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**PERSONAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION: TWO  
CASE STUDIES OF A UNIVERSITY BASED INTERNATIONAL  
SERVICE LEARNING INTERNSHIP**

**LA TRANSFORMACIÓN PERSONAL Y POLÍTICA: DOS ESTUDIOS DE CASO DE UNA  
PASANTÍA UNIVERSITARIA DEL APRENDIZAJE-SERVICIO INTERNACIONAL**

**A TRANSFORMAÇÃO PESSOAL E POLÍTICA: DOIS ESTUDOS DE CASO DE UM  
ESTÁGIO UNIVERSITÁRIO DO APRENDIZAGEM-SERVIÇO INTERNACIONAL**

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### Abstract

This article presents the results of two related studies that were interested in exploring the impact of international service learning (ISL) experiences on university student interns in terms of personal and political transformation. We report on the findings related to the question: "How do university students envision social change, and experience personal and political transformation following a long-term international service learning internship?" We begin by providing a background context for the studies, followed by a review of the theoretical framework, transformational learning theory, within which the studies were situated. This is followed by an overview of the research methods used to carry out this study, the findings and our analysis of the data. These were mixed methods studies using three data sources: survey questionnaires, interviews, and student blogs. Our studies demonstrate that while there is clear evidence of envisioning, personal and political transformation amongst the students who participated in this ISL internships, their experiences and the degrees of transformation varied. Our research points to the need for structured activities related to critical reflection to be built into all stages of ISL program planning, from pre-departure throughout and after the internship.

**Keywords:** Service-Learning, international programs, higher education, transformative learning, social justice.

### Resumen

En este artículo se presentan los resultados de dos estudios relacionados que estuvieron orientados a explorar el impacto de las experiencias del Aprendizaje-Servicio Internacional (ASI), en términos de transformación personal y política, en estudiantes universitarios que hicieron la pasantía. Este reporte es acerca de los hallazgos encontrados en relación a la siguiente pregunta: "Cómo conciben los estudiantes universitarios el cambio social, y cómo experimentan su transformación personal y política durante una pasantía de largo plazo del aprendizaje-servicio internacional?" Comenzamos ofreciendo un contexto de fondo para los estudios de caso, seguido de una revisión del marco teórico, la teoría de aprendizaje transformacional, en los cuales estaban situado los estudios. Esto es seguido por una revisión general de los métodos de investigación usados para llevar a cabo este estudio, los hallazgos, y nuestro análisis de los datos. Estos fueron estudios de métodos mixtos con tres fuentes de datos: cuestionarios de encuestas, entrevistas y blogs de los estudiantes. Nuestros estudios demuestran que si bien existe una clara evidencia de la conceptualización, y de la transformación personal y política de los estudiantes que participaron en esta pasantía del ASI, sus experiencias y sus grados de transformación variaron. Nuestra investigación señala la necesidad de actividades estructuradas relacionadas con una reflexión crítica para ser construida en todas las etapas de la planificación del programa del ASI antes de salir, durante, y después de la pasantía.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje-Servicio, programas internacionales, educación superior, aprendizaje transformativo, justicia social.

### Resumo

Neste artigo apresentam-se os resultados de dois estudos relacionados que estiveram orientados a explorar o impacto das experiências do Aprendizagem-Serviço Internacional (ASI) em termos de transformação pessoal e política em estudantes universitários que realizaram o estágio. Este escrito é acerca das descobertas encontradas em relação à seguinte pergunta: "Como concebem os estudantes universitários a transformação social, e como experimentam sua transformação pessoal e política durante um estágio de longa duração do aprendizagem-serviço internacional?" Começamos oferecendo um contexto de fundo para os estudos de caso, seguido de uma revisão do marco teórico, a teoria de aprendizagem transformacional, na qual estavam situados os estudos. Isto é seguido por uma revisão geral dos métodos de investigação usados para realizar este estudo, os achados e nossas análises dos dados. Estes estudos foram de métodos mistos com três fontes de dados: questionários de opinião, entrevistas, e blogs dos estudantes. Nossos estudos demonstram que ainda que exista uma clara evidência da conceptualização e da transformação pessoal e política dos estudantes que participaram neste estágio do ASI, suas experiências e seus graus de transformação variaram. Nossa investigação assinala a necessidade de atividades estruturadas relacionadas com uma reflexão crítica para ser construída em todas as etapas de planificação do programa do ASI antes de sair, durante, e depois do estágio.

**Palavras-chave:** Aprendizagem-Serviço, programas internacionais, educação superior, aprendizagem transformativo, justiça social.

## INTRODUCTION

International service learning (ISL) is an increasingly popular approach to internationalizing post-secondary education. Many assert that such international experiences for university students are effective pathways to guide students towards becoming engaged global citizens committed to social justice (Bremer, 2006; Brown, 2006; Kiely, 2004; Killick, 2012; Lewin, 2009; Taraban, Trilokekar & Fynbo, 2009). However, although one of the explicit goals of ISL is to affect world view (perspective transformation), cross-cultural understanding, and social justice oriented citizenship, there has been little research, especially longitudinal, focused on these outcomes (Crabtree, 2008; Kiely 2004; Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011). As Crabtree (2008), writes, we need further research using “a social justice framework for understanding the outcomes of ISL on students” (p. 29).

The studies that we report on in this article are an attempt to understand the impact of an ISL program on changing the social justice perspectives of student participants. We begin by providing a background context for the two case studies, followed by a review of the theoretical framework, transformational learning theory, within which the studies were situated. This is followed by an overview of the research methods used to carry out the studies, the findings and our analysis of the data.

