

Intercultural citizenship through participation in an international service-learning program: A case study from Taiwan

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Abstract

Byram's (2008) intercultural citizenship framework includes the following orientations: cognitive, evaluative, comparative, action, and communicative. Using this framework as a theoretical basis, this study explored the international service-learning (ISL) experiences of four Taiwanese non-native English speakers (NNES) during a two-week trip to a poor community in the Philippines. Data collected from these students' individual reflections, interviews, and public presentations illustrate their acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of intercultural citizenship. This study thus demonstrates that ISL allowed students to engage beneficially for themselves and their hosts with other NNES, instead of following the tradition of study abroad in countries where English is spoken natively.

Keywords

college volunteers, English as a foreign language, intercultural citizenship, intercultural competence, international service-learning

I Introduction

International service-learning (ISL) is a pedagogy that combines service-learning, international education, and study abroad to prepare students to become global citizens (Bentley & Ellison, 2007; Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011; Mueller & Lee, 2010). Promoting this type of experiential education has become a focus for higher education in Taiwan since it allows students to connect themselves to the world. This type of learning has also been

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promoted by the Youth Development Administration of the Ministry of Education, which has offered financial support through both curricular and extra-curricular activities (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2013). Furthermore, an increasing number of universities are collaborating with non-governmental organizations to host international volunteering or service-learning programs.

In this study, Byram's (1988) term 'intercultural citizenship' was used to address the educational objectives of foreign language education and global citizenship in relation to ISL. Intercultural citizenship is similar to global citizenship, but developed from language teaching and learning. This study examines how non-native English speaking students (NNES) perceived and responded to social issues, such as economic poverty and social inequalities. This is supported by Bringle, Hatcher and Jones (2011), who note that ISL engages students in an intercultural experience leading to a deeper understanding of global issues through self-reflection. Byram (1988) argues, further, that language learning can be a catalyst for social justice work.

The relationship between language teaching and ISL also has significant pedagogical implications for language education. First, the objectives of ISL emphasize learners' intercultural competence and their development of a sense of global social responsibility (Grim, 2010). Therefore, ISL offers the possibility of developing Byram's (2008) emphasis on the acquisition of critical cultural awareness through foreign language teaching. Furthermore, in ISL, language learners have the opportunity to become immersed in a culture associated with the target language whereas English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is generally confined to the classroom (Grim, 2010), and classroom instruction, albeit professional, is usually limited with respect to authentic contexts of language use (Grim, 2010). Thus, for college-level EFL students, using English in an authentic context can complement and enrich understanding of cultures in which it is spoken. Furthermore, ISL can offer the opportunity for immersion in a cultural context which develops an understanding of social justice issues. Recent studies not directly linked to ISL have demonstrated that language education which brings learners into meaningful contact with other speakers of the language they are learning enriches learners' intercultural understanding and better prepares them to be socially responsible, global citizens (Jackson, 2011; Porto, 2014; Porto & Byram, 2015). A journey involving intercultural experiences can transform students, allowing them to gain a better understanding of themselves within a global context (Jackson, 2011). In this study, the relationship with ISL was made explicitly.

1 Context and background to the study

This study explored the teaching experiences of Taiwanese learners of English in the Philippines. The students visited, taught, and lived in a community on Olango Island in the province of Cebu for two weeks in mid-January of 2015. The volunteers' major task was to teach local high school children how to address social issues in their lives. The program was organized by Vision Youth Association (VYA), a non-profit organization (NPO) in Taiwan that offers volunteer programs for students who want to do service learning abroad, in countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia. It was partially funded by City University's (pseudonym) English department, it was a non-credit program and participants were volunteers.

One of the reasons the VYA sends student volunteers to the Philippines for experiential learning is because of the country's geographical proximity to Taiwan. Furthermore, both countries hold commercial relations. Taiwan provides labor-intensive jobs for immigrants from the Philippines in construction, manufacturing, and the health care industry (Taiwan Ministry of Labor, 2016). For example, many Filipina women are employed in Taiwan as caregivers for the disabled and elderly.

