服務學習於提升學生的人際溝通能力：香港個案研究

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本文旨在探討大學課程中設有服務學習的聯課課程能否促進學生的人際溝通能力，以及課程質素如何影響學習成果。本研究採用混合研究方法，即問卷調查和訪談。調研結果顯示學生自感在人際關係管理能力有所提升，但在察覺他人經驗和感受的能力下降。研究並顯示課程質素能夠預測以上兩項能力的發展，即課程愈能緊扣其質素標準要求，則效能愈高。質性研究也有相同的結果，展示課程的特徵如：有意義的經驗、多元化的體驗、學生的聲音、團隊工作，都是發展有關能力的要素。

關鍵詞：服務學習、人際溝通能力、聯課課程、高等教育

Enhancing Students' Interpersonal Capabilities through Service Learning: A Hong Kong Case

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This study aims to explore whether university co-curricular courses with embedded service-learning have an effect on students' interpersonal capability development, and how course quality relates to student outcomes. It used a mixed-methods approach comprising surveys and interviews. The survey data show that students' self-perceived relationship management skills improved in all co-curricular courses. Students' perception of their own awareness of others' experiences and feelings,

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however, was found to have worsened. Course quality was found to be a predictor of both aspects of interpersonal development, suggesting that closer alignment of courses with the recommended quality standards will make them more effective in promoting students' interpersonal capabilities. The qualitative data echo the quantitative findings and reveal that course characteristics, such as meaningful experience, diversity, student voice, and group work, are significant for developing students' interpersonal capabilities.

Keywords: Service-learning; Interpersonal capabilities; Co-curricular; Higher education

Introduction

Attempts to include service-learning (SL) in co-curricular (CoC) courses to enhance students' capabilities in higher education programs are proliferating in Hong Kong and elsewhere. There is a significant consensus among employers and other stakeholders that communication skills are the most important generic capability required of college graduates (Billing, 2003). In reality, however, it appears that higher education currently falls short on promoting students' interpersonal development, because students usually complete classroom work alone, which is fundamentally different from the way things are done in the workplace or community (e.g., Ehrlich, 1997). SL is considered to be a pedagogical approach combining classroom learning and community service, deepening academic learning by reflecting on service experiences, and at the same time contributing to the community (e.g., Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2003; Pritchard, 2001; Speck, 2011). Eyler and Giles (1999) argued that SL can be an effective pedagogy for interpersonal capacities, because it provides students with the opportunity to work alongside people and get to know people who are very different from themselves. Indeed, with the diverse interpersonal experiences in

community placements, the tasks with real-world values, and frequent teamwork, SL has the potential to develop students' interpersonal capacities. The aim of this study is to find out whether CoC courses, with or without an SL component, can benefit students' interpersonal capability development.

Literature Review

Service-Learning and Interpersonal Development

It is highlighted in large-scale longitudinal studies that community service is being related to students' interpersonal growth (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). To illustrate, Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) surveyed over 22,000 undergraduate students, comparing the impacts of SL and generic community service. After controlling for disparities in key characteristics of students and colleges, both types of service experience were found to be positively associated with the development of interpersonal skills, leadership ability, and involvement in leadership activities. Community service is increasingly treated as an important component of academic courses

and recent studies have traced changes in students during their learning over a semester (e.g., Groh, Stallwood, & Daniels, 2011; Hebert & Hauf, 2015; Weiler et al., 2013). These studies mostly employed reliable scales instead of single general questions, and investigated students' specific interpersonal capacity development. The findings of SL studies are however inconsistent. For instance, Moely and colleagues (2002) found that students who engaged in SL gained in self-perceived ability to communicate with others and leadership skills. Some studies have found that SL experiences enhanced various leadership skills (Groh, Stallwood, & Daniels, 2011; Sabbaghi, Cavanagh, & Hipskind, 2013). In contrast, Kearney (2004) reported that engaging in SL only increased self-perceived leadership ability in students, but not the perceived ability to listen and understand others. Moreover, one study has shown that after completing an SL course, students' self-rated competence across basic communication contexts (e.g., public, group, dyad) and receivers (to strangers, acquaintances, and friends) improved, while behavioral expressions of empathy and active listening skills did not (Katz, DuBois, & Wigderson, 2014). The authors suggested that students might gain more confidence in interpersonal communication but that their actual skills remained unchanged.