## 1. CONTEXT

This article focuses on an ISL program, referred to henceforth as *The Program*, which is a large Canadian university’s community response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in East Africa. *The Program* was established in 2003 by *The University* initially in partnership with a local East African Women’s Rights Organization<sup>1</sup>. *The Program* began as a knowledge and technology transfer initiative whereby knowledge concerning setting up yoghurt kitchens, procedures for making probiotic yoghurt, and business and marketing knowledge and skills was transferred from *The University* to a group of Tanzanian women. Now, each year, about 8 university student interns receive course credit for going to Tanzania, Rwanda and Kenya to participate in *The Program* and conduct research for their Master’s or PhD theses. To date, over 60 students from across every faculty at *The University* have participated in 3-4 months internships.

This article presents the results of two related studies that were carried out in 2012. Both were interested in exploring the impact of the ISL experience on university student interns in terms of global consciousness and personal and political transformation. Here we report on the findings related to the question: “How do university students envision social change, and experience personal and political transformation following a long-term international service learning internship?” The participants in both studies were drawn from the larger sample of the 55 student interns who had participated in *The Program*. One study, which focused on the long-term impact of the internships, involved the student interns who had participated in *The Program* between 2005 and 2011. The other study, which focused more on the short-term impact, involved one cohort of students who had just participated in *The*

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1. We have not used the real name of the university or the program. As well, the names of all participants are pseudonyms and any identifying information has been removed to protect all identities.

*Program* internships in 2012. Details about the research methods are provided below, following our discussion of the theory that framed these studies.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSFORMATION THEORY

This study draws upon Mezirow and Associates' (1991, 2000) transformational learning theory as a framework for examining how students experience perspective transformation. For Mezirow (1991), transformative learning occurs when individuals become critically aware of how their assumptions can constrain how they perceive and understand the world, change those assumptions to become more inclusive, and then act on their new understandings. Transformation theory focuses on how individuals make meaning of their experiences and how significant learning and behavioural changes often results from the way people make sense of problems, critical incidents, and/or ambiguous events. This theoretical framework also has explanatory value unique to ISL contexts as it describes how different modes of reflection combined with meaningful dialogue lead people to engage in socially-responsible action.

Mezirow's empirically-based conceptual framework has been used in a number of different studies to explain the transformative impact of service learning on students' personal, civic, moral and intellectual learning and development (e.g. Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rhoads, 1997). In particular, Kiely (2004, 2005) built upon Mezirow's theory to develop a model of emerging global consciousness through his longitudinal study of 22 students' perspective transformation following an ISL experience in Nicaragua. Kiely noted that previous research (e.g. Eyler & Giles, 1999) showed perspective transformation occurred where there was an explicit social justice orientation and that it involved substantial moral, political and intellectual change. However, most research focused on the short-term, positive aspects of individual perspective transformation and skill development and assumed this led to long-term change and social action. Kiely's contribution to the literature was to provide empirical evidence of long-term perspective transformation, and our study builds upon that initial, seminal piece of research.

Kiely's model of emerging global consciousness includes three learning dimensions: envisioning, transforming forms, and the chameleon complex<sup>2</sup>. Envisioning involves the initial shift in perspective to a **deeper** understanding of the historical, political and cultural roots of social injustices, as well as a commitment to work to address these. In this respect, envisioning involves the sense of empowerment and the 'intention to act' on their emerging global consciousness to promote social justice when students return from the ISL experience.

Transforming forms refers to a dynamic shift in how students see themselves and the world in at least one of six types of perspective transformation: political, personal, moral, cultural, intellectual and spiritual. The focus in this paper will be on personal and political forms of transformation as they are the most closely related to the development of social justice orientations amongst the student interns. Personal transformation involves the process of re-evaluating one's identity, beliefs, roles, relationships and career path (Kiely, 2004). We add academic path shifts to this definition as a number of the most recent cohort of interns

2. The chameleon complex refers to the struggles ISL participants experience upon returning home as they learn to translate their new consciousness into action in their lives.

(2012) are still enrolled in their university programs. Through personal transformation, the individual becomes more aware of their own personal weaknesses or shortcomings and, as a result of the intense experience, undergo changes in their level of confidence and skills to overcome these. They describe increases in self-esteem and self-awareness as they overcome fears and personal challenges.

Political transformation involves the student rethinking their citizenship role from passively voting or volunteering to an expanded sense of citizenship as global rather than just national (Kiely, 2004). Students express a sense of greater responsibility to address social injustices as global citizens in alliance with their international partners. The difference between envisioning and political transformation is that students translate transformation into 'action' through behaviours such as engaging in political activities to advocate on behalf of and with those experiencing oppression.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

Our studies are based on case study methodology, examining students' experiences of personal and political transformation following a 3-4 month internship with an ISL program in East Africa. Case study methodology was chosen to explore the real-life, complex, dynamic and unique events, surrounding the human relationships and other factors specific to the experiences of *The Program* interns (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Case study methodology is highly suited to programs such as this since they are bounded by time and activity, and accommodate experiential understanding and the interpretive role of both participants and researchers. Stake (1995) also states that meaning from cases is made through both direct interpretation of individual instance and through aggregation of instances until patterns emerge so that something can be said about them as a class. Moreover, case study research has practical application to program improvements while, at the same time, can contribute to theory by building upon existing transformational and intercultural learning theories (Kiely & Hartman, 2011).