Politically, the countries have not always been on good terms. In 2013, travel from Taiwan to the Philippines was temporarily suspended when the captain of a Taiwanese fishing boat was shot and killed by members of the Philippine Coast Guard. This situation was referred to as the *Guang Da Xing No. 28 Incident*. It created tremendous animosity between the two countries due to misleading media coverage and poor judgment on the part of the Philippine Coast Guard. The Taiwanese government felt it was necessary to suspend travel to the Philippines to protect national pride (Whaley, 2013). Consequently, the current study took into consideration how this incident informed the way Taiwanese students developed and/or transformed their attitudes towards the people of Philippines.

The experiential visit was referred to as a two-week voluntourism trip. This gave the Taiwanese students, who were future teachers, not only the opportunity to teach and live in another country but also the opportunity to contribute to the sustainable development of the host community, as tourists, by purchasing fair trade items, such as banana chips, hand-made soaps, handbags, and other commodities made by people in the community.

The purpose of the program was to promote the Taiwanese students' understanding of cultural complexities through international experiential learning. Prior to the trip, VYA prepared the Taiwanese students to attend a two-day orientation workshop in which they were trained to explore one of the poorest communities in Central Taiwan, and their culture. Following the trip to the Philippines, a seminar was hosted in March 2015 to provide students with the opportunity to share their experiences in the ISL program.

As a nonnative English speaking professor from an 'Expanding Circle' country (Taiwan) (Kachru, 1992), I was aware that study abroad in an Inner Circle country has the potential to reinforce the hegemony of English when NNES only interacted with native English speakers (NES). I believed that an ISL program in a different kind of context with other NNES could provide learners with an opportunity to act as linguistic explorers and enter the cultural field to explore the realities of an unfamiliar society; learners would be able to make their own interpretations through observations and interactions with other NNES.

In this learning situation, this study then asked the following questions: (1) How does ISL participation develop intercultural citizenship of NNES by interacting with other NNES? and (2) How do the intercultural transformations of NNES occur (or fail to occur)?

2 Literature review

a Intercultural citizenship: EFL education and study abroad. Traditionally, EFL education in Taiwan has highlighted developing NNES' native-like English proficiency. Native-like English proficiency, in Taiwan and other Expanding Circle countries is actually a

euphemism for White culture, with little regard for other countries where English is also the dominant language. This approach to culture does not take into consideration the complexities of social justice themes involving issues of race, class, gender and other inequities, and this discourages students from critical thinking and action. In this context, language learning misses its potential to prepare students to address global issues (Byram, 2008).

Byram (2008) notes that foreign language education in many parts of the world tends to overemphasize students' language proficiency and underemphasize the importance of students' understanding of their cultural identities relative to the foreign language they are learning. Traditionally, study-abroad programs for English language learners have only been based in countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States of America. These programs reinforce the hegemony of White, Anglo-Saxon culture and seldom allow students to experience varied cultural heritages, and studying abroad in the Inner Circle countries often results in students meeting colonial ideologies that may adversely affect their ability to understand the historical impact of English on English language learners (Pennycook, 2003).

In contrast, Perren and Wurr (2015) have argued that non-native English learners living in Outer Circle countries can benefit greatly from international service-learning programs like VYA. Unlike other types of study abroad language programs, ISL allows students from Expanding Circle countries to visit Outer Circle countries. This approach may potentially counter White hegemony by raising awareness of colonial influences on developing countries that adopt English as an official language.

b English and globalization. The English language has become more powerful throughout the world because of globalization (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Phillipson (2009) has noted that globalization is confounded with Westernization and that the EFL curriculum prepares learners to understand the Western world. More specifically, he suggests that English language teaching (ELT) functions as a vehicle for imposing Western capitalist values and beliefs on students because of its imperialistic influences (Phillipson, 2009). Globalization is indeed Westernization and is apparent in Inner Circle countries where many EFL learners study. Students who visit these countries to learn English risk becoming consumers of the ideology of the Inner Circle, and language learning can become a form of intellectual or psychological, cultural invasion (Phillipson, 2010). As a result, EFL learners may show an understanding of British and American cultures but little or no understanding of other English-speaking cultures (Guilherme, 2007). This cultural imperialism has also been documented in ELT materials and practices with White Anglo-Saxon ideology (Gray, 2010).