Inconsistent findings are also revealed by mixed-methods studies. The qualitative findings of Eyler and Giles (1999) suggested that students learn to "work with others" from their SL experiences. Simultaneously, their quantitative data showed that students developed skills in leadership and tolerance for diversity, but presented no change in communication skills.

Similarly, survey data reported by Simons and Cleary (2006) revealed no change in students' interpersonal or leadership skills, and social competence even decreased over a semester, despite students' responses to open-ended questions claiming that most had gained interpersonal growth. In the interviews and reflective journals reported in these studies, students mostly reported having closer relationships with the community members they met in person, and a general feeling that they became better at socializing with others. Nevertheless, these perceptions are not usually echoed in self-rated generic interpersonal competences, which are normally assessed in quantitative research.

The above-mentioned studies suggest that SL experiences might have an effect on some aspects of student interpersonal development, but not others. In order to understand the potential of SL as a pedagogical approach in educational programs, more empirical research is needed to examine its effects on specific interpersonal capability development in students. The present study intends to add to the empirical evidence of the effects of SL by assessing two specific aspects of interpersonal development: interpersonal management skills and social awareness.

The construct of interpersonal management skills and their measurement were developed from the self-management (or self-regulation, self-direction) literature: the process by which individuals actively apply cognitive and behavioral strategies to guide their goal-directed activities (e.g., Karoly, 1993). This study employs Xue and Sun's (2011) scale, which measures

student capability that corresponds to managing one's emotions and interpersonal relationships. The scale was designed specifically for undergraduate students, which Xue and Sun found that students' relationship management skills are positively associated with their good physical and psychological health, and life satisfaction.

Social awareness represents "a contextualized cognizance either of oneself or of another person" (Sheldon, 1996, p. 621). Individuals with different types of social awareness habitually attend to different types of social information. Specifically, individuals may pay attention to themselves or others (target), may pay attention from their own perspective or from the perspectives of others (perspective), and may focus on appearance and overt behaviors or on covert experiences (content). Crossing these three binary dimensions yielded eight types of social awareness. This study focuses on two of these: (a) awareness of another individual's experience from one's own perspective (as may occur when we disagree with another person's explanation for why he/she feels a certain way), and (b) awareness of another individual's experience from his/her perspective (as with people who "put themselves in someone else's shoes"). Perception of social information is important because it is arguably essential for self-regulation in a social context, helping individuals to fulfill their own social needs. For example, in order to influence another person, an individual might pay attention to how one appears from another person's perspective, and use this social information to regulate his/her behaviors. Research has shown that frequent use of another person's perspective in viewing their experiences is related to one's need of intimacy and nurturance, while retaining ones' own perspective on the experiences of others is associated with a need of power and dominance (Sheldon & Johnson, 1993).

The Association between Course Quality and Interpersonal Development

Researchers have argued that SL courses vary considerably in terms of major learning goals and course structure. These characteristics partly determine the effectiveness of the courses (e.g., Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fisher, 2010; Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999). Put differently, some courses may be more effective in promoting interpersonal development than others. Currently, only a few empirical studies have revealed course characteristics that made a difference in student outcomes, and the majority of these studies focused on academic and civic outcomes (e.g., Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Batchelder & Root, 1994; Dharamsi et al., 2010; Levesque-Bristol et al., 2010; Mabry, 1998). A study that directly scrutinized interpersonal development was conducted by Eyler and Giles (1999), which highlighted that SL alone was not a significant predictor of improvement in communication skills. It is, however, the quality of placement in SL that is the predictor of improved communication skills. In particular, it has been found that students who have been immersed in community placements where they met challenges and resolved problems are more likely to improve their communication skills than other students who have not had these SL experiences.

To fill the gap between course characteristics and course effectiveness, this study also intends to examine the potential impacts of the course elements included in the K-12 SL Standards for Quality Practice (Billig, 2009). The quality standards were advanced by the National Youth Leadership Council, which include meaningful service activities, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity of SL experiences (Billig, 2009). Although these standards are proposed for K-12 education, many of them are in line with the research findings regarding academic and civic outcomes in higher education.

