Social Justice Education in an International and Interdisciplinary Service-Learning Experience

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ABSTRACT

International service-learning provides opportunities to explore concepts of social justice with students. In this study, we describe the structure of a summer international, interdisciplinary service-learning experience for undergraduate and graduate students. We describe the ways in which these students engaged in social justice education and the experiences which the participants felt were most meaningful. Finally, we examine how experiences influenced four undergraduate students' beliefs and understandings of social justice The participants reported increases in the five components of social justice education identified by Hackman (2005): multicultural group dynamics, their ability to engage in persona reflection, their content understanding, their ability to enact social change, and their ability to engage in critical analysis. Through their experiences, participants shifted their concept of social justice towards a more process focused conception (Rawls, 1985).

Colleges and universities across the United States are beginning to heed the calls for a focus on social justice and social justice education in postsecondary institutions. One avenue universities have used to address the need for social justice education is service-learning projects. However, few studies exist that investigate the experience of students in these service-learning projects, especially projects in international settings or that are interdisciplinary in nature. This pilot case study investigates the experiences of undergraduate students involved in an international service-learning project enacted by one southern plains university in partnership with St. Monica's School of Basic Learning for Women in Gulu, Uganda. The study uses a survey and semi-structured interviews to collect stories of student experiences during the service-learning project and analysis identified themes of connection and conflict as students engaged in the project.

Social Justice

Social justice as a concept appears in the literature of a wide array of academic disciplines. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in a variety of definitions of social justice. Indeed, a consistent definition of social justice is so elusive that in 2006 the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) removed the term from all of its documents, stating "the term is susceptible to a variety of definitions" (Wise, 2006). Social justice

can be operationalized in a multitude of ways depending upon the purpose for which the term is being used. For example, Hytten & Bettez (2011) offer five conceptions of social justice: philosophical or conceptual; practical, ethnographic or narrative, theoretically specific, and democratically grounded. Likewise, North (2008) indicates that the definitions of social justice used may reflect the unit of analysis; that is, whether the research is focused on distributional or recognizant issues at the micro (individual) or macro (systemic) levels. Many current instantiations of social justice work trace back to the work of political philosopher and theorist Rawls. Rawls (1985) conceived of justice as fairness and based justice on two principles: first, that justice aims to ensure that all people have full and compatible access to basic rights and liberties and second, that when inequities in social structures exists, those inequities should favor those who are least advantaged in the current system (Rawls, 1985). It is important to note that these principles frame justice as a process rather than a product. That is, justice is comprised of actions taken to further move social structures towards fairness. While Rawls conceived that these principles would allow actors to engage in justice-oriented work from a disinterested and rationalist perspective, Noddings contends that Rawls work did not properly consider the development or social conditions of people in his work. Noddings recognizes that people are neither born fundamentally rational or autonomous and are interdependent throughout all of life (Noddings, 2006). Thus, "We need to consider the human condition in both its original and evolving forms" when considering acts of social justice. With these considerations in mind, we define social justice as the set of processes which:

a. Develop understandings of inequitable systems or structures at interpersonal, institutional, or international levels and the roles autonomous actors can play to further propagate or dismantle these systems
b. Engage in actively dismantling inequitable systems or developing systems which further the aims of fairness.

As such, we recognize the cyclical nature of social justice; as existing inequitable systems are better understood, dismantling those systems and reconstruction of more equitable systems becomes more feasible. As systems are dismantled and replaced, we come to better understand additional inequities that are unearthed in the process.

Social Justice Education

While concepts of social justice and social justice education are being more widely accepted and implemented at university levels, the field lacks a clear definition of these key terms. Given the broad range of possible definitions highlighted above, it is no surprise that social justice teaching is also broadly conceived and can range from improving learning opportunities of students from marginalized communities to empowering students as agents of change (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008). This broad range of definitions allows for multiple entry points into social justice teaching, but, as Hackman (2005) notes, may ultimately work as an obstacle to the realization of education as a catalyst for social change if educators are not aligned in purpose.

Like social justice, social justice education lacks a firm theoretical foundation. Some researchers define social justice education in ways which focus only on the treatment of students within classroom settings. That is, social justice education is

defined as education which has “an expectation of success for all students, irrespective of their gender, social and economic background, level of intelligence and ability” and ensures that students “are treated equally, their views are respected, and they get equal opportunity to learn” (Panthi et al., 2018). However, many researchers extend the definition of social justice education beyond the treatment of students within the classroom:

> *Social justice education does not merely examine difference or diversity but pays careful attention to the systems of power and privilege that give rise to social inequality, and encourages students to critically examine oppression on institutional, cultural, and individual levels in search of opportunities for social action in the service of social change. (Hackman, 2005)*

In this conception of social justice education, a key purpose is developing students’ abilities to be agents of change in democratic societies, which requires the students to develop skills in critical thinking, dialogue, empathy, and understandings of multicultural groups so that they are able to act on social issues (Hackman, 2005; Hytten, 2006). In this framework, educators are called upon to engage students in critical analysis of the values, politics, and structure in which they live and learn so that they may conceive of more equitable alternatives (Hytten, 2006; Carlisle et al., 2006). With this definition in mind, Hackman offers five components of social justice education: content mastery, critical analysis, social change, personal reflection, and awareness of multicultural group dynamics (Hackman, 2005; Jefferson et al., 2018).

