

# INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

# 2017



Rwanda



Cambodia

Vietnam





# Table of Contents

Preface .....	1-2
Bios of the Journalists .....	3-4
Technology without borders (COMP) .....	5-26
• Cambodia .....	11-18
• Rwanda .....	9-24
Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Countries (SN) .....	27-74
• Cambodia .....	31-42
• Rwanda .....	43-62
• Vietnam .....	63-74
Serving the community through teaching English (ELC) .....	75-90
• Cambodia .....	
Hospitality Management in Operations in Developing Regions (SHTM) .....	91-104
• Vietnam .....	
Student-initiated Project-Technology 4 Development (Tech4D) .....	105-120
• Cambodia .....	
Service-Learning Programme in Cambodia for Staff .....	121-134
• Cambodia .....	
Takeaways, Improvements, and Conclusions .....	135-136
Epilogue .....	137-138

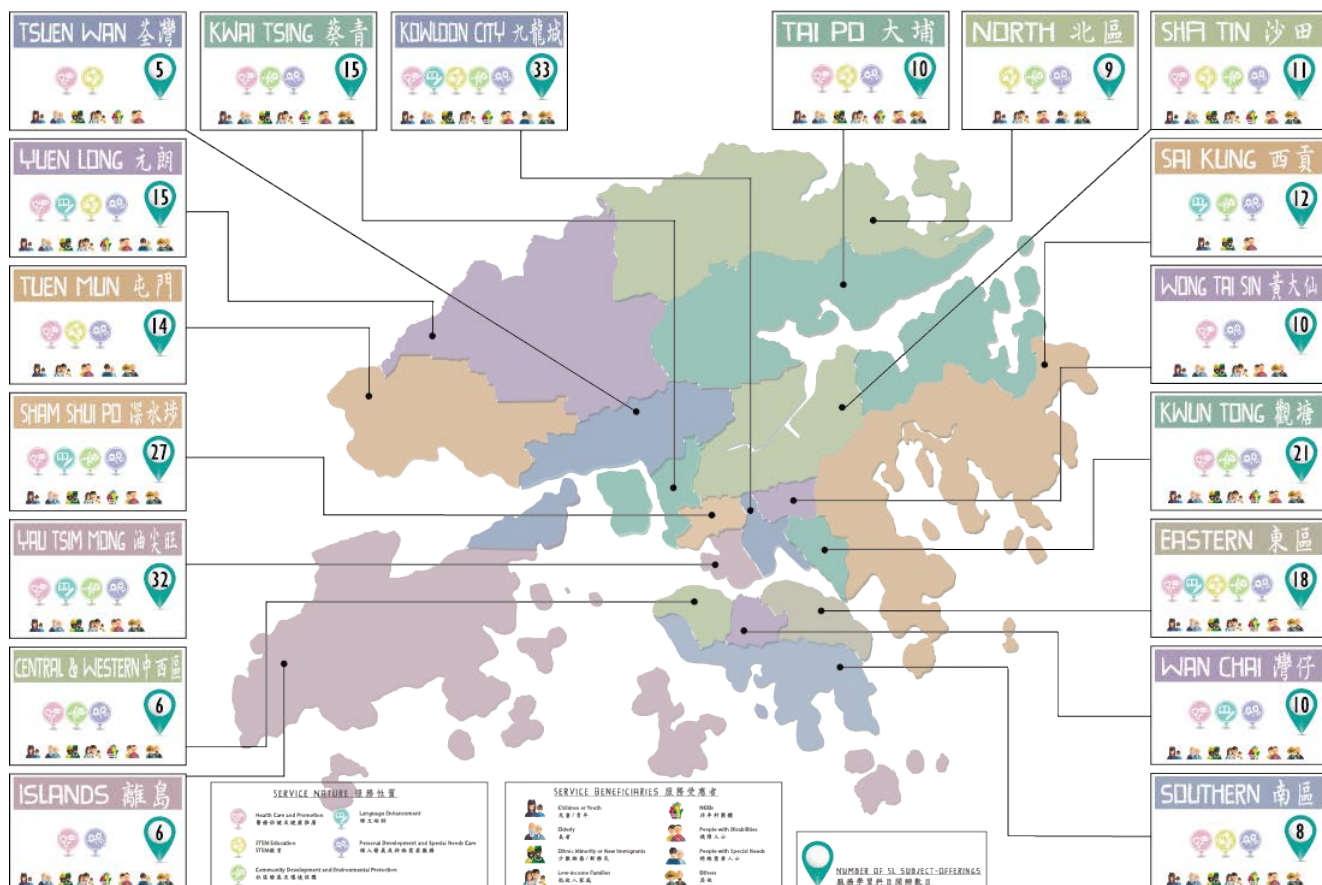
# Preface

by Grace Ngai and Stephen Chan

In 2017, Service-learning at PolyU reached the five-year mark. These five years have been nothing short of a miracle. From service-learning being a virtually unknown pedagogy practiced only by a few teachers, we have reached over 60 subjects today, and there are almost 200 colleagues who are involved in directly teaching the subjects. Our projects have expanded to cover all 18 districts in Hong Kong:

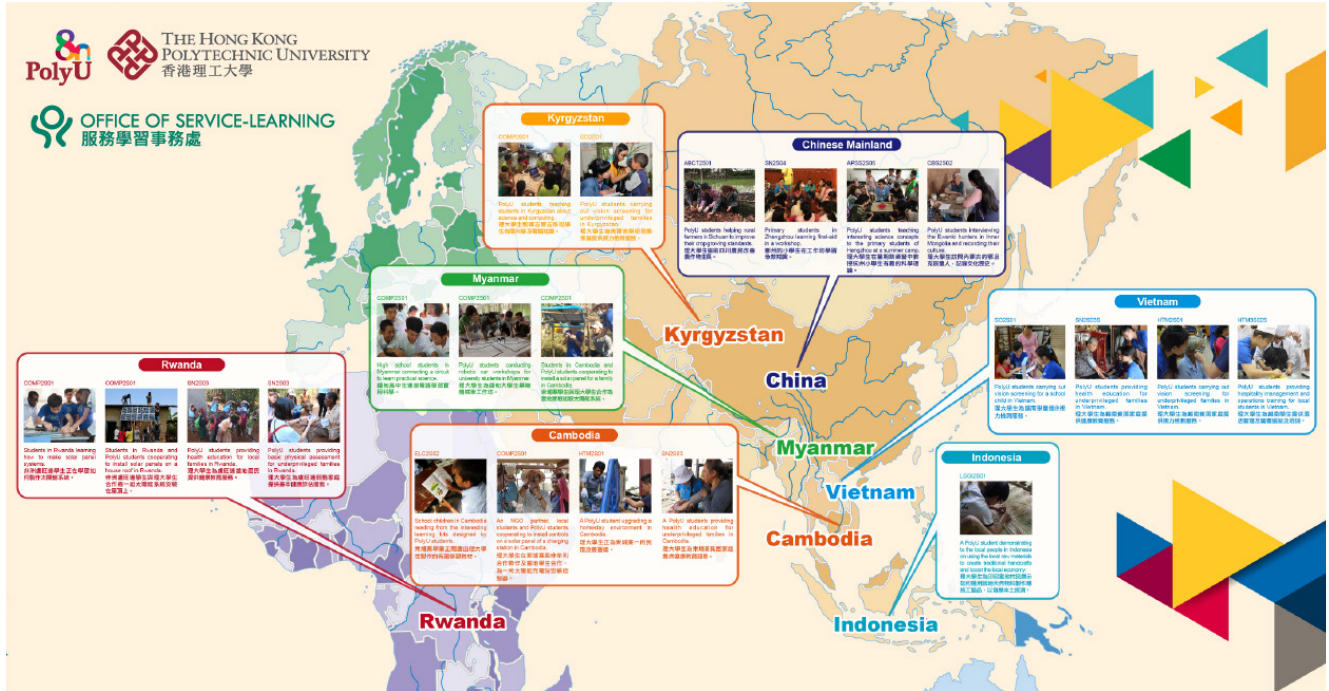


## SERVICE-LEARNING IN 18 DISTRICTS 區區有「理」心





and seven countries worldwide.



Our international partners have also expanded. In 2015, through the University Social Responsibility Network (USRN) headed by PolyU, we started including students from other universities into our projects. Through this program, we have so far played host to students from Peking University, Beijing Normal University, Szechuan University, Washington University in St Louis, and Haifa University.

Our partnerships with higher educational institutions in our international service-learning sites have also deepened. In 2016, PolyU signed an MOU with the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to set up a Hub for Service-Learning and Leadership in Cambodia. In 2017, this Hub played host to 2 leadership subjects and 3 service-learning subjects, and a symposium on leadership and service-learning.

The 2017 cohort of our journalist program – four students from Brown University and two students from PolyU – have spent substantive effort chronicling our international projects this last summer. They have been embedded into our teams, spent sleepless nights with our students, sweated through hot, dirty locales, and immersed themselves into the community to tell their – and our – stories. We hope you enjoy the fruits of their labor.

# Bios of Journalists



**Ben Bosis** is a rising junior with a knack for finding free snacks, climbing things, and leaving his passport at home. If he could, he would major in eating chocolate ice cream and movie soundtrack trivia. Instead, he studies social and economic development, and will probably continue to pursue a career in journalism.



**Amy Hui**, studied in Product Design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and is currently a fresh graduate. She is passionate about travelling as she wants to feel the world, to see things from new perspectives and to make reflection. Through sharing the stories and experience in the journey, she hopes to enlighten people and connect them together to take part in solving world issues.



**Kayla Thomas** is a senior at Brown University, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She is interested in historical sociology and the intersection between inherited trauma, inequality, and resistance. She hopes to pursue sociological research and contribute to positive social change in communities which need it most.



**Carmen Zheng** is a third-year student at Brown University studying Public Health. Hailing from Columbia, Maryland, she is interested in exploring the intersection of healthcare, technology, and the digital media space. With a passion for traveling and storytelling, she aspires to give a voice to those who need it the most.



**Jamie Li** is a Year 3 local student studying Marketing in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She is interested in languages, and she is learning German and taking Translation as a minor. She believes that communication is the first step to get along with each other and erase bias. Enculturation is the core of intercultural learning, which everyone ought to step out from their comfort zone.



**Lucas Troadec** is a senior at Brown University studying international relations. Born in France and raised in Abu Dhabi, he is interested in investigating social injustices across borders. With a passion for traveling, photography and visual journalism, Lucas hopes to explore the repercussions of international relations on people's lived realities through the intersection of anthropology and journalism.





# 1

---

## **Technology without Borders**

Department of Computing

---

Cambodia 30 May - 15 June 2017  
Rwanda 17 June - 1 July 2017

# Technology without Borders

Department of Computing

by Kayla Thomas

## Overview of Purpose & Methodology

This summer a group of PolyU students, professors, and teaching assistants came together with two goals in mind. They sought to create lasting positive change within impoverished rural villages and to learn from the people and communities they encountered. Although only one of the several service-learning projects, the computing team is unparalleled in its preparation and impact. Students commit to weeks of electrical engineering instruction, and additional weeks of manual labor to install lighting and solar panel charging stations in developing countries. This year's cohort included two groups headed to Cambodia and Rwanda. They are one of several groups to embark on this journey since Grace Ngai, the Associate Professor of the Department of Computing and Associate Head of the Office of Service-Learning, and Stephen Chan, the Head of the Office of Service-Learning, founded the project in 2012. In 2010 there was a university initiative to make service-learning mandatory for students beginning from 2012. In 2011 the pilot course was initiated and in 2012 Stephen began bringing students on the project. Computing is key to their commitment to service-learning (purpose) because it provides concrete results and noticeable impact. The two have strong wishes for their student's academic and personal development and they see this project as part of a greater push towards experiential learning.



Dr. Ngai and Dr. Chan posit that there are two dimensions to their expectations. The first is community impact. They hope that the service is both helpful and sustainable. This is apparent if the community makes use of the electrical installations for a prolonged period of time. There have been instances during the early stages of this project, when students installed items that were not used, either because villagers were uncomfortable or afraid of utilizing them. However, as the project has developed, the issue of unused equipment is a rare occurrence. Part of ensuring sustainability is contributing to the local economies. Oftentimes when service groups enter impoverished communities, their contributions unknowingly redirect the demand for goods and services away from local industries. By only bringing what is not available and affordable locally, such as solar panels and wiring, they are able to contribute significant funds to the purchasing of local equipment. This dependence on local goods also broadens the possibility for the communities to continue the projects themselves, without the assistance of PolyU.

The second dimension of their expectation is student growth. One of the main priorities of the service-learning projects is for students to not only expand their potential for empathy but to come face to face with just how fortunate they are. Despite the differences in culture, color, affluence, and education, students should leave these rural communities with an understanding that they are no better than the other, and all deserving of basic respect and human dignity. They seek to unlearn any degree of intolerance and gain a love for meaningful, impactful work.

The work they commit to throughout this course is inherently meaningful due to their strong relationships with local community partners. Local involvement is a vital component to successful foreign service projects because it brings community voice to the forefront of service. PolyU attempts to include the needs and wants of service recipients in every facet of their work. In Cambodia, PolyU works closely with a local non-governmental organization called Young People Do (YPDO). YPDO was founded by young Cambodians who disheartened by the lack of sufficient social services in their communities and eager to forge an alternative. Although the group lacks the resources and manpower to eradicate severe poverty, they have found a way to bring positive social change to Cambodian slums and provinces. Samoun An, one of the founders of YPDO, finds the projects that engage with beneficial for the local community. Panha Ek, another of YPDO's founders, helps connect PolyU to the villages they work in. YPDO also helps connect PolyU to a local University, the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). PolyU and RUPP maintain a relationship in which the former aids the latter in building up their community capacity and provides guidance regarding how a university and a computing program should be run.

In Rwanda PolyU partners with the non-governmental organization African Evangelical Enterprise (AEE) and the University of Rwanda. AEE is a well-established organization that operates out of ten to twelve countries in Africa. AEE also has a longstanding relationship with these communities and ensures that PolyU students are awarded the opportunity to assist some of the most marginalized communities in Rwanda.



▲ Students attended the symposium in the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)



▲ Local staff had a sharing with PolyU students in the African Evangelical Enterprise (AEE)

## Project Details

In preparation for the project, students were provided with two to three background lectures on economically and socially insightful topics. Such topics range from wealth disparity to the digital divide that exists within poor and rural communities. Students were pushed to discuss potential barriers for using technology and appropriate solutions. These discussions feed into their basic understanding of the histories and cultures of these areas. Two examples of such preparation was a screening of the film 'The Killing Fields' detailing the Cambodian genocide from 1975–1979, and the film 'Hotel Rwanda' describing the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. Students were also taught basic cultural history and ethical photography. At the conclusion of these lectures, the students spent weeks being trained in technical skills such as soldering and circuit building. Although the focus of the project is on indoor wiring and social panel assembly, the social and historical aspects of the course are just as important as the technical.



After weeks of instruction, the students travelled to their respective country, met with local partners, and began working in homes. Prior to wiring the houses, the students conducted a survey to assess electricity need, uses, and expenses. They asked the families how many lights they want and where they would like them. Although each home they enter receives indoor wiring, they do not all receive solar panels. Select homes are equipped with solar panel charger stations intended to be used by neighboring houses. The wiring system for each house is powered with a car battery and once the battery dies, it can be recharged at a nearby station.

# Cambodia

## Specifics

The computing project in Cambodia has brought together an assortment of disciplines, nationalities and life experiences. In addition to the forty PolyU students, the team was comprised of four students from Haifa University, in Israel, and several students from RUPP. There were eight groups of five-student, each of which is responsible for designing and constructing a solar panel charging station. A few of the PolyU students come from various engineering disciplines and were distributed amongst the groups. Although both the Haifa and RUPP students are largely unfamiliar with the task at hand but PolyU students help them catch up during the first few days in the country.

Both the PolyU and Haifa students travelled to Cambodia from Hong Kong and stayed in Phnom Penh for the first few days. They have less than a week to prepare their materials prior to beginning their projects.

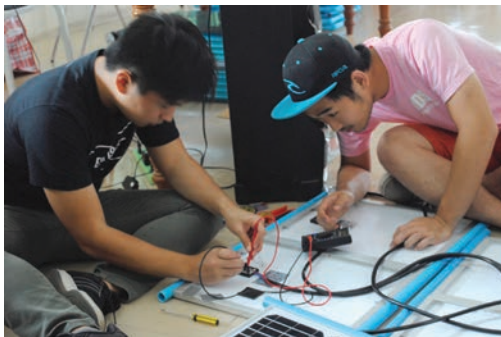
After weeks of preparation, the students began to work in the village, Oneang Hing. The teaching team tried to give each group room to problem solve on their own while providing guidance along the way. Despite this guidance, the groups were expected to be capable and relatively self-sufficient. According to Professor Ngai, the original idea was for the villagers to build wooden stations before the students came. However, communicating their diagrams proved difficult. Due to the time-sensitive nature of the project, the students had no time to gain sufficient experience in assembling wooden structures that able to support solar panels and car batteries. The students learned most of the needed construction skills on the job, primarily from the local community and RUPP students. Letting the community have a role in the production of the structure is also beneficial because it grants them some ownership.

The homes students encounter are poverty-stricken and built with cheap materials such as wood, leaves and mud. Most of the families had only one source of income, if any. This was due to a number of factors, but most notably the need for childcare. One family in particular comprised of a man, his wife and two sons. The father lost his bottom left leg and is unable to work. The family spends 10,000 riel a day and take in a weekly income of 60,000 to 70,000 riel. They are only able to save 100,000 riel a month, the equivalent of 191 Hong Kong dollars. Due to his injury and lack of access to after-school childcare, the father must stay at home to watch the kids.





Every house that was wired was asked preliminary survey questions. However, many skipped key questions during this process. What initially appeared to be mere laziness was in fact the result of severe roadblocks in communication between PolyU students and the local community. This was most notable at the home of Vy, a 54 year old woman with seven children. She was happy to get the solar panel station because there will be no more darkness in the house, and her family hopes to be able to use the television, radio, and fan. They view the solar charging station as essential. It became difficult to get a grasp on any deeper, more complex feelings she had towards the project because the last few questions were incomprehensible for the RUPP students. The latter half of the survey includes more profound and probative questions such as « Name five things you think are essential in order to have a good life? » « Do you feel involved in the project » and « Do you feel concerned about how things would be in the village, after the installation of the solar charging station? What are your concerns » expressed a little uncertainty regarding whether the station would be difficult to use, but it was nearly impossible to understand more, including whether not she felt involved in the project. The questionnaire has not been translated into Chinese nor Khmer, the national language of Cambodia, and as a result several other groups also skip the last sheet of questions. This issue raises concern given that community communication and feedback are key to successful service projects.





