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Not Just for Students Anymore

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Abstract

Offering community-based global immersion experiences for faculty and staff members provides transformational learning opportunities. This study explored perspectives of faculty and staff participating in university-sponsored immersion programs as professional development and their subsequent influence on both classroom instruction and immersion experiences for students. A qualitative descriptive method was used to capture the experiences of community-based global immersion in faculty learning communities. Perspectives shared through individual interviews illustrated the personal and professional development through engagement in community-based global learning. Faculty and staff reported how dissonance prompted internal transformations to new or modified perspectives. Most significantly, participants identified an increase in compassion for students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, through the shared experience, relationships among faculty and staff developed across disciplines, unifying efforts toward strategic goals of providing community-based global immersion for students. These experiences have the potential to foster students' holistic development, thus furthering the university's mission of preparing students for future civic engagement.

Keywords: *faculty development, local immersion, community-based learning, international immersion*

La inmersión

Ya no solo para estudiantes

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Andrea Solis Canto

Resumen:

El ofrecimiento de experiencias de inmersión global basadas en la comunidad para la facultad y los empleados provee oportunidades de aprendizaje que son transformativas. Este estudio exploró las perspectivas de la facultad y los empleados participando en programas de inmersión patrocinados por la universidad como desarrollo profesional y la subsecuente influencia en la instrucción en el aula y en la experiencia de inmersión para estudiantes. Se utilizó el método descriptivo cualitativo para capturar la experiencia de la inmersión global basada en la comunidad en comunidades de aprendizaje de la facultad. Las perspectivas compartidas a través de entrevistas individuales ilustraron el desarrollo personal y profesional a través del compromiso en el aprendizaje global basado en la comunidad. La facultad y los empleados declararon que la disonancia dio a transformaciones internas o a perspectivas nuevas o modificadas. De manera significativa, los participantes identificaron una mayor compasión para los estudiantes de antecedentes diversos. Aún más, la experiencia compartida dio a relaciones entre la facultad y los empleados que cruzaron las fronteras disciplinarias, así uniendo los esfuerzos hacia metas estratégicas de proveer la inmersión global basada en la comunidad para los estudiantes. Estas experiencias tienen la posibilidad de promover en desarrollo holístico del estudiante, así expandiendo la misión universitaria de preparar estudiantes para la responsabilidad social en el futuro.

Palabras claves: *el desarrollo de la facultad, la inmersión local, el aprendizaje basado en la comunidad, la inmersión internacional*

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Community-based global learning as an educational practice can positively affect student learning, both personally and academically (Evanson & Zust, 2004; Kuh, 2010; Levine & Perpetua, 2006). Studies have analyzed the effects of these immersion experiences on students and academia through participant reflections, demonstrating that community-engaged experiences bring positive value and change to students, universities, and many communities (Kearney et al., 2014; Levine, 2009). Such learning experiences are considered among the 11 higher educational learning practices, identified as making a significant impact on student success and retention (Kuh, 2010). Furthermore, the potential for students to encounter new perspectives can create disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000) and the dissonance that can lead to transformational learning (Kiely, 2005).

Although the outcomes of student cultural and community-based global learning experiences have been well documented, there are few studies on the effects of similar experiences for faculty and staff. Scholars acknowledge the need for pedagogical training for faculty to integrate and facilitate immersion experiences into their course structure and the lack of consistent models for doing so (Bender-Slack & Ceo-DiFrancesco, 2018; Landorf et al., 2018; Pasquarelli, 2018). Offering such experiences for faculty and staff allows educational institutions to further their mission of civic engagement and promises professional development without the added responsibility of facilitating the experience for students. Furthermore, these experiences allow faculty and staff to engage with diverse communities, transform the way they teach, relate to students, and serve their local community as individuals. To that end, this study sought to explore faculty and staff perspectives regarding university-sponsored community-based global learning programs specifically for faculty and staff and to examine their significance on personal and professional growth related to future programming for students.

Background

Although many terms such as service-learning, community engagement, academic service-learning, international immersion, and others have commonalities in their definitions, they are unique. This study specifically investigated community-based global learning, defined as an educational practice of immersing students in cultures different from their own to examine global injustices (Hartman et al., 2018).

Benefits of Community-Based Global Learning for Students

Studies identifying outcomes of community-based global learning have focused on student learning outcomes by analyzing student reflections, journals, coursework, and interviews, noting the benefits of such programs (Kearney et al., 2014; Walters et al., 2009). Documentation on student growth because of such experiences includes a change in perspective resulting from the immersion in a culture other than one's own, allowing learners to examine issues of justice, power, and privilege and to observe aspects through a new lens (Ceo-DiFrancesco et al., 2020). These immersion experiences could also prompt deeper critical reflection and discernment in participants (Carrington & Selva, 2010). Critical self-reflection following the engagement in a new context can lead to a transformation of perspectives (Cranton, 2016).