Service-Learning

There is a growing call to provide students venues for meaningful and authentic service-learning opportunities situated within international communities. Service-learning offers “hands-on experience that simultaneously fulfills a local community need and the learning goals of an academic course” (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Jefferson et al., 2018). Students in a service-learning course collaborate with community partners from historically marginalized communities and participate as learners and contributors to develop, implement, or facilitate a project (Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018; Warter & Grossman, 2002). To develop an international service-learning experience for students, faculty members must work in partnership with international communities and/or organizations and be responsive to the linguistic and cultural contexts so that the experiences can be of value to partners as well as the individual participants (Furco & Moely, 2012; Murphy & Tan, 2012).

There are two types of service-learning: placement-based, which requires students to participate in an ongoing project for a set number of hours; and project-based, which requires students to organize and implement a project to meet a specific community need (Lee and Kelley-Petersen, 2018). To participate in project-based experiences necessarily requires critical analysis of the community issue being addressed, the enactment of social change through the process, and an awareness of the group dynamics between and within the partner community, three of the key components of social justice education as defined by Hackman (2005). Thus, project-based service-learning provides a ripe opportunity for social justice education. As such,

for the purposes of this paper, we chose to adopt Hackman's definition of social justice education.

Research Questions

The lack of clear understandings of social justice and social justice education suggest that university students may not have well-conceived notions of the meaning of social justice. Therefore, students' understandings of social justice may change through their service-learning experiences. This case study seeks to understand the components of social justice education students experienced as part of an international, interdisciplinary, service-learning experience in Gulu, Uganda. Specifically, we ask:

1. What experiences were particularly meaningful to students who participated in an international, interdisciplinary, service-learning experience in Gulu, Uganda?
2. What constructs of social justice education did participants engage in during their experiences?
3. How did their experiences influence students' beliefs about or understandings of social justice?

This study answers the call for research which interrogates the experiences and perceptions of participants in international service-learning experiences (Furco & Moely, 2012). In doing so, we adopt a transformative activist stance as defined by Stensenko (2008; 2012). Building upon the constructivist view of learning, which emphasizes the experiential and social nature of learning, a transformative activist stance centers on empowerment and emancipation as the critical goals of teaching and learning and recognizes the transformative nature of research and learning (Stetsenko, 2008, p.473-474). In a transformative activist stance, "persons are agents not only for whom ''things matter'' but who themselves matter in history, culture, and society and, moreover, who come into Being as unique individuals through and to the extent that they matter in these processes and make a contribution to them." (Stetsenko, 2012, pp. 144–145). Rooted in the belief that sociocultural contexts and relationships with others are the catalysts for human development, a transformative activist stance requires that service-learning work be grounded in purposeful and collaborative efforts of social transformation, which necessarily requires a focus on dialogical and ethical relationships both between people and with the environment in which the work is conducted (Stetsenko, 2012). While we, and the students we engage with in this work, act to transform the context in which we work, the context reciprocally acts on and changes us as well.

Methodology

This pilot case study investigates the perceptions and experiences of three undergraduate students who participated in a month-long international, interdisciplinary service-learning experience in Gulu, Uganda. This study seeks to attend to the purposes served by the experience and the understandings gained by participants for insight into the challenges and requirements necessary to structure a meaningful international service-learning experience focused on social justice issues.

Setting

The Interdisciplinary Study Abroad program was initiated through the University of Oklahoma (OU) College of International Studies. Before 2015, students in the College of Law and the College of Medicine were participating in study abroad experiences during which the students did work with and for Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at St. Monica's Girls Tailoring School in Gulu, Uganda. The school was initially designed to help women returning from captivity by the Lord's Resistance Army gain practical skills with which they could support themselves as well as provide a community for these women and their children.

In April of 2015, a group of faculty who were either interested in African issues or represented colleges that could support the needs and wants of Sr. Rosemary were invited to stay at St. Monica's for a week. These faculty entered into conversations with each other and institutions in the area around creating projects and service-learning experiences for OU that would directly support St. Monica's and the women with whom the Sisters of the Sacred Heart worked. There were representatives from medicine, architecture, education, business, arts and sciences, international studies, and engineering. The interdisciplinary study abroad program evolved out of this trip. Members of the different colleges on the OU campus began meeting over the summer and into the fall semester to create a syllabus for the program and make plans. At its beginning, there was a hope that everyone would only work on one project. However, the College of Education was already in the process of working with people within the St. Monica's and Gulu communities to create a school for adult women to receive primary education. The school for women was a special request to the College of Education by Sr. Rosemary and aimed to provide primary education in English (the language of business in Uganda) and mathematics, with a particular focus on financial mathematics. It soon became clear that the projects involving students from the College of Education might have to be somewhat separate to meet the needs of the adult women learners in the school as well as the specific professional needs of the students in the College of Education.

Ultimately, a set of objectives for the program were developed, some that included all students (regardless of majors) and some that were specific to engineering, regional and city planning, business, and education. Faculty involved in developing the program felt that students would benefit most from participation in both college or content tracked projects (engineering, etc.) and a shared, interdisciplinary project. Thus, students from across the University worked together, as well as in small, discipline-specific groups. University courses were designed to facilitate success once students were abroad. For example, the engineering track connected the service-learning experience to a required field work course, while the education track tied the service-learning experience to a course in global education. These courses were tied to the service and cultural learning objectives agreed to by all involved faculty but also had specific objectives related to the track and specific activities around both the interdisciplinary and discipline-specific projects.

After the first summer service-learning experience, it was decided by the faculty that students needed to also have an introduction to Africa in general and Uganda specifically to be better prepared for the context in which the students would find themselves. A course entitled Africa in Context was developed so that students could

gain the necessary foundational understandings about the history of Northern Uganda and postcolonialism before their service-learning experiences in Gulu.

