

Transforming Short-Term Study Abroad Through Service-Learning

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Abstract

Study abroad can be one of the most impactful experiences in a student's college career. When considering types of programs, year and semester-long programs are often considered the best opportunities for students to obtain the greatest benefits of the study abroad experience.

However, short-term study abroad programs appear at the bottom of many rankings of programs and program types. This study describes how a short-term study abroad program in Paris was transformed through the implementation of a service-learning component. As a result, the program achieves many of the "higher-level" objectives that are believed to be obtained primarily through long-term study abroad programs.

Keywords: Study Abroad, Short-Term Study Abroad, Service-Learning, Experiential Learning, Learning Outcomes

Whether the university abandons or assumes its leadership role in seeking and transmitting knowledge, broadening the definition of knowledge beyond the merely utilitarian, fostering critical and innovative thinking, and nurturing humane and civic values, will make a significant difference in the quality of society in the future. International education can make a major contribution to these endeavors if it makes full use of its potential for changing both individuals and institutions. (Grunzweig, et al., 2013, p. 12)

Introduction

Study abroad is one of the most impactful personal and academic opportunities that a student can have while in college. It provides students with an opportunity to get out of their comfort zones into a foreign environment where, in addition to learning about themselves, they learn about other countries and cultures. Through this experience, they have the opportunity to develop, among other things, “intercultural awareness” and a sense of what it is to be a “Global Citizen”. While there is a myriad of study abroad programs appealing to a broad spectrum of student needs and interests, Lillie and John Engle have sought to codify them by developing a “qualitative hierarchy” of four program “types” based on how closely each one comes to achieving the objectives that include “language acquisition and cross-cultural competence” (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 1). Correlatively, the ability of each program to provide students with the opportunity to achieve higher-level objectives, is equally implied in this hierarchy. All of these “higher-level” objectives focus on students “gaining knowledge and understanding [of] other cultures” and a sense of what it is to be a global citizen (Kehl & Morris, 2015, p. 69). Some scholars describe this as “cross-cultural competency and global-mindedness” (Kehl & Morris, 2015, p.67), “intercultural competencies” (Dwyer, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004, Rizzo & Marlow, 2020; Dolby, 2008; Rundstrom Williams, 2005) and the role these play in developing an understanding of global citizenship (Stebleton et al., 2013). To this end, Engle & Engle (2004)

have selected key pertinent features of study abroad programs that underpin their rankings. These include the duration of the study abroad program, the amount of exposure to and use of the target language, and students' cultural engagement while abroad (p. 8).

At the top of the Engles' (2004) hierarchy are "Cross-Cultural" programs that are either a semester or year-long and require at least an intermediate level of linguistic competence (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 12). In these programs students often take regular courses with domestic students at a host institution, taught in the target language. There is a broad range of housing options, from group accommodations to home stay visits and home stay rentals. And there are often "optional" and "occasional" integration activities—including among them, opportunities for internships and service-learning.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are the shorter programs that are less than a semester in length. The "short-term study" programs are often between 3-8 weeks in duration and include summer programs (Engle & Engle, 2003, p.11). At the very bottom is the "study tour", lasting from "several days to a few weeks" (Engle & Engle, 2003, p.10). These programs are similar as they often require little or no competence in the target language. In these programs, students frequently travel and live together often in accommodations that offer limited exposure to the target language and culture. In these types of programs, students often take courses offered by their home institution, taught by faculty from that same institution. Perhaps, the most critical part of the programs that puts them at the bottom of the Engles' list is that not only are they short, but there are also few provisions, if any, made for "cultural interaction" or "experiential learning" (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 11). As described, students in these programs remain at a distance and detached from both the host language and culture.

Kehl and Morris (2015) suggest in their study that a statistical analysis of their data comparing students who participated in short-term study abroad with students who are simply “interested” in it, “indicates insufficient evidence to conclude that significant differences exist in the global-mindedness [their measure of assessment] of students who study abroad for eight weeks or less and those who plan to study abroad in the future” (Kehl & Morris, 2015, p. 76). Although statistically inconclusive, it is at least notable that when comparing groups of students who are “intending to study abroad” with those who have participated in short-term and semester-long programs, the students who studied in short-term study abroad programs scored the lowest in global-mindedness among these groups (Kehl & Morris, 2015, p. 76). While these and other studies question the value of short-term study abroad (Allen, 2010; Freed, 1990; Freed, et al., 2004; Davidson, 2007), my recent experience challenges and refutes a number of claims of their inferiority and failings.

