challenge because they had a greater distance to get to their local school sites. They had to allocate additional time for bus rides to and from their local schools.

One student stated: "It was hard for me to ride a bus because I never ride a bus at home, so the extra time and scheduling was kind of a challenge.

Another student stated: "I think we should have a day or two upon arrival just to get to know our area and do more group activities. Sometimes it is good to jump in and start doing things, but I felt a bit overwhelmed at the beginning, figuring out my way by looking at the map of the city."

Time/schedule demands while abroad. With respect to the third theme, the most common challenge identified by student respondents was balancing the demands on their daily schedules. This meant incorporating their local school teaching and learning experience with additional on-line University courses students were taking while abroad. Lack of time and time-management was perceived as a challenge for both students and for University instructors/coaches. Several students shared that the amount of work they had for additional (University required on-line courses) and the time demands of the program were overwhelming.

One student stated: "We have long days every day of the week, Monday-Friday, plus have to take two on-line classes. On top of that, we have homework for all these classes, and everyone in the group has to take two additional classes because that is mandatory credit limit. So, we are working constantly and are stressed out about our

on-line classes, and some of us have to get extensions because we don't have enough time to finish everything. I would like one day off to finish my journals and homework so we can travel over the weekend and explore the city".

University Instructors/Coaches

The two major themes resulting from University instructors' feedback on perceived challenges of the program were partnering with University campus offices and the challenge of limited time/demanding schedules. It is important to mention that instructors perceived program challenges relative to their role in the program. As previously mentioned, they had multifaceted roles because they observed student teaching formally and interacted with students informally during house-based and other program activities.

In addition to their liaison role and collaboration with the local elementary school teachers, University instructors/coaches also worked to address logistical matters affecting all students. They were responsible for ensuring that students follow the timetable and agenda for their assigned school site, and that they participate in their seminars and coaching sessions.

In short, the University instructors/coaches provided logistical support inside and outside the classroom and served in a multitude of roles. Hence, the findings indicated that the instructors felt the demands of the daily schedule while abroad and perceived the time limitations for accomplishing all they were tasked to do. Each of these themes is elaborated in the sections that follow.

Partnering with University campus offices. University instructors/coaches recognized that the University has the responsibility to ensure safety and consistency when it comes to study abroad experiences for all University students. However, they also recognized challenges in partnering with University campus offices.

One University instructor/coach stated: "It is sometimes challenging to work with other University offices that are not directly involved with our vision for the program, but we are 'beholden to them' to use that phrase, because we cannot function independently with our curricular vision. Sometimes that is a challenge."

Although University instructors recognized that some of the offices work on a different timelines and focus on different priorities, they felt that this operational side of things can be perceived as a challenge because the program has many 'moving parts' for all participants (e.g., early application deadlines for students, different payment schedules, multiple pre-departure meetings, coordination with vendors and community partners abroad, Canvas assignments etc.).

Limited time/demanding schedules. The most important perceived challenge cited was lack of time/demanding schedule for University instructors/coaches. Some of the major reasons for this challenge were multifaceted roles University instructors/ coaches had and limited time in the U.K. to "fit everything" in the four weeks abroad.

One instructor stated: "There is so much information about teaching, learning, literacy, our eight pillars, and it is all very complex for the students. So, we have to use

our time very intentionally and stay focused despite the daily distractions, varying

schedules and demands on our time we experience."

Community Partners

The community partners perceived one primary challenge and one less prevalent

theme associated with the program. The primary challenge was finding a way to

showcase the program to the larger community. Interestingly, this challenge resulted

from the overall positive perspective about the value and quality of the program as

community partners reported being proud of their collaboration with the American

University.

The second, less prevalent theme was the perceived challenge of timing of the

program. However, this perceived challenge was primarily specific to one local school,

which had the tradition of 'end of year' student performance, which involved all

grades, all students and all local school teachers on certain days of the week. Each of

these themes is elaborated in the sections that follows.

Showcasing the program/collaboration to the larger community. The challenge

of showcasing the community partner collaboration with the University's program was

connected to the overall positive perceptions about the program by the community

partners abroad. They expressed their interest in showcasing this program to their local

governors (equivalent of a school board in the United States), as that would illustrate

the strong, mutually beneficial partnership between the University and the local

schools. Based on community partner remarks, showcasing their collaboration would inform the local community about the types of global connections and collaborations in which the local schools were involved.

