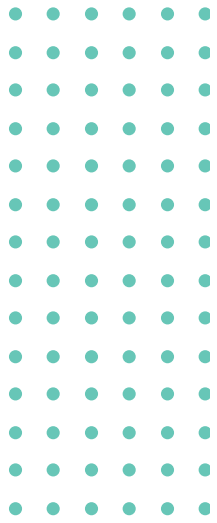


INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING at POLYU 2016 SELECTED CASE STUDIES





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• **SELECTED CASE STUDIES**



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PREFACE by Prof. Yuen-Tsang Woon Ki, Angelina

Vice President (Student and Global Affairs)

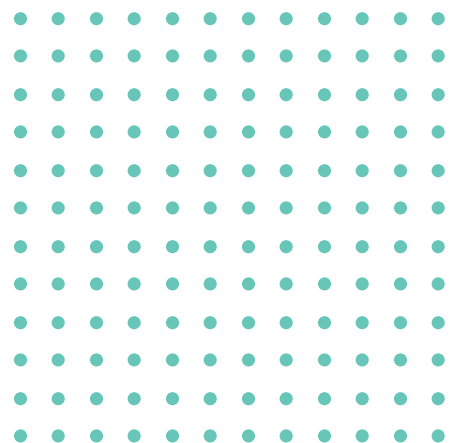
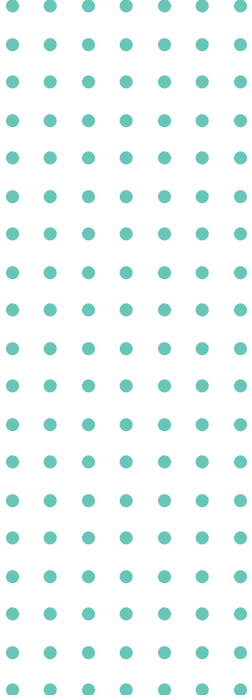
Service-learning takes students out of the classroom and into the community. They discover the needs of the community, local and overseas, and learn about meeting those needs with what they have learnt in the classroom. The more challenging the tasks at hand, the more our students can learn; and the more the community they serve is different from the community they are from, the wider their horizons will become. It is for these reasons that The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) has been developing and offering in-depth service-learning programmes to take our students away from Hong Kong to Cambodia, Vietnam, Rwanda and beyond.

Earlier this year, I visited students and their teachers undertaking service-learning in Cambodia. I climbed onto the roof of an old cargo container that was being converted into a community learning centre to watch our students in action installing solar panels so that the centre could have power off the electrical grid. Seeing the students working in the field with such passion and devotion was gratifying. I am convinced more than ever that PolyU's efforts in developing and advancing offshore service-learning are worthwhile.

Offshore service-learning is one of the important initiatives through which we provide global exposure and learning to our students. We are also developing new networks, exchange arrangements, undergraduate research opportunities and innovative co-teaching across universities and countries. Together, they are helping to weave a strong multicultural social-engagement fabric into our university.

This book provides a snapshot of that quickly developing story, as told by the students. I am sure you will enjoy reading it as much as I did.





PREFACE by Dr. Grace Ngai and Dr. Stephen C.F. Chan

Since service-learning became part of the institutional strategy at PolyU in 2012, global service-learning has hit one milestone after another. 2011 saw the first credit-bearing overseas service-learning project, to Cambodia, as part of COMP397, then a discipline-specific requirement open only to Computing students.

International service-learning has taken massive strides since service-learning became part of PolyU's institutional strategy in 2012. From 29 students, enrolled in one subject, going to Cambodia in Summer 2012, in 2016 we have 211 students from 8 subjects in Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Rwanda.

People often ask us why we put so much effort into our international projects. Our response is simple. International service-learning takes students out of their comfort zone, immerses them into environments that are alien to them, and puts them in situations where they have to interact with people who are unlike them in appearance, language and culture. Many of our students come from lower-income families and this may be their first opportunity in a non-Chinese culture. For many others, this is a unique opportunity to interact with aspects of a foreign culture they would not get to experience as a tourist. For all of them, this is a valuable learning experience. We are hence committed to providing more opportunities for students to serve and learn from this experience. On the other hand, these projects also help us to strengthen our collaborations with overseas institutions and universities in real projects with impact.

We believe in the power of stories to communicate, to touch and to persuade. After our first overseas project in Cambodia in 2010, we documented our experiences into a book. That book was invaluable in helping other colleagues, students, administrators, NGO partners, and donors to understand what we were doing. This year, we will try a different angle. Instead of telling our own story, we are inviting others to tell it for us.

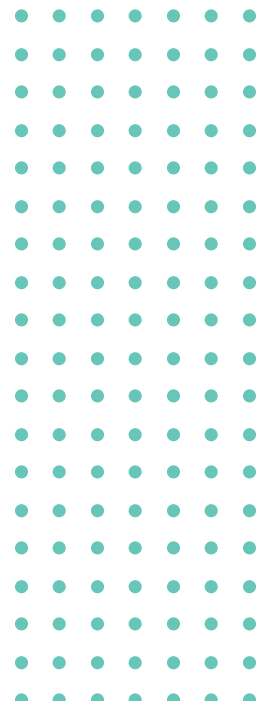
Our student journalist internship program was designed with this objective. Through this program, we wish to build up a community of students who are passionate and



effective at telling the stories behind service-learning. From a broader perspective, it is a form of development communication – the use of communication to facilitate social development. Their assignment is to observe, to learn, to document. We hope that simultaneously, they absorb and they learn — both from their experiences “following” the project teams on site, but also through interactions with the students they are observing and from each other. Through their eyes, we wish to learn more about our own projects, our own efforts, our own students. How we are doing, what we should and could improve, and why.

2016 is the pilot run of this journalist internship program. We are starting out small, but over time, we envision that this program will grow to involve more students, from different schools, working together for the purpose of supporting and motivating development through communication.

Clarice, Daniella and Blanca, from Brown University, are the first cohort under this program. Over the summer, they were assigned to follow different project teams. They lived with them, observed them at work, interviewed the students, teachers, and the community. This is their story.



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INTRODUCTION

Clarice Brough, Daniella Balarezo and Blanca Garcia

This book documents a number of the overseas service-learning projects undertaken by PolyU students during Summer 2016. It is hoped that they will illustrate the learning objectives of the work delivered and the training processes leading up to the projects, and also provide insights into the experiences of the students themselves.

Whilst the principal objective is to explain how these courses function, we also strive to capture the spirit the students brought to their field work. These accounts were written to celebrate the university's service-learning programme, and everyone who contributed – both staff and students.

The projects themselves were all quite distinctive and, as a result, did not lend themselves to being covered in a homogenous manner. The reviews also vary in authorship, so each chapter is, hopefully, as unique in its approach as the project it covers.

Contracted by PolyU for the summer of 2016, we set out to recount the students' stories and experiences throughout the delivery of their service. To compile these reports, we spent a substantial amount of time observing, interviewing, and interacting with the project participants. When possible, communication with students and teachers began before the service trip and was followed-up upon returning to Hong Kong. However, we were able to observe only a small part of the project preparations, which took place throughout the academic year. Follow up was also fragmentary, as students were on summer recess.

Hence, the majority of the material heavily relies on information gathered during the service trip. The book was thus moulded into a mixture of primary, secondary and tertiary accounts. Because of the unique circumstances of how we relate to each project, our reports range from narrowly focused accounts to more expansive reports.

We hope we have been able to capture a strong sense of the participants' passion. As chroniclers, we have withstood a range of emotions and walked away from the experience feeling inspired.

Bios:

Clarice Brough is a third year student at Brown University concentrating in Hispanic studies. Her passion for travel teamed with her enthusiasm for writing has led her to consider a career in journalism post her degree. Her particular areas of interest are languages, philosophy and international relations.

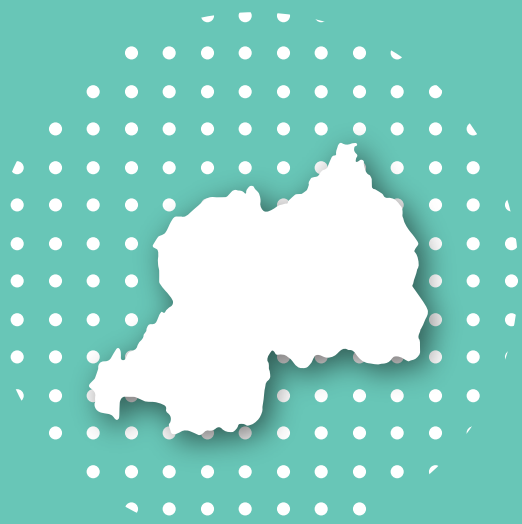


Daniella Balarezo is in her third year at Brown University studying Political Science and Ethnic Studies. She is a dual citizen of the U.S. and Mexico, residing in the borderlands of El Paso, Texas. Daniella dreams of becoming a writer and telling stories that give voice to those who most need it.



Blanca Garcia currently attends Brown University where she studies Neuroscience. Passionately curious, she has a wide range of interests and has developed a knack for adventure. She aspires to be a journalist and help share the stories of the world.





RWANDA

Technology Beyond Borders: 18 May -5 June 2016



2

Technology Beyond Borders

Blanca Garcia

Introduction

The 2016 Rwanda service-learning project took place between 18 May and 4 June. The course – “Technology Beyond Borders: Service-Learning Across Cultural, Ethnic and Community Lines” – is offered by the Department of Computing (COMP) and led by professors Stephen Chan and Grace Ngai. Their teaching team also included Wing Wong, an assistant officer, and two student leaders: Erin Wu and Kimmy Chow.

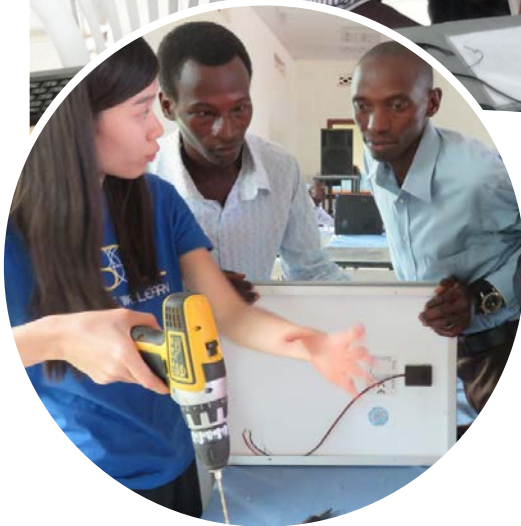
The teaching team led a group of 17 undergraduates from 13 different departments on the trip to Kigali, Rwanda. While in Rwanda, the students worked on three main projects: solar power charging station construction, computer lab and learning centre set-up and an information and technology communication (ITC) project.

Before the students arrived, dating as far back as 2013, PolyU began working closely with the African Evangelistic Enterprise Rwanda (AEE Rwanda). AEE – an international organisation working to relieve poverty in and evangelise Africa – has quite an extensive network in Rwanda, and thus provided the students with accommodations, transportation, translators and assistance coordinating between PolyU and the local communities.

In addition to AEE, PolyU collaborated with the University of Maryland on the computer lab and learning centre projects, and the University of Pennsylvania on the ITC project. This was the first time that the COMP team had worked with either of these universities, and everyone was enthusiastic about the new partnerships.

Methodology

Although Rwanda is in the midst of rapid economic expansion, a sizable fraction of their population remains without electricity. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, up to 77% of households did not have access to electricity in 2015. Furthermore, the electricity shortage has led to a computer shortage, which in turn has contributed to the digital divide, both within Rwanda and on a global scale.



The Technology Beyond Borders service project was designed with these issues in mind. The students would deliver their service in the rural villages of Gicaca, Kigali, where they would work towards their goal of providing power for 120 households. The students would be leading the installation of LED lights and phone chargers in the households.

To fulfil their goal of serving 120 homes, the students required additional help. The assistance came in the form of local youth and young adults eager to learn. The students were responsible for teaching and leading small teams of local Rwandans to wire up the houses with lights and phone chargers. In the process, the local youths learn useful knowledge and skills relating to solar power and electrical systems.

This project not only allowed our students to use the electrical engineering skills they acquired during the weeks of preparation back in Hong Kong, but it also pushed them to master the skills. They had to be familiar enough with the material to teach the locals how to install and maintain the systems. It was the locals who would ultimately complete the project and ensure that all 120 households had working lights and chargers once the students returned to Hong Kong.

Giving 120 households access to electricity, while life-changing for those families, would make only a small step towards closing the digital divide. The next step



depended on the learning centre and its computers. The centre would provide a place for community members to gather, and the offline computers would give them access to information that would otherwise be much harder to obtain.

Similar to the solar panel project, working on the learning centre provided the students with the opportunity to use their electrical engineering and computing knowledge as they set up the computers. The project also engaged the humanities side of service-learning, as the students collaborated with undergraduates from the University of Maryland. The two groups explored the qualitative effects of the service being provided.

The project placement challenged PolyU students by having them work in unfamiliar environments among people and students with different cultural backgrounds. The service inevitably forced students to be flexible, think critically and tackle any problems that arose in a creative fashion.

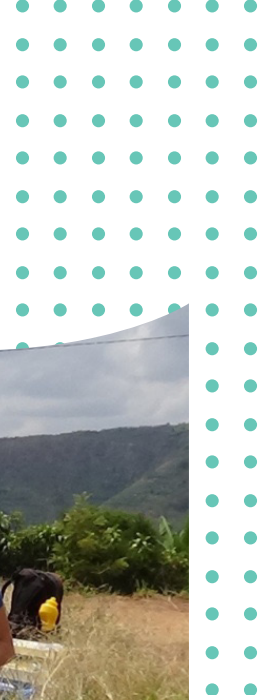
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Technical / Methodological Details

The students began preparing for their trip to Rwanda as early as February 2016. Throughout the course, the students became familiar with IT infrastructure, maintenance and teaching. More specifically, they learned the basics of circuits, soldering and proper tool use. This provided them with the skills necessary to construct the LED circuits, solar panels and PVC pipe frame structures.

After assembling the LED circuits, the students subjected them to stringent tests to ensure they would withstand the journey and to prove that they could handle fluctuating voltages. This attention to detail was maintained in all aspects of the project.

The PVC pipe structures that supported the solar panels were designed to fit the houses and accommodate the direction of each roof. Details, such as drilling additional holes in the bottoms of the pipes to prevent them from trapping rainwater,



were very much part of the wiring design process.

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The students actively sought out the professors' advice on how to improve their solar panel design, and they remained patient during the tedious submission and revision processes until the proposals were approved. Yet, that approval was not the final stage of preparation. It took 13 weeks of lectures, workshops and preparation before the students were fully equipped with the knowledge to carry out their service project.

Upon arriving in Rwanda, the professors had a design in mind that would allow the students to most efficiently provide power to the 120 households. They divided the district into 4 areas, each containing around 30 households. Rather than provide each home with solar panels, each received a car battery that could power the LED lights and chargers within. The residents could then take the batteries to a charging station in their respective zone. One house in each area was selected to serve as the solar charging station, and it was equipped with twelve 20-watt solar panels on the roof capable of charging five car batteries simultaneously.

Two students, Winky and Paul, were responsible for setting up the solar charging stations and the solar panels on the learning centre. They travelled to all four zones with a group of locals to assist them in getting the solar panels onto the roofs and, afterward, setting up the indoor wiring. These homes received additional wiring, as they were not only equipped with lights and chargers but also with five battery-charging stations.

The ten remaining students were divided into five small teams, each with two or three Rwandan locals. Each team was responsible for teaching the locals how to install the



lights and chargers. The students working on the ITC project later joined these teams, because they completed their project ahead of schedule.

Wired 60 households, half of the goal, students provided a group of local with the tools and skills necessary to confidently and safely finish the project. Furthermore, if any glitches arose in the systems that were already installed, the homeowners could contact the group and have their systems inspected and maintained.

As these students worked to spread access to electricity, another group of students worked to provide access to offline computers and their educational resources. This second group partnered with three students from the University of Maryland to construct a learning centre, gauge the community's needs and determine whether they were being met.

The University of Maryland spearheaded the community assessment portion of the project. Their students were trained in global leadership and community service-learning. Together with our students, the group developed two questionnaires. The first was designed to assess the effects of solar panels installed the previous year on the families who received them. The second explored the community's needs and desires as they related to the learning centre.

In return, the PolyU students trained the Maryland students to assemble the Raspberry Pi computers that would be installed in the learning centre. Although the computers did not have access to the Internet, they were equipped with offline educational resources in both English and French. The students tried to upload information in Kinyarwanda, the principal language in Rwanda, but had difficulties finding sources online.

The students implementing the learning centre project initially struggled to work as a unified team. The PolyU and Maryland students worked differently, which created tension and uneasiness within the group. However, in the end, the PolyU students repeatedly pointed to overcoming cultural differences with the Americans as one of the most rewarding experiences of the trip.

Student Experience and Learning

The students embarked on this project with little to no prior knowledge of Rwanda. When asked why they joined, as opposed to signing up for a local project or one in a country closer to Hong Kong, the students' explanations touched on everything from cultural curiosity to the greater good.

The students' unfamiliarity with Rwanda became evident upon their arrival. They were shocked to find that they were expected to take bucket baths and hand-wash their laundry. Hot water was also not a luxury afforded to them. Yet, they quickly saw that the conditions at the guest house comfortably surpassed the living conditions of the service recipients they would be working with.

13 The students also had to engage in outdoor manual labour, some for the first time in their lives. They were so disconnected from this lifestyle that many complained about the heat, even though Rwanda has an average temperature of 20°C in June, while Hong Kong has an average temperature of 28°C at that time of year. Once again, this reflected the comfortable living standards to which the students were accustomed.

After a week in Rwanda, many of the students could still not fully grasp the disparities between the lives of the locals they were serving, and their own. Fetching water daily was absolutely foreign to the group. Even more strange for the students was the locals' bright and hopeful outlook on life.

The locals were happy and welcoming, wearing smiles that could hardly be contained. "In Hong Kong, not everyone will greet you, but here, everyone greets you or even shakes your hand. I think the people here are very good", said one student when asked about interacting with the locals. "I feel very welcomed."

In addition to immersing themselves in a different culture, the students were also expected to carry out their service projects, and as their work progressed, their uneasiness was palpable.

Many of the students in the solar panel group did not study engineering, and because they had only recently acquired the skills themselves, they expressed hesitation in teaching the locals. Their uncertainty was further fuelled by the language barrier between the two groups. Some of the PolyU students had not fully mastered English,

and the majority of the locals had very limited English themselves. However, their commitment pushed them forward, and they used hand gestures and different motions to communicate.

As the groups progressed with their projects and wired more houses, our students quickly found that they had underestimated the local volunteers. The locals immediately engaged and were very eager to learn and get started. The students were excited and surprised to realise that the local students were just as capable as they, and easily followed instructions. The students discovered the importance of working collaboratively.

“The local people helped each other. Some were good with English, some were not”, explained one student. Those who were, helped to translate for others. You could see them working and collaborating together to try and figure things out. This undoubtedly had a huge impact on the students, so much so that when I asked Paul, a first-year Electronic and Information Engineering student, how it felt to take charge and be the leader in the project, he kindly corrected me, saying he was not taking charge but rather using effective communication so that as a group they could work towards their goal.

The students recognised the ever pressing necessity of accepting help from the community if they were to realise their goal of wiring all houses in the four zones. Aside from being quick learners and picking up the material being introduced, the local learners also presented ideas that the students had never thought of. The people of Rwanda are no strangers to improvisation, and their creative solutions captivated the students. In all, the students were left fairly impressed by the locals’ initiative, resourcefulness and overall work ethic.

The students left the project understanding that they had greatly underestimated Rwanda and its people. They were more effective communicators, having learned to connect using more than just words. Moreover, they understood the importance of helping; not only helping others, but also learning to receive and accept help from the locals, who were eager to contribute.

The learning centre team experienced just as much insight, if not more, than the solar panel group. The former experienced additional challenges, as they were tasked with unifying three different cultures: Hong Kong, American and Rwandan.

PolyU intentionally collaborated with the Maryland students, knowing that their backgrounds and disciplines differed. The assumption was that the two skillsets would complement each other. However, this was not necessarily the case. Initially, the differences between the two groups translated to into separate approaches to problems. Understandably, it was not long before conflict arose.

The first of their problems occurred prior to arranging the learning centre, as the students conducted community assessments. A number of students felt frustrated with this process and viewed it as time wasted – valuable time in which wiring and other activities could have been conducted. Other students felt helpless. One felt the needs of the community would not be met if time was wasted on the community assessments, “We made a promise to help them”, he argued.

Other students insisted that it was meaningless to serve people without knowing their culture. In support of the community assessments, these students were adamant about the importance of learning about the Rwandan culture. The conflicts stemmed from the students’ desire to be as efficient with their time as possible, further fuelled by the aspiration to make the greatest impact that time would allow.

After a debriefing session, the students collectively decided that they were relying too heavily on the professors, and that collaborating with one another would be most effective. This decision was tested when our students were given the opportunity to wire the learning centre with LED lights and the offline server. They worked against the setting sun to accomplish as much as possible before darkness set in. They worked together to get the job done quickly and effectively. This, more than anything, demonstrated their profound inclination towards service-learning.

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The work ethic that the students demonstrated carried over to their interactions with the locals. Iris, a second-year Industrial Systems Engineering student, described the impact that she and the other students had on her local learner, “Now you leave and the tears are running down my face”, he messaged her. His dream was to be a diplomat, the student shared with the group, and we were helping him to get closer to that by providing him with access to information. He is closer to his dream now.

On the last day of service-learning, the students were debriefed and asked, “Was this worth it? – Was it worth the time and preparation? Was it worth the financial expense to fly all the students out?”

The students separated their responses to reflect their personal gains on the one hand, and the benefits to the Rwandan locals on the other. Not confident to speak for the Rwandan locals, the students focused much more on their own growth and what they were able to take away from the experience.

Most of the students approached these questions by expressing and confirming their commitment to the service. They took it seriously and continued to think of ways to further develop the project. Venn, a first-year Computing student, said “the learning centre is a long-term project, unlike the solar panels”, and expressed plans to continue uploading information onto the hard drive in the following years.

Carol, a 2nd-year Accounting student, spoke about the locals’ experience. “It is not

necessary to change everyone's lives. Even changing one life is enough and we changed one life so it is worth it."

The PolyU students agreed that the comfort they found in the kindness and hospitality of the Rwandan people was the best part of the trip. They were astonished by the beauty – in the scenery, the country and the hearts of the people. "Come to Rwanda, come to Africa", they all insisted, at the ends of their interviews, "this place has much more to offer than anything you could imagine". "This place is full of hope", said another.

"In Rwanda, we gained a clearer understanding of ourselves", said Venn, about the experience. "Changing a life is easy; changing one's mind is hard", he continued. But that is exactly what this service project did. It gave hope to the Rwandan people, expanded their range of possibilities taught our students that they can change the world.

NGO or Community Feedback

The stay in Rwanda and the project as a whole were due to the partnership between AEE and PolyU. AEE assisted in all aspects of the trip, from providing accommodations to translation. It also gathered the volunteers from the community to work closely with the students. Although there was a clear language barrier, one volunteer shared with us why they decided to help with the project. "Your volunteers bring new things to this area. This is an area that benefits from electricity. The children will use it to revise notes from school. It's a good change for this community."

Some of the AEE employees elaborated further on the partnership. Ben, a community facilitator with AEE, sat with me and answered a number of questions.

Q: Ben, can you tell us a little bit more about AEE?

A: AEE is a Christian organisation. In full it is the African Evangelistic Enterprise, but internationally it is African Enterprise. AEE in each country is independent with branches in different districts. In Rwanda, we are operating in more than 20 districts, we are near to covering all the districts in Rwanda.

Q. Tell us about the partnership between AEE and PolyU.

A. We had a partnership with the university years ago and last year is when they came to introduce what they are doing. At first they came with solar panels and equipment. We appreciate what they are doing. It is very important for the community. And we appreciate the students; they are doing well and are collaborative. This time they also

brought computers and they could continue learning.