Although students found the work incredibly difficult they pushed through, and provided each other with continued support. Some obstacles the groups encountered were attempting to successfully waterproof the structure, battling the sun, stabilizing their construction, and losing screws. Several groups who struggled with the construction portion of their project relied on the men in the community, who took it upon themselves to assist in digging holes and hammering nails. Throughout the process Kin, a teaching assistant, helps the groups secure their constructions to ensure both practicality and sustainability.



## Interview

with Reynold, PolyU student

**Q: Do you believe the charging station is useful to the villagers and the project is sustainable?**

R: I think there are many people who are going to use this battery around this area. For the sustainability, I think it's going to last at least one year, maximum two years I guess. But I don't think the villager will fix it on their own if the panel broke down. I think they will just let it be and go to another area to charge their batteries.

**Q: How have your group dynamics been, how has your group worked together?**

R: For my team, everyone is working hard. Although there is some small conflict, but it's not a big deal. My team is working great and we get things done quick and safe in a proper manner.

**Q: What are some problems that you've had surrounding communication? In terms of with the group or with the villagers or with the faculty?**

R: I don't think we have communication problem with the group. But during the survey interview, we find that it's very hard to communicate with the villagers, especially when we ask an open-ended question. It may also because the RUPP students don't understand the importance of the survey. They just translated what we said directly, they didn't process it first. I guess that's because they were not there when Grace briefed us about the survey. In that time, all the Cambodia people are voting, most of them went to their hometown to vote. After that, we didn't explain to them what the surveys were.

**Q: Why do you think the surveys are important?**

R: The survey is for project improvement next year. PolyU is planning to work in this area, Kampong Speur, at least three years. So the surveys are very important to know the perspective of the villagers.

Q: Do you believe PolyU, RUPP, and the Haifa University students have been equal partners in this project?

R: In the team, we are equal. We did things by division of labor. Like some doing the teaching, some doing the indoor wiring and the main splitter.

Q: Do the recipients and the local community know why you're here and do you believe they are involved in decisions that get made? Do they have a voice in the project?

R: To be honest, I don't know. I think only the program leaders know. We're just doing our job as best as we can.

Q: Do you believe that this project greatly impact the local community?

R: I do believe this project really helps the local community because there is no lights, no toilettes, no other things, only the house with some beds. I think this project is very helpful for them.

Q: How has this experience been for you?

R: I feel that it's a pleasure to be here, work with the villagers, and see how hard they're living. To see things in their perspective, it just makes me a little bit sad. To see how their living condition is, I feel like I should be more grateful for what I have now. And about the teamwork, because I've never been doing stuff like this with a team, so I feel it's very fun. Working with teams, working with people, it's very fun. It increases my teamwork abilities, communication abilities and those soft skills.

Q: Has this changed you in anyway and what are you taking away from this project?

R: I think I've taken teamwork abilities, soft skills, communication skills and just being more grateful I guess. That's what I get from this project.

## Journalist's Perspectives

# Impact

by Kayla Thomas

In total the students were able to wire over eighty houses and install eight solar panels stations. Although the work environment was much more difficult than anticipated, they are humbled by the experience and believe they were well prepared. The students have undoubtedly learned and grown from their involvement with the computing project. Given that many had never worked with wires or solar panels before, they left Cambodia with new sets of skills and perspective. The overall student impact however is noticeably greater for the PolyU students than for the Haifa or RUPP students. Pheara, one RUPP student admitted that she didn't feel very involved because in the project and largely did not understand what was going on. The RUPP students were initially allocated less preparation time than their peers and in addition, had to leave town for a couple days to vote in the national election. For Pheara, her main duty on the team was to interpret and to pass needed materials to her team members.







Although there is significant PolyU student engagement, there is not nearly enough community engagement. Community needs were not taken into consideration when nails were lost, and small wires left to litter the ground. It is important to be more aware of any harms they being inflicted upon the community and minimize such harms as much as possible. Although no noticeable harm arose from these actions, precautions must be taken when working in communities in which children do not wear shoes and medical care is not easily accessible.

It is also vital that students are more properly trained if they plan on building wooden structures. Many of the students had difficulty with basic construction techniques such as hammering nails.

The overall impact on both the community and the students however, is positive given that rural villages have been equipped with lighting and no known issues have surfaced.

# Rwanda

## Specifics

The Rwanda computing program is unique in its degree of social impact. The social impact of providing electricity in Rwanda is greater than in Cambodia because the mountains make it harder to travel and people in these villages tend to have little access to the outside world. They are severely socially isolated from greater society.

Unlike Cambodia, the students only have one day of preparation while in the country. During this day of preparation the seven Rwandan University students are briefed on solar panel assembly and indoor wiring. They attempt to go through two weeks of intense training in merely one day. There are seven students from the University of Rwanda, five of whom study applied statistics, one in alternative energy and another in mechanical engineering. These students are divided amongst the four PolyU teams. Three teams are solely responsible for indoor wiring projects while one responsible for both indoor wiring and the construction of four solar panel charging stations. Instead of building wooden structures as stands for the solar panels, they place the solar panels on top of roofs. This difference in technique is due to the difference in terrain of the two countries.





Students live in the AEE guest house and travel every morning on bus to the village. AEE helps determine which village to go to and which homes to wire. Although there are constant changes to the plans, intentions, and design of the project, the students are able to adapt quickly. In one instance students stayed awake until much past 1AM to prepare equipment. This desire was prompted by a rumor that some homes are denied electricity due to their failure to bribe village leaders. Despite the possibility that such an allegation was fabricated, students wanted to ensure there would be no discrimination over who received electricity and who did not.

Professor Chan constantly reminds the students that installing solar panels are only part of service learning. Their overarching goal is to leave this country with a deep understanding of how these people live. The relationships students have forced with the RUPP students and local community members, are proof that they are doing just that. Many students have grown so close to their Rwanda friends that they remain in contact long after the program has ended.

The students are hardworking, observant, and critical. One student, Arthur, is from a rural village in China in Henan Province and notes that his hometown has similar conditions to the ones faced in the rural villages of Rwanda. His father lived in these conditions and he sees this project as an opportunity to help the villagers help themselves in the hope they can become better off and independent of outside assistance.



## Interview

with Mr. Gaspond, villager



One of the most memorable interviews conducted during this trip was with Mr. Gaspond, a 38 year old villager who has lived in his house since 2003. He was a recipient of the computing project last year, the Summer of 2016, and received indoor wiring and a solar panel charging station. Since then the electricity has been incredibly helpful for him. He now uses lights instead of disposable batteries, and his four kids are able to study at night. Besides the light however, very little else has changed. He still struggles to provide for his family and searches for more out of life. Despite this, the work of PolyU has only aided his predicament. His family did not expect to receive electricity and were grateful when they did. For a few years they had hoped to receive government electricity the electrical posts never arrived. PolyU stepped in where his government didn't. Although the service is free, quality of work offered by PolyU students still has significant room for improvement. Since PolyU's visit last year, the two controllers he was given have stopped working, the PCP lights which were installed in his home last year become exhausted very quickly and burn out after seven months, and the crocodile clips used for the charging station have rusted and ceased to work. He appreciates the electricity but it is different from the government electricity he has yet to receive, because it does not allow him to do many things such as watch television. The government has yet to install electrical lines but if they do they will connect the electricity to his house and he will continue to use the station for the other people in the community. Before this year's project he had many people coming to charge their car batteries. Since they have begun wiring houses he now has more people, at least six a day. Each battery takes maybe all day to charge. Last year the batteries lasted a week, this year they last only two to three days. This may be due to the fact that this year more efficient wires are being used, which are able to conduct more electricity at a time. This year the program has also added radios to the list of items they distribute to the recipients. The additional radio usage may be draining the car battery faster.

Although the service provided by the students do not compare to government standards, it is impressive that they are able to serve as a substitute until proper social services are available. The goal is not to be function as a professional electrical team, but to give assistance in places where decent living conditions are lacking. As a way of making such an endeavor more sustainable and wide reaching, the program train the people who live in his community and provide them with the tools to make repairs themselves.



## Journalist's Perspectives

# Impact

by Kayla Thomas

The students were greatly impacted by their involvement in the project. Group one, comprised of Red Lo, Saga Nshinziriunga, Steven Shema, Weilun Lin, John Cheung, German Cheung, had forged a noteworthy bond. The group was comprised of six students, two Rwandan University students, and four PolyU students, two of whom are international. The Rwandan students were excited for their opportunity to meet students from Asia for the first time. Together the group shared culture, skills and goals.

At the final debriefings students were dismayed by how much they learned about the lives and living conditions of these communities. This project has pushed them to want to help more people in need. For example, on the last day a group encountered one woman in need of a car battery, but they didn't have an extra to give her. Although the Rwandan youth have wired some homes in PolyU's absence, they do not have the proper tools and equipment to finish the job, such as car batteries. For this reason, some homes like that of the woman previously mentioned, indoor wiring but no means of generating electricity.





Overall the students are determined to do more to alleviate the types of poverty they encountered. They arrived at a consensus that the issues prevalent in Rwanda are similar to the poverty and wealth inequality in Hong Kong. Thus, although they may not be coming back to Rwanda anytime soon, they can continue their love for service by caring for their own communities. One student in particular, a second year mental health and nursing student named Laura, is dedicated to helping as much as possible. Because of this she believes PolyU can do more in Rwanda by either increasing their manpower or dividing the work. Laura also strongly believes that the PolyU students should grant the Rwandan University students and local youth significant opportunity to wire homes throughout the project. Although the Hong Kong students may never be involved in such wiring projects again, the Rwandan students and local youth will have plenty of opportunities to continue the work after leave. Thus, although they may not have access to proper instruction after the program is over, they may at least have the experience and knowledge base to successfully organize and become relatively self-sufficient. Such self-sufficiency is vital because some of the Rwandan youth they work with, although helping to wire other houses, do not have electricity within their own homes. To Laura, this is not right.

Both the teachers and local community are satisfied with the work being produced. Innocent is certain that the computing project is changing people's lives for the better. They are attempting to aid the most marginalized of these communities, and doing a remarkable job with what they have.



Journalist's Perspectives

# Future Directions and Conclusions

by Kayla Thomas

Dr. Ngai strongly believes that there is a point at which living conditions are beneath human dignity. The people she has met in the rural villages of Cambodia and Rwanda often fall below that point. One of the many reasons she continues to run the computing project overseas is due to a woman she met in Rwanda the summer of 2016. This woman lived alone in a small mud hut nearly impervious to light and fresh air. Her husband had taken another wife and after discovering his infidelity, ran him out of the country. Upon meeting this woman, PolyU did their best to raise money for her and distribute it through AEE. With the donations she was able to buy a cow and some livestock and maintain some degree of dignity and independence. This is not just one project because it has impacts beyond the current batch of students.

The program itself and the people it attracts, teachers and students alike, are incredibly well intentioned. The project overall however does raise many concerns. The main ones being the quality and sustainability of the project. The quality is affected by the students lack of thorough preparation, the barriers to communication, and the inconsistency with which work is being done. For example some of the villagers from last year don't understand why this year's recipients received radios and they did not. Last year's recipients also have notably shoddier equipment, including the strength of their wires. The communication issues that the program constantly faces is demonstrative of the fact that they should hire a professional interpreter. It is important to guarantee effective communication between the service providers and the recipient. Without this all good intentions are rendered null due to the groups inability to truly understand and listen to the local communities. Local students should not be depended upon to interpret, and should be given the space and time to be more involved in the project. Ethically speaking there needs to be some institutionalized feedback mechanism through which local community members can voice their concerns throughout the year. Such feedback is necessary to inform next year's cohort. The community must know it is okay to voice any concerns, questions or grievances. Beyond including more local voices and involvement, the students, specifically those from RUPP, Rwanda and Haifa University must also be allotted more preparation time.



One of the most surprising facets of the program is that students are not taught to be critical of their work and their involvement. A critical outlook may begin by refusing to look at the villages and communities they visit within a vacuum of poverty. Instead of saying “Oh they are poor we should help!”, student should interrogate why countries and communities are so poor to begin with. Although students were constantly reminded to observe how they living conditions in these rural communities, no real discussions were had regarding the reasons they lived like or larger issues of socioeconomic inequality. By attempting to understand the root causes, students will begin the project more informed and also have a greater understanding of the limitations and overall impact of their work. Through an in-depth discussion on the causes for extreme poverty, students can become more aware of the role that outside intervention can have in harming communities such as these. Thus they can also become more aware of the possible harms that they could be incurring, and be more cautious with their intentions and actions. Students must place their impact onto these communities at the forefront of their discussions and honestly assess themselves and the project.

Some involved in the project have expressed the fear that no matter how much they do, it will not be good enough for the community. They contend that unless the government or political structures change, there is not much they can do to improve the livelihood of these communities. They seem to be spending a lot of resources on things that do not seem to be making much of a difference. Despite this the students and local communities are greatly impacted by their service. These criticisms does not diminish the work being done. As with any project, there is room for improvements.





# 2

---

## **Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Countries**

School of Nursing

---

Cambodia 30 May - 13 June 2017

Rwanda 17 June - 1 July 2017

Vietnam 5 - 16 July 2017



# Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Countries

School of Nursing

by Benjamin Bosis

## Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the term “developing countries”? In modern societies, vaccines and antibiotics have elevated our quality of life beyond the influence of illnesses that have historically posed huge challenges to human life. As a result, we rarely stop to consider one of the most common characteristics of the developing world: disease. Not only diseases like Ebola, Zika, or HIV/AIDS, which threaten to spread and lead to international outcry, but diarrhea, fever, and the common cold also all pose huge threats to populations without the resources to practice the basic health precautions necessary to stop them.

When our students imagine the community they will be going to help, it is easy for them to feel excited about how they will enact real change and make significant improvements in the lives of people living there. It is a significantly sobered and wiser group that leaves almost two weeks later – but for most of the students, there is an immense satisfaction in the amount of work and care they invest in bringing even the smallest of benefits to those they serve. During the project, PolyU students perform wellness checks, extensively survey individual conditions, and perform trainings that cover topics from basic nutrition to treating chronic muscle pain. Because the level of need is often so fundamental, the skills needed to administer check-ups and trainings are not knowledge intensive, enabling non-nursing students to participate alongside those with more experience. But nurses or not, all students come away with a new understanding of the immensely challenging and even more fulfilling world of healthcare, and the passionate and capable people who make it their mission.



## Project Details

The first phase of the nursing project centers on the use of the WHO general health survey known as the Global Servants Health Questionnaire. The students use this survey both because it provides a comprehensive overview of the health conditions which may lead to the problems they are trying to address, and because alongside their project the data they collect in this format can contribute to the general world project in aid of developing communities. Students spend several days getting to know the community, working alongside partner students from local universities to survey the needs that will inform their later training sessions. These questions include diet information such as the level of income for the entire household, the typical amount of fruit and vegetable intake, and the individual's satisfaction with the conditions of their life. The community is informed beforehand about the existence of the project by the NGO through which the university works, but no family is required to allow the students in. Regardless, almost all are welcoming, and seem excited by the prospect of learning something that could improve their own or their children's lives.

After collecting as many individual cases as possible, the students consider each case within a framework of general health guidelines established in their course, which began 8 weeks prior to the trip. Considering factors like nutrition, stretching, exercise, and cleanliness, the students develop individualized lesson plans and return to their clients to share the information that would most benefit them. The return visits are the key to establishing a good relationship with the community, as the return demonstrates the students' care for the individual and offers them the chance to learn something new. Over the course of the project, our students develop a detailed action plan and interact with a culture and people they have never encountered before. They adapt to challenges and struggles that arise while they work, and learn to demonstrate compassion through professional care. In the end, the community members may experience less muscle pain, or may get malaria less frequently - but though the change is small, the experience of intercultural exchange and friendship is not one that either party will soon forget.

## Introduction

In the heart of Phnom Penh, the bustle of an open market, the vibrancy of local fashions, and the sheer amount of motorcycles commanding the roads bring a distinct rawness that is characteristically different than that of Hong Kong. The streets—congested with cars, motorbikes, and pedestrians traveling in every which way— exude an air of unpredictability and liveliness. Unlike its neighbors, Cambodia is not a glossy and lustrous tourist destination by any means. The roads are dusty, debris is scattered haphazardly along the pavement, and poverty is no stranger to the country. However, amidst this landscape of seemingly orchestrated chaos lies a rich and diverse culture, and it is in this very environment that 31 Hong Kong students find themselves transported to this past June.

Led by Dr. Cynthia Wu and Ms. Phyllis Pang, PolyU students who elected to take the course, "Healthy Lifestyle Challenges for Developing Countries", travelled to Cambodia with the aim of promoting healthy lifestyle habits among the local Khmer people. While the project had historically focused on the slum communities residing in the Sen Sok district of Phnom Penh, this year, the School of Nursing aimed to expand its reach west into the Kampong Speu Province. As such, the students were divided into two cohorts: Cynthia's team remained in the Sen Sok slums while Phyllis's group served the villagers of Kampong Speu. In addition, this year's crop of students ranged from a diverse set of disciplines; students from Computer Science, Hotel Management, and Construction were all represented alongside the School of Nursing.

## Methodology & Project Details

Prior to coming to Cambodia, PolyU students spent eight weeks in preparation for the service project. Their time spent in the classroom centered on lectures focusing on four main themes: smoking cessation, alcohol reduction, diet modification, and exercise habits. As the nursing project grew and evolved over the years, it became increasingly evident that a more organized framework was needed in order to gauge the impact of the services being done. In order to meet this need, this year saw the implementation of the ABC model, a conceptual guide which served to help students meet the affective, behavioral, and cognitive components in service delivery. Assistant Leader, Sylvia Tsang, commented that the ABC model was designed to help the PolyU students better measure the emotional components of learning and provide more standardized care to their service recipients. Equipped with a foundational training in health education, PolyU students set out on their trip.

Once in Cambodia, the PolyU students worked alongside student interpreters from the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) to administer a series of walking surveys, collecting data and recording systematic observations about the local residents on foot. More specifically, information regarding the villagers' eating patterns, exercise habits, family history, and other related health concerns were gathered. After obtaining this data, the students crafted a health promotion plan tailored to each individual client's key concerns, and set out to inform the villagers about the health benefits of various lifestyle changes.

According to Student Leader Kartion Cheung, this service learning program had three core aims: (1) nurturing student responsibility in health promotion, (2) generating greater student conscientiousness as a global citizen, and (3) serving people in need. In addition, the nursing project was designed to deliver health promotion with an emphasis on primary healthcare. Since primary healthcare is the first point of consultation in the healthcare delivery process, it tends to focus on promoting prevention. Secondary and tertiary healthcare, on the other hand, are more so concerned with treatment after the onset of illness. By transmitting health knowledge and addressing the causes of disease, PolyU students aimed to help reduce the need and expenses related to secondary and tertiary care. Moreover, the inspiration behind bringing students offshore was to invite them to step out of their comfort zones and unlock a greater opportunity for growth. That is, by being exposed to unfamiliar and challenging situations, students learn to develop beyond their local community.

