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ON PARTICIPANTS AND MISSION INTEGRATION**

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EFFECTS OF UNDERGRADUATE SERVICE IMMERSION PROGRAM
ON PARTICIPANTS AND MISSION INTEGRATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF UNDERGRADUATE SERVICE IMMERSION PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS AND MISSION INTEGRATION

Victoria Santangelo

It is the perspective of this research that an effective way to transmit mission to the next generation of students, in addition to curricular efforts, is through service immersion programs. In this research, a special focus was placed on the work of James Fowler and Arthur Chickering as well as other major developmental theories. The particular focus of the study is the Vincentian mission that guides the work of the service immersion program at St. John's University. The research assessed the impact that service immersion programs had on the alumni who participated when they were undergraduate students.

“Students who return from an immersion experience often report that it was “life-changing,” but how do we know that students’ lives have been changed, especially when change is best measured several months or years after the immersion” (Clark, 2019, p. 55)? Within the context of a Vincentian institution, what does that change mean focusing on their actions, cognitive growth, emotional growth, seeing value in being a good citizen, increasing their desire to serve, and spiritual growth?

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research is to examine the impact of the St. John's University service immersion program on its participants. The participants that were the focus of this study were three (3) alumni of St. John's University. Participants were chosen through purposeful sample to ensure the established

criterion for this study were satisfied. The demographics of the alumni that were interviewed included that they were a graduate of St. John's University who voluntarily participated in a service immersion experience. The three (3) alumni participants who were interviewed 1) reflected different service immersion experiences, 2) reflected different time periods when the service immersion occurred, 3) included a mix of commuter and resident students when they participated in the service immersion experience and, 4) included alumni who are racially diverse. All of the data (in-depth semi-structured interviews, documents of formation sessions, journal methods and artifacts) were triangulated and the researcher developed a composite description.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Vincentian Service Plunge Program and to measure the impact of the service program on the alumni who participated as undergraduate students. Catholic universities are working to identify how they can effectively transmit mission as their administration and faculty members have fewer vowed clergy. The task of preserving the very foundation of the institution is now in the hands of a collaborative team of lay and clergy who know the mission of the institution. They must be engaged and able to convey the message of the mission in a way that engages the heart, minds and souls of those who are a part of the institution. “The national conference of Catholic bishops (NCCB), in their final draft of the ‘Application to the United States’ of Ex Corde Ecclesiae reminds universities that they ‘are called to continuous renewal, both as universities and as Catholic.’ It states that this relationship between the University and Catholic is ‘clarified and maintained through dialogue that includes faculty of all disciplines, students, staff, academic and other administrative officers, trustees, and sponsoring religious communities of the educational institutions, all of whom share the responsibility for the character of Catholic higher education” (Estanek, 2002, p. 1). The purpose of this research is to measure the impact on the alumni who participated in service immersion programs as undergraduate students and assess future actions, cognitive growth, emotional growth, seeing value in being a good citizen, increasing their desire to serve, and spiritual growth.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This research utilized three areas to create the theoretical/conceptual framework:

- 1) student development theories, 2) Ex Corde Ecclesiae & Empowered by the Spirit, and
- 3) faith development theories.

The research on student development theories including Erik Erikson psychosocial development, Piaget's cognitive-structural theories, Person-Environment Theory and The Typology Theories are integrated into this phenomenological qualitative research.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued Ex Corde Ecclesiae, (ECE); which stated, "in the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: it's Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in research, and to evaluate the attainment of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person" (ECE, 2000, #7).

Faith development theories including Fowler's stages of faith and Chickering's seven vectors are included in this research. As a connection to the faith development theories, Vincentian spirituality can be one area that resonates with the life, energy, and experience of young people. "The members of the Vincentian family yearn for

wholeness, for meaning, for transcendence...there is nothing more valuable that we can do for the members of our Vincentian family than to hold up before their eyes a captivating vision; a vision that will help each of us to integrate their life and give it away as a gift; a deep, vibrant, holistic spirituality” (Maloney, 2001, p. 127). As a Vincentian institution, St. John’s can offer a great service to its students if the University instills in them the desire for wholeness, meaning and transcendence. A student may define these qualities as personal and professional success, in a similar manner to the way that St. Vincent De Paul did in his early career. However, the task of the institution is to help them find success in a way that moves them toward an integrated, holistic lifestyle. College students yearn for a “captivating vision” of what the future can be. The story of the life of St. Vincent de Paul offers them that captivating vision if it is told well and can connect to their life experiences. St. Vincent de Paul’s commitment to service, as experienced at St. John’s could offer them that captivating vision for a life of service. This definition of spirituality can be the foundation for the integration of developmental theory into the co-curricular experience of a college student through service. The fact that spirituality and the search for meaning are important to students gives a compelling insight on how to invite this generation to carry the mission of Vincentian institutions forward. Vincentian institutions must find ways to enliven the mission during the time a student spends on campus, but they must also embed patterns of Vincentian behavior that will be carried forth after graduation. This research seeks to measure the impact of service immersion programs on the alumni who participated as undergraduate students.

Significance of the Study

It is not yet known if the need for service immersion should be included as part of the holistic development of college students and/or if service immersion is an effective tool to transmit mission. This research assessed the impact of service immersion on three (3) alumni who participated as undergraduate students.

The Mission of the St. John's University Vincentian Institute for Social Action (V.I.S.A.) Service Immersion 'Plunge' Program is to offer students an extended service opportunity where they serve those most in need within and outside of the New York City area. Key elements of the plunges are Spirituality, Simple Living, Community Building, Solidarity, Social Justice Advocacy, and Service. These key elements, grounded in the Vincentian charism, offer a foundation for prayer and reflection, through the mutuality of service - they are major components to every Plunge. As students are engaged in service, they are given time to reflect on their experiences – the place where the true Vincentian understanding of the poor and marginalized comes alive. Transformation and long-term application in their lives are also essential to every Plunge experience.

The vast body of writing in student affairs over the past 50 years reveals that there is in fact a dominant student personnel "point of view". This point of view includes both content (values) and method (belief – empiricism). What is understood as "good practice" is grounded in the "point of view." This perspective is rooted in three basic assumptions that are very different from the Catholic "point of view" which is part of the foundation of Catholic high education. The following table illustrates the difference in perspectives: (Estanek, 2002, p. 28).

Figure 1

Point of View

| The Student Affairs Point of View | The Catholic Higher Ed Point of View |
|---|---|
| Knowledge is derived from the structured observation of experience. | Truth is derived from fundamental principles that interact with and interpret experience. |
| The individual is primary, and the community is a voluntary association of individuals. | Human beings are fundamentally social beings and are not isolated individuals. |
| Individual choice is the fundamental societal value. | The common good, not individual choice is the fundamental social value. |

This divide between student development and faith development issues cannot continue. Catholic Vincentian institutions have the responsibility and the privilege of meeting students where they are developmentally and helping them to understand themselves and the world in the context of their academic pursuits, their responsibility to their neighbor, and their connection to their God.

Connection With Social Justice And Vincentian Mission In Education

The following core values characterize the distinctiveness of Vincentian education as summarized by Sr. Louise Sullivan, D.C. in her 1995 book, The Core Values of Vincentian Education. They are:

Holistic: Vincentian education seeks to respond to the intellectual, spiritual, moral and affective needs of the students - educates the heart as well as the head;

Integrated: Vincentian education blends the humanistic and the professional, the abstract and the practical;

Creative: Vincentian education is ever seeking new or renewed ways to meet challenging needs among the student population while maintaining a clear “sense of the possible”;

Flexible: Vincentian education is willing to make the effort to adapt to the needs of the non-traditional student;

Excellent: Vincentian education places quality at the center of its educational activities. It seeks this excellence in:

- *Teaching:* The instructor must not only be competent but must also be efficient, dedicated, and reveal “all those virtues required of the students;”
- *Methodology:* The method employed must be active, challenging, competency-based, and enable the student not only to learn but to enjoy doing so;

Person oriented: The Vincentian educational institution must be one in which all administration, faculty, staff and most importantly, students are respected and valued;

Collaborative: Vincentian education seeks to collaborate rather than merely compete with other educational institutions;

Focused: Vincentian education is ever viewed as central to the Vincentian mission of service to the poor. As such it strives to integrate this vision into the educational process and to keep the primacy of it alive, among all those who share in this common mission

(Sullivan, p. 178-179).

These virtues are the foundation of how social justice connects to service immersion programs at the University. The aim of this research is to focus on the efficacy of those service immersion programs and to assess the impact of service immersion on the alumni interviewed for the study.

Research Design

This dissertation is a phenomenological qualitative research with three (3) interviews of alumni who participated in and completed the St. John’s University Service Immersion Plunge Program when they were undergraduate students. Participants were

chosen through purposeful sample to ensure the established criterion for this study were satisfied. This phenomenological study fostered an in-depth comparison of the shared as well as unshared experiences and challenges lived by three (3) alumni who participated in a Plunge while they were undergraduate students. Further, it allowed for gathering extensive detailed summaries of the Vincentian Institute for Social Action (V.I.S.A.) Plunge documents, itinerary schedules, materials from three (3) eight-hour days of formations, and journal methods from the program. The data was analyzed and triangulated for themes and results.

Research Questions

1. What are the social emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences?
2. How do the demographics of the participants (race, gender, age, etc...) and the location of the Service Immersion Experience impact social, emotional, cognitive, faith, and behavioral growth?

Definition of Terms

Humility - Today, as in St. Vincent's time, humility means that we recognize our creatureliness and our redeemedness, both being gifts of God's love. It shows itself in our gratitude for gifts, seeing all things as grace. Humility is concretized in the missionary's development of a "servant's attitude," a willingness to undertake even menial tasks in the service of the poor. It is also manifested in our willingness to be evangelized by the poor, "our lords and masters," as St. Vincent put it (Maloney, 1997, p. 3-6).

St. Louise de Marillac - Louise de Marillac D.C., also Louise Le Gras, was the co-founder, with Vincent de Paul, of the Daughters of Charity (McNeil, 1995, p. xiv).

St. Vincent de Paul - Vincent de Paul, commonly known as Saint Vincent de Paul, was a French Catholic priest who dedicated himself to serving the poor. He founded the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentians) who founded St. John's University (McNeil, 1995, p. x).

The Vincentian charism - refers to the charism of St. Vincent de Paul, the 17th century French priest who, along with St. Louise de Marillac, established the first organizations of what is now known as the Vincentian Family movement (Rooney, 2017, p. 2).

Vincentian - Members of the Congregation of the Mission use the word Vincentian to describe themselves as members of the community founded by Vincent de Paul. Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul founded by Frederic Ozanam refer to themselves as Vincentians. Today we emphasize a new methodology that is adapted to the person of the oppressed, where the educator and those being educated learn mutually, where teachers not only evangelize but are evangelized by the poor. Contemporary documents note that persons must not only be the objects of formation, they must be subjects within the formation process (Maloney, 2002, p. 9).

Vincentian Tradition - Vincent recognized Jesus Christ as the ultimate teacher, and followed Him by dedicating his life to prayer and service. St. Vincent's mission was to serve the poorest of the poor, whom he called his "lords" and "masters." He integrated both prayer and reflection into his service, and encouraged others to do the same (Maloney, 1995, p. 19).

Conclusion

The theories summarized in this chapter create a foundation for the assertion that it is imperative to integrate faith and student development theory through service if a

Vincentian University is to effectively and meaningfully transmit mission to this next generation of students. The stark religious and social differences in this generation demand creative strategies that will touch the life experiences of the students who enroll at St. John's University. Ultimately, Vincentian mission education, in one aspect through the service immersion program, should lead a student to an understanding that for their life to have true meaning it should be spent in the service of others. This dissertation will be a phenomenological qualitative research of the St. John's University Service Immersion Plunge Program.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Research

Today's context of higher education presents many challenges. Among them are the advancement in technologies and software applications, the ever-changing student-body demographic, a demand for greater accountability of the student and the institution, concern for the increased cost of higher education, and a critique of the moral and ethical issues presented on college campuses. Holistic education and personal development continue to evolve in the academy. What continues to be missed is a greater understanding and a stronger stance in advocating for the place of mission development in the lives of college students – to see the issue of service and spirituality as an issue of student welfare and development, and as part of this holistic approach (Dalton, 2004).

Historically, since the 1960s student development practitioners believed that there should be a clear separation, and particular manner, in the way religion and spirituality should be incorporated in the development of college students. However, in the late 1980-90's such practices were challenged when two noted articles were published in major student development journals between the years of 1987-1999: Sprinthall and McVay's (1987) *Value Development During the College Years: A Cause for Concern and an Opportunity for Growth* and Love and Talbot's (1999) *Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration in Student Affairs*. These documents became an outlet in which to urge those in higher education to consider the dialogue on spirituality in academia.

As student development theory is examined, it is evident that there are numerous viewpoints and theoretical frameworks that have been created as it relates to the development of racial, ethnic, gender-based and/or sexual orientation identity. Therefore,

it is important for the aspects of service immersion programs to recognize all of the various components to which students develop their identity - “the primary goal of higher education should not be the imparting of facts, but the transforming of people; enabling students to address their fundamental questions, and in the process, to become (rather than learn about) the answers they seek” (Scott, et al, 2011, p. 27).

Rodgers (1990), as a member of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), defined student development as “the ways a student grows, progresses, or increases his/her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (p. 27). Having been in existence since the 1960s, the study of student development theory trains professionals to “identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies and create healthy college environments” (Evans, et al, 2010, pg. 7).