In September of 2017, the Center for Peace and Development (CPD) at OU was established, and the Center's directors began to oversee the study abroad program. In December 2017, the CPD met with leaders of seven women's advocacy groups to introduce the center and its goals and to solicit their collaboration. The initial result of these talks was a collaboratively developed grassroots women's peace conference. The inaugural conference was held in June 2018 and served as the interdisciplinary project for the study abroad service-learning experience for students in 2018 and again in 2019. The participants in this study all engaged in this interdisciplinary experience as part of their study-abroad in June of 2019. As such, participants prepared for the conference ahead of time by supporting logistics. They welcomed the women attending, registered them, showed them to lodging, made sure they knew where meals would be, acted as recorders and notetakers during small group discussions and scribes at large group discussions, took photographs, made sure participants had water and snacks, and helped to create the final report that went to each of the groups. This participation allowed students the opportunities to interact informally with women from around Northern Uganda, as well as to hear their stories and support their problem solving during the formal meetings at the conference.

In addition to this work, each discipline engaged students in a discipline-specific project. In summer of 2019, the students who travelled to Uganda represented four colleges across the University; international and area studies, architecture, engineering, and education. The major project for international and area studies and architecture students was to engage in community-based data collection in which indigenous women were interviewed about their perceived community needs. Engineering students were focused on a project centered on repairing local water wells. Students in the college of education, who are the focus of this study, were asked to engage in multiple educational sites in multiple ways. They were asked to observe lessons in vocational classes, primary classes, and classes for adult women; create lesson plans and activities for the school for adult women and primary classes; and teach or co-teach lessons in the school for adult women and, sometimes, primary classes. Often, these lessons revolved around the concept of having students in these classes author their own stories about their lived experiences and/or the mathematics or English they were learning. In addition, they were tasked with helping to assess an incoming class of adult women for a second school in the town of Atiak near the border with South Sudan. This second school was opened to serve both women who had been internally displaced during the conflict with the LRA and refugee women from South Sudan.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the service-learning study abroad experience, professors leading the experience felt that it was important to engage students across content areas. The course was initially designed so that all student participants would engage in not only the peace conference, but also the data collection project that was the focus of the students of the school of architecture and international and area studies. In order to do this, two data collection excursions were planned: one at the beginning of the course, before the peace conference, and another at the end of the course, after the peace conference. All student participants except those from the college of education would participate in the first data collection, while education

students worked in the schools. Education students would then participate in the second data collection excursion while engineering students focused on the water well project. Unfortunately, the faculty member leading the data collection efforts fell extremely ill before the second data collection excursion, and thus the second excursion was cancelled.

Participants

In the summer of 2019, six undergraduate students from the College of Education participated in the international-interdisciplinary service-learning experience described above. Three of these participants agreed to participate in this pilot case study. The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Major
Lucky	Female	White	Social Studies Education
Joy	Female	Black	Social Studies Education
Caleb	Male	African American	Mathematics Education

Data Collection and Analysis

The study began with a quantitative survey focused on the components of social justice education that participants perceived during their service-learning experience. The survey was developed by mapping constructs of social justice education onto a 58-item survey developed by Indian University – Perdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to assess the effect of service-learning courses on students' "perspective on learning, your satisfaction with this course, and your attitude towards service" (IUPUI 2011). Because this study is primarily focused on the intersection of service-learning and social justice education, the IUPUI survey was analyzed to determine which items on the survey addressed one or more of the five components of social justice education defined by Hackman (2005): content mastery, critical analysis, social change, personal reflection, and awareness of multicultural group dynamics. The result of this analysis was a modified 20-item survey. Within this modified survey, each component of Hackman's framework was addressed by four items.

Additionally, study participants provided reflective writing generated as part of the shared course to the research team. This writing included daily journal entries of their in-country experiences as well as written responses to specific prompts given by the course instructor. Two rounds of analysis were used to code the statements in these writings. First, the data were open coded to generate themes of experiences that were meaningful to the participating students. Second, the data were coded a priori according to the social justice education framework developed by Hackman (2005).

Finally, semi-structured interviews informed by the results of the quantitative survey were conducted with each participant two to three months after their participation in the international service-learning experience ended (see Appendix B). These focused on the experiences participants felt were most meaningful and the growth they

experienced as a result. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then underwent the same two rounds of analysis.

Table 2. Data and Analysis Method

Data	Analysis
Likert scale quantitative survey	Descriptive statistics
Reflective writing	Open Coding A priori coding using Hackman (2005)
Semi Structured Interviews	Open Coding A priori coding using Hackman (2005)

Findings

The findings of this study are organized by research question. First, themes of the experiences described as meaningful in participants' writings and interviews will be discussed. Then, the components of social justice education that participants engaged in as part of these experiences will be described. Finally, we will investigate how the participants' beliefs about social justice changed through their experiences. Findings indicate that participants' experiences engaged them in personal reflection and multi-cultural group dynamics in a variety of ways. Students engaged in analysis of multicultural group dynamics not only when engaging with indigenous groups, but also when engaging with the groups of students from other disciplines who participated in the service-learning project. These experiences presented opportunities for students to critically analyze social structures in the local community, in their home communities, and within the emerging community of students and faculty participants in the service-learning project. In their writings and interviews, participants describe how these experiences challenged their notions of community, relationships, and belonging as well as communication and conflict. Faculty were involved in several of the in-country events that participating students identified as critical events. However, we recognize that their perceptions of these events were significantly different than our own. Often, experiences participants perceived as isolated incidents were viewed by faculty as one of several continuing experiences in Uganda as we develop our partnerships with local advocacy groups. In recognizing these differences in perception, we call to attention the need to carefully consider and craft experiences through which students can find meaning and interrogate their understanding of social justice and social change despite limited engagement in the ongoing projects.

