

Teachers as Learners in the (Literal) Field: Results from an International Service Learning Internship

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Abstract

This article provides an account of a recent research study that investigated an international service learning internship for in-service teachers. Relying upon what we know to be the advantages and benefits of somewhat similar experiences (i.e., international internships for pre-service teachers, internships for in-service teachers, and service learning opportunities for university students) to frame our investigation, we explored the impact upon in-service teachers, particularly as they relate to both professional and personal growth. Analysis of questionnaire responses revealed a number of prominent themes. Stories and accounts of professional growth were related to: (a) creating an engaging and safe learning environment, (b) (over)planning for the unexpected, and (c) teaching with (and in front of) others. Stories and accounts of personal growth were related to: (a) letting go of control, (b) facing fears and confronting anxieties while outside of one's comfort zone, and (c) recognizing privilege and the excess of possessions. Results from this study might appeal to those who similarly share an interest in international service learning internships, service learning generally, international internships, in-service teacher education, and/or international or global education.

Keywords: service learning, internship, teacher education, international

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In recent years, a number of teacher education programs have included international internships as a program possibility for pre-service teachers (Robinson & Bell, 2014; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). There have been a number of somewhat familiar rationales for the introduction of these sorts of international experiences. Some have been entirely program-driven while others have been, admittedly, financially driven. For example, some universities' international internships have been introduced due to their teacher education programs' contemporary focus upon multicultural and/or global education while others have been introduced due to less noble goals related to student recruitment (Baker & Giacchino-Baker, 2000; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008).

Almost as soon as these international internships began, some researchers predictably followed by investigating the impact of them upon pre-service teachers (see Black & Bernardes, 2014; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The body of research literature related to these experiences is seemingly unequivocal. That is, though pre-service teachers experience both intended and unintended outcomes during international internships, these outcomes are almost wholly positive with markedly few negative ones (see Black & Bernardes, 2014; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Robinson, Barrett, & Robinson, 2017; Robinson & Foran, 2017; Sahin, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Willard-Holt, 2001).

Despite the introduction and subsequent research of these international internships for pre-service teachers, few international internships (and few research studies related to them) exist for *in-service* teachers. This is both logical and expected. That is, most in-service teachers have no reason to engage in internships of any kind. Indeed, the successful completion of the internship is a present-day prerequisite for graduating and becoming a teacher in the first place. Still, and both because of and despite these observations, our university recently piloted an international internship meant for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

The International Service Learning Internship in Belize

A small number of part-time graduate students (who were also full-time in-service teachers) enrolled in a new pilot course, one that was advertised as a service learning internship within a developing nation. (A similar number of full-time undergraduate students [i.e., full-time pre-service teachers] also enrolled in the same course.) This international service learning internship was a three-credit course requiring students to live and teach in an altogether foreign environment. In addition to pre-departure and post-return activities, assignments, and reflective exercises, students were required to lead a 2-week summer program within a small rural Indigenous community. With few material resources available, students had to teach a number of modules related to contemporary curricular areas (e.g., physical education, music education, science education, and art education). Teaching space was limited primarily to an outdoor field as well as to a lone sheltered area (in case of heavy rain or extreme heat). Indeed, most teaching and learning occurred, literally, in the field.

What Made This International Internship Service Learning?

Service learning is a “class-based, credit-bearing experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets a particular need of a community” (Stevens, 2008, p. xii). Within service learning, professors (among other tasks) design learning outcomes, help students connect in-class learning with in-the-field learning, and spend time supporting students in the community sites (Stevens, 2008). Service learning opportunities differ from “normal” internships

in one especially significant respect: whereas providing internship opportunities is largely accepted as a responsibility owed by school jurisdictions to universities and provincial governments (within Canada), the service learning scenario is, by definition, a much more reciprocal arrangement (individually and institutionally).

Service learning's reciprocity ensures that visiting participants and the cooperating community partners alike benefit in a sort of symbiotic relationship. This reciprocity requires that visiting participants benefit while the community simultaneously benefits. It is also essential to make clear that the "service learning" label does not suggest that the community is the one requiring a service to be provided by those from the academe (Anderson & Hill, 2001). Recognizing the strengths and needs of both our in-service teachers and our host community, we designed this internship to be (and require) more than what is ordinarily a part of a normal internship. In an effort to be especially mindful of the need to offer an international service learning internship that was "legitimate, ethical, and useful" (Butin, 2003, p. 1676), we were hypersensitive to community needs and potential impacts as we designed and offered this opportunity. Related principles guiding this international service learning course included respect, relevance, reflection, and reciprocity (Butin, 2003).