By contrast, some scholars suggest that EFL education should counter Westernization and resist cultural imperialism in ELT, which tends to reproduce Western cultural values (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Nakayama & Halualau, 2012). If EFL students perceive the world through Western hegemony, education that promotes ethnocentrism will prevent them from developing multicultural views of the modern world.

Given this continuing debate, EFL education has come to acknowledge the role of English as an international language and the importance of understanding the perspectives of its multiple speakers. Thus, to enhance students' intercultural competence, Alred,

Byram and Fleming (2006) point out the need for language students to (1) question traditional conventions; (2) empathize with the experiences of others; and (3) reflect on their own identities. Guilherme (2007, p. 72) proposes critical pedagogy as a way to provide students with opportunities ‘for acting as responsible cosmopolitan citizens, without implying the loss of our cultural and ideological roots or the transformation of the English language into a neutral, disengaged or unaffiliated medium.’

This has led to the emphasis on the concept of ‘intercultural citizenship’ and the pursuit of an interdisciplinary field that includes both language and political education. Byram (2008) thus opposes a framework of intercultural citizenship consisting of five orientations: (1) cognitive, (2) evaluative, (3) comparative, (4) action, and (5) communicative. A program like VYA offers learners of English intercultural citizenship experience which can be analysed in terms of this framework. This article examines these dimensions from the perspective of four Taiwanese student teachers who participated in the VYA program. The cognitive orientation was found in the preparation of the students to think critically when investigating cultural knowledge through observation and interaction with the people with whom they worked. The evaluative orientation was evident in the ways in which students’ attitudes toward the target culture were transformed by ISL participation with respect to their critical cultural awareness. The comparative orientation focused on students’ skills in interpreting and relating to other cultures, in particular what they discovered in the Philippines. The action orientation was evident in the students’ activities during their project and in interaction with others in their host environment. The communicative orientation focused on the ways in which NNES perceived their communicative strategies – both verbal and nonverbal – with the young people they worked with.

Grounded in Byram’s five orientations, a research design – described in more detail below – was created to analyse, using qualitative data, students’ international service-learning experiences and to examine their intercultural citizenship practices a combination of language learning and global social responsibility.

c Developing intercultural citizenship through international service-learning. In higher education in Taiwan, international service-learning is viewed as beneficial for its immersion approach to promote student mobility. Yet, the service provided by volunteers could do more harm than good to the target community if students fail to acknowledge their ethnocentrism (Larsen, 2016). Bamber (2016) has argued that ISL should be viewed as transformative learning that enables ethical reflection, personal efficacy, and a more equitable and sustainable society. Bamber (2011, 2015, 2016) and Bourn (2014) say that ISL experience allows students to transform themselves by reconsidering their assumptions of power relations and in turn empower any marginalized people they serve.

Empirical studies have indicated that ISL promotes global/intercultural citizenship (Bamber & Pike, 2013; Bringle, Hatcher & Jones, 2011; Horn & Fry, 2013). For example, Horn and Fry (2013) studied American students who volunteered their services in other countries from 1995 to 2005 and indicated that ISL in developing countries may activate students’ global citizenship. This is because issues related to poverty, educational attainment levels, gender equality, disease, and environmental sustainability may greatly challenge the perceptions of volunteers from privileged backgrounds. Horn and

Fry (2013) conclude that when volunteers study and do service abroad the experience can have a positive impact on their understanding of civic engagement. In other words, volunteers seemed to benefit personally more from doing service learning in other countries than in their own.

The study reported here developed these approaches and emphasized that, when the volunteers are also language learners, it is important to take note of the relationship between their own country and the host country. Hence the emphasis on how students from an Expanding Circle country interacted with people from the Outer Circle country.

II Research methodology

This was a case study which used a qualitative design to analyse four Taiwanese students' intercultural citizenship practices on Olango Island in the province of Cebu in the Philippines. As explained by Yin (2003, p.2), 'the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena.' In this study, that phenomenon was the teaching practices of the participants, and specifically as they related to intercultural citizenship. Case study research involves a detailed, prolonged investigation of participants and their behaviors to collect data to understand the ways in which the participants make meaning in their own contexts (Merriam, 1988). This study explored the participants' experiences throughout their two-week stay. To accomplish this, data from the participants were gathered through analysis of their journal reflections, semi-structured research interviews and public talks given by the students.