Meaningful and Impactful Experiences

In both their written reflections and interviews, participants described experiences that were both generally positive and generally negative as meaningful and impactful. The events described as both meaningful and positive by participants placed participants in direct contact with members of the local community and allowed participants to connect their direct experiences with contextual understandings of local social systems and their effects on the people with whom they were working.

For example, when asked about positive meaningful experiences, all the participants cited experiences which put them in direct contact with indigenous people while they engaged in work the participants found to be meaningful. For these participants, the opportunity to make personal connections was a critical component of their experiences. For example, Lucky summarized her experiences teaching in the school for adult women as valuable because of the connections she was able to make with the adult women learners, even in very limited time:

> *We got close, we formed relationships with them. When we were teaching them and facilitating their learning, it made it extra special. We learned, because of the nature of the lesson we were writing, the storybooks and having them talk about their personal stories, a lot of those women have just been through a lot and they are super courageous. It's a struggle for them to get to school and they are overcoming a lot of things to be in that place. So, it was satisfying, gratifying when we were helping them put sentences together. Because a lot of them were saying that they wanted to start businesses, or already had businesses, or wanted to expand. I just think for sure we were helping them expand certain parts of their lives. It was really meaningful, and we miss them.*

Notice that this experience was particularly meaningful for Lucky because she was able to develop an understanding of how her work might have direct impact on the lives of others. The story elicitation activities Lucky recounts between University students and Ugandan women aimed to support English language and literacy development. Lucky's description indicates that these interactions allowed her to see into the larger lives of the Ugandan women students; lives focused on business development and "expand[ing] certain parts of their lives." This interaction indicates that by developing a sense of someone beyond the student-teacher paradigm - developing a "larger life" context for with whom they worked, the university students began to form deeper understandings of the complexity of social justice work and the multiple ways in which the work transformed both Ugandan participants and the students themselves (Stetsenko, 2008, 2012). Likewise, as Joy described the process of assessing future students at the school for adult women in Atiak, she references the other experiences that allowed her to develop a context for understanding the significance of her work:

> *When we got to the place for the assessments and I saw the line of women out there to be assessed just to go to school, I was like wow. They have travelled who knows how far and some of them had their kids with them. It was later in the day, so probably already been to work, had already done tons of stuff at home, and done lots of things and then travelled here to be here on this hot day to sit and allow me to communicate with them and talk to the about going to school. That was some really important work that I will always, always cherish. Because prior to the assessments we had visited Adjumani, one of the most high-achieving schools in the country. There, we were talking to the administrators about the school and we asked about the ratio of female to male and they were talking about how up until about 5th grade it is usually one to one and around 5th grade girls have to start taking more responsibilities at home. Going to fetch water, going to do a lot of things. So, it became, you could see clearly see more*

females trickling out. And then when we gave the assessments, one of the pre-assessment questions was when did they stop going to school or how far did they go to school and a lot of their answers were 6th and 7th grade. And so kind of seeing that, seeing them go through that cycle, them coming back to empower themselves and take control of their own education even though they had to do something at that time, but they have the power and opportunity to come back and finish their education was awesome. To be able to be part of that was some really powerful work that I was happy to be part of.

In these experiences, participants were able to directly connect their specific, local work to structural inequities that make it difficult for women to obtain an education. For Lucky, the personal stories told by the women with whom she worked gave her insight into their daily struggles in attending school. For Joy, her contextual understanding of these struggles was a result of conversations with local school administrators about the social structures that result in lower rates of women in schools beyond the 5th grade. She was able to critically reflect on the social structures that challenged women's access to education and personally reflect on the significance of those structures. By connecting these understandings of structural inequities directly to their work, the participants were able to frame their work in a social justice context, which made the work more meaningful to them.

In contrast, the experiences that were described by participants as both meaningful and negative often referenced conflict between groups and a lack of contextual understanding of the groups with which the participants were trying to work. Most often, this lack of understanding occurred between different groups of University students participating in the service-learning experience, rather than between students and local peoples. Participants often recognized that they lacked understanding of other groups of students and the projects on which they were working as they described events as moments of tension or conflict. Joy described the challenges of working within the interdisciplinary group of students:

There were just different conflicts of living, moving and being in a space with people you've never been with. It was just, um, little things that divided the group in certain ways. Like opinions of certain people because of like their attitudes. How they decided to communicate with people that wasn't so… that made people feel, like insignificant or different things. A lot of it was communication, it just was not receptive. And that created divisions in the group.

Caleb directly attributed these difficulties between groups of University students to a lack of contextual understanding and background knowledge:

We had to do some work before we went over to Uganda. And I think the other tracks didn't invest a lot of energy and education in their purpose and what they were going to do over there. So at the peace conference, for example, other groups of students were coming up to the education students and asking "Oh well, what are we supposed to do?" And we were going "We don't know what you are supposed to do, we are here doing what we are supposed to do. I would assume you would ask your group's professor." I think the attitude, not everyone, but a lot of the undergraduates, there was a lot more homework that needed to

be done. And so that became a point of conflict because it seemed like people didn't understand what we were doing or the gravity of it. Like we were visitors in someone else's country, home, community, and some of the attitudes; leaving open bottles around, trash was a problem. Not respecting that people don't have water, so we are going to leave full bottles of water with a quarter drunk out of it. Some things you can't teach, but some of those could have been addressed by at least one reading or a class. I don't know.