The early works of student development practice were developed for the most part, based on generalizations and descriptions of the “typical student.” McEwen (1996) identified four primary categories of college student development: 1) Psychosocial theories which focus on the issues people encounter and how they are developed and changed by these experiences; 2) Cognitive structural theories that examine how individuals understand and interpret the world in which they live; 3) Integrative theories that focus on the impact that multiple events/incidences have on an individual; and lastly 4) theories that are based on social identity and considers the affects society’s viewpoint influences an individual’s race, gender, or any other quality that impacts one’s development (Evans, et al, 2010).

Foundational to student development theory, however, was the work of Maslow's (1943) theory of Human Motivation and Hierarchy Needs and the work of Erik Erickson (1959, 1980) and his theory of Identity Development. Student development theory's greatest contributor was the work of Arthur Chickering who described the seven vectors of student development. He believed these areas of "establishing identity" were the core developmental issues students were challenged with during their college years (Evans, et al, 2010). It is clear to see the influence that Erikson had on Chickering's work. However, Chickering considered the impact outside factors/issues could have on a student's individual experience and took into account the ways in which students entered in and out of each vector (Evans, et al, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This research utilized 1) student development theories, 2) church documents such as Ex Corde Ecclesiae, and 3) faith development theories to create the framework for the study.

Student Development Theories

Between 1960 and the present, an explosion of student development research has resulted in the formation of literally dozens of theories. This research has been the foundation of the philosophy of student affairs at virtually every institution in the nation. While the theories examine behavior and decision making within the 18-25 year old age category, researchers declared that there is not one comprehensive model of student development that defines this group. Existing theories tend to group into several categories, including psychosocial, cognitive structural, and typology theories. In addition, Person-Environment models have been introduced that provide guidance

concerning the factors that influence development (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 10).

The Psychosocial Theories examine individuals' personal and interpersonal lives. Early psychosocial development research was conducted by the influential Erik Erickson. He described psychosocial development as a sequence of developmental tasks or stages confronted by adults when their biology and psychology converge and qualitatively change their thinking, feeling, behaving value and relating to others and oneself. Psychosocial theorists state that "human development continues throughout the lifespan and that a basic underlying psychological structure guides this development" (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 11). Arthur Chickering is one of the most widely cited student development theorists of our time. His landmark work that identified seven vectors, defines the stages of development that cumulatively contribute to a sense of identity.

Chickering's vectors complement faith development theories, in that the vectors are not necessarily sequential. "Chickering used the term, vectors of development because each seemed to have direction and magnitude – even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than a straight line. He called these factors 'major highways' for journeying toward individuation. Chickering noted that students move through at different rates, that vectors can interact with each other and that students often find themselves re-examining issues associated with vectors they had previously worked through. Although not rigidly sequential, vectors do build on each other, leading to greater complexity, stability, and integration as the issues related to each vector are addressed" (Evans, Forney, Guido-DeBrito 1998, p. 38).

This research examined Chickering's vectors more fully as they will be the foundational student development theory used to support the integration of the student and their development as the researcher assessed the impact of service immersion programs. The seven vectors are: Developing Competence, Managing Emotions, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, Establishing Identity, Developing Purpose, and Developing Integrity. This progression moves from rigid moralistic thinking to the development of a more humanized value system in which the interest of others are balanced with one's own interests. Next, a personalized value system is established in which core values are consciously affirmed and the beliefs of others are acknowledged and respected. In developing congruence, values and actions become congruent and authentic as self-interest is balanced by a sense of social responsibility (adopted from Evans, Forney, Guido-DeBrito, 1998, p. 39).

The Cognitive-Structural Theories illuminate changes in the way people think, but not what they think. Derived from Piaget, these theories stress the importance of heredity and environment in intellectual development and reveal the various ways an individual develops cognitively. Cognitive-structural stages are sets of assumptions people use to adapt to and organize their environments. Perry, Kohlberg, King and Kitchner are the leading student development theorists in this school of thought.

The Typology Theories examine individual differences in how people view and relate to the world. Although typologies are not developmental in the psychosocial or cognitive-structural sense, innate individual differences occur in mental processing for instance, in how individuals learn what interests them. Major theoretical contributions to

typology theory are the Myers-Briggs theory of personality type, Holland's theory of vocational interest, and Kolb's theory of learning style.

The final category of student development theory that this research will consider is the Person-Environment Theory. This theory not only examines the student and the college environment, but, even more importantly, the interaction of the student with the environment (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 12).

Catholic Church Documents

Ex Corde Ecclesiae describes the relationship between the church and Catholic universities. Richard Salmi, S.J., served as the Vice President of Student Affairs at John Carroll University. He identified 11 student development areas and draws clear connections between Ex Corde Ecclesiae (ECE), Student Learning Imperatives (SLI), and principles of good practice (PGP) in Student Affairs. The SLI were issued in 1994 by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The SLI and the PGP focus on how student affairs professionals can intentionally create conditions that enhance student learning and professional development. Salmi contends that Ex Corde Ecclesiae and the student affairs documents demonstrate that student affairs personnel at Catholic colleges and universities are partners in both the educational mission and in the promotion of Catholic identity at their institutions. For example, Salmi identifies the following connections concerning encouraging the development of social responsibility in college students.

- *ECE* "... the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the greater problems of society and culture."

- *SLI* “.... preparing students to lead productive lives after college including the ability to deal effectively with such major societal challenges as poverty, illiteracy, crime and environmental exploitation.”
- *PGP* “.... good student affairs practice provides opportunities for students, faculty and student affairs educators to demonstrate the values that define a learning community. Effective learning communities are committed to justice, honesty, equality, civility, freedom, dignity and responsible citizenship”
(Estanek, 2002, p. 2).

The connection that Salmi makes draws from the words of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* when it says that the graduates of Catholic universities need to know that it is their responsibility to use their education not simply for their own welfare but for the world community. “Students are challenged to pursue an education that combines excellence and humanistic and cultural development with specialized professional training. Most especially, they are challenged to continue the search for truth and for meaning throughout their lives, since ‘the human spirit must be cultivated in such a way that results in a growth in its ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense.’ This enables them to acquire or, if they have already done so, to deepen a Christian way of life that is authentic. They should realize the responsibility of their professional life, the enthusiasm of being the trained ‘leaders’ of tomorrow, of being witnesses to Christ in whatever place they may exercise their profession” (ECE, 2000, #23).

In 1993, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops initiated the development of a pastoral plan for ministry to and with young adults. The 1996 document, “Sons and Daughters of the Light” is the result of that work. While the document speaks of ministry

to young adults, special focus is given to the important and unique ministry to young adults on campus. This work is built upon the 1985 Bishops' pastoral letter on Campus Ministry, "Empowered by the Spirit." The heart of this document is the identification of six aspects of Campus Ministry outlined in the pastoral letter. The document charges that all Campus Ministry programs should be focused on helping students to develop the following: 1) Forming the faith community, 2) Appropriating the faith, 3) Forming the Christian conscience, 4) Educating for justice, 5) Facilitating personal development, and 6) Developing leaders for the future.

Faith Development Theories

While the leadership of the church writes much about the importance of involving Higher Education professionals in the developmental process of young people, James Fowler is perhaps best known for identifying ways to do this. In his 1981 book, The Stages of Faith, Fowler identifies six stages of faith. He says faith is not something one has or does. Rather it is a process of becoming. Fowler acknowledges that some will only progress through a few stages, mostly because they have not been challenged to move further. In humanity, we recognize that all other types of development come with 'growing pains.' We must crawl before we can walk. We must learn how to trust before we can truly be a friend. With each stage, there are many others along the way to watch and model our own development. Mentors help us develop fluency with whatever skill we try to master. Often faith development is different. The wisdom of Fowler's work lies in connecting faith to our life experience.

Fowler's perspective is this, "Faith... may be characterized as an integral, centering process underlying the formation of beliefs, values and meaning that 1) gives

coherence and direction to persons' lives, 2) links them in shared trusts and loyalties with others, 3) grounds their personal stances and communal loyalties in the sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference, and 4) enables them to face and deal with the limited conditions of human life, relying upon that which has the quality of ultimacy in their lives...The stages aim to describe patterned operations of knowing and valuing that underlie our consciousness" (Fowler, 2000, p. 56). Fowler's work follows stage-theorists Jean Piaget, Erik Erickson and Lawrence Kohlberg. To understand Fowler more fully is to understand these other stage theories as well -- particularly Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Fowler understood that for healthy faith development to occur, one must work to achieve healthy emotional development. Developmental congruence results in deeper fulfillment. Fowler's stages are as follows: Stage 1) Intuitive – Projective faith, Stage 2) Mythic-Literal faith, Stage 3) Synthetic-Conventional faith, Stage 4) Individuative-Reflective faith, Stage 5) Conjunctive faith, and Stage 6) Universalizers (Wolinski-Conn, 2011, p. 226).

Theorists William Perry and Alexander Astin would say that developmental complexity is good and that students must be engaged to continue in their development. Like so many other faith development theorists, William Perry would also say that during their college years, students re-form the structure and meaning of their lives. This reformation will sustain them in their adult lives. James Fowler echoes their work when he speaks of the individuative-reflective stage of early adulthood. This is not a comfortable time in life, yet it is critical. Fowler knows that this time is when a young person will either make faith their own or reject it. This is a time when faith is not about the community or the parish; it is about where "I" fit in. Lawrence Kohlberg and Arthur

Chickering would assert that a student's development is both psychological and cognitive. It involves the development of internal maturity and deep interaction with the external environment.

Fowler's work again applies. He speaks about faith during the late teen and early adult years needing to be coherent and consistent. Like Sharon Daloz-Parks he says that faith development needs deeper meaning and reflection. Chickering would stand by Fowler's assumption that for faith to become meaningful, it has to be about more than obligation. The goal of the final three vectors is essentially the same as the result of resolving stage four of Fowler's developmental process. In the end, we are left with personally held values and beliefs.

Recent theorists, like Karen Kitchner and Patricia King, speak of the importance of helping students find solutions to "ill-structured problems." Early adulthood is filled with these problems. "Ill-structured" problems are ones that have no clear right or wrong answer. While Kitchner and King speak generally of the importance of a strong value system to guide moral choices, Daloz-Parks says "to become a young adult in faith is to discover, in a critically aware, self-conscious manner, the limits of inherited or otherwise socially received assumptions about how life works – what ultimately is true and trustworthy, and what counts – and how to recompose meaning and faith on the other side of that discovery" (Daloz-Parks, 2000, p. 7).

Jon Dalton presented a paper in 2006 that summarizes many of the assertions that students long for a connection to a sense of spirituality that they may not even understand. He summarizes his thesis, *Developmental Factors That Prompt the Spiritual Quest in College*, by stating, "Research on student development during the college years

suggest that there are at least five important developmental factors that contribute to the spiritual search process. Student development in these areas are stimulated by the need to respond to some powerful social-psychological forces with which traditional age college students must learn to cope with and resolve.” Sharon Parks (2000) suggests that the developmental concerns that press upon young adults at this time of their lives are often posed as ‘big questions.’ Some of these major developmental concerns and the related big questions they pose for college students include:

1) Identity: Who am I?, 2) Destiny or Calling: Where am I Going?, 3) Personal Faith: What Can I Believe In?, 4) Wholeness: How Can I Be Happy?, and 5) Mattering: Will My Life Make A Difference?

Related Research

Service cannot be Vincentian without transforming the perspective of the one who serves. This transformation cannot occur unless the student engages in a process of reflection on the meaning of the experience in his or her life. As a result of his 2003 research in an ongoing national study called “Spirituality in Higher Education,” Arthur Chickering contends that reflection is the component of experiential education that makes the experience transformational (Lindholm, 2007, p. 11).

Second to the importance of personal authenticity comes clear time for reflection, for contemplation. Contemplation is the cerebral metabolic process for meaning making. The food that we chew and swallow, that then enters our stomach, only nourishes us, only becomes part of our bloodstream, muscles, nerves, and body chemistry when it is metabolized. It makes sense that the second step in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle is reflection after direct experiences, and before abstract conceptualization an active

application. Reflection is the absolutely necessary intervening activity that converts input - whatever the experiences are - into meaningful working knowledge that can then be tested in other settings. Without reflection, whatever new experiences we have, whatever new information and concepts we encounter and lectures and tests, end up like the residue from food we don't metabolize. It passes through us and may be excreted for a quiz or exam, but does not nourish learning that lasts. In the academy, time is precious; in our general culture, time is money. Ironically, time out for reflection often can be the best investment we make (Chickering, 2003).

Like Sharon Daloz-Parks and Chickering, James Fowler contends that faith development needs deeper meaning and reflection. Vincentian service can only be Vincentian if there is reflection - without reflection it is simply good works. Chickering would stand by Fowler's assumption that for faith to become meaningful, it has to be about more than obligation, it must be a developmental process. Helping students develop integrity is rightfully a task of college and university educators.

As a profession, student development theorists historically rejected the formal inclusion of spiritual development in co-curricular programs. While they understood the importance of these values on the personal level they could not see a place for them within the academy. In his article entitled, *Why spirituality deserves a central place in liberal higher education*, Alexander Astin contends, "To begin with, spirituality points to our interiors, by which I mean our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of observable behavior and material objects that you can point to or measure directly. In other words the spiritual domain has to do with human consciousness - what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. Secondly, spirituality involves our

qualitative or affective experience at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic.

More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life – and our sense of connectedness to each other” (Astin, 2004, p. 1).

