

# Exploring the effects of international fieldwork in the affective domain: Learning outcomes with service learning

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## 1. Introduction

The international cooperation program at J. F. Oberlin University provided a short-term international fieldwork in the Philippines and India. During the field work program, students visit several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and engage in volunteer and community-based activities. These fieldwork programs are among the service-learning programs and elective requirements for international cooperation program undergraduates. Regardless of their colleges, sophomore and senior students can undergo these fieldwork programs given that they are interested in development issues and challenges and in immersing themselves in various societies and cultures.

The author was engaged in such a fieldwork program as a coordinator from 2017 to 2019. Boyle et al (2007) explained that fieldwork is good if positive affective (emotional) responses are triggered in students because affective outcomes foster deep approaches to learning that bring about better student behavior due to higher level of understanding. In addition, a service learning component also helps to increase students' learning and growth. Jacoby (1996) explained that service learning affords students opportunities to acquire a set of transferable skills such as communication, information synthesis, and problem-solving skills. Moreover, Jacoby (1996) emphasized that "service learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (p.5). In addition, global awareness and social responsibility are nurtured by service learning (Jacoby, 1996).

In this article, the author seeks to examine how international fieldwork experience including direct interaction with local people and community-based work evokes affective responses and deeper learning in students. Furthermore, how fieldwork is associated with service learning helps to develop positive learning outcomes.

This study used the data from international fieldwork in the Philippines for the years 2018 and 2019. A questionnaire survey was used to assess the student learning outcomes, attitude and motivation before and after the fieldwork with reflective daily journals of their stay in the

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Philippines and semi-structured interviews.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Fieldwork

Fieldwork is defined as “any arena or zone within a subject where, outside the constraints of the four walls classroom setting, supervised learning can take place via firsthand experience” (Lonergan and Anderson, 1988). Gold et al. (1991) defined fieldwork as any curriculum that includes learning from firsthand real-world experiences outside the school setting. Fieldwork provides students with valuable opportunities to deepen their understanding of the relation between theory and practice in the real world, i.e., immersive and inquiry-based learning (Wilson et al., 2008). Nundy (2001) outlined the three key benefits of fieldwork, namely positive influence on long-term memory due to particular fieldwork settings; residential experience advantages and affective benefits, such as individual growth and social skills; and reinforced affective and cognitive domains that influence each other and provide a bridge to higher-level learning.

Fieldwork is worthy because it elicits students’ affective response in a positive way that supports deeper forms of learning (Boyle et al, 2007). Deep learning is related to interest and relaxed self-confidence. Conversely, anxiety and the fear of failure can accompany surface learning (Entwistle et al., 2002). Fieldwork not only offers firsthand real-world experience but also eliminates barriers between staff and students by enhancing acquaintance (Boyle et al., 2007). Moreover, it strengthens the sense of belonging and establishes a safe environment and secure relation within a group, which promotes students’ interests and motivation for fieldwork settings (Mogk and Goodwin, 2012). Moreover, Kern and Carpenter (1984) noted that fieldwork substantially evokes affective responses and provides more pleasure, interests, and appreciation than learning in the classroom setting and such affective responses led to improvements in deeper learning. Hill and Woodland (2002) stated that deep learning involves acquiring and using higher-order skills, such as information analysis, interpretation, and assessment. Such skills are developed by encouraging students to modify or assess their ideas or knowledge through the critical reflection process (Moon, 2005).

### 2.2 Service Learning

Service learning is an experiential educational approach for higher education that promotes learning and development by engaging students in community service and structured reflection (Jacoby, 1996). Service learning programs focus on learning through experience, reflection and reciprocity (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Putting students in the situation of real-world problems and providing them service-learning curricula around social problems helps students to have a genuine learning experience along with the eradication of negative stereotypes (Kiely, 2005). Through offering opportunities for students to interact with people of different situation, races and social classes, these service learning experiences develop global awareness, communication and problem-solving skills that promote cultural and social understanding (Moely, et al., 2002). In addition, service learning activities are related to various positive learning outcomes such as the improvement of critical thinking and a greater sense of civic responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999) and has positive effects on student learning including empathy (Lundy, 2007), self-efficacy (Simons & Cleary, 2006), motivation to engage in social issues (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius et al, 2008), motivation to study

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(Flournoy, 2007), and civic engagement and responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998).

## 3. Case study: Fieldwork in the Philippines

### 3.1 Program overview

J. F. Oberlin University has been offering a short-term faculty-led fieldwork program in the Philippines since 1994 (Obirin Today, 2011). The program lasts for two weeks and is based in Metro Manila. Students are required to write a daily reflective journal and participate in daily reflection sessions during the fieldwork program. Moreover, they need to complete fieldwork reports in Japanese and English, undergo a one-hour debriefing session, and submit an 8,000-word research paper to earn four course credits.