Note that, in this passage, Caleb is both calling for other students' groups to develop a deeper sense of the purpose and context of the service-learning work, but also recognizing that he did not have an understanding of what the other groups were meant to do at that moment either, despite the work he perceives himself to have done before travelling to Uganda. Both students indicate that communication was a key element of conflict. In reflecting on the stories of conflict between the groups of students that participated in this experience, faculty recognized that while we were intentional in the development of readings and assignments to engage the education students in thinking about the local context within which we would be working, we did not engage the students in thinking about how engineering, urban planning, or international and area studies represent different micro-cultures among University students. Additionally, we did not address how these different students might conceive of the service-learning work in a variety of ways and engage in thinking about and working with social justice from multiple perspectives.

Lucky described how a conflict between University students over a kitten being kept in a student's room developed into a conflict. Specifically, a University student brought a stray kitten into the shared living space. Tension arose as some students felt that they should have been consulted before the student broguht a live animal into a living space they shared. Some expressed concerns because of allergies or other personal aversions. Others recognized that the kitten was potentially problematic for the Ugandan women who worked as housecleaners in the building or expressed concerns for the safety and well being of the kitten as students often worked long hours or went on overnight trips as part of the program. While Caleb and Joy expressed that they did not feel comfortable speaking to members of the other student groups about the issue, Lucky described how her attempts to address the issue only served to increase tension among the students:

One day she was gone, she had been gone for like 8 hours, and the kitten was unattended in her room the whole time and no one could get a hold of her. So, I made the decision to enter her room and take the cat out to take care of it because I felt bad for it. She came back and got super mad at me for invading her privacy. And I explained to her that she should not leave a small animal unattended for going on nine hours. So, she slammed the door and was being really hostile with me.

Interestingly, moments of conflict were not confined to student-student interactions, but also arose between students and professors of different disciplines. Lucky shared how students and faculty participated in a conversation intended to resolve tension about the kitten situation as well as other conflicts they had observed

between students. However, for Lucky, the conversation went immediately awry, leaving her to feel “totally caught off guard” and “shut down.”

> *I was the first one to speak. I said to the professors “I am not sure if you guys want specific examples of what’s going on or general feelings,” and I did not get a response. So, at that point I felt that it was acceptable for me to talk generally and specifically, which is what I did. Personally, I do not see what is wrong with addressing an issue that is very public, in a public manner. We are all adults! I think it is weird that we are all being treated with such fragility; it is very strange to me. I do not see what is wrong with turning to another adult, in a room of adults, and saying “Hey this thing that you did bothered me”, as long as it’s said respectfully. Apparently I am missing something though, because some of the professors sort of freaked out on me. That alone was a crazy experience! I was shocked and totally caught off guard, it caused me to shut down. It was alarming, and I honestly feel like it was disrespectful and unprofessional. In that moment I was being accused of attacking my fellow student, by professors who were yelling at me? Man it was bizarre. I am still shaken up by it and confused.*

Lucky later reflected on the professor’s responses and described her belief that this conflict with the professor arose because the professor had not been fully aware of the context. Thus, the importance of context and cultural understanding is again highlighted within this conflict and clearly indicated a need to incorporate protocols to ensure that professors actively listen to the thoughts and concerns of participating students on a regular basis.

Social Justice Education Components

Given that all the experiences described as meaningful by participants involved multicultural group dynamics (whether between the participants and Ugandan partners or between different groups of students and/or professors), it is no surprise that quantitative results show that the participants perceived they grew the most in their ability to negotiate multicultural group dynamics. However, quantitative results indicate modest but significant improvement in all categories of Hackman’s social justice education framework, with strong results not only in participants’ awareness of multicultural group dynamics but also in their ability to engage in personal reflection. Conversely, students reported the least growth in their ability to enact social change. Below, the quantitative results of each component of social justice education are presented, with support from qualitative data from the participants interviews and reflective writing.

Awareness of multicultural group dynamics. Four items on the survey focused on participants’ awareness of multicultural group dynamics. Two items asked students to evaluate the amount of growth they experienced. For these two items, all participants indicated that their growth was “above average” to “a great deal”. The other two items asked students to agree or disagree with statements that suggested the class helped to improve their awareness of multicultural group dynamics. For these two items, each participant agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement.

Table 2. Awareness of multicultural group dynamics responses

0=no growth, 1=little growth, 2=medium growth, 3=above average growth, 4=great deal of growth	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Understanding values of people different from you	3.67	0.47
Working effectively with people of different races, ethnicities, and religions	3.67	0.47
-2=strongly disagree, -1=disagree, 0=neutral, 1=agree, 2=strongly agree	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
This class has helped me listen to others and understand their perspectives on controversial issues.	1.67	0.47
This class has helped me appreciate how my community is enriched by having cultural or ethnic diversity.	1.67	0.47

When asked how their experiences contributed to their understanding of multicultural group dynamics, participants focused solely on their experiences with local peoples. In these reflections, participants emphasized the role of active listening when working within multicultural groups and focused on notions of partnership in which all parties learn and grow and can sustain the growth they experience. Caleb summarized what he learned about working in multicultural settings by saying “We can go and give things, but it needs to be reciprocal. You know, we can go and learn. We don’t always have to take lead.” Caleb went on to explain his understanding of reciprocity, as akin to understanding others’ perspectives, working effectively, and appreciating shared community enrichment – all three elements indicative of developing awareness of multicultural group dynamics. Caleb stated, “Just ask, hey can I help with this? What do you need from me? I am not here to control you, to control them […] That help has to be something that we believe will provide a long-term commitment and impact that will help and sustain efforts.” His explanation that “help” has to be focused on the “need” of those involved, and a “long-term commitment” that “sustain[s] efforts” indicates a more expansive understanding of the multicultural dynamics involved in social justice education work.