Study Aim and Design

The aim of the study is to find out whether SL, as a pedagogical approach in CoC courses, can develop undergraduate students' interpersonal capability. Specifically, the study addresses two research questions: (a) does SL enhance students' interpersonal capabilities? and (b) is course quality associated with the effectiveness of the courses using SL? To address these questions, a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used, with quantitative methodology as the primary approach and supplemented with qualitative data.

The present study could yield results that add to the literature by examining two aspects of interpersonal development that have received little academic attention: relationship management capability and social awareness. As mentioned earlier, relationship management

is the self-perceived capability to manage one's own emotions and relationships with others, while social awareness represents a disposition in social information-processing. Since this study is an empirical test of the effect of SL courses on students' interpersonal capability building, its findings should shed light on further studies attempting to promote students' interpersonal capability in higher education.

Research Context

The present study was carried out in a higher education teaching context in Hong Kong. In this context, SL pedagogy was adopted in a course offered by a publicly funded tertiary institution providing programs on teacher education and complementary social sciences and humanities disciplines. In 2012, "Co-curricular Learning" courses were introduced as part of the university curriculum, purportedly to broaden students' learning experiences and to enhance their generic skills. All undergraduate students were required to take a credit-bearing CoC course before their final year, and the course normally consisted of 6–9 hours of lectures, 32–40 hours of out-of-classroom activities, and 6–9 hours of reflection sessions. In designing the courses, instructors organized various activities, including visits to museum and participation in sports, and linked them to the course contents. In 2014, the university embedded an SL element into CoC courses. These new courses were called "Co-curricular and Service Learning" (CSL) courses. The inclusion of service-based activities into the CoC courses aimed to provide genuine mind-broadening learning opportunities for students to build positive life and work attitudes, to improve

their capability to cooperate and work in teams, and to improve their interpersonal skills. The present study was conducted in the 2014/2015 academic year, when both CoC and CSL courses were implemented. Both types of course adopted the same curriculum structure, except that CSL courses involved SL components while CoC courses involved non-SL out-of-classroom activities.

Participants and Procedure

The study adopted a pretest-posttest design. The pretest survey was administered at the beginning of the first lecture, together with an information sheet and a consent form. Undergraduate students who were enrolled in three CoC courses and three CSL courses (henceforth referred to as non-SL and SL courses respectively) were invited to complete a survey assessing self-perceived interpersonal management and social awareness capabilities. Students who completed this voluntary survey were invited to attend a follow-up interview; those who agreed to participate in the interview provided their contact information in the questionnaires. The posttest was conducted during the last lecture of the course, and

students completed a survey measuring interpersonal management capability, social awareness, and course quality. Only those participants who completed both the pretest and posttest were included in the final sample (n = 111). Among the final sample of 111 undergraduates, 25 (22.5%) were male and 81 (73.0%) were female (five samples did not include this information); six (5.4%) were first-year students, 64 (57.7%) were sophomores, and 41 (36.9%) were juniors.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with students after the courses had ended. There were two interview formats, focus group and individual. Eleven students participated in interviews, five in individual interviews, and six attended focus group interviews in groups of two. The students were invited in class to participate in the interviews on a voluntary basis after the completion of the questionnaires. Before the interviews, the participants were briefed about their rights regarding participation in the study and assured that their personal information would remain confidential. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on interviewees' experiences of the non-SL and SL courses. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Table

Tabel 1. Interview Participants

Interviewee	Format	Number of Interviews	Number of Interviewees
Students	Individual	5	5 (1 x 5)
Students	Group	3	6 (2 x 3)

1 shows the numbers of interview participants.

Measures

Relationship management capability. The Self-Management Scale (Xue & Sun, 2011) measures undergraduate student capability to manage themselves in order to achieve their life goals. One of its sub-scales was adopted to tap into students' ability to manage their interpersonal relationships and emotions (e.g., "I get along well with most people," "friends always seek my help when they are in trouble," and "I control my emotions very well, even when I am angry with someone"; ten items). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The scale showed satisfactory reliability; Cronbach's α was .83.