This perspective was the impetus for the landmark U.C.L.A. study which measures a student perspective on spirituality. The research, entitled *A national study of college student search for meaning and purpose*, (2003) explored the level and intensity of spiritual experiences among today's college students. This study has led to an abundance of research about the importance of integrating spirituality into the learning experience. Clearly, theorists had suspected that the perceptions of college students have changed with regard to an openness towards spirituality but were hesitant to make that assertion because it was so dramatically different from the body of existing research in student development theory. Jon Dalton addresses this when he speaks of the importance of religion and spirituality for college students. The spirituality project at U.C.L.A. Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) provides comprehensive data available on what contemporary college students believe about religion and spirituality and the role that these play in their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. The data reveals the surprising importance of religion and spirituality to college students and raises many questions about the difficulties students report that they encounter when they try to engage in spiritual activities in higher education settings. For example, findings from the spirituality project indicate that 75% of the new students responding to the survey indicated that they were searching for meaning purpose in life, and 80% reported that

they were at least somewhat interested in spirituality. Almost 50% of the students in a national survey suggested that they believe themselves to be on a spiritual quest and that it was important to find ways to develop spiritually while in college. Many of these students reported that they expected their colleges to provide opportunities for them to pursue their spiritual interests. Religious faith is also important to many new students. 80% reported that they had a belief in God or a higher power, and a similar percentage indicated that they gain strength from their connection to the concept of a divine being. In terms of spiritual practices measured by the HERI project, many religious students reported that they found value in prayer and adherence to religious teachings, and a large percentage had participated in religious services of some type in the year before they completed the survey. Having conversations with friends and family about religion and spirituality was also a common way that college students sought to clarify and deepen their spiritual search. Other spiritual practices found to be meaningful for many students included self-reflection, meditation, reading sacred texts or other books with spiritual themes, and participating in retreats or attending meetings where religious and spiritual topics were examined (Dalton, 2004).

Likewise, Jon Dalton's work echoes the work of his colleagues Astin and Chickering. College students take many paths on their inward journeys. Some of their spiritual searches are within the context of a religious faith orientation. The spiritual practices in which they engage are directly connected to the community beliefs, rituals, symbols, and meanings of their personal faith tradition. Other students choose to explore paths outside the boundaries of a particular faith tradition and engage in spiritual searches that have little if any connection to a specific religious orientation. What is striking about

the contemporary spirituality movement among college students is the wide variety of spiritual practices that students engage in and how receptive they are to exploring new forms of spiritual search (Dalton, 2004). While the perspective of this research project has the particular focus of Vincentian spirituality through service immersion experiences, the broader call for integrating spiritual values supports the larger work of a Catholic University.

“The Christ whom Vincent contemplated and adored is not a representation of an eternal truth, but a living human being united with humankind in history, on a mission from his Father to save humanity. It was the Father’s love which involved him in this mission that consisted in the self-emptying of the incarnation and of his sufferings and his death. The missionary Christ is at the heart of the redemptive movement, and it is in this movement we have to place ourselves. Every person is called to associate themselves with the mysterious adventure of the incarnate word” (Dodin, 1993 p. 56). Vincent De Paul knew Christ through scripture and through that knowledge he came to know himself in the service of the poor.

A Vincentian university must be set solidly on the foundation of the Gospel if it is true to its Vincentian heritage. All universities are obligated to encourage inquiry and the pursuit of truth. Catholic institutions are called to serve as a sign of Christ in the world, calling all who are a part of the community to come to know God through prayer, study and practice of faith. “It [a Catholic university] is a living institutional witness to Christ and his message, so vitally important in cultures marked by secularism, or where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown. Moreover, all the basic academic activities of a Catholic University are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing

mission of the Church: research carried out in the light of the Christian message which puts new human discoveries at the service of individuals and society; education offered in a faith context that forms men and women capable of rational and critical judgment and conscious of the dignity of the human person; professional training that incorporates ethical values and a sense of service to individuals and to society; the dialogue with culture that makes the faith better understood, and the theological research that translates the faith into contemporary language (ECC, 2000, #49).

Chapter 2 of the *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission* (2003), weaves the essential lessons of the scriptures into the way of life the priests and brothers of the mission are called to live. This chapter of the rules illustrates that Vincent did not want the reader to know him, he wanted the reader to know Christ and to know and serve His poor. In a Vincentian university, one of the ways of pursuing truth is through the service of the poor, which enables the university community to come to know each individual's own purpose and their God/spirit more deeply. This is not easy when many of the students have had little or no lived experience of faith. A secular humanist perspective on Vincentian service is not authentic; it denies the essence of Vincent's own conversion which could serve as a developmental model for students at St. John's University. Vincent wanted his missionaries to be people of the word. Engagement in the world was necessary but it had to be nurtured by the word of God. Vincent asked his priests to know the word, reference it and resolve to act on it. This balance of passive and active ways of coming to know God is most effective for mission integration on a college campus. The lack of formal catechesis that accompanies most college students leaves them unable to say what they know or don't know about their faith. This time in

the life of a young adult is a time when they are drawn towards belonging to a community, while at the same time they are searching to find their own identity. The experience of service to another within community that is rooted in prayer and self-discovery is truly the convergence of social, faith and personal development.

If a Catholic and Vincentian institution is to remain faithful to its mission, it must know, love and live the story of Saint Vincent de Paul. Likewise, it must understand that his story comes to life as he comes to understand the words of the gospel. The wisdom of scripture and the history of the Vincentian community demands that the story of Saint Vincent de Paul be presented as a journey of faith. The following gospel text will offer scriptural perspectives for Vincentian higher education that recognize and encourage both faith and emotional development. This text will offer support to students as they struggle to move through their particular stage of faith and student development.

Forming individual identity is necessary for any young adult to become a mature and integrated adult. In the scriptural foundation for the Congregation of the Mission, we see Jesus Christ claiming his own identity and mission. In Luke 4:16 - 21 we read, “He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is

fulfilled in your hearing” (Catholic Study Bible, Luke 4:16-21). Jesus returns to His home. He unrolls the scriptures and knows where to find the words that are in His heart. He quotes Isaiah and finds His own voice, telling those who are gathered that He is ready to begin His mission. In essence He finds Himself within the scripture. This passage must be part of the foundation of the Vincentian community. For it is here that the reader finds the example of Jesus claiming His role in history by exulting those who suffer.

Michael Prior, CM, has written extensively on this passage and says “the major teaching point is that the word is being fulfilled today in your hearing” (Prior, 1997, p. 128). With this important insight as a foundation, a Vincentian university must work to institutionalize ways to convey the 21st-century meaning of this passage to its students. This passage should serve as the core of what it means to educate young people in the Vincentian tradition. So often, universities search for distinctiveness. Luke 4:16-21 provides Vincentian universities with a clear answer to the question, “what should be different about the graduate of a Vincentian University? Vincentian mission education must convey to students that Jesus’ mission of liberating the oppressed is theirs too. The research regarding service immersion experiences can be one place to honor this message in a setting outside of the classroom. This experience of finding God/spirit/meaning in the service of the poor, must lead one towards a reevaluation of what is important in their life.

Ultimately, a Vincentian, Catholic University must be judged by how well it has inspired its students to know and love the poor, oppressed and historically marginalized communities. In the spirit of St. Vincent it also must educate and inspire its students to work for justice for those communities. While mission education and reflective service

opportunities must accompany the students' rigorous academic programs, what must be woven into the fabric of a Vincentian education is self-understanding on the part of the students. They must know that as a graduate of a Vincentian institution, their heart must be for others and, they must have a sense of compassion that leads them to suffer with their brother or sister who is in need and work towards their liberation.

This chapter emphasizes, in addition to higher education studies and research, the importance of understanding that Vincent's faith was fed by knowing the Jesus of the gospels. As a result, conveying the mission of a Vincentian institution without attending to the scriptures that shaped St. Vincent's spirituality would not accurately tell the story. Having established the role of scripture in Vincent's own search for meaning, Vincentian universities can begin to see a model for using scripture to support mission education and integration within a Vincentian institution, especially in and through service immersion. Claiming one's identity, understanding the value of simplicity as one moves through necessary developmental stages, and having the capacity to truly examine one's actions and motives define characteristics of James Fowler's fourth stage of faith development. The individuative-reflective stage is distinguished by these very developmental milestones.

Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study

Since the work of Kegan's (1994) *Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness* and Baxter-Magolda's (2009) development of "Self-Authorship," student development theory continues to consider meaning and purpose of one's life. In *A Review of Spiritual Development and*

Transformation among College Students from Jesuit Higher Education, Thomas Plante states, “faith-based educational institutions generally take the spiritual development of their students, as well as their faculty and staff, seriously by offering a variety of strategic and intentional programs and opportunities to nurture spiritual development and transformation for all segments of the campus community, but most especially for their college students. These programs include on campus religious services, opportunities for pastoral care and spiritual direction, courses in religion and spirituality, extracurricular spiritually-based activities such as retreats, social justice volunteer programs, immersion trips, and meditation sessions and instruction. Faith-based institutions often take mission and identity, steeped within the cultural and traditions of spirituality and religion, very seriously, and suggest that higher education sits within a particular informed way of thinking, being, and viewing the world (Plante, 2020).

Comparison is an important feature of a research design that informs the selection of research participants and theory building, and enhances the solidarity of research findings (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000; Bryman, 2001; Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicolls, & Ormstrom, 2014; West & Oldfather, 1995). Thus, having a comparison group could help to address some of the biases common within qualitative research by enhancing rigor and credibility (i.e., internal validity) of the findings through persistent observation and negative case analysis (Morse, 2015; Tomlin & Borgetto, 2011). However, when utilizing comparison, three dangers merit attention: decontextualization, commensurability, and ethnocentrism. One promising research practice that attends to different logics of comparison while avoiding these dangers is the comparative case study (CCS) approach. The *horizontal* axis of CCS encourages

comparison of how similar policies and practices unfold across sites at roughly the same level or scale, for example across a set of schools or across home, school, religious institution, and community organization (Barlett, L & Vavrus, F., 2020, p. 1). This researcher utilized a comparative data sample from John Carroll University outlined in the article Looking Five Years Post-Immersion: The Long-Term Effects of Undergraduate Immersion Experiences. The authors surveyed graduates of John Carroll University who participated in an immersion program while enrolled in college. John Carroll University offers students immersion trips from seven to ten days in duration to a variety of domestic and international (mostly Latin American) locations, providing experiences that challenge participants to enter into solidarity with the people, culture, history, and other realities of the region. For the John Carroll Study, the researchers attempted in 2017 to survey all alumni who completed their undergraduate degree after 2005 and who participated in an immersion before June 2012. This one-time survey left them with 439 possible participants. The researchers contacted them via e-mail and invited them to participate in an online survey of approximately 30 minutes in length. To improve their response rate, they offered \$10 Amazon gift cards to the first forty respondents. The authors also identified those they knew personally and requested their participation through an additional e-mail. Efforts were made to identify student e-mail addresses via searches on Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, and personal networks among former students. The authors believe that these efforts resulted in additional responses to the survey. However, because the responses were anonymous, the researchers were unable to adequately determine how many responses were generated by those additional efforts. The researchers received responses from 127 alumni, for a response rate of 29

percent. The comparison of the John Carroll University students was used because comparisons can help to reveal important differences, and it is the identification of these differences that is critical to understanding processes as a whole (Morse, 2004).

Comparing and contrasting within and across groups also allows researchers to learn about them and reflect on their situated understandings of their own contexts (Torrence, 2008).

In 1995 during the inaugural lecture of the Vincentian Chair of Social Justice at St. John's University, Fr. Robert Maloney, CM, former Superior General of the Vincentian community challenged the members of St. John's University to respond to the poor around us. Adapting the words which Pope John Paul II spoke to the Vincentian community, he said, "sons and daughters of St. John's, search out more than ever with boldness, humility, and skill the causes of poverty, and investigate short and long-term solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the gospel and of St. John's University" (Maloney, p. 6). This point is the primary source of how service immersion programs can connect to our students, enable them to contemplate the causes of poverty (i.e. systemic racism, unjust systems, heteronormative policies, education, etc.), disrupt those systems and investigate solutions in every discipline and life work after college. Father Maloney went on to offer practical recommendations for remaining faithful to our mission. He says:

1. Focus especially on New York City. (St. John's) is a remarkable university with enormous human resources, with 19,000 students, hundreds of experienced and generous faculty members, with trustees, administrators, and staff members who want to do something for young people today and for the world at large. I urge you: bring these enormous resources to alleviate poverty in New York.

Open the eyes of the young to see poverty here on the streets of New York and move them to use their creative powers to do something about it.

2. Create a global worldview. Offer young people today a vivid vision of the human family to which they belong. Give them an international perspective, so that they see the poverty of their brothers and sisters in Rwanda, Haiti, China, Somalia or wherever it may be. Help them not just to see it but use their minds and energies to attack it. Encourage them to lift up their voices so that they cry out, “no more famine. No more infant mortality. No more refugee camps.”

3. Creatively use your particular gifts and resources as a university.

- Research: Discern the causes of poverty in New York and ask, how can we root it out?
- Teaching: Are there ways in which St. John’s can help to upgrade the level of education given to students in New York?
- Networking: Can St. John’s work with the diocese, with the city, with the other universities and combine resources in attacking poverty at its roots?
- The Energy of Youth: How can the many young people here channel their energies to help the poor?

4. Work together as a university community. An individual’s contribution toward eradicating poverty is usually very modest, but 20,000 of you together, that is an army – – – a huge pool of energy and creativity. Plan together, envision together, and most of all work together.