## Community Background

While walking around the service sites, the communities in the two areas painted striking images to the viewer's eyes. As expected, the slum areas of Sen Sok were densely populated and immensely compacted— narrow walkways wove in and out of the neighborhood, and often enabled only a single lane of traffic to pass by. Moreover, residential plots were nearly glued to one another and many houses were covered or lined with thin metal sheets. The lack of space was further exasperated by the amount of garbage discarded along the roads. Oftentimes, the build-up of food waste, broken glass, and plastic wrappers limited the area of walkability on the already narrow pathways. In contrast, the village in Kampong Speu encompassed a much larger area of land, and residential plots often included spaces to keep animals and grow crops. In such an agriculturally dominant area, it was also quite common to encounter cows and chickens walking alongside the pedestrians on the wide dirt roads. Despite the physical differences between the service sites, the two communities did share some parallel threads. Most notably, both healthcare and health information were neither easily accessible nor readily available at the two locations.





## Sen Sok

In the Sen Sok community, despite having a hospital integrated within the slums, the local Khmer people were often concerned with the affordability of seeking care. In particular, bureaucratic hassles were cited as a common complaint from the community members when asked about why they did not like to go to the Sen Sok Cambodia-China Friendship Hospital.

Even though the health center was situated inside the slum community and offered free care to those who qualified for it, many of the area's residents still underutilized this resource. Dr. Sokha Phea, a staff member of the hospital, reported that the number of patients who visited the health center had taken a severe decline in the last couple of months. While this appeared to suggest that the local residents were getting healthier, the reality was just the opposite. Due to recent policy changes in receiving free care, many of the local Khmer people had subsequently lost their ability to afford medical services. With medical care being rendered less accessible, the health of the community suffered in response. Since the hospital was seeing less patients, the people that were admitted exhibited more severe conditions because they did not want to seek care earlier due to costs.

Previously, NGOs in the Sen Sok area had partnered with the local commune office to issue special identification cards that, when presented at payment, would offset the cost of medical expenses at the hospital. As such, patients who did not have the ability to pay for their own care could register for this card and receive medical treatment free of charge. With the new policy change however, many of the Sen Sok community members were left with outdated cards that needed renewal. But according to the slum residents, many expressed uncertainty about how to begin the renewal process, or reported that the notion seemed very burdensome. This perceived bureaucratic hassle combined with the area's cultural preference for traditional, private medicine caused many residents to regard the renewal process as overly complex and ultimately, not worth pursuing. As such, without access to medical fee waivers, the health outcomes of the slum community did not appear optimistic.

Even though the local Khmer people seemed wary of western medicine and visiting the hospital for care, there was a clear interest within the Sen Sok community to gain access to health education. Many of the residents that were interviewed expressed a desire to learn more about health promotion and in particular, on ways to improve the sanitary conditions of the environment. Unfortunately, it did not appear that the hospital had the necessary resources to carry out and meet this need. Dr. Sokha Phea reported that, at the moment, the Sen Sok Cambodia-China Friendship Hospital was primarily concerned with treatment rather than prevention. She commented that there were no existing initiatives catered toward educating the local community on health topics. However, the hospital had been starting to give vaccinations to the slum children in order to do some preventative work. In spite of these small measures being taken, it was evident that the issue of health promotion and prevention had been largely left unaddressed in Sen Sok.



## Kampong Speu

Unlike its sister service site, the village in Kampong Speu did not have a localized health center where people sought care. Instead, a family-run pharmacy located at the outskirts of the community provided medicines for common ailments and basic health consultations. Due to a lack of medical professionals in the village, many residents were forced to travel into the city to see doctors for more severe illnesses. As such, seeking medical care was viewed as an inconvenience that was best to be avoided.

In addition, the nearest wet market was a 20-minute drive from the village by car. While some of the Kampong Speu community members engaged in subsistence farming, purchasing groceries from local vendors was still a common practice due to its ease and accessibility. Since the wet market was not located within the village itself, vendors would often transport food items into the community to sell them at a slightly higher price. After surveying local market prices, the cost of both salt and MSG were shockingly low; a kilogram of salt could be bought for 1,000 KHR (1.91 HKD), while MSG sold for 5,200 KHR for 500g (9.95 HKD). Due to the affordability of the two, it was unsurprising that the Khmer people favored adding large amounts of these ingredients to flavor their dishes. Furthermore, while salt and MSG were relatively cheap, fresh fruits and proteins garnered a heftier price. For instance, rambutans were marketed at \$1.50 USD per kilogram (6,124 KHR/11.72 HKD), and the cost of eggs ranged from 10,000 KHR for 10 (19,13 HKD) to 45,000 KHR for 10 (86 HKD). Since fruit was relatively expensive in comparison to other food items, this made it rather inaccessible for villagers to include it in their diets despite the health benefits of doing so. By eating meals heavily seasoned with salt and MSG, and forgoing fruit, it was not shocking that the surveys conducted by the PolyU students found hypertension to be a pervasive and extremely common health condition among the village residents.

## Project Background

Due to the lack of health promotion being done at a local level, there is a notable absence of health education resources in both the Sen Sok slums and Kampong Speu village. As such, this need lends itself to be filled by NGOs and volunteers, especially since neither the government nor local health centers have addressed this health education dearth. Given the overwhelming interest in learning more about healthy lifestyle changes in the two service communities, the service-learning project provides a unique opportunity to share in mutual development for all parties involved. For the PolyU students and RUPP interpreters, engaging in cultural exchange nurtures a greater understanding of what it means to be a global citizen. On the same token, the Khmer service recipients gain practical health knowledge to implement into their daily lives.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading causes of death in Cambodia include: (1) Lower-Respiratory Infection, (2) Ischemic Heart Disease, and (3) Stroke.<sup>1</sup> While the curriculum of the service learning course is designed around the WHO Recommendations for Developing Countries, some of the project's goals do align to target the health outcomes reported by the CDC. In particular, the PolyU students' focus on promoting diet modification, exercise habits, and smoking cessation all contribute to the prevention of heart disease as well as respiratory illnesses. Despite these correlations, this overlap is more coincidental than a result of active decision-making. According to the course's professors, the students' abilities, timeframe of the service, and variables affecting the highest sustainability for success were the main considerations in the methodological design of the nursing project. Ultimately, had the service-learning program conducted more research on the Cambodian communities prior to arriving and targeted the project objectives to be more location specific, there would have been greater potential for a larger impact on the service sites.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/cambodia/default.htm>





## Student Experiences & Learning

In general, many of the PolyU students cited the service-learning project as an invaluable experience and enjoyed interacting with the local Khmer people. Being in an unfamiliar environment afforded the Hong Kong students the opportunity to reexamine their own privileges and appreciate new cultural encounters. When difficulties did arise however, some of the PolyU students expressed frustrations over their inability to do more. In particular, the limited scope of the nursing project compelled the students to question the significance of their impact. It was clear that the Hong Kong students felt deeply for the service communities in Cambodia and wanted to tackle the more structural causes for health disparity. However, many of these institutional problems called for solutions that required training beyond the students' current scope of knowledge. Regardless, the skills and experiences gained on this service-learning project will undoubtedly foster a greater sense of cultural sensitivity and social responsibility in the PolyU students.



## Interview

with Nicky Yeung, third year student studying Hospitality Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Q: Why did you choose to go overseas, as opposed to a local or mainland project?**

N: So first of all, I come from Hong Kong, and Hong Kong is a quite developed city. So, I don't know. Maybe I can describe [myself] as a quite ambitious person, so I would like to see more. I [wanted] to travel outside of Hong Kong so I came to Cambodia. I think Cambodia is quite [a] mysterious place, so I [wanted] to know more about [its] culture. Also, [Cambodia is] a developing country and the people living here may need our help more than the Hong Kong ones. I'm not saying that everyone is rich in Hong Kong, but the living quality may be really bad [here] compared with Hong Kong, so that is why I chose to travel to Cambodia.

**Q: How do you believe your service impacted you?**

N: Before I came to Cambodia, I think I had a lot of stereotypes [about] poor people. Like, I thought that they [had] very bad hygiene, but actually they have [a] very strong sense of hygiene. So [going to Cambodia] taught me that I shouldn't have stereotypes about people.

**Q: Do you believe that the service recipients benefited from the project?**

N: Yes. Through the interviews, I learned that they [the villagers] have a lack of money. They lack [the] money to consult doctors and buy medicine. After we deliver our health promotion plan, we can help them improve their [lives] by teaching them to have a balanced diet, healthy dietary habits, or do more physical activities. It will benefit them in [the] long-term, but not in [the] short-term.

Journalist's Perspectives

# Effect On The Local Sphere

by Carmen Zheng

One of the most significant effects of nursing project is its role in the co-development of a local program called Young People Do, or YPDO. When PolyU first came to Cambodia, its operations were coordinated through the local YMCA. However, as the project grew, disagreements led some of the employees of the YMCA to split off into a new direction, and having worked closely with those employees before, PolyU went with them. The intimacy of the new organization, which was smaller but more specifically focused, gave the service-learning program a deeper connection to the local communities and has helped PolyU establish relationships with new ones.

At first, the exchange between PolyU and the YPDO organization was relatively one-to-one. On one hand, YPDO acted as liaisons to inform the local Khmer people about the service learning projects and enabled PolyU to work with an accepting community. On the other hand, PolyU provided the organization with books, batteries, and other resources that they later provided to the local Khmer people on a more year-round basis. As the Cambodia project expanded however, the ideas that the university brought over inspired more and more programs to be run by YPDO. Today, the group maintains a relatively small staff, but has started many community workshops in the past few years, and has developed tourism programs to help fund their work.

The first programs, which aimed at developing skills such as employability for the youth and sustainable crafts for the elderly, began in 2012 for the small population that YPDO was able to reach. But crucially, their partnership with PolyU has served two major purposes. Working with a major international university has helped provide credibility to the young organization as it seeks new partners and employees. In the same way that people trust PolyU to respect the community because they are working through local people who speak the Cambodian language, other groups and potential employees see their connection to PolyU as a sign of the legitimacy of the work that they have been doing.

Beyond that element of reputation, the ideas brought by PolyU for their projects have given YPDO additional ways to get involved themselves. The programs that PolyU has introduced as its service learning projects have inspired local projects of similar types that YPDO can carry on throughout the year, whether PolyU is in the country or not. For example, the homestay program, which funds many of YPDO's workshops, was the brainchild of Kenneth Lo, a long time member of PolyU Service Learning. The unique experience of staying in a home with a Cambodian family not only provides an amazing learning opportunity for the PolyU students, but has also proved to be a lucrative program for YPDO during the year. Because of the preparations taken to accommodate PolyU, tourists can pay to experience that authenticity by taking advantage of the facilities that are already in place.

This allows YPDO to carry out the workshops which are, to a large extent, the real legacy of the service learning project in Cambodia. The local workers have been able to encourage youth engagement with elderly community members who don't have immediate family to care for them. Often, that involves teaching craft skills to otherwise unemployed adults so that they can in some means to provide for themselves. YPDO has also begun professional programs that teach resume and CV writing, as well as job search skills to students. Despite their intelligence, local students often find their chances of advancement completely handicapped by their unfamiliarity with the traditions of codified employment. YPDO now hosts donation drives for school and first aid materials, supports English learning, and arranges trips for local children— children who spend years living ten minutes from the capital without ever going into the city or out to the surrounding mountains to get a taste of the world outside of their immediate community.

The service learning projects often have a profound impact on the students, and the memories of these experiences can help them develop as individuals in the rest of their personal and professional lives. But when one looks beyond the learning component of the program, it is possible that the service that PolyU has inspired, rather than completed, is its biggest accomplishment. In the short term, there are people with specific needs in many communities in Cambodia, and PolyU is able to help alleviate those. But in the longer arc of a country's development, it is the engagement of its own citizens in working for the good of the community that brings about real, lasting improvement. That is a process which, in this part of Cambodia, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has been able to significantly accelerate.



Journalist's Perspectives

# Reflection & Future Directions

by Carmen Zheng

Ultimately, easing the difficulties of healthcare delivery is an enormously complex task. When considering social determinants of health, that is, the economic and social conditions that influence differences in health outcomes, two 1-hour health consultations by foreign university students cannot reverse years of poor healthcare in a community. In truth, many of the health issues experienced by the Khmer people extend beyond the scope of this nursing course. As one PolyU student pointed out, it's rather improbable that one conversation about the dangers of tobacco will successfully curb someone's smoking habits that have built up over decades. Not to say that small actions do not contribute to sparking a difference, but a large and immediate change simply cannot be expected. As such, while the goals of the service learning nursing project are commendable, its sustainability and effectiveness do certainly come into question.

Since the nursing project is designed to help PolyU students develop greater social responsibility as global citizens, it is only natural that the debriefing sessions held each night center on student impressions of being in a new environment. However, it is also necessary to meditate on the project's immediate and long-term impacts on the Khmer people with the same amount of concern that is given to reflecting on the experiences that the PolyU students gain from the service trip. By entering communities with little or no understanding of the local people's history, culture, and way of life, well-intentioned individuals often cause more harm than good. For this reason, encouraging critical thinking and analysis of the context of the service environment are crucial in assuring that any volunteer work being done is carried out with the goal of poverty and disease alleviation in mind, rather than for the fulfillment of the providers.

Despite its limited scope, the services of the nursing project has the potential to become a truly valuable resource for both the Sen Sok slums and Kampong Speu village. However, the goals of a humanitarian venture should provide goods or services that have a profound and lasting impact as opposed to making volunteers feel like they did something. It takes time to learn how to give effectively, and accomplish the most good that one can. In the end, not letting oneself become comfortable with the project and constantly questioning how one's good motives can translate into tangible, impactful actions are the components necessary to getting closer and closer to real solutions.

## Goals and Methodology

The goal of improving health conditions and care is universal to all developing countries, and in that respect, the approach of the project in Rwanda is largely identical to the approach in Cambodia. But though the goals are the same – healthier calorie intake, better preparation for physical labor, etc. – the types of solutions that can be implemented are by no means one size fits all. In Rwanda, unlike Cambodia, the nursing team worked in a rural village much farther from the city, where the residents had sufficient space, often a plot of land for farming, and even sometimes a cow, goats, or chickens. While the poorer members of these communities face similar challenges in acquiring healthcare, however, the Rwandan community also faces struggles of its own. There, for example, the villagers are more exposed to malarial mosquitoes and regularly walk three or even four miles to retrieve water, sometimes as often as three times a day.





Questions about daily salt and vegetable intake, therefore, resulted in different suggestions from the team, and suggestions for exercise addressed very different body issues. Since many rural Rwandans grow their own food, the students must consider a crops land use and water intake before realistically recommending it to their clients. When initially meeting with their clients, the students varied their inquiries, choosing to ask instead about the proximity of their family members, the amount of water drunk per day, and the specific activities after which villagers washed their hands.





▲ Students are collecting service recipient's health data including body temperature, blood pressure, weight and height for making personalized healthcare plan afterwards.





▲ Students went to a local market and carried out research about affordable food for their service recipients.





After conducting the questionnaires, the students took two days back at the guesthouse to consider the answers they had collected, tackle the most serious or outstanding cases, and then develop an education plan for the problems their clients faced. Sitting among the students, it was clear that they weren't simply examining information on a piece of paper.



One of the most impressive aspects of the service learning program is the way it gets students from all academic backgrounds to meet complete strangers – people as different from them as can be – and draws out of them a level of empathy they may never even have exercised before. Those fourteen students, along with seven Rwandan partners, had already demonstrated impressive adaptability, but as they organized the information they had gathered, they spent time really considering the people they had met only days before, seeing them in the survey answers they had given. Even when removed from that situation, they brought the urgency necessary to quickly develop creative solutions to the range of health issues they faced.



▲ PolyU students and Rwandan students practiced exercise before teaching their service recipients.

After team discussions, presentations, and group feedback, they returned to their clients with suggestions ranging from mosquito habitat removal to different food choices for their daily diet (often to provide greater variety, since many Rwandans find it easier to grow only one or two crops). Their advice met with warm reception from the villagers, who seemed touched just by the fact that the students demonstrated such care for their wellbeing and daily lives. After spending a few days discussing and demonstrating their healthier lifestyle suggestions, the students took their last moments to reflect on their time in Rwanda. That process helped them to learn from each other and to gain the context necessary to better process their experiences. Watching the students finally take time to think about the whirlwind of the last two weeks, it was clear that they had become a more mature group, with a better understanding of the world.







▲ One of the service recipients gave a thankful hug to our students.

## Interview

with Tadit Witikanga, Rwandan 4th year nursing student

Immersed in the experience as they were, however, it was somewhat difficult for the students to understand the overall impact of their work on both them and the community. Better equipped to express the arc of those two weeks were the Rwandan nursing students that worked with PolyU in connecting with the community. Their picture of the project drew not only from their experiences in it, but from their knowledge of the community's characteristics and needs both before and after the program. Tadit Witikanga, a particularly precocious 4th year nursing student (who, for obvious reasons, went by Han), had quickly taken on a leadership role within the group by demonstrating in depth knowledge of the situation as well as his willingness to help others. Despite the often frenetic pace of life on the project, we were able to talk to him during one of the student reflections, and asked him to reflect a little himself about how the students had changed both themselves and the community through their work.







I actually only heard about this group one week before they came here, so when they told me about the program I was pretty excited to participate. Besides that, it was my first time meeting people from Hong Kong, so I was excited to interact them and find out how they act and think about things. So they explained what the program was doing, working in the villages here, I was completely sold. I didn't have many expectations actually, because I was unfamiliar with how the Hong Kong students would approach it, but I knew that I had to be a part of this project, because as a nurse I love working with people, and I have a particular passion for the people in the villages who don't get a lot of care. I was really very happy to go deep into the villages and work with those people, to learn more about my own surroundings and help other people learn about my community as well, while helping these people.

At first I thought my role was going to be more as an interpreter, and it was my first time doing this so I was a little nervous about it. I thought 'will I make everything perfect in the translation?' Actually, it wasn't as bad as I thought, because I worked with the students and interpreting was only a part of my job, so I was happy that I was able to do the work.

With respect to the community, I had already worked in areas like this during my time in University, so I knew how they would probably react to the program, and what we would need to do to elicit the best response from them. So I was not very worried because I felt like I knew what we were getting into, and I was glad that I could share that knowledge and confidence with the rest of the team.





“ Personally, one of the main things that impacted me during the project was the realization of how much information affects people's lives. Since everyone wants to be healthy, it is easy to assume that they will automatically do everything to be as healthy as they can. But what we realized from the way people changed from finding out their health problems, such as high blood pressure, is that people will often continue bad habits that make them less healthy because they simply don't realize that it is a problem at all. When they given information regarding their health by the Hong Kong students, they were often eager to change these lifestyle habits that they had only because they didn't know their negative effects. In fact, many of these people live a completely different life even from the people in the city nearby because they don't have access to this information. Even though I did not realize how much the Hong Kong students could help before, I learned how important this kind of program is to help the villagers from their lack of information, and help them live a better lifestyle by knowing what they can do to be healthier. So for example, in one family we went to there was a mother with high blood pressure, who had taken medicine for that before. They know what high blood pressure is, and they know how to treat it, but when we perform the test on the family we find out the father also has high blood pressure. So even though they know how to treat high blood pressure, the father was living with a high health risk because he did not know that he had it himself. Then, when he went to the hospital to get medicine, they performed tests on him and found some other problems that he also did not know about. When we saw that family again, the father was actually much happier because he was getting treatment for these problems and felt much safer because of the new knowledge that he had. Like this father, most people in this kind of village don't really understand what is happening when they get sick, and so the information about how to treat themselves or when to go to the doctor is very very helpful for them.