Given our belief in the need for respectful reciprocity, relevance, and authentic engagement, we made many efforts to work with our Belizean partners and participants before, during, and after the international service learning internship. For example, we have long-standing relationships with our host and the local school principal; these two met with parents/guardians and community members to determine what sorts of educational activities they wished to be done with their children and youths. Our group was fully responsive to these requests and so activities were planned accordingly. Moreover, given that our participants had multiple university degrees (including at least one in education) and none of the local Belizean teachers did, we welcomed local teachers (who were on their holidays) to come and observe our lessons. Some of them obliged and engaged in informal discussions about pedagogy. Importantly these discussions were educative for both groups—Canadians and Belizeans. Lastly, participants also brought plenty of material resources to the school and community (e.g., books, markers, sporting equipment, water pump, etc.) in response to needs shared by our host and the school principal.

Maya Center and Our Mayan Partners and Participants

Belize (formally British Honduras) is on the east coast of Central America, where it borders both Mexico and Guatemala. Maya Center, a small village bordering the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, was established in the 1980s to accommodate Indigenous Mopan Mayan villagers who were forcibly relocated from their homes in the Cockscomb Basin. The approximately 300 residents of Maya Center are almost all Mayan (most of whom are Mopan Mayan). While Mopan Maya is the first language for most people who live in Maya Center, many children, youths, and adults also speak English and Belizean Creole. Men who work are generally engaged in seasonal farming (especially citrus) and/or tourism/guiding. Women and older girls continue with many traditional tasks and activities (e.g., cooking, crafts, and childrearing). Three Christian churches are in Maya Center and many villagers attend service, multiple times each week. All children attend the local school until (the equivalent of) Grade 8. Some then move on to a different secondary school in another community while others begin helping at home (and/or find work).

The 2-week summer program accommodated approximately 55-80 local participants each day. These participants were split into four relatively equal-sized groups (i.e., ages 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-

17). The youngest three groups had an approximately equal number of boys and girls. However, the oldest group was made up of more girls than boys (some of whom were also minding their younger siblings). These four groups rotated through four different 90-minute stations where different students led different sessions.

Related Literature

Before planning and researching this international service learning internship, we thought it sensible to review relevant literature, particularly as it related to the advantages and benefits of international internships, other in-service teachers' internships, and service learning as an educational model. Accordingly, following is a brief synopsis of that literature.

International Internships: Advantages/Benefits

Pence and Macgillivray (2008) investigated a 4-week international internship for pre-service teachers in Rome. Gleaning data from journal reflections, focus group interviews, observations, and follow-up questionnaires, they explored pre-service teachers' changes related to their professional and personal identities. Finding few negative experiences, they found a number of positive experiences and changes related to increased confidence, a better respect for others and others' differences, and a realization about the importance of reflection-upon-practice. Other research (e.g., Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Quezada, 2004; Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, 2003), relying upon data from pre-service teachers' reflections as well as their hosts' reflections, found positive changes in pre-service teachers' instructional pedagogy, self-learning, and understanding related to multiculturalism. For example, with respect to instructional pedagogy, pre-service teachers found that with the absence of material resources they had to necessarily become more creative in their planning and teaching. Additionally, international internships that afford pre-service teachers opportunities to immerse themselves within a new community have been found to allow pre-service teachers to develop more genuine understandings about others and their cultures (Quezada, 2004).

Kambutu and Nganga (2008), relying upon pre- and post-visit surveys, researched an international internship in an African developing nation. While pre-visit surveys revealed a lack of cultural awareness, post-visit surveys revealed that pre-service teachers gained a broader awareness as well as an authentic understanding and appreciation of the hosts' cultures. Similarly, Kabilan (2013), also relying largely upon survey data and reflective journals, found pre-service teachers in another developing nation (within South Asia) experienced similar beneficial and meaningful professional development.

In contrast with these previous studies that investigated North American pre-service teachers travelling overseas, Sahin (2008) surveyed pre-service teachers who travelled overseas to North America to teach. By surveying pre-service teachers and their mentors, Sahin found that an internship program contributes in a positive way both to pre-service teachers' professional and personal development. Moreover, Sahin also found that the presence of international pre-service teachers in a North American school helps the students there develop an improved understanding about other countries and cultures.

Lastly, the limited research with Canadian participants has found largely consistent results. For example, Mwebi and Brigham's (2009) research into Canadian pre-service teachers' (6-week) internships in Kenya found that participants increased their self-awareness, enhanced their understanding of diversity and globalization issues, and built upon their knowledge and skills

related to teaching within local public schools. Similarly, Black and Bernardes (2014), who researched the same Canada-to-Kenya scheme (though for only 3 weeks), also found that participants increased their global-mindedness and intercultural competence; they also came to realize that they were their own greatest teaching resource.