### 4. PARTICIPANTS

This paper presents the results of two separate but related studies, both which focused on the impact of the ISL experience on the interns. The participants in both studies were drawn from the larger sample of the 55 student interns who participated in *The Program* between 2005-2012. The total number of participants in the two studies we are reporting on here is 33. This includes 25 student interns who participated in *The Program* between 2005-2011 and 8 students who participated in 2012. There were 8 males (24%) and 25 females (76%), which is broadly representative of the gender breakdown of the entire population. Of the study participants, 5 interns were placed in Rwanda, 9 in Kenya and 19 in Tanzania. The participants ranged in age from nineteen to forty-seven years of age with the majority being in their twenties. The majority of the students in these two studies were of



white/European background, with 7 students (20%) identifying as mixed ethnicity or as non-European background.

#### 4.1. Data Sources/Research Instruments

These were mixed methods research studies utilizing three data sources: survey questionnaires, post-internship interviews and intern blogs. Specifically, the first study involved administering a post-internship survey to the 25 students who had participated as interns between 2005 and 2011. The second related study involved administering a pre and post-internship survey, as well as conducting post-internship interviews with the 8 students who participated in the internship in 2012. The surveys included background questions about the student internship (location, dates) and personal/demographic background. Data from the survey questionnaires that we analyzed for this article included information about the impact that the internship had on them, their values, beliefs and actions. The surveys aimed to capture any shifts in the students' beliefs, opinions and values before and after the internships through a series of questions that involved participants ranking factors in terms of the importance. Close-ended, scalar response questions focused on the degree to which student interns' values and beliefs shifted over the course of the internship. For example, students were asked to rank the degree which they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "If people worked harder, they could get out of the poverty they experience." Students in the 2005-2011 cohort were also asked to indicate from a list the causes of poverty in Africa. (Students in the 2012 cohort were asked questions about their experiences with and the causes of poverty in their interviews.)

Open ended questions on the 2005-2011 cohort survey explored issues such as expectations and benefits to student and host community, power and privilege, global and cultural issues, relationships with community partners. These questions were aimed at exploring global and self-awareness and global responsibility. Some examples of these questions include: "I question whether 'relief' and 'development aid' are making a difference" and "Canada has a role in addressing poverty and HIV/AIDS in Africa." The survey questionnaires also explored the perceived impact on the students' career paths and intentions to engage in social change/justice activities such as buying fair-trade products. The 2012 cohort were also asked in their interviews to expand upon the impact the internship had on their engagement with various social change activities and any other changes that they had made in their lives as a result of having participated in the internship.

Post-internship interviews were conducted with the 8 student interns who participated in *The Program* in 2012. Many of the same questions used in the survey with the 2005-2011 cohort were asked during the interviews with the 2012 cohort. For example, students were asked what they learned about the East African country they were based in, the relationships and connections they developed, and challenges they faced during and after the internship. Finally, we draw upon the student intern blogs, which have been posted online, as our final data source for our two related studies. This article focuses specifically on data from

all of our data sources related to the impact of the internship on the students in terms of their perceptions about their personal and political transformation.

## **4.2. Data Analysis**

The analysis process was iterative and inductive and attempted to discover, explore, develop, analyze and uncover themes, categories, patterns, tentative hypotheses and relationships that emerged from the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The quantitative survey data identified initial trends amongst student experiences related to key items related to perspective transformation. Quantitative survey data was first aggregated by question for frequencies and percentages of participant responses to the item on the rating scale to identify patterns. Where questions sought a retrospective perspective of an issue before and after the internship, this data was placed in graphs side by side to visually show any changes on the item and for easier comparison. Emergent patterns and significant percentage changes were noted by hand and with graphs.

The qualitative data, which included survey short written answers, interview transcripts and blogs, provided deeper, richer understanding of the trends and patterns about student internship experiences that arose from the quantitative data. Specifically, the qualitative data was aggregated and organized by each question with numbers assigned to individual intern responses. In this way, categories and patterns amongst intern experiences would become apparent by item. Simultaneously, the assigned number would allow the researcher to follow a pattern or theme amongst each participant. Through this process, commonalities and meaningful differences were identified so that a pattern of what was salient emerged.

Drawing upon grounded theory method, the coding of the qualitative data then took place for each question to determine what analytical sense could be made of the data. Using line by line, in vivo coding, the researchers began to conceptualize the data using the words and phrases of participants. Coded views and events described were compared so that analytic categories began to emerge. After the aggregated responses for each question were coded, memos were written summarizing the key themes and categories that emerged. Quotations exemplifying the themes were recorded and researcher reflections were also included in each memo. Through the memos, the researchers further studied the events and experiences described to pursue hunches and analytical ideas about them and the analytic categories that arose (Charmaz, 2008). Finally, analysis of the qualitative data was triangulated with the different qualitative data to refine and develop the final categories for data analysis, leading to the findings, which we address next.

## **5. FINDINGS**

### **5.1. Envisioning**

In this section we explore any shifts that occurred as a result of the ISL experience with respect to students' perspectives about poverty and the broader historical, economic and political roots of social injustice. In addition, we explore the impact of the ISL program on

interns' understanding of their own privilege as primarily white, Western students. Finally, we address whether or not students developed a commitment to address issues of social injustice in their own lives upon their return. Overall, our findings show that the majority of participants experienced a shift in their perspective about poverty, the roots of social injustice, and developed a commitment to work for change in their lives.

*Poverty.* For some of the students, their internship was the first time they had viewed vast inequalities in wealth, especially between people in the urban and rural areas. During their travels within Kenya and Rwanda, many of the interns noted the vast inequalities they saw ranging from extreme wealth (often within cities) to poverty (often in rural areas). However, they also pointed out that these extremes often existed side-by-side, especially in urban areas where there was both much wealth (e.g. SUVs) alongside much poverty (e.g. glue-addicted street children). As Vera (2012) wrote: "The inequality was so striking because it's so juxtaposed."