”



As I talked to Han, it became clear that his optimism about the project exceeded even my own perception of the benefits it had caused. Though I could see the good the project was doing in the community, the knowledge of the community that Rwandans like Han have helps them understand how much a little help can do in the face of large adversities. It is precisely because they have so little knowledge about diseases or treatments or even the most basic health practices, that a few sessions of health advice can impact their lives so significantly. When I asked him for any suggestions for changes in future projects, his appreciation really came through.



If I could meet the organizers of this project,” Han continued, “I would thank them so much, because my biggest complaint about the project is that it is not reaching all villages. Just in this one village, it is good because it is helping people, but to myself I think it would be better if people, not just from Hong Kong but from around the world, could come and do this in all of the villages, because it is so helpful when people can learn about these diseases and things that make their lives better. And about the Hong Kong students specifically, I have to complement them, because when they first arrived, they did not really know where to start, because everything was so new to them. But once they got into the village, they tried to observe their surroundings, and discovered that they were well equipped for the job. First of all, the students were very open-minded and creative. Can you imagine coming from another place, arriving somewhere that the culture is totally different, the environment is totally different, and immediately having to adapt to that style and interact with the people in a way that they will like and understand? It is very difficult, and the students got used to it very quickly, they were able to start out right away, no matter how rough it was at first, and by the end achieved quite a good outcome.



Because of this change over time, even though they have taught many things to the villagers, I am sure they have learned many things as well. Spending so much time in our culture and interacting here, they have learned from our country and our people in the same way that we have learned from them. They have seen how people here live, especially in the rural villages, and were able to help those people toward a better life. I really wish that this project could happen more often. In the last few days I have talked to so many villagers who are so happy with the visits of the students, and are happy to have received this health education.

Personally, I think that the government here should create a program like this, so that students from Rwanda can come deep into the villages like this, and learn and help out in the same way. Sometimes even people from Rwanda who live in the cities do not know what it is like out here, and it is a very good experience to see how different the lives that they lead can be.aaa





▲ Han and other Rwandan students learnt Chinese culture in their first day meeting.



Journalist's Perspectives

# The Power of Belief

by Amy Hui

In June and July this year, PolyU students went to Rwanda for a Service-Learning project. In addition to conducting health education there, they had the opportunity to have cultural exchange with the locals. 'The power of belief' was the most unforgettable part during the two-week stay, on Rwandans students saw forgiveness for foes, religious faith and trust in student volunteers; while on students they saw self-confidence and mutual trust during the course of the service. Such feeling came from the painful history the Rwandans once experienced. The first day I arrived in Rwanda I realised this was a country so different from my impression. Kigali is indeed a bustling capital city with all kinds of shops filled with crowds of people. Little did I know there was a genocide 23 years ago in this picturesque mountainous country, corpses were everywhere back then making a stark contrast to its lively landscape. This tragedy was sparked by the conflicts and hatred between the Hutu and Tutsi peoples.

The difference between the two peoples lied in their social and economic status: Tutsi referred to the higher class or people with certain power and wealth while Hutu in general referred to ordinary people. In the past, the Tutsi was the minority but always the ruling class, despite being the majority the Hutu was being ruled and tortured. Rwanda ended its colonial era and became independent after WWII. It was right after the independence the Hutu people initiated a rebellion and the Tutsi King was expelled in the end. A large amount of Tutsi people thus fled to neighbouring countries. Those fleeing Tutsi people gathered to form Rwanda Patriotic Front and declared war with the Hutu Government. The two peoples had been conflicting ever since.

The genocide was directly triggered after the plane had been shot down on which sat the Hutu President in 1994. The radio station later made public broadcast to appeal to the Hutu people to eliminate the Tutsi in revenge for the death of their president. In the broadcast the Tutsi was called 'the cockroaches' so as to elicit hatred among the Hutu. The rancor between the two was not new and recent, the Hutu would kill the Tutsi randomly whom they saw in the street, relatives, friends and neighbours were no exception. The killing aggravated to an extent that even the moderates and the Hutu protecting the Tutsi would be slaughtered. The country was constantly fighting in blood. The genocide lasted for more than one hundred days with about 800,000 to 1,000,000 people being killed, accounting for more than 20% of the population at that time. The genocide was finally put to a stop when the Rwanda Patriotic Front defeated the Government Army.



The rebuilding of relationships after such tragedy illustrates the fact that the Rwandans are full of love who also hold a powerful belief. After the genocide, executioners should be brought to justice and imprisoned. However, due to the massive number and the limited space in prisons, those felt repentant were released and discharged. Indeed many of these executioners knew the victims and it was unavoidable that they would run into familiar faces when they returned home. After all humans are not saints and it is excusable to have hatred of the killers. Yet, the Rwandan people chose to forgive and they believed that those killers were truly regretful. In the Genocide Memorial there was this touching video clip: an old lady was thankful that the killer had told her where the body of her son was so that she could bury him. She chose to accept the killer despite being hurt. In today's Rwanda, Hutu or Tutsi no longer exists and there is only 'Rwandan' who will rebuild their society and live together as one group. On the last Saturday of each month, all Rwandans will participate in voluntary work in the community, road repairing, infrastructure and arable land, for instance. Everyone contributes all one can to make their society a better place.



Religious faith could also be seen on Rwandans. Christianity is the major religion there, every Sunday I would go to the church service with the locals. I do not have a particular religious background so I was hoping to experience some local culture. The church I stepped into was quite different from the church in my mind, as I always pictured that the audience would sit quietly and pray in their hearts. To my surprise, there was a worship band singing on stage and other churchgoers were dancing and singing along. The service was full of joy and this joyfulness was a sharp contrast to the church which had witnessed the genocide. During the genocide people would only run into churches to pray for protection, they did not expect a massacre within such solemn and sacred place. The Hutu people blew off the gate of the church and gunned down people who were taking sanctuary in there. We visited the Nyamata Church in Kigali and were shocked by the traces of the genocide: the massive bomb hole in front of the church gate, the bullet holes on the walls and the roof, the orange brick wall tainted with blood, the scattering clothes and belongings of the deceased, as if they were replaying the scene right before us. The church could not shelter people who came to seek protection anymore at that time, to make it worse some church members had been planning to turn the church into a slaughterhouse. Yet the locals do not have a single doubt about God or abandon their religion because of this unfortunate experience, today they still choose to believe in God. I remember thinking I once saw a cross made from soda caps on a wall as a decoration. Rwandans go to church every Sunday, it is their religious belief that holds them closer.

When we visited some villages, we could always feel the warmth from the locals towards foreigners and their trust in student volunteers. Students were driven to different villages, kids were greeting and waving at us along the way, some were even running after our cars. Villagers simply trusted our PolyU students who were total strangers to them. It was the first time we met and they would open the door and let us in to provide health services. It was the first year this programme, offered by the School of Nursing, provided services to villages in Rwanda. Some villagers did have reservations at first who appeared to be reticent about their health records and showed reluctance when students tried to take photos of their living environment. When the team returned to visit them later, students noticed that the group photos taken earlier with the villagers had been put into frames. It simply showed that the two-week service was a treasuring memory for the villagers, they actually expressed that they hoped to see PolyU students again the next year. It takes time to build trust and it is believed that the health conditions of the villagers will be improved after following the students' advice. It will be spread by word of mouth and this service scheme will have full support from them in future.



Students have learned to build self-confidence and trust in others during the programme. This service scheme has helped students to know themselves better thus improve their own soft skills. One night during the reflection session, some students admitted that they had had doubt about their own abilities. Since this service scheme was not only for nursing students but also students from other disciplines, they did not have confidence to apply the knowledge on health education that had only been acquired within a few months to the environment and conditions in Rwanda accordingly. When the villagers were willing to listen and follow their professional health advice, students started to gain confidence. In fact, self-confidence and success are complementary, when you believe that you can make it, you will have the courage to action; when you succeed, you will have more confidence. It all comes down to the first step, keep trying and always believe that you can do it, you will reach your goal finally.

Moreover, students have learned to have mutual trust in their partners. The service team from PolyU worked in collaboration with local university students to provide services to villagers in groups. Division of labour is what matters in teamwork. In the scheme students had to trust others' abilities and divide tasks appropriately. PolyU students cooperated with the local university students: the local students would be translating during questionnaire, after that they would have to provide appropriate and easy-to-follow health plans for each household according to their observations and the questionnaire results. I was most impressed when we were reporting a health plan to one household with an uncommunicative local student. His group mates trusted him and encouraged him to read out the report and demonstrate the stretching exercise. He explained the daily sodium intake to the household and showed him how to measure items using soda caps, the use of their common language made the conversation much clearer and easier. From having no clue as to how to communicate to watching them talk with laughter, the smiles on their faces while helping the household just showed how much they trusted each other. It was actually a great illustration of teamwork.











In a blink of an eye it has already been 23 years since the genocide, Rwanda has managed to display their unity and mutual trust to the world that they have let go of hatred but forgiven others. They still have their religious faith and believe the world is full of love, such powerful belief is truly a paragon of virtue students have observed in this service trip. During the programme students have learned to build self-confidence and mutual trust, at the same time experienced 'trust' could be a positive drive to change oneself and others. This Service-Learning scheme was spiritually rewarding, too. The tragedy students were exposed to in Rwanda would make them realise the current social dispute in Hong Kong is actually very minor. What is most important is to keep confidence in yourself and to love others no matter how challenging the situation becomes.

## Introduction

In the heart of Tiger Island, a small rural village in the An Giang province, situated about 200 kilometers away from Ho Chi Minh City, a group of Hong Kong students and teachers, bearing blue and purple t-shirts, is stirring up curiosity among the local residents. Who are these people and what are they here for? Their surprised and curious faces seem to ask. The townspeople, over the course of the week, will realize that this colorful group is part of the SN project from PolyU.

Sent to rural Vietnam for the third consecutive year with the goal of promoting healthy lifestyles and improving the quality of people's lives, this SL project is one of many overseas service-learning trips arranged by the School of Nursing. Facilitated by local volunteers from the An Giang University, this team of nineteen providers consists of fifteen students, three student leaders, two subject teachers and staff members, who some of the residents remember from the previous year. The team aims to better the lives of the people of this island by dispensing nutrition and hygiene education. Knowledge sharing is the ultimate goal of the SN team, through which both Hong Kong and local students will not only learn about themselves, but also about others, by working and living together for a week.





## Project Goals

According to the subject teacher, Ellen Ku, the Vietnam SN project is tasked with providing and spreading information about good nutrition and hygiene that is not readily available in this impoverished part of the country. The hope is that this information, when in the hands of the service recipients, will both be shared horizontally among the community members, and used effectively by the local residents themselves to live a more comfortable life. Some of the key points addressed by the students of the SN project are smoking and drinking habits, as well as general hygiene recommendations.

Coming from different educational backgrounds, the group of fifteen students that embarked on this journey was expected to perform comprehensive health check-ups as well as to provide follow up and personalized guidance to the service recipients. While students learn a lot from their immersive interaction with the local community, experiencing lifestyles and a living environment that are drastically different to theirs, the partnership with An Giang University and its local interpreters also offers a unique opportunity for knowledge sharing and cultural exchange among local and PolyU students alike. As such, the 'learning' component of the SN project aims to foster students' sense of cultural understanding, as well as to expose them to profoundly different working and living environments and ways of life.

This endeavor's overarching philosophy, according to project coordinators, is not only to encourage PolyU students' personal growth from a unique working and living experience, but also and ultimately to help the community by dispensing valuable information and services. Hence, the Vietnam SN project endorses, to some extent, the driving force behind the OSL's mission: the successful rendering of humanitarian assistance through which both recipients and providers make equal gains.



## Methodology

This summer, the project in Vietnam was led together by Ellen Ku, Eugene Cheung and three student leaders. With fifteen students stemming from various educational backgrounds, the whole team prepared throughout the spring semester for a week-long immersive service, in which providers and local interpreters alike worked hard towards the successful undertaking of their assigned mission. Helped by 10 AGU students, members of the SN team were divided among seven groups, each composed of two PolyU students and one local interpreter.

As small units, the teams of students entered the village on the first day. Beginning a long and thorough process of personal interviews that would last for two days and a half, the first half of the service trip was dedicated to the comprehensive surveying of a select number of local residents. With questionnaires in hand – extensive forms that the students prepared carefully throughout the semester with both a qualitative and a quantitative focus – the service providers typically visited three households in the morning as well as in the afternoon. Ranging from 20- to 80-year-olds, the recipients welcomed the young foreigners into their homes and into their lives, often sharing not only painful, but also heartwarming and touching details about their personal stories. Though the questionnaires focused principally on plain facts designed to assess the living conditions of the local residents, the students quickly realized that the personal information they were given in confidence by the service recipients was key to their assignment. The feedback and experiences varied greatly among the different teams, which experienced a wide array of service recipients with intrinsically distinct stories and life circumstances. While some of the teams reported having very positive experiences despite the local residents' distressing living conditions, other groups encountered recipients with serious health issues, such as lung or liver disease, leaving them with an uneasy feeling of helplessness.





The students' next task during the second half of the week - and indeed the most delicate part of their service - was the design of individualized recommendations for each of the households. When back at their home-stays after work, usually after delectable meals cooked by the caring host families that the recipients would all enjoy together, the teams would work among themselves to develop extensive recommendation plans. Once equipped with fully customized health recommendations based on each of the recipients' habits, health conditions and living environments, the students returned to the houses they had visited on the first half of the week. A key point of this process, Ms. Ku observed, was to ensure that no false expectations would arise from the recipient's undertaking. As many of the local residents lacked the most basic health resources, the students needed to clarify that their task was not to provide treatment or medical assistance, but rather valuable information about healthy lifestyles. Hence, with a fuller understanding of the recipients' back stories, each team rendered their health recommendation plans with the well-being of the recipients in mind.



## Interview

with Trịnh Hoàng Ân, An Giang University

Trịnh Hoàng Ân is a recent graduate of An Giang University, having studied English Teaching. Optimistic and a slight jokester, he hopes to educate and inspire middle school students to learn English in the near future.

**Q: Do you think this service has a big impact or change on the local people?**

**T:** Yeah. I think it has a change, but it is not very big. Because some of the clients, they follow our advice and some of them don't follow it. For example, the two families, when we [went] back again to their house, [the homeowner] said that she followed our suggestions and [has been] trying to keep it every day. However, some families, their faces look a little like [they] don't care. They still smile because [our suggestions] are all good things to know, but they seem bored.



## Interview

with Tsui Chun Kit, third year student studying Building Engineering and Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Q: Can you introduce yourself?**

T: Yes, my name is Kit. Full name is Tsui Chun Kit, and I'm from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I [came] to Vietnam because I joined a service learning program to share some information about healthy lifestyle to [the villagers of Tiger Island].

**Q: Do you believe that the service recipients have benefited from the project?**

T: My feeling is [that] this program [does help] some families, but not all of them because some families really did not [seem to] care about their health. They just sat down and listened to what I had said, but they actually had not really listened. They just pretended to listen, I know that— I know [that] some families are like that. But fortunately, there are really some families that do care about what we have [to say]. They really want to improve [their] lives. I remember [that] one woman [had] some issues with her intestine, so she really wanted to know how to solve this problem. They really cared about their body and their health, so I appreciated that.

**Q: How has the project impacted you as an individual? What are some things that you have learned?**

T: For me, [the] service program means to serve and to learn. We did the serve part— we really did give the villagers some advice on how to improve their lives. But what we learned is that... we have learned lots of things. Teamwork is really the most important thing [that] I have learned. Because I worked with my teammates and without them, we could not have done it. Another important thing [that] I have learned is empathy. Because I live in Hong Kong, which is the place that is very famous, we have lots of things. We basically have everything that we want. For example, our medical system. We have a very great, very perfect medical system. But here, in Tiger Island, I think [that] the medical system is not perfect enough. Even the local families [have] said so. They said that the doctors here in Tiger Island are not very professional, so I learned that we have to have empathy, and [also] treasure what we have in Hong Kong.

Journalist's Perspectives

# SN Student Experience

by Jamie Li

“Cảm ơn”, a short and simple greeting from Vietnam; however, is the extremely powerful word from the Vietnam villagers which has kept us going for the 12 days of Service-Learning trip. Taking part in Service-Learning has a huge opportunity to impact lives and changing moments to those in need.

This 12-day trip like an orientation camp. It ended in a blink of eyes as we were still struggling with those little bugs in the homestay. The Mỹ Hòa Hưng community, Tiger Island, is totally different from Hong Kong, the place that we have been living in for like 20 years. We played ice-breaking game Ninja, tackled problems together, lived in the same house. Throughout the “camp”, not only the students from Hong Kong knew more about each other, but the Vietnam students from AGU also became parts of us. We even exchanged our Facebook contact on the last day. Kara, one of the university students from AGU, recorded a Mandarin song for Cindy to encourage her since she had been sick for a few days. They also kept in touch with each other about their daily lives. Most of us never expect to have such a close relationship before this Service-Learning trip and this had changed our views towards the Vietnamese. Happiness can be very simple; it is just us who make it complicated.

Students can strengthen their problem solving skills and the ability of adapting the changing environment through Service-Learning trip. Like the first household that Kit has visited, they had no idea about the stomach pain of the client. Therefore, they used COLDSPA (character, onset, location, duration, severity, pattern and associated factors) to assess the seriousness of her pain. Since she is a vegetarian, the team immediately suggested her to cook in healthier ways, like steaming and boiling. Also, they reminded her to obtain more protein, like tofu and beans, in order to have a balanced diet. However, she does not like tofu, so they suggested other food as substitution, like soya milk to her.



Service-Learning allows students to train their flexibility. At first, Amanda's team planned to teach the clients to make normal saline for wound care education, but the condition in Vietnam is not suitable for making and storing the normal saline; thus having to change the plan to basic wound care like covering wound. Besides, Service-Learning allows students from different disciplines to learn from each other. Everyone can contribute to the teams by providing the professional knowledge that they have learnt in their studies. Amanda is a Year 1 student from engineering discipline. She is capable of providing knowledge of how the physical environment affects human health. By gathering knowledge from different professions, the teams are qualified to serve the clients in a more comprehensive way.

Cindy Hui, a Year 1 Physiotherapy student believes that "to be prepared" is the most important element in order to effectively find out and tackle the main problems that the Vietnam citizens are really facing.