In-Service Teachers' Internships

Internships are almost always associated with pre-service teachers, oftentimes as a synonym for “field experiences” or “practicums” (Robinson & Walters, 2016). When considered as something different than a field experience or practicum, internships are almost exclusively related to beginning teachers and induction periods or programs (Howe, 2006). For example, some school districts hire beginning teachers as “interns” who must complete year-long induction periods before being granted all the rights and responsibilities of a “real” teacher (Bullough, Young, & Draper, 2004).

Perhaps a more similar and familiar model would be internships that approximate work-based experiences, where in-service teachers are immersed in the “operational priorities, challenges and strategies” (Stephens, 2011, p. 69) of another institution or environment. Stephens (2011) suggested that such internships ought to be a minimum of 1-week in duration and occur during school breaks (e.g., during summer). Such scheduling (as opposed to after-school or within-the-day scheduling) allows in-service teachers to focus on internship duties without also having to attend to other classroom responsibilities (e.g., preparing for substitute teachers).

Rivera, Manning, and Krupp (2013) researched a 4-week in-service teacher internship program. Occurring in the summer months, in-service teachers were engaged in an internship program meant to provide meaningful professional development related to science and science inquiry. Unfortunately, despite the overwhelmingly positive results related to the value and efficacy of the program, a lack of funding was identified as an almost insurmountable barrier to implementing new knowledge and skills into the in-service teachers' practice.

Other internships are routinely required or available for in-service teachers making a career change. For example, school counsellor preparation programs often include a required internship period (Pérusse, Goodnough, & Noël, 2001). Moreover, research has demonstrated that adopting a service learning approach within these induction periods helps enable the effective integration of theory and practice for neophyte school counsellors (Arman & Scherer, 2002). Similar internship programs are available for in-service teachers seeking to become school administrators. Research related to these sorts of internships has revealed that those with internship experience feel more confident and better prepared to take on leadership responsibilities within their schools (Jean & Evans, 1995).

Service Learning as an Educational Model

Bringle and Hatcher (2009) have defined service learning as

a course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. (p. 112)

Service learning differs in both structure and purpose from normal internships—where professors generally have little to no substantive involvement with their students. Within service learning,

professors design learning outcomes, help students connect in-class learning with in-the-field experiences, and spend time with their students engaged in the community contexts (Robinson, 2011; Stevens, 2008).

Bringle and Hatcher (1995, 2009), Robinson (2011), and Stevens (2008) all agree that one of the most important aspects of service learning is that it be an enterprise that is of benefit to university students and to the community (members). Such reciprocity ensures that the “service learning” label does not erroneously suggest that the community and its members are the ones “receiving” a service—provided by those within a privileged academe. Within service learning, both parties have something to offer as well as something to gain.

Service learning has been shown to result in a number of positive outcomes related to university students’ personal and social development (Simons & Cleary, 2006). For example, participating students have shown improvements in diversity and political awareness, community self-efficacy, and civic engagement (Simons & Cleary, 2006). Similarly, Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill (2007) found that pre-service teachers engaged in a service learning opportunity cultivated a deeper understanding of diversity and social justice so that they were, in turn, enabled to recognize and confront social injustices within their own environments and communities.

Researching the International Service Learning Internship

One might wonder what value an international service learning internship (as an educational opportunity and/or as a research possibility) might have for in-service teachers—that is, for those who are already licensed to teach. We certainly did. It was partly for this reason that we introduced the international service learning internship as a pilot course and research study within our university’s graduate program. Having observed and researched the benefits of our undergraduate program’s international internships and service learning internships (see Foran & Robinson, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Robinson & Foran, 2017), we set out to introduce and investigate the impact of a similar educational experience upon a number of in-service teachers who were also graduate students (completing a Master of Education [MEd] degree). That is, while we have seen and documented our pre-service teachers’/undergraduate students’ professional and personal growth, their career stages and ages are quite different than that of our in-service teachers/graduate students. Understandably, we have therefore been apprehensive about drawing parallel assumptions about value to be found in an international service learning internship for our graduate students. This was new terrain in our graduate program and we wanted to investigate it.

Research Question(s)

The primary research question framing this study was, “In what ways are in-service teachers impacted, both professionally and personally, by their experience(s) in an international service learning internship?” Secondary questions were related to in-service teachers’ preconceptions, particularly as they contrasted with the observations and experiences they gained in their international service learning internship.