We found that most of the students reflected upon not only the inequalities in wealth that they witnessed within the East African countries where they were based, but the inequalities in wealth (understood primarily in terms of material wealth) between East Africa and Canada. Some expressed their understanding of the relative, contextual and complex nature of poverty. Amy's (2006) statement reflects her ideas about the complexity of social justice issues underlying poverty and that the problem lay not solely with the individual, but at a broader level: "I have learned that there is no single root cause of poverty. Poverty exists and persists due to complex and intertwined socioeconomic factors that cannot effectively be addressed in isolation." And Sam (2012) developed a similar understanding of poverty, noting that:

*Poverty in general is an extremely complex issue. There's many different things that lead into it and so I think that there's a tendency at times to say 'oh all we need to do is this' and the problem will be solved. But it's not that easy, because it's a terribly complex problem and there's so many things that lead into it. I mean you have lack of governance, you have lack of government support, you have non-governmental organizations.*

Some of the interns developed even more refined and complex understandings of poverty. Anna (2009), for instance, explained her deeper understanding of the cycle of poverty:

*Poverty is usually not a choice... it's the result of being born into a family that couldn't provide for you. A child is born into a family that could not support them to go to school. As a result, the child is forced to drop out of school and cannot get a decent job. The cycle continues... We have a phenomenal education system in comparison to East Africa, and therefore we do not have a lot of poverty. This meant that my eyes were opened to so much more. My life changed. I saw the world differently. I saw people of a different economic status differently. I understood poverty and Africa differently.*

Furthermore, some of the interns developed a deeper understanding of historical, political and economic roots of contemporary wealth inequalities. Barry (2005) explained:



I feel I became more educated in understanding the root causes of these different themes. Talking to people from and living in East Africa, you begin to gather a lot of perspectives that I simply was not exposed to ever before. For example, my Swahili teacher often did history lessons on Tanzania that helped us understand the structure of society/language/culture – which in turn provides better perspective on root causes of poverty.

Lara (2012) who had a lot of prior experience living and working in the Global South, also developed a critically informed analysis of the causes of inequality, the fact that life is an “unfair game”, and the role of power and privilege, including her own, in understanding inequities and inequalities.

*Privilege and Power.* Data collected from both studies also showed further evidence of students’ understanding of the privileges and power associated with being white and from the West. In her blog, Aleta (2010) remarked upon both privilege and inequality of wealthy ‘Western’ countries as compared to ‘developing’ countries. In this quote, Laura (2010) expressed a deeper understanding of the need for greater awareness of her own privileges and the significance of her presence in Tanzania.

*Despite being a female and being a [white minority] living in Mwanza, I took for granted at the beginning that this still put me in a place of authority in the continuum of power dynamics. I think it was very important to be aware of what my presence within this culture signified and not contribute to upholding a colonial system that works to suppress by its very nature, the people I wanted to work with.*

The problematic impact of their own power and privilege was at times confusing and disconcerting for the interns. This can be seen in Madison’s (2007) account of the theft of funds by the local project coordinator that she brought from Canada for a community partner.

*This surprised me because I am a very trust worthy person. To hear about her theft and the collaboration with the bank and police made me very aware of the corrupted systems in Tanzania and the difficulties the Mamas<sup>3</sup> had in trusting others, including the ISL interns who were cycled in and out very frequently.*

Similarly, Tina (2008) described a critical incident that took place while traveling on a crowded bus where children often take a seat on the lap of strangers that left her surprised that she was viewed with mistrust:

*We were sitting at the back and the young girls rushed over to sit with us, and in fact, the older girl plopped on my lap. The mother quickly grabbed them and instructed them not to sit with the ‘mzungus’<sup>4</sup>. This was the first time I had experienced a mother not wanting their child to be near me. I had never considered myself to come across as a threat to anyone and the experience upset me. I learned that while many Tanzanians are friendly and welcoming towards Westerners coming to their county, there are others who see our presence as unwanted – the root cause I don’t know exactly.*

3. The term ‘mama’ is a commonly used courtesy title used to address adult women (often assumed to have children).

4. Mzungu is an East African term for a person of foreign descent, usually European. It literally translates to ‘white skin’.

The final words in this quote are important to note. While we did see evidence of the student interns developing more complex, refined understandings of the historical, economic, political and socio-cultural roots of social injustice, and notions of power and privilege, there were some interns that completed their internship not fully understanding the complexity of these issues and their own roles in reproducing unequal power relations. The internship, therefore, had a different impact on different interns and we return to this point in our discussion of our findings below.

*Commitment to Social Change.* Envisioning includes not only interns' understanding about social injustice, but an expressed commitment to work for social change. Similar to the shift found in the respondents' knowledge of social injustices, there was a commitment to act and advocate on behalf of the poor which rose from 61% to 83% amongst the 2005-2011 interns. Almost three-quarters of the participants said that they returned from their internships with the intention to engage in social change and social justice activities. Where just over half of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that, before the internship, their knowledge of social injustices in East Africa made them committed to learn more and work for change, this number rose to 88% after the intern experience. The vast majority of the respondents talked about increased knowledge and awareness with respect to such issues as the root causes of poverty, the impact of colonialism, and 'Western' privilege.

One significant finding was that before the internship, almost half of the respondents indicated their experience with extreme poverty and social injustice had them reconsider their roles in society and their ability to make a difference and after the intern experience, this number increased to 94%. Participants talked about their desire upon returning, to get involved in activities such as building a school, or moving into a career in international development, the global health field, or something related to social change with their deeper understanding of poverty and social injustice in their host country. We explore these further in the section below on political transformation.