The Transformational Service-Learning Process Model developed by Kiely (2005) describes the way in which exposure to distinct contexts, environments, and cultural norms through community engagement can lead to dissonance, critical analysis, and reflection of one's current assumptions and perspectives, and ultimately transformational learning. Harrowing et al. (2012) articulate the transformative nature of learning that can take place due to exposure and contact with others of diverse backgrounds and of historically marginalized populations. Participants on short-term immersion programs have reflected, several years following the experience, the profound, life-changing effects on their personal and professional lives and their continued desire to advocate for change and social justice (Evanson & Zust, 2004; Levine, 2009). Furthermore, Shor et al. (2017) describe the various types of dissonance that students can experience and the potential for transformational learning that can result from these learning experiences.

Research on immersion experiences often highlights the holistic impact that the experience has on students and analyzes the influence these programs have on a student's personal life, academic, and professional career. Through immersion, community engagement often takes students out of their comfort zone, creating opportunities for students to further their understanding of solidarity with others, encourage self-empowerment, and improve cultural competence (Charles, 2015). Immersion experiences permit students to develop personally and professionally in communities different from their own, allowing students to grow as engaged, global citizens (Davis et al., 2015; Trede et al., 2013). Studies conducted with nursing students who have participated in cultural immersions use student testimonies to illustrate how participants gained a greater sense of vulnerability and cultural competence, leading to increased solidarity with others (Charles, 2015; Levine & Perpetua, 2006).

A common theme across literature identifies student empowerment as a result of immersion experiences. Previous studies on cultural immersions demonstrate participants' emotional responses and intellectual growth and the need to challenge students to apply their experiences to their home communities (Charles, 2015; Warner & Esposito, 2008). Organized immersion experiences through academia push students to learn beyond the walls of a classroom setting and force students to connect the experience to the class, their major, and eventually their profession (Dean & Montoya, 2014). Whether conducted in a local, domestic, or global context, immersion in a community distinct from one's own impacts student development in multiple ways and connects them more solidly with a community of learners and a mentor on their home campus, thus firmly situating immersion as a high-impact practice.

Challenges of Offering Immersion Experiences

The institutional benefits of community engagement through immersion point to the importance of fostering solidarity and empowerment between universities and their local (Charles, 2015) and global communities (Hartman et al., 2018) and developing such learning opportunities for students. The extent of campus support for global or domestic immersion experiences is often based on the university's mission and its plan for internationalization or civic engagement (Stearns, 2009). Additionally, universities have been challenged to establish broad strategic goals of civic engagement, demonstrating their commitment to local and global communities (Amen, 2001; Finkelstein, 2001). According to White (2016), the allocation of resources for such initiatives is closely tied to organizational structures and administrative roles.

In general, university efforts to offer community-based global learning experiences as an academic course component are often initiated, developed, and facilitated at the individual faculty and course level, requiring faculty members to dedicate a great deal of time, effort, and pedagogical expertise to create these complex programs (Kahn, 2011). Additionally, this responsibility may fall on university staff members through cocurricular offerings. These faculty-led or staff-led global or domestic immersion programs are often supported through community-engaged, global/international, or other learning centers on university campuses. Yet, faculty carry a considerable burden for planning, recruiting, implementing, and assessing these programs (Hartman et al., 2018). Levine and Perpetua (2006) describe how the strong connections of immersion to personal teaching philosophies and learning outcomes can motivate a faculty member to forego salary to make a program accessible to students. Warner and Esposito further note that observing transformation in students can provide faculty with satisfaction and motivation to continue to offer these types of learning experiences (2008).

Studies on immersion experiences and their impact on student learning highlight the critical role of faculty and staff in developing successful immersions, domestically and internationally, and the multiple responsibilities required of faculty and staff to plan, organize, and facilitate in real time these unique learning contexts (Taylor, 2009; Warner & Esposito, 2008). Although some faculty are willing to integrate community engagement into their courses, concerns focus on the assessment of community-engaged pedagogical innovations and their importance and recognition in the tenure and promotion process (Butin, 2007; Gillis & MacLellan, 2010; Shek & Chan, 2013). The desire to integrate pedagogical innovations and civic engagement often conflicts with the academy's individualistic focus (Lockwood et al., 2011),

and researchers note the intensity of time involved in preparing and implementing community-engaged activities during the academic year (Alexander-Ruff & Kinion, 2019; Butin, 2007; Shek & Chan, 2013).

Current research related to faculty and staff perspectives on immersion focuses on individual faculty teaching and living abroad (Hamza, 2010) or the practical application of strategic and methodological implementation of community-based global learning for students (Hartman et al., 2018; Oghenebruphiyo, 2020; Whatley et al., 2020). Potential benefits of immersion for faculty and staff suggest enhancements in areas of teaching, research, and service—an increase in the level of passion for this pedagogical approach (Arellano & Jones, 2018) and interest in addressing diversity and social justice within the face-to-face classroom (Ference & Bell, 2004; Sealey et al., 2006). However, relatively absent in the literature is documentation of opportunities for faculty and staff to participate in an immersion experience without students, with time built in for professional and personal development (Warner & Esposito, 2008). Furthermore, few studies examine immersion experiences specifically designed for faculty and staff as part of a community of practice.