Research Methods

The research design was a multi-case study (the results within this paper are related to one bounded case of many; Creswell, 2003, 2012). The bounded system (Creswell, 2003) focused

upon here is defined as one group of in-service teachers (n=7) who participated in an international service learning internship in Belize. Data were collected through the use of questionnaires. These questionnaires were administered to all participants at two different times: (a) just prior to the service learning internship beginning, and (b) immediately after the service learning internship ended.

The questionnaires included seven questions (“pre” questionnaire) and 12 questions (“post” questionnaire). Each question asked for 300- to 500-word responses (5,700 to 9,500 words total). Participants who wrote fewer than 300 words or more than 500 words for a response were not asked to modify their responses. Nonetheless, most responses were within the 300- to 500-word guidelines. Participants were given a 2-week period to complete each of their questionnaires and we estimated that each questionnaire would have taken 60-90 minutes to complete. Sample questions on these questionnaires included:

- What are your preconceptions before going to Belize related to the children and youth? [pre]
- What do you think you will learn professionally? [pre]
- What were your observations when you arrived in Belize related to your anticipated strengths in the new context? [post]
- How might your future teaching be influenced by your participation in this international experience? [post]

Participants

The seven participants were all in-service teachers who were also nearing completion of their MEd degrees (all have since graduated). Their ages ranged from 29 to 36 years and their years of teaching experience ranged from 6 to 13 years. Five of the participants were female and two were male. Four were elementary teachers (i.e., Grades K-6) and three were secondary teachers (i.e., Grades 7-12).

Research Ethics

Our university’s Research Ethics Board (REB) first approved all research protocols, including those related to dissemination guidelines. We endeavoured to follow all of these protocols and recused ourselves when any potential issues arose (e.g., when a participant was also a student in another class taught by one of the researchers). So as to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the rest of this text.

Data Analysis

We analyzed all data by searching for issues, similarities, differences, recurring ideas, clustering, patterns, and relationships in the responses. By coding and categorizing the data according to methods outlined by Creswell (2012) and Miles and Huberman (1994), dominant themes were identified, allowing for analysis and interpretation.

Results and Specific Discussion: Professional and Personal Growth

Analysis of questionnaire responses resulted in a number of themes, related to both professional and personal growth. Stories and accounts related to professional growth focused on a number of topics related, for example, to planning and preparation, creating an ideal learning

environment, engaging children and youth, and teachers' professional responsibilities. The three most salient themes related to professional growth were: (a) creating an engaging and safe learning environment, (b) (over)planning for the unexpected, and (c) teaching with (and in front of) others. Stories and accounts related to personal growth focused on a large number of individual topics. Nonetheless, responses did suggest three most common themes. These included: (a) letting go of control, (b) facing fears and confronting anxieties while outside of one's comfort zone, and (c) recognizing privilege and the excess of possessions.

Professional Growth

Creating an engaging and safe learning environment. Given that there were little to no digital or material resources available with which to daily plan and/or teach, participants were required to create engaging educational environments with words and actions (rather than with, for example, technology and equipment). Indeed, it very quickly became evident to participants how often their teaching at home included “bells and whistles” simply unavailable in Belize. As Rachael explained,

One thing that was a bit of a challenge when preparing for these lessons as opposed to teaching in my school was the limitations on equipment. I tried to take into consideration the equipment that was being used in previous lessons and to build my plan around that. I often take for granted the treasure trove of goodies I have at my fingertips when teaching at school although I do always have a wish list on the go). It was good to be reminded that all I really need are very basics and an open space to create some activities. I hope that the kids will take some of the games we taught and play them again, particularly the variations of tag that we introduced that take no equipment and very little organization.ⁱ

Not only has Rachael been effectively forced to create engaging lessons with minimal resources but she has recognized the need to educate her students so that they may also do so within their own daily lives.

Nathan observed the same thing—that engaging learning environments could occur with minimal resources. As he suggested:

Through this experience we also discovered that learning can take place in any environment with minimal equipment. The area surrounding the school was used to facilitate learning throughout the entire week. Shaded areas under trees were used as music rooms and dance floors. The tree by the soccer field was used as a real life jungle gym.ⁱⁱ I think often I get hung up on not having the perfect situation for some types of learning, and this experience reminded me that often the most learning takes place with just plain good teaching.

Nathan's observation resonated with others and ourselves. For example, on the first day in Belize, Amy complained that she could not teach yoga to the students because she did not have any yoga mats. Like Nathan, she quickly came to realize that the grassy field or the lone concrete slab could work just fine.