One community partner stated: "We would love to showcase this program in front of our governors so they can hear directly from the American University students about the learning and experience they've had in our school. This would perhaps be a more formal way of concluding the program, but also a very useful one."

Another community partner stated: "It would be great to have a structured reflection about the program and for the students to isolate some aspects of their learning and teaching experience in our school. A good way to round it off."

Both community partners recognized the logistical challenge and the time constraints in facilitating this idea, because the showcase would require advanced planning in order to have a culminating presentation for their local community constituencies. Nonetheless, they communicated strong opinions about how beneficial that would be both for their schools, their local communities as well as the program.

Time/schedule demands. The second, less prevalent theme was the perceived challenge of timing of the program. However, this perceived challenge was primarily specific to one local school, which had the tradition of 'end of year' student performance, which involved all grades, all students and all local school teachers on certain days of the week. This year-end school tradition made it difficult for the local schools to accommodate regular weekly schedule for American students on the days

when their local students needed to be in rehearsal for the performance. However, the community partners recognized that their academic calendar as well as the American University's academic calendar had little flexibility. Hence, found a 'work-around' this challenge by adjusting American students' schedules on rehearsal days.

Overall Perceptions About the Program

Although participant responses varied in length and depth, all respondents (i.e. students, University instructors/coaches and community partners abroad) reported an overwhelming positive perception about the program. Their answers suggested that the stakeholders held strong opinions about the program being well organized, unique, beneficial for all stakeholders, and enjoyable.

One respondent said that she chose to study at the University because of the positive feedback about the program she received from a neighbor who participated in prior years. She said: "I was very excited about the program, because I wanted to teach in another country and see if I liked it. I thought that this program was just incredible in the way that it was set up, and that it was a month long, not only one or two weeks."

Some respondents shared their views about how close-knit the University community was abroad and how the program helped them develop as educators.

Additionally, American University undergraduate students and the instructors/coaches reported feelings of welcome at the local U.K. elementary schools. Students felt supported by their MTs (local mentor teachers) and their local school staff members. The consensus about the program was that it gave all involved stakeholders

a unique and diverse professional opportunity, which for the most stakeholders seemed

to have been transformative both personally and professionally.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CALL TO ACTION

The primary purpose of the present study was to evaluate an existing, service-learning abroad program based on the participants' perspectives about their experiences in the program. The underlining expectation was for the findings of this study to inform and enhance the existing program. Additionally, the review of perceived benefits and evaluation of the program was intended to promote the development of new service-learning programs at my university. Therefore, the following section will present several key findings with recommendations for program enhancement based on stakeholders' perspectives.

Overall, the findings of the present study illustrated that key stakeholders (students, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad) held largely positive perspectives about the program. The stakeholders expressed strong opinions that the program successfully integrated experiential learning with study abroad, and that the integration resulted in numerous perceived benefits for all participants.

However, it should also be noted that the themes of benefits and challenges associated with the program were relative to stakeholders' roles in the program. This is interesting and implies that an evaluation of a program like this requires feedback from

all stakeholders, because understanding perspectives of only one group of stakeholders would not provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the program.

Furthermore, perceived challenges were relative to stakeholders' roles in the program. Again, this suggests it is important to understand all stakeholders' perspectives. Doing so provides the best way to evaluate the program and to offer recommendations for future program enhancement.

Perceived Benefits of the Program and Implications

Related to the issues of perceived benefits for the student group, it should be noted that the findings of the present study echoed findings of previously cited literature about the benefits of both service-learning programs and study abroad programs. Specifically, that service-learning programs have the potential to improve students' academic attainment and to contribute to their personal growth (Bringle, Hatcher, & Jones, 2011).

The most frequently identified perceived benefits for undergraduate students in the program fell within four categories. The first two categories related to benefits noted previously in service-learning programs:

1) facilitation of students' application of theory to practice;

2) career/skill development.

The other two categories related to previously noted benefits of study abroad experiences:

3) personal growth and development;

4) exposure to diversity.

Related to benefits number one and number two, it is interesting to note that students' perceptions were that the program facilitated their application of theory to practice. All students in education were required to have experiences in local schools, and most students already had some type of previous experience. Yet, students may not have connected previous classroom learning and their experiences at schools to the same extent that they reported in the present study.

Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone (2006) taught students' courses at the school where they had their internships in the United States. Their students also perceived linkages beyond typical program learning. Their students conducted individual behavior change projects (Alvarez-McHatton et al., 2008), at the school as part of their course requirements. This was a type of service-learning project that required students to identify a child with special needs who had behavioral challenges.

