

MANAGING TRANSFORMATION: HOW DO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS  
EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF REENTRY AFTER  
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING?

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by  
Leah B. Hetzell  
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Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Steven J. Gross, Advisory Chair, Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies,  
Temple University

Dr. Cynthia Belliveau, Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies, Temple  
University

Dr. James Earl Davis, Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies, Temple University

Dr. James P. Ducette, External Member, Psychological Studies in Education, Temple  
University

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## **ABSTRACT**

As calls for institutions of higher education to educate globally competent citizens have intensified over the last two decades, the field of international service learning (ISL) has responded resoundingly. ISL programs have been implemented at many institutions and there have been countless studies that demonstrate the great power for student learning and growth inherent in this exciting educational tool. In more recent years, experts have moved away from studying the student experience and have, instead, questioned the power relationships inherent in service learning programs abroad; related studies have made use of newer critical theories and community development philosophies, which have advanced the field tremendously.

However, to date, the re-entry period has still been largely overlooked, and there has been a noticeable lack of studies that apply student development theories to the ISL experience. This study explores how a diverse group of students from a large, public, four-year institution on the West Coast experience transformational learning during an ISL program in Thailand and how they make sense of their experience upon their return to the U.S. and in the months afterwards.

By utilizing a case study design and implementing qualitative methods, this study provides significant evidence that well-designed ISL programs can trigger transformational learning in a variety of ways and that the re-entry period is a significant time of learning and growth for students. Further, the findings importantly show that by creating strategic opportunities for students to learn and connect with others on the program, both during and after the ISL experience, students are better able to navigate the changes in themselves after returning home. Finally, the experiences of the students

indicate that the processes associated with transformational learning continue well on after the in-country experience, highlighting the significant need to provide support and guidance for students during this time.

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandfather, the Rev. David G. High. As a life-long learner with a passion for traveling and helping others, my grandfather instilled in me a need to see the world and to accomplish the highest levels of education possible. While I was often too young to understand his endless attempts to teach me how to speak foreign languages and play classical music, I now appreciate these acts beyond words. By completing this study, I believe that he would have been proud of what I have achieved. In his honor, I will continue to pursue my own life-long education and my global travels in the service of others.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Over the past twenty years, the number of International Service Learning (ISL) programs offered at colleges and universities across America has exploded. The domestic service learning movement gradually grew out of education reform in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the international service learning movement has developed similarly, responding to increasingly dire calls for institutions of higher education to fulfill their democratic missions by educating students via international experiences to become globally aware and engaged citizens (Battistoni & Longo, 2011; Kiely, 2004; Plater, Jones, Bringle, & Clayton, 2009; Silcox & Leek, 1997).

During the 2011-2012 academic year, over 283,000 students studied internationally for academic credit – many of these students as part of ISL programs (*Open Doors*, 2013). While ISL has wide-reaching effects on communities, institutions, and stakeholders, most of the focus in the field remains on students (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). The majority of the research in this growing field indicates that participation in ISL programs contributes positively to student outcomes such as: increased cultural competency; a sustained commitment to service and social justice issues; identification as a 'global citizen'; improved critical thinking, communication, and language skills; a broad appreciation for the host country and culture; and, a better ability to interpret social, economic, and political issues (Kiely, 2004; Merrill & Pusch, 2007; McMullen & Penn, 2011; Plater et al., 2009; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004).

While semester-long programs are still popular options and study abroad enrollment continues to climb, international service learning programs appeal to universities that want to provide hands-on experience and graduate “globally competent citizens” who are ready to participate in the increasingly interconnected world around them (Plater, 2011, p. 24; *Open Doors*, 2013). Students also desire these experiences as well. Most students in America now fall within the category of “nontraditional” and are generally more ethnically diverse, older, employed, and potentially pursuing an alternate pathway to a degree (McMullen & Penn, 2011). With this in mind, it is easy to understand why many students are increasingly more likely to choose a short-term experience abroad, particularly as most ISL programs often take place over the summer, are generally more affordable than traditional semester-long programs, and typically do not have language requirements (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004 Plater et al., 2009).

As these programs have become more widely implemented over the past few years, some trends have stood out to me as a young student affairs professional passionate about global education and experienced with both study abroad and service learning. Most noticeably, in my own experience with undergraduates, ISL programs appeared to create a deeper sense of engagement and a stronger bond to the host country for students than did participation in typical study abroad programs or short-term volunteer programs (e.g. “Alternative Spring Break”). After ISL students return home, they appear changed in a unique way. Often these students maintain strong bonds with other participants who understand their experience, sometimes they participate in service-related activities both on campus and within the local community, and frequently these returned students voice how difficult it was to explain their experience to those who

“didn’t understand.” Watching friends go through this process as an undergraduate was jarring, and as a professional and academic it has awakened a passion to seek a deeper understanding of what this experience entails.

Personally, I experienced studying abroad as an undergraduate and completed an international internship in London during the spring semester of my junior year. This was an experience that I felt was transformational, but still lacked the particular value that philanthropic service brings to international learning – a special trait that helps separate it from more traditional types of study abroad programs (Plater, 2011, p. 45). I had also completed numerous service trips over the course of my life, both local and throughout the U.S., which gave me a deeper understanding of the civic goals of service. For years, I knew that I wanted to study the experience of transformational learning in international service programs.

However, it was not until I visited India and Thailand on my first trip to Asia in 2013 that I thought deeply about the re-entry process. While my trip was for leisure – a beautiful, traditional Indian wedding – I still struggled with my return home even though I had not been fully immersed, nor had I undertaken service. After I got home, I felt out of place and unable to describe my experiences in language I felt could accurately depict what had happened or what I had seen. It was then that I remembered back to my return home from London years before. All of the intense feelings of crying for a week straight and “missing my new home,” as well as all the other tears I had shed after other various international excursions, came flooding back. It was then that I knew how I could combine my research interests and that I began trying to better understand ‘re-entry.’

That day I found Richard Kiely's work, *Chameleon with a Complex* (2004) and read the words, "[The term] chameleon complex describes the struggle study participants experience in learning how to translate their emerging global consciousness (along one or more of the six learning domains) into action upon reentry into the United States." Coupled with my professional understanding of the lack of student support for returning ISL participants, this personal experience led me begin research on the process of re-entry and to understand that this area truly needed to be studied.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As detailed in the second chapter, the pedagogy of service learning is rooted in the science of educational psychology. ISL pedagogy is not singularly defined into one model; it borrows from international education, service learning, and study abroad (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 14). While international programs that are designed without a pedagogical foundation rooted in service may still encourage intercultural competencies, the ability to facilitate sustained perspective transformation is likely diminished as ISL is more than just "study abroad with a community service component added" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Plater et al., 2009; Tonkin, 2011, p. 202). Essentially, if we are concerned about the development of students and we desire the positive outcomes of ISL within our citizenry, it makes sense that we must first fully understand how the learning process takes place and use this information to improve upon existing pedagogical and programmatic models.

Unfortunately, the rush to rapidly internationalize American college campuses coupled with the highly marketable outcomes associated with international programs has pushed some institutions into implementing programs that do not have a solid foundation

in any pedagogy (Plater, 2011, p. 35). This has resulted in programs led by faculty without proper training in facilitating service learning and programs lacking key components of a service learning trip, such as structured reflection; often this is the result of faculty who have no direct, personal experience with service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). Alternatively, some faculty and staff may have the appropriate knowledge but lack the institutional buy-in to be able to sustain partnerships with international community partners or to financially support their programs (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). Without adequate resources, both human and capital, international service learning cannot be fully effective.

It is widely accepted that the process of reflection facilitates the meaning-making process before, during, and after an ISL experience (Plater et al., 2009, p. 493). In recent years there has been a significant amount of attention paid to the orientation and pre-service phase of the ISL experience. Longo and Saltmarsh (2011) note that preparation is a key component of service learning (p. 78). The authors suggest that greater preparation may be needed for ISL experiences and cite experiences like writing to community partners and researching the social, cultural, economic and political histories of the host country (Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011, p. 78). It has also been shown that pre-service orientation may improve participants' reactions to culture shock and help with adaptation (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

On the post-service side, there has been very little research on the process of re-entry following ISL experiences, particularly over time (Kiely, 2011, p. 260). Even the most popular structural models do not detail the process of reflection after the ISL experience (Plater et al., 2009, pp. 495-499). Research suggests that ISL participants

struggle deeply with translating their experience during the period of re-entry, and in the years to follow (Kiely, 2002; 2004; 2011). Without an understanding of how students experience learning after an ISL program, we do not have an accurate picture of transformational learning in ISL nor do we have a complete pedagogy.

Additionally, it is understood in the community of study abroad researchers and practitioners that many of the gains students receive following an international experience as “global citizens” occur through the re-entry process (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 43). Study abroad re-entry programs may be comprised of on-site evaluation, dedicated workshops, or reflection assignments; some colleges now even encourage students to conduct follow-up research to help “reconcile” their experiences abroad with their educational goals at home (Frost & Raby, 2009, p. 181). However, despite the fact that the study abroad field has received a great deal more attention in the scholarly literature than ISL, there is still a large lack of consensus about the pedagogy of re-entry programs – only a very general understanding that without support networks or follow-up, students are largely on their own to make sense of their experience (Frost & Raby, 2009, p. 181).

While there is little scholarly information on the process of re-entry in ISL, this does not mean that support systems do not exist for post-service students. Kiely (2004) notes that students might be assisted in their transition by taking advantage of a post-program course or an alumni network (p. 17). However, even in well-developed ISL programs, support services and post-trip reflection for students returning from international experiences are often lacking. In the ISL program that will be used as the research site for this study, the Hands on Thailand Program directed by Professor Dan

Brook at San Jose State University, there is not an institutionalized re-entry program. However, Professor Brook is strongly committed to social justice and fostering positive student outcomes, as well as integrating service into the lives of his students post-service within the local community as evidenced by the program's robust learning outcomes. Further details of the research site will be provided in the third chapter.

Aside from a lack of research on the transformational learning process during re-entry, there is a lack of dialogue about what types of support students need upon re-entry and about what this experience is like for students (Tonkin, 2011). Longo and Saltmarsh (2011) note that re-entry issues are likely to be even greater for ISL students than other students with international experiences because they more directly engaged with others from very different backgrounds during their program (p. 79). Additionally, the authors describe how they feel these students should be supported upon re-entry; "Intensive opportunities for critical reflection, along with opportunities to continue to support international community partners and address global issues that surface in local ways are core considerations for returning students" (Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011, p. 79). Kiely (2011) also notes that most intercultural models of development have yet to recognize that ISL participants may have different needs before, during, and after service (p. 258). Students may need access to counseling services or they may feel that they want to talk about their experiences (i.e. debrief) with other program participants. Students may also feel passionate about writing a final reflection paper, while others may argue that staying connected with the local community partners is of more importance to them. Accurately describing, valuing and understanding these needs in the context of transformational learning is of utmost importance to both scholars and practitioners.

Clearly, the problem is multi-dimensional. There is a lack of research in the ISL field about re-entry and transformational learning, as well as a general lack of longitudinal studies. As Kiely (2011) has aptly noted, many opportunities exist for research in both of these areas (p. 260). There is also a lack of dialogue about the student experience, which implies that although a great deal of research is done on student-outcomes, the student voice is not centrally featured in these analyses. Within this context, there exists a need to explore these issues deeper using a qualitative, theory-driven approach that will focus on both the student experience and the process of learning.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of transformational learning that may take place within undergraduate student participants of a three-week international service program and to explore how participants manage the process of re-entry to the home country following the international experience. While not all participants may experience perspective transformation during the program, all will experience re-entry. For students who show evidence that they have transformed their frames of reference in some dimensions, it will be particularly useful to better understand how they experience this process. The impacts of pre-service learning experiences and of in-service learning experiences on student outcomes have both been studied by other researchers. What has not been studied is the role of post-service experiences during the re-entry period and how these experiences might impact the process of psychological transformation.

## Definition of Terms

1. **International Service Learning** - While there are many different program models and relevant pedagogies, Plater et al. (2009) define ISL as:

“...an academic, curriculum-based course or a combination of courses in which students participate in meaningful, sustained community service; engage in regular, structured reflection activities that integrate academic content with real-world practice and that ask students to reflect their own values, their sense of social responsibility, and their ability to work collaboratively with individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds; and have multiple opportunities to engage with residents of the host culture outside of an academic setting.” (p. 487)

International Service Learning (ISL) can also be more broadly defined as an international curriculum-based academic experience which incorporates meaningful community service, structured critical reflection, exploration of values and social issues, and a variety of opportunities in which to engage with the host culture. For the purposes of this study, short-term ISL and the newly popular term, “Global Service Learning,” both carry the same weight and may be used interchangeably with the term “ISL.” While the term “GSL” is becoming more accepted in the field, I will utilize the term ISL because it aligns with the language utilized by my research site.

2. **Transformational Learning** – Generally defined as the process of learning that induces far-reaching change in the learner by reconstructing frames of reference, hence producing a paradigm-like shift that influences all subsequent experiences and actions. Mezirow’s famous theory of Transformational Learning will be highlighted below as a theoretical construct for the foundation of the study, and this key term will impact most aspects of the study.

3. **Perspective Transformation** – This term refers to a noticeable shift in a participant’s perspective on, or understanding of, an experience, feeling, value, or other intangible concept. Students may or may not be aware that they have experienced transformational learning and/or perspective transformation. Evidence of such a shift will be provided by the way participants discuss their experience and articulate (in their own words) a change in the way they understand the world around them.
4. **Pre-Service** – This term refers to the period of time prior to the experience abroad.
5. **In-Service** – This term is used to refer to the period of service learning in the host country.
6. **Re-entry** – This term is used to describe the period of time after the experience abroad, when participants return to where they consider home. The period of re-entry does not, as of yet, have a defined length of time.
7. **Short-Term Program** – This term references any program shorter than a typical university semester – generally of less than three months in duration.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the recent history of ISL research, some scholars have made the incorrect assumption that when students are exposed to a new cultural learning environment, they will easily, or even automatically, develop intercultural sensitivities and undergo the process of transformational learning without intentional efforts to involve experiential learning (Kiely, 2004; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Merrill & Pusch, 2007).

Kiely (2004) intricately detailed his personal realization of this concept:

“Because post-trip evaluation of student journals and final reflection papers tended to indicate that profound transformational learning had occurred, I assumed transformation was largely unproblematic and would provide students with the intercultural knowledge and passion to adjust their lifestyles and engage in social justice work. As a result of the present case study, I found that my previous understanding of the meaning and long-term effects of students’ transformation on their daily lives had been sorely lacking.” (Kiely, 2004, p. 6)

This passage highlights the need to perform an in-depth study of the process of transformation during the in-service trip component and afterwards during the reentry stage from a student-focused perspective.

Additionally, Kiely (2004) asserts that scholars should approach qualitative research on ISL with theory at the forefront. Kiely (2004) utilizes Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 2000) groundbreaking research on transformational learning to construct his longitudinal case study of students on an ISL experience in Nicaragua (pp. 6-7). Kiely (2004) then provides a theoretical model based on his findings, proposing that students who do experience perspective transformation on ISL programs do so along six central dimensions: political, cultural, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and personal (p. 11). For example,

“Participants report a profound shift in their spiritual frame of reference resulting from their international service-learning experience. First-hand experiences with human suffering, poverty, and injustices often causes significant dissonance, leading participants to reflect more deeply on their role in society and their ability to make a difference” (Kiely, 2004, p. 14).

In my study, I used Kiely’s six dimensions as a theoretical framework through which to view participant’s experiences and meaning-making processes.

Transformational learning, as defined by Mezirow (2000), refers to the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference about the world so that we may generate opinions and interpretations that will prove more justified and which will guide

our actions in a truer way. A frame of reference, or “meaning perspective,” is the structure of assumptions and expectations that acts as a filter for our impressions. These frames of reference may be inside or outside of our awareness and often represent cultural paradigms (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 8-20).

The center of Mezirow's theory is based on the idea that the learning process in adults generally follows a set path of phases, and that after a “phase of meaning” becomes clarified, transformative change is likely to occur. Additionally, the theory also maintains that this learning process is generally facilitated by critical reflection. I used Mezirow's 10 phases (listed below) as a starting point for my inquiry, and sought to define which phases are most relevant in fostering the process of transformational learning in participants before, during, and after a short-term ISL experience. (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 8-20)

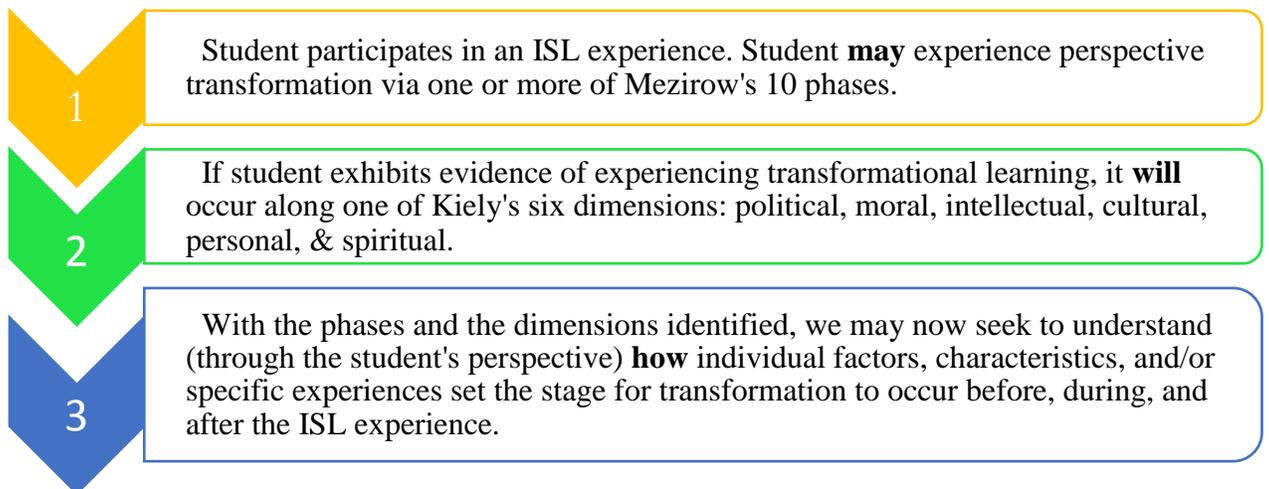
1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and

relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's experience

It is relevant to explain here that Mezirow's research mainly focused on adults. While some may argue that college students are, in fact, adults, the section on student development theory (page 62), will highlight some of the issues with this notion and provide alternate ways of thinking about perspective transformation during this time of life. However, in any case, Mezirow's research on transformational learning still provides a solid theoretical construct on which to build a qualitative study of student ISL participants.

Below, I have constructed a diagram which visually illustrates how I utilized both theories in my research, and details how my study will be of use in a theoretical sense to set the scene for the process of re-entry that students experience post-service:



## **Research Questions**

In my study, I sought to answer two central questions. Each question is followed by a set of sub-questions which provided further direction to the study and helped to shape the foundation of my methodology.

1. Do undergraduate student participants of a three-week ISL program to Chiang Mai, Thailand exhibit evidence of transformational learning?

a. How do participants describe the process of examining and re-interpreting their frames of reference before, during, and after the trip?

b. What feelings and emotions do participants experience before, during, and after the experience?

2. If participants demonstrate evidence of transformational learning, what factors do these participants believe contribute to their ability to manage this transformation upon re-entry?

a. Do participants show evidence of continued perspective transformation after returning home?

b. Do participants feel supported upon re-entry?

c. What resources and/or experiences do participants feel they need in order to translate their experience back to their life at home?

c. How long do participants experience the re-entry process, and do their needs change over time?

## **Potential Contributions**

It is important to note that while I entered into this project with some ideas regarding student outcomes, the overarching goal of this research was to understand how

students manage and sustain transformation. Particularly, following service, I wanted to uncover how students change their frames of reference based upon their individual experiences. As Kiely (2004) has noted, transformation does not occur in every international service learning setting, nor does every student who exhibits signs of transformation actually experience this change in the same manner. With this reality in mind, it is also necessary to explore the potential contributions that this study may have to the large field of international education and to the practice of student development within contexts of international service learning.

It is my hope that this study will contribute positively to the growing body of research that exists on ISL, particularly on the process of re-entry. I do not propose that the findings of this case study will consistently be generalizable to other short-term ISL programs. However, my in-depth analysis of this particular case should allow readers to gain a deeper understanding of how students experience transformational change and how this process is affected by a student's personal transition back to "normal life" post-service. I also anticipate that a wide audience may find this qualitative study useful in their work with developing students, planning international experiences, and understanding transformational learning in institutions of higher education. Since there is very little information available on best practices for re-entry, I hope to provide some thoughts that may contribute to the creation of practices that would fully support student development and promote global citizenship.

Even more specifically, I hope that I can provide an analysis that will highlight the importance of collaboration between faculty and student affairs professionals in promoting an impactful re-entry experience. It is also my aim that this research will

encourage further reflection, research, and innovation within the larger fields of international service learning, education abroad, and student development. Beyond the creation of my formal written dissertation, I plan to submit my work to relevant journals and to present the findings of my research at both national and global conferences. As a whole, by widely disseminating my findings, I will contribute to the field a glimpse into the student experience that captures and illuminates the importance of the period of re-entry, the experiences that contribute to the process of transformational learning, and the necessity of incorporating student development into international service learning.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Background**

In recent years, global service learning has gained a great deal of attention from faculty and administrators in higher education as an educational method that can be used to both internationalize campuses and produce more civically engaged students (Crabtree, 2008, p. 18). As higher education has responded to demands for accountability, institutional conditions are now more conducive to support a more rigorous study of ISL (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 3). Past research has shown that ISL is capable of having a transformative effect on students' moral, political, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, and personal perspectives (Kiely, 2004). ISL has also been shown to expand students' intercultural sensitivity, global competence, and definitions of citizenship while also impacting their future directions in life (Crabtree, 2008; Kiely 2004; 2011; Kiely & Hartman, 2014; Merrill & Pusch, 2007; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004). While an emerging body of research exists in this field, there is a great deal that we still do not know about the impact of ISL – particularly in the long term (Bringle & Tonkin, 2004; Kiely, 2004; Tonkin, 2011).

Initially, scholarly literature in this field grew out of the study abroad movement, which largely began after World War II when international exchanges gained momentum and researchers began to question the impact of such cross-cultural contact (Kiely, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). As students demonstrated positive learning outcomes from these cross-cultural learning experiences over the years, and as models for experiential education grew more popular throughout institutions of higher education within the United States, researchers began to recognize the need to better understand these

experiences so that they could be refined and replicated (Kiely, 2011). There has been a great deal of research on how and what students should learn in international service learning programs, mostly via qualitative, person-centered research (Kiely & Hartman, 2011). Models of best practice have emerged from this literature, but many of the qualitative studies have ignored what has already been studied resulting in a further lack of cohesion and collaboration within the ISL research community (Kiely & Hartman, 2011, p. 304).

While the underlying concept, pedagogy, and practice of service learning has been deeply established institutionally across the United States so as to require little explanation or justification, there is still a lot to be learned about ISL (Plater, 2011, p. 41). Often program directors, typically professors or University administrators, are not armed with the necessary understanding of what a “true” ISL experience should necessarily entail and do not have the personal experience in order to facilitate the desired learning outcomes (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 20). Service learning has become something of a buzzword in higher education; however, this is problematic because without proper preparation and implementation, service learning on a global scale may not be effective (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). Beyond simply not achieving outcomes or being wasteful in terms of resources like time and money, poorly planned service learning could have negative long-term effects on students, universities, and local communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). We know that in order to foster the most impactful programs, we need to know more about the experience from a variety of perspectives.

Specifically, one aspect of ISL that has remained virtually untouched in the

literature is the process of returning home following the experience – commonly referred to as “re-entry” (Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; 2011; Tonkin, 2011). This is a process that students typically experience on their own – a process that I will later argue necessitates a student-centered and inductive approach. First, to better understand the current research landscape, I will unpack the literature that forms the foundation of and rationale for ISL, then explore the topics of cultural adaptation and re-entry, and finally survey relevant theoretical models and studies that help form a basis for further examining the phenomenon of re-entry and the student experience within ISL.

### **Conceptualizing ISL**

It is important to remember that at the heart of ISL is learning; service learning is an academic activity which is intentionally linked to the curriculum (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 5). The foundation of the pedagogical approach to international service learning has been conceptualized by Bringle and Hatcher (2011) as a confluence of three “educational domains,” service learning, international education, and study abroad (p. 4). In their analysis, the authors note that it is important to understand these three components individually and they posit that the confluence of the three will have an “intensification effect” on the positive outcomes associated with ISL, for example, language acquisition, deeper understanding of global issues, better demonstration of democratic skills, and greater transformation of students’ lives and careers (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 23).

In the most basic way, we can understand service learning as intentionally designed, community service experiences linked to an academic curriculum, study abroad as intentionally designed international experiences linked to an academic curriculum, and

international education as international experiences which may or may not be linked to an academic curriculum or intentionally designed. It is necessary, then, to understand the three dimensions to fully understand the rationale for ISL as a critical educational tool for both learning and social change, keeping in mind that where the three overlap (ISL) is where the deepest cultural experiences and highest level of academic learning are believed to take place. (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011)

### **Service Learning**

Although the domain of service learning may have many meanings and iterations in different contexts, and certainly within different institutions, at its core, service learning is a “high impact” educational practice (Kuh, 2008) that is academic in nature, sponsors service activities that are both meaningful and reciprocal to the local community, incorporate reflection as an educational tool to stimulate learning, and has civic learning as one of its main objectives for student learning outcomes (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, pp. 5-6). Over the last twenty years, service learning courses have dramatically increased in higher education, and numerous centers for service learning and community engagement have been created internally to support implementation of this type of course work in educational settings (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 5).

ISL researchers Bringle and Hatcher (1996) also note that the recent spike in service learning has been strengthened by the work of national organizations interested in combining education and service, such as Campus Compact and the American Association of Higher Education. However, the authors note that universities play a key role in the promotion of service learning due to their unique structure, access to resources, and connections to people and communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Many varied outcomes of service learning have been studied over the years with studies indicating that participation in service learning contributes to the development of life skills, personal efficacy, reduced stereotypes and increased tolerance, sense of personal responsibility, and moral and spiritual development (Astin & Sax, 1998; Berry & Chisholm, 1999; Eyler, 2011). There is also growing evidence that service learning has an impact on students' civic engagement, with establishing a sense of civic responsibility being one of the core objectives of any service learning course (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Eyler, 2011). This outcome is being debated within the ISL community as well, as it corresponds to fostering global consciousness, citizenship, and a critical, social justice perspective on the increasingly interconnected world in which we live (Hartman & Kiely, 2014).