## 5.2. Personal Transformation

We focus here upon personal transformation as involving the process of re-evaluating one's values, purpose in life, roles, relationships, academic and career paths. According to Kiely (2004) the dissonance ISL students experience as a result of witnessing extreme poverty, suffering and injustice may cause them to reflect more deeply on their purpose in life, their role in society, and their ability to make a difference. Some may renew their faith or find strength to work for greater social justice, while others reexamine their values and beliefs.

Approximately half of participants believed the internship would lead to reevaluating their relationships and career choices before the experience, the number increased to 70% afterwards. However, the most significant shift in personal transformation was that nearly all participants indicated that they had learned more about themselves and were less fearful of the world. In terms of personal transformation, almost 100% of the 2005-2011 interns reexamined who they were in society and how they connected with the world. Before the internship, about half of participants indicated that the experience with extreme poverty and social injustice would have them reconsider their role in society and their ability to make a difference. This number rose to almost 100% after the internship experience.

Many of the interns also spoke about positive changes they experienced in terms of developing negotiation and problem solving skills, and most importantly for a number of them, patience. As Diane (2005) so eloquently put it: "I came back a much more patient and giving person, less afraid to share my opinions." Through a number of critical incidents, some also spoke about learning to be much more patient. A number of them talked about how frustrated they were with local corruption and having to wait for long periods of time for things to move forward, especially with respect to their own research projects. Some reflected on critical incidents which involved waiting, sometimes in places they were unfamiliar with (or far from their 'home'), for people who showed up much later than planned. Edna (2012) wrote that: "The people at [the lab] are helpful in their own ways, but no matter how far in advance you send them documents that require their input or require them to understand, they will not actually look at them until an hour before they have to...It is very different here in Tanzania and it does take some getting used to as well as some *patience*."

Such destabilizing and de-familiarizing experiences had a great impact on participant beliefs, values and sense of self. When presented with the statement: "The experience will have me/had me reexamine who I was in society and how I connect with the world", 36% agreed with this statement before the internship and this number grew to 95% after the internship indicating a transformative experience related to ones beliefs, self-concept and role in society. Madison (2007) captures this transformation in her thinking about extreme poverty:

A part of me believes that hardships (including poverty) despite the difficulties, also inspires community and relationship between people that is not only appreciated, but necessary. Poverty in my mind had a significant shift while in East Africa because I no longer saw it as solely depressing, rather a space for unity and support for change and hope of a better way of life.

When asked if the experience sustained their energy and desire to work for social justice, half of the participants from the 2005-2011 cohort anticipated this would happen before the experience and 70% agreed after the internship. The depth of their desire to work for social justice is also seen in the number who 'strongly agreed' which rose from 12% before the internship to 35% after the experience.

*Career and Academic Path Shifts.* For many of the students, personal transformation also included changes to their career and academic paths. Almost three-quarters of the participants who had been involved in internships between 2005-2011 indicated their career path had been affected by their ISL internship. Nine respondents talked about a direct impact on the career they chose in either international development work or global health. Amy (2007) noted that she "continued to pursue a career in social justice, with a focus on international development." And Anna (2009), a business student intern placed in Kenya, explained how her career in international development with youth was influenced by her internship experience: "[My career path] completely changed. I am now developing my career in international development, focused specifically on entrepreneurship. I found my true passion and what I want to do for my career."

This comment by Barry (2005) shows how he incorporated his commitment to social change into his career: "I didn't have any specific ideas at the point of coming back but knew I wanted a long-term career that helped benefit society (call it social change). Over the years

that developed into the area I'm in now, which is a leadership position within the United Way."

Other participants commented that the internship gave them experience and increased their confidence levels, which led to interviews or helped build their current career. A few suggested the experience led to incorporating a focus on social justice, social enterprise, or advocating for underprivileged groups as in Madison's (2007) case:

*I am currently a Naturopathic Intern working with HIV/AIDS patients at [a large health centre] and volunteering at [a centre for at-risk youth]. I also plan on volunteering my time as a naturopathic doctor to people living in low socioeconomic or underprivileged community.*

Brent (2005) explains how he incorporated his commitment to social action into his career in internal medicine seven years after his internship:

*I have been an active member of the international health committees and as a resident in Ottawa, arranged to do my community health block in Vietnam. I did manage to get back to my old high school to talk to students about my experiences in Mwanza and to encourage them to look into The Program and other programs to get involved in international aid.*

The blogs also provided evidence that the internship provided them with opportunities that helped advance their careers. Some talked about new technology, medical and international development experiences that they had as a result of having participated as interns with *The Program*. A common related theme amongst participants was how their time in East Africa contributed to an increase in confidence in international travel, learning a new language, living and working in a different culture, and working independently. As Dennis (2011) states:

*My confidence in travelling and living in a different country meant I can look anywhere for my next job, instead of staying in Canada. I may not go looking specifically at helping people in East Africa, but the confidence and comfort is transferable.*

A number of the 2012 cohort also thought that they would make changes within their current academic programs, which would later have an impact on their careers, as a result of having participated in the internship. Rhonda (2012) said that she still wanted to be a counsellor but at some point in her life, she "definitely wants to travel to a developing country maybe for a couple of years and offer some counselling service there". Sam (2012), a business student, explained how his research interests had changed: "I'm a lot more interested in how to properly impart that economical entrepreneurial literacy upon people and how that could be done to the institutions of education that exist within countries."