Social awareness. The Social Awareness Inventory (SAI) measures eight dispositions in social information processing (Sheldon, 1996). As discussed, two sub-scales were adopted to measure awareness: (a) awareness of other people's experiences from one's own perspective (e.g., "I often evaluate other people's feelings to determine whether they are justified," "I usually know how others feel, even if they don't know themselves" (8 items); and (b) awareness of other people's experiences from other people's perspective (e.g., "I can almost 'become' other people when I'm listening to them," "I tend to empathize with other people's problems, even when I know they brought them upon themselves" (8 items). Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (very uncharacteristic of me) to 3 (very characteristic of me). The reliability of the two sub-scales was satisfactory (α = .87, and .90,

respectively). The scores of the sub-scales were also summed to yield a social awareness score for each participant (α = .93).

Quality of the service-learning courses. Based upon the K-12 Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice (Billig, 2009), a 21-item scale was developed by the research team to assess the quality of the six SL and non-SL courses. The scale measured five of the quality standards: meaningful experience, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, and youth voice. The items were constructed to make the scale applicable to both SL and non-SL courses. Sample items include: "the SL/CoC course provided me with interesting and engaging activities/experiences" (meaningful experience), "the SL/CoC experience was aligned with the academic and/or programmatic curriculum" (link to curriculum), "the reflection allowed me to think deeply about complex community problems and alternative solutions" (reflection), "the SL/CoC experience helped me to actively seek to understand and value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving services" (diversity), and "I was involved in the decision-making process throughout the SL/CoC" (youth voice). The scale adopted a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The overall reliability was good (α = .92); and the alphas of the sub-scales were over .70, with the exception of the subscale of meaningful service (α = .67).

Findings

Interpersonal Development Over the Semester

Relationship management ability. A 2 (Course Type: SL vs. non-SL) × 2 (Testing: pretest vs. posttest) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted to analyze changes in the students' relationship management ability over the course of a semester. The main effect of Testing was significant (Wilks' Lambda = .87, F (1, 106) = 16.15, p < .001, ηp2 = .13), indicating that all students reported greater ability to manage relationships in posttest than in pretest. Yet there was no significant main effect for Course Type (F (1, 106) = 0.12, p = .73, ηp2 = .001), or for its interaction with Testing (Wilks' Lambda = .998, F (1, 106) = 0.17, p = .69, ηp2 = .002). These results suggest that both the SL and non-SL groups gained in self-perceived relationship management capability (see Table 2).

Social awareness. An ANOVA on social awareness scores with Course Type as a between-subjects factor and Testing as a within-

Table 2. T-Test Results Comparing Pretest and Posttest Relationship Management of the Service and Non-Service Groups

Self-management	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD
SL (n = 67)	3.55	0.39	3.69	0.38
Non-SL (n = 41)	3.51	0.45	3.69	0.39

Note. SL = service group; Non-SL = Non-service group. Scores of relationship management ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Table 3. T-Test Results Comparing Pretest and Posttest Social Awareness of the Service and Non-Service Groups

		Pretest		Posttest	
		M	SD	M	SD
SL	SA-total (n = 66)	2.16	0. 56	1.95	0. 23
	SAoi (n = 67)	2.14	0.59	1.91	0.27
	SAoo (n = 67)	2.17	0.59	1.98	0.3
Non-SL	SA-total (n = 40)	2.24	0. 64	1.94	0. 37
	SAoi (n = 41)	2.24	0.62	1.96	0.4
	SAoo (n = 40)	2.25	0.7	1.91	0.38

Note. SL = service group; Non-SL = Non-service group. Scores on social awareness range from 0 (very uncharacteristic of me) to 3 (very characteristic of me). For SA-total = overall social awareness, SAoi = other's experience from one's own perspective, SAoo = other's experience from other's perspective.

subjects factor revealed a significant main effect for Testing (Wilks' Lambda = .85, F (1, 104) = 18.45, p < .001, ηp2 = .15). There were non-significant main effects for Course Type (F (1, 104) = 0.25, p = .62, ηp2 = .002), and its interaction with Testing (Wilks' Lambda = .995, F (1, 104) = 0.57, p = .45, ηp2 = .005). Thus, the social awareness of students in both SL and non-SL groups decreased over the semester (see Table 3). Table 3 also displays the results for the two types of social awareness found in students' capability development. Here too, only the main effect of Testing was significant (ps < .001).

The Association between Course Quality and Interpersonal Development

Relationship management capability. Correlations among the course elements and the outcome variables are displayed in Table 4. Overall course quality was significantly correlated with posttest relationship management ability (r = .22, p = .02). In fact, among the five course elements, only reflection was significantly correlated with relationship management (r = .21, p = .03).