Q. How do you think the solar panels and computers will impact the community?

A. Last week, and even the beginning of this week, we went with some of the students and we interviewed different household members. We discovered the solar panels increased the education standards of the children. Before, they were performing badly but now, they are performing well. They can study at night and do their homework at night. Before they could not because there was no light. It has impacted their lives. Also, there were some that were paying to charge their phones but now they are not spending and instead they are saving. I can say that a combination of computers and lights . . . it is like a miracle to community members . . . So on my side, I appreciate what they are doing and I request that they continue the partnership.

Q. What was your experience like working with the students and the two universities, PolyU and the University of Maryland?

A. They are amazing, they are committed and they are active. To work from morning to 6:00 in the evening – there are few people that can do that. They are encouraged and committed to support the communities. They are friendly and active and they are good people. They want to impact the lives in the community.

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Q. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions, Ben. Is there anything that you would like to add?

A. The partnership is good, but they are only here for a short period in Rwanda. So if it can be increased, it would be better. They can then move into other areas and interact with more people. They have a limited time of working so it is challenging, but if they can increase the period they are here it would be helpful.

A. Thank you, Ben!

I also had the chance to speak with John Kalenzi, the Executive Director of AEE Rwanda.

A. First, AEE is a Christian organisation with a mission statement to evangelise in partnership with the church. The Rwandan chapter started in 1987.

Q. Director, can you tell us about the partnership you have with PolyU?

A. At AEE, wherever we operate, we operate as a local organisation. We have our own strategic plan, we have our own fundraising strategy. We have four strategic areas: education, HIV care, youth and female empowerment, and the protection of orphans. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University comes in with education and youth

and female empowerment. We've been in a partnership with PolyU for a couple of years. But I think this is the first time they have come to Rwanda to empower youth and communities to resolve the issues that they are affected with. The partnership has been revolving around the learning centre and helping the communities to light their houses with solar panels, and teaching the communities basic ITC skills.

Q. PolyU will be returning to Hong Kong soon, but you will stay behind and be a witness to how the service will affect the communities. Can you speak on those changes?

A. You see, PolyU doesn't come and say, "This is what we want to do". We are the ones that give them some sort of sense of direction. We say, "We have a lot of need but these are the needs you can actually help us respond to at the moment". So when they come and then leave, AEE can actually try and sustain what has been changed by PolyU. The locals have to be empowered to sustain whatever has been started by PolyU.

Q. What kind of changes do the services bring about in the community?

A. Certainly, the changes are positive. The solar panels are being installed in the communities and the locals are also taught how to fix something if it breaks down so the solar panels can be used. You can imagine if somebody has been walking say six kilometres to go charge the phone, now they can charge the handset within their own house. That saves time and you can use it to do constructive work. That makes a huge difference in one's life. Also the kids, they can sit in their houses and do their homework. I can actually go on and on mentioning the positive effects that are happening but those are a few examples.

Q. How has it been interacting with the professors and the university students from PolyU and what it is like to work with them?

A. The way the professors and students work with the community members is amazing. The youth can easily interact with people of their age and the professors have been so good in terms of facilitating the learning process. They get the students to understand why they're here and what they need to achieve. All the groups that



have come here are very good, they learn very fast and interact with the locals very easily and the locals are also very embracing and very welcoming.

Q. Is there anything you would like to see changed with the partnership?

A. I would say I am very happy and I commend the way the partnership is going, but in a country like Rwanda there is always something that needs to be done and responded to. What we have been doing is responding to areas where the need is most, but that doesn't mean that there are no other needs. We need to strike a balance. How can we help the extremely poor people in the communities but also try to do something that is going to have the multiplier effect? For example, if one goes to a training centre, if you train the teachers, then you can affect every person who goes through the training centre 10 years later. That is another component we need to include and think about.

Q. You have now been in a partnership with PolyU for 4 years or so. Do you see this partnership continuing? If so, in what direction?

A. Personally, I would say if their resources are available I would appreciate if the partnership goes on. If it goes on we could think of other different ways to help. For example, most of the people in the countryside have challenges with their cooking stoves. How can we make use of solar energy for cooking? That is something that is going to help the hygiene of the community because they will not be faced with smoke and also the time that people spend. At the same time, you're protecting the environment because people will not cut a lot of trees. That is one area, but the other area I was telling you, was the training of trainers. For example, the students can come and interact with students here in vocational training. There is something the students in Rwanda could learn about computer engineering from the students at PolyU. At the same time, PolyU's instructors have international exposure and a head start, which is not the case with our own instructors. So our instructors can learn from the instructors from PolyU. Those are some of the areas where I think if the partnership is to grow or continue, that is the route to take.

Q. That is all the questions I have for you, Director. Is there anything you would like to add?

A. I would like to say a big thank you to the teams and the PolyU leadership for falling in love with Rwanda and helping improve the living conditions. A thank you to the students for staying in a different environment and working very hard, it is really something we cannot take for granted, so thank you.

Teacher's Feedback

The teaching team in Rwanda was led by Grace Ngai and Stephen Chan, professors at PolyU. They were assisted by Wing Wong, an assistant officer, and two student leaders: Erin Wu and Kimmy Chow. Two professors from the University of Maryland, Anne Spears and Natasha Chapman, also travelled to Rwanda to help lead the projects and supervise the students from their own university.



Whilst the professors were overseeing the three different projects, I was able to gather some commentary on the projects and their development. Erin, a graduate of the Department of Industry and System Engineering at PolyU, reflected on the projects and service-learning as a concept.

Q. Why is service-learning important?

A. As we are growing up we are accepting the help from the community and many people. So I think it's our responsibility to give something back within our ability and to give to people in need. Learning because we are still students, we are not mature enough, we have to learn to serve people . . . It is necessary no matter where you are. You need to do some service and learning as well.

Q. Erin, do you think the project was successful?

A. That's a big question. Right now I have very complex feelings. Firstly, I feel very excited about the two weeks. We did a lot of things, some of which exceeded our expectations, and for the students I believe they have already learned a lot and this was a very valuable experience for them. Every time I talk to them they have changed, they have improved their behaviour, and I think it's good when they make changes. I also feel a little bit sad because I'm going to leave so its very complex, this feeling.

Q. Is there anything you would do differently or change?

A. There are some changes I would make. There are problems that the students are having that I had when I did my project two years ago. So next year I come here, I will do things based on the experience of this project and the project I did two years ago. It's helpful and changes will continue to be made.

The project has continued to grow and evolve every year. Stephen spoke briefly about its grandiosity and scope:

We take our students, who have some experience with technology, and we take them to some place that is different than Hong Kong. This is the fourth time we have come to Rwanda. Each year we do a larger scale project or more complex, hopefully, to make the project more efficient so that we can bring electricity to more and more people who live in these villages where there is no electrical grid.

In previous years, each household was provided with two solar panels capable of powering the LED lights and phone chargers in the home. However, with this year's new design, 12 solar panels served 30 homes, allowing the university to have a wider reach with fewer panels.

Stephen also touched on the community learning centre project. He spoke about how the partnership with the University of Maryland led to a project that was more well-rounded and better targeted the needs of the community:

The University of Maryland sent a group of students who had complimentary skills. Our students were skilled mainly in IT but they [the University of Maryland students] were more skilled in terms of finding out what the community needed and then trying to provide that. They led us in terms of interviewing the people that lived here, finding out what they needed, and talking with them and asking them appropriate questions . . . and our students set up the system, so together they were a very good match.

Anne and Natasha agreed that the skill sets between the two universities were complimentary, and used the same word to describe the blossoming partnership. It appears Rwanda may only be the first of many service project collaborations between the two universities.



VIETNAM

Learning through Providing Eye Care and Vision Health to the Community: 6-12 June 2016
Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions: 6-17 July 2016



3

Learning through Providing Eye Care and Vision Health to the Community

Daniella Balarezo

Introduction

For the second time ever, the Office of Service-Learning, in conjunction with the School of Optometry, conducted the Learning through Providing Eye Care and Vision Health to the Community service-learning subject in Long Xuyên, An Giang Province, Vietnam. The same service project had been piloted in prior years in Cambodia. Summer 2016, however, saw the particular re-installation of the Learning through Providing Eye Care programme in Vietnam. The project, lasting from June 6 to June 12, was seemingly an overall success and seems to be on track for further implementation in upcoming years.

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Methodology

Community Needs



Figure 1 An Giang and PolyU Students and Staff on the Last Day



Figure 2 Tiger Island



Figure 3 Crop Fields in Tiger Island

The first school of optometry in the entirety of the country of Vietnam did not open until October 2014. The school, a joint project between a university and an eye hospital, is located in the southern part of the country, in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon).¹ The school seems to have opened at an opportune time; in 2007, the Vietnam Institute of Ophthalmology conducted a survey in which 1.6 million people reported suffering from poor vision, 380,000 people reported blindness, and 2-3 million people suffered from refraction issues.² Taking the dated report and overall lack of information about eye health in Vietnam into account, the needs of the Vietnamese community as it pertains to vision health seem clear.

For instance, as mentioned, the school of optometry in Vietnam is located in Ho Chi Minh City. This means that rural or Northern Vietnamese populations must either travel expensively to seek out vision care or pay high prices at private optical shops. In this way, PolyU's service has proved to be of particularly great benefit.

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Project Goals

Keeping the needs of the community in mind, PolyU students arrive in Ho Chi Minh City to experience the culture and emerging economic growth of Southern Vietnam. Their main service, however, is conducted a five-hour bus ride away in the province of An Giang, in the city of Long Xuyên. This unconventional location aims to reduce the gap that arises in eye care delivery, as sites like Long Xuyên, so far from the city, are less exposed to optometry. By providing eye care services to areas where there is little to no optometry practice, PolyU students meet their goal of serving underserved communities.

1 <http://www.brienholdenvision.org/media-centre/latest-news/981-a-new-era-for-optometry-in-vietnam.html>

2 <http://talk.onevietnam.org/seeing-the-facts-about-blindness-in-vietnam/>



Figure 4 City View of Long Xuyên



Figure 5 City View of Long Xuyên

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Learning through Providing Eye Care and Vision Health to the Community has a few basic yet compelling goals. At its core, and as its title suggests, the project intends to deliver eye care and vision health to the community of Long Xuyên while also teaching both credit-bearing subject material and leadership and civic engagement. This is the fundamental idea behind service-learning. Students from all disciplines – ranging from seemingly impertinent subjects such as fashion and textiles to the very relevant subject of optometry itself – learn to work together and solve problems by practising the delivery of their service in interdisciplinary, interlinguistic and intercultural ways. Although the most central deliverable of the service-learning projects is the service itself, PolyU students learn from not only each other, but also the local students with whom they work.

Further Project Details

The involvement of local students is one of the most extraordinary goals and outcomes of this specific service-learning project. PolyU partners up with An Giang University (AGU), a university based in Long Xuyên. Both groups of students work together to conduct screenings for different groups, including children and the elderly. The An Giang students learn technical terms about vision care in both English and Vietnamese. They gain knowledge about how to conduct the screenings and, importantly, explore their own capabilities and the capabilities and needs of their community while inescapably participating in a cultural exchange with PolyU students. As the PolyU course instructor told the An Giang students, “This project is not possible without you.”

Thirty-two PolyU students, half of them from the School of Optometry and the rest from varied disciplines ranging from Engineering to Nursing and Fashion and Textile, travelled to Ho Chi Minh City on June 6 to begin their service-learning trip. However, their service-learning journey began well before arriving in Vietnam. As a compulsory requirement and like any other credit-bearing subject, PolyU students

prepared for their service-learning programmes throughout the semester.

Savio Lee, a project coordinator for the service-learning projects in the School of Optometry, was responsible for the preparation of this specific programme. He has coordinated and completed over 70 vision screenings since the offering of the service-learning course in 2014. According to the subject syllabus, students are “required to demonstrate that they are competent and can safely and accurately perform simple clinical tests taught for vision assessment while undersupervision before they may render eye screening services for their target community.” In other words, the subject teachers firstly taught students how to conduct vision screenings to test for things such as near-sightedness, colour blindness, mobility and over- or under-reaction in eye movement. Then, Savio and other registered optometrists from PolyU, who actually accompanied students on their service-learning trip, assessed that students had the necessary skills to adequately conduct these tests.



Figure 6 PolyU Student Wearing Traditional Hat called Nón Lá

Once in Vietnam, students conducted the tests quite independently. Savio could be seen pacing around the service sites in the hot Vietnamese heat, checking that his students were completing the tasks on time, but never micromanaging them. When students did ask for help, Savio and the other optometrists were attentive. More often than not, however, the instructors only prompted the students, guiding them towards a solution they eventually found on their own. The tasks the students completed were quite varied.

For example, students who studied optometry or were in more advanced years were tasked with more complex duties, such as preparing eyeglasses or conducting mobility tests. Non-optometry students were assigned jobs that were less intricate yet still involved, such as managing and teaching service recipients how to properly

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Figure 7 PolyU and AGU Students Taking Photograph Together



Figure 8 PolyU Students Preparing Eyeglasses

take care of their eyes by, for example, properly washing their hands. In any case, each and every student worked difficult and lengthy days, in 30°C plus heat and 75% humidity or higher with no air conditioning. Large bottles of water were provided and replenished throughout the day, as students hydrated and rehydrated to make up for constant perspiration.

In total, students spent one day at a secondary school testing schoolchildren and teachers, two days at a former AGU practice school where they tested practice school students and Red Cross Charity House members and followed up on the last service targets and finally one day doing home visits on Tiger Island to low-income village households. The numbers of service recipients added up to around 400.

A key factor to the implementation of this service-learning project was for students to learn how to apply the learned content on site. PolyU students were tasked with not only retaining the information learned back in Hong Kong, but also enacting their practice in Vietnam, and furthermore teaching and working with local AGU students to successfully complete the service in Long Xuyên.

The process of working with An Giang students actually began early on in the undertaking of the service-learning trip. Once the PolyU students had arrived in Long Xuyên, a welcome dinner was held for both AGU and PolyU students to become acquainted with one another, with the 32 PolyU students and 25 AGU students receiving orientation and training. After the session, students worked together to set up at the Bui Huu Nghia secondary school to prepare for a vision screening scheduled for the next day, in which 130 children and 10 teachers would be tested.

Throughout the project, and especially in those early sessions, the PolyU students taught the AGU students, most of whom were studying English as their major, the basics of how to conduct the vision screenings. Both the AGU and PolyU

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Figure 9 PolyU Student and Optometrist Work Together



Figure 10 PolyU and AGU Students Work with Beneficiary



Figure 11 Subject Instructor Helps AGU and PolyU Student Test Service Recipient's Colour Vision



Figure 12 PolyU Students Conduct Vision Test

students worked to find the best way to translate vision screening instructions and questions from English into Vietnamese – and even Cantonese into English and then into Vietnamese – to best conduct the service. Students mentioned when interviewed that learning how to use simple direct phrases in addition to using body language such as hand motions helped to ease the language barrier they often faced. As a matter of fact, although many students feared the language difference would be the biggest obstacle they faced, by the end of the trip most of the students noted that the language barrier was not the primary problem of their experience.

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Student Experience and Challenges

Overall, the students seemed to agree on three key things about their service-learning experience: first, that they had all learned to work well together; second, that serving an underserved community could be a meaningful learning experience; and third, that learning about – and from – another culture was a formative experience. Although the students faced challenges in each of these three areas, most said they were content with their service-learning experience.

For Phyllis, a Radiotherapy student in her final year at PolyU, working well with others was a primary goal. She had participated in the Cambodia service-learning



Figure 13 PolyU Students Conduct Vision Test



Figure 14 PolyU Student Taking Child's Temperature

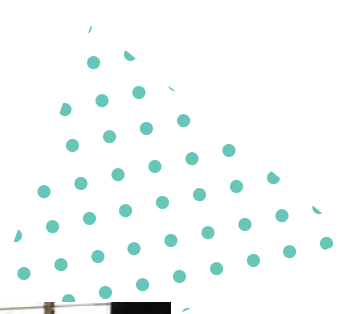


Figure 15 PolyU and AGU Student Test Child's Eyes



Figure 16 PolyU Student Fixes Child's Glasses

optometry trip two years before this year's installation, and returned to service-learning in Vietnam for two reasons. The first was a clear willingness to help others. The second and chief reason was the offer of a scholarship from the Office of Service-Learning, which presented Phyllis with a position as a student leader for the trip. The most difficult part about the project for Phyllis was connecting with the

students she was supposed to lead. She admitted, "Because I had never seen the students before – I think I met them in less than one week – I had to teach them... to work as a team, and build teamwork... The students come from different disciplines, and they may not know what to do or have experience with screenings, so the most difficult part is working through that." However, she noted that once the students established team camaraderie, it became exponentially easier for everyone to learn together.

Jessica, an Applied Biology and Chemical Technology student, noted that working with others could certainly be difficult. She explained that teamwork was tough, especially when everyone was tired after working long and hot days, waking up early and going to bed late. However, Jessica believed that despite the difficulty, the work everyone was doing was worth the struggle, as she personally found it quite meaningful. She was surprised to find that service recipients often did, in fact, have issues that were identified by students like her.



Figure 17 Phyllis, a Final-year Radiotherapy PolyU Student



Figure 18 Jessica, an Applied Biology and Chemical Technology PolyU Student

For example, for her station in which she tested colour vision, Jessica found that many service recipients were indeed colour blind. She was also struck by the differences between the elderly and schoolchildren, seeing that about 80% of the elderly had a colour defect, while only about 10% of the children did. For an optometry student, this might have been a

known statistic, as colour blindness can occur as a result of the natural damage to retinal cells when one grows old. For Jessica, this was a whole learning process, a pattern she noticed after a few days' work, a new factoid not directly related to or coming from her majors. However, this knowledge arguably still linked back to and further informed her studies.

The work, long days and heat were not the primary challenges. The challenge for both Phyllis and Jessica was functioning in this large team and group dynamic. As an example, Jessica explained that one of the problems she encountered was caused by the way the screenings were structured; so many people working at the same time occasionally proved inefficient. She explained there were two "parts" to the vision screening. The first part consisted of the visual screening tasks, like testing the eyes and checking basic eye health. The second part consisted of dispensing the needed treatment, such as eyeglasses. Jessica said, "At first, when [recipients] were doing the first 'part,' the second part would not have so many people, and later it would be empty at the first part and then [really] crowded at the second." It was indeed evident during the vision screenings that students occasionally found themselves with nothing to do, while others frantically worked.

Jessica admitted she did not know the best fix for this specific problem. It seemed that perhaps working closer with the flow control crew or adding people to the flow control would ease this difficulty. Perhaps restructuring the schedule would have helped, although this would have entailed extensive organisational creativity, which at times was unavailable. There are clearly numerous logistical details that go into each facet of a project like Learning through Providing Eye Care, and a mishap with one can evidently have a cascading effect on the others. It is important to note, however, that this is not to say this specific trip was disorganised. As a matter of fact, most of the people interviewed, whether they were from PolyU, from AGU or service recipients, said the only thing they would want to see improved for this project was the amount of people PolyU serves.

The adequate organisation of the trip was certainly evident. For example, although she enjoyed her trip to Cambodia, Phyllis noted that the trip to Long Xuyên was a step up. Phyllis stated that this trip was "just better organised." In addition, she applauded new initiatives taken this year, in which students aimed to educate service recipients on how to take care of their eyes once PolyU students returned to Hong Kong. Little to no additional educational information had previously been given to service recipients. This year, however, one whole group was dedicated to sharing information with each service recipient who left the service site. Phyllis explained, "This time we have been doing education packets... We give them leaflets and play games with them so they know how to protect their eyes." The importance of this kind of sharing of educational information was not lost on Phyllis. With optometry

slowly spreading throughout Vietnam, she knew “you can’t always rely on others to check your eyes, so [service recipients] need to know how to do it [themselves]; it’s kind of like self-help.” The question that arises, then, is whether self-help is enough to establish lasting change in the quality of eye care that people in Long Xuyên receive, or if perhaps a different, more long-term structure for the project is worth looking into.

The follow-up could help this long-term structure. This year, follow-ups with service recipients from prior years were conducted. Unfortunately, although hundreds of recipients were served in the prior year, only dozens (if that) were followed up with. This could have been due to the timing of the service (the screening was conducted in late summer, when schools were no longer in session), accessibility (perhaps the change in service sites, difficulty with transportation to the sites or lack of information about PolyU’s return to Long Xuyên), lack of perceived need for service (service recipients might not have felt like following up was necessary) or other circumstances (such as the hot weather), which prevented recipients from returning to the screenings. These factors that make follow-up difficult, paired with the lack of overall access to optometry in Vietnam, further fuel the question of the extent and level of this lasting change. It is worth noting that PolyU students, instructors and partner NGOs were ready, proactive and excited about giving service to the recipients who were receiving follow-up care. Sadly, they had few opportunities to act on their excitement and proactivity. It seems maintaining contact with, and ensuring follow-up for, all recipients in the future is not only feasible but also necessary for lasting, long-term change to occur.

Lasting change is a notion Jessica seemed to believe in. She noted that regardless of the weather, bottleneck traffic from the first “part” to the second and the long, hot days, everyone was learning how to be patient and how to serve others. In addition, she noted that both AGU and PolyU students were learning about each other’s cultures while also managing to do their work, a feat that took time and effort. All of the participants came from different areas of life and from a wide array of disciplines. For example, most of the AGU students were English majors, and about half of the PolyU students were non-Optometry majors. Explaining the details of vision screenings not only translinguistically but also interdisciplinarily was understandably difficult.

One particular student from a starkly different discipline was Cathy, a third-year Fashion and Textile major. For Cathy, learning how to do screenings was not too difficult. After all, fashion and textiles are, like optometry, visual subjects. Still, although there might have been a shared appreciation for the optical, the question arose as to why someone like Cathy would be drawn to an overseas service-learning project. Why would Cathy choose this particular service-learning subject? What



Figure 19 Cathy, on Left, is a Third-year Fashion and Textile PolyU Student

makes it special? For her, it was interacting with new cultures and working with the local AGU students.

When I interviewed Cathy, she was sitting with two AGU “friends”, a term many students used for each other during the trip. When asked what the best part of this project was, she admitted colloquially and with a slight smile as she looked over at her friends that “the best part is working with these guys.” Cathy professed, “I am so happy... We all work together and help others well.” This particular sense of teamwork – one that Cathy explicitly mentioned but would be blatantly obvious to anyone who witnessed the interactions between the PolyU and AGU students – extended from working well together to “help others,” as Cathy said, to teaching one another about different cultures, languages and customs and finally to eventual real, visible, mutual caring and friendships.

Cathy was also well aware of how difficult it would be for her to do meaningful work if it were not for the AGU students. She was one of the few students who personally contended that the language barrier presented the most difficult challenge. When Cathy worked with kids of a young age, she found it difficult to communicate with them, and at these times she found it essential to have her AGU “friends.” Jessica also admitted that although she faced other primary problems, she needed translation most of the time. Although translating a vision test was not easy, Jessica declared, “There are some very clever [AGU] students; I’m pretty impressed.”

Cathy said she would highly “recommend PolyU students to join this project” so they could “learn about other cultures, about other countries, and meet other foreign

friends.” The AGU students would probably agree.

NGO Feedback and Challenges

This relationship between AGU and PolyU is perhaps an unintended but compelling product of the service trip. The students from both PolyU and AGU referred to each other as “friends” whenever they spoke; a clear marker of the bond forged during the weeklong trip. Beyond the service they provided to An Giang residents who needed vision screenings, the PolyU students provided AGU students with a connection to First World higher education, a look into Western and Chinese culture, a mutual appreciation for the communicative properties of the English language and importantly friendship and mentorship. A service-learning project in an overseas community clearly thrives only with the aid of the NGO (or NGOs) that PolyU partners with. Having worked with the PolyU Office of Service-learning once before, AGU was vital in carrying out and planning this year’s Learning through Providing Eye Care programme.

Mai is one of the AGU staff members who made the project possible. She is an International Relations (IR) Assistant at AGU. Her job is to welcome foreigners who come to the university and to organise workshops for the staff and students. Mai admitted she likes working as the IR assistant because “it’s a rather interesting chance to work with foreigners.” Mai claimed that “for us, for the university, for staff and students, we have a chance to work with the Hong Kong people, to learn from them their working style, their behaviour, the way they behave to the local people and children; we have learned a lot from them.” Mai’s sentiment reverberated in every interview conducted with anyone from AGU: AGU appreciates its partnership with PolyU.