For over 20 years, I have taken students from my institution on faculty-led short-term programs to Paris over the summer. And for many of those years, the program fit the lower-tier model described by Engle and Engle (2003) and others in their hierarchies of programs. Up until recently, I accepted that this characterization of short-term programs was definitive. This all changed, however, when I implemented the Communication and Culture Through Service course in the program’s curriculum. It is through this course, at Louisiana State University, after 40 years of the program’s existence, that this faculty-led program broke the mold of short-term study abroad and was transformed into a program on par with any at the top of Engle and Engle’s (2003) hierarchy of types.

The Paris Program and Short-Term Study Abroad

With between 25-35 students, the Paris program is a large program that includes a broad variety of courses offered and taught by my institution's faculty. Courses offered in the past include History, English Literature, Political Science, Architecture, Anthropology, Film Studies, Landscape Architecture, Geology, Art History, and Art. While these courses are all taught in English, the Paris program also offers a number of intermediate and advanced level courses in French that are taught in the target language. These include courses in intermediate French language, intermediate and advanced oral communication, introduction to reading literature, French culture and civilization, and French film studies.

As a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program, the Paris program provides a variety of benefits and opportunities to a broad range of students. Today, many students recognize the importance of having a study-abroad experience as part of their undergraduate education. But many students are unable to spend a semester or year abroad. Short-term programs often provide these students with an opportunity to study abroad that they would not otherwise have. Additionally, this program provides students with a certain level of familiarity and comfort, since the courses and their instructors are all from the home institution.

The aspect of comfort is often part of the attraction of this and other short-term study abroad programs. While it provides students with an opportunity to leave the comfort zone of their home and home campus, there is the security of knowing they are still attached to the umbilical cord of home through the program while being in unfamiliar territory. As Hanouille and Leuner (2001) explain, "Students (and parents) may be more comfortable with the familiar rules and regulations, even in a foreign land" (p. 4).

While there are many advantages for students participating in a short-term study abroad program such as this one (Hanouille & Leuner, 2001), there are also a number of disadvantages. Programs such as these are often designed to give students a chance to visit many of the cultural sites—the monuments and museums—and experience some of the cultural activities that include: shopping in Paris’ famous department stores and open-air markets, having picnics in the parks, going to cafés and restaurants, and meandering along the grand boulevards and the banks of the Seine.

As critics, like Engle and Engle (2003) suggest, what is often found lacking in such programs, is deep and meaningful direct contact and engagement with the culture itself. Many short-term faculty-led programs are primarily Anglophone programs that are designed to draw the greatest variety and number of student participants possible. As a consequence, the idea of having or developing a deeper contact and understanding of the language and culture—improving linguistic competence in the target language and knowledge of that culture and society—and developing a sense of “intercultural connection” and “global citizenship,” is not in the foreground in the design of these programs.

This situation creates a dynamic tension. On the one hand, in its general curriculum and design, it attracts a student body that seeks a certain level of comfort in experience and instruction. On the other, by offering some courses requiring intermediate and advanced levels of French, the program is also promising these students that they can, indeed, fulfill the broader goals of improving their level of spoken French and gaining a greater and more profound understanding of French culture and society through participation in this program.

This combination of curriculum and courses make it hard at times to attract French students to the Paris program. Not only is the city of Paris itself—where everyone speaks

English—a disincentive when recruiting French students to this program, additionally this program competes with the university’s French immersion program in the French Alps that takes place at roughly the same period and for roughly the same amount of time.

Yet, every year there are between 6-12 students who are studying French and decide to participate in the Paris program. They are motivated by the promise that through their participation they will, indeed, improve their skills in French and develop a deeper knowledge of French culture and society. The task here for the program is: How does the program keep this promise?

