# Developing a Conceptual Framework for Student Learning during International Community Engagement

Matthew A. Pink
*Australian Catholic University,* matthew.pink@acu.edu.au

Youssef Taouk
*Australian Catholic University*

Stephen Guinea
*Australian Catholic University*

Katie Bunch
*Australian Catholic University*

Karen Flowers
*Australian Catholic University*

***See next page for additional authors***

Follow this and additional works at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp

# Developing a Conceptual Framework for Student Learning during International Community Engagement

**Abstract**

University-community engagement often involves students engaging with people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage or marginalization. This is particularly true when universities work with communities in developing nations. Participation in these projects can be challenging for students. Assumptions about themselves, their professional practice, and broader society are tested while dealing with the challenges of life in a developing nation. In light of this, students' learning and their personal well-being need to be supported before, during, and after participating in international community engagement . This paper reports on the development of a conceptual framework for the support and enhancement of student learning during international community engagement. The paper then reports on the development of a resource that aims to support student learning. Early pilot data suggested that the resource is effective in supporting student learning and well-being and that the resource shows potential for wider use in the higher education sector.

**Keywords**

University-community engagement, student learning, reflective learning, well-being

**Authors**

Matthew A. Pink, Youssef Taouk, Stephen Guinea, Katie Bunch, Karen Flowers, and Karen Nightingale

# Introduction

Universities are increasingly sending their students on international community-engagement experiences within developing nations (Bender & Walker 2013). This reflects a modern push by universities to develop graduates who understand the principles of social justice and have the capacity to work with people from diverse backgrounds in a contextually considered manner (Green, Johansson, Rosser, Tengnah & Segrott 2008; Howard, Gervasoni & Butcher 2007). These learning outcomes, however, are less likely to occur if students are not adequately supported within these engagements. International community-engagement experiences are at risk of becoming "cultural tourism" (Addleman, Nava, Cevallos, Brazo & Dixon 2014b, p.191) where the students "see" and "do" but do not necessarily learn at a level that transforms their understanding. Structured written reflection and group debriefing processes have previously been identified as effective means to support student learning during these placements (Addleman, Brazo, Dixon, Cevallos & Wortman 2014a; Carrington & Selva 2010; Hullender, Hinck, Wood-Nartker, Burton & Bowlby 2015). These processes can provide a means for students to reflect and learn during what can be both a busy and personally challenging experience.

International community engagement brings students face to face with the challenges of daily life in a developing nation, and teaches them about the practice of their profession in a context that may include issues such as poverty and past and present trauma. This context becomes a "lived experience" for the student, as opposed to a more distal and superficial understanding of the issues faced by a developing community. Such an experience can lead to students experiencing vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman 1990), which can have a substantial impact on their personal well-being. To date, there has been little work in the area of developing a conceptual framework that accounts for both the support of student learning and students' personal well-being before, during and after an international community-engagement experience. The present paper reports on the development of such a conceptual framework and the associated model and resources designed to provide such support.

## University-community engagement and student learning

University-community engagement involves a university partnering with a community group to build capacity within that community (Howard et al. 2007). Through this partnership, the university and community work towards mutually beneficial goals in a reciprocal, non-hierarchical manner (Marais, Donson, Naidoo & Nortje 2007). A reciprocal relationship allows both enhanced capacity for the community (i.e., development in key areas of need such as health) and a benefit for the university through enhanced learning outcomes for students (Felten & Clayton 2011; Kezar & Rhoads 2001). University-community engagement can become a transformational learning process for all involved (Pink, Butcher & Peters 2013).

Many students participating in international community engagement projects have the opportunity to develop their professional practice in an environment that will challenge their professional capacities (Addleman et al. 2014b; Pink & Butcher 2014). Their learning, however, can also extend beyond demonstrating capacities in an international setting to deeper transformational learning, through which they can gain increased capacities to understand the world "through the eyes" of the people they are working with, as well as develop a genuine understanding of the principles of social justice (Bernacki & Jaeger 2008; Carrington & Selva 2010). This learning can also contribute to the quality of their professional practice, their development as engaged citizens and the attainment of graduate attributes desirable for universities committed to social justice.

Positive outcomes for students who have participated in university-community engagement experiences include increased community and cultural awareness (Baldwin, Buchanan & Rudisill 2007; Bernacki & Jaeger 2008), the ability to work with people from other backgrounds (McAllister & Irvine 2002; Osborne, Hammerich & Hensley 1998), developing an engaged approach to professional practice that considers multiple perspectives (Giles & Eyler 1994; Santoro & Allard 2005), professional self-efficacy (Addleman et al. 2014b; Pink et al. 2013), both personal and professional patience (Davidson, Jimenez, Onifade & Hankins 2010; Pink & Butcher 2014) and broader perceptions of potential career exploration (Osborne et al. 1998). Thus, student engagement in these international community engagements can lead to a rich learning experience where the student develops both as a person and as a professional.