For Lara (2012) the experience was transformative, but in ways that she could not have envisioned even though she had been involved in ISL before. In reflecting upon her role as a researcher in East Africa, she concluded:



*I think it has changed me dramatically in terms of my academic work in that sense – in an intellectual sense – I’m thinking about Tanzania in different ways and because of the different focuses that I’ve brought to the work as a researcher. I think that’s where the transformation was...I’m hugely changed as a teacher maybe and as a researcher because I just really feel a heavy sense of responsibility for having intruding in peoples’ life and asking them so many questions.*

So we see a variety of shifts in personal transformation amongst the interns. These changes related to their sense of themselves, including their values, purpose in life, roles (as students, researchers, workers, etc), academic and career paths. Students experienced personal transformation in different ways, some unexpected and others, like increasing confidence levels, building upon previous international experiences. We turn now to forms of political transformation that the students underwent, acknowledging the clear connections between the personal and the political.

### **5.3. Political Transformation**

Political transformation refers to an expanded sense of social responsibility and citizenship that is not just local, but global (Kiely, 2004). Different from the intentions of ‘envisioning,’ political transformation involves students taking action to advocate on behalf of the poor, raising awareness about global poverty, and attempting to change unjust institutions and policies. Political transformation was evident in the findings of this study where, before the internship, 55% of the 2005-2011 participants indicated their sense of citizenship had expanded beyond national to global responsibilities and accountabilities and 95% after the experience. Moreover, all of the 2012 interns agreed with the statement “I am a Global Citizen” after completing their internships.

Where just over half of the 2005-2011 participants indicated they were committed to act and advocate on behalf of the poor before the internship, 83% indicated so after the experience. For Gabby (2009), the internship confirmed the importance of taking action as she was exploring how to go about building a school in East Africa: “The experience made me more passionate and further instilled in me the importance of doing humanitarian work. Has made me more ambitious to accomplish my goals so that I can give back somehow.”

Political transformation is also heard in Liz’s account of social justice activities since her internship in 2006:

*I was the member of a team that wrote and submitted grant applications for funds to expand the project in other areas of East Africa. [I] planned and organized a Global Health Conference focusing on the problems/challenges/solutions affecting the Global South. [I was] a member of an international committee and organized a conference supporting the advancement of science in Africa.*

The 2012 cohort of interns were asked a series of questions on both their pre and post-internship surveys to determine the degree to which they participated in the following social/political actions: donating money to a charity, volunteering time for a charity, writing a letter to a politician or editor of a newspaper, attending a protest march/rally, signing a

petitions, and buying fair-trade products. While most of them indicated that they participated in a few of these activities, at least once/month, the amount of political participation remained the same or increased for all of students after the ISL program. All of the students who completed both the pre and post-internship surveys said that they intended to donate money and time volunteering to charities, sign a petition and buy fair trade products (at least once/week to once/6 months).

Nonetheless, many of the interns spoke and wrote about either their experiences in various social justice activities or, in the case of the 2012 cohort, their intentions to be more actively involved in actions and activities related to social change. In addition to the social actions noted above, interns noted that they engaged in reading social justice books, magazines and blogs, writing letters for charities such as Amnesty International, sponsoring a child in Kenya, and fundraising. This is illustrated by Carrie's (2005) comment seven years after being in Tanzania working with a women's group: "Being in East Africa made me more aware of poverty overseas and allowed me the opportunity to do fundraising for various communities abroad." Other students spoke about how the experience made them more conscious of environmental and sustainability issues. As Heidi (2012) explained:

*I don't know if this is completely due to the WHE internship but I would think at least partly just being more responsible and environmentally...that's the other thing about Kenya, it's so green, there's so much trees and grass and nature everywhere and they kind of just build around that as oppose to taking it all down and I like that.*

For some of the interns, especially the females, the internships made them more keenly aware of gender injustices. Diane (2005) talked about this and how she was inspired to engage in the women's rights movement following the internship in order to make a difference.

*There were several incidents wherein my safety felt threatened, where men approached me in ways that would not be acceptable in Canada. I learned how important it is that a society values women as equals, not as second-class citizens. This inspired me to become more of a women's rights advocate, and helped me gain a stronger grasp on the importance of feminism.*

And she added that through her internship, her "perceptions about the need to advocate for women's rights were changed greatly. They were heightened."

And finally, there were a handful of students that were not comfortable with more active and public forms of social justice/political actions. For them, the internship increased their confidence to talk about their experiences and new understandings with others at home. As Sam (2012), when asked what he is doing differently now as a result of having participated in the internship, said: "I spend more time having conversations with people...I'm able to give them more views." Similarly, Dennis' (2011) only wanted to engage in creating awareness and social action "on a small level", and he continued: "I'm not afraid to voice my opinion, but also not looking to stand up and shout it from the rooftops." And finally, Carrie (2005) described how she took action in her personal relationships and in her work when she stated, "To make family and friends more aware of the injustice and inequality East

Africans face. I also worked with a youth group at home and would talk to them about my experience in East Africa.”

*Solidarity with others.* One of the most significant learnings that the student interns took from their experience in East Africa was an increased critical awareness of the problems associated with charitable giving and hand-outs, and the benefits of working in solidarity with communities in the Global South to address social injustices. Many of the students saw and appreciated the agency and resilience of local people. Rhonda (2012) wrote about how much she learned about the Kenyan “work ethic and how much harder it is to do something in Africa than it is to do here ...so I gained a lot of appreciation for their work ethic.” In particular, the female interns spoke about the work ethic of the women they met and how much they learned from them. As Laura (2010) wrote: “Being humble and learning from the women was very essential to ensuring that the relationships were built on mutual benefits and understanding.” Heidi (2012) also noted how much she learned from these women:

*I think I really connected with the women of the school just because I identify with being a young female...They had kids and they were trying to work and be single moms and things like that. I think I just mostly learned what it is to be a woman in another part of the world, and it was really neat to talk to them because they all have different experiences.*