The fieldwork program includes seven pre-learning and three post-learning sessions. The pre-learning sessions include history, culture, social issues in the Philippines, foreign aid, and details of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that will be visited. The post-learning sessions pertain to a reflection on the fieldwork experience and a discussion of topics and ideas for the research paper.

The fieldwork program in the Philippines focuses on urban poverty issues in Metro Manila and obtains an in-depth understanding of social justice, the reality of poverty on marginalized communities, and the efforts of NGOs to bring about social change. Students join the immersion program organized by the Office for Social Concern and Involvement of Ateneo de Manila University (AdMu), which is a partner institution of J. F. Oberlin University. Additionally, the students visit four NGOs such as an organization for disadvantaged children, a nursing home, a housing project in poor community, and an organization for helping women in distress as well as human trafficking victims. Students engage in community-based work to learn the issues and challenges that Philippine society faces, and the roles and impact of grassroots activities of local NGOs. Further, students visit Payatas, a barangay predominantly known as a poor urban neighborhood and former garbage dumpsite in Metro Manila. The students are encouraged to participate in a three-day program, which includes a homestay conducted by a Japanese NGO, Salt Payatas. Students are given opportunities to experience the livelihoods of people living in poverty and directly hear stories from vulnerable city dwellers and former scavengers.

By living and working with the locals, students understand the current situation and real problems. Such a direct experience provides students with ideas on how to address the issues of developing countries.

### 3.2 Purpose of fieldwork in the Philippines

The fieldwork program enables students to face the social and development issues in the Philippines by interacting with the victims of social injustice, such as street children, scavengers, and abandoned individuals.

The program aims to promote empathy by allowing the students to put themselves in the shoes of marginalized people who struggle to make a living and to raise students' awareness regarding development and social injustice to visualize what development should be ideal and how to address such issues.

#### 4. Methodology

The participant group comprises seven students who participated in 2018 and four students from 2019. Except for two students, all participants were from an international cooperation program with limited experience abroad, and three students had never visited developing countries.

The methods used to assess changes in students' learning outcomes, attitude and views toward international development before and after fieldwork are questionnaire surveys, reflective daily journals, and semi-structured interviews.

### Results

#### 5.1 Changes in students' image of the Philippines pre- and post-fieldwork

The students' image of the Philippines before fieldwork was biased toward what they heard or learned from various media. After the fieldwork, their impression of the Philippines changed into one that is related to the people's lives, history, and social problems. The students' image of the Philippines was transformed into more realistic and detailed one after directly interacting with the locals.

Before	After
Banana, mango, English-speaking country, beach resort, tropical island, friendly country, rich in natural resources, Smokey Mountain, notable gap between the rich and the poor, poverty, and high crime rate	Dumpsite, scavenger, Jose Rizal (national hero), Spanish occupation, Japanese military occupation, Catholicism, Christianity, corruption, social and income inequality, heavy traffic, migrant worker, flood disaster, warmth in people's hearts, hospitality, family ties, Jollibee (fast-food), halo-halo, mosquito, mango, banana, and coconut

#### 5.2 Students' affective responses toward poverty and development: Challenging the preconceptions

According to Hope (2009), "Fieldwork can give us direct experiences that challenge our preconceptions". Eight students shared that they had negative preconceptions that people living in poverty were pitiable. However, the students provided different responses after the fieldwork. Many students stated that despite their poverty, we should not assume that they are powerless and hopeless until we directly interact with them.

Direct interaction with marginalized people stimulated students' emotions and changed their assumptions and beliefs about people with poverty and development issues. This experience helped to evoke affective responses from students, nurture empathy and enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students to address issues of poverty and development.

Student A (2018) shared that she had wanted to help poor people in slums in developing countries, because she thought they were "pitiable people" while she was from "developed country". She said that fieldwork experience changed her views and she now thought that although we cannot do anything to help them, we can understand their lives and strive to do something together to make their lives better. She added that she used to subconsciously look down upon them until she spent time with her host family in Payatas and people in the local community. The lives of her host

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family were very challenging. However, her host mother looked after abandoned cats and dogs even though her family did not have enough food for themselves. She felt that despite their poverty, they were not just pitiable but rather had compassion.

Student B (2018) reported that when she compared herself with people from economically poor families in developing countries, she initially felt sorry for them before participating in the fieldwork in the Philippines. However, she started struggling to feel that way because she realized that they had their own sources of joy and hope to better their lives. Though poor, people from developed countries should not assume their lives to be miserable. To combat poverty, the student considered the importance of supporting people in poor communities and providing them with access to education and acquisition of technical skills to gain better economic opportunities. Student A was hired as a system engineer after graduation. In the future, she aims to return to the Philippines as an engineer to teach computer skills to the people in marginalized communities.