As shown in Table 5, a hierarchical regression model was calculated to test the unique contribution of course quality to posttest relationship management ability. Gender, year of study, and pretest relationship management ability were entered in Step 1, followed by course type (SL vs. non-SL). Course quality was entered in the final step. After controlling for students' gender, year of study, and previous relationship management capability, SL activities did not explain a significant amount of variance in relationship management capability. However, course quality explained 3% of this variance (p = .057). Altogether, the variables examined

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations between the Two Main Outcome Variables and Studied Independent Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Year of study	2.32	0.57										
2. Relationship management	3.69	0.38	0.151									
3. Social awareness (overall)	1.93	0.3	-0.159	0.118								
4. Social awareness (oi)	1.92	0.33	-0.179	0.076	.881**							
5. Social awareness (oo)	1.94	0.34	-0.097	0.136	.889**	.565**						
6. Quality of course	3.72	0.43	0.023	.221*	.364**	.252**	.393**					
7. Meaningful experience	3.78	0.45	0.058	0.159	.228*	0.18	.220*	.727**				
8. Link to curriculum	3.66	0.52	-0.045	0.104	0.169	0.171	0.13	.765**	.612**			
9. Reflection	3.68	0.56	0.077	.209*	.335**	0.168	.422**	.848**	.504**	.488**		
10. Diversity	3.74	0.55	0.034	0.187	.383**	.268**	.411**	.866**	.455**	.534**	.770**	
11. Youth voice	3.74	0.52	0.004	0.189	.315**	.215*	.345**	.845**	.492**	.520**	.637**	.694**

Notes. N's range from 105 to 111 due to occasional missing data. Relationship management and social awareness scores are average scores in the posttest. Quality of course and its 5 sub-scales (Variables 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

* p < .05; ** p < .01

in this model explained 29% of the variance in social awareness (F (5, 92) = 7.45, p < .001). Table 5 displays the final beta weights of all the variables in the regression model. Course quality was a marginally significant predictor of posttest relationship management capability (β = .18, t = 1.93, p = .057). Gender and pretest relationship management were significant predictors, suggesting that female students gained more in relationship management capability than male students, and pretest ability was highly associated with posttest ability. Taken together, although students' relationship management capability showed an overall improvement over the course of the semester, the courses that were more aligned with the quality standards appeared to have a greater influence on students' development, after students' pre-

existing individual differences were considered. Finally, when the five specific quality elements were entered into a regression model instead of overall course quality, none was shown to be a significant predictor.

Social awareness. As shown in Table 4, course quality correlated positively with posttest social awareness (r = .36, p < .001). The correlations between social awareness and four of the five course elements were moderate (rs > .23, ps < .05); the course element "link to curriculum" was not correlated with social awareness (p = .08).

Gender, year of study, pretest social awareness, course type, and course quality were entered into a hierarchical regression model with posttest social awareness as the

Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Posttest Relationship Management (N = 98)

Step and predictor	R2	ΔR2	B	SE B	β
1. Gender	0.26	.26**	0.19	0.08	.24*
Year of study			0.05	0.05	0.09
Pretest relationship management			0.33	0.08	.38**
2. Service	0.26	0.001	-0.02	0.07	-0.02
3. Course quality	0.29	.03†	0.15	0.08	.18†

p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01

Table 6. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Posttest Social Awareness (N = 96)

Step and predictor	R2	ΔR2	B	SE B	β
1. Gender	0.05	0.05	-0.05	0.07	-0.07
Year of study			-0.05	0.05	-0.1
Pretest social awareness			0.05	0.05	0.11
2. Service	0.05	0.000	-0.07	0.07	-0.11
3. Course quality	0.16	.11**	0.25	0.07	.35**

** p < .01.

dependent variable. Table 6 shows that course quality, when entered in Step 3, accounted for 11% of the variance in posttest social awareness. The variables jointly explained 16% of the variance in social awareness ($F_{(5, 90)}$ = 3.41, p = .007). Table 6 also lists the final beta weights of all the variables in their contribution to social awareness. Only course quality was a significant predictor of social awareness (β = .35, t = 3.42, p = .001). To summarize, students' self-perceived social awareness decreased over the semester, but the students in the courses that complied with the quality standards were more likely to have higher levels of awareness of social information than students in lower-quality courses. Regarding the specific quality elements, the five quality standards collectively explained a significant amount of the variance, but no single standard predicted social awareness. Finally, the scores of the two sub-scales of social awareness were similar to those of the entire scale.