5. Teach a spirituality of justice, a philosophy of justice, a law of justice, an economics of justice, a liberal education (a freedom) founded on justice. The prophet Micah says to all living in the Judeo-Christian tradition: ‘What does the Lord require of you but to do justice?’ (Mi 6:8). It is those who hunger and thirst for justice, Jesus tells us, who are ultimately satisfied (Maloney, 1995, p. 10).

These recommendations continue to encourage the work of the University. The question remains, how does the University excite young people about the life and vision of Saint Vincent de Paul? First, it must tell his story in a way that young people can relate to it.

Conclusion

“Creating opportunities for students to engage in meaningful local, regional, national, and international service projects or to gain first-hand experience of other people’s daily lives can facilitate spiritual development. Service experiences may promote spiritual qualities such as charitable involvement, ethic of caring, and ecumenical worldview. Service learning opportunities—which combine service with academic and reflective components and are so wide spread that we did not discuss them in this guidebook—can promote a spiritual quest in addition to the aforementioned qualities. Finally, immersion experiences, which are distinct from service experiences, are designed to broaden students’ sense of community, thereby promoting a sense of solidarity with others. All of these experiences also serve to promote spiritual development” (Lindholm, Millora, Schwartz, and Spinoso, 2011, p. 38). The intent of this research is to assess the impact of the service immersion program.

CHAPTER 3

Method

This research utilized methods of phenomenological qualitative research and its applicability to examine service immersion experiences at St. John's. "Phenomenology is the study of human experience from the actor's particular perspective. The purpose of phenomenology is to more fully understand the structure and meaning of human experience" (Keen 1975). This research explored the service immersion program and investigated if there is an intentional integration of faith development and student development theories. While mission education happens at St. John's University, one clear aspect of this research is to prove that mission engaged students who are involved in service immersion can articulate how that experience changed their future action, cognitive growth, personal growth, moral growth, growth in social responsibility and growth in spirituality. This chapter will outline the methodology.

The service relationship in higher education is focused on developing the whole person for life, academically, socially and spiritually. This development requires individuals to see themselves as part of a community, a community to which they have responsibility. This research assessed the service immersion program that seeks to integrate student development and faith development theories.

Research Questions

1. What are the social emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences?

2. How do the demographics of participants (race, gender, age, etc...) and the location of their service immersion experience impact social, emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral growth?

Research Design and Data Analysis

This dissertation is a phenomenological qualitative research with three (3) interviews of alumni who participated in and completed the St. John's University Service Immersion Plunge Program when they were undergraduate students. Participants were chosen through purposeful sample to ensure the established criterion for this study were satisfied. "Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. The approach investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. Phenomenological research studies lived experiences to gain deeper insights into how people understand those experiences" (Ho, 2022, p. 1). In this research, the experience of the participants on the service immersion plunge program will be examined. According to Delve Essential Guide to Coding, (Ho, 2022, p. 3) "below are the four main characteristics of phenomenological research design.

1. Phenomenological research design is descriptive. The researcher aims to describe as accurately as possible the structure of a phenomenon.
2. Qualitative phenomenological research design aims to uncover what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it.
3. This approach requires researchers to set aside their prejudices and prior assumptions and focus mainly on the immediate experience.

4. It requires the researcher to first describe the lived experiences objectively and then reflect on the description with reference to the existing theories about the phenomenon.”

This phenomenological study fostered an in-depth comparison of the shared as well as unshared experiences and challenges lived by three (3) alumni who participated in a Plunge while they were undergraduate students. Further, it allowed for gathering extensive detailed summaries of the Vincentian Institute for Social Action (V.I.S.A.) Plunge documents, itinerary schedules, materials from three (3) eight-hour days of formations, and journal methods from the program. The data was analyzed and triangulated for themes and results. The researcher found there to be no prior research on service immersion programs at St. John’s University. This research will be the first of its kind on service immersion at St. John’s. Method triangulation involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2012). This type of triangulation, frequently used in qualitative studies, includes interviews, observation, and field notes. Fontana and Frey (2000) described the in-depth individual (IDI) interview as one of the most powerful tools for gaining an understanding of human beings and exploring topics in depth. IDI interviews, ranging from the structured and controlled to the unstructured and fluid, can elicit rich information about personal experiences and perspectives (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005).

Reliability and Validity of the Research Design

The sample population included students who self-selected into the program by completing an application and accepting the invitation to attend formations, fundraise, and participate in the immersion experience. The advertisement of this program happens

throughout campus and in various capacities; however the nature of the program can appear to draw students in who are more interested in programs such as these, than other students. Additionally, students could feel limited in their participation based upon time and finances. Students from St. John's University express that it is a luxury to have one week available for a service experience rather than having to attend to work and/or family responsibilities.

It is also worth noting that those who selected to complete the interview could have possibly be influenced by a professional or past relationship with the researcher, thereby resulting in a biased response. To minimize participant bias, those selected who have a professional or past relationship with the researcher 1) received a letter in writing stating that the researcher is cognizant that bias may be present and ask the participant to be objective, fair and open in all responses, 2) prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher read the aforementioned letter and 3) member checking was also used as a qualitative technique by the researcher used to establish the tenet of credibility in trustworthiness. The researcher conducted member checks as a part of the research study multiple times throughout the study. "The researcher will determine if and how participants 'see themselves' and relate to the data and the researcher's interpretations (or if and how they do not). Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences" (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016, p. 1).

Lastly, the instrument is a self-assessment, and asked students to offer a personal perspective and interpretation of the interview questions. The instrument can be interpreted

in a variety of ways by the students who are being interviewed, ultimately offering uniquely formed insights. The study will include extensive description of service immersion formation and preparation meetings, Plunge itineraries/schedules, journal methods used on the Plunges, and interview narratives from the participants' experiences. Robson (2002) suggested a number of strategies aimed at addressing these threats to validity, namely prolonged involvement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis and keeping an audit trail." The researcher did keep an audit trail to monitor and keep a record of all the research-related activities and data, including, but not limited to, the raw interviews, NVivo transcripts, and all V.I.S.A. Plunge documents.

Participants

The participants that were the focus of this study were three (3) students who are alumni of St. John's University. Participants were chosen through purposeful sample to ensure the following established criterion for this study were satisfied. They ranged in age from 22 to 26 years old. They were reflective of different locations and time periods of the service immersion experiences. The alumni also had different fields of study and reflected a mix of commuter and resident students when they participated in the service immersion experience. The alumni were racially diverse. As an undergraduate student at St. John's, the interview subjects voluntarily participated in the service immersion experience. All participants on service immersion experiences were traditional undergraduate students at St. John's. Figure 2 displays the demographics of the participants for the interviews.

Figure 2

Participant Demographics

| MACON | LOS ANGELES | RENDU |
|--|--|--|
| Born in Hackensack, NJ | Born in Rockville Center, NY | Born in Norwalk, CT |
| Identifies as white, hispanic | Identifies as white | Identifies as mixed race |
| Identifies as Christian | Identifies as Catholic(ish) | Identifies as Christian |
| Identifies as female | Identifies as female | Identifies as female |
| Graduated from St. John's College in 2019 & studied psychology | Graduated from School of Education in 2019 & studied childhood education | Graduated from St. John's College in 2020 & studied English and French |
| Currently 25 years old | Currently 25 years old | Currently 24 years old |
| Was a resident and commuter student | Was a resident student | Was a resident student |

All graduates have a common baseline understanding of the Vincentian mission. These insights come from mission orientation and the mission component of their required freshman coursework in Discover New York (DNY). As part of the University's undergraduate core curriculum, faculty members develop DNY courses around the application of their own academic disciplines, employing these disciplines as the conceptual lenses to address the general framework defining DNY's educational goals. As a result, students have the opportunity to learn about and "see" New York City through a particular academic perspective including those focused on the arts, business, social and political relationships, literature, and media in the city. With a continual emphasis on critical thinking and information literacy skills as the primary pedagogy of learning, the city becomes the laboratory for the students' application of the course focus.

Moreover, with the course mandate for Academic Service-Learning, students experience the city as a place populated with “real people,” many of whom live in difficult situations and need assistance. Student Affairs collaborates with the Institute for Core Studies administration and faculty to provide out-of-class field based learning experiences for the DNY course.

Instrument

The interview questions were taken from Looking Five Years Post-Immersion: The Long Term Effects of Undergraduate Immersion Experiences (Clark, McGinness, Menkaus, and Costigan, Journal of Catholic Higher Education, 2019, pp. 66-75). See Appendix A. The themes that were addressed in the interview questions included assessing future action, assessing cognitive growth, assessing emotional changes-personal growth, assessing moral growth, assessing growth in social responsibility, and assessing growth in spirituality.

Procedure For Collecting Data

First, the researcher identified the phenomenon for this study, namely, the impact of service immersion experience on participants at St. John’s University. The researcher has shared a detailed description of the service immersion ‘Plunge’ program. The researcher invited participants utilizing a purposeful sample with criteria. A formal invitation letter (See Appendix B) and informed consent form (See Appendix C) were sent to an excel-generated random group (every tenth name on the rosters from the last five years) to generate a list of participants for availability. Questions or concerns were addressed in person, via phone or via e-mail.

Interviews

The interviews with the three (3) alumni participants were conducted virtually. In preparation to request Plunge alumni to participate, the researcher worked with the St. John's University Chief Data Officer to create an algorithm to randomly select participants.

He responded with this information.

“For a random name selection /generator based on an excel list, this is what I use:

<https://www.ablebits.com/office-addins-blog/excel-random-selection-sample/>

This allows you to select a list or column in excel and randomly select X number of names from the list at random.”

Upon receiving IRB approval, so as to create an environment one step removed from the researcher, a staff person at the University used the algorithm, served as the contact person and sent the request to participate letter to the VISA plunge roster of 422 names to request participation in this research. Once three alumni responded, the researcher was approved to move forward to schedule the interviews. The interviews were conducted in December 2022 prior to the St. John's University winter break. In order to overcome positional bias, the researcher began each interview with the following remarks:

“As we begin this interview, I clearly want to state that I, as the researcher, am not looking for particular answers. I want you to speak, honestly, from your experience. As the researcher, I will show you the responses afterwards to ensure that everything that was transcribed states what you shared in the interview today. If you feel at any time that I am showing bias or if a question seems to be

informing an assumption, or leading towards confirmation, please let me know or pass on responding. I will check in with you during the interview to reinforce these concepts.”

A member check-in was conducted, and these sentiments were repeated a second time during the 40 – 50 minute interviews that were conducted.

As was outlined in the researcher’s proposal to the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), all of the participants were given a pseudonym. A semi-structured protocol was used for the questions allowing for further clarification if necessary and recorded by the researcher. Questions were taken from a previous study with obtained permission from the author (Clark, 2019) as seen above. The questions revolved around assessing future action, cognitive growth, personal growth, moral growth, growth in social responsibility and growth in spirituality. For the qualitative data, the interviews were recorded on Zoom and Voice Memo then transcribed verbatim through an external transcription program called NVivo. The interview participants were given pseudonyms based upon which Plunge they attended as Macon, Los Angeles and Rendu. Each transcript was sent to the participants for approval and each participant wrote to approve the transcript. To verify that these participants did attend the Macon, Los Angeles and Rendu Plunges, the researcher located the Plunge rosters on file for the years aforementioned. Those rosters were a part of the approved documents in the Vincentian Institute for Social Action (V.I.S.A.) office that were approved for this research. Due to anonymity of participants, those documents will not be included as a reference in the appendix. Collection of the data included the interviews that were taped and scripted. Data analysis involved reading the data, marking the data, eliminating irrelevancies,

and arranging the data into themes that accurately and fully describe the participants' lived experiences.

Data Sources

In addition to the interviews, the three (3) other data sources include 1) three (3) eight-hour days of formation material that prepare students for the service immersion experience, 2) participant journal methods from the days of formation and from the service immersion experience, and 3) V.I.S.A. Plunge documents and Plunge schedule/itineraries.

Goals of the St. John's University Plunge Program

The Mission of the St. John's University V.I.S.A. Plunge Program is to offer students an extended service opportunity where they serve those in need, with the exception of the Rendu first-year Plunge, outside of the New York City area. As described in the V.I.S.A. documents, "key elements of the plunges are Community building, Spirituality, Simple Living, Solidarity, and Service. These key components, grounded in the Vincentian charism, offer a foundation for prayer and reflection, through the mutuality of service. As students engage themselves and are given time to reflect on their experience, the true Vincentian understanding of the poor and/or marginalized comes alive. Transformation and long-term application in their lives are also essential goals to every plunge experience."

Overview of the Three Plunges

The Rendu Service Experience is offered in August, a week prior to the start of the academic year. The Rendu Service Experience is a Plunge for first year students. During the experience, students work and serve those in need in New York City. Service

sites may include soup kitchens, nursing homes, and youth programs. Students experience community living (residing in the St. John's University Residence Halls) and form bonds through their shared journey of faith and friendship. Participants in this service plunge are given the opportunity to form both memorable and life changing experiences, before one's college experience even begins. The process to join the Rendu Plunge happens during the summer before students enter into their first semester at St. John's. No interested student is turned away. The Los Angeles, California Plunge is offered during Spring Break. Students experience an urban setting of working and serving on Skid Row in Los Angeles. Students partner with the Vincentian Service Corps West and live, work and serve with the homeless, veterans, immigrant communities, formerly incarcerated, children and elderly of LA. Students work in a variety of service sites connected to the aforementioned populations. Students live together in a day-center, Cardinal Manning Center and also engage in advocacy lectures with partners in the LA area (i.e. The Catholic Worker, Homeboy Industries, etc...). The Macon, Georgia Plunge is offered during Spring Break. Students traveling on this Plunge stay at Daybreak, a drop-in shelter and resource center for those experiencing homelessness in this rural Georgia town. They work/serve alongside the Daughters of Charity who founded Daybreak in 2008 providing hygiene, health, education and job preparation for the homeless population. Students apply, interview and are selected by two Plunge leaders (employee and/or student facilitators) for the Los Angeles and Macon Plunges. The Los Angeles and Macon Plunge interview questions and assessment scale are found in the Appendix. Each Plunge leader works with the local service partners to create a unique week-long itinerary.