Personal reflection. Four items asked students to agree or disagree with statements that suggested the class helped to improve their ability to engage in personal reflection. For these four items, each participant agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement.

Table 3. Personal reflection responses

-2=strongly disagree, -1=disagree, 0=neutral, 1=agree, 2=strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
This class has helped me to gain a clearer idea of my professional goals.	1.67	0.47
The nature of this class helped motivate me to be the best student I can be.	1.00	0.00
I have a strong sense of civic responsibility to become involved in my community	1.67	0.47
This class motivated me to stay up to date on current political trends	1.00	0.82

Much of the personal reflections presented in participants' writing and interviews were focused on the participants' racial and professional identities. Lucky, who self-identified as White, described her experiences as people reacted to her pale skin. At first, she simply remarks that people react to her skin, and is often amused by the reaction. For example, within the first week of arriving in Gulu, she wrote: "I ran into the most adorable child while I was there. He was fascinated by me and the lightness of my skin. He kept rubbing my face, and he also tried to rub my tattoo off. It was so funny". However, she soon developed an understanding that the reactions to her skin tone were not generally positive. A week later she wrote about an experience interacting with children:

> *We got to sit and play with them for a bit. Although, I did make one cry because of my pale skin. This is not the first time this has happened on this trip, and I doubt it will be the last!*

The experience of having children emotionally respond to her skin presents an opportunity for a subtle shift in Lucky's thinking. She shifted her focus from the child, as illustrated by the repeated use of "he" in the first quote, to herself as she uses "I" and "me". This may indicate that these experiences in the context of living and working in a different culture created an opportunity for Lucky to shift her thinking towards questioning the constructed nature of race and her own role in the construction and perpetuation of racialized systems. Clearly, Lucky is only beginning this journey; the hope is that these experiences motivate her to continue learning and growing in her understanding of the complexities of race and systematic racism.

Conversely, Joy, who identified herself as "Black," described how it felt to 'not stick out' in Uganda because of her skin. She described her surprise as she joined some of the Sisters of St. Monica for an outing in Gulu:

> *I got in the car, Sister Josephine looked at me and told me I was Ugandan. A few people told me I resembled Ugandans, but her statement stuck with me because she was serious and the way she accepted me to be a part of the them without knowing me made me feel so welcomed.*

Joy continued by describing how she wished to engage in work that would allow "all people" to feel accepted and welcomed in her home culture in the US. Hence, Joy

found that she eager to become more involved in her home community because of her experiences in Uganda.

In addition to reflecting on their racial identities, the participants also reflected on their identities as educators, a professional identity connected to all four survey constructs. For example, Caleb reflected on his teacher identity after his second experience teaching a lesson in Uganda:

> *After I taught my second lesson, [Ugandan students] told me that I was a good teacher but that they had never worked hard before. And I was like, oh! In my head I'm like, oh am I Dr. [Author 1]? Am I [Author 2]? Am I putting people to work? Because I have just never had that experience.*

Caleb's realization that being "good teacher" includes "putting people to work" implies a growing sense of responsibility and professionalism. This comment indicates he is beginning to see that "good" teaching is a contract between the teacher and students in which both work "hard" together. These stories indicate that personal reflection was a point of growth for participants.

Content mastery. Four items on the survey focused on participants' perceptions of their development of content knowledge (i.e., knowledge of science, social studies, mathematics, or literacy pedagogy and content) during the course. Two survey items asked students to evaluate the amount of growth they experienced in their content knowledge both inside and outside their major field of study. For these two items, participants responses varied widely, although each participant indicated that they experienced at least some growth for each item. The other two items asked students to agree or disagree with statements that suggested the class helped to improve their understanding, skills, or knowledge of their major field of study. For these two items, each participant agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement.

Table 4. Content mastery responses

0=no growth, 1=little growth, 2=medium growth, 3=above average growth, 4=a great deal of growth	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
In-depth understanding of my major field of study	1.33	1.25
General understanding of subjects outside my major	2.66	0.94
-2=strongly disagree, -1=disagree, 0=neutral, 1=agree, 2=strongly agree	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
This class provided me with skills/knowledge that I can use in my career.	1.00	1.41
This class has helped my decision-making about my major or career	1.00	0.67

It is important to note that students significantly more strongly indicated that they grew in their general understanding of subject matter outside of their major rather than inside it. When asked about their major field of study, each participant indicated a specific content area (social studies or mathematics). In their writing and interviews, whenever these participants discussed educational issues outside of their content field, they were clear to indicate that these experiences were not in their major field of study.

For example, Caleb felt that his experiences working in the preschool were outside his field of study because his focus is secondary mathematics. Similarly, Joy indicated that working on literacy skills with the adult women was outside her area of expertise as a social studies education major. Thus, it may be that because their individual definitions of their areas of expertise are so narrowly defined, their learning was reported to have been largely outside their major field of study.