Directly stemming from the eruption of the civic engagement movement within higher education over the past few years, the notion of civic engagement is at the core of both service learning and ISL pedagogies. Richard Battistoni and Nicholas Longo (2011) have proposed in their chapter, "Putting Students at the Center of Civic Engagement" in the book *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education* that the civic engagement movement has failed to engage and empower students in a transformational way (Battistoni & Longo, 2011). The main argument of this work is that it is necessary for higher education to "put students at the center and [give] them opportunities to cocreate in real democratic spaces within the academy" (Battistoni & Longo, 2011, p. 202).

In their work, Battistoni and Longo (2011) provide very concrete strategies and advice for scholars and administrators to create these types of environments. Their work

steers practitioners of service learning away from the need to examine outcomes and data; instead, it proposes that a closer look at how students are actually experiencing engagement within the local community is needed. This analysis is important because it highlights how local (or ‘domestic’) service learning can demonstrate an ability to achieve learning outcomes, but is seemingly missing the ability to capture students’ attention in a long-term way; or, put otherwise, there is a lack of *transformation* evident in most traditional service learning courses due to a lack of understanding the student voice.

Not everyone feels that service learning is lacking transformational outcomes, however. One way that scholars traditionally believe that the outcomes of civic engagement and global citizenship can be achieved in service learning is through using structured reflection activities to examine processes of thinking – aligning with the historical tradition of reflection that John Dewey proposed in 1910 (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Whitney & Clayton, 2011). Hatcher and Bringle (1997) define reflection as, “the intentional consideration of experience in light of particular learning objectives” (p. 153). Related to the concept of cognitive dissonance, there is a widespread belief that if the learner’s current way of thinking or process of meaning-making is challenged with a more appropriately complex way of thinking, cognitive development will be initiated (Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1975). This is also evident in Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning, where students’ frames of reference are shifted by reflecting on critical events and understanding them within a new context (Mezirow, 1978). However, while reflection is generally accepted as a principle of “good practice” within the field of service learning, there is a lack of standard practice of implementing reflection activities

as well as a lack of studies that measure the impact that reflection may have on learning outcomes (Eyler, 2002, p. 518).

As Eyler (2002) proposes, “Knowledge and deep understanding come through a process of constructing knowledge through assessment of experience” (p. 519). Kolb’s model of experiential learning (1984) also supports this idea by proposing that learners begin with a concrete experience, then move to reflective observation where they describe their experience, then move to abstractly conceptualizing these observations, and then finally experiment or test these observations with more experience (Qtd. In Eyler, 2002, p. 520). Multiple models of adult cognitive development support this idea that in order to move beyond a dualistic view of the world to an advanced stage where critical thinking skills are well-developed and the complexity inherent in solving social problems is understood, that learners must consistently move between the concrete and the abstract, evaluating conflicting perspectives and making decisions based on ambiguous information (Eyler, 2002). Eyler proposes that these advanced cognitive skills are particularly important in developing citizenship in students (p. 521).

Although crucially important to all service learning efforts, the type of reflection activities varies significantly in each course. To move towards a standard practice of reflection, Eyler (2002) created a specific map for incorporating reflection before, during, and after the course. This map has surely been used by many since its creation. Essentially, this map was created to encourage program faculty to ensure that reflection is continuously integrated into the experience in as simple a way as possible (i.e. by following the instructions of the roadmap) – and not simply an afterthought.

While all of these tools are important for achieving overall learning outcomes, it is particularly relevant for the purposes of this study to highlight the “After Study” components in thinking about how this might impact re-entry. Eyler (2002) proposes that students should reflect alone by completing a paper, film, or artwork, with classmates in a team presentation, and with community members by presenting to other community partners (p. 523). However, it is noted that an even more important action might be taking time to think about next steps and to consider about the “now what” (Eyler, 2002, p. 531). Interestingly, this section of Eyler’s work is the least developed and the least cited. Despite the fact that over 14 years have passed since this work was published, there is still a lack of research on the impact of post-service activities as well as a large disparity in how reflection activities are implemented in courses between institutions of higher education.

While reflection is popularly valued as one of the core components of service learning pedagogy for its ability to stimulate cognitive development and critical thinking skills, identity development is another important outcome that is stimulated by exposure to and understanding of new environments and perspectives (Plater, 2011). In particular, it is believed that diversity in service learning settings can stimulate positive outcomes, although it is not discussed frequently in the literature (Eyler & Gyles, 1999; Zlotkowski, 1996). There is a distinct lack of diversity in most service programs and an even greater lack of understanding about how diversity impacts the ability of students to develop their identities across numerous pathways in these types of educational experiences (Holsapple, 2012).

To explore the issue of diversity further, the chapter, “Service Learning in Context: The Challenge of Diversity” in the book *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning*, provides an excellent starting point. Drawing on first-hand experience with college service learning programs, this work illuminates two of the biggest challenges to service learning. First, the lack of diversity amongst participants is discussed. As referenced previously, most service learners are white and female – a crucial issue that the authors note “must be addressed in the field” (Lin, Schmidt, Tyron, & Stoecker, 2009, p. 120). Second, the absence of a quality diversity training program for students is critical because without an educational component, service learning may simply become another form of exploitation by the dominant group (Lin et al., 2009, p. 130). The central message of this study is that valuing diversity on all levels is necessary in order to provide a successful service learning experience (Lin et al., 2009, p. 124). The authors also explore a question that is slightly beyond the scope of this study, but still important to consider nonetheless; that is, how can we challenge established norms and stereotypes while providing students an opportunity to learn cultural competencies (Lin et al., 2009, pp. 123, 133)?

It is also important to understand how students develop self-awareness via service learning. Intrinsicly tied to student identity development is the principle of “self-authorship,” a term coined by Baxter Magolda (1999). The term self-authorship is defined as the ability to act on one’s own internal beliefs separate from the influence of others. Baxter Magolda further explains self-authorship as a way of making meaning of oneself and the world that extends beyond critical thinking or informed judgments (p. 6). One key principle of this theory is the ability of students to engage in relationships with

others without losing one's own internal identity (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 12). In service learning contexts, students develop self-awareness through experiential learning and personal reflection (Mitchell, 2008). It is also likely that students would develop self-authorship as well, as students begin to think about who they are in relation to the world around them and how they will navigate their lives in accordance with their new perspectives.

In addition to a well-developed understanding of self, an understanding of community is another important outcome of service learning. Taking part in experiential learning that is tied to academic outcomes, within diverse environments, with opportunities for structured reflection is all part of the experience described as "critical" service learning (Mitchell, 2008). Critical service learning is an evolution from "traditional" service learning; the difference being a commitment to furthering social justice and the betterment of society (Mitchell, 2008). As service learning has evolved to this new critical tradition, it seems plausible that true transformational learning, as Mezirow (1978) would define it, is entirely plausible. Critical programs move service-learning closer to the border of ISL, if we think back to the conceptual map utilized at the start of this chapter.

### **Study Abroad**

As noted, study abroad primarily refers to the practice of receiving academic credit in association with a period of international study. Study abroad is viewed within Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) conceptualization of ISL as one of the three central domains that contribute to the foundation of ISL pedagogy. Along with service learning and international education, study abroad as a practice can help us more deeply

understand how students develop competencies tied to global citizenship from educational experiences. Specifically, because study abroad and ISL are so closely related, and because study abroad has been studied more in-depth over the years, it will be important to understand both the theoretical and actual differences between the two as educational learning tools.

In the 2012-13 academic year, 289,408 students studied abroad for academic credit, with the majority of programs being short-term (less than eight weeks) in duration (*Open Doors*, 2014). Study abroad numbers continue to rise each year, yet only just over 1% of all American college students take advantage of this type of educational experience (*Open Doors*, 2014). According to NAFSA, the National Association of International Educators, study abroad helps students increase their foreign language fluency, cross-cultural competency, tolerance for ambiguity, problem solving skills, and can also contribute to higher grade point averages and college completion rates (*Explore International Education*, 2015; Bringle & Hatcher, 2011).

Further, study abroad can also help prepare students to live and work within a competitive, global environment (*Explore International Education*, 2015). Calls to higher education to increase the number of students participating in study abroad have increased over the past few years in order to capitalize on the positive outcomes that have been observed in student participants, resulting in numerous studies and national initiatives (*Explore International Education*, 2015). Both ISL and study abroad have greatly increased in popularity over the past few years for similar reasons.

However, study abroad is not a new phenomenon. Over the past few centuries, there are numerous references to scholars undertaking study in other countries or regions

of the world to learn about language, culture, art, and so on. There is a common understanding that study abroad is meant to develop a student's global competence, typically with the individual development of the student as the central goal in mind (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 8). However, within the body of study abroad research, there is a lack of focus on the long-term impact of study abroad, a lack of research on how participants develop this global-mindedness, and an overall need to demonstrate how study abroad can improve the "greater good" in our society (Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi, & Sieloff, 2014).

In the 2004 work, "Large Scale Assessment of Student Attitudes after a Short-Term Study Abroad Program," authors Chieffo and Griffiths addressed this question of whether students studying abroad developed greater global awareness to a larger degree than students taking similar classes at home. The authors found that even in short-term programs of one month in duration that there was a significant impact on students' perceived growth in terms of both global awareness and knowledge acquisition. In this study, global awareness was identified as having four central components: intercultural awareness, personal growth and development, awareness of global interdependence, and functional knowledge of world geography and language. It was recognized that these "perceived" outcomes, based on the quantitative measures (i.e. anonymous computer survey) utilized in the study of over 2,300 students, were likely to vary from actual outcomes that could be analyzed by utilizing standard pre- and post-tests. The authors also raised a very important question – how would the addition of service change the outcomes observed in these student participants? (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 167, 174)

Additionally, it has been proposed that study abroad as a domain of learning is

also designed to encourage the budding “global village,” similarly to the field of international service learning (McKeown, 2009, p. 15). Josh McKeown, author of *The First Time Effect*, makes an excellent point in his work – essentially encapsulating that the mission of higher education is necessarily tied to the intentionality of specialized learning experiences. McKeown states, “Institutions of higher education, among other objectives, seek to enhance students’ global awareness and competence...but colleges and universities also have an interest in enhancing students’ understanding of diversity, critical thinking ability, and ethical conduct” (McKeown, 2009, p. 14, 15).

In this study, McKeown makes use of a mixed methods research approach, using both survey data as well as student essays from one semester’s study abroad population at eight Universities to examine gains in intellectual development and the variables that contribute to this development after a full semester of experience abroad (McKeown, 2009, p. 22-23). McKeown’s study implied that there were significant gains in terms of development for students; however, his work does *not* imply that studying abroad was transformational in nature. This highlights an excellent point; it is believed that transformation consistently involves a critical reflection of one’s own beliefs and values, whereas development only signals a move forward without looking back. This would suggest that ISL, as a practice reliant on reflection designed to foster perspective transformation, has a unique place in student development as well as engagement that study abroad simply cannot fill due to distinct pedagogical differences.

One well-known study, completed by Lewis and Niesenbaum in 2005, examined short-term study abroad programs that had been integrated into a semester long course at home, intentionally designed to involve service learning components. This study is cited

in the field because it was the first study to “cross” the fields of study abroad and ISL, and to recognize that the outcomes were, in fact, different (Lewis & Neisenbaum, 2005). Although there is some skepticism in both fields about the efficacy of short-term programs, given that these experiences do not involve long, sustained interaction as do semester- or year-long programs, multiple studies have shown that even very short ISL programs provide a deep cultural experience for student participants. In this study, it was found that a majority of students who participated in this program reported that short-term study abroad was more attractive than long-term study (Lewis & Neisenbaum, 2005, p. 257). The authors also found that short-term study abroad, when combined with service learning, led to improvement in students’ critical thinking and research skills, personal development and growth, and an understanding of their “civic role in a globalized world” (Lewis & Neisenbaum, 2005, p. 258).

While Lewis and Neisenbaum’s (2005) work relies on students’ own survey replies, the findings do give credibility to the educational gains of a short-term study abroad experience that incorporates service learning. This study is insightful into the outcomes associated with hybrid study abroad and ISL programs. However, it does not give any deeper insight into how or why adding a service component contributes to student development, learning, or transformation.

It is clear to see where the fields of ISL and study abroad overlap; the literature clearly shows that both types of programs foster a perceived gain in intercultural awareness and sensitivity amongst student participants (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Crabtree, 2008; *IPSL*, 2015; Merrill & Pusch, 2007). However, it seems that the difference lies in the lack of transformative experiences, which lead to varying outcomes.

Specifically, to highlight a few of the typical differences, study abroad experiences do not provide intentional experiences working closely with the community, do not necessarily require a commitment to issues of social justice and social change, and do not require reflection. As Brockington and Wiedenhoef (2009) note, showing up to a study abroad program where there are not opportunities for intensive integrative cultural experiences and structured reflection will likely produce a frustrated student who doesn't understand how to make meaning of their experiences and their place within their surroundings (pp. 130-131). Further, it is helpful to remember that developing a sense of global citizenship and awareness takes place over time and should not be expected as an immediate outcome of study abroad (Brockington & Wiedenhoef, 2009; Cornwell & Stoddard, 2000).

Yet, in recent years, scholars have begun to question these differences. Many have even started to seek out the areas where opportunities for change might exist in order to better align the domain of study abroad with the desired outcome of developing and fostering a sense of global citizenship in student participants (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Hovey & Weinberg, 2009). As authors Hovey and Weinberg (2009) have commented, "We do not want to reproduce a world of privilege in which a passport and a study abroad semester on a CV are a sufficient claim to global citizenship" (p. 46).

In their assessment of research completed on study abroad programs, Hovey and Weinberg (2009) propose a unique way of thinking about study abroad in the context of creating global citizens. They describe programs in a dichotomy composed of both "low road" and "high road" programs (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 36). "Low road" programs are designed to generate more economic activity, often by promoting efficiency, doing

more with less, and making as few investments as possible (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 36). These programs are likely familiar to many Americans; students live together abroad, travel in large groups, don't fully learn the local language or customs, and essentially get the typical American college experience in a different country (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 36).

Alternatively, "high road" programs are characterized by using the best products and people in order to produce products with a high value (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 36). These programs currently comprise a small percentage of study abroad programs, but they are intentionally developed to ensure cultural and linguistic immersion and to develop global citizenship (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, p. 37). Four principles for development of high road programs are also proposed: commitment to small scale and wide access, emphasis on exposing students to less traditional destinations, plans for re-entry and life-long engagement, and commitment to reciprocity within the local community (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009, pp. 37-38). Essentially, in their analysis, the authors have effectively highlighted the problematic areas of study abroad and shifted the focus within the discipline to the gray area that overlaps with service learning and international education – the space in which international service learning is born. Further, they have directed attention to the critical period of re-entry, which has been studied in this field (Seiter & Waddell, 1989) – but not frequently.

In moving towards this new vision of study abroad, Paige and Associates (2009) created a conceptual model for global engagement using outcomes from their a four-year research study of study abroad programs. In this study, the investigators utilized a retroactive tracer methodology where they surveyed 6,378 people who had studied

abroad between 1960 and 2007, as well as 5,924 non-study abroad participants (Paige et al., 2009). Additionally, the team interviewed a random sample of 63 people from the larger study abroad sample and created 10 in-depth case studies out of these interviews to create a triangulated mixed methods approach that fully described the participants' experiences. It was found that undergraduate students who study abroad become globally engaged in a variety of ways in their post-college years and that they often attribute this to their international experience. Also found was that participants' study abroad experience was often the most influential event in their life, the depth of the program created the strongest engagement outcomes, and study abroad significantly influenced educational and occupational decisions. This study is particularly important not only for the significant findings, but in its creation of a useful "global engagement" scale, and because it focused on the long-term behavioral impacts of participants. There are limitations, as the study only looked back on participants' experiences and didn't actually examine them longitudinally as they unfolded, but this popular work has called for more attention to the goal of further developing and increasing access to study abroad so as to achieve larger societal goals of global engagement (Paige et al., 2009).

In addition to exploring global engagement in the domain of study abroad, as with service learning, the diversity inherent in the program structure is crucial to developing students' identities and fostering critical thinking. Again, these skills and understanding of self are crucial to the development of global awareness and citizenship. Despite the fact that the literature on diversity in service learning is sparse, the more advanced literature on study abroad (as a more researched field) has pinpointed key diversity issues of which the topic is highlighted.

By utilizing case studies and drawing on current statistics, authors Picard, Bernardino, and Ehgiator explore strategies to engage minority student populations in study abroad programs within the current global context in their book *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Question for Global Citizenship* (Picard, Bernardino, & Ehgiator, 2009, p. 321). Their overview is simple and to the point: only 2% of the college student population studies abroad, and these students are mostly white, mostly women, and mostly middle to upper class students; essentially, minority student participation in study abroad is “stagnant” (Picard et al., 2009, p. 322-323). The authors help illuminate this crisis of diversity very clearly in their chapter and provide concrete strategies for improvement.

However, while the need for diversity is discussed in an overarching sense as it relates to general social justice and access to experiential education, there is a lack of dialogue in this piece regarding the importance of a diverse population in order to foster development and transformation within the program. Diversity as it relates to transformation and the development of global citizenship has not been explored fully in contexts of study abroad, although I believe the relationship will be central to the current study and to the resulting analysis in hopes of better illuminating this under-researched relationship.

### **International Education**

To complete the evaluation of the conception of a field formed by three overlapping domains, it is important to understand the third – and most ambiguous – of the three, international education. The term international education may be described by the terms global awareness, intercultural awareness, intercultural competence, world

studies, and cross-cultural understanding, amongst many others (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 10). Oftentimes international education is seemingly synonymous with the term study abroad; however, here we will use this term broadly to refer to programs that seek to build global citizenship as a course or program outcome and/or which generally internationalize the curriculum or the campus (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, pp. 10-11). However, to refer back to Hovey and Weinberg's (2009) concept of "high" and "low" road programs, it is easier to think of many programs that fall within the category of international education as "low" road programs. That is, these programs are not designed intentionally, they typically occur outside of an academic setting, and they are not assessed in traditional ways, such as through grades and transcripts (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 13). Yet, these programs are still valuable to explore in order to understand how international education is growing rapidly at institutions of higher education and how they operate in relation to ISL.

One such program type is a popular program known throughout America as "Alternative Spring Break," or ASB. ASB programs can be defined as experiential, immersive community service programs that are typically short term (1-3 weeks are the most common length) and take place during University break periods. Over the past twenty years, ASB programs have grown immensely in popularity; "Break Away" a national non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and expansion of ASB as an experiential tool for fostering active citizenship and social change has proposed a model founded on eight core principles: strong direct service, orientation, education, training, reflection, reorientation, diversity, alcohol and drug free (*Break Away*, 2015). Founded by students at Vanderbilt University, Break Away currently has a

network of over 100 chapter schools, more than 400 non-profit partners, and hundreds of individual members worldwide (*Break Away*, 2015). Out of 145 chapter institutions, Break Away reported that in 2014, over 1,550 trips were taken with over 21,200 participants completing over 1,310,800 hours of direct service (*Break Away*, 2015).

While there is little scholarly research available on ASB programs, numerous colleges and Universities offer a diverse array of ASB program models and themes designed purposefully to incorporate intercultural education into the campus. For example, the University of Maryland has been sponsoring ASB programs for over 10 years, with over 200 programs completed to date in 30 different communities (*VCU: Global Education*, 2015). In their ASB mission statement, it is stated that, “Through reflection, education and service, Alternative Breaks develops mutually beneficial community partnerships, critical thinking and leadership skills to create a socially just world” (*VCU Global Education*, 2015). Clearly, there exists program-based evidence to suggest that there are positive outcomes that support the development of global citizenship within student participants.

While these programs have much in common with both service learning and ISL programs, there is a lack of connection to academia and to the underlying pedagogy that defines quality, high-impact ISL programs. However, it can be definitively stated that students have led the Alternative Spring Break movement in the United States; one striking example of this is the formation and rapid expansion of Break Away. Authors Battistoni and Longo (2011) note the importance of the student voice in campus decision-making efforts, citing that it helps increase student engagement and create a culture conducive to democracy and learning (p. 203). They also state that it is not enough to

simply provide the opportunities, but that leadership must allow students to define their own engagement and empower students to have a meaningful voice on campus (Battistoni & Longo, 2001, pp. 202-204). It has also been stated that students of the millennial generation are increasingly service-minded and they care about issues of social justice (Noll, 2012). Further, these short-term international experience, although not always intentionally designed nor aligned with the curriculum, are generally more accessible for a wider population of students in terms of scheduling, price, and academic “literacy” – that is, the ability of students to navigate their institution.

With these affirmative notions in mind, it is easy to understand how ASB has become increasingly popular. This begs the question: are ISL programs inaccessible or too academic? While a reasonable conclusion could be “yes” on both counts, it is helpful to remember that the lack of a curriculum in ASB programs goes far beyond categorizing ASB as non-academic in nature. Without a faculty member or a program administrator skilled in the facilitation of proper reflection and evaluation of student learning, students will likely not receive the most dissonant, challenging, and transformational experience (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). While short-term change may be evident in participants of all programs, to achieve long-lasting change, the program must be rooted in pedagogy – the proper structure of which will be further discussed within the next section.

Another example of an international education program that falls outside of the domain of study abroad, service learning, and international service learning is an on-campus, domestic, global living-learning community. In this type of program, students are provided with an opportunity to develop global citizenship without ever travelling abroad. One example of this is Virginia Commonwealth University’s “Global Education Living-

Learning Community.” Per their mission statement, this program, “prepares students to navigate within and between global communities at home and abroad and in professional and personal contexts” (*VCU: Global Education, 2015*). Even more specifically, this program is designed to expose students to issues of globalization and expand their knowledge, identity, and impact as global citizens (*VCU: Global Education, 2015*).

As a participant in the VCU Globe program, students live within a global community in a residence hall for at least two years, carry out over 40 hours of service, complete a global curriculum comprised of multiple global education seminars and courses, demonstrate cultural immersion experience, submit a global portfolio, attend special VCU Globe events, and keep up a grade point average over 2.0 (*VCU: Global Education, 2015*). Students in the program represent a variety of diverse backgrounds, majors, and interests; however, they all have a similar commitment to developing skills that will help them succeed in an increasingly globalized world (*VCU: Global Education, 2015*). To fulfill the “cultural immersion” requirement, many students opt to study abroad or participate in an international student exchange program (*VCU: Global Education, 2015*).

While the specific learning outcomes, and the results of whether or not they have been achieved, are not publicly documented, this program appears to have a positive impact on internationalizing the campus climate and promoting global citizenship. It has been stated that internationalizing the curriculum at American Universities would likely be incomplete in terms of achieving the larger goals of developing a sense of global awareness in students (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011, p. 11). However by incorporating elements of “cultural immersion” alongside residential learning experiences and traditional service

learning, programs like VCU Globe may prove a powerful collaborative tool for aligning and incorporating international education efforts with more traditional ISL programs. Yet, there still exists a question of whether a program of this nature can impact students in the same way as an intentionally designed international service learning program, structured to incorporate reflection and promote cognitive development by fostering dissonance through challenging experiences and feelings.

Another type of international education program, one which may occur within or outside of the academy, is “Citizen Diplomacy” themed programs. These programs have a history of support from the U.S. government over the past 50 years, especially evident by the widely known Peace Corps and the International Visitor Leadership Program (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). IIE describes citizen diplomacy as “an array of actions and activities that individuals can partake in that contribute to deepening ties between individuals and communities and to advancing the goals of public diplomacy” (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011).

In a 2011 report, the Institute of International Education evaluated and measured the impact of these programs. Utilizing a case study approach, the study investigated high school exchange programs, postsecondary and study abroad programs, professional and leadership exchange programs, as well as international volunteer programs (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). Many of these programs had already completed internal evaluations utilizing a variety of assessment techniques. However, the most common outcome, particularly within the postsecondary and study abroad category, was increased intercultural awareness (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). Within this category, there was also a positive long-term effect on academic and career outcomes as well as an interesting

“multiplier effect” on the global awareness on family and friends (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). This report demonstrates how widespread the efforts to develop global awareness are within the United States.

Additionally, this meta-analysis of programmatic outcomes also brings up a few other relevant questions; are there standards of global citizenship and are there measures against which we can compare outcomes to understand what the most effective programmatic structures are? This question will be further explored in this chapter as the relationship between ISL and its subsequent outcomes are more fully clarified. Additionally, the emphasis on examining outcomes and the role of assessment will be analyzed further both here and within the final narrative.

### **International Service Learning Pedagogy**

Although international service learning programs have recently greatly increased in number throughout institutions of higher education across the nation, ISL existed in a similar format as it does now since the early 1980’s. One of the most well-known organizations and program facilitators is the International Partnership for Service Learning and Leadership (IPSL), formed in 1982 to serve students, universities, program administrators, and communities in order to link service with communities and academic study (*IPSL, 2015*). As the IPSL website states, the mission of the organization is to promote service learning and offer international programs, with aims to engage students, educators, and community members in the union of service and learning so that all will become more civically engaged, interculturally literate, internationally aware, and responsive to the needs of others (*IPSL, 2015*).

As a non-profit and advocacy organization, IPSL is unique because the leadership initially sought to empower students to think for themselves with a lack of “ideological conditioning,” and began utilizing their own pedagogy linking action with reflection – which has now become the standard for ISL programs (*IPSL*, 2015). Today IPSL still sponsors many undergraduate and graduate programs in addition to their own accredited masters degree, while simultaneously holding conferences, publishing books and newsletters, and sponsoring research on the outcomes of ISL (*IPSL*, 2015). Essentially, the IPSL has served as a huge promoter of service learning around the globe for over 30 years, while also providing an excellent research site for multiple researchers to study best practice and student outcomes in varied ISL programs.