At that time, the students were also taking coursework related to behavioral management and educational psychology at that school. Although their program was taught at a school in the United States, and the current study evaluated the program abroad, the commonality was that students in both settings reported being able to better connect theory to practice.

The application of theory and skills learned in the classroom to 'real life' situations and experiences has been identified in other studies (Nino et al, 2011; Poulin et al, 2006); however, it is important to emphasize that the course-required reflection

about the experience provided students in the program an opportunity to use their 'real-life' experience and apply it to theory learned in class.

Similarly, the program evaluated in this study provided students with the opportunity to be introduced to the profession of teaching. Participation in the program also enabled them to explore and improve their future careers and professional skills. This is consistent with the conclusions of Jones (2011), whose findings indicated that one of benefits for students engaged in service-learning was being able to examine their career options.

Additionally, the findings of the current study echo conclusions of other studies that have cited exposure to diversity among the benefits of service-learning experiences (Belliveau, 2011; Sanders et. al., 2003). Consequently, the findings of this study support previous research on the potential benefits of service-learning abroad. It is therefore, logical to conclude that courses which incorporate service-learning activities and programs have the benefit of providing students with "real life" experiences.

In addition to the perceived benefits reported from the service-learning experience, the students in the present study also reported benefits that could be attributed to their study abroad experience (e.g. benefits number three and four listed previously). For example, according to the study by Dwyer (2004), students who were part of the study abroad program reported positive changes in their self-confidence and world-view. In fact, their survey results indicated over 95% of participants indicated an increase in personal development, including an increase in self-confidence.

Therefore, the findings of this study indicated that participation in the program had a greater impact than only service-learning. In addition to linkages between students' coursework and practice, there were additional perceived benefits from the study abroad experience. Those additional perceived benefits included students' personal development and exposure to diversity. Conclusively, the findings of the current study supported the argument for further inclusion of service-learning programs abroad to enhance students' learning experiences and professional development.

It is also important to address the expectation that the findings of this study have the potential to promote the development of new service-learning abroad programs at my university. The following paragraphs will address that expectation.

Based on my personal and professional observations, the evaluated program illustrated several of important elements, which safeguarded its overall success and resulted in perceived benefits for all stakeholders. One instrumental aspect of the evaluated program was the strong leadership and expertise of the program director, who provided the operational framework, support structure, as well as guidance and mentorship for University instructors/couches.

Additionally, the evaluated program included an extensive orientation component, which is essential for all effective service-learning and study abroad experiences. As previously mentioned, the orientation consisted of mandatory pre-departure and post-departure meetings and activities for student participants. Although the components and duration of these activities varied, the orientation

included an overview of the community-based interaction in local schools, an overview of academic and service-learning expectations, and a variety of activities to help program participants better understand the host country.

It also should be noted that the evaluated program also provided extensive support services for students while abroad. This was another crucial element ensuring program success and student satisfaction with the program. University instructors/ coaches were available around the clock to address student concerns before, during, and after the program abroad. The orientation component and the extent of support services for students are often part of effective service-learning experiences as indicated by Katz, DuBois, and Wigderson (2014).

As is the case in many service-learning programs, special emphasis was devoted on team-building and professional skill development of all program stakeholders. The perceived benefit of a unique professional development opportunity was specifically mentioned by all three groups of stakeholders, undergraduate students, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad.

Finally, the evaluated program incorporated a variety of course assignments which focused on reflection about students' daily experiences. A few students reported that in addition to these required course-related assignments, they kept a personal journal about their daily experiences inside and outside the classroom. The emphasis on reflection was noted by students as an important element which made this program successful and rewarding for them.

As Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones noted, the structured academic experience of service-learning in another country requires students to "reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally" (Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011, p. 19).

In summary, the evaluated program provided a solid example of a successful program design for faculty who might consider development of new service-learning abroad programs. Noteworthy elements included emphasis on detailed program development, extensive orientation and pre-departure preparation, ample student support services while abroad, a variety of required reflection assignments, and the director's strong leadership.

Last but not least, the evaluated program also had a uniquely collaborative partnership with the community partners abroad. According to Ruch and Trani (1991), three characteristics identify effective university-community relationships; they are: a) the interaction is mutually beneficial to the university and the community, b) the interaction is guided by institutional choice and strategy, and c) the interaction is one of value and import to both parties. (Ruch and Trani, 1991, p. 27). This means that a successful partnership requires ongoing commitment from both partners, commitment of resources, time required for planning, as well as collaboration between the university and community partners that is beneficial for both parties.