I Data collection and analysis

The study was approved by an ethical review board for Higher Education research, and participants signed informed consent forms. To enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in my role as researcher I accompanied the participants to observe them, as well as to develop relationships with the students. Although I was a faculty member from the Taiwanese university, I intended to develop a researcher-researched relationship with students.

Students were asked to develop reflection logs with a minimum of 2,000 words in Chinese and deliver a 20-minute speech reflecting their personal opinions on the experience. They were also interviewed individually, and each participant's interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, taking place within nine months after the trip. The date at the end of each quotation used in the analysis below indicates when the data were collected.

Prior to the trip, one of the participants (Linda; see below) had agreed to help with data transcription and analysis and her participation was therefore fully funded. The data were transcribed and key phrases or sentences were highlighted. All highlighted sentences were coded using an Excel matrix. All transcriptions and texts were in this way analysed into themes based on Byram's five orientations and translated into English. Approximately 90 codes were created. My on-site participation was useful in interpreting interview data, even though participant observation was not used as a form of data collection. Finally, a draft of this article was sent to each participant as a member

Table 1. An overview of the study participants when they joined the study.

Name	Gender	Age	College years and major	Overseas experience
Mina	Female	24	Graduate, first-year, English Literature	Yes
Rachel	Female	21	Undergraduate, junior in English	Yes
Linda	Female	21	Undergraduate, junior in English	No
Abbey	Female	21	Undergraduate, junior in English	Yes

check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in October 2016 to ensure accuracy in the representation of the data.

2 The study participants

The English department of City University (CU), a Catholic institution, provided partial stipends for students, as part of its commitment to international community service. CU has a long and distinguished tradition of international education and research in addition to a wide range of resources including faculty, staff and students with international interests. CU requires students to complete a minimum of 40 service hours before graduation and some joined this project to fulfill that requirement. Reflections logs were required of the participants by the university. All the students completed their reflections and they all volunteered to do public presentations of their experiences. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants (names are pseudonyms).

The four women were English majors. Mina was an upper-middle-class alumna of CU and a graduate student studying at a national university in southern Taiwan when she joined this study's ISL program. She was the vice-leader of this ISL trip and mentored students because she had attended the international volunteer program twice prior to this trip. She had also visited the Philippines three times. Therefore, her previous reflections were also analysed for background information. Rachel was a junior at the university and came from a single-parent family. She applied for this trip because it was funded by the university, and she was interested in doing service in a country other than her own. Linda was also a junior and she was from a middle-class family. Her participation in the ISL trip was her first time abroad. The fourth participant was Abbey, also a junior at the university, and also from a middle-class family; she was the least proficient in English.

The four participants went to Olango Island for a two-week program. As volunteers, they taught local high school students problem-solving strategies and practices, in a five-day project-based lesson. In this iteration of the program, the local high school students, working in teams, had decided to address the problem of environmental pollution in the community. Volunteers were placed with three groups of students and taught them how to identify and find solutions to problems faced by the local community. When the project was completed, they presented their work to community residents. Then, as tourists, the four participants visited the community's wildlife sanctuary, planted mangroves, visited fair-trade merchants, and purchased goods in order to contribute to the local economy.

III Results and discussion

Following is a detailed description of the four participants' intercultural experiences with respect to Byram's (2008) five orientations.

I Cognitive orientation

Under 'cognitive orientation' the analysis focuses on the acquired knowledge of student participants from the host community. The ISL experience allowed Taiwanese students to identify similarities and differences between their perceptions of Filipino immigrants in Taiwan and Filipinos living in their homeland. Although the Philippines is close to Taiwan geographically, Linda revealed that prior to this ISL trip, her knowledge of the people from the Philippines was very limited, 'As foreign laborers, I only know that they have contributed a lot to our economy. They work hard here for their children to go to school and to be free of hunger. That's all I know [prior to this trip]' (Linda's reflection, 15 February 2015). Staying with the people in the village allowed her to explore their cultural knowledge and relate it to her identity as a Hakka Taiwanese (one of the ethnic groups living in Taiwan) (Taiwan Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, no date). The following reflection log offers testimony of this:

In the dim grocery store, there was a strong smell of pickled fish. The ceiling was hung with the children's favorite snacks ... The smell of pickled fish became the mark of the store on this island. It reminds me of the early agricultural society of Taiwan when refrigerators were not commonly found in the family. Pickled food was the best option. As a Hakka, I was not unfamiliar with pickled food because it has been part of our eating culture. What is implied in this food culture is their industrious and thrifty ways of managing their households. I'm impressed by that. (Linda's reflection, 15 February 2015)

Linda's insights regarding pickled food in the Philippines were used as a wise way to understand how the people living in the economically poor environment struggled to preserve as much food as possible. By identifying their food practices, Linda could relate to her early days in Taiwan; giving her more respect for the Filipino way of life. In another quote, Linda described how she realized water was a limited resource after staying in the community:

Water is very precious, regardless of whether it is groundwater or rainwater. We learned not to waste a drop ... The easier the access, the more waste we have. This [experience] has impacted [me], as every time I turn on the faucet, a flash crossed my mind after I returned to Taiwan that the other side of the earth was short on water [and] people can only drink sediment-polluted water. (Linda's reflection, 15 February 2015)

Seeing water as a limited world resource changed her behaviors after her return to Taiwan. This reflection from Linda illustrated how the cognitive orientation of Byram's (2008) framework can be beneficial for understanding the political aspects of knowledge such as the world-wide water crisis. Larkin, Larsen, MacDonald, and Smaller (2016) noted that ISL instructors can use these experiences to inspire students to explore

knowledge from the community. This knowledge does not solely include facts about a target country but also the relationships which develop between the participants and the communities in which they serve.

2 *Evaluative orientation*

Students illustrated how their critical cultural awareness changed when their cultural assumptions were challenged and empathy was developed. This can be seen in their reflections about the impact of poverty on the resource-poor high school at which they taught. In the following reflection, Mina showed empathy when she was able to appreciate the local students' engagement in learning. She stated, 'I enjoyed watching children's faces when they were concentrating on the computer. I felt grateful because with constraints, they were willing to come during their break time or time when they could do the family household or when being hungry' (Mina's reflection on her second visit in June, 2014, 28 February 2015). She was very conscious of how poverty affected children's learning.

Participants' encounters with the locals allowed them to examine the norms of hospitality. Hospitality in this Filipino community meant sharing everything one possesses with guests, including bedrooms. In contrast, Taiwanese people generally offered a separate bedroom to a guest to demonstrate hospitality. As a result of her positive experience on the island, Abbey mentioned that she desired to visit it a third time:

[Because] the place has offered a feeling of going home. In a foreign country, I have a place that accepts me for who I am and remembers me. With affection for these familiar people, I am more involved in paying attention to the international affairs related to the Philippines because it is part of Southeast Asia and the Taiwanese discriminate against Southeast Asian people. (Abbey's interview, 22 October 2015)

Abbey developed a sense of belonging within the community; she perceived herself as 'a member' of the community and her return as a journey home. She was able to analyse the contrast in her Taiwanese attitudes toward southeastern Asian people prior to and following the trip.

Abbey recounted a story told by another volunteer that haunted her. In a board game named 'Values Auction', in which students had to rank the importance of various personal values by bidding, she learned the differences between the most and least important values of Taiwanese and Filipino students:

On our last day before leaving the island, we were asked to share our feelings. One volunteer, who came from a single-parent [home], had believed that a satisfying materialistic life made a good family. Her belief was challenged by seeing the strong connection among [Filipino] family members even if they were not economically affluent. In a lesson named 'Values Auction,' all the children put all their money in the value named 'a happy family'. The volunteer saw those cultural values and changed her perception. (Abbey's interview, 22 October 2015)

Similarly, Linda indicated that the pursuit of happiness between the Taiwanese and the villagers was different. 'We [Taiwanese] often think we need many things in our life.