Student C (2018) claimed that visiting and interacting with former scavengers in the Payatas district changed her views about development. The dumpsite in the Payatas was closed by the city government because of a deadly “trash slide” that occurred in 2000 and buried hundreds of residents alive (Philstar Global, 2001). The student stated that closing the dumpsite was the best solution for the residents for security, environmental, and health reasons. However, many residents still wish that the dumpsite be reopened because they had moved there to work as scavengers but lost their daily jobs upon the closing. Student C was shocked to hear such answers and found that imposing general ideas and values is not always a solution to the problem. Further, she learned that development planners and practitioners have to focus on reality, listen to voices on the ground, and refrain from applying their personal blueprint for development. Moreover, Student C had believed that everything that the government did was right. However, due to the case of the Payatas dumpsite, she began to think that it is important to critically weigh the government’s decisions.

Student D (2019) stated that she had believed poverty meant unhappiness because she learned the various negative consequences of poverty in university classes in Japan. However, by interacting with people in communities in the Philippines, she found strong ties among people who had a tendency to help neighbors facing problems. She had believed that only development brought happiness to poor people but realized that this was a limited view.

## 5. Findings

Fieldwork with the service learning component helped to develop students’ skills and behavior such as communication skills, global awareness, motivation to study and social responsibility. Daily reflection sessions and reflective journals supported to enhance students’ behavior outcomes. Throughout the fieldwork, daily reflection sessions were held to share students’ learning, thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Daily reflective journals were also another requirement to undergo a process of critical self-examination and self-reflection of everyday activities. All students answered positively that the both reflection sessions and reflective journals were meaningful because they enabled the analysis of issues encountered every day, the critical evaluation of their perceptions with peers, and the creation of new ideas. Harrison et al. (2003) explained that “Learning through reflection is an important skill, which enables students to progress and improve the quality of their learning experience. A reflective learner monitors, manages and action plans his/her learning effectively”

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(P138).

Student E (2018) reported that she struggled to verbalize her opinions and share thoughts and ideas with other people before the fieldwork. However, the daily reflection sessions changed and encouraged her to logically discuss and coherently share ideas because the atmosphere of the session was very relaxed and provided a safe space to share ideas with peers.

Student F (2019) shared that her understanding and conceptions about poverty and development issues were shaped by writing daily reflective journals. She said that by expressing her emotions and ideas in writing, she objectively understood the issues and identified what she needs to do to address them.

Student G (2008) stated that the reflection session helped her to think about development and international cooperation deeper. She said that all peers shared their thoughts, ideas and feelings comfortably and discussed various development topics and explored possible solutions with enthusiasm. This experience made her think that we all should realize the importance of helping others in need because it is a fundamental part of humanity. She strongly felt that no matter where we live, we need to help each other with respect as a citizen in the world because we human beings are responsible for creating a better world.

Student H (2019) claimed that interacting with the underprivileged and living under the same roof with a family in a poor community made it easier to imagine being in the same situation, and it led to an active discussion about development issues more specifically and concretely not only in his self-reflection but also in each reflection session with peers. He said that direct interaction with people living in poverty was a powerful way of changing students' views and helping them realize that they are inhabitants of the same planet as unprivileged people. Student H (2019) said that he came to realize the importance of empathizing with those who struggle to live, and this made him want to be a problem solver to make this world more peaceful and tolerant.

**6. Conclusion**

All students wrote an 8,000-word research paper on specific topics of interest from the fieldwork experience. Students chose research topics that focus not only on international cooperation and development issues in the Philippines, but also on the various themes that they became aware of. Students attempted to analyze and interpret the issues of each topic and evaluate what they have researched. The topics of their research papers were;

1. Social business in marginalized communities.
2. Healthcare issues in slum areas.
3. Relationship between gender issues and religion.
4. Issues of poverty and education.
5. Flood risk management.
6. Current situation and problems in dumpsites in the Philippines.
7. History recognition between Japan and the Philippines.
8. Approaches to poverty issues.
9. The gap between the rich and poor in the Philippines.
10. Overseas women Filipino workers.
11. Exploring solutions to reduce traffic.

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Moreover, after the fieldwork, eight students took other classes, such as those related to international cooperation, international relations, international law, environmental studies, ethics, gender studies, peace building and other international fieldwork programs in order to learn more and analyze the development and humanitarian issues and challenges based on their experience in the Philippines.

This study revealed that fieldwork experience results in affective responses that lead students to deeper learning. Moreover, fieldwork incorporating service learning components generates increased empathy toward others, positive attitudes to study and motivation to engage in social issues. Further, students were able to enhance their learning outcomes such as higher-order thinking skills, communication skills and feelings of civic responsibility as members of a larger community and thus learned how to respect and help others. Students learned the importance of the connection between theory and practice through the immersive experience and understood the significance of learning in the real world to address social issues.

The present study only examined a two-week fieldwork program in the Philippines and data from limited numbers. Future research will investigate the impact of long- or short-term fieldwork courses and larger numbers in different places. It will be interesting to investigate how these eleven students who experienced fieldwork in the Philippines change their views and behaviors after several years.

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