They are planning to utilize the cultural behavior into changing the Vietnamese diets by creating their own card games to educate villagers about a balanced diet. It is always good to see that students are passionate with what they are planning to do and work on it wholeheartedly. While some students are good at hard skills like artistic designs and others are good at soft skills like interpersonal management and communication skills, I can tell that every teammate has their unique position and they have collaborated the work in an efficient way.

Cindy also states another concern of modifying the plan immediately. With the assumption that they will not be able to obtain detail information about the villagers before they conduct the site visit with the villagers, there is always the probability that the designed plans may not fit them. For example, if a villager has a joint problem, his range of motion would be much smaller. Considering this, they will have to modify the exercises to allow him to do sufficient exercises without worsening his joint problem.

Service-Learning makes Cindy to turn into a more caring person as she will consider other people's needs and situations before giving advice. She tries to put her feet into others' shoes and thinks about their actual needs.

Although it is quite discourage sometimes when the students cannot offer solutions that help the clients solve their health problems immediately. The families also be thankful for our visits since we have brought them joy, care and laughter. It may be the only chance that we meet with this magic combinations; however, we all believe that we have the chemical reaction with each other and we are connected. The villagers treated us so well. Every time when we enter their homes, they will turn on the fan for us even though the electricity bill in Vietnam is quite expensive. They will treat us with fruits and snacks, like bananas, coconuts and tea. Things normally will not go in this way in Hong Kong. We try to avoid strangers and only be good with our social circles. We seldom offer a helping hand in hong Kong as we are afraid that we are cheated by the strangers. Sometimes we are just so sensitive. We even seldom care much about our neighbours.

Think about it. Do you know the surname of your neighbours? Will you greet them? Will you share food with your neighbours? If you need any assistance, will you seek help from your neighbours? Probably all the villagers in Tiger Island will say "Yes" to these five questions. They can name every single one of their neighbors and proceed to introduce them to my group with clear memories of who they are. They are willing to help each other and provide us with a lot of assistance, point out the right directions for us as they know that we are not familiar with the village. The children there also demonstrated trust and care among the neighborhood. They will share the information and tools with each other and have an open-minded attitude towards strangers like us.

This special bonding they have developed between neighbours are not what we would normally observe in Hong Kong, and I find it very heartwarming to be part of their community. It is understandable that it is easier to develop relationships in a small village; however, it does not mean that we have to block and avoid contact with our neighbours in Hong Kong. Many students feel impressed by the hospitality of the Vietnamese and they really want to bring back home with this culture in order to make their home, hong Kong, to become a warmer place.

Effective communication is a big issue in this project, especially when the students rely on the translation from AGU students. Students learnt how to deliver the message in an easy way, having more eye contact with the recipients and non-verbal communication. Gesture, facial expression and movement sometimes speak louder than words. Clients can feel our care and love when we smile to them, pat their shoulder or even give them a hug.

AGU students help us a lot in translating the messages. However, sometimes we have different types of communication challenges. For instance, we will have diverse points of view among teammates, which will bring a number of conflicts during the process of cooperation. We all have different mindset, so we have to be more open-minded instead of being stubborn and irrational when we have contrasting thoughts. Moreover, students will feel frustrated when they cannot reach the consensus among the group with their Vietnamese student. They are embarrassed to express their feeling but if they left the problem alone, the situation cannot help. Some students are really stressful and despondent to this scenario, and even cannot define their roles. After the consultation with tutor and staff members from Office of Service-Learning, Ellen, Cindy and Eugene, students decided to take the bull by the horns from identifying and tackling the root factors.

Besides, encouraging words like “Keep going” or “We’ve already done a great job” become the unexplained supernatural power to keep everyone moving on even we are facing challenges or having the confusing moment. Every time when we finished visiting a household, we can build stronger team spirit.

During this Service-Learning trip, three students are sick, and one of them had to stay in the hospital for two days. They have experienced the healthcare system in Vietnam. They first went to a clinic in Tiger Island to have the body check. The facilities there are not very well-equipped, but still there is doctor to offer medicines to patients. As one of the students had serious fever, she had to be sent to the hospital.

Ambulance in Vietnam is transformed from a van vehicle. It is smaller than the Hong Kong one and there is only one bed for one patient. There is no equipment at all on the ambulance. On the other side, hospital has much more equipment unexpectedly. Students can do the simple health checks, like X-ray, ultrasound and blood testing. After taking rest in the hospital for two days, the student can finally get back with the team with the unlimited support from the AGU teacher Mai and two AGU students, Samantha and Tiffany, who are arranged by Mai.

Without their help, the student may face a lot of difficulties when communicating with the doctors and nurses. “They demonstrated me the ways to love the others and to treat others how we want to be treated. Love does not represent unlimited material gratification but to hold your hand when you need it,” Claudia stated.

Before the trip, students also wonder if their visits can really help with the families. They think that their power and knowledge is limited, which restricts them to help effectively. They do not believe that two visits for one hour each can make their clients going to change their living habits which have been kept for 30 years, like smoking, drinking alcohol, adding too much salt and sugar in their diet, to name but a few. Most of them have this concern in their mind until they have reached their families. The villagers are open-minded as they believe that we are coming to the village to help with their health problem. Most of them are willing to take our advice and follow the stretching exercise that we have taught them. They promised to quit smoking and drinking alcohol by reducing the amount that they take everyday continuously. They are also willing to try some healthy cooking methods, like steaming and boiling, instead of deep-fry.

According to Amanda, the emotional grandma that they met in the very first household cried during the interview because she said that was the first time she met foreigners and she was overwhelmed. She was crying tears of joy and they were so blessed to see her smile throughout the interview.

Some clients are so active and willing to follow our advice. They will have follow-up questions in order to improve their health problem. This also shows that trust has built between students and villagers. Students were so surprised that their suggestions can help the villagers feel more comfortable. They were delighted that they were able to improve the bad habits of the villagers in order to achieve their healthy goals.

Teamwork is another big issue in Service-Learning trip. As all groupmates have different personalities, we have to be flexible to accommodate with each other and divide the work according to our abilities in order to fasten the process. Students who are relatively introverted and slow-to-warm-up have become more outgoing and will express their opinions confidently.

Alternatively, students who are very straight-forward and always express their ideas once they have come up in their mind have learnt how to be considerate and understand that it is not possible to get everyone follow the same pace. They realised that thing can still work pretty well even though one team has different working styles among teammates.

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples” originally from Mother Teresa, that quoted from a team during the final presentation is a noteworthy sentence to summarize the Service-Learning trip in Vietnam. Service-Learning trip in Vietnam.



May **HAPPINESS**  
ripples to everyone in the world





# 3

---

## **Serving the Community through Teaching English**

English Learning Center

---

Cambodia 1 - 10 June 2017

# Serving the Community Through Teaching English

English Learning Center

by Lucas Troadec

## Introduction

This summer, the corridors of Emmanuel Community School, in Cambodia, resonated with the cheers and laughter of its students, running to catch a glimpse of the unfamiliar faces that sojourned in the school. For a week, Cambodian students got to know the strangers who wore blue T-shirts—PolyU student tutors and TAs there to present them with a beautiful and memorable experience.

Summer 2017 marked the second consecutive year of the ‘ELC’ service-learning project in Cambodia. Standing for “English Learning Center,” the ELC project, also known as “Serving the Community through Teaching English,” was first initiated in Cambodia last year. A subject hosted by the English Language Center at PolyU, this service-learning project is part of a larger and longstanding effort to promote English education in Taiwan, China’s mainland, and now Cambodia.

This summer, like last year, the ELC project was able to partner with Emmanuel Community School (ECS) in Phnom Penh, a primary and secondary education establishment in the outskirts of Cambodia’s capital city. ECS, an underfunded and struggling school that values its recent affiliation with the PolyU and its students, welcomed for the first time a number of local university students in addition to a team of 45 of our service providers, as part of the ELC service-learning project. When the project coordinators decided this year to widen the scope of the services provided in Cambodia—a project created and now overseen by Ms Anna Ho—the project’s role and size grew significantly. Going beyond the tutoring service that took place at ECS in 2016, this summer the project aimed to expand simultaneously the size of the tutoring team. The project dispatch a new group of student Teaching Assistants (TAs), who would supplement the work of student tutors by teaching, in addition to ECS children, a number of ECS teachers and local students from the Asia Human Resource Development Center (HRDI). While the literacy tutors from PolyU worked alongside HRDI students, teaching in fourth grade classrooms, the team of student TAs was given the responsibility to organize and conduct English-speaking workshops for the local university students and teachers as well.



The ELC project in Cambodia, lead by Anna Ho, James Evans, and Chris Shephard, was given a broader and more comprehensive role. Having tripled in size since its inception in 2016, it provided English speaking and literacy workshops to a wide range of university students, fourth grade children and ECS teachers, with the hopes of more effectively serving the community.

## Project Goals

In accordance with the Office of Service-Learning's (OSL) primary objectives, ELC's fundamental goal is to bridge the gap between 'service' and 'learning'. At the heart of this mission is the creation of a mutually beneficial situation, where both service providers and service recipients make equal gains. Even more so with the summer 2017 trip in Cambodia, the hope is to foster a two-way cultural understanding, providing local students (both from university and primary school) as well as our own students with exposure to different working environments, foreign interaction, and cultural diversity. By bringing PolyU students together with local HRDI university students and ECS school children alike, the subject teachers and project coordinators aspire to see English education grow in one of Asia's poorest and most secluded countries, while giving the chance both to service providers and recipients to become more aware global citizens. The driving force, therefore, behind this project is the broadening of students' horizons and the cultivation of their sense of social responsibility beyond borders.

This ultimate goal fits with Emmanuel Community School's mission, according to subject teacher Mr. Evans. Making this relationship particularly valuable, Emmanuel Community School Principal sees a unique opportunity in this service-learning endeavor to accomplish the school's vision—a vision in which ECS children grow up to become “a new generation of leaders and citizens” of Cambodia. However attainable this is, the long-term objective of the ELC project, teachers and coordinators likewise agree, should be the personal and educational growth of local and Hong Kong students alike.

With a closer partnership between PolyU, ECS and HRDI this year, the project's goals have become more tangible. As the scope and reach of the service project expands, and as local university students become increasingly involved as partners as well as recipients, the ELC service-learning trip manages to reconcile the somewhat conflicting 'service' and 'learning' ambitions of the project.

## Methodology

Like other service-learning subjects, ELC is one of many options available to our students to fulfill their degree requirements. However, ELC is not an opportunity offered exclusively to those who study English at PolyU. On the contrary, students coming from all backgrounds and departments are enrolled in this course; they prepared throughout the spring semester for a challenging, yet rewarding experience.

Taking place over the course of 10 days, the service-learning trip to Cambodia is only the visible part of a long, thorough and difficult preparation process on the part of the students. Though open for all, students were chosen on a selective basis and through a series of interviews, where the main criteria taken into account was the students' willingness to teach and learn. In the end, more than 40 students were chosen to take part in this project (triple last year's number), with a dozen of students joining the TA team and another thirty joining the tutoring team.

The PolyU students prepared throughout the semester in a course devoted to the design of teaching kits as well as to the historical, cultural and social context of Cambodia. Paramount to this training is not only the obtainment of basic teaching skills, but also a fundamental understanding of where the service recipients come from. Hence, the PolyU students became acquainted with the traumatic past of Cambodia, learning about the 1970's genocide and Khmer Rouge regime both in the classroom and on the ground. Shortly after their arrival in Cambodia, students were given the opportunity to visit some of the country's most notorious historical landmarks. Cultural visits of the infamous Killing Fields and S-21 prison—experiences that proved to be hard on the students—aimed to increase the providers' awareness of the tragedies that marked Cambodia's recent past and the everyday life of its people. The visits to these historical sites in Phnom Penh were supplemented with classes on cultural sensitivity. It was therefore with great pride that we occasionally saw our students greet and thank the local recipients in their native language. A visit to the capital city's slums, in a like manner, was organized in order to expose the PolyU students to the lived reality of Cambodia's poorest people—who were, to some extent, the principal recipients of the students' services. Indeed, students at ECS, as one subject teacher highlighted, are predominantly children of trash-pickers, construction workers and factory workers who live in some of Phnom Penh's most humble neighborhoods. Though problematic in some aspects, those cultural activities, the same professor argued, gave the students a better sense of the recipients' difficult background as well as their alternatives to being in school.

The teaching kits prepared by the PolyU students differed between the TA team and the tutoring Team. While TAs designed unique speaking workshops and activities for the HRDI students and some of ECS' teachers, the literacy tutors were asked, like the previous year, to lead a reading workshop for fourth grade students. With both projects totaling 40 hours of teaching, the literacy tutors worked alongside volunteers from HRDI, who served as interpreters between the students and the service providers; the TAs imparted their service to another group of students from HRDI, who this time were the service recipients. With the different needs of each recipient group in mind, the students tailored unique reading and speaking activities. Differing in content and form, these teaching kits required many hours of planning and hard work, before the trip as well as during.



▲ TA team was having speaking workshops with HRDI students and ECS' teachers



▲ Tutoring team was teaching fourth grade students with volunteers from HRDI



## Students' Experiences and Daily Routine

Battling with torrid heat and sweltering humidity, tropical storms and torrential rain, the students of ELC worked in a challenging physical environment. Though confined between the walls of ECS during the majority of their time in Cambodia, they experienced, during 10 days, the difficult conditions that characterize the daily life of local students in Phnom Penh.

However, the first and main challenge that the service providers had to face when arriving in Cambodia was not the difficult climate, but something far less predictable: the national elections. With the impromptu governmental decision to suspend public activities around Election Day, the ELC service-trip saw the duration of its service shortened to only 4 days. Hit the hardest by this turn of events among the service-learning projects in Cambodia, ELC had to be re-arranged swiftly. In order to adapt the best they could to a particularly short time frame, ELC students, therefore, modified and re-adjusted the numerous activities and workshops they had prepared. As one PolyU students expressed with regret, the TA team was only able to teach HRDI students and ECS teachers for 3 days, making their contribution limited. The same student criticized the lack of an ongoing process, recognizing the need for greater and extended involvement with the recipients.





Although these issues should be both taken into consideration and improved in the forthcoming years, the general sentiment is that students will gain substantially from the sense of adeptness and hard work they demonstrated in order to carry out an effective service. Such unforeseen complications, the OSL staff argued, are precisely part of what makes working overseas and in complex working environments a valuable and instructive experience.

In order to cope with these unexpected circumstances, service-providers for the ELC project found themselves working astoundingly long hours, typically waking up at seven in the morning and working late at night to prepare for the next day's activities—sometimes until one or two am. This uphill battle, Mr. Shephard explains, was also partially due to some key cultural barriers that the students had not foreseen when planning the teaching kits. According to the subject teacher, some of the pedagogical activities designed by the students relied on specific cultural references that local Cambodian students did not share with the PolyU students. For instance, one game that the students played required the service recipients to guess the name of a number of animals in English. The PolyU students quickly realized that, because most animals they had originally included did not exist in Cambodia, the recipients were not able to fully participate in the activity. Hence, the service providers were tasked to constantly modify the content of their speaking and writing workshops in order to adapt to the cultural specificities of Cambodia. With this heightened need for preparation and adaption, topped with the added pressure to deliver their service despite a shortened service period, students saw many of their evenings turn into long and stressful nights of hard work.

However, the overall experience, students agreed, was both extremely valuable and constructive. Driven by a sense of curiosity and a taste for adventure, many students admit to having embarked on this journey with the hope of broadening their horizons. While some of them had previously joined similar programs in other countries, it was, for the majority of students, the first time they were given the opportunity to learn about a different country in such an immersive way. Indeed, when asked about why they chose to conduct an overseas service trip to Cambodia, as opposed to potentially less taxing options in the mainland, the service providers overwhelmingly cite their intention to discover a new country and culture—to learn about the difficult history of a neighboring state that still very much remains in the shadows. During the evening reflection (debriefing sections devoted to self-examination and introspection), the students often recognize having left Hong Kong with preconceptions about Cambodia. These preconceived ideas about poverty in developing countries, many acknowledge, turn out to be false—or at the very least simplified versions of the truth. What they have found at Emmanuel Community School, many students posited, is evidence that poverty does not preclude the service recipients from living a life of dignity.

The service providers predominantly described the human contact they shared with the ECS and HRDI students as the most rewarding aspect of the trip. Despite the limited impact they were capable of producing and the many difficulties they were faced with, one student argues, the most valuable part of the ELC project was the genuine communication that took place between the service providers and the service recipients. In fact, many students at ECS had been anticipating the return of the PolyU students; a number of them, one teacher recounts, had been learning some English words on their own, awaiting the ELC team to communicate with them better this time. During class breaks, it was hence common to overhear in the corridors clusters of ECS students chanting the English songs that they had been taught during their morning activities. This will and desire to learn, the PolyU students point out, was the foremost thing they took away from their experience in Cambodia.

One TA student describes with amazement: “You can tell that students cherish every opportunity to learn. They [HRDI students] have a passion for learning; they want to change their lives—to work more to improve the quality of their lives and that of their families.”

During the tutoring team’s last reflection, many contrasted the cheerful and passionate nature of the service recipients with that of local students in Hong Kong. Emphasizing the lesson they had learned from those they intended to teach, the PolyU students discussed their amazement at the cheerful and exemplary attitude of their students. A group of tutors, Hilary, Twinky and Cmau observed, “We were very inspired by the kids in Cambodia; they really want to participate and to learn, they are constantly asking questions and always very attentive.”

They concluded: “the students struggle with English; they know some words but just don’t know how to place them and how to construct sentences. [However], it’s an opportunity for them to become more familiar with English [...] the point is to give them an experience with English—a first exposure that maybe will give them the idea or make them want to learn more in the future.”

Like with the HRDI students, it seems as if the service providers and coordinators alike, though aware of the limitations of the project, view the ultimate goal of the ELC service trip to be the mutual inspiration the students gain from working together. On the one hand, the hope is to cultivate the service recipients’ curiosity for English and to see their sense of language learning grow through innovative teaching methods. The interaction that happens naturally between the students, on the other hand, also leads to knowledge sharing and cultural understanding across the different socio-economic and language barriers.



## Interview

with Bobby, student TA and Electrical Engineering Major at PolyU

**Q: So, Bobby, why did you decide to become a TA this year?**

B: One of the reasons was that I really like what we have done. Because, I think, for the whole group--the ELC project--they really spent a lot of effort and they really care about the impact and the education and the design of each lesson. They care about all those, and thus it really affected me. Because we were all impressed by some of our teachers, their effort encourage me to be a better teacher in the future.

That's why I think it'll be really good to come back and learn more from everybody--from our peers and the teachers. And so it's also good to know about more countries; it's my first time in Cambodia.

**Q: And why opt for an overseas project in particular?**

A: I've had several past experiences teaching kids in China and in different places. So when I was selecting my subjects, I wanted to continue the work I was doing, and so I picked this one because it is also dealing with teaching classes and kids.