However, here I was challenged to see one can be happy without access to Internet and water' (Linda's reflection, 15 February 2015). For students in the community, happiness implied simply spending time with family and friends and appreciating their possessions. The evaluative orientation suggested that participants' cultural awareness was critical in advocating for intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008). Cultural learning is more than simply understanding the different lifestyles of English-speaking individuals. This ISL journey was an exercise in deconstructing the stereotypes that Taiwanese citizens generally possess towards the Filipino people.

3 Comparative orientation

Byram (2008) suggests that a comparative orientation highlights the skills of interpreting and relating. This ISL project allowed participants to interpret the poverty-education relationship and Taiwan-Philippines relationship from a political perspective. Through reflection, the students identified their implicit ethnocentrism and misunderstandings of the host community. For example, poverty was apparent in the lack of electricity at Sunny High School (pseudonym). There were no lights in the classrooms and no air conditioning. Rather than associating these problems with the local citizens, Mina perceived that the high school was 'the victim of a powerless government' that could not eliminate poverty (Mina's reflection on her first visit in June 2012; 28 February 2015). Mina began to connect politics with education in this rural school.

The Taiwanese students also revealed their ethnocentrism in their reflections. In some cases, it was displayed in the implicit hostility of the Taiwanese toward the Filipinos and the global problems faced by their community, including pollution and over-population. First, Linda stated her realization that Taiwanese hostility toward Filipinos was promoted by the Taiwanese media, which portrayed Filipinos as laborers. 'If you asked me about my first impression of Filipinos before I made this visit to Olango, I would have said, "they often gather in the plaza of the train station. They are a group of people with dark skin and a heavy accent"' (Linda's public speech, 18 March 2015). Rachel revealed her implicit ethnocentrism in her preconceived notion that environmental pollution was the result of the indifference of local citizens. She realized that she was wrong as she said, 'I learned that these children loved their island very much and they were enthusiastic about changing their current conditions' (Rachel's public speech, 18 March 2015).

In a similar vein, Mina occasionally and unconsciously revealed her ethnocentrism or mainstream ideology to judge the community from her cultural perspective. For instance, a high fertility rate has been one aspect of the community's social problems. Mina mentioned that each time she visited the village, she observed more community members. 'There are too many children. We are shocked to see that another baby was born and one [child] is holding another ... One [child] is taking care of another. They were not full when eating meals and looked somewhat dirty. By contrast, we [Taiwanese] take good care of children' (Mina's interview, 20 February 2015). The phrase 'take good care of children' implied that she did not believe the community residents raised their children well. She also presented an air of superiority since they were 'not full' and 'looked somewhat dirty'. Although she criticized the Filipinos for their child-rearing, she also

admitted that there were parenting limitations in her Taiwanese culture: 'A Taiwanese child might like to chat with his/her parents but may find out they are playing with their mobile phones and they would give another phone to their child as a communicative tool' (Mina's interview, 20 February 2015). She was able to recognize the challenges of parenting in both cultures, as Taiwanese parents were exposed to electronic devices that prevented them from communicating with others. Byram (2008) suggests that a comparative orientation can help individuals identify or reduce their ethnocentric perspectives by constantly reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of their culture compared to the target culture. Reducing volunteers' ethnocentrism required them to have consistent, deep, and meaningful contact with the local community.

4 Action orientation

Action is engrained in any ISL activity and should be to the benefit of the host community (Bamber, 2016). Several actions were taken by student volunteers to economically, environmentally, and educationally improve the living conditions of the residents of the island. Specifically, these actions included purchasing fair trade items, planting mangrove trees, using five-liter water bottles for showering, and, perhaps most importantly, teaching high school students problem-solving skills.

Almost every participant addressed how challenging it was to live in a water-restricted area. By staying with the Olango community, Linda experienced a change in consciousness with respect to the value of water. For example, before she went to Philippines, she never knew how much water she used to flush the toilet. However, after her experience there, she learned how to shower with only five liters of water (15 February 2015). Furthermore, the VYA introduced student volunteers to the concept of purchasing fair trade items to support the village economy. Volunteers purchased and consumed hand-made soaps, post cards, banana chips, and coconut juice, which allowed women and farmers to develop their own businesses beyond their main activity of fishing. These actions were not only constructive for the Taiwanese NNES' understanding of the environment and poverty, but also beneficial to improve the local area's economy.