Why Course Quality Matters in Enhancing Student Interpersonal Development

Meaningful experience. In accordance with the quality standards, meaningful experience was shown to play a role in students' interpersonal development. The extent to which the co-curricular activities were meaningful or relevant to the students influenced whether they actively engaged in learning experiences, and thus affected learning outcomes. A student who immigrated from Mainland China mentioned her thoughts on the SL course:

I spend most of my time at the university. My social networks are therefore mainly students and friends from China. The activities [in this SL course] gave me opportunity to meet local Hong Kong people and to serve the community, which eventually raised my awareness of issues in this society and particularly the needy. (Leadership 1, lines 29–32, M)

The meaning of an activity could help students in a team to build mutual goals, which in turn could help them to resolve disagreements. For example:

When we planned an activity for serving the homeless and the elderly, arguments were recurrent from the very beginning. In the end, we managed to reach a consensus because we knew we shared a common goal, that is, to serve the community. (Poor and Needy, lines 15–21, P)

Similarly, learning to work in teams was never a smooth process, especially when learning experiences were not considered to be meaningful by individual team members. When a student became disengaged and did not do his/her fair share of the group work (a free-rider), it caused conflict and tensions within the team. In other instances, some students did not actively contribute to the activities because the course grades did not contribute to their cumulative grade point average. Interviewees expressed that such experiences enabled them to adopt the perspectives of others.

Diversity. Diversity is the element that was mentioned most often in the student interviews. Here is an example:

During the SL practice period, I met people from diverse backgrounds, such as classmates from different subject disciplines and different years of study, people from different community

centres who helped in the workplace, and the diverse people we served. These personal contacts facilitated the development of my interpersonal skills. (Leadership 1, lines 223–225, C)

Diverse interpersonal experiences in the service placements could help students to develop their awareness of other people's experiences from the perspectives of others, because "it made me step out of my own social group, join a new group, and experience their daily lives" (Poor and Needy, lines 147–152, P). Furthermore, students started to think about "how to deal with people from different backgrounds, to get along with people with different personalities to accomplish different tasks" (Leadership 2, lines 17–21, I).

Student voice and group work. Evidence demonstrates that mere exposure to diversity might not be sufficient to promote interpersonal development. For example, students found that activities in the Hong Kong Toastmasters' Club, where they were exposed to people who worked in different sectors of society, seemed unconnected to their learning. One student said that "these people merely gave lectures, and chatted to you during the break. It seems quite irrelevant" (Public Speaking 2, lines 68–70, P1). In addition to these exposures, in the follow-up student activities, the paired-up work with another student to criticize each other's public speaking skills, a student said that this type of discussion was unhelpful for developing interpersonal capacities, because the purpose was evaluation and the communication was unidirectional (Public Speaking 2, lines 112–113, P2).

The interpersonal development of students appeared to benefit most from courses where they had a voice and worked on a project with diverse groups of people. When students had a voice in a group project, differences in perspectives, motivation, and attitudes could be identified. For instance, one student reported that there were conflicts between team members when they had to decide which song to sing in an activity they were planning for the homeless. During the group discussion, the team member realized that others had different reasons for choosing a particular song, which all made sense. She said, "people often dislike each other if they disagree … which might not be bad since I could learn to listen; they may not be wrong" (Poor and Needy, lines 55–75, P). Another student also said that she had learnt to deal with a free-rider who thought that the course was unimportant. In summary, in a learning context with different sets of quality standards and conditions, such as diversity, student voice, and group work, students must find ways to accommodate differences in perspectives, to solve conflicts, to influence and support others, and to make group decisions in order to achieve shared goals.

Discussion

The results of this study show how a co-curricular course in a university undergraduate program, with or without an SL component, could have an effect on students' interpersonal capacity development. In general, students perceived a substantial improvement in their relationship management capability, despite the fact that their self-perceived social awareness

capability was found to have worsened, which can be further analyzed in this section. It was also found that course quality is a predictor of the two aspects of interpersonal development identified, suggesting that the greater their alignment with the recommended quality standards, the more effective courses will be in promoting students' interpersonal capabilities.