The Pedagogical Search

After decades of effort, I believe I may have finally devised a program that helps students to improve their language skills while at the same time they develop their intercultural competency. At times, this has seemed an insurmountable task. Something that seemed, as if by definition, unachievable in a short-term study abroad program. How could a primarily Anglophone program in Paris, over a short period of time, provide students studying French with the opportunity to improve their skills in French and achieve the higher-level objectives described above—while concurrently providing them with the comforts of participating in a faculty-led program? To this end, I have experimented with innumerable strategies of instruction and pedagogy. And each time, these efforts may be best described—by myself and the students—more by their failings than by their successes. Neither one of us could describe the outcomes as meeting the course and program goals. This is not to say that we didn’t try. In my courses, I have tried all manner of pedagogy and instruction. Among these activities is: A “Meilleur” project. This is a project that has students design and develop a project where they dedicate themselves, during the course of the entire program, to discover “the best” of something

in Paris. They research their topic, explore and experience it while in Paris, and then assess and report on it to the class at the end of the program. Also, students have participated in weekend homestays with families in the City of Troyes; they have had invited dinners with Parisian families; they have done scavenger hunts around Paris that required them to navigate the public transit system and interview people; students have taken cooking lessons at *Le Nôtre Pavillion* cooking school; they have spent weekends visiting the French Alps immersion program. In addition, students have participated in visits to boulangeries, chocolateries, charcuteries, and open-air markets where they have had the opportunity to meet the proprietors and vendors and talk with them about their professions, their products, and their experiences.

The idea behind all of these assignments was always the same: To get the students out of the classroom and directly into French culture, where they could use and practice their French. Yet, each time, these assignments—to greater and lesser degrees—failed to do so. I found an explanation for why, in the fact that these assignments were just that: assignments. That these activities were considered *assignments* that the students *had to* complete for the class, as class assessments, led the students to adopt the attitude that what they were doing was *for the class* and not to enhance the linguistic skills and cultural knowledge—e.g. not for them.

That is, while these assignments were designed to engage the students directly with and in the target language and culture by getting them out of the classroom and onto the streets of Paris and into France and French culture, they failed to *engage* the students in any *meaningful* way. Considered as assignments for the class, students did not *invest* themselves in these activities. As for them, these were just things that they were doing, not for themselves and not for their learning. Rather, they were doing them for the class and because I was making them do it, for their grade.

If I correctly understood the shortcomings of what I was doing in my design of courses and their assignments and activities, then I had to find a strategy for designing them in a way that would change the mindset of the students. I would need to shift the focus of activities and assignments away from any concern for the course itself and towards students investing and engaging themselves in activities that would be meaningful to them. Such a course would turn instruction on its head to a certain extent, as it would place learning in the hands of the students instead of the instructor. I would set up certain parameters for learning, but the students would have to actively participate in, engage and invest themselves in what they were doing. The problem, again, was how to accomplish this.

Enter Service-Learning

In 2017, after years of trying and failing, I had a new appreciation for the limits of short-term study abroad programs, like this one in Paris. I understood why such programs are often considered in the lower tier of study abroad offerings. Nonetheless, I remained determined to figure out a way to succeed as I continued to experiment with new activities and teaching strategies. That year, I had a breakthrough when I reached out to a number of service organizations in and around Paris.

In Spring 2017, I decided that I wanted to incorporate a “day of service” in my French Conversation and Culture classes in Paris. In the course of my online search for service opportunities, I found an organization dedicated to fighting against food waste at the open-air markets in Paris. On Sundays, volunteers from this group arrive at open-air markets around Paris. There, they work with vendors to “glean” and “re-distribute” unsold fruits and vegetables to those in need. I contacted the coordinator of this organization and asked if my five students could participate in one of these activities. He welcomed this idea and proposed they meet up at

the open-air market at the Bastille. For this first activity, I accompanied the students and worked by their side. Once there, we met the organizers and other volunteers. After introductions, the tasks were explained and everyone was set to work. There was an overall atmosphere of welcome and comradery with a communal spirit. Meeting each other and working side-by-side, together with other French volunteers removed any and all of the students' apprehensions and fears about participating so directly and immediately "with Parisians" in a real-world community service activity—and having to do so only in French! With other volunteers, students helped set up a booth for distributing food to those in need. They helped collect fruits and vegetables from vendors at the market, arranged the food at the booth, and distributed the food to those who came there. At the end, they helped take down the booth and put everything away. As a token of gratitude, volunteers were invited for a drink and snack at a nearby café where the students and other volunteers got to know each other as they passed the rest of the afternoon in fellowship and conversation.

In the end, I felt, after so many years, that I had finally found the long-sought-after key to success. In this single afternoon of service, despite students' initial apprehensions and fears, they personally committed and engaged themselves with French people in a community service activity in a real-world context. That is, in their service, they were not simply completing an assignment for the class. Rather, they participated in an activity that was authentic and meaningful for them. And what's more: This amazing experience was done entirely in French.