Central to these positive student outcomes is the development of what Passmore (1985) termed the Sympathetic Imagination, which he defined as a "capacity to understand how other people are feeling" (p.18); he also stressed the importance of developing a capacity to work with others. Passmore argued that this already difficult task becomes even more difficult when students are working with those who are "culturally and socially remote" (p.18) from them. With the increased difficulty of these contexts there also comes increased opportunity for learning (Hullender et al. 2015). This opportunity is a special component of any university-community engagement where students are working either internationally or locally with groups from different socio-cultural backgrounds. However, developing students' sympathetic imaginations is not as simple as merely placing students within a community. Students need to embark on a process of transformational learning (Cranton 2002; Mezirow 2012), a process that requires considered facilitation.

### Transformational learning

Transformational learning (TFL) as described by Mezirow (2012) is a "process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p.75). Through this process, students can develop their sympathetic imaginations (Passmore 1985) and conduct themselves in a way that is sensitive to the needs and worldviews of those they are working with. Addleman et al. (2014b) synthesised Mezirow's (2012) and Cranton's (2002) works to propose three broad phases of the TFL process that can be applied to student learning on community-engagement experiences. The first phase involves an experience or experiences that trigger disequilibrium in students' assumptions about the context in which they are immersed. While the same experience can differ in its effect on students, sometimes a seemingly innocuous event (or an accumulation of sights, sounds and experiences) can trigger a transformational process within a student (Addleman et al. 2014b).

The second phase of TFL involves students critically assessing their "frames of reference" (for example, what they thought they knew about the community) that have been challenged by their experiences. It is pivotal that critical reflection and dialogue is supported by pedagogy during this phase (Bender & Walker 2013; Hullender et al. 2015). Otherwise this learning process has the potential to be stalled by the immediate focus of working in an environment that is often under-resourced and culturally, politically and geographically unfamiliar to the students (Bender & Walker 2013). In such an environment, critical reflection is often one of the first components to be omitted. The third phase represents the potential transformative change, plans and actions. In this phase, students can be encouraged to think and act in a manner that is congruent with their new perspectives, as well as to develop new skills (Mezirow 2012). It is through these processes that, in the long term, students may continue to develop as socially minded individuals and "other-centered" practitioners. However, the support of student learning during international community

engagement is not the only critical issue: there are also risks to students' well-being whilst participating in these experiences.

## Student well-being and international community engagement

Although international community engagement can be a rich student experience, it can often be experienced as more stressful than a traditional classroom-based program (Polson & Nida 1998). Travelling abroad requires students to negotiate numerous roles (e.g. foreigner, learner, guest) and to cope with issues such as homesickness, potential illnesses, language barriers and cross-cultural misunderstanding (Balandin, Lincoln, Sen, Wilkins & Trembath 2007).

International community-engagement experiences may also require students to deal with issues such as poverty, political instability and poor health conditions, which can challenge them emotionally and philosophically (Pinto & Upshur 2009). When they compare their own home conditions with their new surroundings, students are often left to ponder social injustices. Further, students can inadvertently find themselves working with individuals who have experienced significant trauma throughout their lives. For example, they may work in and with communities that have been affected by natural disasters and conflict, leave community members traumatised and dealing with intense emotional pain (Pearlman & McKay 2008). When working with these individuals, students are vicariously exposed to the aftermath of this trauma. In such circumstances, students' abilities to engage empathically with community members, validate challenging emotions and respond to others' trauma are vital aspects of both community engagement and transformational learning. Student well-being must be supported and the impact of potential vicarious trauma mitigated if they are to meet these challenges.

Vicarious trauma refers to a transformation within the inner experience of a student that arises from engagement with clients who have experienced trauma (McCann & Pearlman 1990).Vicarious trauma can result in a student experiencing physiological symptoms that mirror post-traumatic stress reactions, such as hypervigilance, flashbacks, sleep disturbance, irritability and numbing and dissociation (Beaton & Murphy 1995). Importantly, the experience of vicarious traumatisation may also disrupt a student's overall view of the world and the people around them (McCann & Pearlman 1990). Although this is often an important starting point for transformational learning (i.e., a disequilibrium), it also has the potential to place students at risk. Vicarious trauma can accumulate over time through interactions with community members, and can be as debilitating as the primary trauma experienced by the people with whom the students are working.

Given that there are risks associated with the well-being of students on international community-engagement experiences, Bender and Walker (2013) have suggested that there is an obligation for educators who lead such experiences to focus on more than just the students' skill development. Facilitators must also attend to their students' psychological and emotional responses and overall well-being. It is therefore incumbent on educators to minimise the impact of working in these stressful environments by employing strategies that support student well-being. These strategies include briefing/debriefing in relation to vicarious trauma, creating group and individual opportunities for discussing the challenging aspects of a community engagement, planning and implementing activities that support well-being (e.g., rest, exercise, time out, music) and referral to counselling as necessary. Strategies such as these are equally important for those who aim to support student learning.

## Statement of the problem

The discussion above identifies the need to support both students' learning and their personal well-being during international community-engagement experiences. This identifies the need to develop a conceptual framework that accounts for the support of student learning and well-being in a manner that is grounded in the literature and pedagogically sound. Such a framework could then be used to assemble a suite of activities designed to support student learning and well-being. In the following section we report on the development of a conceptual framework for the support of these outcomes.