In 2004, Tonkin and Quiroga undertook a study with IPSL in order to better understand student goals and attitudes in relation to ISL (p. 133). The researchers went about this by gathering data on past and present students, their opinions, their career patterns, and their experiences (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 133). In addition, the researchers completed a series of qualitative interviews and focus groups with 17 IPSL alumni who had been on a program within the last 15 years (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 134). The researchers’ focus was on the general transformative nature of ISL and on aspects of the cross-cultural experience most commonly associated with study abroad, such as linguistic or socioeconomic differences (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 136). There were many significant findings. Researcher Michael Siegel summarized these into three key conclusions. First, students experience ‘reverse culture shock’ upon returning home from ISL experiences, second, students experience a significant transformation of their moral and intellectual character and work through this via reflection, and third, students

develop a renewed, and often more critical, perspective on American values, norms, behaviors, and beliefs (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 147). Additionally, it was found that even experiences which did not involve long, sustained interaction with the host culture (i.e. short-term programs) could provide a significant cultural experience for participants (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 132).

Specifically, the findings from this study are very important in relation to understanding re-entry, because the experience of re-entry had been discussed very infrequently in the previous literature. Tonkin and Quiroga (2004) note that it was not surprising participants generally felt it was easier to leave home than it was to return after the ISL experience (p. 142). While this is understandable, the authors offered two additional findings that helped drive further inquiry into re-entry. First, the authors brought attention to the participants' frame of mind prior to departure and second, it was noted that overall, participants were not prepared for the process of re-entry, they had little or no opportunity to talk about or process their feelings, memories, and new understandings (Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004, p. 142).

It was after Tonkin and Quiroga's work was published that author Richard Kiely published his piece, "Chameleon with a Complex: Searching for Transformation in International Service Learning" (2004). In this longitudinal case study, Kiely (2004) sought to understand how students experienced perspective transformation from participation in an international service learning program with an explicit social justice orientation (p. 5). Initially, Kiely based much of his understanding of ISL outcomes on his own experiences with students, having facilitated ISL programs for over 10 years (Kiely, 2004, p. 5). However, while studying participants in his ISL program to

Nicaragua, Kiely uncovered that his personal understanding of the long-term effects of transformation were lacking (Kiely, 2004, p. 6). Kiely (2004) also aptly noted that previous studies that described positive outcomes for students were more so reporting the *intention* to promote social justice rather than the action itself, as the longer term impacts had not been studied (p. 8).

To remedy this lack of longitudinal research, Kiely designed a longitudinal case study of 43 participants over a seven year period from 1994-2001 utilizing qualitative measures which included on-site participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews (Kiely, 2004, p. 9). Particular focus was given to the post-experience interviews, as well as to triangulation of the data via methods such as member checks with participants and debriefing with peers (Kiely, 2004, p. 9). Kiely (2004) found that every participant experienced at least one type of perspective transformation from participation in the Nicaragua ISL program, proposing that the six dimensions of transformation were: political, cultural, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and personal (pp. 9-11). Further, Kiely (2004) detailed the process of transformation as a four-stage process, whereby students began by exhibiting an *emerging global consciousness*, next they transitioned to an *envisioning* stage where alternative possibilities for changing one's lifestyle were explored, then they moved into an on-going process of *transforming forms* along the six dimensions, and finally found themselves in the re/dis-integration phase of struggling to take action that reconciles and integrates profound shifts in one's worldview upon return to the United States (p. 10).

It is this last phase of transformation that takes place during and beyond re-entry that Kiely (2004) refers to as the "Chameleon Complex." As Kiely (2004) states,

“Chameleon complex represents the internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms, rituals, and practices in the United States” (p. 15). The notion of the Chameleon Complex innately challenges assumptions that students will continue to develop their global awareness in a linear fashion following ISL experiences (Kiely, 2004, p. 16). Kiely highlights ways for practitioners of ISL to incorporate elements designed to promote continued support, reflection, and opportunities for action following ISL experiences, while also calling for further research on how students translate “envisioning” into concrete action for social change (Kiely, 2004, p. 16). This study is crucial to fostering a wide-spread understanding that transformation is a long-term process. While there are some limitations in Kiely’s study, for example, a heterogeneous sample composed largely of Caucasian, middle to upper class, women, the findings are groundbreaking and highlight the true need for further study of the re-entry process and its connection with lasting perspective transformation.

Despite the call for further research on post-service transformation, Kiely (2011) observed that most of the writing on ISL does not draw from empirical research or theory and is still focused on programmatic issues, guiding principles, and instructional strategies (p. 244). Further, Tonkin (2011), posits that “reentry and reverse culture shock” is one of many areas that needs further attention in the literature, noting that based on previous research, the depth of ISL might be directly proportional to the intensity of adjustment following return home (p. 209). In order to more fully understand the student experience following a culturally immersive experience such as ISL, it is necessary to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the reverse culture shock that occurs during re-entry and enables the Chameleon Complex to occur.

## **Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock**

Over the years, there has been a great deal of interdisciplinary research completed on the occurrence of both culture shock and reverse culture shock. Although used quite liberally today, the term “culture shock” was coined by anthropologist Cora Dubois in 1951 to describe the disorienting experience most anthropologists face when entering different cultures (Paige, 1993). Soon after, Oberg (1954) expanded this definition to apply to all travelers, proposing a “honeymoon-crisis-recovery-adjustment” model. The term was still quite vague until Lysgaard (1955) proposed a “U” shaped model, linking Oberg’s terms into distinct phases. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) then further expanded this model from a “U” to a “W”, proposing that along with culture shock came a similar period of reverse culture shock upon return home. However, Kiely (2011) notes that in the research, these “U” and “W” models have proved inconsistent and are typically used for their simplicity, leading researchers to search for more appropriate and realistic models (p. 248).

In 1975, Peter Adler proposed a new model for understanding culture shock. Proposing that culture shock was more than just a type of anxiety or alienation resulting from the misunderstanding of commonly perceived and understood signs and symbols of social interaction, Adler (1975) voiced that culture shock could be an important and positive component of cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth (pp. 14-15). In this model, sojourners move through five stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence (Adler, 1975, p. 18). Moreover, Adler (1975) described that working through complexities and differences would lead to a distortion that an individual would experience as a “journey into the self” (p. 22).

This model aligns closely with the idea of cognitive dissonance that today is still understood to be at the heart of the process of perspective transformation and identity development. In fact, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vector model of student identity development closely resembles this model in a number of ways. Adler's model truly redefined culture shock and proposed that it could be a valuable tool for helping to realize the ideal of the "global village" and challenging issues of ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and nationalism (Adler, 1975, p. 22). Kiely (2011) reflects on this, noting that since this time, newer theories of intercultural learning now propose that culture shock is not just an adjustment, but a "patterned process of adaptation" that may have significant impacts on the process of identity development (p. 259).

While all stages of the process are important in the process, the final stage, independence, is important to highlight for the purposes of understanding re-entry. Adler (1975) aptly notes that not all students may experience this in the same way (p. 20). The author also describes that the final stage is not a culmination by any means, but rather a "state of dynamic tension" in which an individual has made both self and cultural discoveries and is now open to the possibility of exploring new experiences and facets and dimensions of existence (p. 18). As a whole, despite a lack of empirical evidence, this model provided a positive outlook on culture shock and reverse culture shock that introduced the notion that development may continue over time, past the period of re-entry – running contrary to the widely held belief that the impact of culture shock diminishes over time (Kiely, 2011, pp. 258-260).

Another important and well-known model to consider is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, also known as the "Bennett Scale." In the most

simplistic view, this model proposes that people can move from an ethnocentric view to an ethnorelative view, through six distinct phases: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 1993). This model is very useful for shedding light on how individuals cognitively process intercultural experiences, but like other models for intercultural development, it assumes there is an end-point of intercultural competence gained directly from the cross-cultural experience (Kiely, 2011, p. 260). The Bennett scale can be a great tool for classifying students' development, and may be particularly helpful in understanding their worldviews before, during, and after an ISL experience. However, this scale also serves as a reminder that students may come into an experience at varying levels of intercultural awareness, and may experience the same ISL program in very different ways. This point specifically draws attention to the need for a qualitative study that focuses on how individual students experience transformation through the re-entry process.

In thinking of understanding the terms “culture shock” and “reverse culture shock” as part of a larger process of cultural adaptation and awareness, the work of Ward et al. (2001) is very relevant. The authors describe that as the phenomenon of globalization continues, there has been increasing contact both “between-society” and “within-society,” meaning that there are more intercultural encounters between people than ever before (Ward, et al., 2001, p. 8). They explore the many psychological approaches to understanding both the process and the outcomes associated with intercultural contact, finding that, as a whole, the research field encompasses diverse, rich topics like attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and methods of communication (Ward et al., 2001, p. 5). Cultural contact is defined as the social interactions that have the

characteristics of a critical incident – that is, the event is regarded by at least one participant as having an important impact on their life (Ward et al., 2001, p. 5). This description of “cultural contact” provides an excellent vantage point from which to understand the experience of college students abroad experiencing dynamic, personal encounters with people from a culture vastly different from their own. Again, this model runs parallel to the notion of perspective transformation and identity development and is beneficial to be aware of when evaluating the ways in which students describe their intercultural experiences.

In order to reconnect the models above dealing with culture shock and intercultural learning back to the ISL research, we can explore the scholarly work of Merrill and Pusch (2007). In this study, the authors attempted to detail how learning actually takes place and what this kind of learning looks like in “intercultural” service learning settings (Merrill & Pusch, 2007). The study attempts to measure students’ cultural competence via a qualitative study of alumni participants of the International Partnership for Service-Learning (IPSL) program, in a somewhat similar fashion to Tonkin and Quiroga’s investigation in 2004 (Merrill & Pusch, 2007, p. 21). The authors conclude that their central finding was that students experienced a high degree of intercultural learning from ISL programs, which sometimes took many years to be fully realized (Merrill & Pusch, 2007, p. 38). However, it was also found that most participants were ultimately disappointed by the small impact they perceived that they made on the local community (Merrill & Pusch, 2007, p. 38).

While there may be some disagreement in the field about the ability of researchers to quantify intercultural experiences, this particular work shows the importance of

examining intercultural learning from a practical lens, instead relying solely on theory – as is popular in this particular field. Additionally, because of the authors’ finding that suggests time plays a role in how participants interpret and perceive their experiences, this study suggests the need for further longitudinal studies. Finally, this piece of work suggested that the conditions of the service learning environment were more salient to the student experience than personal factors (i.e. demographics, background, etc...), illustrating the interesting dichotomy between individual and programmatic contextual factors and their respective roles in student learning (Merrill & Pusch, 2007).

If we relate these models and studies of culture shock, adaptation, and intercultural awareness to the typical ISL experience, it is easy to imagine both the positive and negative realities of this tension that students experience upon returning home. We know that some students experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, and frustration, while also (and perhaps simultaneously) experiencing emotions of a renewed self-image, a positive and purposeful outlook on their academic and/or professional career, and elation at making new friends and fully experiencing a new culture (Crabtree, 2008; Gaw, 2000; Kiely, 2004; Seiter & Waddell, 1989). Because culture shock has been researched extensively, and the term has gained colloquial popularity, most students expect culture shock upon entry to another country and many receive some type of pre-departure preparation. However, they may not necessarily expect “reverse culture shock” or a “chameleon complex” when returning home. Essentially, there is a lack of preparation in most programs on what to expect when transitioning back to life at home.

## **Issues of Re-entry**

It is first necessary to state again that the period of re-entry following ISL has received very little attention in the literature. Leon (2002) completed a review of eight empirical studies which all drew on Mezirow's theory of transformational learning; none of these studies explored reentry, nor did they analyze how the transformational learning process was influenced by structural or contextual factors (Qtd. in Kiely, 2011, p. 256). Rubin and Matthews (2013) discuss how assessment has been elevated as a priority in the study abroad domain in recent years, as the need to demonstrate the legitimacy and value of these programs via evidence-based research has sharply increased at institutions of higher education (p. 73). The authors note that this will likely pervade the ISL field as well (Rubin & Matthews, 2013, p. 73). Specifically, it is proposed that student outcomes have been studied, but there has not been proper assessment of academic learning outcomes (Rubin & Matthews, 2013). However, while there are numerous studies that have demonstrated evidence of student development, there is a gap in the literature regarding how transformation during the period of re-entry impacts these outcomes (Kiely, 2004).

Much of the existing literature on re-entry comes from fields parallel to ISL. The findings of these works can be holistically described as negative in nature. For example, Werkman (1980) clinically observed that without proper support structures, returnees report dissatisfaction with their lives and are nostalgic for lost lifestyles. Seiter and Waddell (1989) reported a negative correlation between reverse culture shock and relationship satisfaction. Kittridge (1988) found that returnees exhibited a new self-identity that doesn't always conform to American mainstream values. Using a mixed

methods approach on 157 first year college students who recently returned from overseas, Gleason (1973) found that the common problems faced by students returning from abroad were finances, coursework difficulties, career decision confusion, personal identity confusion, and interpersonal relationships.

In addition to the most commonly noted issues associated with re-entry like identity confusion and relationship issues, Gaw (2000) also noted that students returning home were also more likely to exhibit depression and anxiety. Further, and perhaps most importantly, students were not likely to seek help through available student support services if their reverse culture shock symptoms were particularly stressful (Gaw, 2000).

In terms of theory-based study, Richard Kiely is one of the only scholars to focus on the period of re-entry within ISL contexts. Kiely's work (2002, 2004, 2005) supports the notion that high level cognitive dissonance, for example, experiencing poverty for the first time, is crucial to long-term development and transformation. Kiely (2005) notes that this occurs because students continue to draw on the dissonant experiences as inspiration for maintaining and acting on their newly formed critical awareness back at home in the U.S. (p. 15). It is proposed that if there are structured opportunities for participants to engage in both reflective (i.e. processing) and nonreflective (i.e. personalizing and connecting) learning processes with peers, faculty, and community members, transformational learning is more likely to occur and persist over the long term (Kiely, 2005, p. 17).

As discussed above, Kiely's (2004) work, *Chameleon with a Complex*, was groundbreaking for its longitudinal perspective into the transformation that students undergo both during and after ISL. Kiely's work (2002, 2004, 2005) also draws attention

to the larger impact of ISL on global awareness, social justice, and the development of a universal critical consciousness dedicated to fostering human equality. Further, Kiely (2005) suggests from his research findings that knowledge should be generated on the “contextual, visceral, emotive, and affective aspects that enhance transformational learning in service-learning,” rather than focusing on precise methods, disciplinary-based outcomes, and reflective techniques (p. 18). In this same vein, it is proposed that without an understanding of why and how service learning is uniquely transformative, ISL will remain on the periphery of educational institutions (Kiely, 2005, p. 18).

As discussed, critical reflection is heralded in both service learning and ISL as the most crucial component to ensure cognitive dissonance and the subsequent perspective transformation takes place; this seemingly stems from a strong reliance on and acceptance of Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning (Kiely, 2005, p. 5). However, Kiely (2005) proposes that a focus on contextual factors and learning processes, essentially focusing on the “how” instead of the “what,” is deeply important if we are to understand the transformative nature of ISL on cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes (p. 5). Understanding that reflection alone is most likely not responsible for all student outcomes should be of utmost important to ISL researchers, faculty and administrators.

Despite a ten year gap since this work was published, there has yet to be a great level of response in the field to Kiely’s call to action. This is specifically evidenced by Tonkin’s (2011) research agenda for ISL, where the need to understand these processes more deeply is discussed again. Even more precisely, Tonkin (2011) notes that “re-entry and reverse culture shock” is an area that needs attention, posing the question, “In short,

in what ways does the adjustment process have positive or negative outcomes?” (p. 209). Both authors agree that there is a lack of theory-driven practice in the field (Kiely, 2011; Tonkin, 2011).

Due to the lack of theory generation outside of critical reflection and without a solid understanding of the impact of other nonreflective factors (e.g. emotions, connectedness, etc), it appears as though much of the ISL literature has become repetitive and somewhat stagnant. However, Hartman and Kiely (2014) offer a new conception of global service learning, one that necessitates a critical awareness to the rapidly globalizing world around us. Very aptly, the authors draw attention to the idea that ISL has not kept up with growing interest in the field because service learning as a concept is intrinsically tied to ideals of national civic identity and national citizenship (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 7). They note that this is particularly problematic because there is little consensus in the field about how to conceptualize or operationalize the notion of global citizenship in diverse contexts (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 8).

After undertaking a comparative case study where the authors sought to understand students’ conceptions of global engagement and the extent to which students engaged in socially responsible behavior after returning home, it was found that students did not conform to existing theories of global citizenship (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 16). However, students did experience “profound personal struggles and shifts in their behavior and thinking” upon returning home and attempting to integrate their experiences into their lives, mostly falling in line with Kiely’s six dimensions originally proposed in his 2004 study (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 17). These findings reflect a need for a continuously critical approach in the field, as well as a need to more deeply understand

the processes that take place across these dimensions throughout the student experience, before, during, and after service.

While not necessarily contributing to the body of scholarly literature on ISL, another interesting advancement in the field over the last few years has been the proliferation of online resources and communities with a focus on re-entry. One such site is, “Life After Study Abroad,” designed to be a free comprehensive guide to managing life after returning home from studying abroad (*Life After Study Abroad*, 2015). The editors state, “We originally had the idea for Life After Study Abroad when we both returned from studying abroad and realized there was nowhere to find answers to reverse culture shock” (*Life After Study Abroad*, 2015). Offering ideas and guidance on a range of topics from teaching abroad to career advice, there is also a section dedicated solely to reverse culture shock with article titles such as, “The Joys and Woes of Homecoming,” and “Maintaining Relationships You Developed Abroad” (*Life After Study Abroad*, 2015).

Although there is a plethora of potentially helpful information available, there is a decidedly Western character to the site, a strong focus on the individual student experience, and a lack of academic and/or critical discussion of larger societal issues. The broader impact of sites like “Life After Study Abroad” is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to know that students may be utilizing sites such as these in order to process their experience abroad.

### **Transformational Learning**

It is widely accepted that Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning and subsequent models of perspective transformation (1978, 1991, 2000) can be utilized as a

unique conceptual framework for study abroad and ISL researchers assess the transformational learning processes and outcomes that students experience from participation in international programs (Tonkin, 2011, p. 254). By utilizing the ten dimensions, as fully outlined in the first chapter, as a foundation for analyzing the impact international experiences have on intercultural adjustment, researchers have been able to much more concretely understand the cognitive development that takes place within ISL programs (Tonkin, 2011, pp. 254-255).

Although the transformational learning model comfortably stands alone, Taylor (1993) also importantly related this model to other models of intercultural models, placing emphasis on the progressive development and competence that sojourners experience (p. 159). After completing qualitative interviews with 12 North Americans who had lived overseas for over two years, Taylor (1993) found that these participants had experienced a transformational process of becoming interculturally competent in a five stage process: setting the stage, cultural disequilibrium, cognitive orientation (non-reflective and reflective orientations), behavioral learning strategies, and evolving intercultural identity (Qtd. in Tonkin, 2011, p. 256). This research is particularly important to highlight because it added insight into different aspects of the process of learning (Tonkin, 2011, p. 256). Additionally, for the purposes of this study, the non-reflective, emotional, and personal aspects of the process that Taylor (1993) brought to light are important because they demonstrate that the transformational learning process is unique to each sojourner and can be stimulated by factors other than critical reflection.

## **Student Identity Development**

As described in the first chapter, transformational learning theory is generally understood to apply to all adults. There is a lack of distinction in the current literature about how perspective transformation might occur differently for students of traditional college age (generally defined as 18-22 years old). To rectify this and to provide a better understanding of the development process that students are likely simultaneously experiencing during ISL programs, it is helpful to explore one of the most well-known student identity development theories, Chickering and Reisser's "Seven Vectors of Student Development" (1993).

While this theory has gone through several updates and revisions over the years, these seven steps represent the most up-to-date version of the work. The seven vectors, which students assumedly go through more or less in order, represent a continuum of development. Essentially, by terming each stage a "vector," the authors connote that all students may fall at different places along their path of development; there is no one right "beginning" or "end," just an overall increasing capacity in each area (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

To fully understand the theory, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of each vector. First, the notion of "Developing Competence" proposes that students first expand their proficiency in each of the following three areas: intellectual competence, physical competence, and interpersonal competence. The second vector is "Managing Emotions," referring to the period where students increasingly figure out how to deal with, control, and experience emotions of all varieties. The third vector describes how students are actively "Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence," with a focus of gaining

an understanding of balance between self-reliance, belonging, and how personal actions affect others. The fourth vector, “Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships,” refers to an increasing awareness and openness to new and different ideas, people, backgrounds, etc. This vector appears to be particularly relevant to students in international contexts, developing their intercultural awareness (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Finally, the fifth stage is the centerpiece of the theory and refers to the period where a student has fully established a sense of self. This vector, “Establishing Identity,” incorporates the first four stages and then also enables the last two stages, “Developing Purpose” and “Developing Integrity.” In the fifth vector, students really feel comfortable as their own individual person; they have increasing self-esteem, a growing sense of stability about their life, as well as a greater understanding of their own background and personality. They are then able to create a plan for their life and a moral code by which to guide their future actions in the last two vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

If Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning is viewed through the lens of Chickering and Reisser’s seven vector model, there are a few key implications for ISL research. First, the process of shifting perspectives - that is, reassessing deeply held beliefs and cultural paradigms – while simultaneously attempting to work towards establishing one’s own identity, is likely to be a very complex and disorienting process. It seems likely that to have this dual experience during this particular period of life would lead to even greater cognitive dissonance and transformation than if ISL were undertaken earlier or later in life. Second, many of the stages are similar in nature between the two theories, for example “developing purpose” might correspond or overlap with “planning a course of action.” Potentially, students who are already further along in their identity

development before an ISL experience might be more likely to experience transformation. These two ideas seemingly support the idea that it is necessary to investigate students' intercultural competence prior to entering into ISL programs, their motivation for participation, as well as how they adjust to intercultural settings once abroad, in order to more fully understand their capacity for transformation (Kiely 2005; Kim, 2001; Savicki, Binder, & Heller, 2008; Taylor, 1993).

While the field of ISL is, as a whole, focused on student learning in an academic sense, responsibility for student identity development outside of the classroom is typically tasked to student affairs professionals. Barbara Jacoby and Associates (2003) published an edited work entitled, *Building Partnerships for Service Learning*, proposing that in order for service learning to work, intentional partnerships must be built both internally and externally. Specifically, Engstrom (2003) highlights the need to partner between academic affairs and student affairs. Engstrom (2003) describes how both enterprises grew separately throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with faculty primarily focusing on the production of knowledge and student affairs professionals concerned with the psychosocial and emotional well-being of students (p. 68). Many scholars have noted the need for these actors to work together in order to promote more integrated and holistic ways of learning (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Kuh, 1996; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991), yet there is not much evidence of student development theory utilized as a framework for research or even referenced in the current literature on ISL.

To borrow again from the domestic service learning body of knowledge, one relevant study that veers away from learning and towards understanding the role of emotional experience in service learning is Carson and Domangue's (2013) work.

Utilizing qualitative methods and an inductive process of analysis, 42 students were studied over the course of three semesters and were found to experience dissimilar emotions, apparently stemming from their prior experiences with service learning or incoming expectations (Carson & Domangue, 2013, pp. 139, 144). Utilizing Cole's (1993) conceptualization of emotional states in service to others as "hazards" or "satisfactions," the authors found that students experienced "rollercoasters" of emotion, often dynamically changing while engaged in service learning (Carson & Domangue, 2013, pp. 145-147). The authors stated that the available literature on service learning was virtually void of understanding regarding why and how certain emotions were evoked in service contexts and also called for further research on the affective aspects of service learning to better enhance the student experience and pedagogy overall (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

While not completed in an international context, this research importantly draws attention to the affective aspects of service. These aspects, which can be described in a very basic way as the emotions, moods, and feelings of participants, have been demonstrated to be understudied in the ISL field. This work serves as a reminder that service learning is a complex and multi-dimensional experience which cannot solely be captured by the evaluation of learning outcomes – a notion which will prove useful for the current study.

Finally, in 2008, Robin Crabtree published an article reviewing the theoretical foundations of international service learning. This extremely comprehensive work provides a great value to the field in terms of compiling relevant ISL theory and noting directions for future research. However, Crabtree (2008) does not highlight traditional

models of student development theory in this overview, accenting the problematic dichotomy between faculty and student affairs in the field of ISL discussed above.

Student identity development is mentioned in multiple contexts, but Crabtree's (2008) view remains firmly planted in the academic viewpoint of an experienced ISL researcher and faculty member.

Importantly, Crabtree (2008) does discuss crossover efforts from other campus partners in one particular aspect of service learning: the re-entry process. The difficulty and complexity of this process is discussed briefly and Crabtree (2008) highlights the previous work of Quiroga (2004) and Kiely (2004), offering some of Kiely's post-service strategies such as identifying alternative study abroad options, post-graduation service placements, or campus speaking opportunities – all in efforts to sustain the impact of the ISL experience (p. 22). However, it is the following statement that might be the most useful within the context of bridging the gap between academics and student affairs; Crabtree (2008) writes, “Our campuses’ international study abroad programs, international offices, and counseling services may have training or support personnel and useful resources to share” (p. 22).

It is from this short quote that we can arrive at a critical point. During the process of re-entry, even more so than before or during the period of international service learning, there exists a huge capacity for collaboration between the two “sides of the house” within the University – academics and student affairs – to partner together to promote further student development, transformational learning, and a critical global consciousness.

## Summary

Overall, by examining the field of ISL first through the conceptualization of the three overlapping domains of service learning, study abroad, and international education, and then through the current body of research on culture shock and re-entry in ISL, and finally by exploring the relationship of ISL to relevant student development theories, there are a few key implications for the current study. First and foremost, there is a clear need to research the ways in which students experience the re-entry process. This was clearly noted as part of Tonkin's (2011) ISL research agenda. Additionally, following Kiely's (2004) conceptualization of a returning student as a "Chameleon with a Complex," the field has still not responded to his call for further scholarly inquiry into how students experience the challenges and difficulties of re-entry (p. 17).

Further, it has also been demonstrated that it is crucial to understand the contextual factors and the "how" of the student experience. Specifically, I have highlighted how important it is to try to understand how these processes operate in conjunction with, as well as separately from, the process of critical reflection to promote perspective transformation. And finally, a few other crucial concepts in the literature have been explored like the lack of diversity in ISL, the larger impact of ISL on creating a global critical consciousness, and the need for collaboration within institutions of higher education, all of which have appropriately set the scene for the context in which the current study will take place.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Site Description

Over the past few years, many institutions of higher education have outsourced study abroad and service learning programs to organizations that maintain a professional expertise and an expansive global network within these domains, such as the International Partnership for Service Learning and Amizade (*Amizade, 2015; IPSL, 2015*). Third party organizations often are able to maintain long term partnerships and ensure program related tasks are completed efficiently (*IPSL, 2015*). Because planning for ISL takes significant work at the university level, including collaboration and strategic planning (*Plater, 2011*), utilizing a third party organization could mean less work for busy professors and administrators.