All of the data was coded for themes related to the six aforementioned areas of assessment (future action, cognitive growth, personal growth, moral growth, social responsibility and spiritual growth). All of the data (in-depth semi-structured interviews, materials of formation sessions, participant journal method, documents and schedules) was triangulated and the researcher developed a composite description.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that qualitative researchers “look for code segments that can be used to describe information and develop themes” (p. 186). This coding can include information they anticipate finding prior to the study and unexpected information uncovered during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The conceptual and theoretical frameworks which guided the review of literature also provided the themes for the data analysis in this study. Consequently, assessing 1) future action, 2) cognitive growth, 3) personal growth, 4) moral growth, 5) growth in social responsibility and 6) growth in spirituality constituted the themes explored in the data analysis. The researcher also reviewed all collected data to identify any recurring patterns using a code-recode procedure (Krefting, 1991). The researcher engaged in the code recode process in reviewing the transcripts of the in-depth interviews in order to thoroughly identify commonalities and differences in the participants’ documented experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the design of the study along with the data analysis that was conducted. This phenomenological research fostered an in-depth comparison of experiences of three (3) St. John’s alumni who participated in service immersion experiences as undergraduate students. Further, it allowed for gathering extensive

detailed summaries of research participants' experiences and how they experienced it as suggested by Moustakas (1994) and for drawing meaning from their lived experiences as well as interpreting those meanings, as discussed by van Manen (1990). Procedures for consent and collection of the data followed IRB guidelines in addition to upholding research ethics.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

This phenomenological qualitative research study investigated the Vincentian Service Plunge Program and measured the impact of the service program on the alumni who participated as undergraduate students. The Program was assessed through in-depth reflection of Vincentian Service Plunge documents (Program Overview/Goal documents, formation, journal reflection methods and week-long service itinerary) and semi-structured interviews of three alumni who participated in the service plunge program when they were undergraduate students. The research examined their individual responses as well as commonalities and differences reflecting on their experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions investigated the following:

- a. What are the social emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences?
- b. How do the demographics of the participants (race, gender, age, etc...) and the location of the Service Immersion Experience impact social, emotional, cognitive, faith, and behavioral growth?

Sample Participants Case Study Description

Macon is a 25-year-old St. John's University graduate who identifies as a female. Macon identifies as white, Hispanic and Christian. Macon was born and raised in Hackensack, New Jersey. Macon was a resident and commuter student while she attended St. John's University. Macon graduated from St. John's College in 2019 with a BA in Psychology.

Los Angeles is a 25-year-old St. John's University graduate who identifies as a female. Los Angeles identifies as white and Catholic(ish). Los Angeles was born and raised in Rockville Center, New York. Los Angeles was a resident student while she attended St. John's University. Los Angeles graduated from the School of Education in 2019 with a BS in Childhood Education.

Rendu is a 24-year-old St. John's University graduate who identifies as a female. Los Angeles identifies as mixed race and Christian. Rendu was born and raised in Norwalk, Connecticut. Rendu was a resident student while she attended St. John's University. Rendu graduated from St. John's College in 2020 with a BA in English and French.

Findings

This chapter underscores some of the experiences that alumni recalled from their Plunge participation as undergraduate students. This chapter will also identify commonalities and differences in their journeys. This chapter draws meaning from the lived experiences of the study participants (Moustakas, 1994) and interprets those meanings (van Manen, 1990) with respect to the shared and unshared experiences in the lived experiences of the three research participants: Rendu, Los Angeles and Macon. The findings present the results of these examined and contrasted themes using extensive descriptions throughout.

- A. What are the social emotional effects of the Service Immersion Experiences?
How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact social emotional growth?

Assessing Emotional Changes – Personal Growth

All three (3) alumni were asked these five (5) questions: A) Did the plunge cause you to reflect on any cultural biases, et cetera, that you may have had? B) Did the plunge cause you to reflect on the privileged family/society/country into which you were born? C) Did the plunge cause you to reflect on the benefits of a less materialistic lifestyle? D) Did the plunge give you a greater sense of compassion toward others? E) Did the plunge give you a greater sense of connectedness to others locally? Each participant's response was coded for *Assessing Emotional Changes – Personal Growth* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

All three participants felt the plunge caused them to reflect on cultural biases, et cetera, that they may have had, however, each cultural bias was unique to the location of the Plunge. Rendu shared that “the plunge made me see New York in a completely different way from when I was thinking about what this city is. I had a cultural bias and it challenged that bias.” Los Angeles shared that “I think that specifically the bias around people experiencing poverty/homelessness was challenged. It wasn't the first time I reflected on this bias. I remember growing up, and in high school I also went on a service immersion experience. When I shared where I was serving for this high school immersion, someone close to me told me, ‘those people just need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get their own stuff figured out. And so I realized that was a bias that I always had growing up without reflecting on it.’” Macon remembered that the bias on the plunge that challenged “a few of us” was the fact that we were “worried about staying at Daybreak for safety and health reasons. But then having the opportunity to

meet with people who use the services made me take a step back and think about, where is this judgment coming from?”

All three participants felt that the plunge caused them to reflect on the privileged family/society/country into which they were born. Rendu said generally that “I feel like I’ve always been able to think about privilege, which is a privilege in itself. I think the Plunge allowed me to sink even deeper.” Los Angeles reflected specifically about the group talking, as college students, about the privilege of “getting this college degree and how that plays a part in what our future looks like.” Macon reflected about the reality of the realization of having your basic needs met and the striking contrast to the folks coming into Daybreak.

One participant felt the plunge caused them to reflect on the benefits of a less materialistic lifestyle. Los Angeles recalled that “there was not a lot of time to be on our phones. Being shut off from the world outside forced me to be present in the moment. I think it let me not be clouded by these materialistic things that I was thinking about. But then also just living simply and having less extravagant meals. I didn’t feel like I was really missing that.” Rendu shared that the plunge “contributed to my want to continue to live a simple and sustainable life.”

All three participants felt that the plunge gave them a greater sense of compassion toward others. Rendu shared that, “I realized more and more that those we served are people and humans that have gotten themselves into scenarios, mostly because of systemic actions.” It definitely allowed me to have more compassion and ask myself “how I should be treating them, not just in shelters or during the plunge work, but in real life. And they are people, humans and they deserve dignity.” Los Angeles reflected that

I think that so much of that greater sense of compassion “comes from conversation and working together, having the opportunity to meet people who you wouldn’t otherwise meet and hearing their stories and being human beings connected with another human being.”

All three participants felt the plunge gave them a greater sense of connectedness to others locally. Los Angeles said that plunge reinforced in me “the concept of dignity and inherent worth of all people and how we’re all made in the image and likeness of God.” Macon “definitely felt a strong sense of community among the folks that I went there with and also felt brought into the community of the Daughters of Charity there, and with the folks that we were serving. It was one day that we walked from Daybreak to a local church and they served us lunch and they hung out with us. They had no idea of who we were. It was just a very beautiful thing.”

These findings give evidence that Vincentian Service Plunges had a positive effect upon the social emotional/personal growth of participants.

B. What are the cognitive effects of the Service Immersion Experiences? How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact cognitive growth?

Part I - Assessing Cognitive Growth

All three (3) alumni were asked these five (5) questions: A) Did the plunge encourage you to reflect more critically on the world's problems? B) Did the plunge cause you to reflect more on any systematic issues or societal problems such as poverty, racism, et cetera? C) Did the plunge increase your view on the value of education for others as a way to reduce the world's problems? D) Did the plunge cause you to reflect

on the role government policies play in people's lives? E) Did the plunge help you realize that most successful development initiatives come from collaboration with the locals and from local initiatives? Each participant's response was coded for *Assessing Cognitive Growth* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

All three participants felt that the Plunge encouraged them to reflect more critically on the world's problems. Rendu shared that "it made me think about systems and what hole is our work filling and why is there a hole?" Los Angeles shared that "I realized this [homelessness] was a problem that existed throughout our entire country." Macon shared that "it just really made me think a lot about systematic injustice and a lot about how there is often this common idea that if people just worked harder or people just moved somewhere else, they wouldn't live in poverty. And it's just really striking that that's not true."

All three participants felt that the Plunge caused them to reflect more on systematic issues or societal problems such as poverty, racism, et cetera. Rendu stated that, "it makes me think about why and how these communities got here? What kind of systems are oppressing them or holding them back? And even the biggest question is what system are we, as those serving, contributing to? Are we helping or are we contributing to what's going on?" Los Angeles stated that poverty, especially on Skid Row, was a huge issue that they reflected on during the Plunge. "I think it also caused me to think about racism and systemic racism, in the way that racism and poverty are inextricably linked in our country." Macon added to the discourse by saying, "I also think about being in a place of privilege. I am able to experience the frustration of

‘things shouldn’t be this way.’ You know that systems shouldn’t be designed in a way that are nearly impossible to get out of.”

Zero of the three participants felt that the plunge increased their view on the value of education for others as a way to reduce the world's problems. They all nuanced in one way or another that, while education can lead to alleviate poverty and other injustices, they all interpreted this question and answered, in similar ways, that many people who are highly educated and in positions of power and privilege do not use their education to help others or create policies to assist changing problems for those in need. Zero participants felt that the plunge influenced this understanding/factor.

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge caused them to reflect on the role government policies play in people's lives. Macon shared “no, not at that time. I think it wasn’t necessarily something that I thought much about generally, compared to now.”

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge helped them realize that most successful development initiatives come from collaboration with the locals and from local initiatives. Los Angeles shared a memory of meeting with a group that was local to the L.A. area and hearing a story of how they responded to the need in the community. “It did open my eyes to community grassroots organizing and what it looks like to be a member of the community giving back to the community you’re a part of rather than going into a community you are not a member of and trying to help.” Macon similarly shared that the plunge gave time to, “think about the ability to foster a community when you’re working within the local community and how the ability to examine and meet one community’s specific needs and really build a strong development or initiative is greater.”

Cognitive growth refers to intellectual developments and the ways that the Vincentian Service Plunge shaped how students thought about their world and how they viewed their education after their return. The findings support the notion that Vincentian service Plunges have a cognitive effect on students as they confronted economic, historical, and political issues in the world.

What are the cognitive effects of the Service Immersion Experiences? How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact cognitive growth?

Part II - Assessing Growth in Social Responsibility

All three (3) alumni were asked these three (3) questions: A) Did the plunge increase your sense of solidarity with others? B) Did the plunge increase your desire for service to and with others during your time at St. John's? C) Did the plunge lead to a greater awareness of the value of supporting social change instead of "just giving to the poor?" Each participant's response was coded for *Assessing Growth in Social Responsibility* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

All three participants felt that the plunge increased their sense of solidarity with others. Rendu stated, "yes, it did. It allowed me to see people as humans and allowed me to see them, not as people we serve. It definitely made me want to be in solidarity with them." Los Angeles shared, "I don't really love this phrase, but putting myself in someone else's shoes for a short period and I think it opened my eyes to experiences that weren't my own and increased my understanding and empathy around those who might have had those experiences." Macon stated "it encouraged me to think of myself as less

than an individual, but rather an individual within a larger group, not only the group we served with, the group we served, but also to say society as a whole. Not like this isolated person moving through life.”

All three participants felt that the plunge increased their desire for service to and with others during their time at St. John’s. Rendu enthusiastically said, “oh yes! It sparked my whole service career at St. John’s immediately. I, because of the plunge, made friends with those who were like minded, who liked to do service and the way we continued to bond was through signing up for Midnight Runs (<https://midnightrun.org>) or signing up to serve at St. Nicholas of Tolentine Men’s Shelter (<https://stnicholas-queens.org/>). In signing up for all these other service opportunities, it really allowed us to see that there’s more work to be done and there’s always going to be more to be done and someone has to do it. And if it could be us, let it be us.” Macon similarly shared that, “yes, following Macon, I believe I went to the Panama Plunge. I mean, it definitely continued to encourage my desire to engage in service, especially in a group and reflective setting.”

All three participants felt that the plunge led to a greater awareness of the value of supporting social change instead of “just giving to the poor.” Rendu said that “all these questions were flying in and out of my head as I was doing the plunge. And how can we not stop serving? But what can we do to allow these people that we are serving to move on and grow and not have to depend on these services but live the life that they are called to live?” Los Angeles agreed and stated “I do think I will say that St. John’s, specifically, does a good job of that idea of the image of the two feet. And you can’t have just charity and you can’t have just justice, but you need to have both in tandem. And I think that

was something that we reflected a lot and talked about on the Plunge. How do we have both of those things happening so that ultimately one day we don't need to have the charity because the justice exists? But right now, we do need to sort of put a Band-Aid to stop the bleeding while also going to the root cause and figuring out why the bleeding is happening in the first place." Macon also agreed and stated, "yes, for sure. This is something I believe I've always thought about and so sometimes this can feel hard to differentiate. How I wonder if what we're doing is helpful in the long run? And so I think it is, particularly on this plunge, I felt very struck by the fact that there are these plunges that we can go on and do, and there will not be justice, until it comes from a higher level than what I'm capable of providing as an undergraduate college student."