## The university context

The framework discussed in this paper was developed in a large Australian multi-campus university. The university has a strong commitment to social justice, and many faculties have opportunities for student participation in international community engagement. For example, the national faculty of health sciences at this university in 2015 alone had 16 separate international experiences involving 178 students. The project team consisted of seven academics: two community-engagement academics, four from health sciences and one from psychology. Team members' areas of expertise included reflective and experiential learning, local and international community engagement and the support of students experiencing vicarious trauma. During 2015 this team met regularly face to face and via teleconference and videoconference to discuss literature concerning student learning and well-being in the context of international community engagement, and to develop a conceptual framework and resource for staff facilitating student learning through international community engagement.

## The conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the support of student learning and well-being during international community engagement. Through analysis of the literature concerning international community engagement (Addleman et al. 2014b; Balandin et al. 2007; Bender & Walker 2013; Pink & Butcher 2014), three core focus areas for student support were identified: student learning in specific discipline areas (e.g., nursing, exercise science, physiotherapy, etc.); student learning as a deeper understanding of community engagement (i.e., the development of a sympathetic imagination and an understanding of social justice); and support for students' overall emotional well-being. Drawing together literature that discussed student learning outcomes and risks to their well-being suggested that any framework aiming to be holistic in its support for students should support all three focus areas.

Examining literature from experienced-based reflective learning (e.g., Boud & Walker 1990; Dawson 2000; Gibbs 1988) also identified a need to support student learning processes. This is clearly represented by Boud and Walker (1990) and later Boud (2010), who advocated supporting learning before, during and after an event at both a micro level (an event within a project) and a macro level (an international community-engagement project). At the macro level, support

involves providing students with strategies to facilitate meaningful learning and well-being prior to departure, during the experience and after returning home. Blending the three foci of discipline-specific learning, community-engagement learning and well-being with the three phases of learning, before, during and after an international community-engagement experience gave rise to the conceptual framework. This framework in turn provided the blueprint for the design of a resource that aimed to cumulatively support the three focus areas in each macro phase of the community engagement experience. This resource was labeled the 'Three-by-Three' Student Learning Model: International Community Engagement Resource Kit (the resource kit can be viewed online at http://www.acu.edu.au/?a=846330).

| Focus area | (1) Before | (2) During | (3) After |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Discipline-specific learning (DSL) | | | |
| (2) Community-engagement learning (CEL) | | | |
| (3) Student well-being (SWB) | | | |

**Figure 1.** The conceptual framework for the support of student learning and well-being during international community engagement

## Development of the Three-by-Three resource

The resource was divided into three broad sections: before, during and after. Within these sections, activities designed to support the three focus areas were described under the headings "aim", "emphasis" (which of the three areas the activity predominantly focuses on), "rationale" (why the activity is structured as it is), "resources" (directing the facilitator to worksheets, which are included as part of the resource) and "process" (step-by-step instructions of how to run each activity). While each activity should primarily meet the needs in one of the three focus areas (discipline-specific learning, community-engagement learning and student well-being), there were areas of cross-over, where one activity would also at least partially meet the needs in one or both of the other focus areas (Figure 3). To aid the facilitator, a colour-coding system for each activity was implemented. This system allowed a facilitator to see the relative weighting of each activity with respect to meeting the three focus areas at each macro stage (before, during and after) of the engagement experience. An example of this colour-coding system can be seen in Figure 2, where the emphasis for a group debriefing activity in the "during" phase is shown. In this example, from the first week of immersion in an international community engagement, there is a greater emphasis on debriefing discipline-specific learning (DSL) than community-engagement learning (CEL), and less of a focus on student well-being (SWB), which is taken up in other activities scheduled for the

"during" phase of the resource. As the group debriefing sessions develop during the international community engagement, the questions are structured in a way that means there is a greater emphasis on community engagement learning.

| DSL (GREEN) | CEL (BLUE) | SWB (PINK) |
|---|---|---|

Figure 2. Example of colour-coding scheme that shows the emphasis of a group debriefing activity in the Three-by-Three student learning resource

### Activities in the resource

Literature reporting on student experiences and learning during international community engagement recommends the use of reflective journaling and both group and individual debriefing sessions (Addleman et al. 2014a; Bender & Walker 2013; Hullender et al. 2015). Pre-departure and post-return workshops have also been identified as a means to support student learning and well-being (Addleman et al. 2014b; Carrington & Selva 2010). The project team met regularly to structure these activities so that they were contextually appropriate for each macro phase (before, during and after) of an international community-engagement project. Additionally, a registered clinical psychologist with expertise in vicarious trauma designed structured activities to support student well-being and mitigate the risk of vicarious trauma. Figure 3 provides a graphical representation of the Three-by-Three model and activities that were incorporated into a resource designed to cater to the tenets of this model.
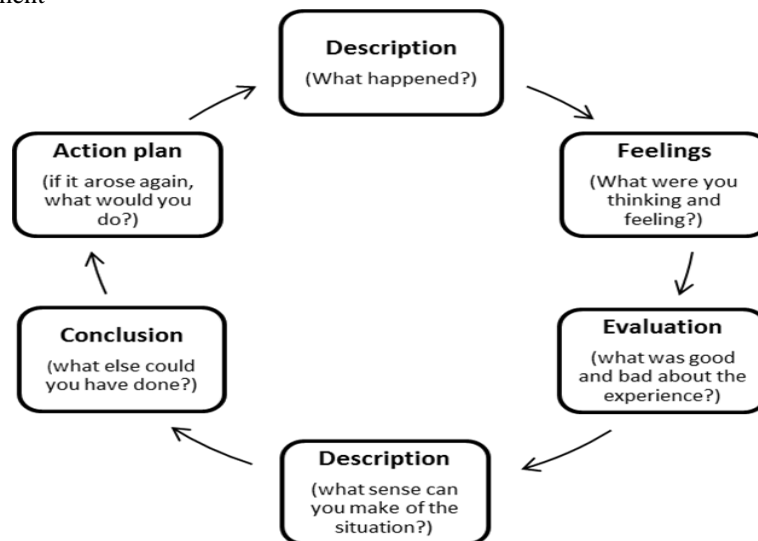
### Group briefing/debriefing

