

Review Essay

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Green, P. & Johnson, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Crossing Boundaries: Tension and Transformation in International Service-Learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Recent decades have witnessed the expansion and amalgamation of some higher education study abroad and service-learning programs into international service-learning (ISL) programs. These new programs seek to provide students with a deeper understanding of global issues by combining coursework, international cross-cultural interaction, service activities, and reflection. In *Crossing Boundaries: Tension and Transformation in International Service-Learning*, editors Patrick M. Green and Matthew Johnson (2014) utilize 12 chapters, written as independent vignettes, to provide a thorough introduction to ISL through the compilation of experiences of different institutions of higher learning in the United States. Overall, the book gives the reader a nearly overwhelming overview of the depth, breadth, and complexity of the field. Clearly defined by the editors at the beginning of the book (p. ix), subsequent chapters, each written by ISL practitioners, tweak and alter the meaning of ISL to fit their individual praxes. For instance, Chapter 9 describes an established critical, power-reflective undergraduate ISL program operated through the partnership between two public American universities and three community organizations in Jamaica. This program focuses on providing students with a multidisciplinary education that promotes social justice while providing course credit in sociology, ethnic studies, or international relations. In other chapters, the authors (1) discuss new or evolving programs (i.e., Loyola University's program in Chapter 8); (2) consider ISL in graduate programs or community colleges (i.e., Chapters 5 and 7); (3) cover programs that focus on more tangible outcomes (i.e., Northeastern University's capacity building in Chapter 6); (4) provide perspective from private universities with religious affiliations (i.e., the University of Notre Dame in Chapter 11), and (5) reflect on data-driven programs with clear research goals (i.e., Portland State University and the University of Science in Chapter 3). Programs presented in this publication also vary in length of time, from a few weeks to multiple semesters, with some offering single-credit preparation courses the semester before the ISL experience. Green and Johnson have clearly and successfully selected programs to include in this book which highlight the diversity of ISL. The book leaves the reader with a strong impression of the highly variable nature of International Service-Learning programs.

Common Themes

Partnerships

Despite this range, several similarities emerge which unite these programs under the label of "International Service-Learning." Typical programs are comprised of partnerships founded on reciprocity between American universities and either community-based organizations or universities overseas, with some notable exceptions (the International Partner for Service-Learning and Leadership being one). Many of the vignettes begin with interesting histories that provide context for the inception of the partnerships, which readers interested in starting programs may find useful. For instance, the University of Science (UoS) in Vietnam and Portland State University (PSU)

established collaboration through a combination of complementary goals and external factors. In other cases, partners founded relationships on similar religious philosophies (Marist University and DePaul University), or they actively sought complimentary “others” (Clayton State University, University of San Diego, and Duncans, Jamaica). Some collaborations developed by chance (Rochester Community and Technical College and the Cambodian Family Organization), the partnerships an unintended result of their interactions.

Focus on Student Learning

Green and Johnson included only programs that focus on educating students while providing assistance to communities overseas. In his introduction to *Crossing Boundaries*, Johnson discusses the benefits he and his students derived from integrating cross-cultural experiential learning into his curriculum. Readers learn that many students conquer cross-cultural challenges to enthusiastically engage in nontraditional learning through and with “others.” In Chapter 1, Mellon and Herrera discuss their observation of three phases that students experience in ISL programs prior to the development of critical consciousness. Subsequent chapters make note of experiences similar to the three phases, such as initial excitement, followed by tension as students step outside of their comfort zones, before they find satisfactory resolution.

Students transition into a more global perspective through ISL as they continue their coursework while working in the communities. This book portrays the diversity of programs with a multitude of learning styles for the students, and views how different programs define their provision of assistance. Student education can include collaboration with local universities to teach coursework in traditional style classrooms as well as less conventional locations, such as a beach in Jamaica. Classes can consist of American University students and any community members who care to join. For programs working to complete projects within communities, much of the coursework includes active project planning, execution, and assessment from the students.

Community Service Activities

The community service activities in ISL programs are very diverse, and are shaped by each community served. Authors of these vignettes stress that the projects initiated are done at the best of, and with the assistance of, the partnership communities. This highly tailored programming influences American students as they choose which programs they will attend. As an example, communities seeking ESL teachers often have programs that attract students whose academic majors are Communications or Education, as demonstrated with the partnership between the University of Georgia, Kansas State University, and the communities in Costa Rica and Guatemala. However, the authors of some vignettes highlighted the diversity of their students as an example that anyone can participate in ISL, a feeling further reinforced by the projects sited in the book. ISL can include building toilets, increasing environmental awareness, language education, health education, and anything in between.