Social change. Four items on the survey focused on participants' perceptions of their ability to enact social change. Two items asked students to evaluate the amount of growth they experienced. For these two items, each participant indicated that they experienced at least some growth for each item. The other two items asked students to agree or disagree with statements that suggested the class helped to improve their abilities to solve social problems. For these two items, each participant agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement.

Table 5. Social change responses

0=no growth, 1=little growth, 2=medium growth, 3=above average growth, 4=a great deal of growth	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Communicating clearly and effectively	2.00	0.82
Finding new ways to use my skills and knowledge as I encounter new situations/problems	3.33	0.94
-2=strongly disagree, -1=disagree, 0=neutral, 1=agree, 2=strongly agree	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
This class has given me knowledge and skills I need to address community issues.	1.33	0.47
I feel confident that I will be able to apply what I have learned in this class to solve real problems in society.	1.33	0.47

When participants spoke about social change in their reflective writings or interviews, they often framed themselves as witnesses to social change, rather than participants in the social change. For example, while being interviewed, Joy described how she learned of a recent significant and systemic change in the local community:

> *I found out the women can go to jail for not paying their rent. That is so crazy to me. And until recently their children would serve time with them in the prison. St. Monica's now offers [care] for the children who are at the prison with their mother. That is a huge change.*

While she was able to identify recent social change in the community, Joy's experiences in Uganda were isolated to one summer. Joy did not indicate a perception of her facilitation of social change from the development of an action plan through to realized results. Thus, it may be that students tended not to focus on accomplished social change as they reflected on their experience. Instead, they often spoke of the potential for change. For example, Caleb described how action plans were created during the women's peace conference and expressed curiosity about whether these plans would indeed result in social change. Similarly, Lucky framed her experiences in the schools as having the potential to change the lives of the women and children who

attended them. At the end of their experiences, however, students still spoke in terms of "hoping" their efforts resulted in positive changes, rather than expressing confidence that they were capable of enacting social change.

Critical analysis. Four items asked students to indicate the amount of growth they experienced in their ability to think critically or analytically. For these items, responses vary widely. However, all students again expressed that they perceived some growth in this area.

Table 6. Critical analysis responses

0=no growth, 1=little growth, 2=medium growth, 3=above average growth, 4=a great deal of growth	Mean	Standard Deviation
Understanding books, articles, and manuals	2.33	1.25
Thinking critically and analytically	2.33	1.25
Evaluating other people's ideas and solutions	2.67	1.25
Making ethical decisions in conflicting situations	3.67	0.47

These self-reported results are supported by frequent critical analysis in the participant writings and interviews. Through their time in Gulu, students engaged in thoughtful critical analysis of the local criminal justice system, the treatment of women and children both in and out of schools, the infrastructure needs of the local community, and climate change, among other topics. For example, Joy contemplated the impact of gender on employment in Uganda:

> *Overwhelmingly, we saw women working in the market selling a lot of stuff, clothes, shoes, fabric, all kinds of things they made. It was interesting because getting there you saw a lot of men on the street working, but in the market it was mostly women, so that was interesting, to kind of see the work, the differences in where men and women work.*

When engaging in this analysis, students often did not just analyze the local community and structures, but related their understandings back to US culture, structures, institutions, or policies as well. For example, Caleb reflected on climate change as a global issue during the women's peace conference:

> *The biggest thing I got from that was that they were talking about climate change and I was like, politicians in our country think that people don't care about climate change but in Uganda they are all talking about climate change. So that shows you the real impact of what is going on in the world and why our governments need to act.*

Here Caleb evaluates the ideas about climate change he believes exist in the American context (item three). This evaluation is extended to consideration of solutions - "real impact" - and he implies an ethical position that the United States should be taking a stronger stance. It is through this kind of analysis that participants began to slowly (and often unconsciously) develop a more nuanced understanding of social justice.

Participants' understandings of social justice

After their experiences in Uganda, each of these participants reported little explicit change to their understandings of what social justice is. However, an examination of the definitions offered by each participant suggest small but significant changes in the way participants framed social justice. Consider the description offered by each participant in their journal during their first week in Uganda.

Table 7. Initial conceptions of social justice

Caleb	The state of countries like Uganda seems to me to be a social justice issue simply because of the lack of resources, time, and commitment given to the people.
Joy	It's something we would deem as something, like a gender role, we would define as oppressive.
Lucky	I think of social justice as the concept of promoting and fighting for equity and empowerment for human beings who are marginalized in society.

In their initial descriptions of social justice, each of these participants describe social justice as a static noun: a state of being, a thing, a concept. However, in the interviews conducted after their experiences, participant descriptions changed and reframed social justice as a dynamic action.

Table 8. Conceptions of social justice at the conclusion of the service-learning project

Caleb	So social justice means approaching inequities in a way that tries to make sure that we can make life better for everyone, but specifically for those who are affected by those inequities.
Joy	I would define social justice as actions that develop in empowering people that face oppression or face injustice, that's social justice, further defining it. Advocating or being an ally or activist in a way that fights for the betterment or empowerment of the world
Lucky	I think of it as a verb, as an activity. It's something you do. You're actively doing something to promote the welfare of people, specifically marginalized people

While this reframing might be subtle, it repositions social justice from an abstract concept to a set of specific actions and goals. Further, despite the low reported growth in participants' abilities to enact social change, all participants reported engaging in social justice actions in their service-learning work in Uganda. In retrospect, participants, like Lucky, felt that "that's the whole point of us being there, is to give women a platform, to be educated and better themselves, with the school, the women's peace conference, all of that stuff. So, for me I mean, I feel like that was the most engaged I've been in social justice. Being on the ground and really doing something." Lucky's comments affirm the conceptual change experienced by participants of social justice from an idea to an action of "really doing something."