Faculty Learning Communities

The concept and structure of faculty learning communities (FLCs) have been documented by Cox (2002, 2004), among others. Defined as a “specialized form of a community of practice” (Gomillion et al., 2020, p. 74), an FLC typically consists of a cross-disciplinary community of 6–15 faculty and staff members participating in a yearlong program with the goal of enhancing teaching and learning (Cox, 2004). Furthermore, FLCs have been described as communities of learning and reflection (McGill & Beaty, 2001) that integrate the experiential learning cycle developed by Kolb (1984). FLCs can take the form of a topic-based or cohort-based model (Cox, 2004), either of which includes the co-construction of an agenda in which members explore a topic that can lead to curricular change or a particular point in their teaching career that can support or reinvigorate their academic work (Nugent et al., 2008). Regardless of the FLC model, participants meet regularly every three to four weeks to “share, discuss, solve problems, and construct meanings and understanding” (Engin & Atkinson, 2015, p. 166). Sessions can also take the form of off-campus retreats, guest speeches, common readings, and visits to off-campus community and educational sites.

FLCs have been identified by Welch and Plaxton-Moore (2019) as an effective way to educate colleagues regarding community-engaged pedagogy and as a means of strategically moving institutions of higher learning toward increased support for community-engaged teaching and learning. As part of the establishment of a Center for Teaching Excellence in 2011 at a Midwestern Jesuit university, the FLC model was incorporated, with the goals of increasing interdisciplinary collaborations, encouraging reflections on teaching, and ultimately, enhancing teaching and learning (Cox, 2004) at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Proposals for FLCs are submitted to a faculty advisory group that is tasked with approving FLCs to commence in August or January. Funding for the FLCs is sourced through the provost’s area. Numerous topic-based and cohort-based FLCs have been offered to groups of faculty and staff since the inception of the Center for Teaching Excellence.

The educational mission of Jesuit universities incorporates an intellectually rigorous liberal arts curriculum and social justice traditions. The Jesuit mission also focuses on forming “women and men for others” through an education that emphasizes solidarity, kinship, and advocacy for justice for the poor and marginalized communities in society (Kovenbach, 2004). *Cura personalis*, or care for the whole person; *Magis*, or striving for excellence; and discernment are all aspects of a Jesuit education that can be successfully integrated into various discipline-specific programs (Campbell et al., 2013). The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm is a cyclical model of experiential education that begins with a specific context. It involves a new learning experience reinforced by reflection leading to action and evaluation to determine the degree of learning (Traub, 2008). Immersion leverages this pedagogical model, which influences learning experiences at Jesuit universities and drives students to discern future action and advocacy based on their engagement in communities (Savard, 2010).

The current study used the context of an FLC model that permitted faculty and staff members to plan, experience, and reflect collectively on the immersion without students' presence. Doing so allowed researchers to address the following research questions:

- How do faculty and staff describe an immersion experience, either domestic or international, that takes place through an FLC, without students?
- What personal and professional growth areas do faculty and staff participants identify as they reflect on their immersion experience?
- How do faculty and staff describe the influence of immersion on their return to campus and future work with students?

Method and Procedures

This study used a qualitative descriptive method, with all research subjects participating in individual interviews to share insights regarding their FLC immersion experience. The immersion FLCs were offered to faculty and staff in 2013, 2014, 2016, and 2019. No FLCs with a focus on immersion was supported by the Center for Teaching Excellence in 2017 or 2018 due to limited funding. Three FLC cohorts participated in a global immersion in Nicaragua, and one FLC cohort experienced a domestic immersion in Apopka, Florida. Not all FLC cohort members responded to the recruitment invitation for this study. See Table 1 for response rates of FLC participants.

Table 1.

Response Rates of FLC Participants

Academic Year	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2018–2019
FLC Participants				
Faculty	6	9	8	9
Staff	0	2	0	1
Admin	0	0	0	1
Location	Nicaragua	Nicaragua	Nicaragua	Apopka FL
Study Participants				
Faculty	2	2	3	2
Staff	0	1	0	1
Admin	0	0	0	1
Response rate (%)	33	27	38	36
Total	12	Response rate	33%	

The FLC immersion experiences were offered for faculty and staff to explore community-based global teaching and learning. The objectives of the FLC immersions were to

- connect immersion experiences to the Jesuit university mission;
- identify ways to integrate immersion into academic curriculum and core courses;
- examine the ways in which immersion promotes transformative learning;
- define the three phases of immersion: pre-, during, and post-immersion, through hands-on experiences.

The immersion component of the FLC was strategically integrated following a period of preparation and training. This preparation phase included investigation on immersion and its pedagogical application, as well as an in-depth investigation of the community in which the immersion would occur, including its language and cultural practices and perspectives.