Gibbs's reflective cycle (1988) provided the framework for supporting students' learning during the group debriefing sessions. This cycle consists of six steps (Figure 4) in which the learner is required to respond to a series of questions (each leading on to the next) that encourage a thorough examination of an event and provoke critical thought. The cycle begins with a description of the event, and involves reviewing and reflecting on an experience and constructing strategies to deal with similar experiences in the future. Gibbs's reflective cycle was chosen because the focus on generating new knowledge after an experience and converting this knowledge into new approaches is congruent with the tenets of transformational learning (Dawson 2000; Mezirow 2012).

The group debriefing process of the Three-by-Three resource involves students completing a pro-forma prior to the group discussion. The pro-forma prompts students to reflect on something they have experienced during the community engagement and would like to explore further with the group. Students are prompted to document the event, describing their feelings and evaluating the positive and negative aspects of the event. Documenting this information provides students with time for personal reflection. Further, a documented reflection at the commencement of debriefing provides students with a reference point to return to as the energy of the debrief evolves (Dreifuerst 2015). The Three-by-Three resource provides guidance for staff to effectively facilitate what are often complex group discussions and the negotiation of new insights and mutual understanding. The group debrief, closes by exploring how this understanding can guide future interactions with the community. In the "before" phase, the activity is projective, and students raise issues about the upcoming project they would like to discuss. This activity also familiarises them with the group

| Focus area | ① Before | ② During | ③ After |
|---|---|---|---|
| ① **Discipline-specific learning (DSL)** | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group briefing<br>• Pre-departure workshop | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Daily "check ins" | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Return workshop |
| ② **Community-engagement learning (CEL)** | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group briefing<br>• Pre-departure workshop | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Daily "check ins" | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Return workshop |
| ③ **Student well-being (SWB)** | • A-Z of self-care activity<br>• Vicarious-trauma information sheet<br>• Pre-departure workshop | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Daily "check ins" | • Reflective journaling<br>• Group debriefing<br>• Exit interviews |

**Figure 3**. The Three-by-Three Model of student learning during international community engagement

**Figure 4.** Gibbs's Reflective Framework

debriefing process prior to departure. This occurs as part of a pre-departure workshop where students receive information about the upcoming engagement. In the "after phase", students reflect on their overall learning during a return workshop and how this can be applied to both their professional practice and their everyday lives.

### *Reflective journaling*

The personal written reflections were based upon a reflective learning model derived from the principles of Catholic social teaching: the See-Judge-Act Model (Dawson 2000). This model bears similarities to Gibbs's reflective cycle. "See" is about empirically experiencing the lived reality of communities or individuals and examining the situation. "Judge" is used in a positive sense, and involves discerning the situation to make an informed analysis of what is occurring. Such an analysis aims to get at the root causes of a given situation. With this new knowledge, "Act" involves carrying out actions within the community that are aimed at transforming social structures in a mutual and respectful manner, leading to improved interactions with the community. The process of reflecting on an important/critical incident that has stayed with the student was adapted from the work of Carrington and Selva (2010) to further facilitate deeper reflection. An example of the written reflection questions in the "during" phase can be seen below:

1.  What have you observed about the culture and values of the community you are working with?

    ➤ Were any of your ideals or beliefs before travelling here challenged? Were any reinforced?

2.  How do you think the local community views our presence here?

3.  Describe an important incident that you have experienced in the past few days or past week. An important incident does not necessarily mean it would affect someone else. It can be something that has "stuck in your mind" that you have thought about several times.

    ➤ What happened?

    ➤ Why has it had an impact on you?

4.  What have you learned about working with the local community?

    ➤ How will this guide your approaches next week?

Similar to the group debriefing process, the personal written reflection in the "before" phase is projective (i.e., student perceptions about what is to come), and that in the "after" phase reflects on the overall "learnings" and how they can be applied to personal and professional life.