**Q: What was your first impression of Cambodia, and did your idea of this country change from when you first came and now?**

A: Before the trip I didn't know much about Cambodia. When we arrived here we spent a couple days visiting their historical sites, knowing about their history--we also took a boat ride to see how the cities now develop. I think it is still, as many people say, one of the most undeveloped countries in this world, but people are living a peaceful life. And sometimes they don't have a desire to change, and that's one of the reasons we are here. It's not only to teach them English, but use English as the media for new ideas, through which Cambodians can embrace new things to make their lives better.



Q: And do you think this has been effective so far--after three days of teaching?

A: Well three days are pretty short and we all know that, but my point is to not underestimate the impact of only three days. We could do longer and I think we will in the future. But this is the first time that TA's come to Cambodia and we're also testing everything, but in three days we did four kinds of activities--ice breakers, fluency, grammar and pronunciation activities--and I think we introduced a lot of new ideas. Many of the language learners focus only on grammar points but here we introduced new teaching games with scenarios to speak and that's very important in language learning because language is communication after all. I think we will change their attitude towards how languages are learned. Also the teachers here, they might be inspired by the games and to use them in their lessons some day.

Q: What were the main challenges you have faced here?

A: We have a very large range of ability sets; it's really hard to find something in the middle. There's always the advanced people who get bored and the beginners who really struggle. So we try to overcome these challenges by providing more help. We have eight TA's for a team and we have over thirty to forty participants, so we try to help them more and we adjust our activities every day, depending on what their levels are.



Q: Where do you see this program go in the next couple years?

A: First of all I hope to see more people join the program, because one of the reasons I'm here is that they don't enroll enough students--there aren't many students registering for this subject. So I hope more people will come here so that we have more helpers with the activities.

Q: What about the partnership with HRDI?

A: The partnership with HRDI is pretty good, because they're teachers. They're already helping us on the tutor side, teaching students. We'll see, this year we came so we know more about their [English proficiency] level so next year we could design better materials that fit their level as well as more back up plans. We'll try to get more feedback so we can improve the program.

Q: What was the highlight of this week?

A: Besides S-21 and the Killing Fields, we had a really close look at places where tragedies happened and you start to realize that the history of this country is not just written in a text but also in front of us. Another part is when we were playing the games, some of the games we didn't expect to work so well--some of them we expected they might not enjoy--they actually did well. And that encouraged us a lot.

Q: What do you think was the impact of this project on the HRDI students?

A: First of all for the HRDI students, some of them are joining the tutors team so they also have a sense of all the activities that have been developed. I think they can develop new ideas from outside. As for those with the TA's, they also have access to new teaching ideas; they can practice their confidence with language speaking. Seeing that there are a lot of people promoting English in very different ways may inspire their own lessons and teaching of English.



▲ Students visited S-21 to learn about Cambodian history.



▲ HRDI teachers and students are participating in the English speaking activity.

## Journalist's Perspectives

# Impact & Looking Ahead

by Lucas Troadec

What were the concrete effects of the ELC project on the local community and the service recipients? What ways do we see forward, and what needs to be improved in the future? This summer, the growing role and extended scope of the ELC service-learning trip in Cambodia demands a heightened need for a thorough assessment of the real impact of the project on the community. Though ELC is strictly speaking a 'service-learning' project, this endeavor retains a humanitarian component. As such, the service-learning trip requires coordinators, teachers and providers alike to remain particularly aware of the concrete effects of their actions in Cambodia.

It was noted by Y.T., the coordinator of Service-Learning at HRDI in charge of ELC, that the main benefit of ELC was to bring students outside of their comfort zone. The point, the teachers emphasized, was to make the service recipients (both HRDI and ECS students) more confident in their ability to converse and communicate with foreigners. In spite of a limited time frame, the service provided at ECS aimed to increase students' exposure with an English-speaking environment. Kimsry, a recent HRDI alumna who re-joined the program after completing her teaching degree, says, "Most of the local students are very shy; exposure to English-speaking students and foreigners makes them more self-confident." Indeed, about seventy percent of the HRDI service recipients hope to one day become teachers themselves. These students, however, live in a country with "no education quality," according to Y.T. With few opportunities for effective language learning, Kimsry sees this opportunity to exchange knowledge and skills across cultural and language barriers as very beneficial. As the majority of these local university students lack the resources to master English, she and the subject teachers hope to see the service recipients learn from the teaching methods used by the PolyU students. This exposure to the outside world, Y.T. also hopes, will broaden the service recipients' mindset, giving them a window through English learning into the opportunities that exist for them. Not only does he expect local recipients to learn from their experiences, but he also wishes for his students to realize that acting with solidarity is, in fact, an option. Through PolyU's program, service recipients become aware that helping their neighbor, even when they don't have much money and resources, is a possibility. Finally, though PolyU is on the giving side, teachers and project coordinators expect ELC's major role to be a bridge between Hong Kong students and local recipients. As a number of HRDI students reportedly stayed in touch with the PolyU students through social media after the service-trip, it is apparent that the project does offer unique opportunities to local Cambodian students, exposing them to different teaching methods, outside knowledge, an English-speaking environment, and contact with foreigners.



Students of ECS, in a like manner, benefit from the ELC project through their interaction with foreigners and exposure to English learning. Service providers and coordinators alike agree, the ultimate goal of the program is to cultivate the kids' desire to learn English, giving them a rare opportunity in the resources-poor setting in which they were born.

However, Mr. Shephard recognizes, the ELC project also needs improvement. According to the subject teacher, the service providers in the TA group were not able to conduct fully effective workshops because of the recipients' large range of English skills. With beginners working alongside advanced speakers, the activities prepared were not fully fit to the diverse group of students they were designed to teach. This problem, the PolyU students also observe, should be fixed in upcoming year, with more effort put into designing teaching kits that take into account the differences in language proficiency of the students they are created for. This, coupled with an apparent lack of effective communication between service recipients and service providers, should be among the main considerations for the ELC project when looking ahead for improvement.

In addition, a number of students deplored the limited impact of their actions on the local community. Central to this common sentiment, was the limited time frame with which the students had to render their service. As one student articulated during the visit of the city slums, the main issue to be fixed was both the lack of time and follow up assessment with the ELC project. Follow up assessment, she argued, was especially paramount to the 'service' part of the OSL project. In this sense, the community should be both involved in the project, and have their needs accurately assessed previous and subsequent to the service learning trip. In her own words, "We need to know what the community needs and wants; it is not only about what we are willing to give."

Along the lines of key humanitarian principles, the same student observed, coordinators and students alike should remain aware of the impact of their actions on the local community, as well as the accountability that falls onto the shoulders of all service providers. Though 'service-learning' pertains to its own category, it is important to carry out the 'learning' objectives of the projects in due respect with the serious and conventional rendering of international service. This need for increased awareness about the nature of humanitarian work should hence be considered carefully when moving forward onto the next implementation of service-learning projects.



# 4

---

## **Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions**

School of Hotel & Tourism Management

---

Vietnam 12- 22 July 2017

# Hospitality Management and Operations in Developing Regions

School of Hotel & Tourism Management

## Introduction

Bridging together different cultures can be a challenging undertaking with potential upsets for all parties involved. Often times, conflicting ideologies can clash in explosive encounters, similar to that of water and oil mixing on a hot pan. Fortunately, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hoa Sen University in Vietnam, and The Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as the Sesame School) were all able to successfully come together to share in mutual and collaborative learning this past July. Led by Professor Raymond Kwong, 28 PolyU students travelled to Ho Chi Minh City for the hospitality service learning program's third year of operation.

Given the growing tourism industry in Vietnam, it is no surprise that many young people enroll in vocational trade schools to gain the necessary skills to find employment. Especially for those who are not afforded the opportunity to pursue the traditional routes of higher education, The Hospitality School of Ho Chi Minh City offers a chance at becoming employable with less than two years of training. In order to supplement the knowledge that the Vietnamese students receive at the trade school, this project aims to enhance the learning experience of the local students through the teaching of Hong Kong-style recipes, an expanded array of hospitality industry techniques, as well as English language skills.



## Methodology & Project Details

Before embarking on the overseas portion of the project, the PolyU students spent five weeks of preparation in their Hong Kong classrooms. Unlike the other service learning projects at PolyU, the hospitality program attempted to cover topics which spanned across four areas of the hospitality industry: bakery, chef, waiter, and housekeeping. As such, after students enrolled in the course, they were later divided into four separate teams. Then, throughout the semester, each cohort formulated a curriculum to teach based on their respective placement.

Time spent in the Hong Kong classrooms also promoted hands-on learning, allotting time for the PolyU students to practice skills related to various sectors of the hospitality industry. For instance, students placed in the bakery and chef teams would hone their abilities to create different dishes such as egg waffles, pineapple buns, green scallion pancakes, and pork dumplings. Due to the long process of perfecting food preparation techniques, the PolyU students were also able to spend time modifying and experimenting with the recipes in order to add creative spins and test out new flavors on classic Hong Kong foods. Out of these trials, one of the most successful creations were earl grey tea flavored egg tarts.

In addition, the PolyU students were able to practice their English-teaching abilities by simulating mock teaching plans at local Hong Kong primary schools. By gaining exposure to teaching in a real classroom setting, the Hong Kong students were able to use the feedback that they obtained from the rehearsals in order to modify and refine their teaching styles before going abroad.



Once the PolyU students arrived in Vietnam, the morning sessions were devoted to vocational skills training and the afternoons were set aside to teach English to the Vietnamese students. During the vocational skills training portion, the Hong Kong students would teach the Vietnamese students how to complete different hospitality-related tasks according to international standards. Some of these tasks included how to fold duvet covers, how to set a table at a restaurant, and how to prepare various dishes with a Hong Kong-style twist. The English-teaching sections of the service project focused on giving the Vietnamese students an opportunity to practice their English language skills. By covering topics such as food, occupations, numbers, and colors, the Hong Kong students hoped to help build the English vocabularies of the hospitality school students while also inspiring them to want to continue their English studies through the use of interactive games. While watching the Hong Kong students interact with their Vietnamese peers, it was clear that invaluable friendships were formed throughout this process of cultural exchange.



## Project Goals

According to the course instructor Raymond Kwong, the aim of this service learning project was to have the PolyU students be able to understand cultural differences as well as apply the skills of critical thinking and problem solving to everyday situations. Most importantly however, the program was designed to help foster a greater social responsibility in the students and help them grow into more empathetic individuals as they provide services to the local Vietnamese community. Raymond commented that, by transferring skills and knowledge to the Sesame School students, the PolyU students are afforded the opportunity to understand people in underprivileged settings and gain greater appreciation for their lives in Hong Kong.



## Interview

with Tiffany, instructor at SHTM in PolyU

My name is Tiffany. I'm an instructor at SHTM and my role in this international Service-Learning is to experience what it's like in an international Service-Learning and also to give the students some directions in terms of the English training for what it is.

I've been watching that during the pilot testing in terms of the English and I will give some advice to them as well.

**Q: Since this is the first time for you to take part in the Service-Learning project, what have you learned the most from it as a teacher?**

**T:** It's my first time to join the Service-Learning project. Service-Learning is very interesting. I understand now that it takes a lot of work beforehand. We are here for 10 days only but it takes planning for at least one year or half a year. Therefore, I'm really looking forward on how to make a Service-Learning trip happen from the beginning and to see the students' reaction to the things we provide to them. I think so far the students who have spoken about their reflection, have shown how they have changed. I think their flexibility is very important, as they have to go out of their comfort zones and to experience something new in order to understand that they need to serve this community which they are part of it.

**Q: As you have mentioned that students have their own reflections and they have debriefing every day, so students will give their feedback about the project or about the service recipients' reactions during the lessons every day. Is there any amendment or follow-up plans that you can help them as a teacher, especially for the improvement for the next day's event?**

**T:** As a teacher, we always try to help them and push them in a way to go beyond what they think they are capable of. Because students they have a lot of potential that maybe they don't see it yet and we see it as an outsider; so during the reflection, we try to give them more difficult tasks and difficult problems to think up and to solve them. If they are going in the wrong direction or thinking in a way that is not so appropriate, then we will go in and change the way. We try to have conversations with them to help them understand which is a better way to think. But during the reflection session, it is mostly for the students themselves to listen to each other. For the teachers, we will then go in individually but not in such a big group to talk to them. We will give them some advice individually. On the next day, we will check to see if the same thing happens again and if they do, we will remind them, like "Oh, this is what you talked about yesterday. Shouldn't you try something different?"



## Interview

with Vivian, student leader of the Chef team at SHTM in PolyU

**Q: Why did you choose to take an oversea project instead of the mainland one or the local one?**

V: This project is related to hotel and tourism. It may be helpful to my future career and I would like to take this chance to go overseas in order to explore more. I got many benefits physically and mentally through this trip.

**Q: After joining this Service-Learning trip, how is it different from the internship that you have joined?**

V: As internship, we have to follow all the rules and the SUP since we are working in a hotel. However, when we are in the Sesame School, we can relax a bit since we are in a teaching mode, which allows students to make mistakes.

**Q: As I know PolyU students have to practice three to four times before going to this trip, do you think there is any improvement or do you have any suggestions?**

V: We have practice two times a week and we have teachers to guide us step by step. We will practise the same thing and the same product for every week. We have improvement every week and we will ask other teammates to try our food to give comments. Their comments help us do better in order to suit more people.

**Q: Does this Service-Learning project meet your expectation?**

V: I think this Service-Learning project is a bit stressful for me, especially when we have arrived Vietnam. We have to wake up at 6:30 am and have training before we go to the Sesame School to do the service. Also, we have to prepare for the opening ceremony and the closing ceremony, like food, snacks, drinks and performance. We would rather take some more rest instead of having so many preparations. It is alright to have ceremonies but it would be the best if we can have better time management and arrangement, like the amount of the food that we need to prepare, the schedule of the ceremonies, to name but a few.

## Interview

with Nam, NSU first-year student major in English, leader of bakery team and translator in this project

**Q: Can you share some experience about your communications with PolyU students?**

N: I have talked to many foreigners before but it is the first time that I have been talking with people in English mix with Chinese. It's okay when they speak in English but when they sometimes change things into Chinese, I'm a little bit sad but it's okay and understandable. I have learned to it and I love the teaching style of PolyU students.

**Q: It seems like there is a communication barrier between you and PolyU students, so how can you fix the problem or enhance the communication process?**

N: Like yesterday, my team told me the some questions. However, it was hard to understand and it was really complicated to ask her repeat like six or seven times. I couldn't figure out the questions, so I ask the teacher from Sesame School for help. I don't think it is the PolyU students' mistake but it is my mistake.

**Q: Do you have any suggestion for PolyU teachers in order to select students with higher level of English?**

N: I think it's okay. PolyU students just have to slow down their speed to speak, then it is easier for the translators to understand and translate.

**Q: Do you have any comments on the teaching materials that PolyU students have prepared for the Sesame School students? Do you think the difficulty level and content of the materials is suitable for the students in Sesame School?**

N: The students think that the content is too easy for them because they have learnt it before. They have learnt some of the knowledge in their intermediate schools already.

Q: What do you think about the overall impact that this Service-Learning project has brought to the Sesame School students?

N: Yes, it does have an impact to the Sesame students and also to NSU students. When we do the Service-Learning, we serve and we learn a lot. This learning experience has changed my life a lot, like I learnt to communicate with more different foreigners.

Q: I know that you are the leader of bakery team; do you have any recommendation for PolyU students when they are teaching bakery skills?

N: Oh, it's different. The method that Sesame students used and PolyU students taught to bake cookies are different. They still learn things from PolyU students. Teachers from Sesame School also said that they have never learnt the way that PolyU students taught. Therefore, they are also learning from the PolyU students.



## Interview

with Puiyu, Year 1 student studying in School of Design

I am Puiyu, a Year 1 student who is studying in School of Design. I join this project because it is related to service about hotel and I can visit other country to explore more and know the cultural difference between Vietnam and Hong Kong.

**Q: I know you are working in the bakery team. Can you share about your comments on the facilities between Sesame School and Bistro in SHTM?**

P: For sure, facilities in Hong Kong are much better, but facilities here are not that bad as well. They even have more ovens than Hong Kong. However, some tools like bowls, Bistro will have more tools than Sesame School since Hong Kong focuses more on the teaching and learning while sesame School have fewer students in number and most of them have to make the breads everyday and sell them to the bakery in earn money. There are four to five students who work here and they will share the tools and equipment to make hundreds of breads. Therefore, they don't even need so many bowls and others tools. Besides, here is hot and there is no air-conditioning; however, students here are so willing to learning so they don't care much about the condition. Also, in Hong Kong, we have people to help us clean all the dishes for us; but we have to clean the dishes by ourselves here. Students here are so active that they will help us to do the washing. We also have to sweep the floor and when students see that we are taking the sweeping work, they will just come to us and say, "I will do it, let me do it". I think it is the difference between Hong Kong students and Sesame students.

**Q: Do you think that the knowledge that you delivered in the project, like the bakery skills and the English knowledge, can have the big impact to the students in Sesame School?**

P: Actually for the bakery skills, I don't really think that there is a big impact because they have already learned some skills before, and they are now learning like new recipes and using similar skills. But for the English part, it is good for us to provide a better environment. When we talk to them, we can correct them, like they will always mix the "e" sound and the "i" sound. When they are talking with their friends or other Cambodians, seldom of them can provide the correct pronunciation but we can tell. They can hardly to classify the words, so it is really kind for them to know we can teach them the pronunciation.



Q: Can you tell us how your team encourages the students to speak more English during the class?

P: At the beginning, they are not confident to speak and they are afraid that they are wrong. We will give them some candies and we get into small group individually to let them talk more. We keep taking the same approach and thing does change. In Day One, they were so shy to talk and seldom gave response to us; but on the Day Three and Day Four, they participated actively and some of them are confident to raise their hands and ask questions. I am very happy about that.

## Journalist's Perspectives

# Impact

by Lucas Troadec

Sitting at the table for lunch on their first day of service, the students are asked to reflect on their initial experiences. One student observes in a low voice, that their presence at the school as teachers feels rather superfluous. The other students at this table of seven nod in agreement; they proceed to chronicle the events of that same morning, when, to their embarrassment, it became quickly evident that the Sesame students were more skilled than they were at performing the task they had been instructed. The students then confided with irony, that far from being the teachers, they felt as though they were in fact the ones being taught something new at Sesame School.

With skilled local students under their supervision, this observation became common across the four teams of Hospitality students. From Chef Team to Baking, House-keeping and Waiter team, all four groups observed a clear gap between what they had been expecting the local Sesame students to be able to perform and what they were really capable of doing. The students, however, attempted to rationalize their presence at Sesame School by focusing on the practical skills they were bringing to the service recipients. First of all, they agreed, the local Vietnamese students were learning new recipes and ways of cooking from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan—things they would have little to no exposure to otherwise. Dishes such as Pineapple Cake and Pineapple Bread, for instance, were a big success among Sesame students, who guaranteed these dishes would be on their menu in the future.