Therefore, one recommendation for faculty interested in developing a new service-learning program is to pay close attention to the development of a long-lasting and mutually beneficial community-university partnership.

The program evaluated in the present study incorporated the above-mentioned elements of effective service-learning programs abroad. In addition, it should be noted that this program was built on a solid University-community partnership, which enhanced its effectiveness and increased program benefits for all stakeholders.

Perceived Challenges of the Program and Implications

The present study highlighted several challenges related to students' experiences in the program, including challenges related to: 1) program cost/affordability, 2) program logistics, and 3) time/schedule demands while abroad.

Regarding program cost/affordability, one recommendation is to explore external grant funding and a variety of scholarship opportunities for students. Both institutional and community scholarships would be helpful in offsetting program costs for students.

Another recommendation would be for students to explore and possibly to collaborate fundraising initiatives in their own communities. Some students participating in study abroad programs have been successful in setting up their own "go-fund me" pages and fundraising in their local communities, clubs, organizations, places of worship etc. Although individual student fundraising efforts would not be facilitated by the University, it would be helpful for students to learn about different options to fund their study abroad experiences. Hence, the program advisors could

assist students in further exploring funding opportunities and consult with the Financial Aid and Study Abroad offices for more information about funding opportunities.

Another recommendation is for program organizers to develop more detailed, budget projections that will estimate some of the anticipated in-country costs for students. Although students' individual lifestyles will determine the extent of additional expenses, having a general idea of anticipated additional program costs can assist students in their financial planning and preparations for travel. For example, while daily breakfast was included in the program cost, students needed to understand the potential costs associated with purchasing other meals over the 4-week period. Hence, students need more detail about additional program costs abroad.

It would also be advisable for students to be better informed about budgeting and money saving tips. One possibility to address this would be to create video interviews with former students and to make them available to prospective students. In these videos, students would explain the costs they incurred during the previous year's program, and they could provide suggestions for the incoming student group about money saving and budgeting while abroad.

Another perceived logistical challenge for students was initial familiarity with the host city. All students participated in the post-arrival welcome orientation and in the scavenger hunt, which gave them an opportunity to explore the city. However, some students reported that they needed more time to become familiar with their surroundings and to learn their whereabouts. Based on existing program structure,

students did not have extra time to tour the city and experience a more extensive cultural orientation before their community-based learning and teaching began. Hence, some felt they would benefit from additional time in the city before the official program.

Of course, adding more travel days would result in the increased program cost, so that may not be a feasible solution for this particular challenge. However, one possibility would be to provide students with a virtual tour of the city before their departure. Another possibility would be having speakers from the host country inform students about expectations abroad. This especially would be important for those students who had not previously traveled outside the United States.

Nearly all student participants mentioned a logistical challenge of unreliable Wi-Fi connection in the group housing. It should be noted that some of the student responses focusing on this type of challenge may have been due to cultural differences between the U.S. and the U.K. Because at least 4 student participants mentioned that they had never traveled outside the U.S. previously, it probably was more difficult for them to distinguish between logistic difficulties and cultural differences. For instance, university students in the U.S. typically have uninterrupted access to high-speed internet, and it is common for them to stream videos and do a variety of other internet-based activities at the same time. This may not be the norm in other countries, and students may need to be better informed and prepared for what they may perceive as unexpected challenges abroad.

One possible recommendation is for the program managers, who facilitate vendor contracts abroad, to address this issue directly with the housing contacts. Since the currently selected housing is centrally located in the city and preferred by the group, the program managers and housing vendor could work collaboratively to address this issue of poor internet connectivity. One possibility is to explore the options and costs associated with upgrading internet service abroad. If that were not possible, the program organizers may consider implementing changes to the students' daily agendas so that the house occupants do not need to use internet at the same time. This would possibly enable different groups of students to utilize housing Wi-Fi connection without frequent interruptions.

Another recommendation for program enhancement based on students' feedback relates to the challenge of lack of time and scheduling demands while abroad. Students reported serious difficulties in balancing daily schedules with their study abroad and community engagement due to additional on-line courses they were required to take. This challenge is particularly hard to address because of students' individual time management skills as well as the University-required course sequences for elementary education majors. The primary responsibility for course sequences rests with the University's faculty who teach summer courses as well as the University's academic department. Hence, one suggestion is for the program director (i.e., the University faculty-leader) to possibly communicate this challenge for student participant with the department chair and other faculty who teach summer courses.