### Student well-being

Support for student well-being occurs via several activities across the "before", "during", and "after" phases of the Three-by-Three resource. During the pre-departure workshop, the "A-Z of self-care" activity encourages students to think of activities that matched each letter of the alphabet to support their well-being whilst on international community engagement; for example, "go for a walk" for "G" and "meditate" for "M".  Students are then encouraged to choose their top five activities to use while away. During the workshop, the students are also given a handout on vicarious trauma/resilience and information on what to do if they or their colleagues may be experiencing symptoms. In the "during" phase, the resource provides staff with recommendations and example questions aimed to support informal "daily check-ins" with students whilst overseas (Balandin et al. 2007). This creates an opportunity for students to discuss matters in private that they may not be comfortable discussing with the group. Finally, faculty staff receive advice on conducting one-on-one "exit interviews" upon return to the university environment as well as referral pathways (e.g., clinical psychologist, counsellor) if any students present with symptoms of vicarious trauma or are finding reimmersion into their regular lives challenging (Balandin et al. 2007). It is suggested that where possible, staff who attended these trips conduct the interviews, due to their familiarity with the students and the experience.

## Piloting the resource

There were several phases to the piloting of the Three-by-Three resource. First, academic staff members experienced with university-community engagement and who were independent of the project were invited to provide feedback on the model and resource. Second, two members of the development team trialed the resource during their own international community-engagement projects in Thailand and Chile respectively. These piloting phases provided valuable feedback on the timing of and recommended time needed for each activity. This feedback was incorporated into subsequent drafts of the resource. Feedback identified a major practical limitation of the resource. Initial drafts of the resource included worksheets for students, with the intent that facilitators would copy them as needed and students using and keeping them for the duration of the experience.  This would let students revisit their pre-departure reflections when completing their written reflections in the "after" phase. However, individual sheets of paper quickly were easily lost or damaged as a product of working onsite due to the local conditions. Based on this feedback, members of the team developed an A5 student workbook that contained all worksheets required in order, with space for basic information about a given project (e.g., schedule, important contacts, etc.) A5 presented a practical size for students to keep with them at all times.

### Final independent piloting

After the resource was refined based on internal piloting, an independent pilot was conducted. This involved the school of nursing, paramedicine, and midwifery, which was undertaking an international community-engagement experience to Dili, Timór-Leste. This pilot involved six third-year paramedicine students and a facilitator who was independent of the project-development team. The facilitator was given the resource in advance, and attended a workshop on the resource, its intent and the processes and purposes of its activities. Ethical approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee was obtained as part of the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement's overarching ethical clearance to collect qualitative data on international projects. Informed consent was obtained from participants. The data collected from the Timór-

Leste experience represents the pilot data and initial evaluation of the Three-by-Three resource presented in this paper.

## Data analysis

Data from the paramedicine community-engagement experience in Timór-Leste was analysed via a manual deductive content analysis of the students' personal written reflections and the facilitator's written reflections on the use of the resource (Addleman et al. 2014b; Elo & Kyngäs 2008; Hullender et al. 2015; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013). As the purpose of the analysis was to gauge the effectiveness and impact of the resource, student data was specifically analysed for evidence of student learning and student well-being during the community engagement. The data-analysis steps were based on the recommendations of Elo and Kyngäs (2008) and Vaismoradi et al. (2013). These included the development of an analysis matrix, the reading of students' written reflections to gain a sense of the data and the identification of meaning units (specifically, student learning and student well-being) that became subject to meaning condensation (i.e., producing succinct descriptions of meaning-unit content).

The facilitator's reflections were analysed for comment on the use and utility of the resource in line with the steps described above. It is expected that the pilot data will inform a more extensive research project that assesses the use of the Three-by-Three model and resource. Data is now discussed under the following headings of "student learning", "student well-being" and "use of the resource". For the purposes of anonymity, the names associated with student and staff quotes have been changed.

## Findings

### *Student learning*

Analysis of the completed Three-by-Three student work booklets showed some evidence of student learning from both the community-engagement and discipline-specific perspectives. An example of community-engaged learning (i.e., the development of a sympathetic imagination) can be seen in the case of Jane. In Jane's pre-departure reflections she wrote about "helping those less fortunate" and "sharing knowledge and experience" in a very top-down and transactional way (Howard et al. 2007; Hullender et al. 2015). In the "during" phase there was evidence of Jane's disequilibrium (Mezirow 2012) as she reflected on the Timorese delivering paramedicine services with limited resources in a challenging socio-cultural and socio-political environment:

> *It's also hard to hear about the paramedics being called out (to) the serious cases and due to limited facilities and supplies within the truck these are either not correctly managed pre-hospital and if some management is done then there may not be much done for them in the hospital due to the same reasons.*

Jane's writing shows her reassessing her frames of reference with respect to engaging with communities that experience disadvantage. Jane developed an understanding and wrote that it is not "an easy fix", not as simple as just imparting knowledge, and that instead, efforts need to consider the local context and be adaptable and ultimately sustainable. As Jane wrote, "open-mindedness is the key, don't go into interactions with expectations, don't approach training situations with expectations…. It needs to be sustainable [and] effective, and they need to be understanding and getting something out of it or there is no point". In the "after" phase, Jane showed a deeper understanding of the community-engagement principles of mutuality, non-hierarchical relationships, and an understanding of the local context. This is a substantial shift from the "saviour" language in the pre-departure reflections, as can be seen in this excerpt:

> *[I learnt] patience and taking a back seat on some things that I would normally not, for example, watching someone do something that is not done in Australian practice but can be okay in Timor. Normally I would say something but you just have to sit back and watch because we aren't there to tell them how to do things.*

Such a deeper shift in the understanding of work with groups who live in difficult socio-cultural contexts is commonly reported in the community-engagement and service-learning literature (Bernacki & Jaeger 2008; Carrington & Selva 2010). Importantly, Jane had the opportunity to reflect with her student group and in her personal writing when she was challenged by the reality of work in Timór-Leste not matching her preconceptions of it involving the benevolent transfer of expertise.