Discussion and Implications

Throughout their experiences in the Uganda service-learning study abroad, the participants in this study engaged in active social justice work and developed deeper understandings of all aspects of social justice education. However, their experiences were not without pitfalls. The interdisciplinary nature of the study abroad experience necessitated that participants not only negotiate multi-cultural group dynamics while engaging in the formal work experiences with our Ugandan partners, but also while engaging with students from their own University but from different epistemological and ontological traditions and understandings of what it meant to be engaged in service-learning and social justice work. The challenges of these negotiations were not initially recognized by faculty members and, as such, students were not engaged in preliminary coursework designed to facilitate these negotiations. However, the participants in this study recognized the role of the preliminary coursework in which they did engage: to provide a historical and cultural context of Northern Uganda participants could use as a lens when engaging in work with our Ugandan partners. Additionally, all three participants suggested that an extension of this work focused on building community and working collaboratively across disciplinary groups would benefit all participants. Each participant group engaged in social justice work in different ways; we cannot assume that these groups would be aligned in their understanding of the nature of social justice. Therefore, only with a robust understanding of the multifaceted nature of social justice work will the full potential of an interdisciplinary international service-learning project be realized.

Additionally, the student-student and student-faculty conflict that arose illustrate the need to move forward with a more explicit social justice focus that encompasses the development of strategies and protocols which emphasize respect, active listening, and depth of meaning while providing safeguard for individuals. These protocols should require people to own their feeling and focus on the issues rather than the individuals involved. By providing such tools, not only would participants be more able to address and navigate difficult conversations, but they would also equip students with the ability to enact social change within the group, thereby potentially creating an opportunity for students to perceive more personal growth in this critical component of social justice education. If we wish to see growth in students' perceived ability to enact social change, we must equip them with tools that will facilitate such growth.

Despite the constraints and challenges, findings indicate that the participants in this study successfully modified their understanding of social justice in ways which focused on the active process of engaging in social justice-oriented work, rather than abstract concepts of social justice. Thus, this study demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary, international, service-learning study abroad programs to move students from talking about social justice to actively engaging in social justice work.

The growth participants experienced was limited by the relatively short duration of their experiences. Social change takes time; a three-week program does not allow participants to see the effects of their actions. Is it possible for universities to develop sustained study abroad service-learning experiences that allow participants to return to the communities in which their service-learning occurs multiple times in order to engage them in analyzing the social change that results, in part or in whole, from their own efforts? Doing so would requires significant coordinated efforts across University

systems and additional financial supports, opportunities to earn credits, and the development of advanced course work for returning participants. Yet, given the demonstrated benefits of a brief but immersive experience, the benefits from sustained engagement with international communities could also be substantial if not transformative. The development and potential benefits of sustained service-learning experiences should be further studied.

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Appendix A

Student Survey: Perceptions of the Service-Learning Experience in Gulu, Uganda

Part 1: The service learning Gulu course was designed to improve skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Please indicate to what extent this class contributed to your growth in each area: (5-point Likert scale, 0= no growth to 4= a great deal of growth)	
Item	**Component of Social Justice Education**
Understanding books, articles, and manuals	Critical Analysis
Communicating clearly and effectively	Social Change
Thinking critically and analytically	Critical Analysis
Evaluating other people's ideas and solutions	Critical Analysis
Finding new ways to use my skills and knowledge as I encounter new situations/problems	Social Change
In-depth understanding of my major field of study	Content Mastery
General understanding of subjects outside my major	Content Mastery
Understanding values of people different from you	Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics
Working effectively with people of different races, ethnicities, and religions	Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics
Making ethical decisions in conflicting situations	Critical Analysis
Part 2: Please indicate the choice that best describe your opinion (5-point Likert scale, 0= strongly disagree to 4= strongly agree)	
Item	**Component of Social Justice Education**
This class has given me knowledge and skills I need to address community issues.	Social Change
This class has helped me to gain a clearer idea of my professional goals.	Personal Reflection
The nature of this class helped motivate me to be the best student I can be.	Personal Reflection
I feel confident that I will be able to apply what I have learned in this class to solve real problems in society.	Social Change
I have a strong sense of civic responsibility to become involved in my community	Personal Reflection
This class provided me with skills/knowledge that I can use in my career.	Content Mastery
This class has helped my decision-making about my major or career	Content Mastery
This classes has helped me listen to others and understand their perspectives on controversial issues.	Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics
This class motivated me to stay up to date on current political trends	Personal Reflection
This class has helped me appreciate how my community is enriched by having cultural or ethnic diversity.	Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics

Appendix B

Semi Structure Interview Questions

Please tell me a little bit about why you choose to participate in the Uganda study-abroad experience.

Please tell me about your experience travelling to Uganda and Gulu.

Please tell me about your first impressions of or experiences in Gulu.

What work did you do as part of this experience?

Please tell me about a specific event you found to be meaningful.

Please tell me about a time you felt conflict or frustration.

Please tell me about an experience that was fun, engaging, or joyful.

What have you learned about other peoples or cultures through these experiences?

What have you learned about yourself through these experiences?

If you could go back and do something differently, what would you do?

How would you define social justice?

Did your experiences in Gulu shape your thinking about social justice? If so, how?

What does service-learning mean to you?

How did your experiences meet or not meet your expectations for service-learning?

What worked well about the program?

What did not work about the program?

What recommendations might you give the program so it can improve in the future?

What else should we know about your experiences?

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