During the immersion, faculty and staff participated in a carefully crafted agenda designed to immerse them in the community, while examining social justice issues challenging the community. Activities during the immersion phase for both groups included accompanying communities of need, experiencing cultural norms and practices, engaging in community-based work, and listening to testimonials of injustice. Daily group reflections occurred during the immersion to provide support during moments of dissonance and to allow for sharing of new perspectives gained.

Upon return, the post-immersion phase involved FLC members in regular meetings to further reflect on their experiences and to prepare final projects. Public presentations of final projects comprised the final activity. The three phases of the FLC activities were essential for the success of the immersion experience: the preparation of FLC members for the immersion, the immersion experience itself, and the post-immersion reflection to critically examine essential aspects of the immersion experience upon return to work and home environment.

In Nicaragua, the community partner was the Universidad Centroamericana, a Jesuit university in the country's capital. Participants stayed in a simple guesthouse owned by one of the host families. Each participant was paired with a family, sharing daily meals and conversations with their hosts in Spanish. FLC members engaged with community organizations and local populations, examining issues of education and access to health care and caring for people with disabilities, expectant mothers, and those facing long-standing trauma.

Due to political unrest, the last cohort was unable to travel to Nicaragua. Instead, this FLC traveled to Apopka, Florida, to participate in a cultural immersion that engaged participants with migrant farmworkers and focused on topics of immigration, workers' rights, and environmental issues. Participants stayed with mixed-documented families, sharing meals and conversation, primarily in Spanish.

Researcher Position

Each researcher had a different background regarding the aims and objectives of the study. The first author has experience in studying student learning characteristics in international immersion experiences; however, the lack of experience studying faculty and staff provided an objective lens to analyze the data. It should be noted that the second author facilitated these faculty groups during their immersion experience and has studied the development of student intercultural competence during immersion experiences. The third author conducted the interviews as a research assistant and eliminated any power relationship during the interview process.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and de-identified to minimize the influence of the first two authors' knowledge of the participant or the experience. All three researchers conducted the data analysis to minimize the influence of one perspective.

With the Xavier University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, faculty and staff consented to participate in individual interviews, using a semistructured interview guide. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes.

Participants

Using a convenient, purposive sampling approach, all participants met the inclusion criteria of having participated in an FLC on global community-engaged teaching and learning at one Midwestern Jesuit university, qualifying them to meet the aims and objectives of the study. The 16 participants included 11 females. Of the 16 participants, 10 spent 4–5 days in Nicaragua, and six engaged in a 3.5-day experience in Apopka, Florida.

The participants provided a wide breadth of perspectives, ranging from 12 faculty, one administrator, and three staff employees of the university. These positions were consistent with the time of the immersion experience. Disciplines represented by the study participants included occupational therapy (1), psychology (1), health services administration (1), education (1), political science (1), communication arts (2), management and entrepreneurship (1), chemistry (1), sports studies (2), and modern languages (1).

Data Collection

Each interview followed a semistructured interview guide, with discussion prompts based on the literature. A sample of questions is included in Table 2.

Table 2.

Sample Interview Questions

- What was the goal/intended purpose of the immersion? (Levine & Perpetua, 2006; Lockwood et al., 2011)
- How did you reflect during and after the immersion experience? (Charles, 2015; Lockwood et al., 2011; Urraca et al., 2009)
- In your own words, explain the importance or value of attending these types of immersion experiences. (Lockwood et al., 2011; Sealey et al., 2006; Shek & Chan, 2013)
- Explain your current relationship with your fellow travelers. (Warner & Esposito, 2008)
- How has the immersion experience influenced how you address issues of diversity or social justice on campus? (Ference & Bell, 2004)
- Share how you feel [the university] values and recognizes the importance of these immersion experiences. (Shek & Chan, 2013)
- Describe how your experience affects how you live [the university's] mission. (Lockwood et al., 2011)

Data Analysis

Using an iterative process to conduct a thematic analysis of interview transcripts, the analysis focused on minimal interpretation and factual representation of the results (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In preparation for analysis, each researcher immersed themselves in the data, reading the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the gestalt of participants' responses to the interview prompts. Then, each researcher identified the smallest unit of meaning, assigning a code word to each unit. Together, the three researchers determined a final code word list with operational definitions. According to the final code word list, the first author then used HyperRESEARCH (Version 4.0.3) to conduct descriptive-focused coding (Adu, 2019) of the transcripts. Researchers drafted descriptive memos to provide a summary of data representing each code from the computer-generated output report.

Further data reduction occurred to determine relationships among the descriptive memos to determine categories (Saldaña, 2016). Another round of data reduction further identified relationships among the categories, ultimately yielding four themes and a visual model representative of the faculty and staff experience, supported by the data. The analysis was focused on the content of the participants' responses. Responses were minimally interpreted to provide an authentic representation of the participants' experiences (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The authors used several strategies to support the authenticity of the findings (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004; Stanley & Nayar, 2014). Having 16 participants from the levels of administration, faculty, and staff provided a breadth of perspectives on immersion experiences. Basing the interview questions on published literature added to the legitimacy of the interview guide. Having triangulation of researchers from different backgrounds prevented the influence of one perspective during

data analysis. Although the transferability of the results is the responsibility of the reader, providing a dense description of the participants allows the reader to determine the applicability of the results to their context. The study design, researcher position, and trustworthiness strategies used support the authenticity of the following results.