The program director, college dean and other faculty who teach required summer courses could further discuss possible accommodations to summer course schedule. One recommendation is to have summer courses offered on an alternate calendar in order to minimize the overload on the students who participate in the programs abroad. For example, the study abroad program could be offered during the first summer session and other courses could be offered during the second summer session. If this were not possible, the program director could consider rebalancing course assignments (in her own course) to place a heavier emphasis on students completing some assignments before they leave and other assignments after they return from study abroad.

Lack of time/demanding schedules were also perceived as a challenge by the University instructors/coaches. Respondents identified their multifaceted roles in the program as the primary reason resulting in this challenge. As previously mentioned, University instructors/coaches were responsible for teaching/mentoring the undergraduate students, for serving as liaisons with the local schools, for logistical needs in group housing, and so on. Hence, University instructors/coaches experienced high demands on their daily schedules, and this presented a challenge while abroad.

One recommendation to address this challenge is to consider reorganizing duties and responsibilities for University instructors/coaches. For example, one instructor could have sole responsibility for communication with local schools and could serve as a liaison for all necessary logistical arrangements. Another University instructor/coach could be assigned sole responsibility for most logistical arrangements related to group

housing. The third University instructor/coach could assume responsibility for the pre-departure orientation and cultural activities while abroad. This would lighten their workloads, so they could devote more time to their teaching and grading responsibilities. However, it would be advisable that all three University instructors/coaches continue to share mentoring responsibilities for smaller groups of students, so they have ample opportunities to interact with them. Sharing mentorship responsibilities would also enable students to learn from different teaching and work styles of University instructors/coaches.

An additional perceived challenge for the University instructors/coaches was collaboration with the other University offices such as study abroad office. The University instructors/coaches recognized the University's responsibility to ensure health, safety and consistency of operations related to study abroad experiences for all University students. However, they also recognized challenges in partnering with the University's study abroad office. This challenge probably resulted from varying perceptions about program priorities and different curricular vision for the program.

One recommendation to address this challenge is to implement earlier planning and enhanced communication between the University's study abroad office, instructors /coaches, and the program director. It is important to emphasize that all parties would need to make a sustained effort and a commitment to open communication for this challenge to be addressed.

For example, the University study abroad office would need to consider supportive operational policies to better assist the University instructors/coaches in

their roles. Similarly, University instructors/coaches would need to consider operational and logistical timelines that are imposed on the University's study abroad office (e.g., vendor agreement deadlines, pre-determined application deadlines for students, payment schedules, scholarship application deadlines, etc.).

It would also be advisable that the managers of the University's study abroad office and the program director meet to discuss the uniqueness of this program as they begin preparation for next year. Scheduling an initial program planning meeting early in the fall semester would be ideal as that would enable all parties to communicate their vision for the program, their expectations, and their proposed working timetables for next year's program. Following the initial planning meeting, it would be beneficial to continue with regular follow-ups, virtual or in-person, as that would enhance open communication and enable all parties to address emerging issues in a timely and practical manner.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of the present study was to evaluate the existing, service-learning study abroad program based on the participants' perspectives about the program and their experiences in the program. As previously described, all program stakeholders (undergraduate student participants, University instructors/coaches, and community partners abroad) reported an overwhelming positive perception about the program. Their responses suggested that all participants held strong opinions about the program being well organized, unique, beneficial for all stakeholders, and enjoyable.

Some respondents shared their views about how close-knit their group interaction was abroad and how the program helped them to develop as educators. The consensus about the program was that it gave all stakeholders a unique and diverse professional development opportunity, which seemed to have been transformative both personally and professionally.

Consequently, the findings of the present study indicated numerous perceived benefits resulting from participation in the program. Although the themes varied based on the stakeholder group and their roles in the program, there were benefits shared by multiple groups of stakeholders (undergraduate students, University instructor/coaches, and community partners abroad).

The most frequently identified perceived benefits for undergraduate students in the program fell within four categories: 1) perceived personal growth and development, 2) application of theory and practice, 3) development of career and professional skills, and 4) exposure to diversity.

Program participants who served as the University's instructors/coaches reported that the primary perceived benefit for them was professional development and mentoring experience. The University instructors/coaches commented that the program was transformational both for students and for them, because all participants had the opportunity to 'evolve as teachers' in the program.

Finally, community partners in the U.K. reported overwhelming positive perspectives about the program. Their answers suggested that the program was very well organized, unique, and beneficial for their local teachers and students. The two

major themes identified based on U.K. community partners' feedback were: 1) perceived benefits of the program as a professional development opportunity for the local teachers, and 2) the benefit of exposure to diversity for the local students.