Other participants also provided evidence of learning contributing to deeper understanding of community engagement and the development of personal and professional capacities. For example, Michael, when reflecting on his experiences of international community engagement, spoke of his now "lived" experience of a communication barrier and how this would influence his professional practice: "I am much more tolerant and patient with people who cannot speak English because I know how hard it can be trying to communicate in another country after being in Timor." Felicity, whose pre-departure reflections were about "giving" and "showing" and the universal right of health care, was challenged when there were physical (e.g., equipment and the distance from hospital) and socio-cultural (i.e., beliefs around health care and responsibility) barriers to the development of capacity. Felicity needed to develop an understanding of the local context and work within this environment instead of just "giving" and "showing". Through reflection, Felicity could see how this learning would apply to her future practice"

> *The experience is going to impact my work in the future as it has made me more culturally aware. Although I may not be able to understand and relate to beliefs that I may come across, this trip has made me more open-minded. As such, in future when going into a job I will be more willing to adapt my approach to suit the cultural needs without hesitation.*

This quote suggests the development of a sympathetic imagination (Passmore 1985) and the taking on of multiple perspectives even though the writer may not necessarily have agreed with them. Similarly, Lisa, whose pre-departure reflection was heavily focused on the development of her own personal skills, had developed a rich understanding of transformational capacity-building, as opposed to the mere delivery of aid, by the time she wrote her final reflections: "The goal to build

up Timor's healthcare without promoting dependence is hugely relevant to preserving the dignity of all people (and of the country)".

## Student well-being

There were several examples in the student written reflections of instances that had had the potential to be traumatic. These instances included the witnessing of seriously ill patients who were unable to get the same level of treatment as in Australia. Lisa wrote, "The hospital was a challenging experience of observing human suffering, often in a way that would be entirely curable in Australia." Several students reflected on seeing premature babies and other young children who were unlikely to survive yet who would likely have survived in Australia. When vicariously experiencing situations such as these, students were challenged emotionally and had to consider the restrictions on their capacity to effect immediate change. This was well described by the facilitator:

> *In [the] one-to-one debriefing and general discussions feelings of being overwhelmed by the perceived struggle that Timor-Leste communities and individuals face in their day to day lives was common amongst students and Team Leaders. A sense of what is meant by "meaningful change" was a concept that continually featured in discussions. Empathy would at times manifest as melancholy and sadness.*

The facilitator also commented, however, that the group debriefing and the student well-being activities provided support to the students in managing their well-being whilst immersed in the community engagement. In particular, the pre-departure A-Z of self-care activity was used to develop rapport between the group and to prime student thinking about self-care whist away:

> *When discussing strategies as a group the students reflected on their own self-care approaches and happily incorporated and even swapped some strategies into their own lists. This generated much discussion with common comments of "I didn't think of that, that's great". As Team Leaders and students alike were included in this reflective tool, the commonality of strategies engendered a notion of a group experience. This helped foster the rapport between each other and the Team Leaders.*

The daily check-ins were implemented during the immersion; the facilitator wrote, "This provided a succinct and easy way to initially engage with the students on a daily basis." The use of the resource's recommendations around daily check-ins provided "the opportunity to 'touch base' with an individual focus, more so on their personal well-being". In the written reflections, students were asked to reflect on their self-care during and after their community-engagement experience. Students described their strategies; these included taking personal space when they needed it, eating well and getting the right amount of sleep and talking to others when issues were affecting them. Overall, the structure of the Three-by-Three resource appeared to support the students in minimising the impact of vicarious trauma by raising awareness of self-care, and by providing

opportunities for shared and individual reflections with facilitators. There were no instances of vicarious trauma that needed referral when students returned to Australia; however, the resource contained appropriate referral channels if required.

## Overall use of the resource

The examples presented in this paper suggest that the reflection framework and activities show potential for supporting student learning on international community engagement. The utility of the reflection framework and activities, the written and group reflections, the daily check-ins and student well-being activities before, during and after the immersion was also supported by the facilitator:

> *The structure of the resource (before tour, during tour, and post tour components) provided the students with the opportunity to develop their ideas/views of what this engagement opportunity may offer them in advance. Ongoing reflection was enhanced by this structure and the ability to look back through the reflective booklet assisted with this process.... The structured components provided individual and group discussion opportunities, where experiences, often shared experiences[,] were unpackaged and discussed.*

This facilitator also commented that the resource was easy to follow, and that the briefing workshop prior to implementation was invaluable in preparing to implement the resource. It appeared that the facilitator's guide within the resource contributed to its ease of implementation.