These results are significant, especially with the participants understanding that charitable contributions, while useful, do not promote social change. This belief, along with the greater sense of solidarity with others and their desire to serve to and with others are very important concepts to take away from the immersion experiences.

C. What are the behavioral effects of the Service Immersion Experiences?

How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact behavioral growth?

Part I - Assessing Future Action

All three (3) alumni were asked these five (5) questions: A) Did the Plunge increase your desire to learn more about social justice issues such as poverty and inequality? B) Did the plunge lead to an increase in community service after you left St. John's? C) Did the plunge lead you to become an engaged citizen or advocate in your community? D) Did the plunge cause you to increase your donations to charitable

organizations? E) Did the plunge challenge you to live simply in some aspect of daily life since college? Each participant's response was coded for *Assessing Future Action* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

Two of the three participants felt as if the Plunge increased their desire to learn more about social justice issues such as poverty and inequality. Rendu shared that the plunge "made me realize, OK, what more is there to learn and figure out and see? This is only the beginning. I'm only getting a week glimpse at this." Macon remembered "having a conversation with this person and feeling very much like there is evident need and disparities for mental health services among minoritized and homeless population." So, Macon thought "in that way, educationally and professionally, the plunge kind of cued that up for me" connecting to my studies at St. John's and future profession.

Two of the three participants felt as if the Plunge led to an increase in community service after they left St. John's. Los Angeles shared that the Plunge "was the most hands-on experience with people experiencing homelessness that I had. And so that led me to seek out more opportunities in where I could serve other people experiencing homelessness." Macon shared that the Plunge did not lead to more service because, practically there is not much time or connections to resources to engage in community service like I did in college."

All three participants shared that the plunge led them to become an engaged citizen or advocate in their community. Rendu shared that "the more I saw what needs there are and what communities we are serving in, the more it made me think about why these communities, what is going on in these communities where there is so much need? And it made me dive into the disparities of each neighborhood of each borough. And it

made me dive into so much literature into redlining or intentional ways that racism is built into the system.” Macon shared that “advocating for rights for certain groups has been something that I’ve been into.” When answering this question, Macon shared that “if you’re thinking about community, like community of women or community of clinicians, in that way, I am advocating for communities.” Los Angeles shared, “yes, because of the Plunge I sought more service opportunities and through those opportunities was also introduced to policy advocacy on top of direct service.”

Zero of the three participants said the plunge caused them to increase their donations to charitable organizations.

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge challenged them to live simply in some aspect of daily life since college and the third participant said yes and no. Rendu shared that, “I try to live as simple as possible and for many reasons, because I enjoy the zero-waste living sustainability of the environment. But it’s also because of that Vincentian mindset and the things that I have seen through Plunges. Macon, however, nuanced the answer and shared “I think in some ways, yes. When I can think about the level of privilege that I am aware that I have my status in society and how that allows me to live simply in a way that feels simple to me. I can also recognize how there are communities that don’t have the opportunity to live simply in the way that I live simply. So, I think it helped instill values of respect for others and almost like this ability to zoom out on my own privilege, which I think in turn allows me to live in a more simple way. But I don’t think that I necessarily ‘live simply.’”

The research findings reinforce the long-term potential for change.

What are the behavioral effects of the Service Immersion Experiences? How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact behavioral growth?

Part II - Assessing Moral Growth

All three (3) alumni were asked these five (5) questions: A) Did the plunge increase your solidarity with the marginalized? B) Did the plunge cause you to reflect on how your actions impact others in this world? C) Did the plunge encourage you to reflect on your lifestyle, including decisions on matters such as where you shop and the goods you buy? D) Did the plunge encourage you to reflect more globally in your viewpoint? E) Did the plunge encourage you to reflect more on the value of being a good citizen? Each participant's response was coded for *Assessing Moral Growth* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

All three participants felt that the plunge increased their solidarity with the marginalized. Rendu shared that “the more I was able to see folks in these situations, the more I want to stand with them and build them up and be with them and be able to do work, from their lens, as much as possible.” Los Angeles shared, “having had previous experiences,” my solidarity with the marginalized “was very high. But I do think that the plunge did increase it even more so.” Macon shared deeply “about the recognition I had of privilege and power. I think something that really stuck with me was that I can use that privilege and power in different ways so I can be in community with the marginalized and offer maybe really basic things like love, compassion and friendship. And I can take that up a notch and, you know, do other bigger things.”

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge caused them to reflect on how their actions impact others in this world. Rendu shared that “I’ve always thought about that ripple effect, like a butterfly’s wings rippling that can cause earthquakes somewhere else. And the plunge showed me firsthand that I have the same effect on people as well. That my actions will always lead to something reacting to that.”

Two of the three participants said the plunge did not encourage them to reflect on their lifestyle, including decisions on matters such as where they shopped and the goods they buy. Rendu shared that “growing up, I was raised by an immigrant mother, and I don’t think the plunge necessarily changed my thought or had me reflect upon that because I already was just like anyone else. I think it’s because of where I started from.” Los Angeles connected this question to her future discernment and responded by saying, “going on this plunge reminded me that this is what I want to do, dedicate my life to service.”

Two of the three participants said that the plunge did not encourage them to reflect more globally in their viewpoint. Macon shared yes, “that I thought at that time a lot about the impact that our service had directly and indirectly on the folks we served and the impact it had on me directly and indirectly, not necessarily in very specific ways, but just kind of this overall feeling and thought.”

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge did not encourage them to reflect more on the value of being a good citizen. “The term citizen is interesting in that you use it,” stated Rendu. “I might be thinking too deeply, but I feel like citizen connects to someone being a part of a society in a system. So, I don’t think for me, I reflected on whether or not the plunge made me a good citizen or not. I think for me, it is more about

who I am as a human being, as a person on this Earth, more or less, not me connected to a certain sets of laws or systems that then deem me a good citizen. So, I would say, no, I think it made me think more about myself as a Christian and what my Christian morals and values are and how that connects to my humanity.” Los Angeles responded by stating, “just based off of all my experiences, the driving moral compass for me is how do I exist as a person in this world who can make it a better place than it was when I got here.”

The data supports that the Vincentian Service Plunges did shape some perspectives on participants’ life and opened their eyes to a world of need and disparity and created a sense of moral obligation to respond. These data findings also supports a need to develop further meaning-making to connect the plunge to how the service encounters could relate to global viewpoints.

D. What are the faith effects of the Service Immersion Experiences? How do the demographics of the participant and the location of the Service Immersion Experiences impact faith growth?

Assessing Growth in Spirituality

All three (3) alumni were asked these five (5) questions: A) Did the plunge encourage you to cultivate a habit of reflection? B) Did the plunge deepen your spirituality? C) Did the plunge increase your awareness of God's love for all? D) Did the plunge encourage you to develop a personal belief system inspired by Vincentian values? E) Did the plunge increase your view of faith and what it means to be faithful? Each participant’s response was coded for *Assessing Growth in Spirituality* as it related to their overall responses to the questions.

All three participants felt that the plunge encouraged them to cultivate a habit of reflection. Rendu shared that “I was always a reflective person as a writer. It’s something that I loved to do but the plunge really sparked me to continue that in a new lens of social justice and change. So it absolutely allowed me to think about reflection in terms of not just about myself, but about the world and what would that be and what that can be for me and beneficially, for others.” Los Angeles said, “definitely! I think that was something that there was a lot of time for. There was both reflection as a group, but then also personal reflection and journaling time. Our moderator was also good at making sure that individuals who were external processors had a chance to do that and reflect with others externally and auditorially. Then there were those who were more internal processors that the moderator gave time to reflect in their journals and think about it for themselves without being forced to participate in a discussion if it wasn’t comfortable for them.” Macon also shared, “love this question! I think each day was very emotionally charged for some reason, and I don’t know if that was a function of where we were staying at the time or the time we were there. I think there were a lot of factors, but each day felt very emotionally charged. And in that way, I was drawn to really reflect on my experience in a very intentional way because I felt if I didn’t, I would just be sitting with all of these feelings and not knowing what to do with them. And I definitely carried that [habit] with me for a long time.”

All three participants felt that the plunge deepened their spirituality. Rendu attributed this to the fact that, “for me, I connect to God and my faith through service a lot. That’s where I think I see God the most in those that I serve and through those that are in need. And the plunge continued to solidify that. That there is God in all these

crevices of life and especially in those who people may not see God in always. They have the spirit within them.” Los Angeles similarly stated, “I think specifically for me, so much of my spirituality is connected to service with others. So yes, (the plunge deepened my spirituality) because that was what we were doing and the way, personally, I feel most connected to God is in others and seeing the face of God in others.” Macon shared this sentiment, that “I felt more connected to my faith being in community with others, which felt really important to me at the time.”

Two of the three participants shared that the plunge did increase their awareness of God's love for all. Two of the participants, Rendu and Los Angeles, both critically examined this question through the lens of suffering. Rendu shared that, “it makes me think about why this happens? And sometimes we have to see ourselves as God’s helpers.” Los Angeles also posed the hypothetical question often asked, “if God loves us, why do such horrible things happen?” But the answer was resounding in that the plunge “definitely increased that recognition of God in others and finding God’s love in other people.”

All three participants felt that the plunge did encourage them to develop a personal belief system inspired by Vincentian values. Rendu stated that, “yes, it did. I came into my time at University, my time at St. John’s with a foundation of Christianity, and this (the Plunge) definitely helped me solidify what it means to be a Christian. It helped me focus a lot, for sure, on my morals and values and which one I want to put in practice.” Los Angeles recalled that “the one thing that stands out the most is that Vincentian idea of going out to the margins and begin with others there. And, in a critical way, how do you do that and form these connections, have these conversations

and do this work in a community that you might not necessarily be from. But with the idea of love and service and justice and fighting for what is good and just.” Macon, clearly stated, that “it encouraged me to find a balance between that feeling of ‘white savior-ness’ and being in community and being on the ground with someone versus, ‘Oh, I’m this person who’s going to swoop down and fix all the problems.’ From what I remember of Vincentian values, its being ‘in’ community with the poor.”

Two of the three participants felt that the plunge increased their view of faith and what it means to be faithful. Los Angeles said, “I think the plunge came at a time for me where I was discovering what it means to have a personal relationship with Christ. And so, I think, as I mentioned before, so much of my spirituality is tied to service, and it caused me to reflect on faith and what faith means. And some of my issues may be with the institutional Church, but also this idea of following in Christ’s footsteps and being a conduit for good and change and service and social justice.” Macon shared that “the folks in the community we served had such a profound level of faith, I think it encouraged me to be reflective of my own faith. And I think I felt more connected to my faith and spirituality after the plunge than I did before.”

St. John’s, as a Catholic and Vincentian University, shows that a Vincentian Service Plunge experience has the capacity to deepen or strengthen one’s spirituality and understanding of the Vincentian charism. The data supports the notion that participation in a Vincentian Service Plunge had a positive influence on the spiritual development of the participants.

Formation Documents and Journal Reflection

The Vincentian Institute of Social Action (V.I.S.A.) at St. John's University believes that if a student is pushed to work for justice, to see a new way, and to grow closer to God, the time and resources will be well spent. In addition to the in-depth interviews, this research assessed the Vincentian Service Plunges by referencing the Vincentian Service Plunge goals, formation material and reflection resources that students experienced and explored. Upon scouring the preparation documents, themes that were coded included:

- the focus on Catholic Social Teachings and the basis of human dignity,
- the use of Scripture and prayer to set the foundation of the service immersion,
- the practical elements of service immersion experiences,
- theology of fundraising,
- community building,
- historical/local context of the location and those who were going to be served,
- Vincentian charism development and,
- processing good/harm of short-term missions.

Each Vincentian Service Plunge participant was invited to use reflection as a key element to the immersion. This takes place through journaling and discussion modeling "See, Judge, Act" Process, namely:

See: What is happening? Who are the people involved? Who gains from this situations? Who loses? What is the situation doing to people? Why is it happening? Why does it continue?

Judge: How do you feel about this situation? Have you ever behaved or acted like anyone in this situation? If so, what happened? Why? How did you and/or those involved feel? What do you think should be happening? What does your faith say about it? What does our Vincentian Tradition say about it?

Act: What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening (the reality) and what should be happening (the ideal/what our faith says)? What action are we going to take? Who can we involve in our action?

Conclusion

The findings in this research gave insight into the positive and numerous impacts on the social emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences on the participants. The findings also gave insight into how the demographics of the participants (race, gender, age, etc...) and the location of the Service Immersion Experience impacted the social, emotional, cognitive, faith, and behavioral growth of the participants. Every Vincentian Service Plunge depends on chance encounters, group dynamics, and even weather patterns. However, several ‘best practices’ emerge while conducting this research. Proper preparation/formation and post service immersion follow-up are essential to accomplishing the goals of these experiences. A thorough application and selection process for student/employee leaders and participants assists in the likelihood that students are prepared. Reflection is crucial to help students process they day, raise questions and let the realities of the experience

challenge their worldview. While the majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive, some of the responses point out some potential areas for improvement.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, when he was Superior General of the Jesuits wrote in response to a question on why he felt immersion experiences were crucial for the development of young Jesuits. He replied, “They enable us, at least for a time, to get away from a world in which we feel secure, perhaps even comfortable, and experience in our own flesh something of the insecurity, oppression and misery that is the lot of so many people today” (Aixala, 309). The Vincentian Service Plunge Program attempts to transform the way students see the world and increase their capacity to work for change.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research was to examine the impact of the St. John's University service immersion program on its participants. The participants that were the focus of this study were three (3) alumni of St. John's University. Participants were chosen through purposeful sample to ensure the established criterion for this study were satisfied. The demographics of the alumni that were interviewed included that they were graduates of St. John's University who voluntarily participated in a service immersion experience. The three (3) alumni participants who were interviewed 1) reflected different service immersion experiences, 2) reflected different time periods when the service immersion occurred, 3) include a mix of commuter and resident students when they participated in the service immersion experience and, 4) included alumni who were racially diverse. The only criteria that was not accomplished in the sample was a mixed gender population. All of those who were interviewed identified as female.