Figure 1 illustrates themes shared by all program stakeholders and also themes shared by only one or two groups. For example, the theme of professional development/career skills was mentioned by all three groups of stakeholders and is highlighted in yellow across all groups. The theme of exposure to diversity was mentioned by the students and community partners abroad, and it is highlighted in green for those groups. Other themes only were mentioned by one stakeholder group, and these themes are highlighted in a unique color (purple, brown, or blue).

Students	Community Partners	Instructors
Career/skills development	Professional development for local teachers	Professional development
Exposure to diversity	Exposure to diversity for local students	Mentoring experience
Application of theory to practice		
Personal growth and development		

Figure 1.1: Perceived Program Benefits: Themes by Stakeholder Group

Nonetheless, the perceived benefits of the evaluated, service-learning program abroad were not without challenges. The University undergraduate students' perceived challenges fell within three themes: 1) program cost/affordability, 2) program logistics,

and 3) time/schedule demands while abroad.

The University instructors/coaches mentioned two perceived challenges: 1) partnering with other University offices, and 2) the challenge of limited time/ demanding schedules while abroad.

Finally, the community partners abroad perceived one primary challenge associated with the program and one secondary challenge. The primary challenge was finding ways to showcase their successful collaboration with the American University and the benefits of the program to their larger, local community. The secondary challenge was the lack of time/schedule demands for one local school which had a tradition of the 'year-end' school performance.

Figure 2 illustrates themes shared by all stakeholders and themes shared by only one or two groups. For example, the theme of limited time/demanding schedules was mentioned by all three groups of stakeholders and is highlighted in yellow across all groups. Other themes were mentioned only by one stakeholder group, and they are highlighted in unique colors.

Students	Instructors	Community Partners
Time/schedule demands while abroad	Limited time/demanding schedules	Limited time (mentioned by 1 of 4 schools)
Program cost/affordability	Partnering with University campus offices	Showcasing the program to the larger community
Program logistics		

Figure 2.1: Perceived Program Challenges: Themes by Stakeholder Group

The call to action section of this case study provided specific recommendations which are intended to address all stakeholders' perceived challenges. These recommendations can be used to enhance the program for future participants.

Additionally, this evaluative case study identified specific program elements, which were perceived to contribute to an overall positive stakeholders' perspectives about the evaluated program. These elements were also perceived to have impacted positive learning outcomes for students. These successful program elements were identified and further discussed in the context of providing a solid model for other University faculty who may consider creating a new service-learning programs abroad.

In summary, the findings of the present study supported the idea that: "The professional ideology of experiential learning is that it empowers individuals to gain control over learning and hence their lives, and to take responsibility for themselves. Experiential learning is widely regarded as empowering learners perhaps in ways that non-experiential learning does not" (Griffin, 1992, pp. 31-32).

Furthermore, the findings of this study supported the argument for further inclusion of service-learning programs abroad in an effort to improve student learning experiences and their future career/skill development. It is my hope that additional service-learning abroad programs will be developed for students on my campus, and that others will learn from these findings as they develop programs at their colleges and universities.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Program Participants

1.   What is your general perspective about the program?

2.   How does this experience help link theory to practice?

3.   What perceived benefits does participating in this program have for you?

4.   What challenges do you/did you face in this program?

5.   How does this program increase your cultural sensitivity/understanding?

6.   What opportunities do you have for reflection on the program?

7.   In what ways can the program be enhanced in the future?

8.   Is there anything else you would like to share with me in today's interview?

Appendix B: **Contact Sheet for Observations**

Date:

Time:

Location:

Participants:

Describe the activity taking place:

Describe the overall atmosphere:

List notable interactions, comments, side conversations etc.

What did you observe today that relates to your research questions?

What questions arose in the observations today?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Amela is a recipient of the Fulbright-Nehru 2019 International Education Administrators (EIA) award to India. She is also a 2018 graduate of the AIEA's (Association of International Education Administrators) Senior International Officer Leadership Academy. Amela is a recipient of the 2017 USF Global Achievement Administrator Award for USF Sarasota-Manatee.

Amela earned a Bachelor's degree from Hamilton College (NY) where she studied Cultural Anthropology and German Literature. She later earned a Master's degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. At the time of this study, Amela was a doctoral candidate in Program Development with emphasis on innovation program at the University of South Florida.