We all met up later to discuss the experience and share our feelings and thoughts. The students were clearly very proud of what they had done that day in their service. But their pride was reflected, as well, in their own feelings and in how they had overcome their own obstacles and trepidations in rising to meet the challenges set out in this unorthodox "class" exercise. Their

pride extended as well to a new confidence in speaking French, meeting French people, and navigating the public transit system on their own. In short, in this single community service experience, they had all left their comfort zone and had found a place of comfort in it.

I could not have been happier with this activity and the students' embrace of it. What I needed now was to find a way to build on this success. I had found the key to success here. Now I needed to use it to open the door. When it opened, I found more volunteer organizations and service-learning opportunities.

Many of these groups belong to a network of service organizations operating in and around Paris, brought together and linked, under a single umbrella organization: *Benenova*. This organization, itself, is part of a global network of service organizations, *Points of Light*, whose objectives are to empower individuals to engage and "[...] create a society where it is easy for every individual to take action and accelerate change within their community and around the world [...]". As part of this network, *Benenova*, in Paris, brings together over 140 service groups and serves as a centralized location for these organizations to post and promote their community service activities and opportunities. In its role, this organization vets each individual organization and each service activity. It also requires that each organization welcomes and trains the service volunteer upon arrival at the activity. Key and unique to its mission is that all service activities are open and available to anyone who wishes to engage in community service. To participate, one does not have to be a member of the particular service organization. Nor does it require any prior experience or training. All that is necessary is the desire to volunteer and establish an online account with it. After setting up an account, it is simple to sign up for service activities. The umbrella organization has established categorical themes for service activities that can be used to help filter the types of activities based on the individual's volunteer interests. The themes

included the following: working with the environment; working with the disabled; working across generations; and working with people who are at the margins of society. To participate, one simply chooses from the themes and selects the dates of availability. A calendar of activities appears with a list of the dates, times, and locations, plus a description of each activity and how many volunteers are needed. All activities last 2 to 5 hours. There is no commitment to either action or organization beyond the single activity of interest. Participation requires simply selecting that activity by clicking that you want to participate. After that, in advance of the activity, the particular organization will reach out to the volunteer and provide them with any additional information.

Re-Developing the Course

After this very successful student experience in international community service, I dedicated myself to developing an entire course around it. I met with the director of the umbrella organization and presented this idea to her. She enthusiastically agreed to partner with me on this project. As an *Institutional Partner* with the umbrella organization, and in addition to the regular services they provide, my students would receive additional orientations and detailed information. The organization would help coordinate student schedules and activities. Plus, they would help troubleshoot any problems that might arise. They would also keep a digital log of each student's service activities and provide details that included: who, what, where, when, and for how long each student performed their service. The course, set for Summer 2018, would be titled: Communication and Culture Through Service in Paris.

Communication and Culture Through Service is a course designed to overcome the shortcomings of previous efforts to meet the desired goals of study abroad and the student objectives of improving their skills in French while developing direct cultural knowledge of

France. By focusing instruction on the students' own intensive engagement in direct and meaningful experience through their participation in community service activities, they are, by necessity, immersed in real-world and real-life experiences. It is through these experiences that the students not only use and improve their skills in French; they also gain direct knowledge of contemporary French society and its problems, and the means individuals and groups are using to address them.

This course takes a decidedly different approach to service-learning than is common. In his *Introduction to the Service-learning Toolkit*, Andrew Fuoco describes service-learning as a particular style of experiential learning that focuses its "attention to benefit the provider and the recipient of the service equally, as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring" (p. 14). As well, in the context of study abroad, service-learning is considered among the "high-impact" components that are engaging students to "foster transformational learning experiences and the development of global citizenship" (Stebbleton, Soria & Cherney, 2013, p. 5). In a traditional service-learning course, the service activities often serve as a complement to a course's content and instruction. That is, while a course may provide abstract concepts and theories in its in-class instruction, through student participation in relevant community service activities, they gain real-world experience and knowledge of the issues studied in class. In so doing, students are able to synthesize the knowledge and experience in developing a better understanding of the subject of study in the classroom. An example of this pedagogy is described by Cone and Harris: "In our program, students enter the community with a set of clearly explicated theories that have been introduced in the classroom. These offer the students a systematic way of looking at the world" (Cone and Harris in Fuoco, p. 31). Cone and Harris' approach, reflects the inherent deductive character of

traditional service-learning courses which use the particular service activities as a vehicle for reinforcing classroom contents.