Moreover, Luke, like others, also observed that engaging learning environments need not be overly focused upon safety (as is a seemingly routine practice within Canada):

I also learned that teaching does not require the best equipment in the world to be meaningful. We made do with what we had and if we were lacking, we improvised. Teaching in Belize demonstrated that a school and its grounds does not have to be baby-proofed and that kids are able to access levels of risk. The playgrounds in Canada are so bare for fear of a child getting hurt that they are left with an empty open space with no stimulation. The Belize school grounds had piles of sand, half-finished concrete walls,

rebar everywhere, trees, bushes, and abandoned buildings. The kids played in, over, under, and around these obstacles with zero injuries. Makes me re-think what we are doing to the childhood experiences of kids today in Canada.

Similarly, Nathan also made this observation regarding the reconsideration of safety:

At first I thought I should tell Julian to wear a helmet while riding his bike to the river. Then I realized he didn't have a helmet. I don't think there was a helmet in the whole village. Then I thought I should tell him to wear shoes or to stop doubling one or two friends. All of this while on our way to swim, without a lifeguard, in a river. Right when I thought of speaking up about safety, I noticed the machete forged into his bike frame [so that he could cut down bush after school]. It was then that I realized that I had become somewhat preoccupied with safety and that I should instead consider the learning environment and safety within and while also considering the culture and the community. Our litigious and overly safety-conscious lives at home should not impact what we do there (or maybe at home too).

While all participants seemed to recognize that they could (when functionally forced to do so) create engaging learning environments with minimal resources, some also came to see that their overconcern for safety might limit the possibilities for students' engagement with their local environment and day-to-day lives. The realization that creating a suitable learning environment can be focused around things other than available resources is a welcome one. We are hopeful that upon returning home these teachers resist any temptations to complain about limited resources. Moreover, we also appreciate their entirely new (to us) perspectives related to the overconcern for safety—particularly when one considers imposing Western safety standards upon others.

(Over)planning for the unexpected. As experienced teachers, the participants had come to view planning in an almost routine fashion. Indeed, as a number of them suggested, before participating in this international service learning internship, lesson plans had become largely limited to a few words or sentences for each of their lessons. To others similarly engaged with public education, this should not be a surprising happening. Still, given the entirely new and unique teaching and learning context within Belize, participants were required to first submit and refine detailed lesson plans. This exercise was seen as useful by all participants, who observed that it was essential to “over” plan, especially given the number of unexpected contextual variables related to the new and unique environment. As Luke shared:

Teaching in Belize was an affirmation to be prepared for the unexpected. Belize threw a lot of obstacles at our neat and tidy pre-made unit plans which had to be re-worked on a daily, or hourly, basis. A rogue thunderstorm, dog fight, red ant attack, no running water: all can, and did, contribute to an immediate change in planning. I believe one of the things that made our teaching so successful is that most of the teachers were well prepared. It was good to plan like this again.

In an entirely concordant manner, Nathan observed:

I think this experience reaffirmed the effect good planning can have on the learning experience of the students, as well as the experience the facilitator has as a result. Throughout my past 9 years teaching, I've gotten away from formal lesson plans. I think this is normal, however in planning the lessons for this trip, I've once again seen the value. I'm not going to claim that I will now make formal lesson plans for my classes, but I'll put more thought into the questions I can ask during the lessons, as well as plan activities that will be more engaging and meaningful to my students.

Not only has Nathan been, again, effectively forced to spend considerable time planning but he has suggested that this experience will have an impact on his own future teaching. Suggesting that he will “put more thought” into his future planning as a result of this experience suggests, to us, that the experience has allowed him to critically reflect upon his own planning practices. We believe that this experience has disrupted the sort of complacency that allows teachers to abandon serious planning efforts. Coming to find that the value of planning has been (re)realized by participants is most affirming.

Teaching with (and in front of) others. While teaching is most often regarded as a solitary exercise and profession, the international service learning internship purposely required participants to plan and teach together. Although we could have designed a program where individuals would have taught all classes, we presupposed that, given the new and unique context, participants would benefit by co-planning and co-teaching opportunities. Participants expressed appreciation for these experiences in many ways. For example, Amy offered:

Coming in to the trip, it was nice to collaborate with two groups of people: Luke and Rachael, whom I have worked with on projects and presentations previously, and Trina, who I hadn't even met in person before heading to Belize. Both groups were focused on preparing thorough lesson plans that covered a variety of games, dances, and musical activities. Having the accountability to have my lessons prepared on time so that the group was prepared was a welcome change to my daily planning in my own program. As one of two physical education teachers in the school, this past school year I taught my own program in a gym that was divided into two classes. My teaching partner taught his own thing on the other side of the curtain. The only person I was accountable to daily was myself. This had its pros and cons, and I appreciated the group planning process for our lessons in Belize.