All of the data (in-depth semi-structured interviews, reflection on Vincentian Service Plunge goals, formation documents, and journal process) were reviewed so that the researcher could develop a composite description. The alumni feedback summarized in Chapter 4, confirms that there are social emotional, cognitive, faith, and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences. The feedback summarized also confirms that the demographics of the participants and the location of the service immersion experience impact those factors.

At the United Nations in 2015, Pope Francis issued a challenge: In seeking to address poverty and injustice, we must remember our goal is enabling persons to become “dignified agents of their own destiny,” not just numbers on a spreadsheet. In emphasizing both dignity and agency, Francis continually reminds us that going to the existential peripheries is about building community of mutuality and justice. It is not that those who are marginalized need our help, as if we are coming to save them. We promote and protect the dignity of those who are excluded by recognizing their own agency and ability to participate or contribute to the wider community. If this vision of going out to the peripheries began to make some anxious, Francis gently reminded us “to go out of ourselves and join others is healthy for us.” The invitation and imperative to go out to the peripheries and embrace a wider vision of marginalization and exclusion captured by existential peripheries is woven throughout this pope’s teaching and ministry. The work of the Vincentian Service Plunges is part of the programming at St. John’s University that responds to this challenge.

Interpretation of Results

Based upon the interviews and the review of the Vincentian Service Plunge documents, the findings show that the goals that focused on faith and justice were mainly accomplished. The findings were positive in that the respondents reported that their participation had a meaningful influence on six areas: future action, cognitive growth, personal growth, moral growth, social responsibility, and spirituality. The research identifies specific components of the immersion that particularly resonated with the alumni who participated. Each alumnus reflected on how important it was to establish relationships with people on the margins to begin to understand not only their particular

situation but also the structures within society that prevent people from living a full, dignified life and create such disparity in wealth, equality, and justice. Teaching students the importance of reflection was an element that the research showed immensely engaged the participants during the service immersion. Reflection also had an impact through the interview process. Alumni shared that the questions allowed them to reflect again and shape new ‘take-aways’ in their current time. The focus on see, judge and act, daily reflections, intended to enhance the participant’s understanding and connect deeper with one another and God. All of the data findings showed that the reflection did have those results.

The interviews and review of Plunge documents revealed that learning took place through immersion into the local reality, and meeting people in their homes, neighborhoods, and place of business. The responses from the participants and the preparation documents show that “plunging” into the Rendu, Macon and Los Angeles experiences had an impact that does not take place inside the classroom. The goal was not to do service in the traditional sense (though almost all immersion trips had a service component) but rather to serve by being present and learning how participants can learn and empower others. The Plunges, in their preparation/goals documents hope to begin the journey of growing in solidarity with those whom students will encounter. The Plunge participants do not enter into relationships to change those whom they will meet, but are instead invited to let the experience potentially change them. Participants who were interviewed shared that those goals were accomplished and that they were transformed by the experience.

Relationship Between Results and Prior Research

The goal of this research examined the impact of the Vincentian Service Plunge program. The findings connected to the theoretical framework conducted in Chapter 2. The theoretical framework in Chapter 2 is seen through the service immersion experiences that the alumni participated in when they were undergraduate students. “The task in front of us is not merely to pass on the tradition (Vincentian) to a new generation, a lay generation. The task is to hand over responsibility for the tradition to a new generation. We must replace a century old process of cultural transmission at our universities (that is, priests, brothers and sisters teaching succeeding generations of lay collaborators) with a new process of cultural transmission (lay professionals teaching lay professionals). If we fail to do so, much like the Catholic colleges that choose to become private non-sectarian institutions, our beloved Vincentian institutions run the risk of losing something that many have found quite precious indeed” (Holtschneider, 2005, p. 111). It was clear in the findings that the Plunge Program did pass on the Vincentian charism to the participants. The respondents shared in the findings that the Vincentian charism was an important aspect of the experience, and the mission was something that they carried with them.

The second connection to the theoretical framework that was clearly amplified in the interviews was the aspect of Student Development and Faith Development theories. For a co-curricular Vincentian Service Plunge to be effective, it must be led by a person formed in the Vincentian charism, it must include meaningful service to the material poor, and it must provide significant opportunities for conversation and reflection on the meaning of the service in the life of the student. This reflection must be facilitated by a

Vincentian mentor who is trained to recognize the stages of student and faith development. If the Plunge offers students the opportunity to get engaged in service and meaningful reflection, the student will logically begin to move to the next stage of Chickering's factors and Fowler's stages of faith development. Students will enter the Plunge at different stages of faith and student development, but it is the job of the facilitator to consciously and intentionally move them towards reconstructing the framework of meaning that will sustain them in their adult lives. In Chickering's schema this involves moving them from autonomy to intimacy. The role of the leader of the Plunge cannot be understated.

Nationally, an important emphasis has been placed on creating campus communities that provide students with mentors. Sharon Daloz-Parks contends that mentoring communities are the best ways of engaging students in the process of making meaning in their lives. This means that engaging students about values and behavior is both important and relevant. Chickering's definition of integrity is "consistency between values and behavior." James Fowler's work flows from Chickering's assertions when Fowler speaks about faith during the late teen and early adult years needing to be coherent and consistent. The intellectual and experiential engagement that occurred in the Plunges offered a practical way for students to see that the Vincentian perspective is coherent and consistent with all that St John's hopes to teach them during their years at the University.

Additionally, all of the qualitative data was compared to the research conducted in the Journal of Catholic Higher Education article, Looking Five Years Post-Immersion:

The Long-Term Effects of Undergraduate Immersion Experiences. This comparative study of immersion experiences occurred at John Carroll University.

Table 1

Emotional Growth Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All 1 | 2 | Moderately 3 | 4 | A Lot 5 |
|--|----|-----------------|----|------------|
| Q: Cause you to reflect on any cultural biases, et cetera, that you may have had? | | | | |
| 3 | 4 | 23 | 30 | 40 |
| Q: Cause you to reflect on the privileged family/society/country into which you were born? | | | | |
| 1 | 8 | 11 | 19 | 61 |
| Q: Cause you to reflect on the benefits of a less materialistic lifestyle? | | | | |
| 1 | 10 | 21 | 26 | 42 |
| Q: Give you a greater sense of compassion toward others? | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 18 | 29 | 50 |
| Q: Give you a greater sense of connectedness to others locally? | | | | |
| 5 | 10 | 32 | 28 | 25 |

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each category.

Comparatively, regarding emotional growth, the three St. John’s University participant responses generally fall into moderately – a lot (range 3 – 5) except for their responses to the plunge having caused them to reflect on the benefits of a less materialist lifestyle which would comparatively fall into not at all (range 2). These findings give evidence that Vincentian Service Plunges had a positive effect upon the social emotional/personal growth of participants.

Table 2

Cognitive Growth Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All 1 | 2 | Moderately 3 | 4 | A Lot 5 |
|--|----|-----------------|----|------------|
| Q: Encourage you to reflect more critically on the world's problems? | | | | |
| 0 | 3 | 10 | 36 | 51 |
| Q: Cause you to reflect more on any systematic issues or societal problems such as poverty, racism, et cetera that impact the lives of others? | | | | |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 40 | 54 |
| Q: Increase your view on the value of education for others as a way to reduce the world's problems? | | | | |
| 1 | 3 | 11 | 35 | 50 |
| Q: Cause you to reflect on the role government policies play in people's lives? | | | | |
| 3 | 7 | 16 | 37 | 37 |
| Q: Help you realize that most successful development initiatives come from collaboration with the locals and from local initiatives? | | | | |
| 4 | 15 | 24 | 30 | 28 |

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each category.

Cognitive growth refers to intellectual developments and the ways that the Vincentian Service Plunge shaped how students thought about their world and how they viewed their education after their return. Comparatively, regarding cognitive growth, the three St. John’s University participant responses generally fall into moderately – a lot (range 3 – 5) except for their responses to the plunge having an impact that it increased their view on the value of education for others as a way to reduce the world’s problems which would comparatively fall into not at all (range 1). The findings support the notion

that Vincentian service Plunges have a cognitive effect on students as they confronted economic, historical, and political issues in the world.

Table 3

Growth in Social Responsibility Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All 1 | 2 | Moderately 3 | 4 | A Lot 5 |
|---|---|-----------------|----|------------|
| Q: Increase your sense of solidarity with others? | | | | |
| 2 | 6 | 16 | 39 | 38 |
| Q: Increase your desire for service to <u>and with</u> others? | | | | |
| 6 | 3 | 18 | 29 | 49 |
| Q: Lead to a greater awareness of the value of supporting social change instead of “just giving to the poor?” | | | | |
| 2 | 3 | 13 | 32 | 50 |

Comparatively, regarding social responsibilities, these questions earned the highest responses all falling into range 5 based upon the St. John’s alumni feedback. These results are significant, especially with the participants understanding that charitable contributions, while useful, do not promote social change. This belief, along with the greater sense of solidarity with others and their desire to serve to and with others are very important concepts to take away from the immersion experiences.

Table 4

Future Actions Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All | | Moderately | | A Lot |
|---|----|------------|----|-------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q: Increase your desire to learn more about social justice issues such as poverty and inequality? | | | | |
| 1 | 3 | 20 | 25 | 52 |
| Q: Lead to an increase in your community service after you left JCU? | | | | |
| 5 | 18 | 25 | 28 | 24 |
| Q: Lead you to become an engaged citizen and/or advocate in your community? | | | | |
| 4 | 16 | 30 | 27 | 23 |
| Q: Cause you to increase your donations to charitable organizations? | | | | |
| 12 | 21 | 20 | 24 | 23 |
| Q: Challenge you to live simply in some aspect of daily life since college? | | | | |
| 9 | 24 | 25 | 20 | 22 |

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each category.

Comparatively, regarding future actions, the three St. John’s University participant responses generally fall into moderately – a lot (range 3 – 5) except for their responses to the plunge having any impact to increase donations to a charitable organization which would comparatively fall into not at all (range 1). The research findings reinforces the long-term potential for change.

Table 5

Moral Growth Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All | | Moderately | | A Lot |
|---|----|------------|----|-------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q: Increase your solidarity with the marginalized? | | | | |
| 1 | 6 | 28 | 31 | 34 |
| Q: Cause you to reflect on how your actions impact others in this world? | | | | |
| 2 | 5 | 24 | 21 | 47 |
| Q: Encourage you to reflect on your lifestyle, including decisions on matters such as where you shop and the goods you buy? | | | | |
| 4 | 12 | 30 | 21 | 33 |
| Q: Encourage you to reflect more globally in your viewpoint? | | | | |
| 4 | 6 | 21 | 29 | 29 |
| Q: Encourage you to reflect more on the value of being a good citizen? | | | | |
| 2 | 8 | 19 | 34 | 36 |

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each category.

Comparatively, regarding moral growth, the three St. John’s University participant responses generally fall into moderately – a lot (range 3 – 5) for their solidarity with the marginalized and their reflections on how their actions impact others in this world. Their responses to the plunge having an impact on their lifestyle decisions and global viewpoint would comparatively fall into not at all (range 1). The responses to the question related to being a good citizen is difficult to compare because all three alumni from St. John’s University did not want to use the term ‘citizen’ as an outcome of the Plunge. The data supports that the Vincentian Service Plunges did shape some perspectives on participants’ life and opened their eyes to a world of need and disparity

and created a sense of moral obligation to respond. These data findings also supports a need to develop further meaning-making to connect the plunge to how the service encounters could relate to global viewpoints.

Table 6

Spiritual Growth Effected by Immersion Experiences

“Did your immersion experience...”

| Not at All | | Moderately | | A Lot |
|--|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q: Encourage you to cultivate a habit of reflection? | | | | |
| 4 | 17 | 24 | 27 | 28 |
| Q: Deepen your spirituality? | | | | |
| 9 | 16 | 19 | 28 | 28 |
| Q: Increase your awareness of God's love for all? | | | | |
| 10 | 16 | 25 | 24 | 25 |
| Q: Encourage you to develop a personal belief system inspired by Vincentian values? | | | | |
| 3 | 12 | 24 | 27 | 34 |
| Q: Increase your view of faith and what it means to be faithful? | | | | |
| 10 | 11 | 33 | 23 | 23 |

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each category.

Comparatively, regarding spiritual growth, these questions earned the highest responses all falling into range 4 - 5 based upon the anecdotes from the participants. St. John’s, as a Catholic and Vincentian University, shows that a Vincentian Service Plunge experience has the capacity to deepen or strengthen one’s spirituality and understanding of the Vincentian charism. The data supports the notion that participation in a Vincentian Service Plunge had a positive influence on the spiritual development of the participants.