However, educational institutions that grapple with the same financial realities that their students do understand that it may be more affordable to design, propose, and implement service learning programs within their departments. This is particularly effective given the availability of service learning planning materials and the ease of the sharing materials, best practices, and strategies online. While both internal and external programs are largely accepted as appropriate formats for service learning, I have chosen to research an internal program that values student access to educational experiences abroad.

Operated by Professor Dan Brook at San Jose State University (SJSU) in California, the “Hands on Thailand” is a new three-week service learning course that was offered to all students of the University in June 2015. Designed as an Introduction to

Sociology course and taken for standard course credit (3 credit hours), the experience is open to any student and will be graded on a Credit/No Credit basis. At the foundation of this program is a desire to introduce students to Thai culture while providing a “structured opportunity to have an international service-learning academic experience that is educational, useful, and transformational” (Brook, 2015).

Specifically, students were required to participate in academic work (lectures, readings, etc), 10-15 weekly hours of service with a local organization, group reflection sessions, and multiple group excursions and tours. The course as a whole is designed to be culturally immersive, community based, and fun, while also adhering to the standard tenets of pedagogically designed GSL (Brook, 2015). In terms of the outcomes, Professor Brook has identified five key areas of learning:

SLO1: Students will be able to think sociologically about the relationship between social structure, interaction, identities, and inequalities;

SLO2: Students will be able to identify and explain major sociological theories and apply them to everyday life;

SLO3: Students will be proficient in qualitative and quantitative research design, data collection and data analysis;

SLO4: Students will be proficient in oral and written communication skills appropriate to the discipline;

SLO5: Students will be able to practice sociology as educated and civically engaged persons. (Brook, 2015)

Beyond these comprehensive outcomes, it is Dr. Brook's explanation of how students will transform that makes this site particularly useful to my study. He notes in his syllabus that students will return to SJSU with more knowledge, skills, abilities, confidence, and excitement to better succeed in school, including graduate, school, the workforce, and in society (Brook, 2015). It is exactly these outcomes that my study hopes to investigate. (Please see the appendix for the detailed course syllabus which contains full descriptions of how each learning outcome will be achieved in accordance with program requirements).

While this is the first service learning program Dr. Brook has instituted at SJSU, Dr. Brook himself is quite familiar with Thailand. In past years, he has taught English in Thailand and has visited many times since, establishing connections with both the culture and the people. Dr. Brook proposes that Southeast Asia is the ideal setting for service learning, as have other service-learning professionals, particularly as it relates to development in terms of population, economy, and social change (Brook, 2015). In thinking broadly about the site, it is necessary to set the scene by providing a better understanding of the country, city, and culture in which the "Hands on Thailand" program will take place.

As a nation of over 67.5 million people, Thailand is the only nation of Southeast Asia that was never conquered during British and European colonization, leaving intact a strong monarchy and very deep cultural roots (*One World, 2014*). While some argue that Thailand is still developing as a nation, Thailand became an "upper-middle income economy" in 2011, due largely to sustained growth during the 1980's (*Thailand Overview, 2014*). However, Thailand has lagged behind in development compared to

other East Asian countries, particularly due to the global financial crisis in 2008-2009, the flood in 2011, and political tensions and instability in 2010 and again in 2013-2014 (*Thailand Overview, 2014*). As a whole, Thailand still faces many challenges, primarily related to widespread poverty outside of its major cities (*Thailand Overview, 2014*).

Since the end of World War II, Thailand has upheld a positive political relationship with the United States, and is known worldwide as a popular tourist destination (*One World, 2014*). Thailand is also commonly referred to as the “Land of Smiles,” and over 95% of the country is of the Buddhist faith (*One World, 2014*). Thais strongly value education and the country sustains a high literacy rate of over 90% for both men and women (*One World, 2014*). Further, Thai people place a high value on history, customs, and tradition, and in both the experience of Professor Brook and myself, the Thai people are very kind and open to assistance from “outsiders,” as long as they are well-intentioned.

In the north of Thailand sits Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand, known as a cultural center of Asia. While the railway to Chiang Mai was completed in 1921, the city remained secluded for many years. Chiang Mai has only recently started to experience rapid development within the last fifteen years, and much of the traditional “Lanna” (translated as, “Land of a Million Rice Fields”) culture and sights have been well preserved. The city has a well-known night market, a plethora of Thai and global cuisine options, many Buddhist Temples, traditional Thai massage parlors, cheap accommodations, a few well-known educational institutions, and seemingly endless shopping, nightlife, and sport options. As such, Chiang Mai presents a perfect setting in which to implement a culturally immersive GSL experience.

Within the city of Chiang Mai, students will be exposed to all that the city has to offer, but will use a local hotel, the Royal Guest House, as their base of operations. The living arrangements of the participants on this trip within this guest house will be pivotal to their experience. While this guesthouse offers some standard amenities students may be used to at home (air conditioning, wireless internet, and a pool), living together for three weeks in close quarters, without access to clean drinking water from the tap, and adjusting to new standards of cleanliness may prove to impact the overall experience. Additionally, students will self-select their roommates prior to departure. This experience may simulate a residential life experience that will surely impact the living-learning community that will likely develop. I will certainly observe at the guesthouse and ensure that these important dynamics are explored as I undertake my research with participants.

In addition to understanding the actual setting in which the service-learning will take place, it is also helpful to understand the home institution of the students who will partake in the program. The detailed make-up of the case and its participants will be discussed further, but an overview of the home institution and its mission may help provide a better sense of the purpose associated with this specific program. SJSU is a major, comprehensive public institution located in the heart of Silicon Valley and is the oldest state University in California. SJSU is strongly committed to providing access to education. The University website states, “Among [our] most prized traditions is an uncompromising commitment to offer access to higher education to all persons who meet the criteria for admission, yielding a stimulating mix of age groups, cultures, and economic backgrounds for teaching, learning and research.” The University also promotes a strong commitment to developing a sense of social and global responsibility

in students and operates a vibrant Center for Community Learning and Leadership. Finally, implementation of service-learning projects has been supported across multiple departments, particularly as evidenced by the acceptance and implementation of the new “Hands on Thailand” program (*San Jose State University: Mission*, 2014).

To gain access to this site, I have requested to use the program as the basis of my study via Professor Dan Brook and have been approved to use the participants as the foundation for my research. In order to research SJSU students, I also need to complete an official form with the SJSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) to provide the details of my study and inform that I have received appropriate approval from the Temple University IRB. I will still need to obtain individual student permission to use personal written materials and interviews; however, Dr. Brook will provide additional access to application materials and academic work for document review as requested. Finally, I plan on creating specific recommendations for this program to increase long-term student learning and development that could be implemented by Dr. Brook or his colleagues in the future.

### **Sample Population**

While the number of students accepted into the program will vary depending on final applications, it is expected that approximately 15-20 students will participate in the Chiang Mai program. However, even with just 15 participants, this relatively small group will allow for a detailed, in-depth analysis of each individual’s learning process and re-entry experience as part of the case.

Initially, I will reach out to the entire group and may narrow down the group if there are any students who voice that they do not want to participate. I plan to narrow my

focus of study to a specific set of participants based on whether or how they show initial signs of perspective transformation during our first round of interviews on-site in Chiang Mai. Once these students are identified, I will more closely follow their experience in Chiang Mai. Any others who do not show signs of perspective transformation will still be interviewed, observed, and analyzed; their experience is still quite valuable to the case. However, those who truly experience transformation are the participants whom I would like to focus more energy on for the purposes of this study. One defining aspect of this study, and particularly of the participant sample, will be that it will reflect diversity in many forms. Traditionally, most participants in ISL are Caucasian females from North America, and the literature has tended to reflect this population demographic (Kiely, 2004, p. 17). Further, study abroad and GSL experiences tend to be more available to those who have the financial means to travel internationally (McMullen & Penn, 2011). I propose that these students – typically middle and upper-class – likely have a larger understanding of the intrinsic personal and professional value of immersive cultural experiences, due to the educational privilege they have access to. However, the group participating in the Hands on Thailand program will not reflect the average ISL participants.

As described above, my study will interpret meaning amongst a diverse group of public university students, as well as students from various academic disciplines, abilities, genders, sexual preferences, races, and socio-economic backgrounds. From the researcher's perspective, incorporating diversity will ensure that multiple perspectives are heard and that a rich data set is obtained. This is important because it will help illuminate how the process of transformational learning takes place for each unique individual, with

each offering many different examples and perspectives. But additionally, by ensuring that the sites are diverse, there will likely be larger implications in terms of access to transformational educational experiences in higher education. By selecting the participants that I focus my analysis on within my final report, I will strive to ensure the participants reflect diversity in a number of ways.

### **Procedures & Instrumentation**

As Lichtman (2006) has noted, “Qualitative research is an umbrella term” (p. 22). While many methods and paradigms can be reflected in this one word, using specific qualitative methods designed to capture the personal experience of individuals in an interpretivist tradition will be the most effective method of answering my research questions. Gathering multiple sources of data is crucial in qualitative research in order for researchers to form insights and draw conclusions. For this study I will utilize a variety of methods of data collection including observations, interviews, and private document review (i.e. student journals and/or blogs). It is important to note that I will not act as a participant in the service activities or academic components of the trip, but will complete observations while simultaneously obtaining a first-hand experience alongside the participants.

Further, while I will be observing and interviewing participants before, during and after the ISL experience, I will not be able to fully participate in or capture the experience of all of their activities. I will only be on site for one week of the three week program and may only get to visit a few service sites within Chiang Mai, of which there will likely be five to seven. I anticipate being able to explore the physical nature of the service sites, the guest house, the city, and potentially accompany the group on one to two excursions

outside of the city (i.e. to an elephant reserve, a Buddhist Temple, or other cultural site). However, I know that the larger group will experience Chiang Mai in ways in which I will not, and that I will aim to participate in as many group reflection sessions as possible and record the others in order to be exposed to as many critical participant experiences as possible.

While many institution-based ISL programs require pre-service orientations, there is no official “orientation” for the “Hands on Thailand” program. However, there will be a pre-departure meeting in mid-April where students will meet one another, review the syllabus and course expectations, discuss the cultural norms of Thailand and Chiang Mai, and choose rooming assignments. This will be a crucial stage during which to interview students. However, because I will not be there in person, my perspective could be skewed regarding participants’ expectations prior to the meeting. Additionally, at this point in the program planning process, there are no post-service requirements for students. This could make it difficult for students to stay engaged and to want to continue to provide updates on their experiences and participate in interviews with me following their return to the U.S. Given these circumstances, it is particularly crucial for me to utilize multiple sources along the way to truly obtain the essence of each student’s experience.

It is also important to highlight that I will be an outsider to the organization and will need to develop relationships with both the staff and the students early on in my research in order for everyone to be forthcoming with me in every method of research utilized. My role as a researcher will be primary; however I will also be seeking to develop trusting relationships with participants in order for them to feel comfortable

enough to provide detailed explanations of their experiences. This is one of the key reasons why I will begin my research (and outreach) prior to the students' departure from the United States. I hope that by beginning the process prior to the students' arrival, I will then be able to obtain a more complete and total picture of the GSL program in Chiang Mai – before, during, and after.

For my observations, I will be present for a week's worth of activities on-site in Chiang Mai towards the end of the experience. This method will include observations during service experiences, academic lectures and discussions, recreational outings, reflection time, and "down time." Lichtman (2000) states, "Observing humans in natural settings assists in understanding the complexity of human behavior and interrelationships among groups" (p. 139). While I will not specifically be a "participant observer," I will take fieldnotes on participant behavior and relationships in an array of settings and may participate in specific activities if requested to do so. In formal settings, I will use a computer or iPad to type notes. When in informal settings, I will jot notes during the conversation or as soon as possible thereafter. My observations will focus on exploring how participants are transforming their frames of reference, understanding their process of growth and reflection, and interacting with other participants, community members, administrators, and personal friends and family members.

In addition to completing observations, I will also be completing interviews. Interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research and provide an excellent way to set up a situation where participants will share thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the researcher (Lichtman, 2000, pp. 116-117). Interviews will also allow me as the researcher to take control over the line of questioning and will

provide direct information filtered through the views of the participants (Lichtman, 2000, pp. 116-117). While my main focus will be on students, I will also aim to interview Professor Brook as well as a few of the community partners during the trip, to the greatest extent possible given time and language constraints. All interviews will be taped and transcribed.

Over the course of the study, I will complete “unstructured” individual interviews with participants. “Unstructured” interviews are designed to attempt to capture the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 653). By using interviews that are emergent in nature, a “human-to-human” relationship that places value on understanding over explanation is established (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 654). This style of interviewing is innately anthropological in nature and geared towards researchers working in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2000). While my study is focused on a specific case of students, elements of ethnography are certainly present. Developing a rapport that is based on mutual trust is very important as I negotiate conversations with students in attempts to accurately capture the realities they face as ISL participants. It is important to note that as I guide each interview, I will focus my line of questioning on the experiences that have led to shifts in perspective and to the resulting emotions from these potential shifts. I will aim to gather as much detail as possible, while letting the participants describe their experience and transformation in their own words.

In terms of the logistics, I aim to perform these interviews once prior to the ISL program, once during the program (on-site), and twice upon their return home. It is my hope that these interviews will be at least an hour in length at each interval. The first set

of interviews will take place online via Skype or another online service prior to leaving the U.S., before the start of the program. The second set will take place in Chiang Mai, most likely within the guest house where the participants will be staying or at another neutral locale in the city. The third and fourth interviews will take place via Skype or via phone after participants have returned home, a few weeks after their return and a few months after their return, respectively, following their re-entry. I will also work with Dr. Brook to facilitate a focus group during my site visit, which will essentially serve as a group interview – the goal of which will be to reflect on individual and group experiences and encourage students to process their experiences with each other.

As I have discussed, I believe that the period of re-entry is critical in the process of student learning and meaning-making and has not been given enough attention in the recent literature. Because of this, I will focus energies on engaging with participants as much as possible following the ISL experience (Kiely, 2011, p. 256). Outside of the two proposed interviews, I will encourage more conversations if participants are willing to participate. While a few studies exist that follow participants longitudinally (Kiely, 2002; Kiely, 2004), there are no established guidelines as to when follow-up interviews and/or interactions should take place. I propose that a period of three months (almost as long as a typical U.S. academic semester) after the trip will allow student participants enough time to acclimate or “readjust” back to their life at home, to reflect deeply on the international experience they had and their process of reentry, and to begin to manifest long-term change into their lives.

Finally, I will perform a document review by studying participants’ journals about their experiences on the trip and examining participants’ final capstone projects to

uncover what they learned from the service activities they participated in as part of the “Hands on Thailand” program. I will also ask participants to share any journals, videos, or blogs that they have created to better understand how they have integrated and related their academic knowledge with their experience in the local communities. All of these documents may potentially be incomplete or inaccurate, but will provide a personal glimpse into the lived experiences and the learning outcomes of the students during their time abroad. These documents will act as written or photographic evidence of these experiences and will serve as an accessible way of understanding the language participants use to describe events and feelings. Even more specifically, I believe that it is likely that if students are experiencing a significant period of personal transformation, it will be evident in the materials that the participants have created. I will obtain permission before accessing this data and from each individual participant before using any personal material in my final narrative.

### **Data Analysis**

It is significant to note at this point that the process of qualitative data analysis is ongoing and does not follow a prescribed path. Analyzing this case study will require that I provide detailed descriptions of the setting and the individuals involved so that the data may be coded, categorized, and organized in order to interpret and bring meaning to the information presented. During data collection I will utilize a computer to keep files organized and secure. After the data collection, I will follow the traditional qualitative “cut and paste” method; that is, I will hand-code information and organize it in a way in which themes and trends clearly emerge. I will digitize my findings as necessary, but I will not be using a computer program to assist with the data analysis. In this analysis, I

will utilize the ongoing, iterative process Lichtman (2000) describes as the “Three C’s:” that is, the process of analyzing data by moving from “overarching codes,” to more “narrow categories,” and finally, to a “few key concepts” (p. 167-168).

Finally, while I will be pursuing the research outside of my “backyard,” so to speak, it is also important that I employ multiple validity measures in order to create reader confidence in the findings (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). To ensure validity, I will triangulate the data via usage of multiple data sources, clarify the bias that I will bring to the study, and will utilize “member checking” in the form of a follow-up meeting with participants. Finally, I will use rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings as part of the ultimate qualitative narrative that will serve as my dissertation. Important to note again is that generalization is not the goal of this study. The final narrative of the case will focus on the central conceptual issues but will also tell a detailed story of the meaning-making process that participants experience in hopes of aiding in the reader’s own personal construction of knowledge and interpretation of the outcomes (Creswell, 2009, p. 184-200; Stake, 2000, p. 438-442).

### **Anticipated Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues are prevalent in every stage of qualitative research. It is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the participant from harm and ensure their rights are respected throughout the study. To this end, I will follow the American Psychological Association’s published guidelines on ethical principles and codes of conduct. Specifically, I aim to adhere to the five general principles that guide research in the field: beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice,

and respect for people's rights and dignity (APA, 2015). Because sensitive and personal information is often revealed in observational research, it is crucial that the researcher identify how the rights of participants will be protected.

Below are the steps that will be taken to address the specific ethical issues that may arise within this study:

- a. A proposal will be filed with the Temple University IRB and approval will be received before any data is collected.
- b. Participants will be notified verbally and in writing about the research goals, objectives, and structure to encourage a clear understanding of what participation in the study entails.
- c. Participants must complete an informed consent form before they take part in the research study. This step will ensure participants acknowledge the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in a qualitative study.
- d. Participants may receive written copies of transcriptions and/or interpretations of data upon request.
- e. The rights and wishes of participants will be taken into consideration regarding reporting of the data. All participant identities will be concealed throughout the research process unless participants feel strongly that they would like to reveal their identity within the final report, effectively "retaining ownership of their voice." (Creswell, 2009, p. 90).
- f. To encourage reciprocity, participants will be collaboratively engaged in the data collection process, will be encouraged to be a part of the analysis process, and will be informed if any personal information will be utilized in the final report.

g. To uphold respect for the research site, research will take place in such a way that effectively minimizes the impact of observations and interviews. Interviews will be conducted at night to reduce interference in the service schedule and observations will be performed in a non-overt way that encourages participants to focus attention on their actions and work.

As the sole researcher, my role will be critical in this study. To ensure that my position as a University administrator at Temple University does not conflict with my research or promote bias in my study, I have decided to undertake my case study with a program outside of my home institution. This will ensure that I do not know the student participants prior to the study and will give me an unbiased perspective on their participation in the program. However, it is also important to note that in my role as a researcher, I may need to intervene during data collection to fulfill my obligation as an educator. For example, if a student discloses that they have been abusing drugs while on the trip, my responsibility as an ethical student affairs professional would necessitate that I share this information with the professor. This is a potential limitation of my methodology that could interfere with the accuracy of my results. However, Laubscher (1994) reports that decisive intervention in the field is necessary in order for students to begin theorizing about their experiences (qtd. in Anderson, 2003).

Also, I am entering into the study with the notion in mind that I have the capacity to influence the student experience. Essentially, by probing into students' experiences, I may, in fact, be impacting their growth by promoting internal reflection and external expression. These factors will be noted in my analysis, but should not detract from the overall findings of my research. I also understand that my study may be limited in some

regard since I won't be able to consistently monitor each participant, and I may necessarily need to provide students with guidance on how to reflect on their own experience. By providing students tools to be successful, my sole aim will be to assist participants in further understanding their individual process of learning, not to fulfill my personal research goals.

### **Personal Biases**

In my past experience, I have spent time traveling abroad, studying abroad, as well as completing a service learning trip and spending time volunteering in my local community. The subject of international service learning and the transformation that may result from this experience is very close to my heart. I feel that I have experienced a transformation in my own personal frames of reference, and because of this, I do think that I bring a specific bias to my topic. I have also spent time researching and reading about the subject, and I aspire to a career in this field. In this way, I bring a unique focus to my study as well. Additionally, I am currently a student affairs administrator and work with students on a daily basis – a fact that could in some ways could blind me to subtle signs of transformation, development, and growth.

However, I do not feel that these factors will prohibit me from exploring my research question with an open mind. I will anticipate that ethical and bias-related issues will arise, however I simultaneously acknowledge that the participants and the situation will be removed enough from my own sphere of influence to give me a fair amount of perspective. In this sense, I will be knowledgeable on the topic and connected to the participants and site, but I will have enough “space” to create new relationships within the context of this particular setting.

## Summary

In a broad sense, my methodology will address calls from the ISL field to utilize quality case study research with a solid theoretical framework, as well as calls to follow participants throughout the learning process rather than analyze their experiences through a retrospective lens or ask participants to recall old memories (Kiely & Hartman, 2011; Merrill & Pusch, 2007, p. 38; Taylor, 2000, p. 319). By giving a deeper knowledge of how participants in this three-week long ISL program experience transformational learning and manage their new perspectives upon returning home, I believe that this case study will allow us to gain knowledge of how the learning process occurs while also gaining valuable knowledge that may inform future ISL pedagogy and design.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

In this chapter I will present the findings of my study, undertaken from June 2015 to December 2015. First I will review my methodology and the details of the case, including the demographics of the participants of this specific program. Then, I will present the findings from my data sequentially, first unpacking the experience of students during the international service learning program in Chiang Mai, followed by the experience of students upon their re-entry to the United States in the months following the program. In this format, I will use the qualitative data collected to answer my initial research questions:

1. Do undergraduate student participants of a three-week ISL program to Chiang Mai, Thailand exhibit evidence of transformational learning?
  - a. How do participants describe the process of examining and re-interpreting their frames of reference before, during, and after the trip?
  - b. What feelings and emotions do participants experience before, during, and after the experience?
2. If participants demonstrate evidence of transformational learning, what factors do these participants believe contribute to their ability to manage this transformation upon re-entry?
  - a. Do participants show evidence of continued perspective transformation after returning home?
  - b. Do participants feel supported upon re-entry?
  - c. What resources and/or experiences do participants feel they need in order to

translate their experience back to their life at home?

c. How long do participants experience the re-entry process, and do their needs change over time?

### **Background**

On June 6th, 2015, the Hands on Thailand program began as the majority of the group departed together from San Francisco, California bound for Chiang Mai, Thailand. The group was comprised of 16 participants, mainly students entering into their junior or senior year of college at San Jose State University, and Dr. Dan Brook, the instructor of the course. Interest in this first-time program was very high and students learned about the program mainly from the Sociology department at the University as well as via flyers on campus. After submitting a detailed application, 16 students were selected by Dr. Brook based on their main application essay that asked participants to describe what they hoped to gain from participating in a service learning course in Thailand. At least five other applicants were not accepted into the program to keep the enrollment to a "manageable" number, as determined by Dr. Brook and the sponsoring department.

Despite the fact all of the students were mainly recruited by the Sociology department, the 16 participants were diverse in terms of their academic majors. As the ISL course was categorized as an "Introduction to Sociology" course, many of the participants were Sociology, Psychology, and Anthropology majors. However, the course was advertised University-wide, and attracted other students from a variety of fields such as Nursing and International Business who were looking to add an international study component to their degree.

Additionally, the participants had similar reasons for joining this program. As

noted, multiple participants described being attracted to the program via a physical flyer that they saw on-campus. One participant, Lisa, said that she had been looking for something different and didn't want to "sit behind a desk" on a "typical" study abroad program (Day 2 Observation). Others were attracted to the program because of Dr. Brook, who has a generally popular reputation amongst Sociology students on campus and a relaxed personality and teaching style. The majority of participants noted that the course location in Thailand and the reasonable cost were large factors in their choice to apply (Day 4 Reflection Session). As a whole, most of the group was interested in traveling, personal growth, taking part in a new experience, working in a community setting outside of the classroom, while also expanding their resume experience.

Prior to leaving for the program, after the participants were notified that they were chosen for the experience, they were given instruction by Dr. Brook that they would be responsible for setting up their own community service sites prior to arrival in Thailand. This aspect of the HoT program was very unique and provided initial cultural contact with the Thai community while students were still in San Francisco. Most participants described later that this step was a challenge and they lacked direction in how best to contact local organizations and schools. However, while there was stress associated with this process for some, it proved to be a positive experience for many. Participant Crystal noted after the program, "For some people it might be hard, but I liked it because I got the ability to know that I could do things on my own... It was our job to figure it out ourselves" (Crystal Interview 1). This serves as an illustration of the independence and freedom instilled in students as part of the HoT program.

Additionally, it is important to note in setting the stage for the program the

varying levels of cultural exposure encapsulated within the group of 16 participants. Most of the participants had undertaken some travel previously, typically on family vacations to locations within America or to neighboring countries, like Mexico, Canada, Costa Rica, the Bahamas, etc. A few other students had traveled more extensively throughout the world, some having been on backpacking trips and/or school trips; these few described that they already had the "travel bug" and talked often about the destination of their next adventures frequently.

However, there were also two important outliers within the group. Brian, a junior History major who is heavily involved in Greek life at SJSU, had traveled to many countries previously since he was very young. As the son of a gate attendant with a major international airline, Brian was often able to travel for free, as was the case for this trip. Brian described that Thailand was always high on his list of places to visit again and for a longer time, so that he could really experience the culture (Day 3 Observation). The second outlier was Jason. As a senior at SJSU, Jason was a non-traditional student, starting his college career in his late 20's following a turbulent period including the death of both of his parents and subsequent alcohol abuse. Committed to making a difference as a community activist and Sociology major interested in urban development, Jerry had never had the opportunity to leave Northern California in his life and was thrilled not only to be able to explore a new country, but a culture that was so vastly different to the American way of life (Day 2 Observation). The differences between these two students and their prior experiences and rationale for participating in the program certainly had an impact on their respective experiences, which I will discuss further later in this chapter.