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Figure 20 Mai, the International Relations Assistant at AGU

This partnership began during the previous installation of the Learning through Providing Eye Care project. The two universities first came into contact when Professor Dennis Berg, a Fulbright Scholar who formerly worked with higher education in Hong Kong and now lives in Ho Chi Minh City, suggested they partner with each other. Since the first year of Learning through Providing Eye Care and its perceived success, AGU and PolyU have worked together to further implement and organise more projects. These projects offer AGU the ability to meet its personal goal of providing and supporting community development. Mai noted the importance of working specifically in An Giang, explaining that the Mekong Delta, where the

province of An Giang is located, is “still a poor area.” Working with PolyU, Mai said, helps AGU to continue pursuing its goal of servicing those who need aid in the province of An Giang. AGU, PolyU staff and students and Prof. Berg looked kindly and excitedly upon the prospect of a long-term relationship between PolyU and AGU, with PolyU and AGU mutually working to aid communities (like An Giang) in need.

Mai considered the community aspect the best part about this service. Although she loved working with foreigners, Mai thought the vision-screening project was most important because the participants, especially the “schoolchildren” and “those who cannot get their eyes checked,” now had “a chance” to get their vision tested. Furthermore, people with real optometry skills could assist these participants and raise the issue of eye-protection awareness. Mai found that these services conducted by PolyU students were indeed beneficial to the community.

Working with PolyU for Mai meant interacting with “hardworking and very friendly students.” She explained that in the prior year everyone was “really exhausted after the service,” but students kept “working and serving the community.” Mai noted, “This year I can see it’s the same; although they are a new group from the School of Optometry, they all seem to work really hard.” Mai commended the students’ long journey, which included their five-hour ride from Ho Chi Minh City to Long Xuyên, the early-morning site visits to set up equipment and the late-night arrivals to the hotel after a long, hot day of service. She recalled that every time students were finished with the service “it was rather late in the afternoon, but they all [felt] really happy because they thought they were serving the people here and [thought they] helped them a lot.” Mai believed not only that the service was beneficial to the community, but also that a good, high quality job was being done.

The challenge, then, was not with the students’ work, but rather with the administrative details of undertaking the extensive service project. Contacting a local school or centre to establish a service site was the most difficult part for Mai. The service recipients in the prior year were mostly schoolchildren. This year, homeless children and elderly people from the Red Cross Charity House were also serviced. The difficulty came from being in contact with all of these service recipients, as ensuring their participation required extensive steps.

First, AGU had to deliver questionnaires and consent forms. Mai admitted that before there was an established service site, service recipients were reluctant to participate in the programme. Once the site was established, service recipients were more likely to agree to sign the necessary forms (and they did). However, once the programme actually began, many service recipients did not show up. The number of participants was thus reduced from the number expected. This worked favourably, however, as the recipients who did not sign up ahead of time but who did go to the service site on

the day of service were able to take a slot and have their eyes checked.

Mai said this aspect of preparation before the service was perhaps the only thing PolyU could improve upon. AGU works directly with the schools that function as service sites to deliver the questionnaires during the academic school year. However, Mai said that because the project is conducted in the summertime, “it’s really hard for a schoolteacher to involve the schoolchildren to [come back and] take part in the activities” once they are no longer in school. Mai added that the children are sometimes unable to get to the service site. She thought an increased, earlier involvement on behalf of PolyU that would allot more time for pre-visit preparation would be beneficial. In addition, Mai thought that PolyU could work with AGU to deliver the questionnaires before the trip to Vietnam. In the prior year, AGU travelled to the local schools to deliver the questionnaires to the service recipients. Mai conceded, “To be honest, it is hard for us... I know that sometimes it is costly to travel to Vietnam to do a pre-visit.” However, she contended that AGU often needed the presence of PolyU staff to work out the details of certain processes, such as those involving paperwork, regulation, location scouting and permissions.

35 These kinds of permissions left the trip in a particularly precarious spot about a week before the programme in Vietnam was scheduled to start. In March, before the beginning of the programme, Savio and Office of Service-learning officers completed a site visit. They set June 7 as the date to provide vision screenings for about 100 children. One week before the departure to Vietnam, they were told the children had returned to their hometown for summer holiday, which meant the students would have no one to deliver service to. The schoolchildren could not return to receive the service because it would be too costly in terms of convenience and money for accommodation and transportation.

Savio explained why the sudden change in service was highly detrimental to the process of the project: “We have to plan ahead for the site, set up a plan for where to put our stations and equipment, check lighting intensity, arrange screening flow logistics and programme rundowns, etc., beforehand.” Savio further admitted, “It’s not easy for us to set up our screening stations in a brand new venue without any information.” He explained that PolyU must negotiate with school principals in these kinds of trips. Little space is often allotted for the service, and PolyU must convince school administrations to, for example, remove tables from a classroom to free up space for the screenings. In this case, however, Mai acknowledged the school principal was standing in between a rock and a hard place. Mai explained, “He highly appreciated [PolyU’s] willingness and potential support for their children if the service could be organised; actually, he had a meeting with the management board and the permanent supporters for the school... As a result, they decided to let the schoolchildren take the summer break for the children’s joy and convenience, and to

not join the service.” After this site withdrew permission, AGU came up with a plan to help PolyU “meet the target” of their service; it helped PolyU contact secondary schools in the suburb to select 100 schoolchildren to service. The site was eventually replaced with the Bui Huu Nghia secondary school.

The administrative and bureaucratic details of arranging a service-learning trip are clearly complex. With the crucial help of AGU, PolyU was able to deliver the needed service to over 400 service recipients. The AGU staff played a huge role in the execution of this project. Yet, perhaps the heaviest work performed on behalf of the NGO was actually performed by the AGU students. This is not to say the humble students would say so themselves.

Sam, for example, claimed the work was not “heavy.” An English major, Sam gushed about loving English and English culture. She was very happy to help her “friends” and “Hong Kong teachers” with the vision screenings. She excitedly described PolyU students as “very friendly, amazing and careful.” Sam clearly cared for her new PolyU friends, admitting that she worried about them and wondered if they were adjusting well to the Vietnamese weather, culture and language. She also admitted that students sometimes did not know each other very well, but exclaimed that “what we are doing is amazing” regardless.

In terms of how the service affected her community, Sam argued that the service was “an amazing and great thing.” She explained, “Even in a city like Long Xuyên, there are a lot of [poor people] and they need help.” To many PolyU students’ surprise, the AGU students were not poor, nor did they live in remote areas. After all, they were attending a higher education institution. Peter, an AGU student who was also an English major, admitted that delivering service to recipients during the local home visit on Tiger Island was a good experience for him: ‘I think about myself – how lucky I am.’ Still, even these educationally privileged students had little access to optometric services before the service trip. Many of them tested their own eyes once service recipients were gone for the day. Sam herself became a beneficiary: “I did my own eye check. It was really good.”

Selena, another AGU student, noted that helping people like Sam get their eyes checked was her favourite part of service-learning. She called the testing “very important” and commended PolyU for being “very interactive with [Vietnamese] people.” Peter agreed that helping “our locals” was his favourite part of service and service-learning. However, he added, “But I don’t feel like I am learning. I feel like I am experiencing and learning.” Peter, whose English was top notch, eventually



Figure 21 Sam, an English Major at AGU



Figure 22 Jonathan, Peter and Selena are English Majors at AGU



Figure 23 Peter Served as Master of Ceremonies for the Farewell Dinner

became the master of ceremonies at a farewell dinner arranged by AGU.

Moments before the dinner, Peter admitted that it was all “a little bit bittersweet.” He confessed, “We are happy to host the PolyU students and finally have time to relax – we work so hard these days, and this is a time for us to get together and have a big meeting, but now we are getting ready to say goodbye forever; how bitter!” The sentiment in Peter’s words was one that many students felt – tears were shed at the dinner. “I don’t want to think about it,” Peter said. “Tomorrow I will come here and I won’t see any of them again.” These emotions, clearly rooted in caring, friendship and melancholy over the programme’s end, further fuelled the desire for PolyU to continue its long-term partnerships with its “friends” from Long Xuyên. As Selena said, it was clear that everyone worked well together and had “a very good time.” The students added that perhaps those who were slightly happier than the AGU students

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Figure 24 Students and Staff from AGU and PolyU at the Farewell Dinner



Figure 25 Service Recipients from the Red Cross Charity House



Figure 26 Service Recipients from the Red Cross Charity House

were the true service recipients.

Recipient Feedback

In the prior year, most of the service recipients were schoolchildren. This year's installation of Learning through Providing Eye Care saw the delivery of service to recipients of all kinds. Apart from schoolchildren, teachers, parents and other low-income adults were also serviced. In addition, a day was dedicated to the overwhelmingly elderly population of the Red Cross Charity House. Overall, most of the service recipients were pleased with the service.

Minh Dung Nguyen, a 52-year-old staff member from the Administrative Office of the Red Cross Charity House, noted that students were very enthusiastic and treated him “very nicely, very kindly.” He admitted that although he did not know a lot about optometry and thus could not comment on the vision activities, he did believe the programme was well organised and professional. He hoped that this activity would continue in the future. Minh Dung himself was responsible for bringing the elderly to the service site.

The elderly recipients, donned in sleeping clothes, seemed to be in high moods



Figure 27 Schoolchildren Service Recipients



Figure 28 PolyU, AGU and Schoolchildren Recipients

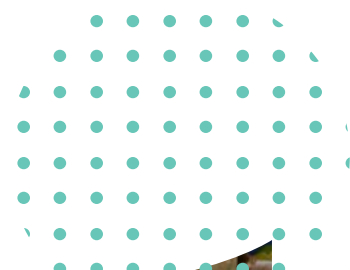


Figure 29 Schoolchildren Receiving Education Packets

despite having arrived an hour early to the site. Mrs Tran Thi Than, a 63-year-old resident of the An Giang Charity House, was informed she needed glasses. She was prescribed a pair to help improve her near vision. Mrs Tran’s glasses would be prepared and then sent to the Charity House, where she would await their arrival. When asked about the service rendered, Mrs Tran concurred with Minh Dung’s sentiment. She spoke with heart:

“Everyone treated me very kindly. I hope you can carry out [this project] and continue it next year and the following years. I would like to thank you on behalf of all of the members of our charity house. We would like to continue this activity to benefit our vision.”

Many of the elderly, albeit sweaty, left the service with noticeable smiles on their faces. Ming Dunh said he would be happy to work with PolyU again: “I appreciate this activity. It benefits not only myself, but also the people in my charity house and community.” Other community members and beneficiaries seemed to agree.

One particular community group benefiting from the service was a group of low-income grade-school children. Lê Ngọc Trân, a 10-year-old girl, was one of these beneficiaries. She responded to interview questions in a quality of English that stopped everyone in their tracks; her fluency and vocabulary was as good if not better than those of the AGU students. She already owned a pair of glasses and was ready



Figure 30 Minh Dung Nguyen, a Staff Member from the Red Cross Charity House Administrative Staff



Figure 31 Mrs Tran Thi Than



Figure 32 Lê Ngọc Trân, a 10-year-old Service Recipient

to check her vision to see whether there had been any updates in her prescription. Lê Ngọc admitted she thought the service was “really good” for the community. Lê Ngọc explained that her school brought her to the site, as was the case with most of the younger recipients.

Lê Ngọc was able to communicate her feelings about the activity – in perfect English, no less. However, some of the youngest recipients were too shy, or lacked vocabulary to explain their sentiments as eloquently. One little boy in particular could only say he was “happy” over and over. Another boy, Shay, who was actually a follow-up case, kept repeating that everything was “really good.” Even parents who accompanied their children and received service themselves were quite conservative with their reviews. One mother said only that the service “was good” and explained that her daughter’s school had brought her to the site.

Lê Ngọc spoke a bit to one of the secondary goals of the project: using English as a learning tool in these subjects. She spoke extensively about how her English had helped her in life, noting that the activity would be less difficult and even better for her community if more spoke English. It seems that communication and feedback would be easier that way. Lê Ngọc dreamt of studying English as she continued school and hoped to become a teacher one day. She was excited to have students from Hong Kong and hoped that PolyU’s presence over the long term would help to bring more language studies into Long Xuyên schools, aside from optometry practice.

Looking Forward and Conclusions

The School of Optometry and Office of Service-Learning did indeed teach by “providing eye care and vision health” to the Long Xuyên community. PolyU students learned about Vietnamese culture, customs, food and language. They learned how to work together and how to communicate across cultural, disciplinary and linguistic barriers. Students also learned the value of serving others. They were

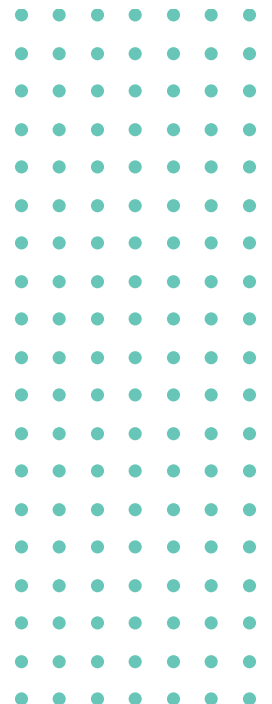


Figure 33 Child Service Recipient whose Only Comment was "Happy"



Figure 34 Shay, a Child Service Recipient

able to forge bonds with Vietnamese students their age, with service recipients twice as young and with beneficiaries three times as old. The project, a seemingly and increasingly improved version compared with its pilot projects in Cambodia and prior years, seems to be on track to become a deeply rooted and established venture for PolyU. The trip was not without its hiccups or challenges, but looking forward, minor changes and more experience and community engagement will only improve the quality of service delivered to the deserving Vietnamese An Giang community.



4

Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions

Clarice Brough

Overview

This year, 2016, the hospitality team headed for Vietnam for the second year running. The service location, formerly French owned and known as “Sesame School” but now government owned and named “The Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City,” remained the same as last year. Twenty-two students from PolyU, headed by Raymond Kwong, Dr Murray Mackenzie and Cindy Lam, embarked on this 12-day journey to the capital.

The project provides our students with a chance to not only gain valuable experience as teachers, but also learn from their Vietnamese counterparts. At the heart of the service-learning project is collaborative learning. We hope that all participants gain valuable skills, whether cultural, linguistic or social. Recently, the project was altered to increase its emphasis on English language teaching, as this is where we believe our students can make best use of their expertise. Although service-learning aims for collaborative learning, we must have a lasting effect on these students by contributing to their lives in a positive way.

Not all of the students from PolyU who attend this service major in hospitality; indeed, their skill levels are mixed. The students split into four teams for the service: the waiter, housekeeping, bakery and chef teams. The Vietnamese students and our students have a shared interest in the hospitality industry (regardless of whether it is their major), and in a way this project uses this shared interest as a platform from which to facilitate language learning. This perhaps shows how the project aims to be an educational opportunity that encourages learning through a variety of different media.

Methodology

This service-learning project involves thorough planning before the students’ arrival in Vietnam. The students have six lessons that are four hours each in duration, several rehearsals for skills training and English teaching, proposal consultation sessions, an intensive training week and one class about Vietnamese culture. During the intensive



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training week, our students work closely with a local primary school in Hong Kong. They practise practical skills with the schoolchildren in preparation for the trip. It is clear from this brief summary that the preparation emphasises practical training as opposed to cultural training, but it is hoped the latter will take place upon arrival at the location. After all, it is difficult to understand and get to know a culture from a distance.

The Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City aims to alleviate poverty by giving street children and individuals from low-income backgrounds the opportunity to gain valuable training in the hopes they will find work after graduation. The school trains the students in the hospitality business, and the students also hold English, math, life skills and Vietnamese classes to complement their studies. In terms of support, the school relies heavily on donations from international charitable organisations. It has been estimated that 90% of students who study at The Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City find work after graduation. The school seeks to reduce poverty through education, and because of the enthusiasm of its teachers and students alike, it is the perfect location for a service-learning project.



The Vietnamese students are roughly the same age as our students (18–21) which creates an interesting dynamic. Our students

are not trained teachers and cannot claim to have any expertise in the field. However, their English level is ultimately more advanced than that of the students at the hospitality school. It is evident that our students form valuable friendships during their stay and that the whole initiative is an exciting opportunity for the participants, but this should not come at the cost of inhibiting successful learning after our departure.

The Daily Routine

Each day our students wake up early in the morning and sit down to breakfast at the hotel at 6:45 am. They depart from the hotel to head to the service site at 7:15 am. Whilst they are on the bus, the student leaders (who head each group) make announcements about the timetable for the day. The plan is detailed down to every five minutes of teaching time. At roughly 7:45 am, depending on traffic, the students arrive at the school and groom themselves to get ready for the busy day. The morning begins with a recap of the skills learned and English material covered the previous day, and then the students continue with the new hospitality skills training. At 11:30 am, the students take their lunch break and have a chance to rest and discuss the morning activities. From 1:30-3:30 pm is the English language learning time, the Vietnamese students have split into Beginner and Pre-Intermediate classes according to their language level. At 3:00 pm they wrap up for the day. Each day is followed by a detailed reflection session before the students have dinner and return to the hotel for more planning.

The hospitality training aspect of the project complements the English language learning aspect. The training involves showing the Vietnamese students how dishes are made, how tables are set and how cleaning is carried out according to international standards, with Hong Kong traditions. This does not mean we consider “our” way to be superior; it is simply different. We believe practical training in a shared field of interest provides a highly effective way of applying language learning to real-life situations. Moreover, in the hotel and restaurant business, it is becoming more essential for employees to speak English, and so the material is tailored for to the industry. By way of example, our students conduct lessons that teach vocabulary one would expect to encounter in a hotel or a restaurant.

The days are long and tiring for the students. They have to maintain a high level of enthusiasm throughout to ensure that everyone remains attentive. It can also be an emotionally draining experience, as evidenced by the tears of our students towards the end of the week. One lamented, “I really don’t want to leave. I feel we are really doing something amazing here.” Another student added, “It is just so inspiring that



these students have had such different opportunities in life, yet they never complain. I will miss them very dearly.”

On the last day, the afternoon classes are replaced with a farewell ceremony. This is an opportunity for the students to celebrate the work done and begin to reflect on the experience as a whole. Our students and the Vietnamese students have rehearsed performances to present at this closing ceremony, making it an entertaining event for all involved. The staff and administration from both schools make speeches and go about the formalities by presenting one another with gifts. We hope the afternoon is viewed primarily as an opportunity for the students and teachers to celebrate the week of work and that the formalities do not overshadow this. These kinds of events are important because they help build a relationship with the school that may in turn secure our return for the coming year; however, their emphasis is always on the students. It is a well-deserved time of appreciation and thanksgiving.

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Despite the similarities between Cantonese and Vietnamese, there is a difficult language barrier between the students. To make communication possible, the service-learning project makes use of translators from Hoa Sen University in Ho Chi Minh City. The translators mediate between our students and the Vietnamese to not only facilitate learning, but also involve another voice in the project. It is truly amazing to see relationships evolve between the students from the three respective institutions during the course of the week and how the language barrier dissolves as they find ways to communicate.

Student Experiences and Learning

Interview with a PolyU student before the service-learning trip:

My name is Monica. I am 19 years old and I am a year-one student. I chose tourism as my major because it fits my personality. I like to go out, and I like to travel. I don't want to be limited to a hotel. In terms of my hobbies, I like to dance, and I like

watching videos on YouTube in my spare time.

So what attracted you to this service-learning project?

I think really it was the chance to go out of Hong Kong and travel that attracted me. I am a big fan of travel. The second thing is that Vietnam is a new place for me. In Southeast Asia, the only country I have been to is Thailand, and that was only for a vacation. I also want the chance to teach the students. I want to take my expertise and teach them. I think this will be a really great experience.

How much preparation did you have before the trip?

We had classes the whole semester, from January to April. We had 13 weeks, but I think maybe 4–5 of the weeks we had lectures from our instructor Raymond. He would also give us information about the work. I am from the housekeeping team, and so for six weeks I had to go to the Hotel Icon and go to occupied rooms. It was real training. I know how to clean sinks and fold towels. So yeah, six weeks of training before the project. I know much more about housekeeping now. I have the practical skills.



Have you had any cultural training?

For this project, no, not yet. Well, sort of, actually. Yes, in the lecture we did a little. I think some people from the service-learning office gave us some basic background about what to say and what you have to be careful about in Vietnam. So yes, we had one session.

And what challenges do you think you will encounter when you are there?

Well, I am a little bit worried about their English level, because if we can't communicate with them it will be such a big barrier, and I also think it will be very difficult for us to continue teaching. But there are translators/facilitators, so I think that it will be fine. The second thing will be the weather. I am really, really worried about the weather because it will be July in Vietnam and so it will be super, super hot.

Do you hope to go into a hospitality career?

Yeah, sure. At first I wanted to be a flight attendant, but because of my height I don't know if I can do that. I really want to do something where I can have direct contact with people from different countries and different cultures.

47 *And what do you think you will get out of this experience? What do you think you will learn?*

The first thing I have to learn is how to cooperate with my group mates, throughout the whole semester and during this preparation week also. We have a lot of time to work together, teach English together and learn how to fold towels together. So yes, the first thing is learning how to cooperate with my group mates. The second thing is maybe I can learn to take the initiative to communicate. The students there may also be shy, so I may have to take the first step to talk to them. So yes, I will have to try to be more extroverted and outgoing.

How do you think the training with the local primary students will help you for the Vietnam trip?

I think the purpose of this is for us to get a taste for teaching first. We will learn what it is like to be a tutor. It is a different variety of teaching, but the nature is the same. In terms of the differences, I think the skill levels will be different. They are adolescents in Vietnam, but we are teaching them the alphabet, which is the absolute basic. Most of the kids here already know the alphabet, so yes, I think it is fair to say the level is going to be different.

Reflection Session

At the end of the classes each day, a reflection session is held at the school. During this meeting, the students and teachers from PolyU share some of their thoughts on how the day went and think about how they will tackle some of the problems they encountered to ensure progress.

On Wednesday, the third day of the service-learning project, Dr Murray Mackenzie opened up the discussion by reflecting on the English classes hosted during the afternoon of that day. He went through each team methodically, giving feedback and constructive criticism to the group members. When addressing the first group, he commented on the importance of going over the material from previous days before beginning new lessons to ensure that nothing would be forgotten. He also mentioned how essential it was to split into smaller groups so that everyone's attention could be held. Furthermore, he praised how the students took turns to control the class, as it showed their level of planning.

Dr Mackenzie commented on the evident team spirit of another group and how this made such a difference to the learning environment. In addition, he noted how the team had relied heavily on demonstration to supplement language. Of course, the language barrier between the Vietnamese students and our students may pose challenges, but we must find ways to overcome this challenge and facilitate learning. During this service-learning project, our students are witness to the importance of gestures and demonstrations.

As stated, the students from PolyU are not trained teachers—they are students just like those they are teaching in Ho Chi Minh City. It is therefore important to remember that we are not in Vietnam solely to transfer our skills. Our students and the local students have very different skills, and part of the project involves understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each group. There are things the Vietnamese are more skilled at, and things our students are better at. The collaboration involves identifying these skills so that together we can all learn and broaden our horizons. The project should be considered an exchange of ideas as opposed to simply a teaching opportunity for our students. Moreover, because our students have no experience in teaching, it is essential that our teachers guide them through this process during the reflection sessions.

One of the groups had been particularly active, moving their students from one location to the next periodically. Dr Mackenzie said this was “very inspiring” and praised the students for the initiative they took. By making full use of the different spaces around the school, the students ensure that the minds of the Vietnamese students are kept active and do not tire. Many of these students have other jobs in

addition to attending the hospitality school, so they can become very exhausted. During lunch break, one student spoke about how he slept for two hours a night on average. This came as a big surprise to our students, who seemed shocked by his lack of sleep.

Dr Mackenzie closed the session by saying, “You all learnt so much today. You have really made progress since the first day.” He added, “Of course, things have gone wrong and at times it has been difficult, but what is important is that you have all been able to compromise and construct new ways of looking at and solving problems to move forward.” We hope our students learn the importance of dealing with difficult situations in a mature and constructive fashion and that all problems can be turned into positive learning points. This is a skill they can take back to Hong Kong and apply to their lives there.