Findings

Thematic analysis yielded four themes representing the faculty and staff experiences of university-sponsored immersion programs. Themes included *Solidarity*, *Dissonance*, *Transformation*, and *Immersion as an Academic Tool*.

Theme 1: Solidarity

The first theme, Solidarity, reflected participants' descriptions of having an intense connection and engagement with others as they experienced the new context. Although solidarity is a reciprocal relationship, this study did not have access to the populations with whom the FLC members engaged during their immersion. Therefore, solidarity is described through the perspective of the FLC members participating in this study. The interactions with the local population prompted an awareness of similarities between the FLC members and the local community. As one participant explained the connection with their host family:

Mmm, I think the, the connection between the host family that I stayed with and our activities that we did during the day really made are really made up the learning some more substantial because there was like flesh and bones of people who were experiencing the things that we're going through and how are, how they were living. (P10)

Additionally, participants shared how the purpose of the immersion experience was engagement, not providing service to the local community. Their descriptions included a deeper level of connection. One participant described the appreciation of diverse realities:

We weren't down there to, to fix anything or to make changes. We were there to actually, um, develop relationships with the people and have an appreciation of who they were, what their, you know, their culture a little bit, uh, to learn from each other, just style and substance and, um, but not, I really wasn't used or utilized as an educator, but really just as a another person, another human, um, to experience there, um, to experience what they experience on a day to day basis. (P6)

This theme demonstrates the impact of immersion in another culture and community and the opportunities for participants to experience a way of life distinct from their own. Hearing first-person accounts of the sociopolitical climate of the host community generated deeper connections through meaningful human encounters.

Theme 2: Dissonance

The second theme, Dissonance, indicated participants' reflections regarding how the immersion experience caused a feeling of discomfort and an increase in awareness of situations compared with their own. This experience was multisensorial and challenged their previously held assumptions and perspectives.

As one participant shared:

You know we had the family that we lived with was a mother, a father, three children, and a dog in a single white trailer ... with one bathroom and two bedrooms. So ... I haven't had to. I don't even have hotel rooms that are that small really, when I go places. So that was really very different and very eye-opening. We forget you know, we are working so hard every day to

advance ourselves here, you know intellectually and economically, and it's easy to forget that others easily get left behind. (P1)

These comparisons impacted their engagement, particularly when attempting to speak the local language or attending to their physical needs or preferences.

One participant described physical and emotional discomfort in this way:

The lack of comfort, you know, the bugs or whatever that are in your room or having a roommate. I mean there's plenty of discomfort, but I think that's part of the learning experience, but I don't think anyone was punished, um through that. And I think it's really hard, when people come with a value set or a certain mindset of what they're used to. (P3)

Another participant shared communication challenges:

The language was definitely challenging. Spanish is easier for me to understand than to speak. So it was one thing to sit and be able to listen and it was another thing I felt so nervous and anxious when it was just me carrying on a conversation with someone I felt like ... you know I was bothering them cause I was so slow, and my language wasn't as good and have to repeat, you know and I was struggling with words and that part was hard. I don't think anyone thought I was disrespectful, but it just felt like it hindered my ability to fully engage in a way that I could if I were better with the language. (P15)

Additionally, these comparisons continued when readjusting to their home environment. Many participants shared how the return home caused them to feel guilt or even depression because they realized their life experiences involved more instances of comfort and luxury in comparison to the environment they experienced during the immersion. This was illustrated as follows:

I think there's a huge potential after an experience like that to have a period of depression kind of when you come back, to my house that's four bedrooms and three and half baths with just me and my husband and think Gosh I must be awfully selfish. So that's a little difficult and you know you want to help and then the enormity of it hits you ... sometimes that can be a little overwhelming. (P1)

All instances of comparisons appeared to cause emotional reactions, ranging from discomfort to shame.

Theme 3: Transformation

The third theme, Transformation, encompassed participant changes to their attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives. Perspective changes included an increased awareness of social justice issues within their various personal communities and an awareness of the impact of individual decisions and behaviors on communities outside their personal context. Participants also shared how having an open mindset to new experiences was a part of their transformation. As one participant described:

So I think if the value of putting yourself in a new, a new place, right, is to challenge yourself personally, um, help you learn, grow, um, kind of just take on different, like be able to perspective, take and learn from another. Another community and another place. Um, so the value of that for faculty and staff I think is to get us out of the [University] bubble, um, and get us off campus out into the real world and just thinking about issues from or thinking about life from a different, different perspective. (P14)

One aspect of personal and professional transformation described by participants included how the experience changed their perspective when returning to campus. For example, participants described how their intense engagement with the host community impacted their engagement with students from diverse backgrounds as their perspective was changed. Participant 10's description was:

I think it was a good experience to have because I'd be able to more identify with students when they're, when they're going through those things and be able to kind of locate, um, opportunities for, uh, that, uh, the adjustment or working with different emotions that, that happen or structures that come out that can be caused by the various experiences during immersion. (P10)

Descriptions of transformation ranged from an increased awareness of marginalized people to a total change in perspective with plans to modify one's personal and/or professional life.