In terms of preparation for the program, most participants described the “pre-trip” period as overwhelmingly positive. During the pre-departure orientation meeting in April, the group discussed the schedule and appropriate logistics. Moreover, this meeting was an opportunity for the group to meet each other and begin the process of forming relationships and setting expectations for the ISL trip. Only two or three of the participants had known each other prior to the trip, and those who did noted that they only knew one another on a surface level mainly from shared classes. In this sense, from an administrative perspective, the preparatory meeting served to provide helpful logistical information. However, from the groups' perspective, this meeting served as a type of social lubricant and made everyone more excited for the upcoming journey.

### **Site Description**

Upon my arrival in Chiang Mai at the start of the third week of the service learning program, the group was bonded as a cohesive unit. There was also a palpable feeling that Chiang Mai was "home," and as participants were preparing to leave their placements, everyone was attempting to explore the sites of Chiang Mai that they had yet to see. I spent the last five days of the program observing all of the service learning placements, taking part in two reflection discussions, eating meals with the group, and talking to participants during periods of "down time." I acted as a participant observer, taking notes whenever possible and yet attempting to be present in the moment. At certain times, I was just another member of the group, and at times I acted in an advisory role to certain students; sometimes I was fairly invisible, and other times I provided input or advice. Dr. Brook notified the group in advance that I would be participating and I was warmly accepted with open arms into the program, as another American experiencing the

magic of Chiang Mai for the first time.

As anticipated, the various service learning sites were vastly different from one another and served to impact the students differently. As noted previously, the students were responsible for arranging their sites in advance of the trip to the greatest extent possible. This final list of site placements included: teaching English at a local school for aspiring monks, teaching English to sex workers via a nation-wide activist organization known as "Empower," working with rescued animals at a non-profit organization called "Care for Dogs," volunteering at an organic farm, and assisting with editing a Master's thesis with scholars at Chiang Mai University in association with the "Mekong School" of activists. During my time in Chiang Mai, I visited the first four placements. The last placement, which falls slightly outside the standard definition of "service," was only two weeks in duration so I was unable to observe this site. However, I took time to discuss it in detail with the two students who took advantage of this unique opportunity.

The first, and most popular, site was the colloquially termed, "monk school." Located about 45 minutes outside of downtown Chiang Mai, the boys-only school educates students utilizing a traditional curriculum while also incorporating elements of Buddhism, such as chanting and prayers, throughout the day. While some of the students are local, many of the boys come from long distances (and even other countries) in order to attend the school and live with families nearby. This particular school had never welcomed foreign teachers before. However, they were eager to work with the HoT participants so that the boys could be exposed to native English speakers in their studies. The headmaster of the school would welcome the girls from the HoT program each day, show them to their classroom, provide a hot lunch for the group, and give necessary

feedback about the current English knowledge of the boys being taught that day. The girls taught full days (approximately six hours) three times a week for the three weeks of the program to a large classroom of around 25 boys per class. (Day 1 Observation)

On the particular day that I joined the program, seven female participants were teaching including Crystal, Cameron, Payton, Riley, Colleen, Ivie, and Lucy. Six of them had taught regularly since the start of the program. Two of the seven were also taking part in another service activity in Chiang Mai (Ivie and Payton), but had both joined the teaching group after hearing about how rewarding the experience had been. None of the seven had previous teaching experience before coming to Chiang Mai, so most of their "lesson plans" were created on the spot as a group according to the needs of the boys on that day. This setting became a great learning grounds for the girls, as they began to hone in on the skill set needed to teach the English language and communicate effectively with those who did not speak a great deal of the language. However, while their teaching methods were fairly elementary, the boys were very appreciative and demonstrated evidence of growth in their proficiency during each session. Prior to the girls' departure, the school hosted a small ceremony and presented them with a certificate and the girls similarly reciprocated with parting presents. This site provided a great deal of exposure to Thai language and culture and overall was extremely successful in achieving the mission of the HoT program. (Day 1 Observation)

While the second placement location was also dedicated to teaching English, the setting was entirely opposite to that of the monk school. "Empower," a well-known Thai organization devoted to promoting rights for sex workers, is located above a bar off of a busy road near downtown Chiang Mai. The five female participants (Ivie, Lara, Teresa,

Lily, and Louisa) taught English at least three times per week for over five hours per day for the three weeks of the program, amongst other English teachers who volunteered occasionally for the program as well. As part of the mission of the organization, learning English is seen as vital to the role of sex workers in Thailand both in terms of physical protection and in terms of expanding their client base (Day 1 Observation).

On the day that I visited Empower, one of the participants had paid for a translator to be present so that the participants could accurately learn about the sex worker experience in an open discussion setting with two of the leaders of the organization. This was a particularly interesting time to visit. I learned a great deal from the conversation and was able to witness how the students had grown in their understanding of this issue throughout the course of the program. The discussion went on for over two hours and all participants were highly engaged. Typically, on a regular day, the girls would teach English alone for a morning or afternoon to a group of 5-7 adult women. As a whole, in this service site, students were exposed to language and culture, but also to very important current political and social issues facing Thailand and the entire Southeast Asian region (Day 1 Observation).

On my second day of observations, I spent most of the day at the third service site, "Care for Dogs." This nonprofit organization, run by an elderly retired British woman, is devoted to rescuing, rehabilitating, and caring for stray dogs with the ultimate goal of placing these dogs up for adoption at homes all around the world. Three students, two female and one male, Brian, Gabriella, and Lisa, worked at this site for approximately three days a week, each week of the program. Other volunteers from around the globe were prevalent at Care for Dogs, some volunteering for only a few

hours and others who had been assisting regularly for years. At this placement, the students were responsible for walking groups of dogs, giving the dogs baths, and spending time socializing with the dogs – many of whom were not yet used to human interaction. The students took direction from the staff, but were largely unsupervised – following a short "volunteer orientation" on their first day. All three of the student participants were animal lovers and felt strongly that they were helping both these animals and the local community. This site provided a great connection to their shared passion and was enjoyable, but was lacking in the sense of cultural exposure (particularly in regard to language) as compared to the first two sites. (Day 2 Observation)

As the smallest, and the least visited, site, the fourth location was called "Pun Pun Organic Farm." Dr. Brook had introduced this site to one of the participants, Payton, and she visited occasionally throughout the trip, while also teaching English at the monk school regularly. Growing up in Northern California, Payton had spent a great deal of time on farms and felt this site provided a connection to nature that she was looking for as a part of the trip. The day that I visited, Dr. Brook accompanied us and the three of us assisted in watering and weeding the large garden of plants and vegetables. We also admired other volunteers who were building a mud-based structure to serve as an event space for the organization. This was followed by a quiet lunch at the outdoor cafe adjacent to the garden. Clearly, this site was quite different from the rest. Although only one student participated, it was an experience that brought Payton closer to the local community and to understanding the economic future of Chiang Mai.

Lastly, two male participants, Jason and Alex, organized a partnership with the Sociology department at Chiang Mai University prior to leaving San Francisco. For their

placement, they each worked over eight hours per day for the first two weeks of the program editing a Master's thesis for a scholar from the “Mekong School,” a highly regarded international organization focused on the training of social activists. The paper was focused on exploring water access and sustainability measures within the Mekong delta region of Southeast Asia. While this was not a “typical” service site, the two students were provided an insider glimpse into academic life in Chiang Mai. They were provided an office and lunch in an air conditioned space each day, and they were able to make great connections at the university while advancing their editing skills and learning about the Southeast Asian economic region and the development issues facing this region of the world. Prior to turning in the finished draft, Dr. Brook provided feedback and assisted with the final edits. (Day 2 Observations)

While I was unable to visit Chiang Mai University, I sat down and interviewed the two participants for approximately 45 minutes regarding their experiences to gain a clearer picture of the site. Both of these two students were extremely invested in this project and were introduced to other local activism opportunities and cultural highlights. Clearly they learned a great deal, which serves to highlight the notion that development can take part in "non-traditional" service placements during ISL programs. (Day 2 Observations)

In addition to the service sites, it is helpful to provide a description of the hotel which served as home for the HoT participants throughout the duration of the program. The program participants all stayed in a medium-sized boutique style hotel located in central Chiang Mai, sharing double rooms located on two adjacent floors. Accommodation was quite cheap at approximately \$10 per night per participant, and

provided air-conditioning, a breakfast buffet, a large swimming pool, as well as a large lobby area perfectly sized for the group reflection settings. Overall, the accommodation was comfortable, home-like, and provided easy access to the local sights of Chiang Mai. Participants became friendly with the hotel staff and even came to know some of the locals nearby, like the laundry owner and proprietor of the closest coffee shop. As a whole, the residential setting reflected the Thai culture which only served to enhance the cultural experience for all participants.

### **Research Approach**

While my full methodology has already been presented, it is helpful to note the specifics of my approach to collecting data prior to presenting the findings. As noted above, during the ISL program I was a participant observer and took copious notes detailing my observations of the service placements, personal conversations, and the two whole-group evening reflection sessions I took part in. I interviewed some students individually during the program as well. Upon returning home, I attempted to schedule interviews with all participants, but focused on attention on those whom I believed had experienced transformation from the ISL program. I interviewed five participants, two of whom I interviewed twice at different stages (approximately three months post-trip and six months post-trip), and received detailed written accounts from two other participants regarding their re-entry experience. Additionally, I have stayed in touch with other participants via social media and while I have not included quotes from these communications in the analysis, they have contributed to my understanding of the transformational process and some of my larger conclusions.

## **Findings**

To provide a concrete answer to my first main research question of, “Do undergraduate student participants of a three-week ISL program to Chiang Mai, Thailand exhibit evidence of transformational learning?” it was necessary to deeply examine and ponder the changing words, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants both during and after the program in order to determine whether or not their meaning perspectives had shifted. If we recall Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformational learning, meaning perspectives are generally described as sets of predispositions that are impacted by our environment and culture which filter the way in which we make sense of and perceive the world around us. The theory offers that life experiences, particularly those that inflict deep emotion and necessitate significant reflection, may cause perspective shifts resulting in a “transformed” worldview (Mezirow, 1991). It is well established that ISL programs offer opportunities for transformational learning, but there have been not been many findings that describe how this process works and fewer, if any, that have confirmed Kiely’s (2004) dimensional categorization of the “forms” of transformation.

**Finding #1: Participants exhibited evidence of transformational learning and they did so along Kiely’s (2004) six dimensions: political, moral, spiritual, intellectual, personal, and cultural.**

To my surprise, it was clear that by the start of the third week of the program, when I arrived to Chiang Mai, the process of transformational learning was already occurring for many of the participants. The evidence was clear from my very first conversation with one of the participants. Cameron, a Caucasian female and a rising senior with an outgoing, energetic personality, eagerly opened up and told me that in

Thailand she could now see that at home, her life was similar to that of a “hamster on a wheel” (Day 1 Observation). That is, she felt that her daily activities were repetitive, stressful, and unfulfilling; essentially, she was working extremely hard without purpose or passion. In Thailand, she was relaxed and able to spend large amounts of time reflecting on cultural differences, exploring both her passions and her purpose in life, and creating meaningful connections to others (Day 1 Observations). Almost all of the participants echoed this same feeling throughout their last week of the program.

It is widely accepted that cultural appreciation and reflection does not necessarily equate to transformation of deeply ingrained meaning perspectives, and in fact, some other authors have posited that true transformation may be quite rare (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Kiely, 2004). In this case study, each and every participant expressed that they appreciated or even “loved” the Thai culture. However, those who experienced a true, deep sense of transformation, the type that completely changes the way the participant views the world, spoke about their experiences in a different way. This new outlook and way of verbalizing their experiences can only be described as though participants were really seeing the world and themselves fully and clearly for the first time in their lives. To demonstrate how participants experienced the construction of a new meaning perspective and used this new accompanying language, it is helpful to reference participant Payton. Below is a powerful excerpt from her description of the experience from a written correspondence six months after returning home from the program,

It's hard to get the full picture. I feel like if I could, I'd paint it for you, and you might see my before and after a little better, but I'm not such a great painter. However I'm confident if I did paint it, it would be black in white, while slowly transitioning into the brightest of colors. I feel like finally, my life has gained

back its color” (Personal Comm. Dec. 15).

This analogy describes the transformation process as one that is both transitional over time and increasingly positive developmentally.

In order to better understand the transformational process that participants experienced and provide evidence that transformation followed Kiely’s (2004) theory of dimensional forms, as detailed in previous chapters, it is essential to analyze a specific example. First, I will examine an example of a spiritual transformation. Kiely (2004) describes the spiritual form of transformation as a movement toward deeper (un)conscious understanding of self, purpose, society, a search toward spiritual practices and organizations to connect with others of similar beliefs, and an increased practice of challenging systemic injustice (p. 11). This form is particularly relevant here because spirituality abounds in Thailand. Over 95% of the population practices Theravada Buddhism, and this faith pervades every aspect of life and culture in the country. It is certainly not easy to ignore with large, ornate Temples on every corner and idols revered in public spaces (“One World,” 2014).

As part of the HoT course, students were required to participate in a “Monk Chat,” that is, a talk where local monks welcome visitors into their Temple to answer questions about the Buddhist faith and their accompanying lifestyle. The Temples are a large aspect of the culture in Chiang Mai and their open, welcoming nature was a surprise for many students who are used to the religious plurality and separation that is standard within the United States. Many of the participants on this trip were quite enchanted by Buddhism and religion consistently played a role in many conversations throughout my time observing the program in-country.

On this program, there were two students who were obviously transformed in a

spiritual way from Thailand; both inwardly and outwardly, a spiritual change was the most salient of all the forms for these two students. For this particular analysis, I will focus on the transformational experience of Ivie, an African-American female and rising senior, who described her desire to participate in the program as “a chance to become more open minded” (Day 4 Reflection). Raised in the Seventh Day Adventist church with strict Christian values, Ivie spent a lot of time during the program in Thailand seeking to better understand Buddhism and reflecting on her beliefs and attitudes towards others. (Day 1 Observations)

On my first day in Thailand observing the group, Ivie and I had a unique chance to spend time together as a two-some on a long *songthaew* (open air taxi) ride from the Monk School, in the northern suburbs of Chiang Mai, to “Empower”, on the south side of the city. As we enjoyed our ride, Ivie described a side trip that a few of the participants had taken to an elephant rescue and nature park called the “Elephant Nature Preserve.” This park allowed those who went to spend time up close with the elephants, learning about their habits, emotions, and needs. Ivie noted that everyone came away with a newfound respect for nature and a changed understanding of both human and animal rights; essentially, the participants who went to the preserve had experienced a critical event that shifted the way they thought about their relationship to their physical environment (Day 1 Observation).

During the last reflection session, Ivie revealed to the group that she had researched Buddhist values and she had become much more open to the idea of vegetarianism (Day 4 Reflection). Ivie also participated in a conversation with me and three other participants regarding animal rights where she vocalized that she was

interested in understanding other ways of eating. These actions denote that Ivie had begun to act upon her new perspectives gained from the elephant preserve. However, Ivie's real transformation became evident after she wrote the following statement six months after returning home,

I remember struggling with my faith while being in Thailand and considering practicing Buddhism. Today I am confident in my Christian values, but can appreciate the essence of Buddhism, the values the practice demonstrates, and the beauty of practicing the lifestyle. (Ivie Personal Comm. Dec. 15).

This quote demonstrates that instead of completely changing her belief system, Ivie successfully managed to change her perspective from one that only allowed her to feel that one single religion was "right," to one that values other spiritual practices.

Additionally, Ivie also discussed her newfound understanding of American materialism through her understanding of Buddhism. She wrote "I can now understand that it has so much to do with our culture and how we place high values on material things and neglect the importance of caring for others and treating them like we would our friends and families" (Ivie Personal Comm. Dec. 15). The connection Ivie made between her own personal values (as well as the expression of these values) and the culture of Buddhism in Thailand, compounded by a meaningful critical event that caused reflection, is a spiritual transformation in every sense of the definition. Ivie's experience also closely follows that of the students Richard Kiely (2004) worked with in Nicaragua who used their ISL experience to, "reflect more deeply on their role in society and their ability to make a difference," and to create a "spiritual base for renewing their faith" (pg. 14). This parallel demonstrates that Ivie shows similar characteristics to other students who have experienced transformation from another ISL program.

By taking into account this example alone, it can be said that the answer to the

first research question of whether participants exhibit evidence of transformational learning is yes. However, sub-questions 1A and 1B importantly inquire, “How do participants describe the process of examining and reinterpreting their frames of reference before, during, and after the trip?” and “What feelings and emotions do participants experience before, during, and after the trip?” Understanding the feelings of the participants as they undergo this process of re-shaping their worldview is critical. Based on the data, I have found that the most important factor that influences the human experience of transformation across the participants is the program setting.

**Finding #2: The cultural context and setting of the ISL program strongly impact the experience that participants have as they re-interpret their frames of reference.**

Unanimously, the group of participants had strong, positive feelings of connectedness and belonging to the city of Chiang Mai. All of those who exhibited signs of transformation mentioned that the relaxed and stress-free environment of Thailand was conducive to their ability to fully experience and reflect on the immense cultural dissonance. While research on the impact of different physical environments on transformational learning has not been explored as of yet, Kiely’s (2005) work points out that programmatic factors are critical to transformation. Specifically, because students experience “24/7” immersion in a unique cross-cultural environment,” there are multiple opportunities to interact with the community in different ways (Kiely, 2005, p. 9).

Interestingly, although the term “cultural dissonance” generally brings to mind a negative clash, the dissonance that participants felt on this ISL program was overwhelmingly experienced in a positive way. The relaxed structure of the program allowed participants to choose and set up their own service site and attend according to

their own schedules. This element mirrored the surrounding culture and provided another level of dissonance, seemingly allowing the students to become even more fully immersed in the Thai way of life. Kiely (2005) has described how dissonance is important, but it is also important to more intimately understand the actual environments and programmatic context in relation to the process of transformation.

One HoT participant, Cameron, described her experience within this particular setting in the following way,

Being in Thailand just relaxed me... At home I'm always pushing myself to be social and join something but sometimes I just have those days where I just want to hang out. In Thailand I had the chance to just do whatever and just hang out and have a meaningful conversation with someone" (Cameron Interview 1).

Another participant, Crystal, described her experience quite similarly,

When I was there I was always really relaxed. I just woke up every day just excited for what I would do. Even if it was nothing, I was just so at peace (like) you didn't care what you did and even if you just walked around the city, you would still feel like you did so much" (Crystal Interview 1).

Both of these quotes demonstrate how valuable the idea of "free time" was to the participants, recognizing, of course, that as college students, this concept is often quite foreign in their at home. For some participants, it seemed as if it was one of the first experiences of their lives where they had the time and space to truly relax, unwind, and spend time doing something that they were passionate about, which led participants to explore their own identity. Here, we can see that essentially being "at peace" set the stage for inner reflection to occur.

Not surprisingly, then, relaxation and happiness were both two common themes in the language which participants used to describe their experiences. Additionally, it is useful to note here that all participants interviewed felt a positive connection to the group.

While we will discuss this more in the next section, in general, all were pleased with the dynamic within the program, contributing to an overall “happy” environment. Further, the participants collectively expressed a feeling that Chiang Mai had become a type of “home.” They also all strongly rejected the idea that they were tourists. In their minds, by the end of the trip they had become temporary citizens of the city with a deep understanding and appreciation of the culture. (Day 4 Reflection Session)

When analyzing these themes in the context of transformational learning, it appears as though a perfect setting for change was created on this ISL program. In this comfortable, yet challenging, environment, participants experienced critical events that would lead to shifts in their meaning perspectives. Essentially, a “safe space” was created. The participants were happy, they felt relaxed, there were little time constraints or worries (as they were operating on their own self-designed schedule), and they were consistently feeling a sense of accomplishment from regularly completing service to others while living independently abroad. In this setting, students looked forward to the group reflection sessions as a way of processing the independent learning they had done on their own, again leaving all participants with positive feelings and an environment that seemed to encourage transformation.

To understand this environment even better, we can explore examples from both during and after the trip. Participants Payton and Cameron both noted during the trip that they felt safe to make mistakes within their teaching placement at the Monk School because of the perceived lack of judgment they felt from the students and administrators at the school (Day 1 Reflection Session). These two were initially worried because they did not have a background in teaching, a feeling that all of the other girls who

volunteered at the Monk School felt as well (Day 1 Observation). However, these fears were unfounded; all were welcomed with open arms and their English fluency provided the credibility they felt they lacked.

As these two young women were used to the rigorous standards that American students must meet and exceed in order to become a teacher, the unexpected respect given to them in the classroom was quite encouraging! Payton and Cameron explored their new roles as teachers utilizing different learning methods and doing their best to help the young boys learn the language. Additionally, the freedom of lesson planning without worrying about test scores or deadlines inspired creativity in the teaching styles tested by the participants. Participant Crystal noted to me that she had even begun researching lesson plans in her spare time and using various helpful online resources (Day 1 Observations). It was immediately very clear that the atmosphere of the school was a safe one in which to make mistakes, and to reflect on cultural differences.

During each day of service at the Monk school, all of the female students sat and ate lunch together outside in a covered patio area. The food was provided by the school, and they ate Thai food, in a traditional Thai school, surrounded by the other Thai instructors. In this space they felt important yet humble, valued yet as though they still needed to accomplish more before the day was over. Here they talked about what was working in the classroom, which students were having difficulties and why, and they brought me up to speed on what they had learned about the school itself and the pupils themselves. Because they had been entrusted with a great responsibility of teaching these young boys English (many of whom they believed may never again get an opportunity to speak and learn with a native English speaker), most felt obliged to devote themselves to

this site and were highly engaged with the work and the students. They began to know some of the students' names, and started to learn bits and pieces of their background and their likes and dislikes – despite the huge language barrier between teacher and student. In this way, the service site became intimately intertwined with the culture and a personalized relationship was essentially formed between each participant and the Monk school; when given a gift of appreciation on the last day, Crystal cried in front of the entire school, demonstrating the strong emotional ties that grew from providing this service to the school community.

To highlight another example, after the trip, participant Lucy reflected on how the culture of Thailand had impacted her. During the experience she noted that she had felt much more connected to nature and her physical environment. After coming home, she still felt this physical connection but also felt that the Thai culture had impacted her in many other ways, like being more giving and carefree. Lucy described how the cultural aspects of the program influenced her perspectives on materialism and happiness,

I feel like, 'you like my shoes? You can have them' ... It was a reminder of, like, why are you worrying about what you're wearing and being superficial? ... I should be worrying about me and being happy with who I am and what I do. That was, like, the biggest take away. (Lucy Interview 1)

Lucy demonstrates that the cultural emphasis on happiness and kindness to others impacted her ways of thinking and her behavior well after she had left Thailand.

Similarly to Lucy, Cameron described how the relaxed nature of Chiang Mai allowed her to reflect on her experiences and beliefs, noting that one of her perspectives that had changed after the trip was simply “enjoying life.” She describes,

One perspective that changed was just, like, enjoying life. People over there just enjoy life. A few days ago I was playing loud music and I was thinking back to Thailand about just really enjoying life... it was reiterated a lot by (Dr.) Brook

just to enjoy the small things and not stress out too much. Like, we were taking a *songthaew* back with him. (We were) hungry and tired, and he kept reiterating our expectations, ‘If you don’t have expectations then it’ll probably be shorter than you think – just enjoy it! Don’t sweat the small things, just enjoy life as it comes and have lower expectations.’ That is the mindset that I’m trying to take away from Thailand. (Cameron Interview 1)

In this reflection, Cameron details both her own memory of Thais enjoying life and how Dr. Brook enforced the cultural norms of Thailand throughout the program. By reinforcing the culture and providing life lessons such as this one throughout the trip, Dr. Brook ensured that the program also became a reflection of the environment. This essentially provided an even deeper cultural experience, one that encouraged the program participants to live by Thai norms and emulate their lives in positive ways.

Again, to reference back to Kiely’s (2005) notion of the importance of dissonance in facilitating transformation, the HoT program was able to create even more opportunities for students to learn and grow by ensuring cultural dissonance was preserved throughout the program. For example, students could have stayed at a much nicer hotel where every amenity was provided and they only interacted with other foreigners vacationing in Chiang Mai. Instead, they stayed at a small hotel, shared rooms, made good friends with the local family next door who did their laundry, practiced their Thai with the staff, and essentially spent every minute of the trip in the “real” Thailand.

Amongst all of the participants interviewed after returning home, all had stories similar to these that highlight how the Thai culture impacted their development positively. Participant Jason described how he felt significantly changed after returning home, describing that, “The whole laid back-ness of Thailand really affected the way I interacted. I don’t stress that much, I look at the bigger picture and I’m not too focused on stressing over work” (Jason Interview 1). Crystal also agreed that her perspectives had

shifted. In particular, she cited the example of her decreased road rage, stating, “Like, I had huge road rage, and I realized that it doesn’t matter... There it was so calm! I just need to relax, things are not that bad. If I get stressed, I just need to take a break and think about the things that really matter” (Crystal Interview 1). Both participants began looking at importance of the “bigger picture” and the “things that really matter” instead of the smaller everyday stressors because of the “calm” and “laid-back” environment they had experienced in Thailand.

However, it is also important to observe that not every aspect of the cultural environment that led to a positive change was necessarily easy for participants to experience. On my first day of observations, participant Lily described the experience she had on the first day working at her service site, “Empower.” Specifically, Lily was unprepared for the “lack of preparation” for the volunteers, the “disorganization” in terms of lesson plans and scheduling, and an overall “different style of doing things.” She was so overwhelmed on that day that she almost did not return. This was Lily’s most critical event of the trip – one where she faced the cultural differences and, with encouragement from others in the group, decided to “stick it out.” After working with the organization for three weeks, Lily was extremely glad that she chose to stay and noted that she had made extremely close ties with some of the women at the site. Lily learned that the organization needed her to be more responsible for her own schedule and to create her own lesson plans according to the needs of the women. In this case, the “laid-back” nature of Thailand did not initially make sense within Lily’s worldview, but as time went on, she made sense of the norms that were in place and grew to appreciate them and incorporate them into her actions. (Day 1 Observation)

Another key point here is that those participants who exhibited a greater sense of transformation during the HoT program were also exposed to more cultural complexities during their service placements. These greater challenges provided more opportunities for critical events to occur, thereby triggering the reconstruction of meaning perspectives. Specifically, the group of three participants at “Care for Dogs” simply did not have the same level of exposure to the language or to the culture as the others did who were teaching English to locals or working closely with native Thais. The group seemed to understand and acknowledge this idea, but all three felt as though they were really helping the animals and the larger community (Day 2 Observation). While their transformation was not nearly as evident, all three still had positive associations with their placement. This experience supports the idea that during ISL programs, for maximum transformation to occur, participants should take part in challenging placements that require full participation in the local culture – preferably where language acquisition is possible or probable.