By contrast, the Paris Communication and Culture course turns traditional service-learning on its head in its adoption of an inductive approach to service and learning. Here, by design, rather than having a priori and prescribed concepts, theories and outcomes that inform the students' experiences and their learning, this course places primary emphasis on the students' experiences in their service activities and in their meaningful direct engagement with the community through community organizations as they address contemporary social issues and needs. It is out of these particular real-world experiences in conjunction with discussion and guided reflection activities—during and post-program—where the broader implications, ideas, and concepts are derived. With a priority on the service activities as vehicles toward fulfilling the personal and academic purposes of improving skills in French and gaining cultural knowledge, the time spent in the classroom serves as a complement to the service experiences. In this way, students are able to synthesize what they have experienced with what they have learned through these experiences in developing a greater conceptual understanding of the social issues that are not unique to Paris, France, but are global and pertain to their lives at home in the United States, and in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Course:

The course was offered during the 2018 and 2019 Paris programs. (Note: It was scheduled for the 2020 and 2021 Paris programs, but both programs were canceled due to COVID-19.) Upon arrival in Paris, all instruction, assignments, and communication between myself and the students were entirely in French.

In the first offering, in 2018, the course presented a unique set of challenges to me and the students, as neither I nor the students knew what was going to happen. In the design, I had ideas and expectations in terms of what I wanted the students to get out of the course and how the objectives were going to be achieved. But, since this was the very first time the course was being offered, I could not provide the students with any specific details that would assuage their uncertainties, concerns, and anxieties. I was unable to answer with any certainty the barrage of questions they had: How will we know where to go and who to talk to? Who will be in charge? How will we get to the service activities? Do we go alone? What will we be doing? Will our French be good enough to communicate and perform the services? What if we go to an activity we don't like? What if we don't understand? What if we get lost? How will we be graded? If we aren't meeting regularly in a classroom, when and how will we meet? Who do we contact if we have problems?

To these and many other questions, I simply could not give a precise answer. While I could provide some answers of a general nature, these questions could only find answers as they arose during the course itself. It was clear that this course would require flexibility and patience from everyone concerned as we went along. Yet, this aspect of the course should have come as no surprise, as to a certain extent, this ambiguity and uncertainty was an inherent part of the very structure of the course itself. That is: The course was conceived precisely to place ownership of learning and the experience of learning in the students' hand while giving them the opportunity to provide their own answers and solutions to these questions and circumstances as they encountered them. The course was, by design, set up to challenge the students to go out into French society and to work side by side with French people—to be immersed and engaged in the

community—and do so entirely in French. As such, it would require students to not only leave their “comfort zone”, but to get—as one student described—“way out of my comfort zone”.

The following year, I had the advantage of being able to offer specific answers to the students’ questions. With the experience of the previous year, I could provide them with greater details and specifics as to what exactly they were going to do and what to expect in the course. Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned from that year was that the students needed to be mentally prepared in advance, that the course—by its design—would be a true challenge, as it would take them way out of their comfort zones.

Both iterations of the course taught in the 2018 and 2019 Paris programs shared the same basic syllabus and structure. Ownership for the course began with our first pre-departure orientation meeting on the university’s campus. After my presentation of the course, the students then logged onto the umbrella organization’s website and established their individual accounts. Together, we navigated the site and learned how to identify specific service activities and how to sign up to participate in them. The next pre-departure assignment was for the students to each select a preliminary weekly schedule and calendar of the 26-30 hours of service activities they would complete during the four and a half weeks in Paris. Each student would present these details to me and the student cohort at a final pre-departure meeting. At that meeting, students were given the assignment to choose one of their anticipated service organizations and prepare an oral presentation on that organization at our first meeting in Paris. They were also given their first video assignment on the day of departure for Paris: They were to film a 5-minute video that recorded their thoughts, feelings, and expectations of the experience upon which they were about to embark.

Student self-reflective videos were a central role in student assessment. In addition to the pre-departure video, at the end of every day—for the duration of the Paris program—students would film a 1-minute reflective video journal where they would describe that day’s activities, their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and what they had learned. In total, there would be 33 journal entries. Additionally, each student would complete three other short videos: One would be an interview with an employee at one of the service organizations; another, an interview with a fellow volunteer; and finally, a reportage on someone who received the benefits of a particular service activity. At the end of the program, for our final meeting, each student would prepare another 5-minute video where they reflected on their overall experience, including their thoughts and feelings referenced in their pre-departure video. All these video assignments served as tangible markers for student activities and engagement. By comparing videos made early in the program with videos filmed at the end, these documents served as a chronological tool for assessing the progress in the student’s competence and confidence in speaking French.