In the reflection sessions held at the end of each day, a different set of questions is posed and the students are invited to respond. The questions and answers from one particular session are as follows.

- Describe a situation you found difficult but manageable.
- What role did you take in managing the situation?
- What was the result?

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“The most difficult part is the communication. We have different language levels—I don’t know how to speak Vietnamese, and they do not really know English. So I ask myself—how can I solve this problem? I use gestures. It is very difficult because sometimes our gestures are different, but finally we did a good job and had a successful egg tart.”

“Communication is hard. We work in small groups and sometimes the translator cannot be present in each group. I just use body language to demonstrate what I mean. The other problem is that the bakery lab is very hot and the students may be tired.”

“I have had a problem with the translator. He is very helpful, but he might not have understood us at the beginning. Yesterday and today he has been much better, though. Sometimes they may not translate well, but now they know what we want. This is the process of making things smoother.”

“I am in charge of demonstrating the baking. I think the translation style may be different from the way that we speak. In my opinion, I prefer him to translate sentence by sentence so things are not lost. We solved this by communicating with the translators about the translation style, and now everything is much smoother.”

“The biggest problem I found is the communication with the students. We

communicate via the translator, and sometimes they do not understand the rules of the games very clearly. I spoke to the translator about all of the rules of the games and demonstrated them at lunch so he would understand very clearly what we would do in the afternoon. They really enjoyed themselves this afternoon because they understood. We also thought of many games because we were teaching numbers and numbers can be a little boring.”

“Every night when we gather in the room we think about the timetable. At night everyone is very tired, and so I am a little worried. But I have found that I should trust my teammates more. They know what they are doing. I think trust is very important. Sometimes I am a little bit anxious, but I just need to give my teammates more room to be creative and perform.”

“I just want to start by saying thank you because I really love my team. This is the first time I have spent this amount of time with the teammates. I want to mention the teaching and my relationship with the staff. As we mentioned yesterday, the stove didn’t work so well—some of the spring rolls burnt. But this time, the spring rolls turned golden on the outside. The local staff asked us to take them off the stove when they were golden. I did not agree because I thought they were not cooked on the inside. Sometimes we have different opinions and we have to find the truth. So we cut the spring roll to see whether it was cooked inside. We need to do something to prove whether we are right or wrong.”

“Working with the chef was difficult at first. He was really strict with us because we occupied part of his kitchen. We need to make sure we ask permission for everything. For these problems, we need to work on discipline with the kids so the chef can have a good environment to work in. The chef was really nice today, and he lent us a steamer so that our work could be done faster. This showed great progress and learning.”

“I would like to talk about the difficulty of communicating with the local teachers. We were told the students would know basic vocabulary, but they can actually speak in whole sentences. So we need to amend our materials every night. We found their English levels were much better than expected and much better than what we were told. They learn much faster than we thought, so we have to add material so that they don’t get bored.”

“For the English teaching, I would like to make some extra points. I was really surprised on the first day that there were other staff in the kitchen. The chef was a little bit grumpy when we got in because we were a little bit noisy. We found out that the kitchen was a holy land for the chef and that we were the intruders. We found that if we were nice and asked him for permission to be there it was okay. Today he was really nice and he lent us the steamer. We don’t even get to use the steamer in Hong

Kong, so that was great. I guess one of the things is that we cannot judge people by the first impression we have of them. I would also like to make an extra point about the English teaching. We found that the students actually know more words than we had thought, so we have focused on pronunciation. Yesterday and today they have been really outgoing and helpful. We need to keep chatting and exchanging information with them.”

“I want to mention that there are some problems with our translator in the skills training part. We divide into two groups. Our translator has a lot of passion, so she always helps us a lot in the demonstration, but when translating she tries to do the demonstration again, and so time is a problem. We have been trying to do the demonstration ourselves to solve the problem and save time so it is not repeated twice.”

“The two groups have different paces when it comes to how quickly or slowly they do things. The students who finish first hang around talking, which prevents the other group from practising the incomplete material. We solved this by asking them to do more, and this has created a better atmosphere where everyone can learn. On the first day, their English levels seemed quite low, but today they showed us that they knew all of the numbers. This was very pleasing.”

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“Our group has some problems or conflicts. We had a conversation about how to be efficient and it worked out good today. I think we need to have patience and learn to listen to others. Everyone has a passion to do well in this subject. We need to discuss with the other group mates and inform them of our thoughts. We always need to listen first, and patience is very important. Let others finish their sentences before we respond. We all learnt something today.”

“We have had some internal communication problems. We are here in Vietnam, and we should take the chance to teach. We need to focus on the outcome and why we are here. We can make recommendations on how to get there, but it also doesn’t matter if there is failure along the way. We are all honest and we can talk about the problems. We have manners and we do not like conflict. I also think that respecting others is a very important learning process for us. Let’s cherish these last days!”

“I would like to share the difficulties with our translators. I am not a talkative and outgoing girl. I do not start conversations. I have learnt that I have to do this, though. I want them to know more about us so that we can cooperate well in our conversations. I have grabbed every opportunity to chat with them. I also enjoy learning Vietnamese from them. When we get used to them, they really help us a lot in the lessons and will automatically help us to translate and vice versa.”

“Some students are passive and some are active. We sometimes ignore those who are

passive. They will be bored because of the active students. It seems like the passive students are deprived of the opportunity to learn, so we suggest that every member of the team has to come out and answer something at least once. We want to encourage them to get involved. We also give more stars if a new person volunteers. We see that they are more active and involved in the games now. They are not bad students; they are just quiet, so we have to make the effort to get them involved.”

“First, today was quite a tough day for me and for most of the others, I think. We didn’t check the teaching kits before we handed them out, and then when we did we found there was no translation on them. We had to explain the English descriptions, but this took time and so the students were not catching what the teacher was saying. The facilitator finally came by and helped, but this was a difficult and stressful situation that we had to deal with.”

After all of the students had shared their reflections with the group, Raymond Kwong, the teacher of this service-learning subject, brought all of the ideas together with his final comments. He commented on how the words “translator” and “communication” came up time and time again. As some of the students had already suggested, he advised them of the importance of communicating with the translators before classes so they were in the loop about what was going to happen. He then went on to give the students some feedback about their teaching that he had received from the local teachers.

In general, the feedback was very positive. The students were described as having a “good attitude” and being “professional,” “skilled” and “prepared.” The local teachers also commented on how they noticed a lot of improvement this year over previous years of the programme, which is of course very good to hear. In terms of negative feedback, the local teachers commented on how they thought we could improve on our organisational skills moving forward. It is essential that we thoroughly plan the procedures and steps before our arrival in Vietnam. On this topic, Raymond Kwong said he thought the space itself affected the students’ delivery because they were not used to the new environment. This is something that must be considered in the coming years so that it does not impede learning.

To conclude the reflection session, the staff and pupils discussed classroom management. One of the ways the students tried to manage the class was by starting a competition. The Vietnamese students are competitive and like games a lot, so this could be used as a classroom tool to ensure order. One group gave out stars when the students answered questions correctly. If a group reached 80 stars, they were given an award. Another group said they found a punishment system more effective. They claimed the students were not all that interested in prizes and that it worked better to have forfeits for losing groups. All of the groups observed that the students

loved music and that this was a successful way of rewarding good work. The final group to comment on the issue of classroom management said they had not set any classroom rules and did not have a system of punishment or reward. Instead, they had focused on creating a friendly environment by kicking the week off with icebreakers. They said their philosophy was to create a friendly environment as opposed to an authoritarian environment to ensure learning. This last suggestion is perhaps the one most in keeping with the values of service-learning: to foster an environment of collaborative learning as opposed to one of merely transferring information.

Teacher Feedback

Raymond Kwong, the teacher from PolyU's Hospitality School who headed this project, spoke about its success this year. He praised the students for their hard work and dedication, saying, "It is truly amazing how quickly you have all learnt." He then went on to talk about his own experiences in the hospitality business. He explained that a number of years ago he graduated from a hospitality school in Hong Kong and found work in Myanmar. He spoke about the mistakes he made upon arriving in Myanmar: "I felt like I was more knowledgeable than them because I was from a cosmopolitan city." He went on to say that he gave English names to the locals he met there and tried to show them that using cutlery was a better way of eating than using your hands. In other words, arriving in Myanmar was a difficult learning curve for Raymond. He learnt he had to adapt to their culture rather than try and force something on them. What amazed him in the course of the service-learning week was the ability of our students to learn these lessons so quickly and to understand the Vietnamese students and respect their culture.

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In terms of the future of the project, Raymond informed us with a big smile on his face that we will be collaborating with the same school next year. This will be the third year we have worked with the Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City. He emphasised the importance of securing these deals in person, as communication becomes difficult when we are back in Hong Kong. We must also remain positive and hope that the political situation between the two respective countries remains stable.

Community Feedback

It is always difficult to assess the success of a project from the point of view of the service recipients. Communication is difficult, and we can never be sure whether the feedback we receive from the community is accurate. Perhaps the best indicator of



the success of a project is whether the school would like us to return, and thankfully such is the case for this project. The laughter and smiles of the Vietnamese students throughout clearly indicated that they enjoyed the service project. The difficulty comes when we try to assess whether the teachers at the Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City appreciated the collaboration. Of course, as noted, they said they would like us to return, which suggests they viewed the collaboration positively. However, we must always be mindful of the potential for hidden feelings. A transcribed interview with one of the teachers at the school is included as follows. It may give more insight into the community's feedback.

Interview with the English teacher at the Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City:

First of all, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Huong. I graduated from Hong Bang University in Vietnam. My major is English, specifically teaching English. I have been teaching English since I graduated from university in 2007. Since then, I have been teaching English for different language centres in Ho Chi Minh City, but I have been working here for only one year. I am really new here.

So what brings you to this school as opposed to a more mainstream school?

What brings me to this school... Well, I guess it is probably God, my Buddha. He hears what I pray every night. (By the way, I am a Buddhist.) Every night when I kneel down, I pray for a chance to help the poor people, to have the chance to do something very meaningful for my country and for my city. This is my wish from the bottom of my heart. I think that in our country we still have a lot of children who

need help, children who live in poor families and poor households. There is a saying that if you give something away it doesn't necessarily mean that you have a lot, but that you know exactly the feeling of having nothing. So, I always hoped that I could do something like this, and one day I searched on the Internet for some schools and I found this school. These children have a lot of needs. Mostly they are street children and children living in the poorest households, compassionate shelters and also some community centres.

So the students do not pay to attend this school?

We are a non-profit organisation. In addition to our operational funding granted by the government, we are supported and sponsored by international organisations. So, the students here, no, they do not have to pay any tuition fees.

What do you think about this collaboration with PolyU?

Well, because I am really new here, this is the first time I am taking part in this kind of activity. I think these kinds of projects can help our students a lot, and I also think it is extremely helpful to have international friends who come here and exchange their knowledge and skills. I think it is a really good project for us.

So how is learning English helpful to these students?

Our school, this organisation, now aims for hunger alleviation and poverty reduction in Vietnam, and we are trying to do that through vocational training and job creation for the youth. When the students finish their time here, they will be introduced to the hotel business and the restaurant business. So English plays an important part because they have to use it in their workplace. Being able to use English at work will be very important if they want to find a job.



CAMBODIA

Social Poverty in Developing Countries: 1-12 June 2016

Serving the Community through Teaching English: 4-11 June 2016

Technology Beyond Borders: 4-19 June 2016

Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Communities: 19-30 July 2016

PolyU Volunteers (Faculty and Staff): 12-18 June 2016

Technology 4 Development Student Self-initiated Project: 11-19 June 2016



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Social Poverty in Developing Countries

Clarice Brough

“Social Poverty in Developing Countries” is the name given to one of our many projects in Cambodia. As its name suggests, this project takes a wider stance on poverty alleviation. As opposed to some of our other projects that focus on one method, this initiative looks to bring aid in a variety of different forms.

Shortly after arriving in Phnom Penh, the students and staff from PolyU went to the rural site where they would serve that week. The visit began with an opening ceremony officiated by General NEM Sowath, and we were pleased to see around 100 members of the village in attendance. We believed it was an effective way to begin our collaboration, as it provided the villagers with an opportunity to express their hopes and expectations for the coming week. Furthermore, it served to introduce our students to the villagers and vice versa.

The feedback from the villagers suggested that their main priority was the construction of a kindergarten. It was evident that lack of manpower and resources had slowed the building of this site. Moreover, it was decided that four 10-watt electricity generators, 10 sets of 5-watt solar panels/fluorescent light systems would be placed in various homes. Furthermore, the students distributed hand lights and stationery to the community whilst also organising workshops for the primary school students. It is clear from this brief summary that the work done by the PolyU students involved in this project looked to improve living conditions and the quality of life of the villagers using a number of different strategies.

As with all service-learning projects conducted by PolyU, the goal was not simply to serve an underprivileged community, but also to provide our own students with an opportunity to learn and grow as individuals. We believe the multifaceted nature of this programme equips our students with a wide variety of practical skills that are rooted in alleviating poverty. It is hoped the relationship that evolves between our students and the Cambodians during the course of the week will serve as an educational opportunity with lasting benefits for both parties.

At the heart of this project is communication. Despite the language barrier, we hope to cultivate an environment that encourages an exchange of ideas between our students and the Cambodians. Conversation is made possible with the help of a team of young local translators. This not only allows us to respond to the needs of the



community, but also acts as another medium of learning, that is, English language learning for Cambodian university students.

Interviews conducted with two families at the end of the service week revealed that they were extremely appreciative of the work of the PolyU students. The women of both households praised the students' desire to understand their living situations and applauded their respect, bowing their heads and speaking in Khmer. Nevertheless, despite the kind words of these women, the harshness of their realities was immediately obvious. The families made only just enough money to feed themselves; they had nothing in the way of savings, and so the fear of someone falling ill was a constant worry.

When asked what their usual diet consisted of, the first lady interviewed said they usually had two meals a day. These included rice-based meals accompanied by either some fish or "prahok." When questioned about the size of the fish, the mother motioned towards her baby's tiny hand. Prahok is a kind of fermented fish paste that can be bought relatively cheaply and lasts for a long time. One family relied on making leaf lattices as their main source of income. The woman of the household stated that if they worked they could make around US\$5/day. She added that some of the children made money and that their total net income was about US\$50 a month. However, they had to spend US\$2.50 on food each day, totalling roughly US\$75 a month. To account for this deficit in net income and outgoing costs, the younger members of the family went out fishing some days to source food.

Whilst these details of the lives of the villagers highlight the difficulty of their situations and may lead to some reflection on the part of our students, our ability to understand the gravity of their daily life is uncertain. In the same way that both



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women interviewed knew very little, if anything, about Hong Kong, our students will never really know what it is like to live in rural Cambodia. Despite this, we believe the trip is meaningful and educational for all participants. Whilst our students may not be able to put themselves in the shoes of these villagers, they cannot help but to realise and reflect on the painstakingly obvious differences between the lives of the Cambodians and their own lives back in Hong Kong. In providing services to the villagers, our students learn about these differences and are witnesses to the needs of the community.

As stated, at the heart of service-learning projects is the notion of collaborative learning. Each initiative is viewed primarily as an educational opportunity for service recipients and participants alike. Here at PolyU, we believe that education is the best form of aid we can provide. The villagers may welcome short-term forms of aid such as food donations with open arms, but we emphasise long-term gain. In keeping with this thought, our main priorities on the most recent trip were to get the building of the kindergarten underway and to teach the villagers how to use the solar panels that would give them access to electricity after our departure.

It is important to understand the benefits of solar electricity and its effects on the lives of the villagers. Without it, the Cambodians must go to a specific shop to charge their electrical devices; this of course comes at a price, which incurs an opportunity cost. Furthermore, their homes can be lit in the evening by kerosene lamps only, which are much less effective than their solar equivalents. With this stronger, cheaper and renewable form of light, the villagers can work in the evenings when the climate



is more agreeable.

The main challenges faced during the most recent project were communication and cost-effectiveness. In terms of communication, it became clear in the interviews conducted at the end of the service-learning week that some of the villagers remained unclear as to how exactly the solar panels worked. It is important that we equip families with visual manuals so the solar panels can be used effectively. Moreover, students must try to explain, with the help of one of the translators from HRDI, how to use the electricity so that it does not go to waste.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, the price paid for the solar panels comes into question. Unlike other service-learning projects, the solar panels are purchased in the form of a complete package and distributed as opposed to being built and wired by our students. Although they may be more time efficient, the cost of purchasing already-built solar panels is relatively higher, and we must be sure we are not paying too much. This highlights the importance of communication and thorough planning before our arrival in Cambodia.

On the second-to-last day of the service, the PolyU students paid a visit to the families with whom they had been working that week. The purpose of their trip was to find out a little more about the specific needs and wants of the villagers. The students wrote down the information that was conveyed to them by the HRDI translator and in return promised to be back the following day bearing gifts. Each student group was given a budget with which to purchase items for their respective Cambodian family. The gifts included donuts for the children, kitchenware and

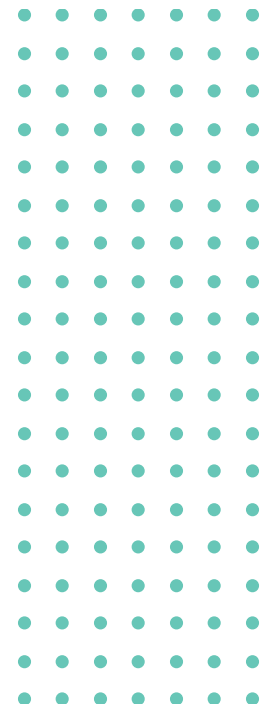


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stationery. It was evident, despite the language barrier, that the villagers were touched by the PolyU students' desire to help. One woman embraced our students as the tears rolled down her face. Her obvious appreciation led our own students to tears; it was definitely an emotional moment for all involved. The translator who was present during this meeting explained that the lady was "so sad that the students were leaving and that she would miss them so much." The PolyU students expressed their frustration with not being able to communicate with the lady directly, but thoroughly appreciated her kind words.

The work done by our students on this service-learning project extended to not only families living in the village but also a local monastery. It was decided that allocating our resources to this space would highly benefit the community. Speaking to the head monk highlighted why installing a solar panel in the monastery was so helpful. He said the main problem faced by the monastery is "not having electricity." He explained further that he needed a light source so that the children could study in the evenings and also mentioned how afraid they were of the dark. The head monk was solely responsible for taking care of the nine students that study, sleep and eat at the pagoda. Whilst he received some donations from NGOs, resources were limited and help was met with open arms.

Towards the end of our conversation with the monk, it became clear he had a request of PolyU. He asked whether it would be possible for him to learn how the electricity generator works with the Hong Kong students. The monk clearly had a burning desire to learn, and his question confirmed our hopes and wishes for service-learning initiatives – that they should be a platform on which recipients and participants alike can collaborate and learn together. Our interviewer from PolyU responded to the monk by explaining that we were in fact beginning a collaboration with a local university in Phnom Penh that would involve workshops designed to teach the building of solar panels. The interviewer added that perhaps the monk could attend such a workshop and learn alongside other students who shared his passion for education.



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Serving the Community through Teaching English

Clarice Brough

Introduction

This year, 2016, saw the start of a service-learning project in Cambodia named “ELC,” which stands for “English Learning Centre.” Whilst a similar initiative has been in place for some years in both Hong Kong and China, this is the first year we have taken students to Cambodia to teach English. In previous years, this sort of teaching was simply a student activity, but because of its evident educational aspect, it has now become a credit-bearing subject.

The project is headed by Ms Anna Ho and came about because of the numerous contacts we have in Cambodia. (Service-learning activity has been taking place in the country for some time now.) In December of last year, a group of staff visited various possible locations we thought might be suitable for the ELC project. It was decided that Emmanuel Christian School in Phnom Penh would be the perfect place to start due to the enthusiasm of their staff. Ms. Anna Ho claimed, “Even if I want to serve, it is important to find people that want to be served.”

Bilands DY and James Evans are the two teachers from The Hong Kong Polytechnic

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University who oversaw the whole programme from start to finish for this pilot year. They worked closely for a semester with the 12 students who embarked on this weeklong trip to Cambodia and accompanied them on the project itself.

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Methodology

The primary objective of the ELC programme is for PolyU students to learn about the educational opportunities for young children in Cambodia, with particular emphasis on English language learning. We hope the project will both broaden the horizons of the PolyU students and cultivate in them a sense of social responsibility. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for our students to use English outside the classroom, that is to say, in a practical setting.

However, at the heart of the ELC service-learning project is the notion of collaborative learning. We are looking not simply to educate and benefit our own PolyU students, but to provide a service to those underprivileged members of Emmanuel Christian School, both teachers and students alike. It is this exchange in learning that makes the project such a valuable experience for all of the participants.

Students of Emmanuel Christian School lack basic needs to facilitate successful learning. Not only do they not have adequate school supplies such as textbooks, pencils and notepads, but the teachers themselves have not been given the teaching opportunities that teachers in Hong Kong may have access to. This is evident in their teaching methods, which essentially rely on rote learning and repetition.

The lack of educational opportunities available to young Cambodians has at its



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root the history of the country. Under the dictatorial regime of the Khmer Rouge, education was strongly discouraged and even punishable. It was believed an educated population would be more likely to revolt. The aftermath of this belief is still present in Cambodia. Teamed with a struggling economy in which many lack the resources to even feed themselves, this contributes to a bleak landscape when it comes to education. The ELC team strive to make a lasting difference for education in Cambodia through a process of collaborative learning.



Technical / Methodological Details

ELC is one of the options our students can undertake to complete the required service-learning component of their degree. Like many of the other projects run by The Office of Service-Learning (OSL), the initiative is not completed with only a week of work. The PolyU students must attend classes that prepare them for a semester before the trip. These classes provide the students with information about the history of Cambodia and the current situation of the country. In addition, the classes give the PolyU students an opportunity to prepare their teaching materials and learn about the ways in which Cambodian culture varies from that of its Asian neighbours.

The teaching kits the students prepare are intended to equip them with the materials



they need to facilitate successful English language learning. These kits are the result of a lot of hard work on the part of the PolyU students, overseen by their teacher Bilands DY. The PolyU students are divided up into teams, each of which has a group leader. Each team begins by writing a fictional story, complete with illustrations. Whilst some of the stories are cut from the programme, all undergo a process of evaluation and reconfiguration, with the intended outcome of a tale that can be used alongside language learning. The stories are made into handy booklets to be given to the Cambodian students, complete with a counterpart for the teachers. Although storytelling is at the root of the ELC methodology, the tales simply provide a basis from which the PolyU students can teach. It is this kind of innovative teaching method we believe is so important to ensure a brighter educational future for Cambodian students.

When the students arrived at Emmanuel Christian School in Phnom Penh, they were thrown into the deep end. Despite the semester of necessary and useful training they received back in Hong Kong, the PolyU students could not be described as trained teachers. Most of them had never taught before, not to mention that their students were young Cambodians with very basic English skills, if any. The PolyU students, battling a 36°C heat that felt like 40°C, attended two hours of classes in which the Cambodian teachers taught their young students in their regular fashion. This provided the PolyU students with an opportunity, if a fairly short-lived one, to observe what it was like to be a student at Emmanuel Christian School. They were given a short lunch break, and after this, when the children returned from home, they were asked to conduct English classes that would run until the end of the week.

Of course, the PolyU students made full use of the teaching kits they prepared, but it was evident from the start that the lesson planning would not end in Hong Kong.

The PolyU students had to constantly adapt their teaching materials in response to the needs of the students. The classes the PolyU students conducted used games, music, pictorial depictions and a lot of demonstration. It was hoped the Cambodian teachers, who observed the PolyU students conducting themselves with confidence and enthusiasm at the front of the class, would learn from some of the techniques used in a way that would encourage their English language learning. When the PolyU students returned to their hotel at 4:30 pm after a long and tiring day, their efforts did not stop there. Instead, they worked relentlessly to make sure the classes scheduled for the next day could be as effective as possible. A reflection session conducted by Bilands, the teacher, took place to go over the day's events, and with this in mind, the students returned to their groups to further alter their teaching kits for the next day, working late into the night. It should be noted that because the PolyU students taught children of varying ages, they constantly had to adapt their materials to best fit the class level.