Theme 4: Immersion as an Academic Tool

The fourth and final theme, Immersion as an Academic Tool, encompassed participant descriptions of what they would do differently upon returning to campus. Participants reflected on immersion experiences through an academic lens, with the intention of clarifying how the experience influences teaching and serving students, as well as designing immersion experiences within their discipline. Participants identified the importance of immersion as a multisensorial experience, providing learning opportunities identified within course objectives. Furthermore, they recommended vital structural components for an effective immersion experience, such as adequate and varied preparation activities and reflection for faculty and students.

As one participant shared:

I would say with the right preparation and introduction, I think these experiences can be transformative, particularly for students who've not had to have, who have not had a lot of opportunities to interact with differences before; but the preparation has to be there. You can't just throw somebody into something like that. That's that intense, without that support that they need. Right. So we always talk about the right balance of challenge and support. And I would say a good immersion leaves you with more questions and maybe more frustrations than when you went in. It's not a Pollyanna kind of thing. It's messy. (P2)

Participants also mentioned the need to plan immersion experiences as authentically as possible to represent differing viewpoints. For instance, participant 9 suggested, "I'd be interested to see other perspectives. Like, what do other people in the community and public officials perceive the issues? How do you incorporate those things without undermining the organic nature or the authenticity of what you're seeing?"

Furthermore, participants described a clear link between the university's Jesuit mission and immersion experiences, particularly related to social justice. Due to this vital link, participants argued for systematic approaches to implementation. This participant recommended one example of recommendations for systematic structures for preparing community-based global learning experiences for students:

I think the University could do more to push students and say by being at this place, this is an expectation of you. I think that needs to happen, and I guess I say that in part because when I look at the options for studying abroad or doing experiences overseas in particular, I'll just say this but a lot of them still look like vacations to me, and I just don't think a vacation is an immersion experience ... and I worry about does it just sort of reinforce the privilege that people have? Um that you get to this because somehow you're special. When you're not. You're just lucky. You're just lucky you were born to people who had money and could fund that kind of thing. So I would love to see the University do more really immersive experiences with students. I just think that's the mission of this place. I mean that's what we're supposed to be about. And I have finally come to the conclusion that my role as an educator is to inspire more students to get involved. And I really want to see this place doing more of that. (P11)

However, this systematic approach is not without challenges, as participants recognized the structural changes that must take place to recognize and reward faculty efforts related to curricular integration, facilitation, and logistical design. Some specifically mentioned the importance of recognizing efforts to

implement immersion experiences as pedagogical and service innovation toward tenure, annual reviews, and merit pay.

A participant described these challenges as tensions in this way:

Professional development funds are important too, I think, to push faculty to be willing to do some of these things. But there is a tension that until faculty get tenure, they're focused on using whatever financial resources the University gives them to go to conferences and to produce papers and perhaps give them some research funds. And so there's a bit of a disconnect between, I think the expectation for faculty and the amount of resources they can put at encouraging them to pursue this other thing called immersion where we're getting a little bit better and intentional. (P6)

Participants also highlighted how immersion experiences served as a means of influencing the development of community-based global learning experiences in their specific academic field. Immersion experiences are opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to step out and learn beyond the classroom environment, while also being personally challenged. As one participant shared:

I think, honestly, the intentionality of taking us through a process, that helped us to be prepared for what we were going to engage in and also to be able to process that experience, you know, if you think of it like the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, right? You know, you experience, and then you reflect and then that leads to action. So being able to come back and then say, alright, here was that experience and then here's what that can look like as I consider leading students on an immersive experience. (P3)

