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Title: Non-formal learning in an International and ESL Community Coffee House: Investigating its Impact

Abstract
The purpose of this empirical enquiry is to examine whether international newcomers, possibly overwhelmed while adapting to a new city and a new culture, are supported by involvement in non-formal learning. This research looks at opportunities for international students and international residents to enhance social and English conversation skills through involvement with community in a non-formal learning environment, a Coffee House (ITCH). This non-formal learning may provide needed support to language learners in the areas of language skill development as well as in cultural understanding. It also asks the question, “Are international newcomers isolated and motivated to seek community interaction?” I used the case-study approach to this qualitative research because I was researching a bounded, non-formal learning program. To better envision and research one case, this non-formal learning program, and to look at it through lenses that see 360°, I chose this research design. Drawing on this approach, my research describes the holistic meaning of involvement at a Coffee House with community members by 3 men and 6 women, of a variety of ages. I analyzed data from my records, including evaluations and photographs, reflecting both non-formal and informal activities, which clearly showed how and why the participants engaged in these. The interview data obtained was analyzed and categorized by themes. The four highlighted areas of: Learning Support for Studies, Friendship and Association, ESL learning, and Confidence were identified. Findings indicated that the category of friendship and association ranked highest in order of importance for attendance and participation in non-formal learning at the Coffee House. International learners experienced heightened social connectedness, had increased confidence levels, and sensed an improvement in their English-speaking performance as a result of involvement in this non-formal learning. Learning support took place in the areas of cultural awareness and familiarity with the community, and improved confidence when participating in the formal classroom. However, participants continually made associations between confidence, learning support, English-language learning and friendship with community members. It became apparent that the interaction between all aspects was dynamic, each having a bearing on the other, in a vibrant association. The meaning that is revealed through the investigation of and analysis of this non-formal learning program will contribute to future curriculum planning for both formal and non-formal learning environments. The use of questions, every Friday evening at the Coffee House, aligns with methods
used in the Highlander learning environment, where Myles Horton “posed a good question as the ultimate act of pedagogy” (Preskill and Brookfield, 2009, p. 132). This way of learning supports the same educational method valued in formal learning environments, during discussion in the classroom.

This research makes specific recommendations how non-formal learning can benefit international newcomers. However, more research is required on the benefits that international learners bring to the communities they visit or make their home.