Student Experiences and Learning

Tommy is a third-year student at PolyU, studying business and accountancy.

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Tommy, what attracted you to this service-learning project initially?

The name of the course, really. I was born in HK and raised in China. I realised my cousins didn't have a great English level, and I felt that if they did, this would help them a lot in life.

Did you know anything about the place or the service recipients before the service?

Well, all I knew was that Cambodia was a very poor country. I thought they had no Wi-Fi, electricity or clean water, and I was particularly surprised when I had to take the vaccination shots.

What training did you have in preparation for the course?

Well, we did a lot of preparation in terms of the teaching. We also had some cultural sensitivity training, which helped us to understand things like dancing and greetings. Oh, and we also learnt about the history of Cambodia. We watched a movie called "Killing Fields."

What were the main challenges you faced along the way?

The moment when we ran out of electricity when we were teaching, I was very



scared about how the kids would react. Another moment that was challenging was when one of my teammates was sick due to dehydration. We had to reconfigure the programme.

Was there any particular moment when you had to adapt what you had previously learnt in response to the environment?

On the first day, we had to change all of our planning because there was a change in the schedule. Someone also had to run back to the hotel because the change in schedule meant that the teaching kits didn't work.

What skills have you learnt that you will take home and apply to life in the future?

Flexibility. I want to go into business, and as a businessman you need to be really flexible. There are different challenges to face each day and I have to adapt to them.

Debbie is a second-year student at PolyU, studying food safety and technology.

So, Debbie, what made you interested in this project?

Well, I have some experience in teaching and more specifically in teaching English. I love both teaching and kids, and I am also aware of how important English is.

What information did you have about the location before commencing the project?

To be honest, all I really knew about Cambodia was that it is an Asian country close to HK.

Did you get some training beforehand to educate you about the place?

Yes, of course. We had some training in teaching and also cultural teaching that involved watching movies about their history. We learnt about their lifestyle and school life.

What was most difficult about the programme?

First, I would say the heat. The place is not clean in the same way as HK is. It took me a while to get used to that. I also struggled because the lower primary students didn't really understand our teaching.

What was the most surprising aspect of the journey?

I was actually surprised that the students were genuinely interested in us. They wanted to know us and were very passionate, always giving us lots of hugs and kisses.

What do you think you will take away from this experience?

I think really what I have learnt about is the way to treat education. In HK, people are generally very stressed by academics, and here everyone is much more bonded together. It seems they learn together as a whole here, instead of the competitive nature of learning in HK. There is much we can learn from them in this area.

Scarlett is a second-year student at PolyU, studying clothing, apparel and textiles.

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So Scarlett, what drew you to this service-learning project?

To be honest, I really just wanted to work with people. Given what I am studying, I am often alone working on things, and I really wanted an opportunity to build up my interpersonal skills.

Were you in the know about Cambodia and its people before embarking on this journey?

Well, we had some lessons about the background of the people, their salaries for example. I learnt about how education is neither popular nor encouraged. I really just want the people of Cambodia to have their own future and be able to dream in the same way as we students from HK can.

What did you find particularly challenging?

Well, not all of the teaching kits we had spent a long time working on ended up being successful on the first day. We had to spend a lot of time adapting our material. Around four of the days we were here we worked until 3 or 4 in the morning to alter the kits. That was pretty tough. The issue was that the English levels of some of the kids were much lower than we had anticipated, and as a result the kits were too challenging for them. Primary one, for example, didn't even know how to write their names.

What personal tools have you acquired along the way?

I would say the interpersonal skills I have developed are the most important—those, and the ability to work in a team. I have also gained knowledge of the importance of having what I will call a learning heart. Everyone in this world deserves to learn. Perhaps we are the lucky ones, but I also think we can learn from the kids in a unique way. The children love the teachers, and I love the learners. I think we must all be learners and have learning hearts.

Adam is a second-year student at PolyU, studying product engineering.

Can I begin by just saying how happy I am to be here? The reason for this is that I just love English and spreading it to different countries. Having said that, I really didn't have much experience teaching students and kids before coming here!

Did you not get some teaching beforehand?

Well, yes, actually we did. Bee (Bilands DY) showed us this movie about Cambodia before we came. The movie spoke about the red army and how the whole system collapsed. It also informed us about how the controllers didn't want people to be educated because of the fear that if they were they might revolt.

What were the main problems you encountered?

Estimating the language level of the students was really a challenge. Considering this whilst also bearing their culture in mind was tough.

What would you describe as most valuable about this as a learning experience?

I think the key is helping students who are not familiar with English. Teaching in English about English is extremely hard when the kids do not have a basic level of English. We attempted to overcome this in many ways, and I think we were at least partly successful. I have found this process of learning, helping and reflecting particularly valuable.

Harriet is a first-year student at PolyU who really wanted to get into this programme because of her desire to go to Cambodia.

What lessons did you have to prepare for the service-learning project?

We had a whole semester of discourse about how to present ourselves, and we also used the class time and our own time to develop teaching kits that would help us on the project. James also gave us an important lesson about how to use your voice. I found this a really important lesson because it was not something I had considered before.

Can you tell me about some of the more surprising moments you encountered?

Well, to be honest, there were many, many surprising moments. When the electricity stopped, for example—this is probably the most obvious example, but it was still very surprising. I really find it so unimaginable but this is not that surprising to them. The facilities really must be better, and that is a moment I will not forget easily. What was interesting, though, was how Bee (Bilands DY) made us reflect on the positive nature of this event. We used the lights on our phones to lighten up the room and teach the kids. It was interesting how this actually helped to keep the focus of the kids where we wanted it. This taught us an important lesson about turning adverse situations into a teaching tool.

That is definitely an important lesson. Do you think you acquired any others?

I would say we learned to be humble. The kids are so kind and helpful. We can really see the passion for learning that the kids have, and this is so great. Of course, I am still learning too, just like them. They were so accommodating, and I found this to be such a humbling experience. They really were learning from us, but I also felt I was really learning from them. In a way, they were also the teachers and I was the student!

Reflection Sessions

The first day the PolyU students attended Emmanuel Christian School may be described as the toughest. During the reflection session that took place at the end of the day, Bilands, one of the teachers-in-charge, said, “The first day is the hardest day, the toughest day. You almost want to give up, but then that one student does something and suddenly you are alive again.” It is clear that although this day was a steep learning curve for the PolyU students, it was also highly rewarding. The experience of actually being in the classroom, working with the children and applying the teaching kits they had spent so much time preparing actualised the whole experience.

It is essential to bear in mind the guaranteed unexpectedness of this first day. That is to say, no matter how much preparation has been done for the project, the PolyU students inevitably meet with the unexpected. This year, upon arriving at the site, it appeared the school’s schedule had changed. The PolyU students had planned their classes according to a different timetabling system, one that had been issued some months prior to the trip. This turn of events meant that the lunch break had to be dedicated to reworking the planned classes. The PolyU students showed a huge amount of initiative in this moment to deal with the problem, and Bilands herself commented that they handled the whole situation “like mature adults.” This highlights

one of the intended outcomes of the projects: to show students the importance of handling stressful and unexpected situations with flexibility and competence.

When discussing the upper primary level class, the PolyU students described the service recipients as “smart,” “active” and “confident.” They also commented on how the children enjoyed a challenge and thrived in a classroom environment that leaned towards competition. Based on this reflection, it was decided that more games, like hangman, would be worked into the teaching kits that night. This shows how the students had to constantly respond to the needs of the service recipients throughout the project and adapt their teaching material accordingly.

In a similar vein, the PolyU students noted that there seemed to be a noticeable gap in the varying abilities of their students, making their job of curtail the teaching kits difficult. The solution proposed was to pair the PolyU students up with their students when doing activities with the hope that those less-able students might seek aid from their stronger counterparts. Bilands added that the stronger students in classrooms can be a useful aid to the teacher because they can be “used” effectively to demonstrate material to their peers, boosting the morale of that individual and not making him or her feel bored whilst also encouraging students who struggle in comparison. This shows how the situations PolyU students had initially perceived as negative could be turned into a positive teaching tool.

One of the main problems the students observed from the kids was that the kids struggled with saying whole sentences and were for the most part capable only of saying single words. It was agreed this should be one of their main focuses to ensure successful English language learning. As it is definitely a leap to go from vocabulary to sentence structure, to render this a more achievable goal, the PolyU students decided they would break the sentences down into smaller parts, filling in some of the words and leaving some blank. This would at least give the Cambodian students some guidance in forming sentences whilst encouraging them to think about grammar.

The key issue for the younger lower primary students was their low level of ability. The students were unable to write their names, and as a result this group presented the largest challenge. The Cambodian teacher present in the class ended up having to translate the material the PolyU students had planned. One of our students described this whole process of translation as “a little embarrassing” and affirmed that “she didn’t know what to do in the moment,” as she felt the material they had prepared was as simple as it could possibly be. Three key features of teaching were taken from this: demonstration, repetition and visual aids.

In terms of classroom order, the younger pupils were a little more difficult to control than the older age groups. Bilands responded to the PolyU students’ concerns

about this by underlining how essential it was to begin each class by going over the classroom rules. Moreover, holding the focus of the students was key for order and learning. The PolyU students used the phrase, “one, two, three look at me” to refocus their students at moments when attention was seemingly dissipating. Furthermore, the physical configuration of the student groups was important. With one key student in each group conducting the lesson, the others found it useful to be situated in the aisles of the classroom, which also acted as a physical barrier to kids running up to the board before they were picked on. All of these small details, which might not have been considered before the PolyU students arrived in Cambodia, were now proving essential to the success of the class. Again, the importance of responding to the environment effectively was made known to our students.

73 More than one of the groups used the game “hangman” as a teaching tool. Reflecting on this, one group seemed to be more successful than another, and so our students delved into a discussion about why this might be. The more successful group had first demonstrated the game and provided their students with the first and last letter of the word, so they could visualise more easily that the word had to be completed by inserting letters. They also teamed the game with actions; for example, if the desired word was “dancing,” the PolyU students would dance in the classroom. It was also stated that instead of hanging a stick man, as is traditional in a game of hangman, the students would simplify the activity by drawing a set of hearts on the board and crossing out the hearts as if lives were lost. This was a simpler concept for the young students to grasp, especially if they were not familiar with the hanging of stick men. Again, the materials underwent a process of reconfiguration each night after this period of reflection.

One of the main challenges for students and teachers alike was the baking heat. The classrooms were indeed very hot and not outfitted with air conditioning. They had fans, but even these stopped working one day. The Cambodian students started to become very flustered with the rising temperature and consequently began to lose focus. One of our students said that she observed two of her pupils playing rock, paper, scissors and that the loser of the game had to fan the winner. This was not only an indication that these two students had lost their focus, but also were a distraction to their fellow classmates. Bilands told our students that even this could in some way be turned into a teaching point. She said that perhaps the students could start a game whereby the winner would be fanned by the rest of the class. She said, “Find a way to look at the situation, and find another way to twist it.” Teaching is a process of continual adaptation in response to the environment, no matter how challenging the surroundings may be.

In the last reflection session, Bilands DY thanked her team for their hard work and dedication. She underlined how the programme would not have been possible

without them and how noticeable the hard work of the students was to her. She claimed that “sweat and tears” went into the success of the project and that what she most admired about the students was that they handled themselves in a mature fashion throughout, meeting and in fact going above and beyond her expectations. She praised their energy in the classroom and noted their lack of complaint throughout, despite the difficult conditions in which they were working.



Community Feedback

Chin Pich, an English teacher at Emmanuel Christian School, spoke about the changes he had witnessed at the school over the past five years he had been working there. The school has doubled in size due to the addition of a secondary school in the adjacent building and has also improved in terms of the ability and dedication of the staff.

Chin Pich complimented the PolyU students on their hard work and particularly noted their wonderful planning skills. Nevertheless, evaluating the effectiveness of this project is a difficult task. When Chin Pich was interviewed, the teacher expressed his hopes for the future of the project. In addition, the students were all smiles at the arrival of the PolyU students and could not have shown more enthusiasm in their classes. All of this seems to suggest that the recipients were generally pleased with how the project went.

However, we must be mindful that despite intensive planning our students are not teachers. We come into Emmanuel Christian School and do not follow the textbooks they usually use. This means the Cambodian teachers have a fair amount of catching up to do when the PolyU students leave. Of course, our intention is to educate both the students and teachers alike, but we are also mindful that our presence has the potential to create an unnecessary comparison between our students and the Cambodian teachers. We do not wish to provoke ill feelings, but hope our presence may serve the community to improve English language learning in the future and provide our own students with valuable lessons.

Ms Anna Ho recounted a story that perhaps highlights one of the key benefits of English language learning service projects. She explained how after one of these collaborations took place in China, one of the teachers approached her and commented on the importance of the mere presence of the PolyU students. She explained how the children at her school really needed to understand that English was an essential subject for them to learn and that the arrival of the foreigners helped



them to fathom this. Anna became aware of the benefits of the project during another incident: one of the Chinese students became particularly interested in the ethnicity of one of the PolyU students. The child began naming countries in an attempt to guess where the PolyU student was originally from. It quickly became obvious to Anna that the vocabulary of the different countries he named came directly from the teaching of PolyU students in previous years. In other words, he listed the very places the students had in that particular class. Anna exclaimed, “That’s what it’s really about: communication!”

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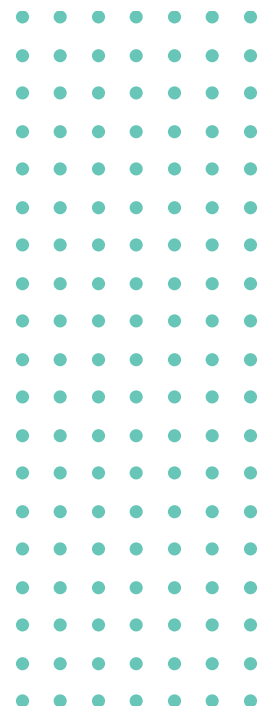
Teachers’ Feedback

Bilands DY and James Evans seemed to be very proud of their students and the way they handled themselves throughout the project. They dealt with the difficult situations maturely and confidently. Furthermore, they did not complain, and Bilands claimed she could hear her students working on their teaching kits into the early hours of the morning. It is evident that the project at Emmanuel Community School has gotten off to a wonderful start, and the whole team looks to continue and develop the project in the coming years.

In terms of changes that must be made, Anna Ho spoke about the importance of teacher training: “Unless we are changing the mind-set of the teachers here, we cannot have long-term sustainability.” She went on to explain how she started a project in which PolyU students taught local teachers in China. She said that although they were initially and understandably reluctant, their views changed as the programme went on. Sending teachers with our students was one of the measures taken to minimise the animosity shown towards the PolyU students who would come in and essentially teach the Chinese teachers. We named our own teachers the official teachers and our students classroom aides. This linguistic change, Anna believes, is very important for the collaboration to be successful and inoffensive to our Chinese counterparts. Perhaps most interesting, as the programme progressed, the Chinese

teachers seemingly forgot about this difference between our staff and pupils. They began to engage with, enjoy and learn from the material they were taught.

We are currently communicating with Asia Human Resource Development Institute, a local community college in Cambodia, about starting a similar service. We hope that by starting this sort of teacher training at a younger age, including for university students who are interested in teaching, we can train individuals to become wonderful teachers in their own community.



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Technology Beyond Borders

Clarice Brough and Daniella Balarezo

Introduction

The computing team head to Cambodia each year to bring aid to Silk Island. The initiative has two principal and correlated aims. First, our students provide solar power to poor families, a task that involves building the panels themselves and wiring up homes with basic electrical appliances. Second, the team builds a learning centre and computing lab for a local Cambodian school on the island. In conjunction with the learning centre, the PolyU students design learning resources with the aim of teaching the local children about science and engineering.

This year, the project was headed by two of our university's pioneers in service-learning: Dr Stephen Chan and Dr Grace Ngai. Approximately 120 students embarked on the journey to Cambodia in June 2016. The students came from not only PolyU in Hong Kong, but also Haifa University (Israel), Sichuan University (China) and Washington University in Saint Louis (USA). In addition, the project worked closely with Asia Human Resource Development Institute (HRDI) and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, local tertiary institutions in Cambodia. The students from RUPP and HRDI acted as collaborators and translators, making communication between our students and the villagers possible.

The first week of the project centres around thorough planning and the assembly of the solar panels. During this week, the students have the chance to acclimatise to their environment and become somewhat more used to the heat. We also run cultural sensitivity training, which involves a trip to the slums, the killing fields and S21. The second week is dedicated to the actual installation of the solar panels. During this week, the students move from a hotel in Phnom Penh to the homestay location in a village in Sen Sok district. From the homestay, they travel each day to Silk Island with the goal of completing the desired aims of the project by the end of the week.

Methodology

The main goal of this service-learning project is for our students to bring aid to the local Cambodians. However, it must be noted that the form of aid has a particular



emphasis on long-term gain as opposed to other “quick-fix” solutions. That is to say, we look to provide electricity to families living on Silk Island because of the economic advantages of having this facility. Moreover, our students assemble the solar panels themselves, which means they have a considerable amount of expertise in the operation of these electrical appliances. We hope there is an exchange of ideas between the students who embark on this project and the locals, so that the locals can use the solar panels effectively when the students leave at the end of the fortnight.



This perhaps highlights the marked difference between service-learning and work done by many other charitable organisations. At the heart of service-learning is the idea that these projects are primarily educational opportunities for all of the parties involved. The students who form part of the computing team gain practical knowledge in the actual building of solar panels. Some of the students who undertake the computing initiative major in subjects that are completely unrelated to engineering and science, and so it must be remembered that this project relies heavily on teamwork and communication between the students. As mentioned, we hope the project serves as an educational experience for the local Cambodians too, so that they may learn how to use these appliances. Broadly speaking, solar panels aside, the collaboration is an eye-opening experience for our students because it gives them the opportunity to witness first-hand the differences between their lives in Hong Kong and the lives of the villagers in Cambodia.

We should also mention why we believe solar panels are such an effective form of

aid. Before our arrival and subsequent installation of the electrical appliances, the villagers had to go to a specific location to charge their devices, and this of course incurred an opportunity cost. They also had to rely heavily on kerosene lamps as their source of light. These are more costly, more damaging to the environment and less effective light sources. The lights we install in the homes provide the families with the opportunity to work in the evening when the climate is more agreeable, which is economically advantageous.

Nevertheless, we do not have unlimited resources and time. We cannot provide electricity to all families on the island, and we are under a huge amount of time pressure when we are there to complete the work we set out to do. With the help of the locals, we decide where to situate the solar panel stations so that they can be accessed by a larger number of people living on the island and not just by those in spatial proximity. Moreover, because of the limited time we have in Cambodia, it is even more important for the project to serve as an educational opportunity for the locals, so that in our absence the appliances can be used and fixed if need be.

Whether constructing the solar panels ourselves is a good use of our time has been called into question on numerous occasions. It has been argued that we could install more panels complete with manuals for a larger number of people living on the island if we did not involve ourselves in the building process. However, this approach seems to miss the core value of service-learning projects: they are primarily an educational opportunity for all involved. At the end of the service-learning week this year, many students expressed their contentment with having applied technical material they learnt back in Hong Kong to real-life situations. In the process, we have also empowered local youths with the knowledge and skills on solar electrical power. It is this kind of practical education that puts the technical into perspective for the students. In addition, it is much cheaper to purchase the various parts that are put together to build the solar panels instead of purchasing already completed devices. Considering all of these factors, we believe this way of conducting the project is the most efficient and effective use of our time and resources for our students and that it has equally lasting benefits for the villagers.

Technical / Methodological Details

All of the students at PolyU must complete one of the service-learning projects to graduate. Naturally, the students have preferences when it comes to which projects they undertake, and we conduct interviews at the start of the academic year to allocate them. Once this has been decided, the students undergo a semester of training in preparation for the trip. Broadly speaking, this consists of eight two-hour lessons



that take place on Saturdays. We hope the training equips the students with the practical skills that will be required of them once they are in Cambodia. However, we also aim to introduce them to some of the cultural differences they will witness on the trip. It must also be noted that the service-learning component of the students' degree is a credit-bearing subject, and so the students are evaluated after the service based on their written responses. By making it a credit-bearing subject, we hope to instil in the students the sense of social responsibility we believe to be so important. This also means that students who would ordinarily shy away from such an experience have the opportunity to try something new and get out of their comfort zone.

Despite the extensive training conducted prior to the trip, the students are somewhat thrown into the deep end when they arrive in Cambodia. There is a significant difference between learning about a culture from the comfort of one of our classrooms at PolyU and being at the location. Furthermore, as with all challenging projects, there are unexpected hiccups over the course of the students' stays that they must overcome. It is not uncommon for things to be different from how the students believed they would be upon arriving at the service location. Wiring and solar panels may be destroyed as a result of rain and have to be completely reworked. This, however, is all part of the learning process for the students.

In terms of organisation, the students are divided into three groups that are further split in half to make six smaller groups. Each big group has its own design, with the idea that in future years the students can look to past models and improve on their construction. Again, we see how this service-learning project places a strong emphasis on future gain as opposed to focusing on short-term poverty alleviation.

As mentioned, this year saw the start of a collaboration between our own PolyU students and individuals from both Haifa University and Washington University. This change to the initiative made for a project that took into account a number of voices, different cultures and varying skill levels. We are certain this addition will strengthen our results and expand the possibilities in store for computing service-learning projects to come. Communication between students from different backgrounds and



life experiences becomes even more essential to ensure that the work gets done. It is also amazing to see how relationships begin to form and how bonding these experiences can be.

Student Experiences and Learning

For this trip, we were joined by students from many different parts of the world. Vanessa, a student from Washington University in St. Louis, found our project when looking for summer internships abroad. She admitted to learning how to do hands-on work: “I had never used a drill before, but now I have; it’s kind of cool, and reminds me that I like engineering!” Vanessa said she has also learned “tons” about communication. She suggested that all volunteers for this project are engineers in a way, which “is good,” as she hopes to be an engineer herself someday. According to Vanessa, many people say that engineers are bad at communicating. “But here,” Vanessa explained, “all day, 11 hours a day, you spend time with each other, you make so many detailed decisions, and you talk; it’s a different communicative experience from, say, a group paper, which you just divide into parts.” More than engineering skills, Vanessa believed that she learned how to communicate effectively.

For Vanessa, language did not bar communication. Born in China, Vanessa speaks fluent Chinese, although she claims her skills improved after spending time with PolyU students. There was sometimes a barrier, however, when speaking with Cambodian students. Vanessa explained that HRDI students are English majors and that their English is often the best. Her team figured out a way to work with everyone: “We [found] it easier to explain to [HRDI] students first, and then they



can use Khmer to explain to other students and volunteers in their own language.” Vanessa noted that although there was a language barrier, the Cambodian students learned quickly. She also illustrated that their hands-on ability was “a lot stronger than ours.”

Vanessa struggled with little. She acknowledged that “the weather is really hot and we don’t have enough food,” but she still enjoyed the experience. She noted that perhaps more cultural training, even if provided via a blackboard module on-line, would be a great thing to have before coming to Hong Kong for orientation. “After we got here, there were a lot of opportunities to learn, but I would say it would be good to give us preparation beforehand,” Vanessa said. As a foreign student, Vanessa did not know what to expect. PolyU students begin to work on the project at the beginning of second semester. Vanessa suggested a Skype call during a class would be helpful, especially in getting to know PolyU students, whom she said are split into groups early on. In addition, she hopes we can deliver more service in the future, seeing as service often began at 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning, with the students gathering at 7:00 to leave for Silk Island. Spending less time on travelling, Vanessa says, may help to serve more people. However, she conceded that “this is the first year” that PolyU is hosting international students and that “it can only get better.” As our project grows, our administrative challenges widen, but this means we are working and striving to do as much as we can.