In addition to the service activities and the video assignments, each day I would meet informally with each individual student for a de-briefing on their activities and experiences. As a formal exercise, we would all meet twice per week for dinner and discuss their experiences and what they had learned. At the final class meeting, students would present their reflection videos and they also would make a brief presentation on a service organization in their home communities, in the United States, that had a service mission and activities comparable to the ones with which they served in Paris. This would all function as a kind of final course de-briefing. Finally, I would reach out to each student by email at six-month and one-year intervals after the end of the Paris program and ask them to reflect on their experiences and the impact—if any—the service-learning in Paris course had on them.

Once in Paris, we met with representatives of the umbrella service organization and they gave us an orientation explaining their mission, the organizations with which they worked and their role assisting in the coordination, communication about, and troubleshooting for us as service volunteers.

Shortly after that meeting, in both the 2018 and 2019 programs, the students—together as a group—participated in an inaugural service activity with the same organization from the year before at the open-air market at the Bastille. Since I had worked previously with this organization, I was confident that the students would be well received and have a positive first service experience volunteering with them. As well, I wanted the students to take ownership of their learning and experience, so I did not accompany them in this activity. They were provided with the essential information found on the umbrella organization's website that included: the name and contact information for the person in charge, the date, time and location of the service activity, and a brief description of the service activity itself. The students had the responsibility for organizing themselves and coordinating their travel to and participation in their first meaningful engagement with French, Paris, Parisians, and French society. And while at first nervous and apprehensive, afterwards—as before—the students were proud, self-assured, confident, and satisfied with what they had achieved that day in the two and a half hours of volunteering at the open-air market at the Bastille. They were no longer scared. They were ready to go and ready for more.

Some students began their service activities the next day. In the first year, there were 3 students enrolled in the course. The following year there were 6. While I supervised, briefed and debriefed the students, they were all independent, autonomous and fully responsible for their service activities. They set up their schedule, contacted and communicated with each service

organization, and coordinated their transportation. The service activities sent them to all parts in and around Paris. The transportation itself was a challenge, as getting to the service activities would require them to master not only the Paris metro, but commuter trains as well as local and regional bus systems. Once they arrived at the service activities, students would have to communicate entirely in French with those who were participating in service—both those performing service as well as those receiving its benefits.

They would participate in service activities across the spectrum of the umbrella organization's themes. In the first year, the three students performed service activities related to the environment and working with the handicapped and the elderly. The focus of the environmental activities was on conservation, recycling, and reducing waste. In addition to working with the organization at the Bastille market and with other environmental groups, students performed similar service activities at a number of other open-air markets in and around Paris. With one organization, students traveled around Paris and collected unsold and unused food from restaurants, caterers, and grocery stores. They then delivered it all to community food banks and kitchens. At another service organization, students assisted in the thrift store where they sorted, priced and stocked the shelves and racks with donated goods. With another community group, students worked side by side with volunteers, school employees and parents to create an organic vegetable and flower garden at a middle school. Students also served at a senior center where they assisted residents getting from their rooms to on-site concerts and activities. They were also able to participate in conversations with the residents. The residents enjoyed meeting and getting to know them and the students, for their part, enjoyed learning about them and their lives. An additional service activity at the same senior center was "Dansons un Pas à Deux", where the student volunteer learned to dance the Tango and then taught it to

blind residents. At another activity dedicated to helping people living at the margins of society, students had conversations and fellowship and served drinks and meals to those without shelter. Students served, as well, alongside other volunteers to provide meals to refugees.

Assessing Students' Experiences

The second year of the course had six students enrolled. This year, in addition to the service activities from the previous year, students participated in the service activities that included: “Travaillons le Corps et le Mental à Tout Âge” at a senior center, where they helped seniors exercise—physically and mentally. In the activity “Nageons avec les Dauphins” student volunteers helped teach disabled adults to swim. They worked with volunteers serving in community kitchens in immigrant and low-income communities. They made and repaired toys and games with a service group in Nanterre. With a judo club and the activity “Judo Pour Tous: Handicap ou Pas”, student volunteers assisted in the instruction of Judo lessons for the disabled. These examples of the students' 30 hours of community service activities, while here limited, are reflective of the kind of personal commitment and community engagement that transformed them and their experience in the course of the Paris programs. While this program in Paris is short—roughly a month—it was able to make up for any lack in duration by the frequency and intensity of the students' direct, meaningful engagement, and immersion in the community through their service. Through these experiences, I witnessed their transformations as the process—that was the course—unfolded. Initially, students had great trepidation. In anticipation, they were apprehensive, nervous, and a little scared. The tasks seemed daunting and “way out of their comfort zones”. But as they took on each new experience, contacting each community partner, traveling to the activity site, introducing themselves, meeting other volunteers and receiving training, they became increasingly comfortable in their discomfort. These adventures