It is also important to note that while the cultural setting influenced the personal experiences of the participants throughout their time in Thailand, it was the most evident (and the most transformative) while the students were performing service. While exposure to various cultural differences on its own, for example on a family vacation or even an extended backpacking trip, can certainly be enlightening and life-changing, service is yet again proven by the results of this study to be the key component in creating deep meaning perspective shifts. Connecting with the local people and engaging in meaningful work while exploring the socio-economic issues, societal norms, religious beliefs, and so on, truly fosters change. In this way, Thailand was an almost perfect

setting as it offered high-quality opportunities for service in sectors that would enhance students' academic thought and learning (i.e. local schools, non-profit organizations, etc...) and then also provided a truly rich cultural overlay to continue the reflective process while students were not engaging in service.

Interestingly, a common thread running throughout many of the examples of shifting meaning perspectives amongst the 16 participants of the HoT ISL program was the importance of the group dynamic. The phrase, "the group," came up over and over again, largely with positive associations. This language indicates that this bond to the other program participants impacted how the participants experienced re-interpreting their frames of reference and was connected to the participants' feelings and emotions about the ISL experience both during and after the trip. This leads us to the third finding of the study.

**Finding #3: The perception of strong group bonds that enabled a feeling of "connectedness" to others on the trip was an important condition for transformation.**

During the trip in Thailand, it became apparent through observations, conversations, and reflection sessions that the group of participants had developed a strong connection to one another. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, most of the participants did not know one another beforehand and none were close friends prior to the trip. As a part of the pre-departure orientation meet-up two months prior to the trip, Dr. Brook encouraged the students to get to know one another and to decide upon their roommates at that time. The collective excitement grew from this point and the friendships started developing prior to departure.

Once in Thailand, smaller groups of friends formed, but the larger group dynamic

remained strong. This dynamic was described often by participants as one with “a high maturity level,” where “everyone gets along,” and is “drama-free” (Day 4 Reflection). Within the unique environment of the ISL program in Chiang Mai, participants felt as though they were able to easily create friendships with the other participants on the program. Because they were all experiencing some of the same common aspects of the program (i.e. living together and completing service abroad in a foreign country), many felt connected to each other in a unique way.

It is important to note that over the years, there has been some recognition within the existing literature that creating meaningful relationships is key to having a “successful and satisfying” international experience (Crabtree, 2008, p. 22). However, although Crabtree (2008) briefly mentions how these relationships can positively impact cross-cultural awareness and overall experience, citing research from well over 30, 40, and 50 years ago, there is a general lack of acknowledgement in the field that the group dynamics and interaction play a critical role in the process of transformation in young adults today (p. 22). To better understand this interplay, I will explore some of the individual participant examples from the HoT program.

After returning home, Cameron described that the group reflection sessions helped her begin more deeply examining her frames of references after hearing others doing the same (Cameron Interview 1). Not surprisingly, Cameron even described the reflection session as her most significant interaction during the program in Thailand, stating,

(During) the group meetings that we had, everyone came together and felt really inspired after them. (Dr.) Brook was really philosophical during them (*laughs*). Every group meeting was really fun for me and I loved hearing everyone talk about their experiences. The amount of people speaking increased as the program

went on. The passion increased. (Cameron Interview 1)

In this quote, we can see how this feeling of closeness with the other program participants seems to be heightened by their shared experiences with one another within the valued, twice-weekly reflection sessions. This is aligned with what we know about the research on the importance of critical reflection in setting the stage for transformation by encouraging and welcoming dissonance (Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002; Kiely, 2004; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004).

Beyond sharing experiences, there is also an element of a group routine that Lucy highlights in her interview after experiencing re-entry, “I felt like I wasn’t part of a group anymore, I felt lonely. I’m a loner...I like to be by myself, but I felt like, ‘Where are all the girls, where is my group?’ I felt like I wasn’t part of the group and it was like, ‘Ok, now what? What do we do today?’” (Lucy Interview 1). Getting back to a routine at home proved more difficult than expected for Lucy because even though she was older and felt more independent, she still had relied on the group and missed that sense of stability and connection. Considering Lucy’s reflection, we can see how the group provided stability and structure within the program while in Thailand. Similar to the cultural context discussed in Finding #2, we can see how the group itself also contributed to creating a “safe space” for experimentation and reflection.

Further, if we juxtapose Cameron’s experience, described above, with Lucy’s quote, we can go one step further in the analysis. The group dynamic contributed to the feeling of being in a “safe space,” but also simultaneously encouraged the participants to push their boundaries and explore new ways of thinking. Without the group, most of those participants who experienced transformational learning would not have done so. This finding speaks to the power of group reflection, which, as noted above, has been

written about frequently in the ISL literature. But to go even deeper, this notion speaks to the power of friendship and interpersonal relationships in a foreign culture. The feeling of “being in this together” is incredibly powerful, as is feeling as though you have changed in a way that only your fellow group members could understand.

In this way, the group itself served an important role as a tool for transformation, essentially providing a space for the dual roles of “challenge and support” discussed by Nevitt Sanford in 1966. Sanford (1966) coined the now commonly used term, “challenge and support” to describe that development happens when students are ready, and when they are forced to question their beliefs but are also given the space they need to process and are not facing constant challenges. This theory gives us an excellent lens through which to examine the results and to reflect on previous works that highlight that cultural dissonance is the primary method of spurring on transformation. I argue that dissonance alone does not create lasting, positive developmental changes in our students. To create this type of change, students need both dissonance (i.e. challenge) as well as support. They need to question their existence and their role in this world and the inequities that they may see in foreign cultures, but also have the time and the space to have a break from processing those difficult questions – otherwise students may be too overwhelmed to seek answers and continue the difficult process of re-envisioning their frames of reference. In the case of the HoT program, the students received seemingly adequate measures of challenge and support through their membership in the 16 person group.

While the group was certainly important during the trip, it was the recognition of the significance of these bonds that was hugely important after the trip (during re-entry) that was even more important and quite surprising. After being home for a few months,

participant Jason describes the value of staying connected to the group through re-entry and how his friendships with some of his group members have evolved,

I've seen everyone on campus, but yeah, it is hard to stay connected to the people you have wanted to stay connected with. Staying more connected is the one thing that I wish we had done better upon re-entry, because we all experienced different aspects but we all had a similar take away, especially being culture-shocked in the good way... The two (people) I didn't hang out with are the two I'm seeing so much more now! It's good though. We have mutual interests and we share common things. We built that connection in Thailand. (Jason Interview 2)

Here we can see how the strength of these group bonds stays, and even grows, throughout the period of re-entry, a point that we will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Additionally, this quote gives voice to the point that although every participant had a different experience, their take-away is very similar. To reiterate Findings #1 and #2, not everyone transformed, but amongst those who did, they did so along similar dimensions and in similar ways due to the cultural context.

However, despite the closeness of the group, it is important to note that the strong ties between participants did not inhibit the development of independence. In fact, it seems that the reverse may be true; those who developed the greatest sense of independence were amongst the most connected to the group. Two participants, Ivie and Teresa, each had a unique experience in Thailand that supports this last point. Each of these examples would fall under the "personal" dimension of transformation using Kiely's (2004) forms, leading to increased self-awareness and reliance. Interestingly, both women also spoke publicly about their individual transformations while still maintaining (and vocalizing) close connections to the other group members throughout the program.

On the first day of my observations in Chiang Mai, Ivie told a story that had

occurred the previous week. Dr. Brook had visited the Monk School and also wanted to visit “Empower” that same day (i.e. the same route that Ivie and I were taking together at the time). It was obvious that Ivie would lead the way, as she had done the journey solo a few times at this point. However, the distance was quite far and it was raining that day. Ivie began to doubt that she would remember the route, how to give directions to the address in Thai, and what a fair price for the journey would be. Of course, Ivie wanted to impress her professor as well! Despite the extreme anxiety she felt, Ivie managed to navigate the journey with Dr. Brook very successfully. Ivie felt proud afterward and even felt comfortable enough to share this experience with the group during the reflection. Particularly relevant is that Ivie noted that she hadn’t previously realized how much she relied on others to navigate the way and take the lead on trips. After this turning point, Ivie felt that she could be a leader within the group and she felt more confident in her own abilities. Essentially, within the context of the group, Ivie was able to challenge herself and develop new skills (Day 1 Observations)

In contrast, Teresa did not have one significant critical event that spurred her understanding of her own sense of independence. During the last reflection, Teresa described that she felt she had learned a lot about herself and that she had felt a gradual build-up of self-confidence throughout the trip that ended with her spending an entire day alone in Chiang Mai. Teresa described the feelings she had during this day, stating, “Wow, I can do this. When I was by myself, I was much more willing to talk to other people. I met a nun and we had an awesome conversation (*laughs*). But I really enjoyed being by myself.” Teresa also mentioned how she felt a real sense of self-love during this time, and others in the session agreed that they too felt more empowered when on their

own. In this reflection, we can see that although Teresa was building her sense of independence. Yet, this didn't take away from her ties to the group and, in fact, connected her with her peers even more as they shared about similar experiences. In this way, Theresa really grew on her own throughout the trip, but by sharing her experience with others she was validated and supported. (Day 4 Reflection Session)

At one point or another, every participant mentioned the positive group dynamic. However, there was one female participant, Riley, who had a different experience in relation to the rest of the group. From my very first observations, it seemed as though Riley was having a good time on the trip in Thailand. However, it immediately became clear that she wasn't entirely engaged with her service placement in Chiang Mai at the Monk school. Riley was hanging back and was not taking a leadership role in teaching the students. It was obvious that she was not as thrilled to discuss how "amazing" she thought this program had been, as her fellow participants were. As the days went on, I could see that Riley had created great friendships with the others on the trip, but there was something missing. (Day 1 Observations)

On my third day of observations, Riley and I had the chance to spend some time together without the rest of the group. During this conversation, Riley described how she had initially applied to the program with two of her best friends. She had been accepted, and both of her two friends had received "waitlist" spots. Riley's initial expectations for the trip were never met and she missed her friends from home throughout the program. Throughout her time in Thailand, she was thinking about what it could have been like if they had been a part of the HoT program. In this way, Riley's goals for participating in the program were quite different than everyone else's. The other group members

expected to make friends while also deepening their independence, while Riley wanted to share this experience with her friends from home. Riley was, then, perhaps unprepared for the strong bonding element of the trip and how important it would be to her own development to make friends and connect with the other students on the trip. To reference Sanford (1966), Riley was missing a critical element that is necessary for development: readiness. (Day 3 Observations)

It is crucial that students are prepared for the immersive nature of any ISL experience and are truly ready to undertake an experience. This is particularly important when we consider the robust connection between strong group ties and transformational learning. Unfortunately, Riley was an example of someone who may have just not been in the right place in her life to complete a rigorous ISL program. It is important that students be prepared for the social elements of such a trip as well, a point that will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

However, we can use this example to point out another interesting idea. Even though Riley did not transform in the same way, she still considers herself a world traveler. In the year and a half after returning from Thailand, Riley visited Canada, Hawaii, the Philippines, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and traveled throughout the US. In the case of Brian, who had already travelled the world prior to embarking on the HoT program, he has also continued to travel, taking multiple trips to Europe including Spain, France, Italy, and Finland, as well as Ecuador, the Philippines, and beyond. Both students graduated from college and are clearly very connected to the larger world outside of the United States. With this example in mind, it must be concluded that if ISL programs are not transformational for all participants, they are not to be considered as failed ventures.

The learning objectives were still met in these cases and the students still had an amazing experience; they simply did not change their perspectives based on their service experience. While one of the big-picture goals of ISL is to create opportunities for deep transformation that will spur on long-term learning and self-reflection, these programs are still extremely valuable even when not everyone returns “a different person.”

Based upon the first three findings, there are clear answers to the first set of research questions. Yes, students experienced transformational learning from participation in this program. As these students went through this process of transformation, the cultural context of the ISL trip provided a common foundation for the way in which they described their examination and reinterpretation of their frames of reference. The setting of the program also facilitated this process by creating a space in which transformation was encouraged and welcomed. Finally, the strength of the bonds formed within the larger group impacted the transformational learning process and was consistently emotionally expressed by all changed participants. Participation in the group also served to provide both challenge and support to participants as they began to experience development. Moving forward, as we look at how the data best answer the second set of research questions, the critical period of re-entry will take center stage.

Taken as a whole, the second set of research questions asks how participants manage the process of re-entry. To begin to understand how the process of transformational learning works after the ISL program, I will first address the significant question posed in 2A, “Do participants show evidence of continued perspective transformation after returning home?” This question is particularly important to understand as it highlights the potential lasting impacts of ISL programs over time as well

as the significance of the re-entry period in reaping the full developmental benefits of these immersive experiences beyond the in-country segment of the program.

**Finding #4: Upon re-entry, participants exhibited signs of continuing perspective transformation and on-going identity development.**

To start, this finding generally supports the notion that ISL contributes to on-going, lasting personal development. After their return home, many of the participants interviewed during the re-entry phase showed evidence that they were still reviewing, rethinking, reshaping, and reimagining the way in which they viewed the world based on their three-week service trip to Thailand. This was particularly evident within the first two months of return, but was also seen at up to six months after return.

One participant who consistently showed continuous change was Cameron. Two months after the trip, Cameron reflected,

I thought that initially I was going to experience a whole bunch of change, and just now I'm starting to see the change. It was totally different when I came home. The stuff I'm noticing about myself I'm starting to realize a month after... (I have) some different values than some of my friends and I'm seeing what friendships are really meaningful for me, and which ones are not. Our minds are different. (Cameron Interview 1)

In this description, Cameron describes how she initially thought that she would experience all of the changes immediately upon coming home because she was so impacted by the program in Thailand. However, she was surprised that her life looked visibly the same as when she had left at home and that the changes revealed themselves slowly, and over time. Her phrase, "our minds are different," also perfectly encapsulates how a college student understands the differences between people who are culturally aware and have experienced and integrated different worldviews into the way they make sense of the world, and those who have not. This phrase also certainly aligns with

Mezirow's (1991) definition of perspective transformation and serves to demonstrate that Cameron likely has an understanding that she has reassessed and reformulated her beliefs, values, and assumptions of the world around her – even if she does not quite have the academic vocabulary to convey this change.

To analyze this idea further, it is helpful to note that Cameron had a difficult time navigating her friendships during the re-entry period. Cameron felt as though she had grown apart from one friend in particular (her roommate), who was living her life in a materialistic and unambitious manner that was not in accordance with Cameron's values (Cameron Interview 1). This struggle, an example of Kiely's (2004) "Chameleon Complex" – that is, feeling changed and misunderstood within your original home environment after a transformational experience – seemed to provide another opportunity for transformation to occur. Essentially, the new meaning perspectives that Cameron developed in Thailand created dissonance with the life she was living at home, leaving space for critical events to occur which could spur further re-interpretation of her perspectives. In this way, the data demonstrate that during the period of re-entry when "reverse culture shock" or "Chameleon complex" is felt by participants, the cultural dissonance is so strong that transformational learning is likely to occur again or for the first time. In order to more fully support this idea, it is helpful to explore the experiences of other participants during the time after returning home.

While in Thailand, participant Jason, an older student with a non-traditional college career, had numerous realizations about Asia. First, because Jason had never left the United States, he had a profound shift in how he viewed the country and the culture. Jason believed that Thailand would be "third world," but later he understood just how

internationalized the population was, how the tourist industry was thriving, and how a great deal of social change was taking place. Jason stated, “Like, the stereotypes of what you would assume it would be, (it’s) just so much different and so much better.” Jason was overwhelmed, but in a positive way. (Jason Interview 1)

In particular, Jason was struck by the activism that he encountered in Chiang Mai. As Jason had only been exposed to the local activist scene present in Northern California, he was “really impressed” with how the members of the Mekong School for Activists at Chiang Mai University were working towards social change. Specifically, Jason was inspired by how the activists in Thailand were risking their lives for their beliefs. This group, generally referred to as the “Mekong School,” was actively working on researching pressing environmental issues while also speaking out publicly about the oppressive natures of the current Southeast Asian governments. Members of the Mekong School risked their personal safety on a daily basis by publicly advocating for the issues they cared about in order to foster their cause and working with these individuals was very powerful for Jason. Jason’s perspective on how societal change can be made was completely shifted by his experience working at Chiang Mai University with this influential group of activists. (Jason Interview 1)

Soon after the trip, Jason also re-evaluated and subsequently strengthened his relationship with his major (Sociology) and connected in a new way with his identity as an “activist.” Jason describes this in his first interview,

I didn’t think that I would find activists over there... They are rising up and trying to fight the government... they really do put their lives on the line. (I have a) new, revived passion for sociology, a greater fervor for the causes that I’m going to get into next semester. It’s interesting to see how Asia has changed me and what I do, and opened my eyes to a different realm of what I do. (Jason Interview 1)

This quote demonstrates that Jason acknowledges the transformational learning that has taken place. Further, he recognizes that he is still changing and growing from the ISL experience during the period of re-entry. While Jason was engaged with numerous causes on-campus prior to participating in the ISL trip to Thailand, after coming home, he proudly took on the title of “activist.” As Jason became more connected to the term, it also became a clearer and stronger part of his identity throughout the re-entry period.

In contrast to Jason, participant Crystal had traveled around the world a few times already and had been to Thailand previously with her mother (Day 1 Observations). However, Crystal’s re-entry experience was still profound. During this time, Crystal came to terms with how impactful her volunteer experience was on her future goals and her career choice, and how her international experiences were seemingly building on one another in terms of her learning. She stated,

Not just the trip to Chiang Mai, but all of my travel experiences help me see how good we have it – everyone in America – we all know that we live good lives, but it gets confusing with all of the bad things that happen... But I want to start volunteering more...I need to do more for other people and think less of myself. I need to do more for my community and for my environment. I just need to do more. Less selfishness, more selflessness. (Crystal Interview 1)

Throughout her re-entry time, Crystal allowed her experiences abroad to sink in and reflected on the impact that volunteering had made. Crystal was impacted by her service placement in Thailand, but after coming home and reflecting about the impact while in America, her takeaway was heightened. Because of the cultural dissonance present during re-entry, that is, between altruistic Thailand and materialistic America (in this particular case), Crystal was moved to take action on her new perspectives because she felt so strongly. Without the period of re-entry and experiencing the clash of cultural norms, it is likely that Crystal’s passion for volunteerism and community involvement

would not be nearly as powerful. The experiences Crystal had during the re-entry period acted as the catalyst for the transformation in this instance. (Crystal Interview 1 & 2)

While the three participants above had substantial transformations that re-shaped their identities, the notion that perspective transformation continues throughout re-entry is also reflected in smaller, and perhaps more subtle, ways as well. For example, after participating in the trip to the Elephant nature reserve in Thailand and better understanding the cruelty inherent in most tourist sites involving elephants in Southeast Asia, participant Lucy described feeling a renewed connection to animals and to the physical, natural world around her (Day 2 Observation). Lucy continued to reference the elephants throughout the trip and it was very clear that the experience had impacted her (Day 4 Observation).

After coming home, Lucy again noted that she felt that she still had the same desire to spend more time in nature and to be more observant of her impact on the world around her (Lucy Interview 1). Lucy described how she felt a continual commitment to helping the elephants, even though she was physically far away from them (Lucy Interview 1). Also, Lucy described how she was actively planting greenery in her home and taking frequent hikes, and she jokingly illustrated how her new restrained usage of water, in efforts to be more sustainable, encouraged her family to refer to her as a “crazy Thai lady” (Lucy Interview 1). In this way, even though Lucy was taken out of the cultural context in which her new outlook developed, the beliefs were so strongly valued that they easily survived the re-entry process.

This notion that participants’ changed perspectives may be at odds with the home culture is important to explore. The degree to which participants will “keep,” or live in

accordance with, their newly changed perspectives, seemingly depends on a few different variables – ones which I will investigate thoroughly in the next section. It is important to bear in mind that experiencing critical events does not necessarily mean that participants will change their values, beliefs, or their path in life, as Kiely reminded his readers years ago (2004). It is similarly significant that a few participants did exhibit signs of transformation during the in-country program, but seemingly did not want to (or perhaps did not care enough to) translate this experience to their life at home, although this was fairly rare in this particular case of the HoT program. Overall, while it is known that experiencing intense dissonance during an ISL program can impact transformational learning long after students participate in the program as demonstrated by Kiely's work (2002, 2004, 2005), the examples shown here demonstrate that experiences after the program ends, during the re-entry period, are similarly important and that the process of learning continues.

Of course, as a larger goal of ISL, we hope that students will experience alignment of their new perspectives with their existing value structure or, on their path of development, use their new perspectives as a way to clarify their existing beliefs. As we strive to move students towards this ideal, it is helpful to think of this process as a fluid one – one that can be managed and is easily influenced. This is the space into which Kiely's (2004) "Chameleon Complex" comes into play, and is reflected in research question 2B, "Do participants feel supported upon re-entry?"

Initially, I expected that general support during the re-entry period may be enough to combat this issue and ensure that students weren't struggling alone through the difficult transitional time after returning home. The reality was more complex and more

interesting. The participants interviewed felt that having support from friends and family was helpful in navigating the initial period of “reverse culture shock,” but many felt they were unprepared to have such a deeply intense cultural experience in the first place. However, the most important care they received during the re-entry period came from the group and also from an unexpected source – from within themselves.

**Finding #5: The most important support during re-entry comes in two forms. First, support from within is the most valuable in managing the transition and can be characterized as self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-care. Second, support from others who have had a similar experience helps shape and sustain the transformation.**

As detailed in the last section, both Cameron and Lucy experienced transformation in Thailand and continued to experience development after returning home. Both of these participants experienced alignment. For the purposes of this study, I will define alignment as a sense of fulfilment from beginning to more sharply define and live by one’s values based on one’s newly expanded meaning perspectives. We can define this even further by noting that amongst those who experienced this feeling, it was described as a sense of inner peace, or one of feeling in sync with oneself. Fascinatingly, both of these two women described this experience in almost identical language.

When describing her experiences in Thailand, Lucy noted that she felt like she had many “stop and think while you’re enjoying it” moments (Lucy Interview 1). These can be understood as times where she felt like she consciously experienced a situation, but also internally reflected and processed it simultaneously. When looking back on the trip, she noted, “It was more, like, I awakened from me” (Lucy Interview 1). In discussing her struggles with navigating friendships and processing her new

understanding of her purpose in life, Cameron stated, “Thailand kind of woke me back up to who I am. I think that’s the main lesson” (Cameron Interview 1). Both women detail the process of transformation as a type of ‘awakening.’ From this, it is reasonable to conclude that both Cameron and Lucy felt as though they were individually responsible for their transformation, as if the capacity to live in alignment was always there – lying latent – but needed to be activated. For them, the positive experience of living harmoniously apparently propelled them further to continue their transformation at home while either ignoring or putting up with any negative feelings associated with being a changed “chameleon.”

Interestingly, these two examples would dispel the idea that transformation can only occur in moments of staged critical reflection (i.e. reflection sessions). Kiely (2005) describes that much of the literature in the field cites critical reflection as the most powerful tool to incite learning and development in students and proposes that understanding and theorizing about the “contextual, visceral, emotive, and affective aspects that enhance transformational learning in service-learning” is also necessary (p. 18). Most other studies have been generally more focused on student outcomes, although Eyler and Giles (1999) noted that the processes involved in service-learning are important, finding (amongst other things) that placement quality has a positive impact on student outcomes. However, while it is important to understand the processes involved and to recognize the power of reflection, the lived experiences of the students on the HoT program in Thailand demonstrate that reflective, transformational moments can, and do, happen outside of guided reflection.

To provide another alternate example of this, I will discuss the unique experience

of participant Payton. Other participants also described how important it was to live in accordance with their beliefs, to hold onto their new meaning perspectives, and to be supported from within. Yet Payton describes her re-entry in a very individualized and quite inspiring way, “Thailand renewed my confidence. It gave me a support system, and more or less it gave me hope - which is the most important. I knew I didn't need to keep people that weren't good to me in my life” (Payton Personal Comm. Dec. 15). For Payton, the ISL experience in Thailand completely changed her outlook on life. Prior to leaving for the trip, Payton struggled with depression and toxic relationships, but afterwards she felt as though she was finally in alignment with her true self (Payton Personal Comm. Dec. 15). She goes into this in further detail,

Leaving home, going to Thailand, and then coming back gave me perspective on all the things I was missing out on because I felt like I had to make everyone else happy, but I was forgetting myself. With me pursuing what I wanted, regaining confidence, biking, doing 5k runs, doing all the things that I like to do is completely new for me. I have no idea where I'd be right now if I didn't go on that trip. (Payton Personal Comm. Dec. 15)

Similarly to Lucy and Camille, Payton uses detailed language, above, to describe her trip as an experience of remembering, or awakening to, herself. The self-confidence Payton gained from having her new meaning perspectives align with her beliefs and goals allowed her to manage the difficult aspects of the transition and focus on developing her own identity. In Payton’s case, she had always been passionate about environmental rights and healthy living; after being exposed to new ways of life (e.g. veganism and Buddhist cooking), being exposed to animal cruelty (e.g. elephant and tiger tourism), and forming lasting friendships in Thailand, Payton readily made critical changes in her own life at home to manage her transformation and live in accordance with her beliefs.

However, it is important to note that this process of alignment is not an easy one.

Before coming to the realization of what kind of support was needed during this time, almost everyone first experienced an initial sense of “reverse culture shock” upon returning home. Cameron was overwhelmed by the cultural differences and immediately upon arrival began making comparisons between San Francisco and Thailand (Cameron Interview 1). Jason experienced physical symptoms – a terrible stomach virus that his doctor attributed to the rapid change from healthy, organic food in Thailand back to processed, fast food in America (Jason Interview 1) And lastly, after traveling by himself after the trip, participant Brian was thrilled to be around family but often found himself at a loss for words when trying to figure out how to share his experiences (Brian Interview 1).