The comparative study selected the immersion program at John Carroll University which offers similar seven-to-ten-day immersion experiences with similar goals that participants “enter into solidarity with the people, culture, history, and other realities of the region. Each trip focuses on several specific social justice issues. Their goals are, first, to establish relationships with people on the margins so that we can begin to understand not only their particular situation but also the structures within society that prevent people from living a full, dignified life and create such disparity in wealth, equality and justice” (p 62). Comparatively, for 21 of the questions, the three St. John’s University participant responses generally fall into moderately – a lot (range 3 – 5). Comparatively, for 5 of the questions, the three St. John’s University participant responses fall into not at all (range 1).

Limitations

The researcher selected the Vincentian Service Plunge Program at St. John’s University because of existing professional connections with the program. Until 2021 the Service Plunge Program was facilitated under the Department of Campus Ministry, the Department under which the researcher currently works. The researcher participated in and led Plunges from 1995 – 2011. While efforts were made to enhance participation, limitations remain.

- The researcher attempted to interview a diverse gender sample, however, the respondents only resulted in three participants who identified as female.
- Alumni who responded may have likely been students who were more committed to social justice concerns, thus, some of their responses may not be representative of the entire population of Vincentian Service Plunge participants. Respondents

self-reported attending other Plunges and participating in other service projects while they were undergraduates. Two respondents also reported completing a year of service after graduating from St. John's University. These findings reinforces that this sample included a deeply committed group of students.

- It is possible that the respondents gave socially desired responses and/or that their responses were indicative of the time of these graduates and these Plunges.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Two take-aways for future research included: 1) The impact of the group that attended the Plunge and the development of friendships that were transformative in their college experience and 2) The “gift” that the interview was in their lives a few years after having participated in the Vincentian Service Plunge. All three participants shared a bit of trepidation to say yes to being interviewed because they thought they would have to remember every detail of the Plunge experience. During and at the end of the interview, each alumnus commented on how the experience allowed them to ‘reflect’ once again on the impact of the Plunge and the gratitude they had for how it changed their lives.

Additional implications for future research include connections of Plunge participation and retention/persistence/graduation. Research could examine how the Plunge program impacts those faculty/staff/administrators that accompany students. Does that impact retention of employees or mission formation?

Future practice could allow the academic sector to collaborate with student services in higher education to connect Plunges with classes or curricular collaborations. There is a plethora of studies, for example on the influence of service learning and study abroad.

Future practice could bring these literature fields together. The evaluation of this practice must take into account the uniqueness of the future student population.

In reflecting upon the significance of Luke 4: 16 -21 for the Vincentian family, Sr. Evelyn Franc, D.C. Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, at the 2004 Vincentian Convocation stated, “this call has been sent forth for two millennia by Jesus Christ and is found in the prophesy of Isaiah as read by Christ in Luke’s Gospel, “The Spirit of the Lord Has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to those who are poor...” (Franc). A Vincentian institution must work to institutionalize ways to convey the 21st century meaning of this passage to its students. Essentially, Luke 4: 16 – 30 is a passage proclaiming liberation. Vincentian education and Vincentian Service Plunges must convey to participants that Jesus’ mission of liberating the oppressed is theirs too. St. John’s curricular and co-curricular efforts can look at this mandate for future practice and the implications it could cause on its students in the transformation of the global community.

Conclusion

The fundamental challenge of trying to bring student and faith development together lies in the balance of how we support and challenge students. The Vincentian story can be embedded in that support and challenge. The Plunges cannot be a one-time experience. While it can provide an entry into the world of Vincentian higher education, there should also be developmental milestones built into the curricular and co-curricular experience of students. These milestones should flow from the institutional direction set with regard to mission. Nationally, accrediting associations require that all courses be accompanied by learning goals which professors will achieve through assignments,

readings, and activities outlined in their respective syllabi. This process offers opportunities for consistent follow-up in selected courses within each given area of study. For the co-curricular perspective similar goals should be established within student affairs, residence life, campus ministry and athletics, to name a few. These learning goals should complement those already established in the curriculum and should offer students the opportunity to continue to explore pertinent mission related issues that will assist them in their own personal, spiritual, and vocational development.

Co-curricular experiences at St. John's should enable students to develop as a person and integrate faith/spirituality/values into everyday life. Vincentian service should change the view of each participant and their role in the world. The ability to reflect on service is a transforming quality. Graduates should understand that as they accept their diploma from a Vincentian university, they are accepting it on behalf of all those who depend on them to feed them when they are hungry, give them drink when they are thirsty, and visit them when they are sick. This degree should mean standing in solidarity with the marginalized, giving a voice to the voiceless, and working towards justice. As a graduate of a Vincentian institution, graduates should learn that it is not only their obligation to feed the hungry, but to use their education to search out the cause for their brothers and sister's hunger and find a solution. The findings of the research questions are significant. The participant's interviews and review of the Plunge documents conclude that there are social emotional, cognitive, faith and behavioral effects of undergraduate service immersion experiences. The composite narratives in this research also show that the demographics of the participants (race, gender, age, etc...) and the

location of the Service Immersion Experience impact social, emotional, cognitive, faith, and behavioral growth.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Assessing Future Action

| Not at All | | Moderately | | A Lot |
|------------|---|------------|---|-------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Did your immersion experience...

Increase your desire to learn more about social justice issues such as poverty and inequality?

Increase your desire to further educate yourself about the world's problems?

Lead you to reconsider your extracurricular activities while you were still at St. John's?

Lead to an increase in your community service after you left St. John's?

Lead you to become an engaged citizen and/or advocate in your community?

Encourage you to become more involved in your community/world?

Cause you to increase your donations to charitable organizations?

Challenge you to live simply in some aspect of daily life since college?

Assessing Cognitive Growth

Encourage you to reflect more critically on the world's problems?

Cause you to reflect on any systematic issues that impact the lives of others?

Impact your view on the causes and consequences of social injustice?

Encourage you to reflect on inequities in this world and how they can be changed?

Cause you to reflect more on societal problems such as poverty, racism, etc...?

Increase your view on the value of education for others as a way to reduce the world's problems?

Cause you to reflect on the role government policies play in people's lives?

Cause you to reflect on how U.S. policies, corporations, businesses, banks and individuals have interfered and exacerbated the problem in your immersion location?

Cause you to reflect on the sometimes-adverse relationship between development and the environment?

Cause you to critically reflect on international development and the role of aid from remittances, foreign governments, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, etc...?

Help you realize that most successful development initiatives come from collaboration with the locals and from local initiatives?

Change how you view the world? Do you pay more attention to domestic affairs/foreign affairs, etc., as a result of your immersion experience?

Cause you to reflect on how your actions impact others in this world?

Assessing Emotional Changes – Personal Growth

Cause you to reflect on any cultural biases, etc..., you may have had?

Cause you to reflect on the privileged family/society/country into which you were born?

Cause you to reflect on the benefits of a less materialistic lifestyle?

Give you a greater sense of compassion toward others?

Cause you to reflect on how your actions impact others in this world?

Cause you to reflect on your values and preconceptions of the world and how it operates?

Give you a greater sense of connectedness to others globally?

Give you a greater sense of connectedness to others locally?

Assessing Moral Growth (live and act responsibly – value of being a good citizen)

Lead you to greater awareness of moral obligations to others?

Increase your solidarity with the marginalized?

Cause you to reflect on how your actions impact others in this world?

Cause you to reflect more on the idea of human dignity and how it best can be respected?

Encourage you to reflect on your lifestyle, including decisions on matters such as where you shop and the goods you buy?

Encourage you to reflect more globally in your viewpoint?

Lead to greater awareness of the value of collective action?

Encourage you to reflect more on the value of being a good citizen?

Growth in Social Responsibility (Willingness to Serve)

Increase your sense of solidarity with others?

Increase desire for service to and with others?

Lead to a greater awareness of the value of supporting social change instead of “just giving to the poor”?

Growth in Spirituality

Encourage you to cultivate a habit of reflection?

Deepen your spirituality?

Increase your values and orientation toward greater spirituality?

Increase your awareness of God's love for all?

Bring you closer to God?

Encourage you to realize that one can be rich in spirit even if they are poor materialistically?

Encourage you to develop a personal belief system inspired by Vincentian values (i.e. generosity, gratitude, inclusivity, solidarity, desire for the greater good)?

Increase your view of faith and what it means to be faithful?

Maintain or increase your motivation to attend Mass frequently?

APPENDIX B INVITATION LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Day, Month Date, 2022

Dr./Ms./Mr./Mrs. First Name Last Name

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Dr./Ms. First Name Last Name:

I am a doctoral student at St John's University. You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research study because you participated in a St. John's University Campus Ministry Plunge in the last five years. The title of my study is: Effects of Undergraduate Service Immersion Program on Participants and Mission Integration. The study will assess future action, cognitive growth, emotional changes/personal growth, moral growth, growth in social responsibility, and growth in spirituality.

Please note:

- Your participation in this study will be voluntary.
- You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without cost or penalty.

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact me at santangv@stjohns.edu or (718) 990-1363. If you have questions regarding the rights of a research participant, you may contact my doctoral advisor Dr. Barbara Cozza, at cozzab@stjohns.edu or 718-990-1569, or Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at digiuser@stjohns.edu or (718) 990-1955.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Victoria Santangelo

APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Effects Of Undergraduate Service Immersion Program On Participants And Mission Integration

Principal Investigator: Victoria Santangelo

Email: santangv@stjohns.edu

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Barbara Cozza

Department: Administrative and Instructional Leadership (DAIL)

PURPOSE OF STUDY

I am a doctoral student at St. John's University. You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research study because you participated in a St. John's University Campus Ministry Plunge in the last five years.

“Students who return from an immersion experience often report that it was “life-changing,” but how do we know that students’ lives have been changed, especially when change is best measured several months or years after the immersion”? Within the context of a Vincentian institution, what does that change mean focusing on their actions, cognitive growth, emotional growth, seeing value in being a good citizen, increasing their desire to serve, and spiritual growth? The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the St. John's University service immersion “Plunge” program on its participants.

STUDY PROCEDURES

As part of this study, you are being asked to allow the researcher to conduct one (1) 90-minute semi-structured interview. You will receive an emailed questionnaire requesting demographic and background information, prior to the 90-minute interview. The interview will be audio-taped for accuracy. All data will be transcribed and shared with the respective research participants and their comments will be included in the transcript.

RISKS

There are no anticipated risks to you. All collected information will be kept confidential. Please review the information provided below under the confidentiality heading.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Aliases will be assigned to each participant and to any individuals mentioned during interview sessions. Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Notes of the researcher, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

TO MINIMIZE PARTICIPANT BIAS

The researcher is cognizant that those selected may have a professional or past relationship with the researcher. The researcher asks that participants be objective, fair and open in all responses.

BENEFITS

Information collected through this study will be used to complete my dissertation research, which will be published. The findings of this study will serve to further guide and inform the Plunge program. It will also add to the body of work which discusses the impact of service and spirituality in the field of higher education.

CONTACT INFORMATION

In following the ethical guidelines established by St. John’s University, all information collected by the researcher will be strictly confidential and follow IRB protocol. If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as a result of your participation, you may contact the researcher at santangv@stjohns.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Principal Investigator, you may contact her doctoral advisor Dr. Barbara Cozza at cozzab@stjohns.edu or 718-990-1569, or Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at digiuser@stjohns.edu or (718) 990-1955. Alternatively, concerns can be reported by completing a Participation Complaint Form, which can be found on the IRB website at <https://www.stjohns.edu/academics/provost/grants-and-sponsored-research/human-participants-irb-animal-use-research>

CONSENT FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

___ I have read and I understand the Informed Consent Form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

___ I understand that the interview will be audiotaped.

___ I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Name of Participant (please print) _____ Date _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E DENVER/MACON/LA PLUNGE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Start with question A then ask questions in each category based on the suggestions below.

A. Tell us briefly about yourself and why you're interested specifically in the Denver/Macon/LA Plunge.

Spirituality (prayer, reflection, Vincentian mission, ability to articulate, willingness to grow)

1. How would you describe your spirituality? How do you nurture it?
2. What is one example of a time in your life when something impacted you spiritually?
3. How do you hope to grow in faith/spirituality on this Plunge?
4. Regardless of your own faith background, are you comfortable participating in prayer and reflection based in the Catholic tradition?

Service (experience, physical labor, give/receive, ability to learn from/grow/articulate)

5. What is one service experience you've had that has impacted you? How so?
6. What do you think you could receive from this service experience?
7. What do you think you can give?
8. How do you understand the Vincentian tradition of service?

Community (living with others, team/group role, handle conflict, communication)

9. What is one example of a time you've been part of a group or team? What role are you most comfortable filling in groups?
10. Think of a time you faced conflict. How did you respond?

Simplicity (ability to adapt, what's most challenging, food, sleep, shower, travel days, limited space)

11. What do you think you will find most challenging about this Plunge?
12. Do you consider yourself to be a planner or operate more spontaneously? Give an example of a time when something didn't go as planned and you had to adapt.

B. Do you have any questions for us?

APPENDIX F DENVER/MACON/LOS ANGELES PLUNGE INTERVIEW

Denver/Macon/Los Angeles Plunge Interview

Name: _____ Year: _____ Campus:-

Use the following scale to rate the applicant in each of the areas below.

Yes No Maybe

Spirituality (prayer, reflection, Vincentian mission, ability to articulate, willingness to grow)

Service (experience, physical labor, working with those who are poor, give/receive, ability to learn from/grow/articulate)

Community (living with others, team/group role, handle conflict, communication, sharing space in the Catholic Worker)

Simplicity (CST, ability to adapt, what's most challenging, food, sleep, shower, travel days, limited space)

Overall Rating – Circle One: Recommend, Recommend with Reservations, Not Recommended

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