One PolyU student in particular admitted to experiencing great sadness that we in fact could not help as many people as we wanted. She admitted, “They [the Cambodians] need more than we can offer, but we don’t have enough. I don’t know how to improve the situation, but we are trying to do our best.” She said she really

enjoyed her time in Cambodia and added, “I hope that there will be more projects to help the Cambodian people, other than solar panel and electricity projects—more can be done.” She loved Cambodia so much that she wished there had been more time to communicate and talk with the homestay hosts. She explained that every time students got back from working, they had no chance to talk, as it was already night time.

The students clearly worked hard. One group in particular wired 60 LED lights. The lights were meant for four houses. Jennifer, a Washington University in St. Louis student, admitted that this “might be a little overload for the four houses, but we are only allowed to install the LED lights in the houses that are approved by the village.” She explained that groups were warned that villagers may come up and ask to receive the service, but that groups were “only allowed to do it in the houses they have named.” However, this request thankfully never came about, at least to her group.

Jennifer was particularly impressed with the work of the Cambodian volunteers: “I think at first when we came into the project it was our own design, and we thought, ‘Okay, the Cambodian students are here to help us,’ but in the end, they turned out to be the persons in charge—it was more us supplementing them rather than them supplementing us.” Jennifer insisted that local knowledge is necessary for these kinds of projects. She admitted that, as college students, the kind of expertise an engineer has is radically different from the expertise a carpenter has. Luckily for their group, one of the Cambodian students was an expert in woodwork, and Jennifer learned a lot from him and his solutions to many of the group’s problems.

Local knowledge seemed to work well when paired with local resources. Lydia, another Washington U student, explained that all of the groups made portable lamps to give to families in addition to the wired LED lights, car batteries and solar panels. The portable lamps were made at Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) from palm trees. To cover the lamp wires, Lydia used bamboo. The lamps were powered by a battery box, which used rechargeable USB batteries that could be charged with a USB converter. The converters were provided to each family, and could be charged with their car batteries.

This kind of ingenious work was led by all of our PolyU students. Ben, one particular PolyU student who took on a strong leadership role within his group, explained that sometimes local conditions interfered with the original plans designed in Hong Kong, but that local resources could be the solution. “It is hard to resist rainfall and to protect the LEDs from the rain,” Ben said, “so we had to come up with some solutions that mixed with local conditions... We used coconuts to shelter our LED lights from the rain.” In addition, Ben explained that his team began to wrap the coconuts in aluminium foil to make the LED lights brighter, as previous service

recipients when surveyed had said the lights were not bright enough.

These kinds of solutions to previous years of problems help to make our project better and sustainable. Our students not only installed new solar charging stations this year, but also improved solar panels from previous years by fixing the angle at which they were tilted and adding protective gear to combat the rainy environment in Cambodia.

The environment was one of the main reasons for choosing this particular service project for one particular PolyU student named Barbara. Barbara admitted that after reading newspapers she became interested in the Cambodian environment, children and poverty. At the end of the trip, Barbara said,

I don't want to leave. I think that this has been so great. I love the people here. I love this area. I love the friends around me. Also, my teacher gave me much support, and my Cambodian friends teach me lots of things.

She admitted that in her 19 years she had never really known how to use tools. She thought the experience would be very helpful in the later years of her life. As a business student, Barbara felt unfamiliar with physical knowledge, but she noticed that every time she encountered a problem, she tried to find information, identify what was wrong and think of a solution. She noted that many times the Cambodian students, and sometimes her group, would help her with the solutions: "My Cambodian friends come up with many solutions on how to make things stable and how to build—they are very friendly and know how to put the wood in and make it tight." Barbara's only concern and challenge is that the quality of the wood should improve in the future; she learned that the rain, as the design stands currently, could quickly ruin the wood. She hopes that we will add something to the project beyond solar panels and LED lights, such as something that will improve the water supply.

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Final Reflection Session

At the end of the service-learning week, the students split up into their groups, and staff members from PolyU conduct a final reflection session. We hope our students use this as an opportunity to think about the hectic two weeks they have just endured. Although they fill out written journals when they return to Hong Kong, we believe it is equally important for the students to reflect on their experiences right after completing the project. This meeting is a group conversation as much as an opportunity for personal reflection. In other words, it is a space where the students can share their own experiences and vocalise their initial reactions.

One student opened the most recent discussion by saying, "I have never seen myself

as a leader because in general I am a nervous person. During this experience, though, I learnt the importance of dividing up jobs, and I have seen that I should not be so nervous because I am capable.” It is interesting to note how service-learning can have a real and positive effect on the lives of students, even when they return to Hong Kong. As this student described, students learn the importance of working in a group, and we see a huge change in our pupils during the course of the two weeks each year. For many, it is a great opportunity to build confidence and learn interpersonal skills.

Another student reflected on how the practical skills he had acquired during the course of the two weeks were in fact very important for his major. He spoke about how his class back in Hong Kong focused mostly on theory and how this trip put much of that material into perspective by applying it in a practical way. He said, “Now I really do feel like an engineer.” It seemed he had a newfound enthusiasm for his subject and was excited to continue with his studies once he returned to PolyU in September.

One student even went so far as to say she was sad they were not staying longer. She felt the students had really had a positive effect on the lives of the villagers and wanted to stay in Cambodia and help other families. Time, of course, is a limited resource for us, but we hope that students are inspired in this way and come back to attend service-learning projects in the coming years. Each year we have a volunteer group who does exactly that—return to service-learning as a non-credit-bearing subject.

In a similar vein, one student spoke about how she wished the students could have had more time to enjoy the feeling of completion. She spoke about the moment when they finished wiring a house and had successfully installed everything. She described the moment as a celebration and lamented that there was not more of an opportunity to revel in it. She said they had to move to the next location pretty much immediately to continue work. This is of course the downside of having so much to do in such a short period, and there seems to be far from an obvious solution. Nevertheless, we hope this kind of celebration can take on a new form in the weeks after the trip, such as when the students write in their journals and think about what a life-changing experience they have had.

Again, to address the time pressure concern, one subsection of the group was particularly pressed when they encountered a problem on the last day. Upon entering one house, they noted that the wiring had been completely destroyed by the weather and as a result there was much to be done. The group collectively decided to take a short 20-minute lunch break and return to the project and work relentlessly that afternoon. This exemplifies the group camaraderie that evolved and the responsibility the students felt for the work they were doing.

Talking like a true service learner, one student said that the most valuable experience for her was learning from the villagers. She spoke about one day when they were doing the indoor wiring—it was particularly hot inside the house because of its metal roof. She recounted that as she did her work, sweat pouring down her face, the villagers circled around her with fans. She described how incredibly touching this had been for her: “They barely have enough money for food, but they wanted to help me in my hot state. That was an amazing thing to feel, that everyone just wanted to help each other.”

Towards the end of the reflection sessions, one student said, “Previously, I did not know how to cherish the things I had.” She spoke about how when she came to Hong Kong she had trouble adapting to the weather conditions. She said she would often call her mother and complain about the heat in the city. During the week in Cambodia, however, she had the opportunity to speak with many of the HRDI students, all of whom expressed a burning desire to be able to go to Hong Kong and study at PolyU. This made her realise how lucky she really was to have been given such an opportunity in life. She called her mother to tell her this news, and her mother was very moved that her daughter had learnt such a valuable life lesson.

From the Local Partner’s Perspective

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For the projects in Cambodia, particularly COMP2S01, we partner with a local NGO called Young People Do (YPD) to complete the service project. YPD is crucial in the delivery of our service. PolyU has held a partnership with YPD since 2012, and it is something we hope to continue in the future as these programmes develop. The NGO is instrumental in all areas. It does everything from helping us find service sites to, chiefly, conducting translation services so that we can communicate with villagers and other local people such as transportation and restaurant staff.

Panha Ek, founder of YPD, began her journey in volunteer work before our connections with YPD. She had previously been working for another NGO and did not agree with their intended service goals, so she asked herself, “Why don’t we just sit down and form a project here and continue our own work in the community?” After a couple of brainstorming sessions with other organisers and volunteers, YPD was born. The NGO now works with dozens of organisations from many different areas of the world, such as Taiwan, Australia, the US and of course Hong Kong.

Panha expressed how happy she was that PolyU conducted services in Cambodia. She confessed, “The villagers are really happy to receive our service... You guys just come in with a very helpful project for the community.” She observed that in places without widespread electricity (such as Silk Island) the day ends when the sun sets.

She also noted that now, in the village, several families are no longer “forced to sleep really early” and can instead use the light for reading, eating and homework even during twilight. Panha explained that on the island, only wealthy people could afford the electricity provided by a private electrical grid. She commented that around 90% of the islanders could not afford this high cost and instead used candles at night. Due to our project, this has become less and less the norm. Unfortunately, we cannot eliminate the number completely or service every single household.

Panha explained how we choose service recipients: “For the family, we just come in and we explore the area... We choose the criteria... They have no car battery or electricity... Usually, this is mostly really poor people who have many children.” Panha admitted that there are no big problems with our project on the NGO side. However, she confessed that there are some challenges. “Some people,” Panha explained, “even though they have a car battery, they just say the car battery is very old and broken [and ask] for another one. But because our stuff is limited, we come to check it... If we find... they already have [one], we just say sorry and sometimes connect lights for them as well, and then they are really happy.” Panha claimed that 60 solar panels—the same number as last year—were installed on Silk Island this year, including those used for our container classroom.

87 The container classroom was a venture Panha was most excited about. She detailed her enthusiasm: “In the primary school they have only one building, without a library... 400 students but still only 5 classrooms.” She expressed gratitude that PolyU brought food and took care of and served the community and children of Silk Island and Phnom Penh. She also thanked PolyU for being concerned about education. “I think in the future our kids in the slum and poor communities will transfer education... I wish that kids, children and people in Cambodia will think differently.” Panha beamed. “Cambodia is so small, but with this they can see the world.” For Panha, the classroom container is a step closer to a worldly education. She explained that when we come to install a computer and all kinds of books, it is “easy for students to touch and feel technology in another country; they will not stay in the small country, they can see the world during this project!” Panha’s keen interest is indicative of one of the goals of this project: learning—about other cultures, about our own culture—while and as a result of serving.

Panha was happy to help us serve. For YPD, it is important that Cambodian people help other Cambodian people. For us, our project relies on this local-to-local service to have even a remote chance of success. Looking ahead, Panha said the local volunteers will go to the container to take a look and use the computer. She noted that the library will be stocked with English and children’s books in addition to Khmer literature. She aims to train the teachers to use the container and make it effective and something people actually use. For this, she will rely on volunteers, and if she does



not find a suitable match, she says, “I’ll do it myself.” However, she notes that all of her YPD volunteers are likely to return and help, as they are very happy to be of service to help “their people.” It is difficult to disagree.

Most of the volunteers who made up our service trip from YPD were students at HRDI and RUPP. Their main goal was to help PolyU students translate and learn about Cambodia and Cambodian culture. However, they were also a main component of the delivery of our service; they built stations, wired LED lights and found innovative solutions to our problems. One HRDI student said, “We help PolyU form relationships with the villagers and translate. We not only translate, we also help them do—we install each station as well.” “Young people do” indeed.

The volunteers enjoyed doing any kind of work they could help with. This mostly meant they were assigned building tasks. Yet, volunteers were not hesitant to ask to wire things themselves or learn about how the solar panels worked. Although they alone could probably not fix a wiring system or solar panel station—due to a lack of full experience, not capability—our students noted that the volunteers were nevertheless quick learners. Both groups, the Cambodians and PolyU students, bonded over the course of the stay in Cambodia. One HRDI student said, “We have good communication and we get closer and closer together. We actually exchange cultures and talk to each other about our experiences.” However, the volunteers were mostly happy about helping people who had less than they.

One HRDI student in particular appreciated learning about the situation of other people in her own country. She acknowledged, “We only study in school, so we don’t know the other people’s situations—we just know our friends’ situations, and we

know an easy world, an easy place.” As a matter of fact, the homestay, which most of the PolyU students admitted to struggling with, was also difficult for our Cambodian volunteers. One student said that for him, the homestay was “difficult... the water supply and food is not that great,” and it is difficult to work after not having a good night’s sleep. In a sweet manner, the HRDI student admitted that he thought PolyU students, coming from a “developed” country, probably did not have it any easier. However, he said they helped from their heart, regardless of what they needed or wanted.

In terms of needs and wants, one YPD volunteer, when asked about the challenges she faced, added her suggestions for improving our project: “I think to make next year better, let’s make another station; there are places far away from here, there are lots of poor people... We also need more portable lights and surveys to know more about the situation here and what the community needs and wants.” Our current survey is conducted onsite at each house we are to service. Our student surveyors, with the help of a translator, learn the statistics related to the household income, size and education level and mainly its electricity expenditure and need. In the near future, perhaps with YPD’s help, we can begin to do pre-site surveys. Many of our students and staff suggested, for example, setting up water-purifying systems in addition to solar panels. The suggestion was ever-present in not only the NGO’s volunteers, such as this particular YPD volunteer, but also in our own students. Whether expansion will occur is indefinite, and whether it will occur as part of COMP2S01 or as the beginning of another service project remains an interesting question. However, with the help of NGOs like YPD, service-learning in Cambodia can clearly thrive.

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Interviews

Sheva, Haifa University:

Today is Thursday, the fifth day at the homestay and the fourth day of working. We have spent three days building a solar charging station on Silk Island in area seven. It has been really challenging and really complicated in terms of the teamwork. The actual construction was very easy, though. The Cambodians are unbelievably skilled and knowledgeable about how to construct things in a simple and secure way, so I learnt a lot from them about how to hammer wood and make pieces fit better. It has been awesome. Half of the team did the station and half of the team did wiring inside the four houses. We think we might have missed a house in which a really elderly woman lives, and I am really hoping that we will get permission to go back and wire her house well. I personally will feel really, really bad if the entire street has electricity and she doesn’t.

Do you know about how they choose? As in, the selection process of who gets the solar panels?

The chief of the village makes a decision based on income, so those who definitely can't afford to connect to the national electricity system get priority. It is very expensive; just the connection alone costs 50 to 100 US dollars, and then the on-going payments are also very high. I also think they choose based on sustainability. Someone who won't sell the battery after two weeks, for example, is a better choice than someone who will.

Have you experienced any ill feelings between those who have the electricity and those who don't?

No, no. I didn't see it, but I could just imagine if we didn't connect that electricity for that woman... That would not be a positive side of the project, because we are trying to strengthen the community and provide the service. They were so excited. When it was completed, I almost started crying. It was a beautiful moment. We came, we worked, we made a mess for three days, but when we finished they had this. It was so incredibly touching to see the children dancing in their lit homes to music they can now play because of the solar panels.

But why is the solar panel really so advantageous?

Well, I think that it provides opportunities. It wasn't only us at the site; there were two people from the community that came every day, helping us and giving us tools. We asked them questions all the time, so it's engaging and involving, which is one of the most important sides of these kinds of projects. It's not a gift and we are not just throwing something at somebody. It's a two-way street, and the benefits of having electricity show them that there are other and better ways of living, perhaps motivating them to go and do it themselves.

What about the relationships between the students from HK, the Cambodians and students like you?

It varies greatly depending on the English levels. The English level of the Cambodians is usually very low, so it is actually very, very difficult. Those that have a basic understanding of English basically become interpreters and connectors between the working team and families, and I think that is super important. Within it, you can see people kidding and messing around. Even if their English isn't perfect, they can still joke around. They can point at and show things, and there is some sort of communication.

So do you think that they are doing their job well as translators? Do you think it is really positively affecting the project as a whole?

I think so, yeah. We were told several times that the main problem for the Cambodians is that they don't trust each other because of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. There is a lot of disbelief. So we ask the Cambodians to act as interpreters and translators because the villagers can trust their own people more easily to be able to communicate their needs and requests properly.

And do you see that this project will have some kind of affiliation with your university back home, next year and so on?

I texted my boss last night saying that the VP from HK and I sealed the deal on having an on-going project in Israel. So there are two programmes running now. Maybe we could have a service-learning project in Israel. I think it's going to be challenging and very difficult for the HK university to do it the Israeli way, and I think it's going to be very difficult for my university to do it the Chinese way. I hope we can do it and I would really like to be involved in it if it does happen. I think it could be really, really, really cool.

You say it was difficult for you to do it the Chinese way, but can you tell me what sort of problems you encountered?

91 They are not going to like the Israeli, who has a really loud, very yell-y, pushy, very just get it done kind of attitude. Israelis are a lot more warm and touching, more conversational. I don't know. It's just very, very different. The Chinese are a bit more laid back than Israelis. Safety issues are completely different. We are so much safer with the tools than they are, from what I have been seeing. And you have to remember that Israeli students are much older; even the youngest ones will be older than the Chinese ones (because we are all required to serve in the army). There could be anywhere from a two- to six-year gap between the ages of the pupils. They are completely different in terms of maturity, and they have a very different understanding of how projects and teamwork work.

Interview with a Washington University student:

Hello, I am a student from Washington University in Saint Louis. I am a rising senior and I am majoring in chemical engineering.

So could you tell us a little bit about the service recipients?

Yeah, we actually went into the village and talked to the recipients there. It is a village on an island and the people there mainly make silk for a living. They don't have electricity on the island and they also don't have running water.

What challenges do you think you might face along the way?

Personally, I think not being able to take a shower for a week is a huge challenge. In

terms of the project, I think it is a huge challenge sometimes to communicate with the Cambodians. We can install the solar panel stations for them and also install the LED lights, but I think it is also important to tell them how to maintain the system and especially how to repair it, because usually the situation that happens is that their systems break down and they don't know how to replace the lights. It is pretty simple, but we need to provide the knowledge.

And why did you want to come to Cambodia as opposed to one of the other projects?

Well, there were several countries we could choose from—mainland China, Cambodia and Rwanda. I chose Cambodia because I am really interested in the country's history and the Khmer Rouge, and I also want to know how the people are here.

Ben, PolyU:

My name is Ben and I am a year-one PolyU student, studying engineering and physics.

Can you tell me a little bit about what is going on here?

Yes. We are building the solar station for the villagers, and we are doing some indoor wiring for them, so that they can use their LED lights. We are almost done! We just need to connect the wires right for the controller and the batteries. I think we will finish on schedule. We have done everything in our plan so far.

And how do you feel?

I am a bit tired. We have to wake up very early in the mornings, and we don't get to sleep until late at night because of the planning. However, I think it is worth it because I am learning many things—how to work on a team, and practical skills.

What are the main difficulties you have encountered along the way?

Well, for me, I haven't done anything like this before. Everything is a new experience. I haven't had the opportunity to work with others, learn from them and apply skills in this way before.

And do you truly believe the project has a positive effect on the people living here?

I think it does, yes. We are building the electricity for them, and they can use this in their daily lives. It is a huge help to them, and the joy we bring to them in doing this is obvious. It is such a refreshing experience because not having water and electricity in Hong Kong is practically unheard of. I think it is very important that we have some

kind of experience of how others live.

Community Feedback

Interview One:

In what way or ways does having the solar panel affect your life?

It really helps me. Before, I had no light like this, but now I can do the silk scarves at night too, which helps me to make money.

Are there any problems you have encountered with the students being here?

No, I am just happy they are here.

Do you hope the students come back next year?

Yes, very much.

Can you describe the work of the students?

Really positive and hardworking.

In what way, exactly, will this improve your living conditions?

I can do 50% more work. This really is a big difference for me and my family.

How much money do you spend on food each day?

It costs me around three to five dollars to feed the family. This also pays for the kids to go to school. We have just enough money to live, but only just.

What do they eat?

Mostly fish.

If someone were to fall ill in this family, how would you solve the situation if you had only enough money to live?

We would have to borrow money from the neighbours. This is my big worry.

Do you have any suggestions for the students or the project as a whole?

Well, not much, actually. I would like there to be some sort of dialogue between the students and the other locals. The main station is outside my house, and some people think that the students have helped only me and my family, but this is not the case. I would like there to be a notice on the equipment explaining in English and Khmer that this station is helping many people and not my family alone.

Interview Two:

Hello, my name is Srey Meas.

When did they put the original solar panel there?

June 2015, at the beginning of the month.

Does it still work?

Yes, it does work and it works well.

How has it changed your life?

Before, I had to use kerosene. Even in the nighttime I can use this light, and it is much, much better.

Do you work?

A little bit. I try and make some leaf lattices, but I also have to look after the kids. My husband works in construction. It is very hard.

Are you happy to see the PolyU students here again?

Yes, very happy.

Do you hope they will be back?

Absolutely.

Any problems at all, or ill feelings in the village?

No, everyone is very happy and using it well, so it is good.

Interview Three:

My name is Ouch Poyn.

When did they put the solar panel there?

In 2015, almost a year ago now.

Does it still work?

It still works, but not as well because of the wire clippers and controller.

How has it changed your life?

It's good because we used to use kerosene and we needed to take the battery far away to charge it, which cost 2,000 reels. And now we can use the battery to do the silk scarves, so the kids can study and we can cook.

Are you happy to see the PolyU students here again?

Yes, I am so happy to see them. They come to fix the station and I am very excited.

Do you think that the HK students partly understand your family life?

Yes, I think they do. Well, I think they think we are poverty stricken and that is all.

Do you think that building the solar panels is the best way to serve your needs?

Yes, it is the best way to serve the needs of the community. Actually, though, when it is not the rainy season it is very hard for us to get water. It is also very, very heavy, and we have to pay 300 reels for one bottle. This is our biggest problem.

When the children grow up, what would you like them to do? What sort of life do you hope for them?

When they grow up, I want them to have easy work. I don't want them to have hard work like construction. I want them to find work in the city but not to live there. I want them to come back and live with me on Silk Island in the evenings, but have easy jobs during the day in the city. This is all I hope for.

How many children do you have?

I have three children—two girls and one boy. The oldest one is 12.

Do they go to school, and what is it like?

Yes, they go to school. It is good, but I want my children to study English, and the school does not teach English. There is a place where they teach English, and I would like my children to go there. But I also need them to help me at home so that we can make money and feed ourselves, so I cannot send them to that English place. This is a great sadness for me.

Interview with Manu:

Hello, my name is Manu, and I am a member of YPD, which stands for “young people do.”

What is your involvement with this project?

Actually, YPD was hosting the Hong Kong guys from PolyU. They have projects on Silk Island like installing the solar panels, and we help them to find the areas to put the solar panels in...

So how do you think it's going so far?

Yes, it's very good. I am the referent of the villagers here, and they are really happy when the Hong Kong guys come to help them because they have no electricity and it's very convenient for them.

Have there been any difficulties or challenges?

Yes, we have some problems, but we try to solve them fluidly. We do not care about the problem; we just figure it out.

Do you see this happening next year?

Yes.

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Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Communities

Blanca Garcia

Introduction

In the month of July in 2016, twenty PolyU students, led by a four-person teaching team, boarded a plane to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The majority of the students were nurses in training in the PolyU nursing program, with a few radiography students sprinkled into the mix. These students were 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year undergraduates fulfilling their service learning requirement under the subject, “Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Communities.” The group was journeying to the slums of Cambodia to witness these challenges first hand.

Ms. Phyllis Pang leads this subject, assisted by instructor, Sylvia, and student leaders, Shang and Justin. This was Phyllis’ 4th year traveling to Cambodia and 2nd-year conducting her service learning subject in Phnom Penh. Sylvia had accompanied Phyllis’ team as a teaching assistant the previous year, while Shang and Justin fulfilled their service learning requirement on the same trip. The teaching team had been preparing the students for this journey for eight weeks in Hong Kong. The weeks of preparation were filled with lectures, skill tests, and briefings on their goals for their time abroad.

The students would now have two weeks, July 19th- July 30th, to learn and engage with the residents in the developing communities and hopefully, tackle some of the challenges that were preventing local residents from leading healthy lifestyles. They would present the residents of the slum with health plans, tailored towards each client’s lifestyle in order to have the largest possible impact.

Methodology

Residing in the slums, the occupants have limited access to medical care and attention. While the residents receive free consultations at the government hospital in the slum, they are still required to pay for any medication they may need, which can be a significant portion of their income. Therefore, the most effective method of avoiding any costs is to prevent illness and disease. Healthy lifestyles are one of the many ways to prevent health problems and thus, avoid unnecessary expenses.



This service learning project was intended to provide the residents with the tools necessary to carry out health lifestyles. This is achieved through health education and personalized health plans.