Similarly, talking about the women she worked with, Lara (2012) explained:

*I'm so grateful for their assistance....am so impressed with their skills. It's probably cliché to say that I learnt more from them than they did for me. I think that what they do just to get through the day is amazing. They're really remarkable. There's a sense of community; there's a sense of inner strength.*

Witnessing first-hand the work-ethic, resilience and capabilities of the East Africans they came in contact with challenged students' pre-conceived, stereotypical notions of Africans as helpless and in need of assistance. As a result of this shift in perspective, it is unsurprising then that there was a substantial increase in the number of respondents who 'strongly agreed' that they sought ways to be an ally with people living with poverty which grew from 11% before the internship to 39% afterwards, showing how the experience strengthened their commitment. In this way, we can see the link between personal and political transformation as they involve shifts in personal values and perspectives, in the quest to make connections with Global South partners and other likeminded people to challenge systemic injustice.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study set out to better understand the experiences of The Program interns who spent 3-4 months working with and learning from East African partners. Specifically, the researchers were interested in the extent to which participants' experienced envisioning, personal and political transformation. In terms of Kiely's model of emerging global consciousness, the majority of participants seemed to experience 'envisioning' including deeper unders-

tanding of their own privilege, awareness of global issues, especially around poverty, and a commitment to engage in social change and social justice activities.

Our two studies show that the majority of students developed a greater awareness of their own sense of themselves as privileged citizens of the Global North. These findings are reflective of other studies that have examined the impact of international mobility (study abroad and service learning) on students' development of students' sense of themselves and their role in the world as global citizens, through encounters with difference (Camancho, 2004; Killick, 2012).

Others have written about the dilemmas or feelings of disjuncture and disequilibrium that accompany these transformational processes of self-change (Killick, 2012; Mezirow, 1991). The destabilizing experience that the students in our two studies experienced seemed to, as King (2004) notes, allow new perspectives to be assimilated into many of the students' existing beliefs in such a way that they themselves became subjects of critical examination. Awareness of their own power, which allowed them certain privileges not accrued to locals, such as access to key government officials and being treated with more respect, induced feelings of guilt and confusion within some of the interns. As the post-colonial writer Memmi (1972) explains, even though the colonizer may wish to disavow colonization in favour of humanitarianism, s/he will always experience privilege as it is relative. "He [sic] enjoys the preference and respect of the colonized themselves, who grant him more than those who are the best of their own people who, for example, have more faith in his word than in that of their own population." (p.12). Anna exemplifies this experience when she stated: "They automatically respected and trusted us. Government officials and powerful people would speak to us just because we were Westerners. They treated us like we were so much better than them... when we aren't."

If interns were simply complicit in accepting the superior treatment that was often bestowed upon them and assumed they were entitled to this treatment, this experience of privilege could have the impact of reinforcing reified views of the 'Western' identity being superior. Yet, to varying degrees, resisting the reproduction of these types of views of the 'West' (or the Global North) and maximizing the potential for perspective transformation can be achieved through hyper-reflexivity and critical self-awareness. Thus, the interview and survey questions, which aimed to provoke students to think critically about their experiences abroad, provided some evidence of critical reflexivity. Others engaged in research and the implementation of ISL programs call for the deliberate integration of critical thinking and reflection activities into the pre-departure, during internship and post-internships stages of ISL experiences (e.g. Taraban et. al, 2009)

However, many of the blogs, which students took their own personal initiative to write, lack the kind of hyper-reflexivity that one would hope they would develop through such an experience. Rather than critically reflecting upon deeper issues such as power, privilege and social injustices, many of the blogs read like travel logs, describing interesting food and clothing and, in doing so, exoticized the local people in ways that demonstrated students' 'Othering' of their East African hosts (Said, 1978). This aligns with Taraban, Trilokekar and Fynbo's (2009) study in which they found that the university interns who participated in an international internship program did not use the discussion on the listserv to problematize



identities, thereby failing “to see opportunities for critical thinking about the intersections of race and gender not only in terms of cross-border mobility and how race, gender and other categories of identity are constructed in culturally specific ways.” (p. 228).

Envisioning also involves developing a deeper understanding of global issues as well as a commitment to social change. Both of our studies show evidence of envisioning occurring amongst the participants. In fact, nearly all participants indicated the internship experience had them reconsider their role in society and their ability to make a difference. Other research on service learning, both local and international, has also pointed to the potential of these pedagogies to foster commitments amongst students to understanding and addressing complex local and global problems (Battistoni, Longo & Jayanandhan, 2009).

With respect to personal transformation, the majority of student interns indicated that the experience led to a greater understanding of themselves, their values and core beliefs. Many became more confident, patient and understanding about the complex historical, political and economic causes of social injustice. As a result, many shifted their career or academic paths or noted that the ISL experience confirmed and strengthened their long-standing commitment to work for social change. As Liz (2006) explained: “The experience helped to solidify my career path. Prior to the internship, I knew that health and development were areas of interest to me; however, it became clear in my mind and inner being that it was part of my calling.” Other studies also affirm the impact that these types of international experiences have on students’ career choices, especially in terms of shifting to professions to meet the needs of underprivileged populations (e.g. Godkin & Savageau, 2003; Ramsey, Haq, Gjerde & Rothenberg, 2004).

