

One Shot Yellow Fever, Three Shots Ethics: Reflecting on the Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning

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Who or what is being served by my actions?

Abstract

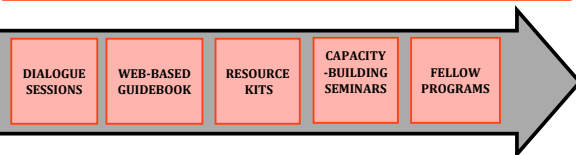
International engagement and service-learning (IESL) opportunities are an increasingly popular way for university students, staff and faculty to realize their roles and responsibilities as global citizens. IESL opportunities are often set in low-income countries where there are pronounced inequities in socio-economic development. There is growing concern that IESL activities are not always informed by ethical guidelines, potentially placing marginalized communities at risk for exploitation and harm. The IESL project enables students, faculty and staff at the University of British Columbia (UBC) to identify ethical issues that affect IESL activities and to develop collective capacity for addressing these issues. Using a series of dialogue sessions and interviews, in phase-one (2009-2010) of the IESL project, students, staff, faculty and international community partners collectively identified ethical issues that IESL participants commonly encounter. Phase-two (2010-2011) builds on the themes identified in phase-one and offers capacity development workshops using an "IESL Kit". This kit comprises resources needed to offer workshops, seminars and classes on the ethics of international service-learning and will sustain the important dialogues around IESL at UBC toward ethically sustainable initiatives.

Introduction

The IESL Project aims to answer the call for an institutional framework in higher education for addressing and responding to ethical issues in international engagement and service-learning. The UBC Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF) provides an enabling platform for incorporating ethical awareness alongside UBC's vision of international engagement.

Key Objectives

- To establish a platform and a community of practice for sustainable, supportive and ethical approaches to international engagement and service-learning at the University of British Columbia
- To strategically address the knowledge and educational resource gaps for students, faculty and staff engaging in international service-learning projects



Methods

- Foundations in Critical Pedagogy** – grounding the project within a framework of Critical Pedagogy. To mitigate potential for harm, we focus first on building *critical consciousness* to ensure that students and faculty can build their own definition of ethical behaviour and navigate complex situations with greater ease and confidence.
- Reflective Approach to Ethics** – assuming a reflective, rather than a directive approach to ethics, we suggest that difference offers an opportunity to critically reflect on one's own views rather than rejecting or contesting a different belief system, while also bringing reflective attention to the ways that we think, act, speak and engage within international contexts.
- Fostering Collaborations** – encouraging collaborations among faculty, staff, students and international partners, we recognize that all stakeholders have valuable life experience and that through building relationships there are rich opportunities for reciprocal learning.



Results

Identification of key themes – Some major themes and linking concepts were identified through the dialogue series in phase one of the project and are identified as follows:

Theme	Linking concepts	Theme	Linking concepts
Cross-Cultural Communication	Agency	Balance & Reciprocity	Relationships
	Double standards		Accountability
	Culture		Humility
	Otherness		Trust
Training & Education	Dignity & Respect	Motivations	Partnerships
	University & institutional roles		Perceived requirement
	Voluntourism		Vocational calling
	Underqualified 'expertise'		Self-serving
	Knowledge & resource gaps		Expectations
Sustainability	Lack of time	Witnessing & Observing	Altruism
	Charity vs. social justice		Paralysis/conflict of conscience
	Returning after having been better educated		Listening
			Understanding lifestyle, problems and solutions
			Learning more before jumping into activities
			Local vs. Western perspective

Development of a Web-based Guidebook (WBGB) – Using the themes identified along with **case-studies** and **theoretical frameworks**, the web-based guidebook addresses ethical dilemmas faced by students, staff and faculty engaging internationally.

WBGB evaluation - conducted a formal evaluation, and wrote and disseminated a report based on 3 focus groups with students; 3 faculty interviews; and 15 online survey responses.

iTalks - hosted iTalks (interactive workshops inviting the UBC community into critical inquiry of ethics of international engagement) titled *"I'm Not a Skill that You Can Master: Talking Back to Cultural Competence"* and *"Humanitarian Aid in Africa: A Question of Sustainability"* at the Global Lounge attracting 80 students.

Kit Development – distributed a **call for kit submissions to faculty, staff and students**. Contributions may include, but are not limited to: experiential learning activities, artworks, musical compositions, short films, poetry, case studies, reflective essays, and scholarly essays. Once completed Faculty may integrate learning activities into their courses, staff may use this resource in workshops with students or their colleagues, and students may find it useful in their clubs, or to personally reflect on their research or service activities.

Global Praxis Workshops - collaborated with the Global Lounge to facilitate 2 highly successful capacity-building workshops with student groups. One student noted that it was the best workshop she had ever attended.

Student Directed Seminar – Two IESL staff have been approved to lead a Student Directed Seminar titled "Developing Internationalists: Critical Approaches to Service" under the supervision of the Co-Principal Investigators, starting in January 2011.

Discussion

The IESL project seeks to create a sustainable platform for ethical international engagement and service-learning practices at UBC. The intention is to embed resources and ownership of IESL across the university in partnership with faculty, students and staff. The aim is to ensure sustainability throughout disciplines and over time. Future plans include developing opportunities for research on IESL and to advance scholarship through faculty, student, staff and alumni **fellowship programs**.

We believe that an institutional commitment is key to expanding and strengthening ethical approaches to international engagement and a commitment to self-reflection and inter-cultural understanding. Building inter-cultural understanding is a crucial step toward generating a student, staff, faculty and alumni body with well-developed critical consciousness.



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