Preparation for the service project began eight weeks prior to boarding their flight to Phnom Penh. In Hong Kong, the students were organized into four teams, where each team would focus on a solution designed to help overcome the challenges present in the slum communities. The four groups were: smoking cessation, alcohol reduction, exercise promotion, and diet modification.

The students would begin their service by conducting health assessments of the slum residents. These were surveys compiled by Phyllis that would provide insight as to what kind of lives, in terms of health, the patients were leading. This included documenting the number of fruits and vegetables they consumed per day, as well as their daily salt, cigarette, and alcohol intake. The survey asked more personal questions as well, such as religion practiced, education attained, and happiness level.

From the assessments, the students would determine which of the four plans would most benefit their patients. Through this process, students were expected to learn about the challenges present in the slum communities that inhibit its residents from leading healthy lifestyles. Further, the students were responsible for constructing health plans to guide their patients to leading healthier lives.

To prepare their health plans, the students visited the local wet market. At the market, the group learned what fruits and vegetables were available to their service recipients, or their “clients” as they referred to them. The students recorded the price of the different fruits and vegetables, as well as meats and fish. This information would aid



in creating effective and detailed diet modification plans.

In the process of their assignment, students were expected to develop a sense of social responsibility and experience the lifestyle lived by some Cambodians. Therefore, they were placed in homestays where they lived out almost half of their stay.

Technical / Methodological Details

99 The project collaborated with Young People Do, a local NGO in Cambodia. The students were also partnered with translators from New Life Fellowship, a local Christian Church. Upon reaching Cambodia, the students met their translators, which they referred to as their ‘Cambodian Friends’.

The translators would allow the students to transcend the language barrier present between them and their soon to be clients, as most of the residents in the slum had not mastered the English language. The translators would accompany the students into the homes of their patients and provide direct and immediate translations.

In order to prepare the translators for the work that would take place, each of the four groups presented their solutions to the New Life Fellowship students – taking them through the four plans: alcohol reduction, smoking cessation, exercise promotion, and diet modification.

Alcohol reduction and smoking cessation had similar plans. Both plans included reducing and tracking the intake of the substance. Their clients were taught relaxation and breathing techniques to curb cravings they might experience. They were also instructed, via a skit, how to resist peer pressure from friends and family. These techniques, of course, were partnered with education on the negative health effects of alcohol and smoking. Lastly, clients were given a black envelope in which they could store any money being saved from a cutback on the substances.



Exercise promotion included cardiovascular exercises for the young and able, and light stretching, for the elderly. The students would guide their clients in the exercise techniques and provide pamphlets for them to follow along with. Exercises were modified to be comfortably done inside the home, or on occasion, clients were asked to step outside.

The final group, diet modification, also presented their health plan. This group pushed the idea of consuming a combination of five fruits and vegetables daily. They were also adamant about having their clients reduce their salt and MSG intake. The clients would be provided with a teaspoon and salt shaker that would help them better modulate and control their consumption of the seasonings.

Once all the groups had presented, one translator was assigned to every two-person PolyU team. With their translator, the PolyU students conducted a mock survey to ensure they were comfortable with the material.

The following Monday the students began their service. The teams met their translators at Samrong Homestay early morning and traveled together to the slum. In the slum, the students were free to wander and approach people in their homes. If the





homeowner agreed to the survey, the teams would go into the clients' homes where one adult would be selected for the assessment. Then, with the help of the translator, the students would go through the questionnaire.

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Along with conducting the survey, the students practiced taking vital signs on their clients. They measured their patients' height, weight, temperature, blood pressure, pulse, and respiration rate. This information was considered along with the health assessments and helped the students construct health plans for their clients.

Wednesday, once all the assessments had been completed, the students visited the local wet market. Here, students flowed through the open air market, where they took note of which fruits and vegetables were available to the locals and at what price.

The students would use this information to help format their health plans. With a better understanding of what is available and most economical, they would be better equipped to put together plans that would benefit their patients.

After working together to construct health plans for their clients, the students returned to the slum communities Thursday and Friday for the appointments they had set up in their initial meetings. They visited their patients' homes and presented the health plan that would lead to the largest impact on the health of their clients. Unfortunately, circumstances did not allow for all the clients to be home at the time expected. Therefore, prompting the students to leave written instruction of their health plans.

Once all the health plans had been delivered, either in person or on paper, the students made their way back to Samrong Homestay. That afternoon, they celebrated the completion of their project with a small ceremony. Students from PolyU, New



Life Fellowship, and Young People Do, shared their experiences and expressed their gratitude for one another. It would be the last day the groups would be together.

Student Experience and Learning

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Eager about the opportunity to explore a new country and delve into a foreign culture, the nursing students signed up for this subject, not fully understanding what it would entail.

“I wanted to know a different culture and get to know the people there. I want to educate them,” is what one student responded when asked why they decided to join the program.

“I wanted to experience a country that is not rich” answered another student.

“This will be a valuable experience for me to explore a developing country and provide service for someone in need. It is also a cultural immersion program to know more about Cambodia,” said a third student, Adrian, a year two nursing student.

With overt curiosity about developing nations, the students enrolled in the subject with expectations and preconceived notions about Cambodia. These ideas would be rejected within the first couple of days in the country and only further negated as the students continued to learn about and explore Cambodia. The disconnect between what they expected and what they experienced left the students feeling confused and overwhelmed with a general set of mixed emotions.

These feelings had a chance to arise at the students’ second debriefing session.

Earlier in the day, the students had paid their first visit to the slum community they would be working in, leaving the students feeling unsure of themselves and their capabilities. The students shared their concerns and bewilderments during that night's reflection session – exchanging quiet whispers and wiping away tears of frustration and sadness.

Noting the high emotions during the session, I asked Lian, a year two student studying mental health nursing, to share what moved her so deeply.

“I feel quite shocked with the experience. These people need more help... we all have a doubt about whether our plan is suitable,” she revealed, “whether it will benefit them.” She took a pause, looking visibly distressed, “the people in the slum have expectations about us and they think that we can help them.”

“Do you think you can help them?” I ask.

“...it is very hard to quit alcohol, but at least we can bring the message and knowledge that alcohol is bad so that they can be aware,” answers Lian.

With hesitations and trepidations, the students begin delivering their service. They arrive at the slum with their partners and translator, anxious to find clients for their health survey. Unfamiliar with the process, the students are timid and reserved as they enter the clients' homes. They find themselves having difficulties taking charge and often step down, allowing the translators to take the lead in the survey.

“This is your survey. This is your client.” Sylvia reminds the students at their debriefing session that night.

The students become defensive and respond by listing the obstacles they faced.

“It's hard to grasp their attention. Some clients have to pay attention to 3 or 4 kids and also us,” they share with the group.

Other students experienced difficulties from not being familiar enough with the survey. “You have to read it and explain it at the same time when we are just learning it,” said another student.

The students continue sharing the experiences they had earlier that day. A number of students are impressed with their clients, mentioning the ones who eat healthy, exercises daily, and uses neither alcohol nor tobacco. “They are quite healthy. They eat a lot of vegetables,” she adds.

However, not all slum residents are as fortunate. One patient does not eat fruits because they are too expensive and many others do not eat meat for the same reason. The students express concern over what type of health plan they will assign to patients with financial limitations. Phyllis instructs these students to work within the

clients' capacities and focus on reducing salt and MSG intake. Once all the students had a chance to share their thoughts, Phyllis wraps up the debriefing session, urging the students to work on the faults that were identified.

The following day the students rise to the occasion. The teams enter the clients' homes with prepared introductions about who they are and where they come from. The students have also agreed on a division of labor within their teams. One partner conducts the interview and engages with the clients, while the second partner plays and interacts with the children, allowing the patient to be more attentive throughout the survey.

The students complete the interviews with notable improvement. One student group took Sylvia's advice to heart and went the extra mile to engage their client. This particular patient was hard of hearing and had mobility restrictions. The students used hand gestures to illustrate the questions while the translator brought out a notepad to more clearly communicate with the patient. When it came time to measure the man's height and weight, the students got creative and sat the patient down on the scale to take down his weight. To measure his height, the students laid the man down and stretched the tape measure beside him.

In spite of improving their performance, the students continued to come across frustrations and obstacles. A number of students had clients that presented them with long lists of symptoms they were suffering from- symptoms ranging from loss of vision to headaches and muscle stiffness. These encounters made it abundantly clear to the students, that there is a serious need for health services in the community. Unfortunately, these are not needs the students can fulfill. The students continue doing their rounds, frustrated with their limited roles, but with a newfound motivation to become nurses.

Wednesday the groups visited the wet market and constructed the health plans for their patients. When they returned to deliver their health plans Thursday and Friday, the pattern of mishaps continued. Not all patients were as excited about their health plans as the students. One patient who was pregnant refused to sign the contract that would bind her to follow the health plan constructed for her. Her plan included reducing intake of certain fruits and increasing intake of other fruits, as well as some light exercise. The patient was experiencing prenatal cravings and could not guarantee that she would only eat small portions of certain fruits. "I will try but I just don't know," she told the students.

Other groups had trouble locating their patients. They returned to their homes and found their client was either not home or preoccupied with cooking or other tasks. Not wanting their plans to go to waste, the students outlined the client's health plan and left a letter for them at their home. However, when clients were home, delivering

the health plan was not all that easy.

The students were having a difficult time explaining some of the concepts in the alcohol reduction and smoking cessation plan, namely the calendars that would be used to track the number of days the clients had been substance free. Each day the client went without alcohol or cigarettes would constitute one happy face sticker on the calendar. However, after expending much effort on explaining the concept, the students decided the benefits did not outweigh the effort exerted.

Finding themselves frustrated with the limitations in place: language barrier, limited knowledge, and even the clients' limited resources, led one group to step outside their role of nursing students. Tommy and Tessa, along with their translator, returned to the home of the man who was hard of hearing and mobility impaired. The pair, with the help of the translator, purchased medical ointment for the old man's muscle pains. When they returned to his home they cooked rice for him as well.

"Why did you help him out of all your patients? What stood out about him?" I asked the pair.

"He is so optimistic. He always smiles to us, he doesn't deserve this, we really want to help him" says Tommy.

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"He has many sufferings, he faces them like it's natural and he will encourage us to face different challenges in life that are not a big deal compared to his" adds Tessa, both notably moved by the encounter with the patient.

Tommy and Tessa are not the only two who were deeply moved by their clients. When questioned, all students felt that they had made a difference in Cambodia.

"Do you think you made a difference?" I asked two students sitting together.

"Yes, they [the clients] promised me they would change their diet" answered Cyrus, a year three mental health nursing student.

"I brought new concepts. An old man that doesn't know how to stretch his muscles, I saw his face and he looked very happy," answered Adrian, a year two nursing student.

Even students who held reservations expressed optimism, "I don't know if it worked or not, but at least I tried my best" answered Choco, a first year nursing student.

The experience and exposure to the slums of Cambodia clearly impacted the students and they began to show appreciation for the privileges they had been granted, "I am very lucky to be a Hong Kong student. In Hong Kong, I can seek medical health very easily and I can find clean water very easily" shares Angela, a second year nursing student. "We should feel really fortunate. We should have more goals in life and

do more things which has a purpose and to help more people because we are more privileged so I want to apply what I have and what I can do to help more people,” says another student.

As the students continue on about privilege and good fortune and as they sit across from me and vouch to work harder to help the less fortunate they overlook the same comments they made on the generosity, kindness, and overall happiness they witnessed among their clients. “I think Cambodians are very kind and are willing to share what they have,” mentions Kenneth, a second-year mental health nursing student. “In Cambodia, happiness level is higher than HK,” mentions another student. “The people in Cambodia are more friendly than Hong Kong people. They are more willing to greet or smile to strangers,” she continues.

The joy received from the interactions with Cambodians was further revealed when it was time to say goodbye. Hugs and kind comments were exchanged between the students and the translators, who played a pivotal role in the students’ ability to deliver service. Emotions were further stirred when it was time to say goodbye to their host mother. These students, without a doubt, would miss Cambodia.

NGO or Community Feedback

PolyU worked closely with two groups to fulfill their mission in Cambodia. The first was Young People Do (YPD), a relatively new NGO established in September of 2015. This group helped organize accommodations and transportation for the students. The second group was New Life Fellowship, who provided the volunteers that helped translate for the students. Translators were a mix of members from New Life Fellowship and had students from all different subjects and adults with different professions- nursing included.



I sat down with three nurses and one nursing student as they told me about their experience translating for the group. When asked why they decided to volunteer their week for the project, they all mentioned aspirations to improve their English, help Cambodians, and a desire to make friends with the students from Hong Kong. One nurse added, “I like to learn more about health education.”

Q. What has it been like to be a translator?

A. "It is hard but I love to help!" answered the first. "I am happy because I want to help the people," answered another.

Q. How do you feel working with your partners from Hong Kong?

A. Our Hong Kong friends speak English similar to us so I like to help them.

Q. As nurses and nursing students, are you able to follow what the students are doing?

A. I know what they are doing, answers one. I have done before, adds the student. We always do in hospital, adds one of the nurses.

However, not all translators came from a nursing background. Sunny, an engineering and architecture student struggled with some of the words, "sometimes it's a little bit hard for me because some nursing words I never use before, and I have to ask some friends how to translate that word," said Sunny.

Q. Sunny, why did you decide to become a volunteer?

A. I'm going to go to Hong Kong at the end of this month and I just want to know more Hong Kong friends and know about their culture and their traditions. So I decided to be part of it, but when I met all Hong Kong students it made me more want to be one of their volunteers because they come here for their study but also to educate our people in the slum so it's a good thing, so I desire to come here every day to help them educate people.

Q. How has it been working with the Hong Kong students?

A. It has been really nice and we cooperate with each other. I can say our work is done very well because the first day we decided to interview 6 people and we reached our goal, the second day we plan to interview 4 people and we also reached our goal. Today is the first day of going back to the homes we interview to educate them so everything is going well.

Q. Do you have any recommendations or changes you think should be made?

A. We should have some change to better understand each other and we can have an MOU, like what we do and what we've done, and also let us know how many volunteers and the rest I think is okay for Hong Kong students. But also I want the Hong Kong students are friendly but maybe have them be more friendly.

Q. Sunny, are you expecting any challenges for the last remaining day of service?

A. I don't think it'll be challenging. More like the first day and second day because we are all strangers but for today and tomorrow there is no more challenge because

we already know them.

Q. Thank you, Sunny! Is there anything you would like to add?

A. Thank you so much HKPU and school of nursing and New Life Fellowship for allowing me to be a part of this program.

Teacher's Feedback

Ms. Phyllis Pang led the teaching team and students in Cambodia. The teaching team was made up of instructor, Sylvia, and student leaders Justin and Shang. Both student leaders shared their thoughts with me at the airport before boarding the flight to Cambodia.

Q: Tell me about yourselves.

Shang: I just graduated from nursing school in PolyU and this is my second time to Cambodia.

Justin: I'm studying year 2 of radiography in PolyU. This is also my second time to Cambodia and we are going to visit Cambodia in the role of student leaders

Q. Tell me about your roles as student leaders.

J. There are duties such as observe their [students'] performance in service and give some comments. Also taking care of their discipline and punctuality so we can ensure everything is smooth.

S. and taking care of their daily lives in the hotel and when we stay in the homestay

Q. How does one become a student leader?

S. We are actually nominated for the Service-Learning Scholarship Scheme by our subject leader Phyllis last year based on last year's performance and participation

J. Before coming here, we have some workshops and leadership training program late last year so they can develop our leadership skills

Q. What kind of challenges do you think you'll encounter seeing the project through as student leaders?

S. Based on last year's experience it might be the punctuality of the students. To get everyone on time, on the bus, get the schedule going, we need to control a bit about this. And the adaptation of the students, most of them, this is the first time to Cambodia. They might have some culture shock or adaptation problems... and we can try to help them with that.

J. This time, we visit the same place as last year so we have the past experience already. We know some of the households so we can give some experience to them and ensure they survive and make them feel more comfortable.

Q. Thank you, guys! Is there anything you would like to add?

S. I feel a bit less nervous than last year because we have less uncertainties than last year so hopefully we'll be fine.

I also got the chance to interview Sylvia and Phyllis after the completion of the project. Sylvia, PolyU alumni and active nurse, shared her thoughts on the students' performance.

Q. Sylvia, what does being an instructor entail?

A. It entails guiding students in terms of course work and giving them advice in their teaching plans. We want to make sure the advice that they give is correct and appropriate.

Q. What have been some of the biggest challenges encountered?

A. One of the biggest obstacles is the language barrier. Having the students use English and then translate it into Khmer and then to give all the information to the local people here I think some of the messages might be lost or might take repeated times for the right message to get through. Also, for people to adjust to the local environment is also quite a challenge for us. We know that here it's hot and humid and the condition might not be as comfortable as if we were in Hong Kong.

Q. Can you speak to the students' experiences with those challenges?

A. I think the students did a great job in being flexible and being adaptable. We also arranged homestays for the students to further help them to blend in the environment. Also being able to partner with the local translators that helped them to familiarize themselves with what is going on here.

Q. How has it been working with New Life Fellowship?

A. They are great. I'm a bit surprised that a lot of the students have some medical knowledge either they are nursing students or midwife students and even they have some medical class within their organization. I think it helped a lot. I think our students actually learned to be responsible and accountable while they are engaging with their Cambodian friends so I think the partnership has been great and benefitting both sides.

Q. You have been going around and observing students as they deliver their service. Has anything stood out to you?

A. One of the things that really impressed us was the improvement of students. How students performed in day one and how they performed in day three or day four. Their improvement was amazing, how they stepped out of their comfort zone and how they delivered their teaching plans confidently. I think in Hong Kong some of the students are timid. We are not used to giving education or talking to people in a bold or in a confident way, but in order to successfully communicate your message you have to have certain qualities and I think the students did a really good job stepping out of their comfort zone because we think what we teach is good for the people.

Q. What do you think the biggest takeaway will be for the students?

A. They are really touched by how warm these people are despite having a lack of resources, people here are still really generous. The students can take this away and once you're back in Hong Kong how you can incorporate this into your profession. I mean, nursing is a serving profession –how you can serve the need of others. The other thing is communication or interpersonal skills. After two weeks of mixing with other students, they have gained a lot of insight in how to interact with others more effectively.

Q. Do you think the students were able to make a difference?

A. I think so definitely. Maybe not at this stage, but the idea is for them, is to inspire them within their own capacity to see the needs of others. This is definitely a big step for them to start thinking... Right now they are still students but maybe three, four years later they graduated, they have the skills, they have the knowledge and they can help others.

Q. Do you think the students were able to make a lasting impact?

A. I wouldn't speculate how lasting or how long-term the effects could be ...but I could see the general environment has been improved. I wouldn't say we could make a long-lasting impact on the communities here but we hope year after year we can make some small changes.

Q. What is your biggest takeaway?

A. The biggest takeaway for me is how to motivate others. How to give them advice that will help them grow. How to help them learn from mistakes. It's okay to make mistakes. How to positively construct others is one of the biggest take away for me. I hope the entire teaching team has helped the students in such a way that they would grow and be positively constructed.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add or speak on, something I did not ask?

A. I think service learning is a really new idea and taking students to a place in

a harsher condition. It is not easy for everyone to find their motivations to help others but I think in a trip like this, people are really genuinely inspired to be compassionate. So I think it's a good start. I generally learn a lot from each of these trips and I hope the students will also be inspired. Because of this trip, more students have opportunities to go overseas. Now more students can benefit and I think that is really precious so everyone has a chance to broaden their horizons.

Busy leading her team of students, I was only able to catch Phyllis at the airport before boarding the return flight to Hong Kong.

Q. Why did you decide to conduct service learning abroad rather in Hong Kong?

A. I think it was inspired by the first time when I was here. When I went to the slum I am really touched by those areas. They live in such poor conditions, I mean the hygiene and health conditions. Yes, there are some conditions that are not good enough, but I think to me, they are more desperate than those people in Hong Kong... I want to inspire my students so they can have more insight on how desperate people can be and live under such conditions and they can do a little bit more to make the world better and to make those people in the desperate condition a little bit better.

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Q. Do the students walk away with that insight? Is that goal accomplished?

A. Yes, I do think so because last year I had 30 students who joined me and 18 were from the nursing department and I think most of them did indicate they would continue serving the communities and I did succeed in recruiting some of them. It really indicated they are committed in service learning and helping those desperate people.

Q. We are running out of time, but was there anything that stood out about this group of students?

A. At first, some of them are not working quite well as a team, but here I can see that they are showing much improvement and some of them are really stepping out of their comfort zones. I have one student who likes cleanliness very much and he doesn't mind sitting on the floor and doing all those demonstrations with the people in the slums. Some of the students are really touched by the recipients and I can see some of them are really touched and changed and transformed.

Phyllis was awarded the 2nd Improving the Student Experience Award for her efforts in Cambodia.

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PolyU Volunteers (Faculty and Staff)

Blanca Garcia

A group of 19 staff members from PolyU travelled to Phnom Penh for the week of 12–18 June 2016. They found themselves in Cambodia on their quest to further understand the meaning of service-learning. Their backgrounds differed significantly, and at the start of the project, the only things that connected them were their employment with PolyU and their interest in service-learning.

The differences in their understanding of service-learning mirrored the differences between the staff members who arrived in Cambodia. A handful of the group members were professors at PolyU who conducted their own service-learning courses, a number of whom also had experience leading student groups abroad. However, the team also included staff members who were fairly unfamiliar with “service-learning” and had not yet come to fully understand PolyU’s definition of the term.

This project was a collaboration between the Office of Service-Learning and the Communications and Public Affairs Office at PolyU. All of the staff members landed after responding to an e-mail and information sessions advertising the trip. It was the first time many of their paths would cross—their differences were so large that it would take an extreme situation such as travelling to Cambodia to bring the group together.

This led to different expectations and assumptions about the country, which threatened to result in the staff walking away having interpreted their experiences in drastically different ways.

Upon reaching Cambodia, the group did not waste time in immersing themselves into the culture. They visited historical sites and different areas of the city. They even attended a cultural learning centre in an attempt to begin understanding the culture and how to navigate within it. Only after the completion of these activities did they begin their service project.

The service project had been planned in advance for the group. They were dealt the responsibility of painting the outside of two recycled shipping containers. The two containers were placed in a primary school, where they would serve both the schoolchildren and the community as learning centres. As the group embarked on



their painting project for the newly repurposed containers, they decided they would also take on the task of installing a green wall in the hopes it would help regulate the temperature inside one of the containers.

Eager to begin their projects, the staff gathered at the school with lush green plants and buckets of paint. The school kids immediately showed an interest as they timidly made their way over to look on from a cautious distance. That night, after completing their first day of service, the staff convened for a debriefing session. Having been exposed to the disparities of Cambodia earlier in the week, the staff expressed their frustration over their limited role and their eagerness to meet the communities' many needs.

"Can we involve the (local primary) students?" asked one staff member, referencing the lot of children who had gathered to look on as the staff painted at the schoolyard.

Another staff member concerned about the distraction they had become for the children chimed in: "Are the teachers okay with us being there?"

"How can we meet the teacher's needs? How can we help them?" asked another.

"Instead of putting in containers, why not help repair the school? Why not make a better environment there?" asked yet another.

With a larger vision in mind, the group members continued on with their list of suggestions. The list trailed on, and soon the staff moved from the topic of the school to the slum communities of Cambodia, insistent that their reach be extended and



made more effective.

Along with the new ideas came the inclination to collaborate further with the locals. The conversation taking a turn yet again, one staff member observed that local contact was important and the most probable way to avoid challenges.

The following day, one could see the effects the debriefing from the previous night had on the group. On the way to the school, one staff member stood up in the bus and initiated discussion that would allow the group to divvy up the work and be more efficient with their time. The group nearly completed the painting work that day.

Thursday would be the staff's last day for service-learning. On Friday, the group would play games and hold workshops with the school kids. Motivated to begin planning the games and workshops, the staff completed their painting with time to spare. They quickly jumped in to help the student groups, alongside whom they had been working, to sand and paint the furniture that would later go into the containers. Their efficient demeanour also gave the staff some idle time in which I could further inquire about their experiences throughout the week.

Amy Ho, Department of Applied Social Sciences

Q: Why did you decide to join this trip?