In terms of political transformation, nearly all participants indicated their sense of citizenship expanded beyond national to global responsibilities. The greatest world view shift was that most participants now questioned the impact of relief and aid, a finding echoed by Taraban et al. (2009). Almost all participants thought about the power and privilege differences and most became more conscious of materialistic and individualistic values in Canada. While many engaged (or continue to engage in) social actions such as volunteering for charities, others did not. It is therefore important to note that the social action/political activities that the students chose to engage in upon their return to Canada varied greatly represented a range from low to high impact. Some did not make any substantial changes to their lives and others shifted their academic and career paths considerably as a result of having participated in the internship. This shows the complexity of the transformation that occurred amongst the interns. For example, five described a desire to create awareness or become involved in social action included social enterprise work, joining committees on international and global health, speaking at high schools, planning to build a school in East Africa, or to speak out about social justice issues. Others simply noted that they had spent more time talking with people about their experiences and in some cases raising awareness of social justice issues at work and amongst family and friends. And others, especially those who chose not to participate in the two studies, may have not changed at all.

Nonetheless, a number of respondents described engaging in social action through their academic studies, careers and choosing to work in employment related to social justice activities. These individuals talked about doing master’s research on the impact of percep-

tions of Africa on aid, sitting on international committees on science in Africa, organizing international conferences, incorporating social justice in health fields serving underprivileged communities and people living with HIV/AIDS. Finally, some respondents talked about continuing to be involved in social action/justice through *The Program* student committees, public engagement and other student led initiatives.

There is little research on the topic of the transformation of students in terms of social justice activism through international experiences such as ISL and study abroad. Cermak, Christiansen, Finnegan, Gleeson and White's (2011) study on the impact of international service trips on understandings of social change is one exception. Their research shows that the primary means for social change amongst their student participants was raising awareness and that participants valued service-oriented activities over those associated with activism. We also noted this amongst some of our participants who, following their internship, preferred to engage with others through conversations to raise general awareness about global issues. Moreover, our findings would lead us to concur with Cermak et al. (2011) who conclude that there is a need to incorporate and model a broader range of civic engagement activities in international programs such as ISL so that students can better understand *how* to engage in social change.

Political transformation also involves developing a sense of global responsibility to address social injustices in solidarity with the 'other'. Where some students in our studies may have had expectations prior to the internship that they were going to help less fortunate 'Others' and bring 'Western' solutions, most learned that East African communities possessed the indigenous knowledge, solutions and resourcefulness to resolve their own social problems. Participants frequently talked about ensuring that decision-making and direction of activity came from the local women showing how they were consciously moving themselves towards the periphery and the local women to the centre of the decision-making process. In addition, the 'Western' notion of Orientalized 'Other' appeared to diminish with most participants as personal relationships brought about a personal transformation in their recognition of the humanity, strength and resilience of local partners and a commitment to work in solidarity with them.

Finally, while there is evidence of personal and political transformation, there are also examples of participants struggling with and against the reproduction of colonial relationships and asymmetrical power dynamics. For example, participants often identified being uncomfortable being seen immediately as wealthy and as an avenue of access to resources as 'mzungus.' Though they witnessed the economic empowerment of women and mutual benefits in the collaboration, some also grappled with 'Western' hegemonic values imposed upon the women working in the kitchens and other community partners by *The Program*.

## 7. CONCLUSION

We presented the results of two related studies that aimed at exploring the impact of the ISL experience on the student interns in terms of global consciousness and personal and political transformation. The question guiding our research was: "How do university students envision social change, and experience personal and political transformation following a long-term international service learning internship?" The findings were organized accor-

ding to Kiely's (2004) model of emerging global consciousness to show the respondents' complex and differentiated experiences of envisioning, and personal and political transformation. The section on envisioning presented participant experiences related to their initial shift in perspectives related to the historical, political and cultural roots of social injustices and their intended commitment to work to address these issues. The section on transformative forms reviewed intern experiences related to shifts they described in terms of political and personal transformation, which we understand as transformation forms inextricably linked to one another.

Pampa (2005) contends that at the core of service-learning are relationships based on equality and collaboration so that service is seen more as an act of working with people in need rather than working to serve them. Similarly, Saltmarsh (2009) asserts that 'how and why' universities engage in service-learning is as important as the activity itself that is taking place in the community outside the university campus. Critical service-learning emphasizes the 'how and why' in the activity because, while the approach meets community needs and connects to classroom work, it also takes a step farther to engage changing attitudes and behaviours (Cipolle, 2010). This approach fits with the global citizenship literature that calls for social justice-oriented citizenship where students reflect upon the root causes of the community problem with which they are engaged and work to promote social change (Kiely, 2004; Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Personal and political transformation are most likely to occur when students are self-reflexive about asymmetrical power relationships and their own privileges, are open to listening and learning from local partners, and make the effort to personally get to know individuals within their host communities. When students see, up close, the intersections of poverty, power, inequality and class, their notion of 'general poverty' is re-politicized and they begin to understand that referring to the many problems and failures of the 'monolithic' Africa only serves to blame the struggles of colonization on the colonized (Ferguson, 2006). Importantly, then a critical service-learning model, with an explicit social justice approach will also enhance the experience of perspective transformation.

In many ways *The Program* does reflect a critical service learning approach. However, this study also points to the need for further work that needs to be done to develop more structured reflection tools and opportunities for students before, during and after their internships that focus on power relationships, privilege, critical incidents, and the intern's own privileges as citizens of the Global North. Furthermore, more research is required to learn more about different degrees of perspective transformation and commitment to social action/social change that occur amongst ISL interns. Just as Westheimer and Kahne (2004) defined three levels of citizenship, from personally responsible citizen to justice-oriented citizen, the participants in these studies indicated a range in the extent of their actions and commitment to incorporate the personal and political transformation into their lives. More research into the correlations between background international experiences, the length of the internship, the activities interns engage in, and the intensity and types of transforma-

tion they undergo may provide more information on how to enhance the ISL experiences for future interns.

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