The concept of 'action orientation' can also be related to Freire's educational philosophy of praxis (Freire, 1990) which emphasizes that change must include political action. The action orientation of the ISL project was similar to Freire's praxis in that it created problem-posing educational strategies to help the high school students identify and explore possible solutions to the social/societal problems they identified. The participant volunteers were not allowed to impose their preconceived ideas regarding what social problems they thought needed solving. This prevented them from falling into the trap of imposing a colonizing agenda on the high school students (Bamber, 2016). One significant change was that the participants did not hesitate to approach the school principal to address their concerns. Because of the support from the administrative team, this ISL event became an integral aspect of the school curriculum later, as reported by Abbey. The ISL students engaged the administration in problem-posing ideas and this action on the part of the Taiwanese NNES encouraged them to reflect on the importance of seeing the Filipino NNES as empowered rather than helpless.

5 Communicative orientation

The Taiwanese students were exposed to an English-as-official-language context that maximized their use of English. Mina noted, ‘They [the High School children] spoke in English, and we responded to them in English. It’s [the interaction] like we helped each other [to learn English]’ (Mina’s interview, 20 February 2015). Rachel realized on the last day of class, while the Filipino students were sharing their experiences, that their English was better than hers:

They [the high school students] were very expressive and fluent [in English] ... They were 9th grade students, and they wrote what you asked them to write, and they spoke what you asked them to speak. Their writing may be better than any one of us here. They are great students’. (Mina’s speech, 18 March 2015)

Guilherme (2007, p.74) notes that ‘the connotations of English are complex. It is the language of imperialism, consumerism, marketing, Hollywood, multinationals, war and oppression as well as of opportunity, science, social movements, peace processes, human rights and intercultural exchanges.’ In this ISL context English was seen as a medium for intercultural exchange and understanding rather than a means to oppression. In a similar vein, Rachel shared how she felt appreciated by one of the high school students:

One student approached and whispered to me that she thought I articulated well [while teaching] and she would like to apply those techniques to solve any problems she encountered in the future. I was very touched by this, and I truly hoped it would work. (Rachel’s reflection, 28 February 2015)

Rachel was pleased to learn that she had brought a new perspective to the students. Besides their verbal exchanges, both groups of NNES engaged in nonverbal communication. For example, Rachel noted that the high school student’s ability to smile freely was another important part of communicating with the Taiwanese NNES. ‘The local children liked to smile. They smiled at you not because they assumed you would give them something but because they thought you were someone special who they would like to befriend’ (Rachel’s speech, 18 March 2015). Rachel became aware of her patronizing and condescending views (‘not because they assumed you would give them something’) as she continued to develop relationships with the students. Bamber (2015, 2016) notes that the process of becoming more other-wise is a demonstration of transformative learning in ISL.

IV Conclusions

The participants in this ISL experience used English to communicate with the locals and create their own interpretations through observations and interactions. Rather than considering ISL only as a form of community service, the study found that ISL can be a transformative learning experience for participants if they are encouraged to reflect on the interactions between themselves and members of the host community.

In this study, the ISL context gave Taiwanese NNES the opportunity to use English to explore a different cultural system of NNES in the Philippines. These two NNES groups, although close geographically, have significantly different cultural values and beliefs. The VYA program provided the opportunity for one group of NNES to gain cultural awareness and understanding of another group of NNES with reciprocal interactions. The fact that neither group were native or fluent English speakers provided a greater understanding of cultural commonalities by comparison and by taking action in the world. This is what Byram (2008) calls shifting the paradigm from intercultural learning to intercultural citizenship in foreign language education.

The ISL program provided participants, as volunteers, with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop English proficiency through the actions of intercultural citizenship. The program offered the application of ELL in a real-life situation. The students' experience of another culture led them to increased knowledge and improved skills through their and cross-cultural comparisons and actions in a new community. Findings from the study illustrate how ISL created an opportunity for students to be active mediators of knowledge obtained from diverse sources. Intercultural citizenship that raises cultural awareness and promotes action can be central to EFL college students' understanding of the dynamics between hegemonic and marginalized cultures.

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