out into the community became regular daily activities that they eventually undertook as if going to class. In this process, the students' affective filters diminished, and they gained confidence and took great pride in their achievements. On a daily basis, while they were in France, they participated in authentic and meaningful community service while doing it on their own and entirely in French. The transformation in each student was made tangible through their video assignments and daily video journals.

For 32 days, each student filmed a 1-minute daily video journal. In each journal they described their daily activities—whether they did service that day or not. On the days they performed community service, their videos had to include: the name of the organization; details describing where they went, what they did, who they met; and their thoughts and feelings about that day's experience. At the end of the program, these and the pre-departure and final reflection videos were downloaded onto a flash drive and handed in for assessment. With all of these videos collected together—like a flip-book or time-lapse—I was able to see and hear the transformation in each student with each act of reflection from beginning to end. What I witnessed in each student, initially, was an awkwardness, a discomfort and trepidation that went beyond simply speaking French. The act of reflecting itself on their own experiences was a challenge. The initial video journals were very much in the spirit of simply completing an assignment. In these entries, students often didn't say very much, and they paused, and waited for the 1-minute time limit to pass. They spoke with a halting French, which made it clear that, even with intermediate to high levels of French competence, they were uncomfortable and lacked confidence in actually speaking the language. As time lapsed, however, as student comfort and confidence grew, so did their daily journals. Their entries increased not only in length and depth of detail but in their fluency and thoughtfulness as well. Probably the best assessment of the

course and student outcomes, and the transformational character of this service-learning study abroad experience, is through the students' own words. I cite a few comments extensively:

My French skills definitely improved while studying abroad because talking to actual French people made me realize that making mistakes wasn't that big of a deal. Having never taken a conversation class before going on this trip, it was time to sink or swim, and being put on the spot with no other option except speaking really helped me learn a lot. When you go to volunteer, you are there to do a job and obviously want to do it right, so if you can't adequately communicate with your organization, you're of no use whatsoever. Having real conversations helps you realize which grammar rules you need to revise for the future. People are also incredibly willing to help you out if you're stuck with a word or conjugation, which really helps remove any element of fear or embarrassment that comes with learning a new language. With the new volunteering program, I was happy to find that I did not feel like a tourist at all because the program sent us around every inch of Paris that we otherwise never would have explored. It also allowed us to have in-depth conversations that would have been almost impossible otherwise. (Student Comment)

The service-learning course definitely had a large-scale impact on me. While the course didn't influence me to volunteer for charities, and NGOs [...], it did encourage me to become more active in my community. A lot of the work I did in Paris brought me into close contact with disenfranchised groups of people (refugees, the homeless, the poor, students, etc.), and it was made abundantly clear after speaking with them that they need someone to listen to them. The best way to do that, in my opinion, is to help people find their political voice. I am now the outreach director for [a campus-wide "get out the vote" organization], which means I am responsible for registering [...] students to register to vote. (And we registered over 2000 people last semester!!!) I go give presentations in the classroom, dorm, and club settings as well as speaking to people at various on-campus events. Without being **forced** to speak French in the service-learning course, I doubt I would have been able to casually speak to people, for public speaking is nothing in comparison to the intense pressure of conversing in a language in which one is not at all fluent. Interacting with the [umbrella organization] volunteers also taught me how to have meaningful conversations with strangers instead of just sticking to small talk. I also think that being surrounded by such helpful and understanding individuals has encouraged me to treat people with the same patience and helpful spirit that was given to me. The program has made me almost addicted to volunteering time (that I definitely do not have) to various political organizations that advocate for the rights of others. (Student Comment)

My world view has become decidedly less cynical than before because the interactions I had whilst in Paris taught me to appreciate the beauty of humanity, the power that each individual has to enact change, and the little things that make life worth living. I know this is sappy as hell, but it's the truth. [The] Paris [program] was simultaneously the worst and the best time of my life, but I would not trade the experience for anything. (Student Comment)

Going to Paris for many students in the USA is the opportunity to have fun in the city of LOVE. However, for our class, going to Paris has been more than just to have fun in one of the best cities in the world. The volunteer services we did make me feel valuable, and, for me, it is considered the first step into action to fight for a better world. This trip was life changing.