Yet, the most rewarding and successful aspect of their service, the students agreed, was the English lessons they provided during the afternoon sessions. Aware of the limitations of the skill-based services, the students put a certain emphasis on the English education part of the Hospitality project. Despite the initial problem that the students faced when they were suddenly told that the English proficiency levels of their students varied greatly, calling for the re-arrangement of all their teaching material, the four teams reported feeling the most optimistic about their work in the classrooms. In particular, they observed that the Sesame students would make a great deal of effort to learn and participate in the classroom activities, leading to positive feedbacks concerning the benefits of such exposure to English education. With laughter and light-heartedness, it was often there, in the classrooms of Sesame School, that bonds were created between the service recipients and the service providers.

The local interpreters from Hoa Sen University, however, reported different experiences in the classrooms; they expressed their disappointment at the sudden change in their status that occurred throughout the week. Because of miscommunication between the local University, PolyU and Sesame School, it quickly appeared that the role of the interpreters was ambiguous and questioned by the project coordinators on both ends. These local volunteers, who had been selected and trained to be interpreters between the service recipients and the service providers, quickly saw their role diminished from translator to mere observer. Especially in the classrooms, the latter were asked to withhold from any active participation, in order to ensure that Sesame students were receiving greater exposure to English speaking. As one interpreter disclosed, though he understood the necessity and benefits of such a course of action, the vast majority of the student interpreters in their group felt not only deceived but also as if their presence was ultimately unnecessary.

The PolyU students, in a like manner, criticized the way in which their last day of service unfolded, indicating that they, more often than not, felt overworked during the closing ceremony. Tasked to prepare an exorbitant amount of food—typically the most popular dishes they had prepared throughout the week—many service providers felt the expectations ran too high, making for a particularly taxing experience. In keeping with the rest of the week, where important, yet numerous and demanding self-reflection activities were organized by the subject teachers, the PolyU students wished they were given more leeway to perform their service.

Nonetheless, providers, recipients and facilitators alike expressed both their gratitude and their satisfaction with the Hospitality project. The PolyU students left Ho Chi Minh City with great difficulty and only after many lengthy goodbyes at the gate of the school. The Sesame students were also sad to part, and many cried as they waved at the students boarding the bus. As was the case during the closing ceremony, both the service recipients and providers openly showed their emotion, snapping pictures together, exchanging social media usernames and expressing their feelings about a week that was as intense as it was highly gratifying. Hence, despite the many difficulties and great challenges the students from PolyU, Hoa Sen University and Sesame school faced together during these seven days, their final word was one of sentimental reconnaissance and satisfaction.





# 5

---

## **Technology 4 Development Tech4D**

Student Self-Initiated Project

---

Cambodia 6 - 15 June 2017

# Student-Initiated Project – Technology 4 Development (Tech4D)

by Jamie Li

## Introduction

What would you do in your 4-month university summer holiday? Find a part-time job? Join an internship programme? Learn a foreign language? This year, fourteen university students from PolyU took part in the Technology for Development (hereinafter 'Tech4D') Service-Learning project and spent two weeks in Cambodia to set up a learning centre for local students. It turned out to be quite a different summer holiday experience for them.



## Project Details

It was the second year Tech4D programme ran its Service-Learning project in Cambodia. The team consisting of fourteen students and two staff arrived in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia, on 6 June. There are seven districts in Phnom Penh, four in the city and three on the outskirts. The capital has a population of approximately 2 million people, it is considered the most densely populated area in the country. Tech4D expressly chose Kampong Speu, a rural village neighbouring Phnom Penh, to be the location of the Service-Learning course of this year. It was hoped that the course would help narrow the rich-poor gap and improve the educational standard for local students.

The Tech4D team was very international. Team members were of different races, there were Singaporean Chinese, Thai, Americans and so on. English was the common language and it did not seem to be a language barrier, the team members had a very great time talking and sharing using English throughout the service. For most members it was their first time to join the Tech4D project. With expectations and excitement, they flew from Hong Kong to Cambodia. After a 2-hour journey they finally arrived at the hotel in a remote area.

Most team members had participated in other Service-Learning courses before, from which they had collected useful experience that could help them adjust and coordinate the planning and arrangements of the project. Moreover, quite a few of the members had sound knowledge of the theories and installation of solar panels as they had already taken COMP2S01, with the participation of some other members who had joined Tech4D last year, the team would certainly be able to provide a better service this year. The Office of Service-Learning assigned two staff to accompany the team to Cambodia for daily operations and transportation arrangements. The project is a self-organised learning activity, yet the team members proved that they had got everything well taken care of. The well-organised schedule and systematic item list were two illustrative examples of their thorough preparations.

Tech4D had two objectives this year: to establish a learning centre for the local students and to build a rainwater collection box. The fourteen members were divided into three sub-teams, namely the Solar Panel Team, the Interior Design Team and the Rainwater Collection Team. Upon arrival, the three teams were already exhilarated and right away they started to unload all materials and tools. They went around to observe the actual size and volume of the cargo before they split to work according to division of labour. Watching them unload the wooden planks and tools as well as the solar panel sets from the vehicle, I was positive that their high will would not be destroyed easily by the scorching sun.

After the Solar Panel Team made an observation, the team members immediately put on their safety belts and climbed onto the roof to install solar panels so that there would be enough electricity supplied to lights and electric fans later. It was the first time for two boy members to take part in the Tech4D programme. Despite the burning sun and the pouring sweat they carefully looked for a perfect spot on the roof to ensure the panels could collect the most sunlight before attaching them to the railings. In the meantime, the Interior Design Team was wallpapering the inside of the cargo with some Cambodian designs. As the rainwater collection bucket could not be built next to the learning centre until the solar panels were installed, the Rainwater Collection Team was cutting water pipes into stands and supports and preparing wooden planks in different lengths for diverting rainwater to the bucket later. The wooden planks happened to have 1 to 2 cm difference in height but the team did not take the inaccuracy as it came. With their insistent attempts the difference was fixed and the planks could eventually be used to divert rainwater. This tiny difference saw the enthusiasm and determination of the Tech4D members towards the service. As the saying goes 'a miss is as good as a mile', they were very prudent to the best sense of this idiom.

The team had most solar panels installed finally after a day of hard work, the remaining ones would be ready once they were wired. The Interior Design Team nearly finished wallpapering the cargo, the canary yellow wallpaper gave a comfortable and casual feeling, which would certainly provide a cosy and relaxing learning environment for the children.





The Tech4D team gathered in the vehicle sharply at 8 in the morning the next day. They were excitedly discussing the items to be completed that day. The shuttles stopped in front of the school at the entrance of the village, in high spirits the team got off and were ready for the tasks of the day. As usual everyone went to their positions with spanners, screwdrivers and drills in hands and performed their duties. The Interior Design Team started sawing timber to prepare planks of wood for making chairs and bookshelves after finishing off the wallpapering. The Solar Panel Team further divided themselves into two small teams, with one responsible for installing wooden pieces in different heights to collect rainwater on the roof and the other assembling electric fans and lightbulbs inside the learning centre. The Rainwater Collection Team also helped with sawing and whittling the wood for making furniture.

All solar panels were mounted on the roof on the second day, electric fans and lightbulbs were also installed inside the cosy canary yellowish learning centre while the furniture would soon be ready, too. Local kids dropping by the learning centre could not help craning forward to get a glimpse of these busy working big brothers and sisters trying to find out where the pounding noises came from. During recess time or after school, they would swarm the learning centre as if some little overseers checking on the team to make sure they were not slacking off. When seeing the team members taking a rest, drinking water or wiping away sweat on the steps in front of their school, these kids would sit beside them gazing at them with their glittering eyes while some could not refrain from tugging at their sleeves asking them to play football and roll tyres with them.

Some members of the Tech4D team got a streaming cold and fever on the third day. They had no choice but to stay at the hotel for some rest. As time was running short and the team was a bit short-handed, other members had to speed up double fearing that the service might fall behind schedule. The Solar Panel Team carried on with the furniture while the Interior Design Team would burnish and polish those finished ones so that they would be in tune with the design theme of the learning centre. The Rainwater Collection Team was carrying around bricks and the stone well cast for building the water collection bucket. One by one they put bricks inside the cast to consolidate the foundation of the water bucket. The team also mixed mortar with soil and water but some members appeared to be somewhat clumsy as it was their first time mixing cement. At last, Stephen instructed them in person demonstrating the correct ratio, with the help of those who had joined the Tech4D programme last year, the team finally knew the trick to the right mixture. The team smeared the mortar layer by layer between bricks to fix them inside the cast. Watching the sweat drop from their foreheads and arms into the mortar, I was so touched by their passions, positive and serious work attitude. I am sure that the local kids and the villagers could feel the same and they would benefit from the hard work and perseverance of these youngsters to a great extent.

Towards the end of the service, the Tech4D team was working at full throttle to complete the remaining tasks: the Interior Design Team was adorning the furniture before moving them into the learning centre; the Rainwater Collection Team continued to install the water collection buckets, filters, water gauges and pipes while the Solar Panel Team was refining the details of the learning centre. When the team members wrote their names on the board inside the centre for commemoration, I believed each stroke and letter would wake their memories of the four days' toil.

Once the learning centre and the water harvesting system were ready, our two staff then invited the village chief and the locals to have a visit to centre. The team introduced the functions and purposes of the centre while demonstrating how to use the facilities and the water harvesting system. When the Interior Design Team was touring around some kids, the Rainwater Collection Team was showing the village chief and teachers how to clean and maintain the water filters. The Solar Panel Team was moving in some gaming facilities like the football goal post and the pitching net that had been prepared two days ago so that the kids could play with them afterwards.

The last hour should be the proudest moment for the Tech4D team. The village chief, villagers, teachers and kids all spoke highly of the learning centre who also praised their perseverance and passion. The team members were having a fun time with the kids, they were pitching balls to see who could throw the farthest. Some were holding the kids when they were trying to walk on the balance beam. The team members seemed to be so content with their production as nothing was more rewarding than seeing the smiles on the kids' faces.







▲ Local kids could not wait to use the water collection tank

## Interview

with Dr. Stephen Chan, Head of Office of Service-Learning



Behind me is the Tech4D team. They are composed of students who have taken Service-Learning before. Some of them have actually graduated already and they are coming back to help. Many of them have taken subject that is related to technology while others are studying other subjects. Some are engineering students but lots of them are not. Still, they all share the same desire to continue the Tech4D Project and they will serve the community.

This team is a little different from other teams because some graduates come back to volunteer again and they are more experienced. Since they had done it before, they made some difference this year on the interior design and the overall structure of the learning centre. They knew about the concept and they also had the experience of working as a team. They are capable of solving external problems, like the hot weather and the living environment.

Some students who join the project again because they love Cambodia so much and they would like to contribute more. They love serving Cambodian because Cambodian are so friendly that they will express their appreciation and praise on their faces. They are so true that they seldom hide their emotions.

Some want to be here so they have joined projects in Rwanda and would like to try a new place, to participate in a different type of project, and to interact with different people.

Tech4D is a team which is relatively mature, not only because some of them have the experience before, but also they understand what they are going to do and as a teacher, I don't have to keep on eye on them every second and I just have to monitor them regularly. Tech4D can figure out the general purpose and then they can go ahead. This is one of their characteristics that I appreciate the most.









## Interview

with Dr. Grace Ngai, Associate Professor of Department of Computing and Associate Head of the Office of Service-Learning



I will talk about why we are doing all these projects and I think that what we are now seeing is a good illustration of the reason why it is happening as we want students to learn how to solve problem and be motivated to learn.

Initially we have many ways for students to learn. When there is problem that they need to solve, they will find ways to solve it . Because this is also a real problem in reality. This is something that we want them to learn as we encourage them to take up the responsibility. Sometimes, they might be uncomfortable with new people because they are not familiar with each other. However, if they still have to solve the problem since there are many people depending on them. We teach them self-control as well. Sometimes, we will feel tired, feel upset, or even want to hide ourselves from others, we still have to work on the project and adjust our feelings. We can talk with our teammates to see if the whole team can help with the situation. Normally, thing goes better in this way and this is essential to keep our team as company.

No matter which discipline you are from, like Computing Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, when you join the Tech4D team, these are things that you can't learn from textbook or Google. If you put yourself into the situation, where you have to oversee the probability and discipline yourself, you will know how much you have gained from the project. You know, after year and year, we've seen from our students that they can be self-discipline and fulfill more beyond the requirement. This is more than just a course, more than just completing the academic requirement; this is actually something as meaningful as a gift. This will be left to the local people, and students can also learn from the reflection. This is Service-Learning and this is what we hope our students to achieve.



## Interview

with RUPP Teacher



Actually, people are very interested in their project they have many interaction between RUPP students and the PolyU student. What I learnt is that different culture can match each other. Like PolyU students, they have no idea about our market, they are very curious about the environment of Cambodia. And for the RUPP students, they are interested in the Hong Kong's culture as well since they haven't had a chance to go outside yet. I am really thankful for the opportunity that we can work together, and I hope that we can keep this long-lasting relationship in the future.





## Interview

with Derek Ma, Student of the Department of Computing, PolyU

Hi I'm Derek Ma. I'm from the department of Computing in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I'm a senior of computing department and this is my second time to join this project and first time is a Service-Learning subject in Rwanda.

**Q: Why do you join the overseas project instead of the mainland one?**

D: For me, the reason is quite simple. I haven't been abroad before and I didn't go outside of China, so when the time I know that I can go overseas and that's a subject, I think I should accept the challenges. I think the teammates in our team are already very familiar with the technical knowledge because we have done this before. There is only one problem like we don't know the background of this learning container because actually we don't know much about this farm school and this area. I think it would be the best if we do some more research about the background information so that we can customize our design and make it more suitable for the children.

**Q: If you have a chance to improve Tech4D Project, what kind of changes would you make to reinforce this project?**

D: I think maybe the teammates who want to join Tech4D can join the team earlier, so that we can know more background information about this project and about this area. We can make that container become more suitable for the people here. Also if we can join the team earlier, we can know more about the teammates and we can have a closer relationship.

**Q: You have mentioned the youth in Cambodia, so have you interacted with them a lot? And have you interacted with the local community here, like the kids and the teachers?**

D: Actually, I haven't interacted with the children and teachers here, because I am busying with the work. But I know we will have some time to interact with the villagers and play with the kids after the completion of the learning centre, so it is fine for me. I have interacted with some staff at the youth organization, so I look forward to playing with the children and have a chat with them.

## Interview

with Erin, PolyU graduate



My name is Erin. I am graduated from Polyu last year, so this is a second time to me come to Cambodia and also the second time for me to join the Tech4D Team, Technology for Development. This year we make use of recycle container and turn it into our library or a learning centre so that the kids or the residents in this village to make use of it and have entertainment. So basically, our operation goes like this. One team is working on the interior design and another team is making the solar panels so that it could power the light and fans inside. And also, there's one more team for the system of collecting rainwater, so that the people would wash their hands and face before they go into the container.

Because this is a second time for me to join the Tech4D, so we can successfully complete the program and made a lot of improvements and details. Take the water system as an example. As we are working with water system, so we add a few filters to make the water clearer. And we also add some water meters to collect some data for the next year's reference. We also have some health tutorial for the local villagers to teach them how to make use of the water system and how to maintain a container. We are very delighted to say that they like it and they are curious about and very interested in doing this kind of project.



Journalist's Perspectives

# Give and Take, Serve and Learn

by Amy Hui

After first time compulsory participation in Service Learning programme, will you join it again voluntarily? I bet there is a voice saying no in most of the people's hearts. Some people may not want to suffer in the poor living and serving environment again. Some may consider the programme is just a subject. They passed and do not want to waste time on doing repeating service. Some may want to support it again but may be unavailable to join due to several reasons.

Therefore, Tech4D team is worth our applause as they have the will to help and take real action. They are willing to spend time for the programme on preparation and service. They need to stay and work in the poor environment again. Every day, they build the container under the sun, suffering from the high temperature with sweaty clothes. During summer in Hong Kong, most people tend to stay indoor with air conditioner. Tech4D team sacrifice their comfort to make a better life for the others.

Is it worth sacrifice? The most important answer is in the heart of every member in the team. I believe give and take is a cycle. When we step out the comfort zone in Hong Kong, living in developing countries, we will find that we are the fortunate group. No one is deserved to be fortunate or unfortunate since born. Hence, we should help the needy to strive for fairness when we have the ability. During the service, we learn from the surroundings, the service recipients, our teammates and ourselves. The long-living experience and happiness, to me, it is worth sacrifice a comparably short period of comfort.





# 6

---

## **Service-Learning Programme in Cambodia for Staff**

---

Cambodia 8 - 14 June 2017

# Service-Learning Programme for Staff

by Benjamin Bosis

## Introduction

As the first university to officially introduce a mandatory service learning component to their curriculum, Hong Kong Polytechnic University is always on the lookout for ways to expand the program to include broader experiences and deeper learning. As part of the effort to inspire new classes and projects, PolyU sends a team comprised of its own staff, unaffiliated with the service learning office, to participate in the Cambodia project.

Their presence there serves several purposes, both for Hong Kong and local students, and also for the staff and the University. While on the project, they most directly assist the children in the Cambodian school, since the purpose of their trip is to outfit a shipping container as a learning center for the local school children. Their presence is also a resource to the university students who, through mutual interest in their service, may develop a relationship with their old and/or future professors.

One of the other offices at the University, the Office of Community Engagement, focuses on more general service than the learning focused projects of the OSL. Their participation in the staff projects is a part of the plan to see the PolyU community as engaged in service as possible. As such, the leader of the Staff group, who is also on the staff of the OCE, played a large part in recruiting members to go and experience community engagement in Cambodia.

The leader, whose name was Carmen, seemed very proud of those PolyU members willing to put their lives on hold to go and serve, and repeatedly told me that “they are the interesting ones. Find out more about them.” But most importantly for the future of Service Learning at PolyU, these are the professors and staff who will become more and more involved as the program expands. Though it is no longer only a technical university, PolyU has the resources to bring more knowledge and skills to these developing countries, and in conjunction with the school’s programs in construction, tourism, and others, these are the people who will do it.

## Project Details

The staff team arrived in Cambodia on the 10th of June, well prepared and ready for action. The bus ride from town took about 40 minutes, but as soon as they arrived at the local primary school where they were working, the team jumped into the job, preparing materials and laying down plans even as they took in their surroundings. The main goals of the service portion of the project were to decorate the container for the children and to furnish the inside with the actual resources they would use to learn, including books, puzzles, and games. The majority of the work in gathering the learning materials had come back in Hong Kong, where the staff researched what could best educate and hold the attention of primary age students.

Once they arrived on the site, the team laid out paints, equipment, and design plans, and got to work sketching the basic layout of the graphic they would later paint. Basing the proportions on pictures they had created beforehand, the group made short work of the job, pausing here and there to re-examine the height of a character's eyes, or the spacing of objects against the background, trying to lay the foundation just right. As I watched them work, they made a striking first impression, working with surprising efficiency while maintaining a friendly banter that kept them energetic and lighthearted on the job.