Since this study applied a mixed-methods design to examine the impact of SL on students' interpersonal development, and the role played by course quality, the data collected from the qualitative and quantitative methods were found to supplement each other for further explanation of the evidence. First of all, regarding students' development of relationship management skills, the survey data showed that students on both SL and non-SL courses improved over a semester. This evidence was supported by the qualitative result that students recognized their positive growth during their participation in a range of activities through which they met different people in diverse learning contexts. Specific meaningful learning experiences throughout the students' course participation enriched their interpersonal management skills and broadened their horizons. Second, the quantitative data show that students' self-perceived social awareness decreased. This could be explained by the supplementary qualitative data, which indicate that students generally learnt from people of diverse backgrounds, and that the divergent contexts and activities in the courses broadened their horizons. The greater the diversity of life that students experienced, the more they gained in reflection. Students recognized that they were not mature enough to understand people from diverse backgrounds, and this might

have lowered their self-rated social awareness development in the quantitative data. This is a possible explanation for the finding that, despite the opportunity to meet more diverse people to broaden their minds, students showed a general drop in their capacity to understand others' perspectives. This echoes previous studies on SL which revealed a reduced capacity to listen and understand others (Kearney, 2004). The reduction in students' self-perceived social awareness in this study indicates that although students tended to be inspired by the diverse people they met, they struggled to truly understand others. Finally, even though their perception of their own capability to understand and empathize with others might have dropped, students' actual capability to understand others might have improved.

Course quality was also a positive predictor of improvement in students' in relationship management capability and social awareness. Provided with meaningful experiences, students developed both more sharply. Diversity was found to be another significant factor in students' growth in the semi-structured interviews. Students verbally expressed that they started to develop empathy and understanding for people they had never met before, and learnt to become more aware of others' needs, even if this was not found to be significant in the quantitative data. Finally, the factor of student voice and group work was identified by students as influential on their learning in the CoC courses. Put simply, the more students participated and engaged in the courses, the greater the chances that they would grow. Overall, the quantitative findings were echoed by the qualitative data, suggesting that, regardless of whether a course

includes an SL component, co-curricular practice has considerable potential to promote interpersonal capability in students, which adds to the understanding of how such specific quality elements as meaningful experience and diversity can have an impact on students' interpersonal development.

Limitations and Future Study

One limitation of this study is that although we intended to test the effects of the five course elements included in the quality standards (Billig, 2009), the scale we developed did not show satisfactory structural validity, despite its good reliability. As a result, we could not test the effects of the specific course elements, but instead focused on overall course quality. Put differently, the quantitative portion of the study only established a link between overall course quality and interpersonal development, preventing us from analyzing the roles played by the specific elements. Nevertheless, the qualitative portion of the study partially compensated for this limitation. It demonstrated that the critical course elements critical to interpersonal development are meaningful experience, diversity, student voice, and group work. Future research might involve developing scales to measure these course elements, and empirical testing of their links with academic, civic, and personal outcomes.

Conclusion and Implications

There is a need for research on the effects of SL on the development of interpersonal capabilities in students, and especially for research on the role played by course characteristics. This study aimed to fill this research gap by investigating two aspects of interpersonal development that have received academic attention, and by linking course characteristics to course effectiveness. The findings provide evidence of the benefits of SL in promoting students' capability to manage their emotions and interpersonal relationships, particularly when students are being involved in service activities that addressing real-life issues and working with people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative data both support the idea that course characteristics partially determine student outcomes (e.g., Stukas et al., 1999). A practical implication of this study is that when interpersonal development is one of the learning goals of SL courses, practitioners should pay close attention to the design and implementation of SL activities.

This study shows that in higher education, SL can be an effective pedagogy for developing general interpersonal capabilities in students. Although the characteristics of particular SL courses are determined by many factors, such as the academic subject and the resources available to instructors and community partners, efforts should be made to ensure that courses encompass the quality elements that are key to the successful student outcomes. The findings also suggest that the success of SL course in promoting student interpersonal development may lie in the match between the course's service activities and the tasks to be attained in workplaces and communities.