In addition to appreciation for opportunities to plan together, most others expressed a similar appreciation for the many opportunities to learn from their teaching peers. For example, Nathan shared:

I also had the opportunity to learn from my colleagues. ... Each member from the group had strengths that they brought to the experience and shared valuable skills that I will be able to implement into my teaching repertoire.

Undoubtedly, it was pleasing to find that participants found occasions to learn from their peers. And, as Nathan shared, we are hopeful that they will take some of that learning and apply it to their own future teaching. Related to this idea of learning from one's peers (whether by co-planning, co-teaching, or observing) is the importance of also supporting one's peers in educational contexts. Amy made this very point, perhaps most clearly, when she shared:

I feel that, professionally and personally speaking, our responsibilities involved not just teaching the children but supporting each other. A strong staff works with and supports one another in their teaching and I really felt we all did a great job with this in Maya Center. Morale was high among the group, and when someone needed a break or lift, support was given.

This experience and conclusion are, to us, applicable to teaching within Canada as well. It is our hope that Amy and others have taken this learning and, with it, have begun to more purposefully support their peers within their “regular” teaching positions.

Personal Growth

Letting go of control. Some participants identified themselves as “Type A” individuals who would normally take control of all elements related to teaching—and would also prefer things

that way. Such a perspective may work well when one takes on teaching as a solitary pursuit. However, and likely for the first time since being “forced” to work with others in undergraduate or graduate classes for pair or group assignments, participants were necessarily required to work with their peers in most respects. That is, they were required to co-plan and co-teach all of their lessons. Moreover, when they were not teaching their own lessons, they were required to offer support to their peers while they taught theirs. This unique scenario required some to forfeit some control. As Ilsa shared:

I had a lot of time to reflect on my personality and my way of doing things. At times I can take on traits of a perfectionist. I like things done efficiently and I put in a lot of effort to complete my goals and various tasks. This had turned me into, what some people like to call, a control-freak. I set my expectations high for other people because I think, “If I can do it this way, then that person should be able to as well.” I am not as bad with new individuals because I understand we are all different and we approach problems differently, but I hold fairly high expectations for the people I work and interact with on a daily basis. This experience has allowed me to recognize this aspect of my personality and aim to be more laid back, less judgmental, and hopefully less stressed. It is unrealistic and disadvantageous to expect others to follow my standards and ideals and it does not contribute to a positive work environment. I hope to cut back on my “Type A” personality and try to share ideas without taking control over an activity.

The requirement for Ilsa to share control with her peers (including with her pre-service peers) was viewed, by her, as a contributor to important and positive personal growth. Letting go of control, or allowing others to take on some of that control (of, for example, teaching responsibilities), was enabled through this experience and it became an ongoing career goal.

Ilsa was not alone when making these sorts of observations. Another in-service teacher, Trina, shared:

Having never had the opportunity to co-teach, creating and delivering lessons with a partner or group was completely a completely foreign concept. It was strange not having control over all elements of the lesson and how they would be delivered so I quickly had to learn when to step in order to help out my colleague(s) or to add something that would benefit the students and when to take a back seat and let my colleague(s) lead. Learning how to walk that line took conscious effort but was important because as a partnership or a group everyone had to feel supported and valued. Working with other teachers and observing new ways of teaching has made me energized to return to the classroom and implement many of the techniques I have learned.

Not only did Trina see that letting go of control could be a positive personal experience, but she also came to learn that there are things to be gained when such control is purposely relinquished. For example, she came to believe that it is important to make others feel valued and she found that she was able to learn from her peers.

Facing fears and confronting anxieties while outside of one’s comfort zone. The many individuals who participated in this international service learning internship shared many of their fears and anxieties. Some were related to teaching and some were related to the foreign environment. All suggested that they were forced outside of their comfort zones and that this experience had a profound and significant impact upon them. For example, Nathan observed:

Stepping outside my comfort zone is something I’m not particularly good at. I feel this entire trip made me challenge myself in ways I normally wouldn’t attempt. Flying, eating termites, hiking, and sleeping in [the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary], spending 2 weeks with unfamiliar people, swimming in something other than a pool, are all outside my

comfort zone and made me realize my apprehensions about this, and other things, are just because I've never experienced them. Now I realize that I can't let that apprehension dictate what I will and won't try. I know it's cliché, but this trip will forever change who I am, and how I live my life.