The group debriefing activities, on the other hand, were more challenging for the facilitator. The debriefing activity was set up such that each student would report on their written reflection of a specific event as a precursor to a facilitated group discussion and active negotiation of meaning from these reflections. The facilitator found it difficult to curb students' enthusiasm to instantly discuss as a group, especially when they had a similar experience. This meant that early debriefing sessions were "stilted and lacked a natural flow". The facilitator reflected that with each successive discussion the students became used to the process; "however the passion with which the students wanted to engage in a purely groups discussion once again made it difficult for the individual to tell their story without input from others" (facilitator). A similar issue with group debriefing was identified by Addleman et al. (2014a), where teacher candidates at times would gravitate towards informal conversation and thus derail the space for listening, reflection and equal opportunity for students to share. Such a challenge with the group debriefing process highlights the importance of facilitator training and how students are briefed in the pre-departure phase of a project (Addleman et al. 2014b; Balandin et al. 2007).

## Discussion

This paper has outlined a conceptual framework for the support of students in three important areas whilst participating in international community engagement. This framework identifies the need to support discipline-specific learning, community-engagement learning and student well-

being before, during and after an international experience. This framework, grounded in literature concerning reflective and transformational learning (Cranton 2002; Dawson 2000; Gibbs 1988; Mezirow 2012), experiential learning (Boud 2010; Boud & Walker 1990) and vicarious trauma (Beaton & Murphy 1995; Pearlman & McKay 2008), also has the potential to be applied to local community-engagement contexts. Its introduction also provides a basis for future development of pedagogy in this area. Data presented in this paper suggests that the use of the Three-by-Three resource developed to meet the tenets of this conceptual framework was effective in supporting student learning, student well-being and the development of student perspectives on community engagement and social justice.

Although the pilot data is promising, some substantial limitations to this initial evaluation must be stated. The authors were only able to access data in the form of students' written reflections in their workbooks and feedback from the facilitator, in line with the ethical clearance at the time of writing this paper. It would be particularly valuable in future projects to evaluate the group debriefing sessions by way of recording the conversations or assessing these debriefs via an independent auditor. Given that there appear to be aspects of facilitator training pertaining to the group debrief that could be improved, further and more rigorous evaluations of activities that have the specific aim of meeting aspects of the Three-by-Three model are required. In addition, the running of focus groups with students after an international community engagement where they can reflect on the support for their learning and well-being would also be a valuable future approach to evaluation. Furthermore, the data reported here is also only from one community-engagement project; the utility of both the model and the associated resources needs to be assessed at multiple sites. A promising aspect of the evaluation reported here, however, is that it was conducted independent of the development team. This evaluation also occurred after several rounds of internal piloting.

Independent piloting of the Three-by-Three resource suggested that the use of written reflections and group debriefing sessions are effective in supporting student learning (both discipline-specific and community-engagement-based) on international community engagement. These findings support previous literature that has reported on the efficacy of group debriefing and written reflections on international engagements (Addleman et al. 2014a; Bender & Walker 2013). In addition, the targeted student well-being activities in the "before", "during", and "after" phases of the resource appeared to offer effective support for student well-being. We suggest that the strong theoretical basis of the model and associated activities within the resource is a key feature of their effectiveness.

Analysis of the students' written reflections showed the development of capacities such as a sympathetic imagination (Passmore 1985), patience and understanding of different cultures and sociocultural circumstances (Davidson et al. 2010; Hullender et al. 2015) and the importance of mutuality (Pink & Butcher 2014). Students could be seen to shift from a mostly naïve sense of what work would be like in Timór-Leste to a deeper and reasoned understanding of working in a context vastly different to their own. Through this, students developed personal and professional capacities that they themselves reported to be beneficial to their future professional practice (Baldwin et al. 2007; Pink & Butcher 2014; Santoro & Allard 2005). This was likely supported by the students' opportunity to reflect on the disequilibria (Addleman et al. 2014b; Mezirow 2012) that occurred when their views were challenged by the reality of life in Timór-Leste. In addition, the capacity of the well-being activities to support the students in mitigating the influence of vicarious trauma in a personally challenging environment was supported.

The data presented in this paper suggests the value of the Three-by-Three resource, a resource that is based on a conceptual framework grounded in the extant literature. The conceptual framework and Three-by-Three resource presented in this paper also show the potential for future development and adaptation in both international and local contexts; this represents a future direction for research. Such a systematic and theoretically informed approach to supporting students on international community engagement can support the development of students who have a rich understanding of the principles of social justice and have developed their capacities in a challenging environment, and whose well-being has been supported.

## References

Addleman, R A, Brazo, C J, Dixon, K, Cevallos, T & Wortman, S 2014a. Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Debriefing Circles to Facilitate Self-Reflection During a Cultural Immersion Experience. *The New Educator*, 10(2), pp. 112-28.

Addleman, R A, Nava, R C, Cevallos, T, Brazo, C J & Dixon, K 2014b. Preparing teacher candidates to serve students from diverse backgrounds: Triggering transformative learning through short-term cultural immersion. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 43(Part B), pp. 189-200.