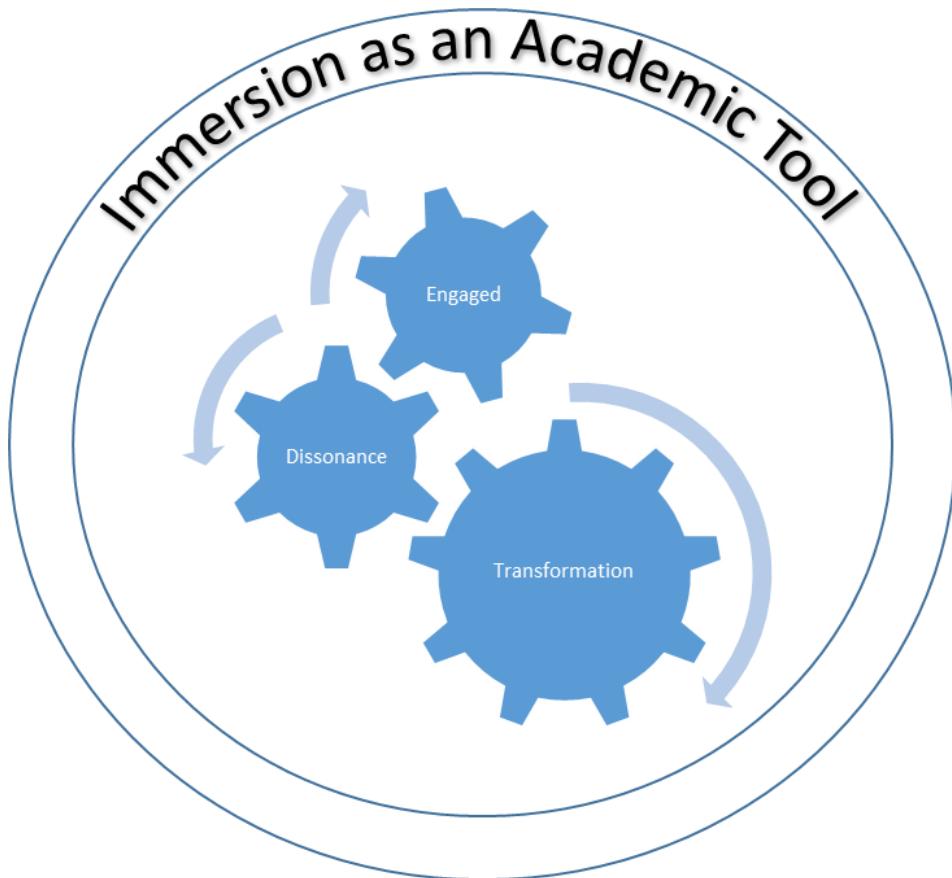
Finally, related to the theme of Immersion as an Academic Tool, some participants called for a need to mandate immersion as a top-down priority—incorporated into each major field of study so that it is integrated across the university for all students. As one participant mentioned:

I think it's going to have to be a top-down priority of the University, and I think that deans and then in turn department chairs are going to have to figure out a way to have some course within each degree program to have an immersive component. And until it is mandated, it's going to be a sort of hidden mess, because it takes time, money, energy, effort. And the University is going to have to better fund students to be able to participate in these immersive experiences. (P8)

Together, the four themes describe how a global immersive experience for faculty and staff can influence the teaching and serving of students. Immersion into a culture different from one's own allows for experiences of recognizing similarities and differences with marginalized populations. Doing so may prompt an adaptation of one's perspective. Our findings described the experience of faculty and staff perspectives of international immersion experiences as academic tools.

Visual Model

Figure 1 presents a visual model representative of faculty and staff experiences when engaged in an immersion. The model illustrates how the interpersonal and intrapersonal effects of engaging in global or local community-based immersion influence each other, prompting solidarity with the marginalized community. Through authentic engagement with the host context, faculty and staff reported feelings of dissonance, ranging from discomfort to extreme challenges. This dissonance further influenced a transformation toward new or modified perspectives resulting in changed attitudes, skills, and behaviors when interacting with students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, participants identified ways the new or modified perspective could influence how they teach or serve students and how the university can support these experiences to support its mission.

Figure 1.*Visual Model*

Discussion

The goals of higher education have traditionally pointed toward the development of citizens who contribute positively to society. Underlying the current civic engagement movement on campuses across the United States is the notion of social justice and the university's role in advancing it (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). For a Jesuit Catholic university, the mission encourages faculty, staff, and students to enact solidarity through a commitment to care for shared humanity (Traub, 2008). Participants revealed the key role that solidarity also plays in immersion, as they reflected on the interconnectedness of humans across the globe and in their cities and countries. One high-impact practice that has been identified to support and promote solidarity is community-based global learning in a context different from one's own (Hartman et al., 2018).

Although participants recognized the integration of social justice and solidarity as central to the institution's mission and thus a vital component of an immersion experience, they also expressed dismay regarding programs that offer superficial tourist experiences (Orphan & O'Meara, 2016). Furthermore, participants called for an increase in student, faculty, and staff opportunities to engage in meaningful, deep immersion. According to Orphan and O'Meara, "a lack of strategic planning and direction prevents these efforts from reshaping academic culture and being brought to scale on campuses" (p. 219).

Participants recognized the transformational learning prompted by disorienting dilemmas, leading them to call into question previously held assumptions and beliefs. Their descriptions mirror

documentation of similar student immersion experiences (Kiely, 2004; Shor et al., 2017). As participants came to understand the benefits and the transformative nature of community-based global learning, they expressed greater conviction to advocate for more students to participate in such experiences. Participants analyzed their experiential learning considering its connection to the university's mission and developed a greater interest in creating an immersion experience for their students. Participants recognized the value of a topic-based FLC in promoting the university's vocation of transforming social realities.