A: I've been teaching a service-learning subject in Hong Kong, and I've found that it's a wonderful way for students to learn. We don't have a fixed syllabus, so they're able to exercise their creativity. They have the chance to work together as an interdisciplinary team. It's a great way to connect the students with the community and use what they have learned and serve the society. It's a good way to build up civic responsibility. I think it's great!

Q: What are you hoping to learn from this trip?

A: I really want to know about what students learn when the service subjects are conducted outside Hong Kong, their experiences with cultural exposure and maybe how you are going to make use of everything to achieve your goal when you are in a



group or society where you don't have many resources. The other thing is, I learned there is quite a number of social enterprises in this country. I'm doing research on social enterprises, so I really want to learn how they operate and what effect they have on the livelihood of average people.

Q. Is there anything so far you think you will take away with you and apply to your classroom as a service-learning instructor?

A. I want students to learn that although we are living in a very different society, we need to learn to make use of what we have—not just material things, but your talent, your creativity—to make the best use of that to help people in need. In particular, I'm doing a service-learning subject on environmental protection, and this works quite well with what I'm trying to teach my students.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience?

A. It's good to have some things that are unexpected. If you know everything and what to expect, sometimes you lose your excitement, but it's just good enough. The amount of information we get is good enough, so there is nothing more I want to ask for.

Crystal Yuen, Department of Applied Social Sciences

Q: Why were you interested in joining this trip?

A: Because I am teaching students of service-learning, and it was a good chance to step into the shoes of students to deliver direct service in Cambodia.

Q: What are you hoping to take away from this experience?

A: How I can make a difference in the children living in Cambodia. I would also like to share with my students how they can serve the children in Cambodia and how they can apply their knowledge to change their lives. They can also learn from the students here. They can learn management skills, leadership skills and how to cooperate with each other. They can also learn from the locals here, their wisdom and how to live

with the culture.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the project the staff is working on?

A: We are doing two containers together with the students from the Computing project. The students will install the solar panels, and we will do the decorations. We will also do some games with the children at the end of the service. We will also do a green wall.

Q: How has it been delivering the service?

A. This is the very first time I have painted! I am quite excited about it.

Q: What have been some of your thoughts on the students who are here delivering service (Computing Subject/Tech4D)?

A. They are very professional.

Q: Is there anything you'll take away and apply to your own classroom?

A. I will tell them about the slum community. You never expect it when you live somewhere in a developed country.

Q: What are you expecting for the next couple of days?

A: I will learn how to apply my knowledge and skills in the service-learning project and also what my strengths are. I will try and reflect on how I can do better in the next similar kind of job.

Q. How has it been working with the staff?

A. I think there is lots of synergy among the members and colleagues from different departments. One colleague from Civil Engineering told me to be careful when standing on the chair because it may not be



balanced. Some staff members take management roles. Some colleagues have much interest in plants and share their experience; they know what types of seeds are strong enough for this hot weather. So they are bringing their expertise and even interest to the project.

Q: Is this your first time in Cambodia? Is this what you expected?

A: This is my very first time in Cambodia. This is not very much what I expected. I have never seen children walking around naked. And clean water is very common, but it is not common here, so it is different from my expectations.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add?

A: I think this is a life-changing experience.

Daniel Tsang, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Q. What made you interested in this project?

A. I have always had an interest in voluntary service. I have been on volunteering services locally and overseas. This is actually my second time in Cambodia. That's for the service part. Learning is quite new to me. Service is easier to understand and easier to do, but to put together how to make people, students or even myself learn through service is something new to me, so I find it quite interesting. I would like to observe people who have experience organising this and how to organise a trip like this for students, make things work, make it sustainable and broaden the effects. Most of the time we just do it by ourselves, but if we could promote others to also do it, it would be much more effective.

Q. Has this trip helped you better understand service-learning?

A. Definitely! It's a direct observation of what other people are doing. I'm also part of a team group, and that's very important because otherwise it's all theoretical. However, it's quite different in reality, and it takes time to perfect your skills and also improve your teaching quality. We would like to attend the debriefing sections and see the students' feedback—that would be most useful. It could help us think about how we will do it in the future when we have a chance.

Q. Do you plan to get involved with service-learning after this trip?

A: Yes, definitely! Actually, even before this trip, I submitted a proposal for service-learning. It was turned down in the first round. During the discussion, I learned a lot about what the concerns were. In the second round I revised it, and it was actually approved a couple of weeks before the trip. Joining this trip will help me decide how to revise and organise the future of service-learning.

Melissa Wan: Alumni Affairs and Development Office

Q. Why did you decide to join the trip?

A. Service-learning is mentioned often in our university, and I wanted to come here to see what it was really like.

Q. What is your understanding of service-learning now that you have taken part in it?

A. I've learned more about this programme, and I do think that we learn from the service and that the service helps the local community. It has its value.

Q. What are some of your thoughts and feeling about being here and delivering service?

A. I think we can always improve in the next year. I think the staff and students can do more planning. Most of our time is devoted to painting, which is quite mechanical, and you do the same thing, which is very simple, but the human capital could be better used. We can think of how to plan to help the school develop better. Like the playground—there is much space, but it is not used. Maybe we can put in a football field. Maybe we can build a small canteen to serve the students. We need to talk to the school principal and staff to identify the problems and what areas they can improve. For the work, like painting, we can invite the local staff and even some of the pupils because it is really too simple. So I think it can be better designed.

Q. Now that you know more about service-learning, do you think you will become involved?

A. I think there are many spaces where you can do this, but you always need to plan and think about it. Sometimes your thoughts can contribute more than what you can actually do. In a day or two you are limited with what you can do, but your ideas, together with financial support and the participation of local communities, can help you do more.

The day ineluctably ended and the group reconvened at dinner to celebrate the completion of the project. Dr Stephen Chan seized the opportunity to prompt the staff into a debriefing session. “Have you changed in any way?” he asked. No one answered the question directly, but the silence that filled the room as everyone lowered their gaze to the tables overrun with food was more than telling. Perhaps prompted by the realisation of the changes they experienced, or by the stark reminder of the privilege that had allowed them to travel to Cambodia and dine at a choice restaurant, a number of the staff left the meal early to purchase supplies for the workshops and games that would take place tomorrow morning.



Friday morning restored everyone's spirits as the group prepared the toys and materials they would need for the day's activities. Their enthusiasm could hardly be contained as the group sang in unison on their way to the school, rehearsing the songs they would teach the children. The staff, filling the bus with childlike excitement, made one wonder exactly who was benefiting most from the service.

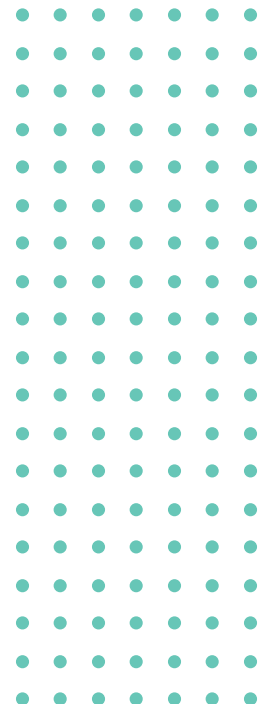
Arriving at the school, the staff broke off into groups to lead the different stations: picture literacy, two ball game stations, a jump rope station, indoor games, arts/puzzles, singing and snacks. Within the hour, the school was transformed. The kids who had been so accustomed to running around and creating games of their own now stood quietly in orderly lines awaiting instruction.

The kids initially struggled to understand the foreign games and songs, but they caught on unabashedly. In no time, they were enveloped in laughter and enjoyment at the novelty of the activities. The time flew by as the children enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The morning came to an end, and as the children were released for lunch, the staff were also released from their service duties. Having completed their project and workshops, the staff had the remainder of the day to themselves to explore Phnom Penh.

It is difficult to say exactly what type of effect a trip such as this has on a number of individuals, even more so when the group is as varied as this one. However, we do know this: the group was sent to Cambodia to not only learn more about service-learning, but also garner support for PolyU's mission—to foster a community in which all are on board with service-learning and all have reached an unspoken consensus on its importance. We know there is a multitude of differences in between



staff and students. However, we also know that when placed in Cambodia, staff and students may share more similarities than differences and ultimately walk away from an experience that challenged them and pushed them into previously unexplored spaces within themselves.



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Technology 4 Development Student Self-initiated Project

Blanca Garcia

Whilst the staff team members were only beginning to familiarise themselves with service-learning, a team of 13 service-learning connoisseurs carried out a project of their own in Cambodia. This group travelled under the name Tech4D, or Technology for Development. They arrived in Cambodia on June 11 and would remain until June 19. Similar to the staff team, it was the first time the members of this group, made up of students and PolyU alumni, were meeting one another.

This group also commenced the project after responding to an e-mail, but the difference was, these students had more than their share of experience with service-learning. While the staff team was only beginning to explore the benefits of service-learning, the Tech4D group was fully engrossed in the concept. The members of the group had fulfilled the service-learning requirements in place for all undergraduates. Many of the students had even enrolled in second or third service subjects and continued their work in service-learning as student helpers. Now, their dedication to service-learning had led these students to volunteer their time to a week-long project in Cambodia.

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Dr Grace and Dr Stephen would largely not be overseeing the Tech4D project. Rather, the team was given a set of guidelines, and the group members would be responsible for attaining a finished product. Thus, they were responsible for creating an action plan and carrying it out to execute their mission. Their assignment included transforming an empty shipping container into a library/learning centre for the children of a primary school.

To develop a plan, the group divided itself up into four teams: the solar panel, interior design, computer lab and water collection system teams. The solar panel team would assemble solar panels on the roof of the container to power the 10 LED lights and 16 USB chargers to be installed inside the container. The interior design team would paint and decorate the inside of the container and install the lights and chargers.

The computer lab team would work at a different site. They would set up a computer lab and provide the computers with offline e-Learning resources. This project would be carried out in a secondary school that had the means to support and maintain the computer lab, which unfortunately the primary school did not have.

Finally, the water collection system team would devise a contraption to collect rainwater. This would allow the schoolchildren to wash their hands and feet before entering the learning centre. The team would also create a concrete path leading from the water container to the learning centre to ensure that no mud would be tracked inside. The group also entertained the idea of a green roof to regulate the temperature inside the learning centre. However, upon reaching Cambodia, the group decided that a green wall would be more feasible and that the staff team would carry out this project instead.

Nevertheless, after the group experienced the intensity of the heat and humidity Cambodia could muster, members became determined to make some contribution to cooling the container. They decided to attach a section of sheet metal to the roof. They built an L-shaped structure to which the sheet metal would be attached, creating distance between the sheet metal and roof. The idea behind this design was that the reflective surface of the metal would deflect the sunrays, thereby cooling



the container. Furthermore, the distance between the sheet metal and roof would hopefully prevent any heat retained by the metal from transferring to the roof.

As the group planned and designed the system, one could not help but notice the ease with which the students adapted to the realities of service-learning. Their expertise was most likely cultivated from their many experiences with service-learning projects. The students' answers as to why they had decided to dedicate a week of their summer to service-learning further confirmed their familiarity with the subject.

Yuhan Ye, a recent graduate of PolyU, decided this would be a fantastic graduation trip: "I am very excited about it," she said.

Another student, Tiffany Kwok, shared that she had built a good relationship with the Cambodians: "The relationship is quite important, and it really makes me want to do more things here so they can benefit from us and also, so we can benefit from them," she said benevolently.

A third student, Erin Wu, had a different answer still: "I came here because it is important to make the service-learning project sustainable," she explained. Erin had recently returned from a similar service project in Rwanda. "The projects in Rwanda and Cambodia are offered by the same course, which is in the computing department.

Although the experiences are different because the projects are done in different places, the things we gain in both services may contribute to the new project, making this project more sustainable," she said.

The students' motivations for joining the project varied. Their interests were different as well, but their sense of genuine passion, partnered with experience, was an unquestionable constant.

The students' experience with service-learning became evident yet again when



they were asked what challenges, if any, they were expecting to encounter with their project. Each student provided a full and lengthy answer. They explained the necessity and importance of planning for the project, all the while understanding that complications were customary.

Yuhan, from the computing team, talked about the setbacks the team was expecting: “We are not sure about the local electricity and whether it can support so many computers running together. We

have created a floor plan, but we don’t know if it can be carried out in Cambodia or whether we will have to redesign it.”

Tiffany, another member of the computing team, mentioned how most of the work was done back in Hong Kong: “We need to set up everything in HK—buy all of the laptops and prepare the server and put e-materials on it, make sure it works well, put together a user guide.” The team’s thorough preparation and anticipation of setbacks allowed them to carry out their project in the two days they had planned, undeterred by having to redesign their original floor plan.

The water system component, however, did not lend itself well for preparation. Erin elaborated, “The materials are too big, so they have to be bought in Cambodia. Most of the preparation done in Hong Kong involved designing





the system and trying to figure out risks and anticipate challenges.”

However, even these tasks proved troublesome. Erin would be assisting with a service-learning project in Rwanda up until a week before the Cambodia trip. Two other students from the five-person team would be traveling before joining the others to depart to Cambodia and thus, were also largely unavailable for planning. This undoubtedly contributed to the setbacks experienced in Cambodia.

Having reached Cambodia, the group had yet to purchase all of the supplies necessary for their project. However, without a translator, and without knowledge of the city, this relatively simple task consumed more time than needed. This first setback marked only the beginning of a string of challenges the group would face.

After purchasing their supplies, the team began building their L-shaped structure. Attaching the sheet metal to the L-shaped structure was difficult, but the team persevered. Things were moving along successfully, and on Wednesday the team began mixing cement. The students quickly realised that none of them had ever mixed cement before. The following morning, the team was puzzled to find that their concrete mix was not holding, as none of the bricks they had tried to lay were bonding.

Dr Stephen, along with members of the staff team, jumped in and helped the students find more appropriate ratios for the mix. The day was looking up as the students fixed their cement compound and more of the supplies arrived at the school.

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Among the supplies, two large concrete cylinders were delivered to construct the base upon which the water tank would rest. The students were responsible for moving the cylinders to their permanent location, closer to the containers.

As the students tried to lift the cylinders, to their surprise, they were much heavier than expected. After deliberating, they decided the most practical way to move the cylinders would be to roll them. The students pushed the first cylinder onto the ground and almost immediately it collapsed under its own weight, snapping into four sections. With the cylinder in pieces and the group out of options, they began deliberating once again.

Tech4D could not afford to break the second cylinder or wait for another cylinder to be delivered. They were on a strict time schedule and had no option but to construct the base with the materials available. They bounced ideas off one another and decided to use a metal rod to lift the cylinder off the ground, allowing a group of four to grip the cylinder from underneath and transfer it to its permanent location. It was a success!

Nevertheless, there was still much work to be done, and the clock was ticking. Bricks had to be laid inside the cylinder to support the water tank, which would become much heavier once filled with rainwater. The pipes had to be put in place on the roof and connected to the water tank. Once those tasks were completed, the cement path leading from the water supply to the containers had to be built. This step also

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included digging out a trail to trace the path and allow for the concrete to be poured. The team had more than their share of work to complete in the following two days.

On Thursday, the students and even some staff members were able to dig out most of the path to create a base for where the cement would be poured. Whilst a number of students were working on that task, the remaining group members were busy setting up the PVC pipes. They made a running incision along the length of one pipe into which the metal sheet was placed. This contraption allowed the water sliding from the metal sheet to be guided directly into the pipes.

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The next step was to connect the pipes on the roof to the water tank below. In a flurry of confusion, one of the students cut the pipe that would lead down to the water basin too close to the container. Now, when attempting to connect the two areas, the pipe leading down from the roof missed the water tank by approximately 8 inches. With no spare pipes, the students could neither replace the pipe that was cut too close to the container nor connect a smaller pipe to make it the appropriate length. Regardless, the students connected and disconnected the pipes over and over, trying to angle them just the right way, hoping to find a solution. There was no avail. The students had no choice but to wait until the following day and purchase more pipes.



Friday, the last day of service, arrived. The project was still not complete, and from the looks of it, completing it would not be easy. The cement had to be poured for the pathway. The gravel that was ordered had not yet arrived, and the students were unsure whether it would be the correct size. The pipes also had to be connected and secured. This group would need every second of the day to finish the project. Even if the team managed to finish on time, they would not be granted the privilege of seeing their finished project after the concrete had properly set and the water tank had



collected rainwater.

As the students worked against the clock, they were not spared further obstacles. The new PVC pipes allowed the two areas to be connected, and there was now one continuous flow from the sheet metal all the way down to the water tank. The pipes, however, refused to be locked together. The students tried hammering them into place, drilling holes and using zip ties, and yet they would ineluctably slip apart within minutes. The team finally began making progress when they combined a number of their approaches. Screws in combination with the zip ties and lots of grout appeared to hold the pipes together best.

As a number of the students worked on securing the pipes, the remainder of the team mixed cement and waited for the gravel to be delivered, all of them anxious about the ominous clouds overhead. With time running out and a promise of rain, the students could not wait for the gravel to arrive—they began to pour the mixed cement into the pathway. The students had completed a third of the pathway before the gravel finally arrived. They laid the gravel down on the remaining section of the path.

The project, while not faultless, was progressing. The water system looked about complete and it was time to test it. The students hauled up several five-pound gallon bottles of water and poured the water over the metal sheet in an attempt to simulate rain. The group turned the valve on the water basin, but not a drop of water came out. Meanwhile, a puddle of water on the roof continued to grow.

Several students suggested that more water was needed. Everyone agreed, and they ran to fill more bottles that they then pushed up onto the roof. The new bottles were also poured onto the sheet metal, and again no water appeared to fill the larger basin.



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The students were disheartened; only a couple of hours remained, and they did not know where to begin looking to fix the problems. Dr Grace and Dr Stephen were called on to help.

After examining the system, the two professors realised there was not enough of an incline to drive the water down the pipe. As a quick fix, they placed three bricks near the apex and two bricks in the centre, not only creating the incline needed, but also securing the sheet metal into the pipe. Two more five-gallon jugs of water were poured onto the roof. This time, finally, there came a trickle of water from the faucet.

The students and professors relaxed, breathing easier. It appeared the group would finish the project on time. Wrapping up their project, the water system team made their way over to help complete the concrete path.

With all hands on deck, the students finished the project just in the nick of time. The group began packing the supplies and the clouds released a sprinkle of rain, warning of the storm to come. It would rain heavily that night, and the students could only assume that the water system would work as well with the rain as it did with the gallons of water. The students loaded the supplies onto the bus, hoping the rain would not interfere with the setting of the concrete.

The Tech4D project, and the water system in particular, was built on a crux of mishaps. Yet, when the students





were asked if they considered the project successful, they answered yes.

Noting my hesitation, the students elaborated on their answer.

“No one had ever done that before,” said one student.

“Yes, no one knew how to do that, but it really worked,” chimed in another.

“There are discrepancies between theory and practice, and we really got to see that,” said Erin, who had largely led the water system project.

Acknowledging their setbacks, the students confessed that the professors had to step in and provide guidance as they fell behind schedule.

Erin continued, “I am concerned about quality. I know there are places where we did not fix it 100%. I don’t know how long it will last. No one has done this before. I don’t know how long the screws for the pipes and L-shaped structure will hold. A lot of things were unexpected—during the project I experienced stomach pain and it was very challenging. But it’s a good experience to have—facing challenges—and thanks to my teammates I was allowed to take a rest while they continued working on the project.”

I began to understand. Success, for this team, did not come in the form of a finished product. Success was everything in between. From the start, the students voiced their motivations for joining the team, specifying that this project could only contribute to the sustainability of projects to come.

This experience served the purpose of teaching the students. Time and time again, the students were able to recognise their shortcomings and find the flaws in their



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tactics—never hesitating to admit that they had wasted time, that the structures could have been built to be more durable, and that overall there was room for improvement. These lessons, for them, were proof of their success.



CONCLUSION

Since service-learning became a core component of the institutional strategy at PolyU in 2012, many subjects and projects have been developed. The stories in this book represent only a small portion of what has happened every year. Indeed, they only represent some of the international projects undertaken in summer 2016.

In this book, we document a diversity of projects in some depth. Some projects are relatively new and issues are still being worked out. Others have clearly been going on for years. Good understandings have been established with the communities and partners involved, and the projects are larger, more impactful and sustainable.

Such is our strategy. We believe that in the process of designing impactful service projects for our students we ought to invest in relationships with our partners and the communities involved. Without that investment, we could not hope to achieve lasting impact.

We wish to conclude by offering thanks to those who have made it possible for our students to gain so much through their efforts. The first on our list must be our teachers, who have worked very hard to design and teach service-learning subjects, who stay up at night thinking about their projects and how best to prepare students to go into the community. They – and we – have been aided tremendously by various support units, including our University Health Services, Finance Office, Industrial Centre, Alumni Affairs and Development Office as well as the Communications and Public Affairs Office. The efforts of these units may not always be visible, but they are known to us and appreciated. And of course, there are many generous donors who have supported these efforts financially and in kind. Our projects could not have come about without any of you, and for that we are grateful.

When The Hong Kong Polytechnic University decided in 2010 to make service-learning a credit-bearing and compulsory subject requirement for all undergraduate students, we were full of anticipation but also wary. On the one hand, we were convinced that this was a good step towards enhancing our students' social responsibility, global awareness and ethical leadership. On the other hand, we were aware of the immense challenge ahead. In the years since, we have done all we can to facilitate the development of service-learning subjects and the associated projects. Thanks to the dedication of the staff and students involved, progress has been made steadily and on schedule. When we graduated the first cohort of students in 2016, we all breathed a bit easier and looked back with satisfaction.



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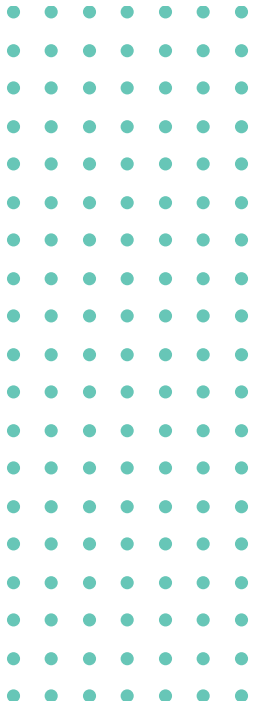
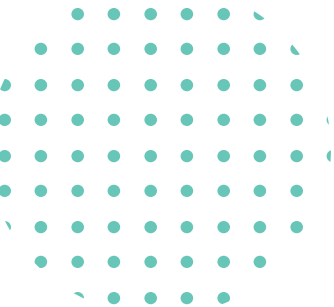
We are particularly grateful that staff and students have taken service-learning to many countries, undertaking challenging projects and devising innovative solutions. They get to know these countries first hand. They experience the countries' cultures and societies, of course, but they also learn about critical social issues, which they help to address. When they do that, they have to apply knowledge and technology appropriate to the issues, taking into consideration local cultures, languages, societal norms, levels of economic development, availability of materials, levels of expertise and the potential impact on the communities involved. They integrate social engagement, global awareness and ethical leadership in a natural manner, under the guidance of their dedicated teachers. It is not easy to imagine a more effective method of bringing all these critical but intangible aspects of learning into the same arena.

We have to thank the students for working their hearts out. More than that, we have to thank the staff for making these projects happen. The professors involved lead the action and deserve full recognition. But there are also the staff in the Office of Service-Learning who set up many of these international projects, and support staff in the many academic departments who assist the academic staff. There are also important contributions from the staff in the Finance Office who have to find ways to facilitate the financial transactions in developing countries, the Alumni Affairs and Development Office and other units who help to raise the needed funds,



the Academic Secretariat who help to devise innovative ways to support unusual schedules, the Industrial Centre who help to train the students in practical skills, the Educational Development Centre who help in staff development, the Campus Development Office who help to provide needed space for the students to prepare, the University Health Service who prepare the staff and students with immunisations and other precautions, and many more. They have all worked hard and the result is there for us all to see. It is evident that service-learning involves a much wider segment of the university community than is normally visible. It is already part of us.

Looking forward, we hope to see more good work done. We also hope to see even more innovative and impactful projects, and more people in the university community being involved. Service-learning is something that all of us can be proud of.





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