When I enrolled [...] in [the] Paris [program], I was just trying to get credits to, finally, graduate from my French Studies degree. Then [the program director] told me that there was a service class. For me it was the best opportunity to do something good for others. The trip ended-up to be more than just “do something good for others”. [The] Paris [program] opened my mind about environmental protection and safety. As a just recent Petroleum-Engineer graduate, being with people that really care about our planet gave me a different perspective about my future career. It actually helped to realize that, even a petroleum-engineer needs to fight for the best of our planet. Therefore, I will give my best to find better ways to deliver energy while protecting the environment. This is an amazing feeling. I will not just focus on producing oil and gas, but I will give my best to reduce environmental harm and help shift more toward renewable resources.

On the other hand, I realize that Paris is more than just the “Eiffel Tower.” Paris is about refugees, people left alone in retirement facilities, food waste, and the list goes on. Paris has issues. This trip helped to better understand these issues. It is easy to be a tourist in Paris. It is hard to see the other side of Paris. For instance, many things are left to do to help people dying with no food. It is painful to see a family (not just one member of the entire family) begging for food and money. It is even more painful to see aged people left alone in the retirement home. However, it is a relief to find good people that fight against these issues. I found people that serve people every day. They leave their comfort zone to help other people and the environment. It is very inspiring. I wish everyone could experience how lovely and inspiring it can be. Today, I am a better man thanks to this trip, and I hope to never forget that in a world with so many issues, little actions actually matter. (Student Comment)

I am so grateful for my experience in Paris. While I still make mistakes, both in speaking and writing, I find that I have a foundation that never before existed. The structure of the program is its greatest asset. Being forced to continuously use a language

makes one become better at the language. Before Paris, incorporating a newly learned French word was "a task", but now I find that I can more easily incorporate new words/common "slang". Reading has also become significantly easier. (Student Comment)

In her “longitudinal study” of study abroad experiences over fifty years, Mary Dwyer’s (2004) focus was on measuring the “impact” of study abroad on participants over time. While the Paris student comments above are only six months to a year post-program, the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning in this short-term program belie the Engle and Engle’s (2013) claim that “brief stays [abroad] allow an at best superficial interaction with the host culture” (p. 36). The depth of meaning reflected in these student comments mirror Kiely’s (2004) observations that: “[F]or many undergraduate students, the international service-learning experience marks an important transformational event in their lives, one that will forever shape their sense of self, lifestyle, connection to others, view of global problems, and purpose in life” (p. 5). Experienced as such, the students in this short-term program have achieved a number of the higher-level objectives described in the references to short-term study abroad programs that were considered out of the reach of such programs. In its impact, intensity, and scope, the Paris program may well be considered among higher-level study abroad programs.

Conclusion

The Engles consider short-term faculty-led study abroad programs at the lower-level of their qualitative hierarchy of programs. They describe these programs as designed for the students’ comfort and convenience where everyone lives together, and students take courses from their home institution, taught by instructors from that same institution. The students’ direct exposure to the host culture is somewhat limited by the length of the program as well as by the practical possibilities of managing the broad interests of a collectively diverse group. This was

true of the traditional Paris programs of the past. But with the implementation of the Communication and Culture Through Service course, students with intermediate and advanced levels of French, with goals of improving their competence in French and knowledge of French culture, were—for the first time—able to achieve these goals, as reflected in their self-assessments six months to a year after the program. The course provided students with situations and contexts that allowed them to transcend many of the limits that the Engles establish between the higher and lower-level program types. In this case, the students left the comfort of the insulated environment provided by the program for the discomfort of directly engaging with French people in a real French context. By implementing the service-learning course into the Paris program, grafting elements of Engles' higher-level types, the program had a hybrid structure that, while retaining elements of the traditional short-term faculty-led program, also allowed students to develop their linguistic competence through their inter-cultural exchanges, and in doing so, they were able to realize the higher-level objectives for study abroad in whatever terms one might wish to use. For years, I had unsuccessfully tried to find the key to these positive results. And it was *Conversation and Culture Through Service in Paris* that transformed the Paris program and provided the *open sesame* to unlock the magic of study abroad.

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