Though the staff members were all from different departments, they had clearly become fast friends on the trip, and joked with each other freely and frequently. Between the twelve members of the team, the sketching went by quickly as each person pitched in on their own piece to bring the whole image together. The next day marked the start of the painting, and displayed a similar scene. If you can't picture 20 intelligent university professors bustling around a container, making quick work of a paint job that would have taken days for a less organized team, and still managing to have a good time, imagine the fish that give Marlin and Dori directions in Finding Nemo, and you'll get a pretty close approximation.



Over the course of several days the team painted the outside of the container with scenes of playing children; filled the inside with books, games, and other fun and educational materials; and to cap it off, hosted a grand opening event for the kids. All the while, despite the tropical heat, they maintained that same fast paced, humorous energy. The final day was full of games and activities that helped the staff bond with the children and introduce them to their new learning space. Each of the team members was in charge of a different station, where they engaged in activities from egg races to singing songs, While learning new english words and having a blast doing it. Everyone from PolyU was entirely focused on the children, and ran back and forth between stations, animatedly explaining games, encouraging participation, and doing their best to keep student excited.

The day really demonstrated to me the team's diversity of talent, because the type of energy it required was so different from what they had been doing all along. Unlike the days spent focused on the container, in which every member moved around that one object of attention, the energy around the kids was nothing but all over the place. And it worked, too - even as the staff ran from place to place, bouncing from organizing to cheering on a race and back to planning in a second, the children were fixated by the activities. Had they given me a well phrased explanation, I would not have seen their excitement to learn more clearly than I did in their giddy smiles and laughter that day.

The team drew a lot of that energy from one of the most charismatic members, Dan, who led the shapes learning game and never failed to get the kids interested in the wacky shape-faces he drew on the board. Watching him jump up and yell, then crouch, scrunch up his face and whisper, I realized these antics were only a more childish version of the morale-raising jokes he had been making all week. Always ready with a cheeky "PolyMe, PolyYou" and a wink, Dan spearheaded the nearly overwhelming enthusiasm the entire team brought to the project through their clear love of children and commitment to education. I caught up with Dan as he worked, of course farcically perched on a platform a tenth of his size, painting the highest parts of the container.





## Interview

with Dan



I'm Dan, and I'm an english teacher at the University, so I do teacher trainings for faculty who use english as their means of communication, I teach undergrads and postgrads academic english, and I teach business communication skills. I do a lot of work with the civil service, and some corporate work as well, so I have quite a few different roles. I came on the trip last year and I really enjoyed it - it was something pretty different from my usual day to day. Although I work with a lot of people at the University, you rarely develop a relationship, so getting to meet colleagues and work with them has been a good experience. Not to mention it's just a good thing to do.

For me personally I came to the symposium to kind of network a bit, and see where I can bring my skills, especially in teacher training. That's where I think one person can have quite a lot of impact, because their work gets very quickly spread on from there.

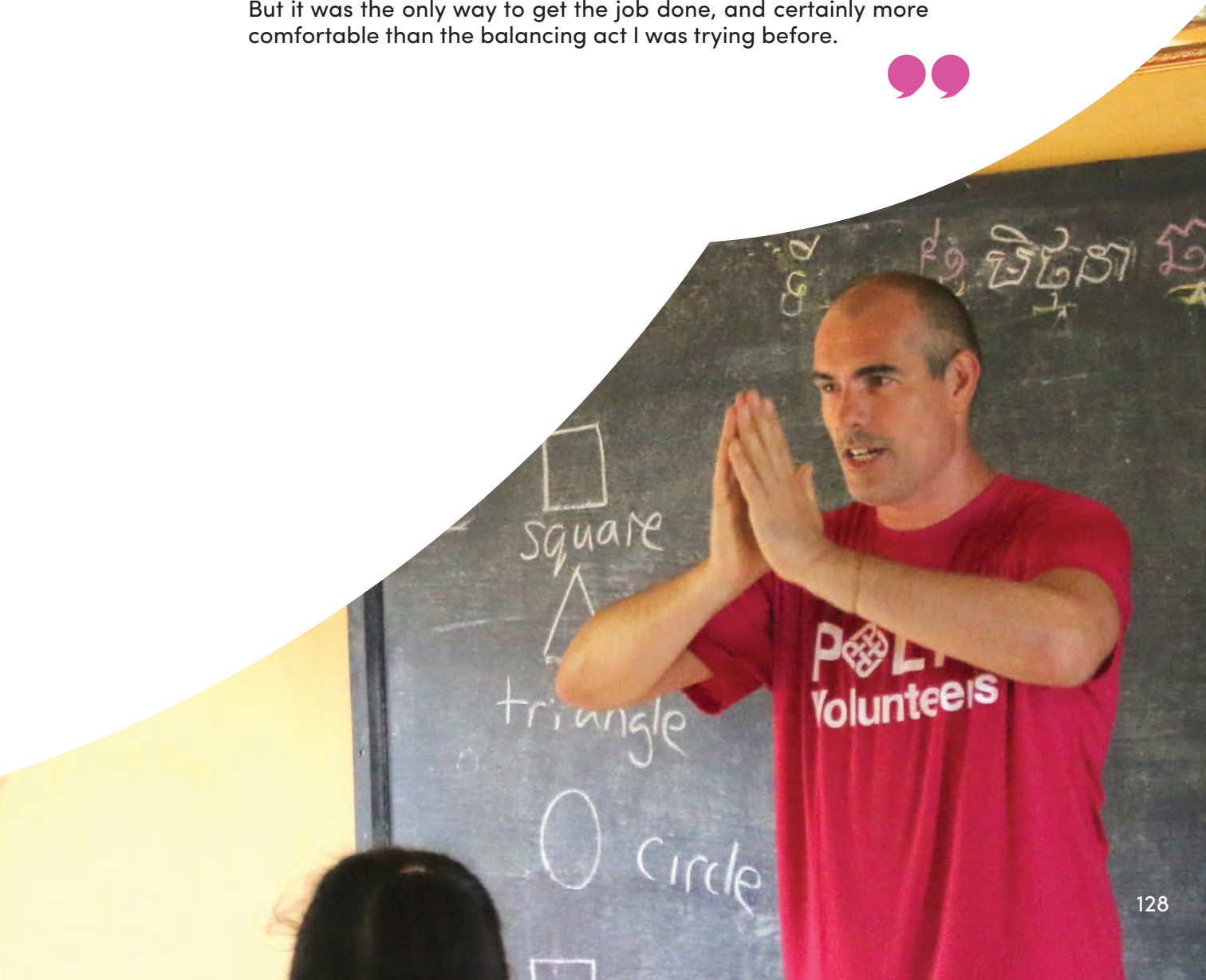
Our staff project was bigger last year, because we had a lot more people as well as a bit more time, so the teams were a bit more clearly defined. This year we've got a relatively smaller team and less time, so we've got to just kind of go for it, and maybe take on a bit more responsibility individually. The area is definitely a lot more rural than I was expecting, given that last year we were in a very populated area. I haven't really met the kids yet, which is quite different. We're planning a sort of games day later on, but I haven't been able to interact with them as much overall because they don't seem to really hang out in the area. Last year we were playing with the kids all the time, which probably contributed to the project taking longer but also made things more energetic.







I didn't have very many personal goals coming in, since I had been on the project before. The administration wanted a person or two who had more experience with the area and the program, so I was able to take on more responsibility in that respect, looking after the group and things like that. But that's a position that was more thrust open me than chosen." He laughs. "Physically right now, the position is starting to get a bit uncomfortable, since at this point I've got a lot of paint on me. But it was the only way to get the job done, and certainly more comfortable than the balancing act I was trying before.



## Interview

with David Broadstock

Working directly below Dan is his colleague (and now friend) David, who laughs at this last comment. After joking about Dan's monkeying around, David tells me his purpose on the trip is a little more clear-cut.



I am a deputy director for a research center on economic sustainability and entrepreneurial finance; I'm a course director for the masters of finance in energy and environmental economics, which is a newly launched masters; and I'm also a regular assistant-professor on top of all that. So one of the main qualities that drew me to the project was its focus on providing the region with solar panels, which overlaps pretty directly with both my personal and professional interests. So what I wanted to do, largely in preparation for the first intake of students for the masters, was try and complement my practical experiences with more realistic experiences found outside the sort of upper income bracket bubble that exists in Hong Kong. So I wanted, in an academic respect, to have a better handle on that side of the issues we will be studying, but also to appear to the students as someone more engaged in the practical implementation of their study.



But even though he had these academic concerns to keep in mind for the university, David told me, the trip had provided him with a lot of new information to take in from the area around them. You could see the difference in his interests through the kinds of details he picked up on:







The nature of poverty here is sometimes quite different here than in many other countries. There is a sense in which resources are being brought to the population, like the metro stations that they sometimes have set up – you know, they're not necessarily leaving to try to find better things. There are amenities here, but it seems to be more a matter of getting them here, since despite the petrol stations and televisions, there are not always proofs of those possessions – especially among the children who run around here barefoot and naked.

The people in general seem more committed to their village, whereas in places of poverty in China and elsewhere there is often a sense of trying to get out. The community here is definitely a strong one, most likely because of the troubled recent history that these people have gone through. I really hope I get to come back in a year or so and see how the people are implementing the new (and hopefully meaningful) changes to the area.



## Journalist's Perspectives

# Enlighten people and be enlightened

by Amy Hui

Hong Kong's education system in general is considered well organized in Asia. Every child in Hong Kong receives twelve years of free education with qualified teachers. However, in Cambodia, a Southeast Asian country, not all kids are fortunate as those who are born in Hong Kong to have the chance to get educated. The country experienced the Cambodian genocide during the Khmer Rouge era, in which numerous of intellectuals and professionals are killed by the leading communist party. Not many people with equipped knowledge and skills left and hence the education situation there is extremely poor.

This year, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University sent several staff volunteers to Cambodia to help the unfortunate kids living in rural area in education. In the village, though there is school, the facilities and teachers are inadequate.

Students study with limited light sources, textbook and stationery. The staff team helped by furnishing the exterior wall and providing materials like books and stationery for the newly built learning container and educating local primary kids with a series of fun learning activities in art, music, English and physical education.

Although time is limited, the staff taught with their best and students were eager to learn. Watching the kids decorating their bag and being content with their art piece, singing and dancing happily with the music played with ukulele, raising their hands enthusiastically to answer the questions in English lesson and participating in sport games actively, I believe both teachers and students were having fun together. Time pass so quickly and we all needed to leave and back to Hong Kong. The impact of teaching on the Cambodian kids may not be long-lasting but the voluntary work experience inspired the staff and aroused their thought of bringing in changes in long term.





The most obvious change in the volunteers is having more understanding of the country. Cambodia is in poverty and there are many locals living near the dump and going for garbage search to trade money with useful stuff found. Education helps people in social mobility. However, there is a lack of resources in education in Cambodia and its people are not educated enough to make profit with knowledge. The country is desperately in need of intellectuals and professionals to help development of the society by teaching the others with what they specialize in as one of the ways. In the symposium held in Royal University of Phnom Penh, the principal of RUPP mentioned the population of engineers in the country is approximately 150 people. The number of intellectuals and professionals is surprisingly low and needless to say their influence on extensive education is limited. Therefore, it is hoped that more and more professionals from diverse background can bring in their own knowledge, serve the needy and educate more people to continue their work to make the Cambodian society thrive again.

Being a global citizen, we can help deal with poverty and improve their quality of life by showing them our knowledge and teaching them how to make money by themselves. This can also create a great impact on the future of the next generation whether they will continue the loop of their parents' life in trash trading or they will have the capability to lead their communities out of poverty.

Besides having understanding and empathy for the country's need, people also gain from giving through the project. Teaching and learning is mutual. Teachers can also be benefited from the service experience. Their teaching can become more flexible with more practical support as they need to adapt to the learning environment and culture and gain realistic outbound experience for their professional fields. In Cambodia, education opportunity and resources are insufficient in the rural area. Making the most of what they have and modifying teaching methods are the challenges for educators. Moreover, personal visit of the village and students' projects provides first-hand information in their academic interest. It also makes teachers appear to students as the model of practical implementation of their study, making the theory more convincing. Academics sitting in ivory towers have limited understanding of the reality, and hence we should go out and explore to make the study sound.



People find new perspective in their professional field as well. Dr. Lam Chi Hin, Jin, who is an instructor of Institute of Textiles and Clothing, mentioned that she got inspired by the creativity of the locals. She had her self-initiated project which provided workshops teaching expressive textile art techniques and theory to some Cambodian women. She helped them to improve fabric product quality and taught them to make income more effectively by sewing tote bags instead of trading rubbish. In staff team's teaching activity, she taught kids to create their own art on bags to express themselves. People's willingness to learn and creativity in mix and match of colors and texture amazed is amazement to her after her delivery of service to different categories of service recipient.





In the service journey, people can find others who also have similar aspiration. During the service, people make friends with other professionals. Chat and know more about the unfamiliar world in academics, in other's experience and perspective. They can also develop relationship with other field which they may not familiar with but are interested in or have potential to cooperate with each other. This helps bringing cross disciplinary learning and collaboration which the trend in higher education.

Circulation between gaining and giving is the way to make the society a better place. When you have the ability to help, go to help with what you good at and share your ideas and knowledge. Your participation can enlighten more young and passionate hearts that want to make every endeavor to change the society. It is not just about enlightening others, but also a way to enrich yourself with service experience. Please join us!



# Takeaways, Improvements, and Conclusions

by Benjamin Bosis

Like all great endeavors, humanitarian service work, especially when done overseas, comes with many considerations that cannot be overlooked. Issues regarding the sustainability of the project, concerns around which organizations are involved, and the long-term impact of foreign involvement are all matters that need to be evaluated prior to engaging in this field of work. As the Service Learning department at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has evolved over the years, it comes without question that the university needs to begin to re-examine and assess the needs of the communities being served as the service learning program continues to grow. With that being said, it is easy to point out the immediate benefits of the service learning projects: the presence of solar panels in underserved areas, increased access to health knowledge in rural villages, and the life-long friendships formed between the domestic and overseas university students involved. Of course, these achievements cannot be overlooked, nor can their merit be denied. However, attention must be paid to unpack the more nuanced impacts of the service projects as well.

As the summer comes to a close and the service providers reflect upon the days recently spent in rural Vietnam, Cambodia and Rwanda, the outstanding nature of their undertakings in service learning becomes more evident. Through their hard work and dedication, the students from PolyU have gained tremendously from their overseas experiences. Emotionally taxed, It wasn't without shedding a tear that the students accomplished the difficult task that was presented to them a few months back. From solar panel installation to lifestyle promotion and English teaching, the students carried on, with passion, with the mission they were given. The many difficulties they faced along the way, far from deterring them, rewarded the service providers in a way many had not anticipated. They would learn, throughout their journey, about the value of hard work, cultural exchange and empathy. This positive impact was not solely limited to the students themselves, but also reflected the constructive role they would come to play in the local communities.



Despite the good work and opportunities for growth which occur within a service learning project, there are improvements that can be made. The most crucial aspects which should be reformed are the extent of communication between the program and local communities, and critical engagement with the work being done. It is important to guarantee effective communication between PolyU students and the local communities they serve. There have been notable barriers to understanding these communities, given the dependency on local university students, typically not fluent in English, and failure to hire a professional interpreter. It would be better if local students were not depended upon to interpret, and instead were granted the space and time to be more involved in the project. Increasing avenues of communication also includes an institutionalized feedback mechanism through which local community members can voice their concerns throughout the year. Such feedback is necessary to inform next year's cohort.

Also, students within service learning programs are not taught to be critical of the work they are doing. A critical outlook includes a more nuanced approach to the socio-economic positions of the rural villages in which they are engaged, and utilizing a framework which goes beyond a 'vacuum of poverty'. Students should be pushed to interrogate why countries and communities are so poor to begin with, and why other nations and communities have become so rich. Although students were constantly reminded to observe living conditions within these rural communities, no real discussions were had regarding larger issues of socioeconomic inequality. By attempting to understand the root causes of these issues, students can begin the project more informed, whilst also having a greater understanding of the limitations and overall impact of their work.

Service Learning, above all else, provides a unique opportunity for both students and rural communities to learn from one another. And now that the program has been established for some time, the University is taking steps to address their biggest concern: the relatively small number of communities served! As more and more faculty are getting involved and excited about their own service projects, the office of service learning is seeking to expand the existing program in Vietnam as well as to develop future connections in other developing countries. And while the specifics of each project determine the benefit to the community and scope of impact, the tremendous energy behind these projects makes one thing abundantly clear. Hong Kong is taking its place in the pantheon of countries dedicated to using their resources and privilege to benefit a global community of human beings - and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University is a leader in that cultural charge.

# Epilogue

by Grace Ngai and Stephen Chan

International service-learning is a particularly challenging but fruitful form of service-learning, taking our students and staff to foreign countries, immersing them in diverse and challenging problems, languages and cultures. They learn about critical social issues that may be very different from those of Hong Kong and their home countries, and help to address them. In the process, they have to apply what they learned from PolyU, and more importantly, continue to learn in the field – they now have a strong motivation to learn in a hurry. Hopefully, they are also able to contribute in a modest way tackling those societal issues. In the process, they learn to deal with diverse assumptions about power distances and relationships, means of communication – something as simple as how to agree and disagree in different cultures, resolving differences in opinion on how to get a project done, exercise leadership while each has a different expectation of leadership, and so much more. They learn competencies that will enable them to function in an increasingly global context. This book allows us the privilege to share in their adventure.



We wish to thank the students for working so enthusiastically on these projects. More than that, we have to thank the academic staff for making the whole thing happen. But there are also many people who often go unnoticed: staff in the Office of Service-Learning who set up many of these overseas projects, the supporting staff in the many academic departments who assisted the academic staff, the staff in the Finance Office facilitating the financial transactions in developing countries, the Alumni Office and other units who help to raise the needed funds, the Academic Secretariat who help to support the unusual teaching schedules, the Industrial Centre who helped to train the students in practical skills, the Educational Development Center who helped in staff development, the Facilities Office who helped to provide needed space for the students to prepare, the University Health Service who prepare the staff and students with immunizations and other medical precautions, and much more. You have all worked hard to create a wonderful learning experience for all. We are so glad to see such a large part of the university being a part of the community involved in international service-learning.

We are, of course, also grateful to the student journalists from Brown University who help us to document this undertaking. We end up with this wonderful situation with students from the USA documenting students from Hong Kong and Cambodian students serving in Cambodia – global cultural competency in action. We are glad to hear that more and better of the same are already in progress.

Stephen Chan  
Grace Ngai  
Office of Service Learning, Hong Kong Polytechnic University



Copyright © 2017  
All rights reserved.

Office of Service-Learning  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University