Balandin, S, Lincoln, M, Sen, R, Wilkins, D P & Trembath, D 2007. Twelve tips for effective international clinical placements. *Medical Teacher*, 29(9-10), pp. 872-7.

Baldwin, S C, Buchanan, A M & Rudisill, M E 2007. What Teacher Candidates Learned About Diversity, Social Justice, and Themselves From Service-Learning Experiences. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(4), pp. 315-27.

Beaton, R D & Murphy, S A 1995. Working with people in crisis: Research implications. In Figley, C R (ed.), *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized* (vol. 1). Brunner/Mazel, New York, pp. 51-81.

Bender, A & Walker, P 2013. The obligation of debriefing in global health education. *Medical Teacher*, 35(3), pp. e1027-e34.

Bernacki, M L & Jaeger, E 2008. Exploring the impact of service-learning on moral development and moral orientation/ *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 14(2).

Boud, D 2010. *Locating immersive experience in experiential learning*. A8, University of Surrey Viewed                                                                                        at http://learningtobeprofessional.pbworks.com/w/page/15914981/Learning%20to%20be%20Professional%20through%20a%20Higher%20Education%20e-Book.

Boud, D & Walker, D 1990/ Making the most of experience. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 12(2), pp. 61-80.

Carrington, S & Selva, G 2010. Critical social theory and transformative learning: evidence in pre-service teachers' service-learning reflection logs. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(1), pp. 45-57.

Cranton, P 2002, Teaching for Transformation. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 2002(93), p. 63.

Davidson, W S, Jimenez, T R, Onifade, E & Hankins, S S 2010. Student experiences of the adolescent diversion project: a community-based exemplar in the pedagogy of service-learning. *American Journal Of Community Psychology*, 46(3-4), pp. 442-58.

Dawson, A 2000. The Social and Communal Aspects of Urban Spirituality: See-Judge-Act and the urban context. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 21(1), pp. 51-62.

Dreifuerst, K T 2015. Getting started with debriefing for meaningful learning. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 11(5), pp. 268-75.

Elo, S & Kyngäs, H 2008. The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), pp. 107-15.

Felten, P & Clayton, P H 2011. Service-learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2011(128), pp. 75-84.

Gibbs, G 1988. *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic, Oxford.

Giles, D E & Eyler, J 1994. The impact of a college community service laboratory on students' personal, social, and cognitive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17(4), pp. 327-39.

Green, B F, Johansson, I, Rosser, M, Tengnah, C & Segrott, J 2008. Studying abroad: A multiple case study of nursing students' international experiences. *Nurse Education Today*, 28(8), pp. 981-92.

Howard, P, Gervasoni, A & Butcher, J 2007. Implementing a university paradigm for effective community engagement. *Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Conference,* Fremantle, vol. 27, p. 2009.

Hullender, R, Hinck, S, Wood-Nartker, J, Burton, T & Bowlby, S 2015. Evidences of transformative learning in service-learning reflections. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15(4), pp. 58-82.

Kezar, A & Rhoads, RA 2001. The dynamic tensions of service learning in higher education: A philosophical perspective. *Journal of Higher Education*, pp. 148-71.

Marais, S, Donson, H, Naidoo, A & Nortje, C 2007. Strategic violence prevention partnerships in a peri-urban South African town: The case of the Jamestown community project. *African Safety Promotion*, 5(1), pp. 19-30.

McAllister, G & Irvine, J J 2002. The Role of Empathy in Teaching Culturally Diverse Students: A Qualitative Study of Teachers' Beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(5), pp. 433-43.

McCann, I L & Pearlman, L 1990. Vicarious traumatization: A framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 3(1), pp. 131-49.

Mezirow, J 2012. Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In Taylor, E W & Cranton, P (eds.), *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Wiley, San Francisco, pp. 73-94.

Osborne, R E, Hammerich, S & Hensley, C 1998. Student Effects of Service-Learning: Tracking Change Across a Semester. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 5, pp. 5-13.

Passmore, J 1985, Educating for the twenty-first century: The romantics and the disciplines. *Quadrant*, 29(8), pp. 11-9.

Pearlman, L A & McKay, L 2008. Understanding and addressing vicarious trauma. Headington Institute, Pasadena, CA.

Pink, M & Butcher, J 2014. A case study of mutuality and reciprocity in community engagement: Future in youth, Timor Leste. *Australasian Journal of University-Community Engagement*, 9(1), pp. 1-22.

Pink, M, Butcher, J & Peters, C 2013. The Future in Youth Soccer Project, East Timor: Changes in the Community Life Space. In Hynes, D, Kiernan, A & Parry, K (eds.), *Football and Communities Across Codes*, ID-Press, Oxford, pp. 135-48.

Pinto, A D & Upshur, R E G 2009. Global health ethics for students. *Developing World Bioethics*, 9(1), pp. 1-10.

Polson, M & Nida, R 1998. Program and trainee lifestyle stress: A survey of AAMFT student members. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 24(1), pp. 95-112.

Santoro, N & Allard, A 2005. (Re)Examining identities: Working with diversity in the pre-service teaching experience. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(7), pp. 863-73.

Vaismoradi, M, Turunen, H & Bondas, T 2013. Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 15(3), pp. 398-405.