Similarly, Crystal described her experience in the same way, stating,

My mom has traveled with me, so she understands getting back to a normal routine. I was super jetlagged the day after, like so bad. (My mom) understands that I need some time. (It’s) hard to explain... it took me about a week to feel back to normal. I really should have started (my routine) a few days after, but I just couldn’t bring myself to study for about a week after. (Crystal Interview 1)

This quote illustrates the difficult mental and physical strain that re-entry poses to participants. Like Crystal, others also felt an internal pressure to re-adjust to life at home and to immediately jump back into a more scheduled existence. This was particularly difficult for this case of participants because they, as a whole, were generally unprepared to transition from the relaxed, carefree Thai culture back to their busy, stressful, organized lives at home in Northern California.

Additionally, Crystal interestingly described her feeling of transformation as something that could be lost. She described this feeling in the following way, “I think that I’ve tried to incorporate some of the feelings I felt in Chiang Mai, but after two months, I

still feel myself kind of losing it... I want to hone in on the feelings I felt while I was there” (Crystal Interview 1). In this quote, Crystal demonstrates how important her experience in Thailand was and how she does not want to assimilate back into American culture without incorporating her new worldviews into her life. More specifically, Crystal placed a high value on her developing sense of independence. Crystal noted that, “It feels as though it is really important to be able to do things on your own,” and that she hopes she can “hold onto that feeling” of being able to independently accomplish things (Crystal Interview 1). Crystal had a number of different ideas about how she could try to “hold onto” her changed perspectives, one of which involved meeting up with the group (discussed further below). However, ultimately she felt solely responsible for her own outcomes and understood that she was an active participant in her own transformational process.

Despite the stress of re-entry described in the instances above, participants generally managed this difficult transition period by relying on, pushing, and motivating themselves. One way that they seemed to accomplish this was through a unique sense of commitment to maintaining their new meaning perspectives. Essentially, those participants who were transformed cherished the changes in themselves and devoted energy to honoring their newfound views. Crabtree (2008) notes that even students who participate in service immersion programs that are only one or two weeks in duration may find the re-entry process difficult and strategies should be implemented to assist in this process such as follow-up projects or research (p. 22). However, as I have detailed previously, most other studies have not addressed the specific contexts, emotions, and complexities of the student experience during re-entry. The data from the HoT

participants suggest that even if some “strategies” are implemented by program administrators to help students, we must first provide students with the tools to help themselves through a difficult transition. Understanding what students actually go through is critical to figuring out the best ways to support students in re-entry.

Additionally, while self-management during the re-entry period looked different for everyone, it seems as though it was a conscious choice for many to spend time encouraging further self-reflection and transformation. Ivie detailed this feeling, writing, “...meditating on my experiences abroad allow me to slow down and bit and appreciate the beauty around me” (Ivie Personal Comm Dec. 15). Lucy also talked about continuous reflection. She noted that because she recognized that her interests have changed due to the trip she is “trying to do something new every day” (Lucy Interview 1). These quotes show that both women were still active participants in their transformational processes during the period of re-entry and that they really wanted the resulting change.

For many of the participants, the desire to travel again was quite strong. A few participants discussed their newfound understanding of the significance of travel. Some even described how they wanted to continue to utilize it as a tool in order to continue expanding their meaning perspectives and gaining further cultural competencies. As Jason humorously stated, “I’m not trying to re-enter, I’m trying to get back out there!” (Jason Interview 2). This humorous quote illustrates Jason’s personal commitment to furthering his transformation.

Jason also elaborated on his feelings regarding further travel while discussing his upcoming plans to participant in a school-sponsored Spring Break service trip to Mexico,

(I’m) trying to get out there and see the world and learn more about culture... I feel like it will weigh heavily on who I am as a person, like, emotionally. (I want

to) get the embodiment of ‘being international’ – not to sound too cheesy, but I’ve been really on a mission to get out there to travel more, especially with school because I feel like it’s a really powerful tool of learning. (Jason Interview 2)

In this quote, it is clear that Jason has recognized the changes taking place within himself after coming home from Thailand. Particularly because he had a very transformational experience during his very first trip outside of the U.S., Jason strongly connected to the idea that more travel will equate with more positive experiences and even deeper learning. While participating in another trip with the University would certainly be a social engagement for Jason, the motivation to participate and to continue the process of expanding his worldviews came solely from within.

Yet, as outlined in Finding #5, support from others who have had similarly transformative experiences was also just as influential on how participants navigated the re-entry process. Even those who developed a solid sense of internal support still had a desire for support from others who had a similar experience, from both within and outside of the “Hands on Thailand” ISL group. Specifically, participants wanted to reunite with the members of the group from Thailand during the re-entry period to share experiences and continue the group reflection they had grown accustomed to. Some participants also had a desire to connect with other people outside of the group who were similarly changed due to cultural experiences. Cameron explains this idea in further detail, “There is a difference between a friend who can listen and a friend who can actually, like, understand totally where you’re coming from. And there are not many people like that, because the people I’m around haven’t traveled like that” (Cameron Interview 1). Here, Cameron recognizes the difference in the support from people who have traveled and experienced the re-entry process and those who have not. She craves

support from those who can closely relate to her own experiences and who have a first-hand understanding of the difficult process she is undergoing.

Similarly, Crystal expressed that spending time with the group members would keep the memory of Thailand in the forefront of their minds and encourage continuous reflection. Crystal stated, “If we get together more with our group it will help us remember what we should be doing. If you’re by yourself, you might forget. If we’re together, we’ll probably remember” (Crystal Interview 1). As described above, Crystal did not want to “lose” her new perspectives. Crystal felt as though sharing with the group during the period of re-entry would be a valuable tool to help her continue navigating the process of her individual transformation. Jason also felt the same way. He discussed how his efforts to “continue the bond” by trying to invite other participants to his house for a barbecue or out for Thai food had not worked out, leaving him disappointed but still eager to try again (Jason Interview 1). Sharing similar experiences with other group members as a tool to manage the re-entry period was cited across all of the participant interviews.

For some, the desire to share experiences with others also went beyond other HoT student participants. Jason discussed his desire for further connection with Dr. Brook, who he admired as a mentor and fellow activist (Jason Interview 2). Cameron observed that she was unaware of what resources were available at her institution for students returning from programs abroad, but noted that she had shared a few meaningful conversations with a co-worker who had recently returned from a year abroad in Germany (Cameron Interview 1). For these participants, further exposure to others who apparently understood their experience helped them make sense of the transition process

and further sustain the on-going process of transformational learning. These particular interactions were not indicative of critical reflection, but of simple shared experiences.

While most participants discussed reflecting with the group in a more structured way, like meeting or sharing meals, some also implied that even keeping up the bonds in a very light or distant way was still important to them. A few participants described checking the program's Facebook group or communicating via group texts with each other, and many mentioned the fond memories they would welcome even just from passing by another participant on campus. Payton warmly described her experience with the group by writing,

...And we all went on our way, took on the world, continued with our lives, but we will pass by each other at the school and on occasion at events, and that's so special. It's special because it's like we share this little secret, and now it's our duty to share it with the rest of the world. (Payton, Personal Comm. Dec. 15)

This quote strengthens the argument that support from others assists participants in managing the transformation occurring during re-entry in an informal, social way.

However, this notion does require that we view the term "support" as in a more abstract manner and brings into play the role that social media might have during the period of re-entry. In the ISL field, we may have previously thought of support as a one-on-one meeting or group session, support from within the group seems as though it can be as simple as a text using only emoji or a "like" on Instagram. As Payton described above, the existing bonds in the group serve as a foundation of support during re-entry, so even if no words are spoken between the participants, the bonds remain strong. This again demonstrates the very powerful connections that are built during ISL programs amongst participants during a culturally immersive experience.

Finally, there is one alternative perspective that existed amongst the participants

interviewed that can be helpful in understanding finding #5 from a new point of view. Participant Brian was one of the few participants who had traveled extensively prior to joining the Hands on Thailand program. Brian easily adjusted to Chiang Mai after a recent trip to China, he enjoyed his service placement, and overall he didn't feel as though he was really transformed by the trip (Brian Interview 1). Brian was also the only participant who readily volunteered that he already felt as though he was a global citizen, stating,

I think I've seen a lot of the world and... I am aware. I watch the news and I have friends from all over the world. Even just having conversations with family friends and stuff, I keep up to date with world events. (Brian Interview 1)

As a world traveler, Brian already felt that being culturally competent was a part of his identity and he felt very comfortable expressing this idea.

While he did admittedly learn a lot from this particular trip to Thailand, Brian did not have the same difficult period of re-entry as did his fellow participants. Brian also did not feel as though he needed support from others. Brian stated, "You come back and you miss it. It might be good to get together... but I really haven't talked to too many people – I haven't really sat down with anyone from the program" (Brian Interview 1). For Brian, reconnecting with friends sounded fun, but was not associated with his further development after the program. So, we can see from this example that for those who are actively transforming their frames of reference and still processing the ISL experience during re-entry, a strong internal commitment to sustaining their transformation and support from others going through similar experiences is crucial. For those not experiencing this process, like Brian, the re-entry period is not as critical of a time in their development process.

As we have seen so far, there are many similar themes that have surfaced

throughout the data running through each finding. It is clear that the ways in which these participants reconstructed their meaning perspectives and adjusted their outlooks on their own lives were impacted by their experiences in Thailand and during re-entry. In order to further investigate how this very complex process was managed by participants, research question 2C inquired, “What resources and/or experiences do participants feel they need in order to translate their experience back to their life at home?” There were numerous examples of Kiely’s (2004) “chameleon complex” evident throughout the data from the re-entry period, particularly early on in the first two to three months. However, I propose that those students who have managed the re-entry process well are effectively translating their experience to their lives at home by taking action to live in alignment with their new beliefs and seeking additional transformational experiences.

**Finding #6: Those who have experienced the greatest transformation are navigating the challenges associated with the changes within themselves and adjusting their lives in accordance with their new perspectives. These chameleons are conquering their complexes.**

As noted previously, the re-entry period is challenging for participants after they have undertaken an ISL program. While dealing with jet lag, changed routines, a completely different environment, and varying expectations from people in all aspects of their lives, students who are still undergoing the (often emotionally volatile) processes of identity development can sensibly be predicted to struggle in the months after returning home. The “chameleon complex” that Kiely (2004) described as an “internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms, rituals, and practices in the United States” after students return home is the perfect way to envision this internal struggle for some of the HoT participants. And yet, after this particular ISL program,

there were students who worked through this struggle quite well and others who barely experienced it. With this in mind, I believe that the data from this case study support Kiely's (2004) "chameleon complex" theory, but also provide a supplemental theory that some transformed participants are able to effectively conquer their complexes, impact the environment around them, and proudly show their true colors after their re-entry period.

Building off of Finding #5, we know that those who have demonstrated the greatest transformation have great internal motivation and highly value group support. Along these same lines, those who have shown the greatest transformation and the most development have also made specific, deliberate changes and choices in their lives during re-entry. Because of their commitment and devotion to their new worldviews, it appears that these participants have been very successful at impacting others in their life. In this way, they have influenced their surrounding environment and made it a better fit for their "new" self.

To analyze an occurrence of this phenomenon, we can explore the relationship between the participants and the social justice causes that many of them became significantly invested in during their time in Thailand. In particular, environmental justice, issues of poverty, and animal rights causes were among the most popular and the most widely discussed amongst group members. By staying engaged with the causes they were introduced to "face-to-face" in Thailand, participants have also simultaneously stayed connected to their new meaning perspectives. Some also found that the program inspired them to continue similar service placements at home. For example, Crystal noted,

So I've realized that I have this passion for teaching kids. This trip has made me want to come back and pick up another volunteer opportunity. I want to have that

feeling of teaching. I'm getting my child development minor, so I can work as a teacher or (in) pre-school. (I) might look into as a part time job. I already knew I liked working with kids, because I've been a counselor and I've babysat and I have brothers and sisters, but it really has focused my energy on what I enjoy. And (what I enjoy) is working with (kids) directly and interacting and teaching. I had wanted to do pediatric nursing, and this trip just strengthened my opinion. (Crystal Interview 1)

Here, we can see that Crystal's experience in Thailand has both solidified her career choice and inspired her to take on additional commitments that are in line with her new perspectives.

For Cameron, the ISL program also clarified her future path and illustrated how important it was to her to assist others on their path towards transformational learning.

I was thinking that I wanted to work in hospitality with lots of people involved, and while that sounds fun, like working at a hotel or being a party organizer, (it) wouldn't have been meaningful to me. (By teaching) I'm doing something exciting, but influencing someone in a meaningful way... I was looking for a certain type of meaning. That was awesome when I realized that. And that it was okay not to have a five year plan. I was so set on, 'I need to have a plan for after college,' but after Thailand, in three weeks, I found something I really liked to do and I never would have known that if I never got to experience it firsthand. (Cameron Interview 1)

In this quote, Cameron describes how the program helped her to figure out what she wanted to do after college. Further, she details how she had always wanted to do something meaningful with her future chosen career, but this experience opened her eyes to how she could actually accomplish this goal in her life at home in California. For Cameron, to adjust her life to her new perspectives, she recognized that she would need to stop adhering to the perceived "rules" for American college students. That is, instead of planning her future in line with what others felt was right for her, Cameron wanted to create her own, independent path. Cameron depicted her next steps, stating,

I'm not a career type. I'm leaning more towards getting out in the world, really literally, and learning what I like to do as each day comes. That's something that Thailand really taught me... it only took me three weeks to find something that I

love to do. I realized why everyone struggles here – you’re sitting around and you’re not trying new things, how would you know what you want to do?  
(Cameron Interview 1)

As Cameron’s words illustrate, she now feels strongly about living in alignment with the principles that she believes in and shows no remorse about not conforming to the American cultural expectations that she believed in until her time in Thailand.

It has been shown that participation in service learning impacts academic learning in areas like problem solving and has an effect on career development (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, what we can interpret from the experiences of the students in this program is that it is the process of learning about one-self after service, during the struggle of re-entry, which is really quite critical. Students may have many ideas about what their future might look like while in another country and trying on a different role or developing new skill sets. After they come back home and try to make sense of this process within the context of their “real life,” though, sometimes it is very difficult to translate the experience in a way that works with their future plans (e.g. summer jobs, graduate school, etc...) and because there is a lack of assistance and understanding, it could be easier for some to simply give up their newly acquired dreams.

To illustrate this point, we can explore Cameron’s experience during re-entry. While Cameron was entirely dedicated to travelling and volunteering after she graduates from college during the re-entry period, she did not have all of the tools to be able to effectively navigate this very different life pathway on her own. Cameron noted that she felt support was lacking on her campus and that she, admittedly, did not know where to go to gather more information about what “alternative” options were available to her to assist in her desire to teach and/or volunteer abroad again. (Cameron Interview 1)

Remarkably, Cameron suggested a re-entry support group to provide resources to

students in her position following ISL experiences. Cameron described the group as,

A place for people who have been abroad and who are interested in getting back out there, (and for) anyone who wants to go abroad, maybe for community service, a way for you to collaborate with your peers... I could see people being hired as advisors who had done it before... Someone who can show you how to get where you want to go, not someone who is just trying to advise you and has never done it, but experienced people. (Cameron Interview 1)

This description is hugely important for a few reasons. First, it demonstrates Cameron's desire for continued group reflection beyond the initial re-entry period. Second, it highlights the lack of group support generally received during re-entry. Finally, Cameron's words indicate that she has made a serious commitment to following through with her new plans to the extent that she has envisioned what future support she may need in order to see it through. Even after only a few months after the program in Thailand, Cameron was working on changing her life completely, despite the inevitable hurdles that she understood she may face.

Similarly, participant Jason also described in both interviews that he felt the "Thai way" had "stayed with him," and was impacting his daily life and his future goals (Jason Interview 1 & 2). As an older student, Jason had already dealt with many personal issues and academic set-backs. While Cameron felt pressured to stick to her "five year plan," for Jason, the trip to Thailand allowed him to begin to think about the future in more concrete, realistic terms. Jason also envisioned his life after Thailand in a completely new way. For example, he talked about potentially living in Asia, stating that a "new door had been opened" and that he "might find a new home with gainful employment" and perhaps "settle down over there" (Jason Interview 1). To make these future dreams become a reality, Jason was still communicating with his contacts at Chiang Mai University and was actively planning out his next trip to Asia (Jason Interview 2). Additionally, Jason

was re-committing himself to his campus activism and was actively encouraging other HoT participants to do the same (Jason Interview 2). Because Jason felt as though the perspectives he gained in Thailand expanded upon his current beliefs, they were easily incorporated into his lifestyle at home and into his visions for his future.

For participant Payton, the changes made upon returning home were much more deliberate and more extreme. Kiely (2004) notes that we cannot assume that the process of navigating changes in life at home will be easy for the “transformed mind,” and this was certainly the case here (p. 17). Again, Payton disclosed that she had been experiencing a period of depression prior to the trip, which then made the transformation that much more enlightening and meaningful to her. Experiencing re-entry following the ISL program in Thailand revealed that Payton’s current life was not aligned with her belief systems at all. This necessitated larger changes and more of a re-creation of her life in order to further explore these new beliefs and continue the transformation. Interestingly, this change came a few months after returning home. Payton described this revelation,

This moment for me, which happened in September, was an important marker and where I decided to make a lot of changes. Going back a bit, prior to Thailand, I was extremely depressed... I had a lot of things going on that were making me feel hopeless, not good enough, not deserving enough... Before Thailand I was with someone who made me extremely unhappy, my car was totaled, I was living paycheck to paycheck, I had a job that overworked and underpaid me. The last thing I could do was volunteer my time for anything. I felt like extracurricular activities were out of the question... so you can imagine my surprise when I came back. (Payton, Personal Comm. Dec. 15)

Payton notes that she was actually surprised at the changes in herself, because they were so drastic compared to where she began the journey. This brings an important point to light; students struggling with mental health issues prior to participating in ISL

programs need even greater resources and support as they experience transformational learning during and after the in-country program.

However, Payton's experience as a whole was a true success and she is now living in accordance with her beliefs and finding new ways to foster her continued transformation. As she describes,

This is the happiest I've been in years. I can't wait to travel again, and with my new significant other who LOVES volunteering with me. We plan to go to new countries and dedicate our time to helping people in their community instead of buying into the sales culture of traveling. It's great knowing I have a partner in crime who I can also help get to where I am today. I feel like I've brought that piece of Thailand back with me. (Payton, Personal Comm., Dec. 15)

Payton further detailed in her communication how she is achieving things she never thought possible before Thailand and how she has a renewed confidence to make her own decisions about her future (Payton, Personal Comm. Dec. 15). Payton's experience highlights the point that despite what others may think or expect, she has reached a point in her transformation where she had made concrete choices and plans that align with her worldviews. Moreover, Payton has chosen to surround herself with supportive and like-minded individuals and to eliminate those from her life who do not support or understand her goals.

To conclude this finding, it is helpful to revisit the last research question, 2D, "How long do participants experience the re-entry process, and do their needs change over time?" There was no one singular theme or answer to this question throughout the participants' responses. Some noted immediate changes, whereas others mentioned it took months for their transformation to be truly revealed. However, Finding #6 illustrates to us that establishing a standard length of time for re-entry is not relevant, and that re-entry should be thought of more as a state of mind or a "transition time" that differs

widely amongst participants. As such, it is much more important to understand the types of cognitive shifts that take place, the emotions experienced, the strategies used to cope with the changes, and so forth. Through the examples above, we have seen that in this case, the somewhat simple, yet extraordinary, answer to the central question of “how do participants manage transformation?” is that participants attempt to change their lives at home in multiple ways in order to fit their new meaning perspectives.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have established answers to the two core research questions of this study and discussed six of the most salient findings that emerged from the data. First, as discussed in Finding #1, it was shown that undergraduate student participants of this three-week ISL program did exhibit evidence of experiencing the process of transformational learning. Further, the cultural context of this particular program setting, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, directly influenced the process of transformation that participants experienced as examined in Finding #2. Because of the great cultural disparity between Thailand and America, participants were given numerous opportunities both in Chiang Mai and within their service placements to experience critical events that would re-shape their frames of reference. The participants gained new worldviews on everything from their own religious beliefs to political ideologies and beyond, supporting Kiely’s (2004) notion that participants transform along six key dimensions. Finally, the perception of strong group bonds amongst the participants seemed to foster transformation by creating feelings of “connectedness” and providing further opportunities for reflection throughout the program, as highlighted in Finding #3.

Next, I explored answers to the second main research question, “If participants demonstrate evidence of transformational learning, what factors do these participants

believe contribute to their ability to manage this transformation upon re-entry?” Keeping in mind that not all participants had experienced real transformation, the few who did provided an expansive amount of data. These participants demonstrated, as noted in Finding #4, that the process of transformation and re-evaluating meaning perspectives did not stop upon returning home. The “shock” of re-entering the home culture provided additional opportunities for reflection, sustaining and sometimes re-igniting the transformational process of re-envisioning deeply held worldviews. Additionally, support from friends and family was discussed in every interview. However, as shown in Finding #5, the transformed participants felt as though the most meaningful support came from within and from others who had also experienced the transitional period after returning home from a meaningful cultural experience abroad. Finally, per Finding #6, of the participants who most successfully navigated re-entry, some experienced Kiely’s (2004) “chameleon complex,” but all made specific life choices on their own to live in alignment with their new worldviews and essentially “conquer” this complex.

Taken as a whole, these findings positively support the notion that ISL is a powerful educational tool that can transform lives. Particularly of interest is the idea that while self-confidence, independence, and support from others with similarly changed perspectives were all important factors to these students in managing the transformation, the observed changes did not take place within a set time period. These changes were also experienced differently by each participant. Additionally, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the notion from participants that new worldviews were changes in themselves that could be lost was truly fascinating. To avoid “losing” these changes, the transformed participants all cherished and fostered the change, spending time to develop and further

reflect upon their newly developed perspectives. However, without much guidance during the re-entry period, participants craved group interaction and some even began to envision new types of group support – an idea that I will further explore in the next chapter.

In conclusion, I can confidently state that the participants of this trip generally experienced positive outcomes. Many participants, and especially the few who experienced the most profound transformations, expressed during the study that their lives have been completely changed for the better. The outcomes between two-six months after the in-country program support the notion that the changes will be permanent and long-lasting. The research questions that I asked initially were answered, and the answers provide us with much needed information about the very personal process of transformational learning that can occur alongside culturally challenging experiences, particularly during the unpredictable time in the few months after returning home from abroad. Given these answers, in the next chapter we can now explore some of the implications and discover how these findings may be used in order to positively impact both programs and their participants within institutions of higher education.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

As we all adjust to our increasingly globalized world, educators must continually adapt and hone their practices in order to ensure that students are acquiring cultural competencies, developing interpersonal skills, and gaining understanding of the diverse world in which they live. It can be said that the overarching long-term goals of such practices are to promote cooperation and communication among individuals, institutions, and nations in favor of promoting innovation, peace, and democracy. One of the most powerful educational tools that may be utilized in aspiration of achieving these desired outcomes is international service learning. The ISL pedagogy has been largely developed in the field by educators committed to those results. However, these programs require further dedicated scholarly research across both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to more fully understand how the design and the programmatic implementation actually achieve the desired impact in practice.

To re-state the central purpose of the study put forth in Chapter One, “The purpose of this study will be to understand the process of transformational learning that may take place within undergraduate student participants of a three-week international service program and to explore how participants manage the process of re-entry to the home country following the international experience.” As a qualitative study designed to bring to light the student experience during and after an ISL program, the focus was on one small group of students and explored both the individual and group perspective “on the ground.” Specifically, the purpose was created with the need to understand how students truly felt about the experience while also incorporating the fact that the ISL re-

entry period had hardly been studied in a scholarly way previously in the available recent literature.

In essence, I can generally summarize the findings from Chapter Four by stating that what we believe to be true about the significant impact of ISL on student learning, is as powerful as it appears to be. Transformational learning did seem to occur along a spectrum of dimensions during and after the ISL program and the findings certainly show that a student's experience during the re-entry period can dictate whether that process of perspective transformation continues or not. It is important for us to further discuss these findings within the context of the ISL field and to juxtapose the findings against the reality of planning international programs at institutions of higher education in the U.S.

### **Discussion**

In reviewing the two central research questions posed in Chapter One, it can be said that some of the participants in the Hands on Thailand (HoT) ISL program exhibited evidence of transformational learning in accordance with Kiely's (2004) six dimensions and that the cultural context of the program promoted this perspective transformation on the whole. Of the participants who experienced this distinct type of development, there is additional evidence to support that the process of transformation continued after they returned home. Of those who demonstrated signs of transformation during re-entry, the data show that they were able to manage this transformation best by drawing on their inner confidence, connecting with others who have had similar experiences, and making life changes in accordance with their new found ideals. Participants generally felt supported upon re-entry, but often were lacking resources to assist in translating their experiences to their everyday lives at home. That is, the participants felt committed to

making changes based on their new understanding of the world, but were unsure of how to make those changes given the realities of their lives back at home. While the data have allowed answers to both of the central research questions and almost all of the sub-questions to be developed, it is important to note that given the length of the data collection period (8 months) there was insufficient evidence to fully answer the final sub-question of whether participants' needs change over time following the re-entry period.

In Chapter Four, six findings were reached based on the data collected during the course of the study. The first finding reads, "Participants exhibited evidence of transformational learning and they did so along Kiely's (2004) six dimensions: political, moral, spiritual, intellectual, personal, and cultural." It is important that another study has confirmed that transformation can happen at all and that these dimensions can be appropriately used to categorize the perspective transformations which occur, especially by giving additional examples to support and further define the dimensions. One of the most important takeaways from this particular finding, and from the study as a whole, is that ISL programs can be planned around the six dimensions in order to promote learning in that particular area.

In this case, the HoT program was associated with an Introduction to Sociology course and had a large emphasis on both cultural exploration and personal development. The curriculum was designed specifically with Thailand in mind. However, the open and flexible nature of this program allowed students to develop along all six dimensions. If the program had been designed around an "Introduction to Religious Studies" course in which all participants were required to volunteer with local monks and attend local Temples, we could expect students' moral and spiritual dimensions to exhibit deeper

transformative qualities. While exploring this type of curriculum building, where the design is based on the desired outcomes, may seem quite elementary at first, it is crucial for ISL builders (who may be administrators, faculty, or even other students with seniority) to have a solid roadmap to follow in planning intentional programs. Every outing should be considered and every reflection session planned ahead of time, with enough free time during the day for casual conversations and individual exploration to take place. For example, one afternoon I spent over an hour with one participant with our feet in the pool at the hotel discussing her career path, and on the last morning I met up with a small group at their favorite local breakfast spot and we talked about what they would miss about Chiang Mai and whether they were excited to go home or not. Free time is critical for conversations to take place and for reflective processing to occur, but must be met with deep engagement opportunities; a good way to think of this is as a wave pattern, essentially an ebb and flow of cultural challenges.