Reflection

A final common theme uniting each vignette is reflection from the students as well as the authors and program directors. Various authors stressed that critical reflection is essential through-

out the programs and should continue after students return home. This reflection includes a combination of verbal and written experiences. Many programs required daily journaling or a final paper at the end of the course to provide reflection opportunities. Program leaders did not limit reflection to the students; a few authors were thoughtful and honest regarding programmatic weaknesses, and even failed programs. In Chapter 8, Ong and Green of Loyola University discuss how lessons learned from one failed program in Vietnam provided information for a subsequent and stronger program in Peru. Through critical reflection, some ISL practitioners have questioned the foundations of their programs. In Chapter 1, Mellon and Herrera elucidate the conflict they experienced in creating an ESL program in Central America, given the historical regional tensions and troubling power dynamics between these countries and the United States. Finally, some practitioners (Espenchied-Reilly and Iverson in Chapter 2) have considered and even researched the impact of their own cultures on the ISL programs they created.

Strengths and Weaknesses

While all chapters carried these similarities, Green and Johnson allowed leniency in the formatting and prose of the chapters, which created strengths and weaknesses in the book. The variety in programs presented is both beneficial and detrimental. The vignette structure is beneficial for readers looking for specific ISL program styles, since they can read chapters in any order without losing information. Some chapters focus on the creation of a program, while others concentrate on programmatic formatting, philosophy, weaknesses, or student responses to ISL. The book's style enables readers to skip around to chapters they feel are more relevant to their purposes. The diversity of the book is problematic in that some of the vignettes are descriptive accounts, written from the perspective of one or a few program leaders without any formal critical analysis or research focus, leaving the reader to question the efficacy of the program. Other programs have clearly delineated outcomes and research foci, which are discussed at the beginning of the chapter and assessed by the end of the chapter. Restrictions on chapter lengths could have limited the ability of some authors to expound more fully on their programs; I found myself almost wishing for a companion volume or graphics that more clearly compared and contrasted the different dimensions of the ISL programs discussed. The diversity of programs and areas of focus in the writings contributed to the difficulty with comparing some programs, making each chapter feel disconnected from the rest.

Another weakness in the book is that the vignettes generally lacked input and opinions from community members. The authors were able to weave their own voices with the voices of their students into their chapters through quotes and quantitative data, but *Crossing Boundaries* does not include the voices of community members. In some chapters, authors would mention an opinion from a community, but not to the extent of actually including reflections from community members. The absence of other voices similar to those of the ISL students suggests that these programs still tend to focus on the thoughts of students more fully than the thoughts or reflections of the community members that they served. No programs discussed in this book reported conducting post-program evaluations with their community partners. Some programs, like the Portland State University-University of Science partnership, have conducted some in-country analysis within the partner organization (the University of Science), but not with the community members they served.

Conclusion

Green and Johnson conclude the book with a final chapter looking forward to a “critical global citizenship” and a presentation of best practices, compiled from the other chapters of the book for a successful International Service-Learning program. In these best practices, the editors use the past three decades of their experience to suggest a direction for future programming, into a new era of ISL, adding to the original goals of service activity, cross-cultural dialogue, and reflection on promoting equality among all people. Future best practice directions discussed are stronger involvement of individuals in the global community and more cross-cultural collaboration. Therefore, you can consider *Crossing Boundaries* an introduction to ISL as it has been in the past, as well as offering a vision for better, stronger ISL programs in the future.

Author

Ann Scheunemann is a graduate student in the Applied Social and Community Psychology program at North Carolina State University. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Biochemistry, she served three years in Lesotho as a Community Health and Economic Development volunteer with the Peace Corps. While in the Peace Corps, she worked with communities on various projects, including support for orphans and vulnerable children, HIV and health education, life skills training, and literacy development, which fostered her interest in the psychology of children in developing nations. Her research interests include the impact of trauma on child development in developing nations and resilience in children affected by multiple traumas. Her goal is to apply this research towards interventions and programs that support the mental and physical health of orphans and vulnerable children in developing nations.