Trina arrived in Belize with a long list of apprehensions. Indeed, she was nervous about almost all elements related to the experience. However, she found that facing them allowed her to gain much needed confidence so that she would be better able to face future challenges in her life:

I purposely waited a week to write this journal so I could have time to adjust back to life at home and properly reflect on the trip. Even though it has been just a week, already I can notice the impact of this experience. My apprehensions coming in to the trip in regards to working with new people, the [Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary] hike, the snakes, and the small plane ride from Dangriga all caused me moments of trepidation, but facing fears head on because I gave myself no other option has had a profound boost to my confidence. At home when faced with unnerving situations, I now remind myself that if I can spend the night in [Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary], I can handle pretty much anything. Challenges will always be present but it is my mindset that will effect how I manage the pressure, reminding myself that the situation is only temporary.

While we had hoped for in-service teachers to experience some professional growth in already-supposed areas, it was difficult to know what sorts of personal gains might be achieved. Indeed, the unique and largely heterogeneous make-up of the group made this especially difficult to predict. Certainly, it was pleasing for us to find that these participants found, what seem to be, genuine opportunities for personal growth with respect to facing fears and confronting anxieties outside of one's comfort zone.

Recognizing privilege and the excess of possessions. The remote village was very undeveloped by most Canadian standards. Homes were rustic (e.g., they included dirt floors, outdoor fire pits for cooking, etc.), poverty was plainly evident (e.g., students wore the same clothes most days; vehicles and bicycles would not be "road-worthy" in Canada, etc.), and medical care was largely lacking (e.g., many students had rotted teeth; the nearest hospital lacked many resources found in Western hospitals, etc.). For most participants, this was an entirely new and awakening experience. As Rachael shared:

As far as the teaching went, I certainly learned not to take things for granted. I realize how privileged my daughters are to go to school here as opposed to in Belize. I see that they have many more opportunities afforded them and that our education system, while certainly not perfect, is much more well rounded than the one provided in Maya Center. I can only imagine the frustration that members of the community must feel to have the control out of their hands but hope that while slow, change will come and the students will be given more opportunities. I have often listened to tales of teachers who have gone to third world or developing countries and shared their experiences and were envious but never really pursued this kind of trip for myself. I am grateful to have been given this chance; it was most certainly eye opening and life changing in many ways.

Ursula made similar observations, finding that she questioned the excesses of her own possessions, particularly given her observations of poor people living seemingly full lives:

I learned a lot from the stories that the children told of what their family life was like, the challenges they faced, the things they did for enjoyment, their responsibilities, what they deemed as important, and how little they needed to make them happy. They lived a very different lifestyle than that of a typical Canadian child. I also learned on a personal level

how little I needed to survive. In Canada, I am often in multiple outfits of clothes a day, always with my hair and makeup done, numerous pairs of shoes to choose from and even a car at my door whenever I feel the need to use it. In taking modern conveniences away for the 2 weeks, I not only have a greater appreciation for the things in my life, but I also have accepted that many are unnecessary and since being home have changed to minimize some things in my life. The learning and growth from this experience is endless. I continue to see it changing my day to day life since I have returned home.

So impactful was the experience in this respect that Luke shared that he was considering bringing his family to the same location:

Compared to the way we live in Canada, they have so little yet they seem extremely happy and care immensely for one another. The trip has brought a renewed appreciation for the luxuries and securities I tend to take for granted at home. My daughter does not have to sell tree berries on the side of the road, my wife only has to press start on the washing machine, and I do not have to have to whipper snip citrus trees for 15 cents a tree. I keep thinking about returning to Maya Center with my wife and daughter so they can experience it for themselves.

It was also somewhat comforting to discuss these sorts of observations with the participants. As also evidenced in their responses, participants did comment upon how “unfortunate” the local children and people were (with respect to an obvious lack of material goods). However, and perhaps more importantly, they also became more aware of their privilege and questioned their own excesses, wondering aloud what things they actually needed.

Concluding Comments

As was previously suggested, an international service learning internship ought not to be viewed as an occasion for university students to provide a service to others in a one-way transactional manner. Though we did not also research the impact upon the approximately 80 children and youths who attended the summer school program (many of whom, at their own expense, voluntarily travelled over an hour to attend), our daily observations certainly told us that our participants were having an immediate and positive influence. The students were engaged, many arrived very early, and many others had to be shooed home. Indeed, it was constantly reaffirming to see the obvious joy and excitement on the students’ faces.

Still, despite these positive results, our research has shown that through their participation in this international service learning internship, our own university students have also benefited—perhaps to a greater degree than the students. With their shared professional growth as well as their, admittedly, “life-changing” personal growth, the participants were very clearly engaged in a symbiotic experience. Both benefited from engaging with one another.