Additionally, knowing that transformational learning can happen along the six dimensions should provide impetus for faculty and program administrators to promote structured and unstructured reflection sessions that focus on identifying and delving into the dimension experienced. This outcomes-based approach should help create a unifying theme throughout the program and keep students thinking about the core dimensions addressed. For example, in returning to our “Religious Studies” course example, students could discuss their different experiences together in a reflection session about how the Thais practice Buddhism, chat informally during the day about what they enjoy about daily life in a gracious, karmic community, write about their own religious background in their journal, and compare and contrast Buddhism and Christianity upon returning home

to the U.S. in a final paper. This type of scaffolding surely exists in the best ISL programs, but could easily be introduced where it is lacking by thinking carefully about each dimension and how to use intentional reflection to achieve desired student outcomes.

In the second finding, I concluded that, “The cultural context and setting of the ISL program strongly impact the experience that participants have as they re-interpret their frames of reference.” Those who have traveled, even within the U.S., certainly understand that new places have distinct imprints on your memory. Typically, it is assumed that the more culturally dissimilar the home culture and the program setting are, the greater the imprint will be. However, when planning impactful ISL programs, it is important to take more than just the cultural “dissimilarity” into consideration. Many programs are planned to highlight and explore the culture of the country and city/town in which the experience will take place, but even when that is the case, there are other important contextual factors to consider.

In the case of the HoT program in Thailand, Dr. Brook was intimately familiar with Thailand after living there early on in his career and visiting multiple times throughout his career. This familiarity lent itself to excellent facilitation of reflection sessions and a closeness with the culture that was extremely relatable. It seems that all too often in the rush to plan exciting trips for students, sometimes the importance of the familiarity with the local culture and community is forgotten. The person executing the program should know the nuances of the culture and should ideally speak the local language. Only someone with this level of knowledge should lead the program; otherwise, their role in the program will also be one of a learner instead of an educator.

Dr. Brook was able to clarify experiences for students, provide perspective, and ask meaningful questions to encourage deeper self-reflection. Because of the extensive knowledge available on Thailand and the Thai people, Chiang Mai became much more accessible to students who would not have been able to have that same experience on their own.

Additionally, in every ISL program there should exist strong ties to the local community. This ensures that the service program or opportunities are easily arranged; this was one element that was lacking in the first edition of the HoT program. If the ties do not exist, then substantial research and networking must be undertaken in advance to secure the sites ahead of time. Students described the difficulty searching for their sites and the time that was consumed in this process that could have been spent helping others and/or developing themselves. Additionally, sites where there is little opportunity for deep cultural experiences (e.g. volunteering at an animal shelter) can be given up in favor of more meaningful opportunities (e.g. teaching English at local schools). This idea should also be applied to the housing selection for the program as well. The setting should be central and accessible to both the service site(s) and local activities, offer space for group meetings, reflect the local culture, and offer students some space for relaxation and social gatherings. The Eurana Boutique hotel where the group stayed was a perfect, and cost-effective, selection and seemed to serve only to enhance all of the positive aspects of the program. Every aspect of the program should not only be considered, but considered strategically in the context of supporting reflection, conversation, relationship building, and self-discovery.

Expanding upon this idea is the third finding, “The perception of strong group bonds that enabled a feeling of “connectedness” to others on the trip was an important condition for transformation.” It is common practice for administrators or faculty to facilitate name-games or icebreakers when students first meet one another during the pre-departure meeting or perhaps upon arrival. However, as a whole, it seems that little work goes into intentional creation of a space where relationships can be built outside of the traditional ISL reflection sessions. Over and over again, the participants voiced how important the other students were to their transformational process and how learning about the experiences of others triggered their own internal reflection process where their meaning schemas were re-examined and often replaced. While no standard best practices emerged from this program, some ideas to explore might be smaller group reflection sessions, introducing “get to know you” or general icebreaker activities, pairing students together intentionally on service sites, and spending more time on structured group outings and adventures (e.g. excursion to the local elephant habitat, etc). While there may always be students who grumble at the idea of organized fun, these activities provide informal, yet very important, opportunities for reflection and connection that students will cherish upon returning home.

Additionally, when we think about the return home, one of the largest losses felt amongst all of the participants is the group “family” that emerged while on the program. This sense of loss and disconnectedness to the other participants is felt very deeply. From a programmatic perspective, when the flight lands back in the U.S., it seems that the program and the entire experience comes to an abrupt halt - but maybe that should not necessarily be the case. Technology has a great role to play here and can be used

effectively to the advantage of students and facilitators. Group meet-ups hosted by the program and/or university should be pre-planned prior to the program, in addition to providing ways for students to get involved after their return home. Unfortunately in the HoT program, the first group meet-up following the program was a failure. To the chagrin of the student who hosted it, no one attended. This could have been prevented by proper planning, RSVPs, social media reminders, and so forth. However, it should be noted that Dr. Brook's email listserv that students joined when they signed up to take part in the course did serve as an effective way of connecting all of the program participants even after their return home. Even today, the listserv is still running and new members have joined, essentially linking the first group of HoT participants to each new incoming cohort that has followed. Setting up this kind of on-going, growing listserv is definitely recommended for any ISL facilitators.

As we continue to think about the re-entry process, it is of utmost importance that we recognize that transformation and identity development are on-going and non-linear. This is the central thesis of this study and the notion that will hopefully make the most impact on future programs. As stated in finding #4, "Upon re-entry, participants exhibited signs of continuing perspective transformation and on-going identity development." In planning for ISL programs, everyone involved must be prepared that the learning process does not stop when the flight lands back home or when the jet lag ceases. The learning and development process continues on for months, perhaps even years, and both students and their families and friends should be prepared to be a part of this process. In a sense, ISL programs don't just impact an individual, they can impact communities of people around the globe.

With this sense of long-term impact in mind, it can be daunting to know where to begin, especially when funds for ISL are generally very tight. However, a pre-departure Orientation and a debriefing session upon return home are non-negotiable as baseline measures. Ideally, there would be multiple sessions leading up to departure and multiple sessions following the program, along with an information session for parents, families, and friends. Given the realities of academia though, it is more reasonable to advise that program administrators provide information on the challenges that may await students during the re-entry period and give details regarding available resources (e.g. campus counseling center, ways to get involved on-campus or in the local community, information on future study abroad/exchange opportunities). Further, professors and administrators must be conscious of their role in the process of transformational learning and continue to work with students during the re-entry period to the greatest extent possible. Campus partners, including student affairs professionals, could be notified of which students have recently returned home and may need additional support. ISL is a great responsibility, and again, one that extends far beyond the boundaries of a traditional short-term program.

During the period of re-entry, the evidence from this study led to the 5th finding, “The most important support during re-entry comes in two forms. First, support from within is the most valuable in managing the transition and can be characterized as self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-care. Second, support from others who have had a similar experience helps shape and sustain the transformation.” Again, if no planning has been done to assist students through the re-entry period, it is likely that many will struggle or will not continue to fully engage with the process of transformation. However,

if students are engaged and supported from others who are understanding of what they are going through, and if they have enough strength and confidence to stand out from the crowd and embrace their new ideals, the re-entry period can be a joyous time in a young adult's life. This newfound passion can be incredible! And yet, the recognition that you do not know everything, that there are many other ways to live, and that your world-view and perspectives been quite limited until this point in your life may be truly difficult thoughts to reconcile.

So, knowing this information, how do we ensure that students have built enough self-confidence to make it through the re-entry process? This can be a function of the ISL program itself, as service to others typically tends to increase one's own confidence level, as does successfully living abroad on your own for weeks at a time. Faculty and administrators can make this a priority as a part of the program, and can introduce and reinforce coping mechanisms for returning to "normal" life after the in-country experience. Further, as part of the application process, it should be a requirement that students explain that they have the academic and mental stamina to take part in a rigorous international program by answering specific questions and by demonstrating a high G.P.A. It is important that international programs be inclusive and welcoming of diversity in all forms, so if there are concerns about excluding specific populations of students based on lower academic achievement then an in-person interview may be a better option to ensure that students are fully committed to the program. The HoT program was a very diverse group of students, which I believe absolutely contributed to both interesting and challenging conversations that facilitated the process of internal reflection for multiple students.

As ISL proponents and supporters of diversity, facilitators must also be aware that students experience the re-entry process differently from one another. However, just as every new student who walks into your office has a different need, each student on an ISL program will too. The old Student Affairs mantra applies, you will need to “meet them where they are.” Provide each student with individualized support, care, and resources, and they will likely emerge successful. The evidence from Chapter Four can help us clarify this point slightly; that is, students want information and guidance on what to do next and this information seems to be lacking, at least it was for the HoT participants. Hosting a website that contains re-entry resources, such as information about study abroad programs or living abroad, is a great first step. Being able to directly connect students to next opportunities and to other students or organizations is even better. Both of these actions can help students continue to manage their transformation on their own and relate it to their life at home.

Finally, the last finding of Chapter Four proposes that, “Those who have experienced the greatest transformation are navigating the challenges associated with the changes within themselves and are adjusting their lives in accordance with their new perspectives. These chameleons are conquering their complexes.” This final finding is specific to the few students who showed evidence of experiencing perspective transformation during the ISL program and after re-entry, and describes how, despite the challenges of the cultural transition back to the U.S., these students are thriving. Essentially, these changed students, or “chameleons,” as Kiely (2004) might refer to them, are effectively navigating the complexities of life after international service learning. All of the students come from different backgrounds with varying levels of

familial support and academic achievement, and yet they are developing positively and responding incredibly to the three-week course that they took together in Thailand. The key word here is “together.” While there may be other forces at play, the commonality amongst those students in this category was that they felt deeply connected to their service experience, to the HoT group, and to Chiang Mai, Thailand.

When analyzing this finding, one of the toughest questions that may be raised is, “what if students do not want to change?” What happens if students see the world and experience new cultures and they decide that they do not want to be an agent of change nor live in accordance with the perspectives they have now been exposed to? The most salient examples of changed students from HoT are now taking action by leading local political organizations supporting the fight against climate change or undertaking a graduate degree abroad. However, the reality is that not every student wants to be a global citizen and not every student who undertakes an ISL program will experience that magical process of transformational learning that this study has explored so deeply. Most will at least incorporate new ideas into their lives, like the participants who adopted a vegetarian diet following the trip, and they will certainly treasure the memories just as much. The goal should not be to change every student, but to encourage and facilitate the transformation if they are open and willing. Again, it is also quite important to remember that this process is a piece of a larger developmental puzzle and that students who may not be ready for change at this stage could still incorporate their new perspectives into their lives as they move into true adulthood. Perhaps part of the complex our ‘chameleons’ experience can be attributed to managing the rigors of emerging adulthood on top of navigating an internal clash of cultures?

## **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

As a whole, the Hands on Thailand program was very successful in introducing students to the Thai culture and spurring on the process of reflection and transformation. For a first-time, faculty-led, introductory-level course, it can be said that this program was highly effective at achieving its goal of cross-cultural learning. In terms of improvements on the practical end, I have already highlighted some areas of logistical change in this chapter, specifically regarding further pre- and post-trip education. However, I would also recommend the following logistical adjustments for the HoT program: adjust the curriculum to test or evaluate students' academic learning during the service component of the course, secure service sites in advance and continue community relationships from year-to-year, set up networks (i.e. social media pages, group chats, etc) and mandatory post-trip events and reporting requirements in advance to ensure students have a way to stay connected both academically and socially after their return home.

Further, I would recommend that in future programs, more group reflection sessions (every day or every other day, instead of twice per week) be added to bolster opportunities for students to discuss, think, talk, and listen. The types of questions during the reflection sessions that seemed to lead to the most engaged thinking were when they were asked to share specific examples from their placements or their daily experiences in Thailand. The participants also responded well when asked to compare their lives in Thailand to their lives at home and identify the differences, and when then prompted to further dive into the "why" behind those differences, which typically led into deeper conversations about culture, politics, history, religion, economics, and into general theories of sociology and human behavior. Outside of the reflection sessions, when I

spoke with students prior to the end of the program, I found that simply asking students how they felt about the significance of what they had accomplished in Thailand and about their preparations for returning home led to a variety of complex answers and emotions. Simply put, when students are challenged to think and are guided in both an academic and an emotional manner, reflection helps students sort out and make sense of the array of sensory inputs they are experiencing each day in a new place. However, it is essential to remember that the reflection is a truly necessary part of the process, but as a tool, it needs to be paired with critical moments of dissonance that start the process of perspective transformation initially (which generally occur in the service component of the trip). More research could certainly be done on the minutia of what style of questions could trigger the most significant self-reflection.

Along with these specific recommendations, I believe that in order to promote the deepest and most lasting transformative experience, other ISL programs should mimic the flexibility that was inherent in Dr. Brook's program. That is, programs should incorporate the organic, guided-style of reflection and the scaffolded group excursions that all truly reflected the culture of the Chiang Mai region and of the Thai people. By reflecting the laid-back culture of Thailand into the program structure, student learning was enhanced.

While this study has confirmed that students on this program experienced transformational learning during the HoT program and after their return to the U.S., these findings are not necessarily generalizable to all ISL programs. Further research in the field is definitely needed as programs such as this one continue to emerge across institutions of higher education around the world. Some specific areas for additional research based on my research and observations include: more longitudinal studies of

program participants over time, comparing outcomes of program participants year after year, exploring how different re-entry programs and services impact how students react during the critical re-entry phase, re-examination of older models of cultural adjustment (especially given the large technological advancements of the early 21st century), and delving into the idea of the “group” aspect even further and exploring why group dynamics and the social element are so integral to the process of reevaluating one’s frames of reference while making meaning of a new cultural setting.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

While I believe that the study was successful in answering the original research questions and in understanding the student experience during and after the ISL program, there are some specific strengths and some important limitations that merit discussion. First, to review the limitations, as I have stated previously, because of the qualitative nature of this study, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to other ISL programs or other student outcomes. This note does not negate their importance, but it may somewhat limit the usefulness of the findings to the field and to other researchers or practitioners. Additionally, because of the physical distance between the East and West coasts, I was unable to attend the pre-trip Orientation session and had to interview students during the re-entry period over the phone. I believe that the data I retrieved could have been richer if I had included pre-trip data and if I was able to interview students in-person. Finally, in reviewing my methodology, I should have planned to interview students over an even longer period of time following their return to the U.S. The need for studies over a longer period of time is quite great, and I can now recognize, based on my conversations with the participants, that the re-entry period likely lasts longer than

even I previously imagined. That is, instead of helping students “re-adjust” only in the first few weeks after their return, we may need to re-envision the length of time it takes students to navigate their transformation after such an important, life-changing event. The re-entry period could theoretically last at least six months or maybe even a year.

Despite some of these limitations, there are multiple strengths of this qualitative study. The most important strength was the “on-the-ground” aspect of my methodology. To elaborate, the fact that I actually went to Thailand and took part in the service with the students was paramount. I was able to create a unique, shared experience that engendered lasting relationships. While still keeping a bit of appropriate distance as a researcher and student affairs professional, these close relationships and the students viewing me as an “insider” led to my ability to accurately understand and analyze the students’ experiences. The trust the students and I formed during one week in Thailand led to continued fruitful conversations throughout the interview process after re-entry and also led, in a few cases, to lasting friendships. As I detailed in Chapter 3, there is a chance that I may have influenced participant outcomes by inquiring about their re-entry experience and discussing their transformation. However, I believe this only had a positive impact, if it had any impact at all.

It is necessary for me to highlight one final note of clarity here, one that is neither a strength nor a limitation. This study was intentionally planned and executed with a student-centered approach. It has been suggested that ISL research should ensure that the voices of the communities served are reflected in the research, and that critical theories should be utilized to ensure that a Western-centric lens of privilege does not filter the entirety of the research in this field (Mitchell, 2008). While the focus of my research has

been on student learning and transformation, an overarching goal of virtually all ISL programs is to create global citizens, particularly those who are capable at effectively crossing cultures and who will work towards creating a socially just society world-wide. By working to better understand how students stay connected and engaged with their experience abroad and how they reflect on these experiences to shift their meaning perspectives during and after their ISL programs, we may be better able to ensure that our programs are actually impactful for the students of today and that our outcomes are aligned with our lofty goals and objectives.

### **Final Conclusions**

In summary, this qualitative study has found that student participants of the Hands on Thailand program did experience transformational learning both during and after the program. Additionally, it was found that students generally experienced this transformation along the six perspectives that Richard Kiely's (2004) work proposed, that the cultural context and setting of the program contributed positively to the process of transformational learning, and that the group dynamic and sense of belonging played an important role as well. Amongst that those who did show evidence of transform, their inner strength and their level of support from others was connected to their ability to sustain their transformation and they were actively taking steps to change their lives at home to align with their newly discovered set of values.

While I have noted in this chapter that more research is certainly needed, we can also finally conclude that the re-entry period is extremely important after students undertake an intensive international service-learning experience abroad. More attention must be paid to this critical time in a student's life if we are to reap the long-term benefits

of implementing ISL programs in institutions of higher education. If we actively take steps to help students manage the transformational learning process during re-entry, not only will we help improve relationships with our students and support their mental health during a critical period of development, but we will see the rewards in the years to come as these students grow into the engaged citizenry and leaders of our increasingly interconnected, globalized world.

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## APPENDIX: “HANDS ON THAILAND” SYLLABUS

Soci 180: Hands on Thailand (HoT): Service Learning in Chiang Mai

(3 units; Cr/NC)

Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, SJSU

SJSU Special Summer Session: Faculty-Led Program (FLP): June 6-26, 2015

Professor: [Dan Brook, Ph.D.](#)

This course will analyze some social aspects of Thailand and our role in them. Through reading, writing, service learning, field excursions, reflection sessions, reflection journals, and more, students will directly explore and experience the processes that shape culture and society in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Blending thinking and doing, service learning is a unique and vital modality that brings the classroom into the community and the community into the classroom. Service learning is an integrated form of experiential learning involving cycles of preparatory reading, collaborative work in the service of others outside the classroom, and reflective writing and group discussions, as well as linking personal and social responsibility, appealing to a variety of different learning styles. With service learning, we directly experience the practical applications of academic knowledge and social analyses in both community and classroom. Doing so in a foreign country only amplifies our learning.

Studying abroad in Thailand, especially by being embedded in Thai culture and society for three weeks, is educational and immeasurably worthwhile. Further, direct knowledge of Thai culture and society is useful as a comparative case to better understand and contextualize other cultures and societies, including that of the U.S. This will contribute to the students' repertoire of knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as their social and intellectual development and their social and cultural intelligence. Asia is an increasingly important continent, for a variety of reasons, and increased student knowledge about and experience in Asia will better prepare them for the future.

When not engaged in volunteering or course activities, students are free to explore and experience the many wonders of Chiang Mai.

### **Requirements (there are no prerequisites for this course):**

Reading

Working with a local organization

Attending group excursions

Monk Chat

Maintaining a journal of experiences, reflections, and social analysis

Participating in group reflection sessions

Following program rules (*especially* regarding health, safety, SJSU regulations, and Thai law)

### **Required Reading:**

1. Dan Brook, [HoT Info Guide](#)

2. Dan Brook, [Go!: Travel Quotes to Send You Off \(Smashwords\)](#)

3. Instructor-delivered readings on service learning, Chiang Mai, Thailand, Thai language, Thai culture, Thai Buddhism, and contemporary social issues in Thailand (to be assigned)

4. Thai mass media articles (to be located individually while in Thailand)
5. Nancy Chandler's *Map of Chiang Mai* (to be distributed)

**Optional Reading:**

Karen Connelly, *Touch the Dragon*

Walden Bello et al., *A Siamese Tragedy: Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand*

Harold Kerbo, *Modern Thailand*

Rattawut Lapcharoensap, *Sightseeing: Stories*

Pasuk Phongpaichit, *From Peasant Girls to Bangkok Masseuses*

Pasuk Phongpaichit *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja*

Any of the various books or articles with "Behind the Smile" in the title or subtitle

Any article or book about Chiang Mai specifically or Thailand generally

**Working with a local organization:**

Students will choose from a selection of non-profit organizations in Chiang Mai with which to engage in service learning for 10-15 hours per week.

This program will avail itself of the richness of Thai culture and work to integrate students into the local community by engaging in service-learning projects with non-profit organizations related to:

education (e.g., Raintree Resource Center, helping to teach English to primary school kids), environmental sustainability and/or teaching English (e.g., Pun Pun near Airport Plaza), children/orphans (e.g., Vieng Ping Children's Home), senior citizens (e.g., Chiang Mai Elderly Home), refugees (e.g., Thai Freedom House), Hill Tribe people (e.g., Karen Hilltribes, Saori Creative Center), women (e.g., Northern Women's Development Foundation, Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution), disabilities (e.g., Chiang Mai Disabled Center), prostitution/human trafficking (e.g., Empower, Urban Light), HIV/AIDS (e.g., Thai Youth AIDS Prevention Project, AIDS Network Development Foundation), art (Art Relief International), and/or animal rights (e.g., Asian Elephant Foundation, Care for Dogs).

**Attending group excursions/field trips:**

Students will be expected to attend group excursions/field trips. We will likely visit various local craft factories, an elephant camp, and a Hill Tribe village.

**Maintaining a journal of experiences, reflections, and social analysis:**

Students are required to maintain a journal in response to: their work with a local organization, required readings, group excursions, items of interest from the Thai media, a chat with a monk, as well as any personal experiences that highlight cultural phenomena in Chiang Mai. There should also be a cumulative journal entry at the end, which reflects on the student's entire experience and your feelings about it. Journals can be handwritten, posted on a blog, or e-mailed to me. While I will read your journals, they are most importantly for you.

**Participating in reflection sessions:**

Students are required to attend and participate in (most) reflection sessions (Mondays & Thursdays, 5-6 PM) at our hotel, where we will discuss what we have been doing and experiencing, what has been going on, and what it means. We may also have some mini-

lectures and guest speakers.

**Group meals:**

There will be at least three planned group meals included in our program, where we can casually eat, talk, and share experiences.

**Following program rules:**

Failure to follow program rules or instructor's written and/or oral warnings, especially regarding health, safety, SJSU regulations, or Thai laws, can result in failure of the course and immediate expulsion from the program without refund.

**Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for the Undergraduate Sociology Program and How They Will Be Accomplished:**

SLO1: Students will be able to think sociologically about the relationship between social structure, interaction, identities, and inequalities;

How SLO1 will be accomplished: Based on readings, lectures, and discussions, students will apply the sociological imagination to their service learning and other academic, social, and cultural experiences in Chiang Mai, Thailand and will demonstrate those applications in their written journals and oral reflection sessions.

SLO2: Students will be able to identify and explain major sociological theories and apply them to everyday life;

How SLO2 will be accomplished: Through oral reflection sessions and written journals, based on their service learning, site visits, readings, lectures, discussions, and other program-related activities, students will be able to analyze, explain, and apply key sociological theories, concepts, and terms to various social issues, social problems, and social solutions in Thailand.

SLO3: Students will be proficient in qualitative and quantitative research design, data collection and data analysis;

How SLO3 will be accomplished: As participant-observers engaging in qualitative field research at their service-learning sites, students will be studying social problems as they work to alleviate them. By analyzing their projects and other activities, and reporting back in their written journals and oral reflection sessions, students will be able to convey their sociological assessments of their own and others' experiences.

SLO4: Students will be proficient in oral and written communication skills appropriate to the discipline;

How SLO4 will be accomplished: In addition to students communicating with their supervisors and those they serve, as well as communicating with Thai students and others, students will also communicate sociological knowledge in writing through their journals and orally through their reflection sessions. Students may also use computers, where available and appropriate.

SLO5: Students will be able to practice sociology as educated and civically engaged persons.

How SLO5 will be accomplished: This is the *raison d'être* of this faculty-led service-learning program to Thailand. Each student will be critically engaged in Chiang Mai, Thailand, working with a local non-profit organization, such as an orphanage or organization dedicated to dealing with human trafficking, and will bring these vital experiences back to SJSU, enhancing their roles as educated, experienced, thoughtful, innovative, and active agents in democratic society as well as other systems and societies.

By accomplishing these learning objectives, students will increase their social and intellectual development. Students will engage in Thai service-learning projects, working alongside Thai and other people to address social problems in Chiang Mai, while placing their useful field experiences in sociological context. In turn, students will take sociological concepts, regarding work, gender, ethnicity, religion, urbanization, development, culture, cross-cultural communication, inequality, leadership, social change, and others, applying them to their service-learning experiences. Other instructional delivery methods will anchor the students' service learning, creating a unique and holistic learning experience with which students will return to San Jose State University with more knowledge, skills, abilities, confidence, and excitement to better succeed in school, including graduate school, the workforce, and in society.

**Proposed Itinerary:**

Day 1 (Sat, June 6): Arrive in Chiang Mai

Day 2 (Sun, June 7): Orientation and Adjustment to Chiang Mai

Day 3 (Mon, June 8): Group Breakfast & Begin Volunteering with Local Organizations

Day 4 (Tues, June 9): Volunteer

Day 5 (Wed, June 10): Volunteer

Day 6 (Thurs, June 11): Volunteer and Reflection Session

Day 7 (Fri, June 12): Volunteer

Day 8 (Sat, June 13): Site Visits to Craft Factories

Day 9 (Sun, June 14): Free Time to Explore Chiang Mai

Day 10 (Mon, June 15): Volunteer, Reflection Session, and Group Dinner

Day 11 (Tues, June 16): Chiang Mai University

Day 12 (Wed, June 17): Volunteer

Day 13 (Thurs, June 18): Volunteer and Reflection Session

Day 14 (Fri, June 19): Volunteer

Day 15 (Sat, June 20): Free time to Explore Chiang Mai

Day 16 (Sun, June 21): Site visits to Elephant Camp and Hill Tribe village

Day 17 (Mon, June 22): Volunteer and Reflection Session

Day 18 (Tues, June 23): Volunteer

Day 19 (Wed, June 24): Group Breakfast/Brunch and Volunteer

Day 20 (Thurs, June 25): Reflection Session and Group Debrief

Day 21 (Fri, June 26): Program Concludes; Depart Chiang Mai

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