The format of the FLC promotes interprofessional development by establishing trusting relationships among its members (Einbinder, 2018), thus decreasing the isolation of teaching through opportunities for feedback and collaboration (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Furco & Moeley, 2012). Participants shared the extent to which they continue to interact with their FLC colleagues and feel a special bond with their group that has lasted far beyond the timeframe of the experience. Furco and Moeley (2012) conducted a multicampus study using an FLC format to promote innovative pedagogies. Their results also indicated continued relationships beyond the FLC. If properly planned and implemented, immersion experiences can result in increased collaboration among faculty and staff (Bender-Slack & Ceo-DiFrancesco, 2018). Like Bezard and Shaw (2017), participants were enriched by the deep connections developed among the group members, resulting from intense shared experiences and honest reflections within a supportive environment. These connections prompted interdisciplinary collaborations among faculty and staff and encouraged participants' future engagement in programmatic development and research opportunities. Cross-campus collaborations support the institutionalization of the university's mission (Cunliff & King, 2018).

Additionally, participants identified intrapersonal transformations as a result of immersion. They highlighted how interactions with distinct communities challenged them to be more open-minded, empathetic, and understanding in their own classrooms. The diversity they experienced during the global-based community engagement served as a reminder of the importance of supporting students of diverse backgrounds. Likewise, Bezard and Shaw (2017) described cultural awareness training that had a positive effect on faculty interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. Similar to Hirst et al.'s multiyear study of interdisciplinary science teacher FLCs, faculty and staff participants in our study reported that immersion fostered increased awareness and change in attitude toward the needs of students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom environment and beyond (2021). These findings parallel those authors who advocate for the use of cross-cultural immersion to better train teacher attitudes regarding diversity, inclusion, and cultural knowledge (Ference & Bell, 2004; Sealey et al., 2006). Participants from both the domestic and international immersion noted that their experience helped them become more mindful of student needs and also transformed their own attitudes and behaviors toward social justice. This increased awareness identified by participants illustrates Taylor's (2006) description of the development of more authentic teaching practices.

Additionally, participants highlighted the personal transformations they experienced during the immersion in another community. The experience influenced their work and teaching styles and also impacted their personal life in a way they still carry with them today. Many participants identified a change in their social attitudes, political beliefs, and behaviors toward social justice on and off campus. Cultural immersions allow faculty to grow holistically, transforming the way they teach, relate to students, and act as citizens in their community.

Like other authors (Butin, 2007; Shek & Chan, 2013), faculty and staff in our study expressed concern for the lack of recognition for community-engaged local and global immersion as a scholarship of practice (Boyer, 2016). Furthermore, junior faculty are often mentored to refrain from community engagement as pedagogy and as an area of research until after tenure is achieved (O'Meara, 2011; Schein, 2004). Community-based global learning is ripe for research opportunities on the institution–community relationship, student learning, and community partner impact. Yet, in some disciplines, this research may not be recognized in the tenure process.

All participants acknowledged how immersion experiences support the university's mission, but concerns were expressed over an individualistic approach to providing those experiences. Participants called for a systematic, coordinated approach to community-based global learning to allow the university

to meet its strategic goal of providing an immersion experience for all students. Cunliff and King (2018) suggested a need for administrative leadership and support for transformative learning practices, such as immersion experiences, and recommended synchronization among administrative departments, aligning policies and procedures to the offering of such opportunities.

Although participants agreed with the university's strategic goal, they commented on the challenge of funding, specifically for students. Without appropriate financial assistance, immersion experiences will only be available for students from privileged backgrounds. Although our findings did not illuminate a need for additional faculty and staff training in international immersive experiences, the FLC model may support the success of such an experience. However, further research in this area is necessary to determine its effectiveness for training faculty and staff to implement successful immersion experiences for students. Additionally, various centers on universities' campuses, such as centers for teaching excellence, community-engaged teaching and learning, and international education, provide resources to faculty for developing international immersive experiences for students. What may be lacking is the further synergy among these centers.

A small portion of our participants were staff or administrators, and their role was to provide support for faculty members and students. Immersion experiences influence these employees in their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds and their support for high-impact learning experiences across campus.

Conclusion

University-sponsored immersion experiences for faculty and staff positively impact the potential of delivering high-quality learning experiences for students to further the university's mission of preparing "students for a world that is increasingly diverse, complex and interdependent" (Xavier University, 2021). The community-based global experiences for faculty and staff mirror the student experience, enriching them personally and professionally. This personal and professional development provides opportunities for a greater understanding of others, influencing inclusive teaching practices and modeling solidarity with diverse communities. Well-implemented immersion experiences include opportunities for community building and shared reflection, promoting increased empathy among participants. The shared experience encourages relationships to develop across disciplines, unifying efforts toward strategic goals of community-based global learning.

Yet, to further the university's mission of preparing students for future civic engagement, both locally and globally, faculty and staff called for university support through continued and expanded funding for faculty and staff professional development opportunities focused on immersion. Doing so can lead to increased quantity and quality of student immersion experiences, as well as encouraging the integration of immersion into the curriculum. Additionally, recognition of this mission-driven work merits consideration for the tenure and promotion process. Finally, these high-impact learning experiences set high standards for fostering student, faculty, and staff holistic development and solidify the university's mission and Jesuit identity.

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