Continuing with such an international service learning internship in the future would not be prudent if all benefits were to be had by only the children in Maya Center. Granted, people might appreciate the opportunity to engage in a completely altruistic experience—to “help” others for no sake other than being helpful. However, our university students need to experience something—to learn something—from the international service learning internship if it is to have some degree of educational value to them and to our institution. While we would like to think we could teach and nurture the kind of professional growth they experienced abroad here at home in Canada, we strongly believe that only this very experience was capable of enabling the personal growth suggested by these participants. If we had been restricted to providing this sort of course within our own community, we could not have planned for such personal growth.

Without question, this course, this international service learning internship, is unique. It is the only thing of its kind at our university. We also understand few experiences like it exist within other Canadian MEd programs. Given the results of this research, we are hopeful that our institution and others might offer similar opportunities to in-service teachers in the future.

A Cautionary Note and Admittance

Despite our shared positive findings and our own anecdotal observations about the good done to and for the children and youths of Maya Center, we would be remiss if we did not also recognize that short-term international service learning internships have the potential to do harm to host communities. Indeed, there is no shortage of literature that cautions people about such a possibility (e.g., see Langseth, 2000; Reisch, 2011; Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, & Koehn, 2009). While we may have taken some of these scholars' cautionary steps to limit or eliminate such harm (e.g., through engaging in significant co-planning with local partners, facilitating multiple information sessions with experienced people, offering daily debriefs with participants, etc.), our inquiry did not focus upon the potential or realized good (or harm) done to Maya Center or its children and youths. While our research participants did make mention of the perceived good they had done, we simply did not ask our hosts as part of our inquiry project. We share this here to be mindful of the sometimes unseen harm that can be done and to also remind readers to share in this sort of mindfulness.

Future Research Directions

Largely in an effort to ensure good and minimize harm, we have made a commitment to return to Maya Center in a number of capacities. Especially given that Maya Center is an Indigenous Mayan community, we have been particularly mindful of both the optics and realized consequences of failing to make and maintain ongoing relationships and partnerships with "those on the ground" in Belize. Currently, our university offers an annual service learning trip (for undergraduate students) to Belize, an almost biennial internship for pre-service teachers/undergraduate students, and a biennial international service learning internship for in-service teachers/graduate students. With these ongoing experiences, attention might best be directed towards investigating the positive (and possible negative) effects upon our partners in Belize. We are suggesting that future researchers within our program and also within programs like ours might turn their attention to their hosts as well as towards their selves in an honest and critical manner.

Additionally, despite the professional and personal growth evidenced by participants in this research study, future inquiries might further explore if and how such international service learning internships might also facilitate a sense of global citizenship amongst participants. That is, though the growth areas are, to us, admirable ones, some might suggest that they are still somewhat selfish—in the sense that they are all about the self. (Again, the growth areas were the following: creating an engaging and safe learning environment, (over)planning for the unexpected, teaching with (and in front of) others, letting go of control, facing fears and confronting anxieties outside of one's comfort zone, recognizing privilege and the excess of possessions.) Perhaps this sort of service learning opportunity ought to be more purposeful so that it can provide participants with knowledge, skills, and experiences to become (better) global citizens. We would suggest future research ought to consider this. Moreover, we note that some

of our participants evidenced some deficit thinking, benevolence mindsets, and othering (Bourdieu, 1989; Jefferess, 2011). Clearly, there is work and research to be done here.

A Final Note on Our Study's Limitations

Lastly, our suggestions for future inquiry have highlighted what we readily concede to be our study's limitations. Like many other similar studies (including those cited within our literature review), we have focused upon the outcomes for our own students. We have done this to, among other things, legitimize what we intuitively think makes sense. However, moving forward, we and others ought to recognize that an equal, or greater, importance must be placed upon considering at what cost (to the host community) such positive professional and personal outcomes are realized. That is, the assumption that things must also be entirely positive for partners in a developing nation needs to be investigated further. Relatedly, some within Canadian and other Western contexts have found that international service learning participants' perspectives of "the other" can be harmful (Dervin, 2012; Jensen, 2011; Larsen, 2014; Seider & Hillman, 2011). Future research studies and conceptual contributions might play a role in addressing these points and findings. So, to be clear, our study's greatest limitation would be its absence of a more critical focus upon the positive outcomes for *all* people involved. The omission of the voices of the children, youths, and adults within Maya Center is not so much a regrettable one; rather, it was simply a research design choice. Nonetheless, our (and by "our" we mean all of us who engage in this work) future work needs to take on this more critical and inclusive perspective.

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ⁱ Participants' responses are included here verbatim. Errors in grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling are the participants' errors and are not identified within the text (with, for example, "sic").

ⁱⁱ The terms "jungle" and "jungle gym" have been identified by some as being pejorative. We make this note here and also explain that we have replaced participants' use of the term "jungle" with "Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary" within this article.