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Academic Service Learning Pedagogy in Social Work: Exploration of student and community lived experiences using an interdisciplinary course model of community-university engagement

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Academic Service Learning Pedagogy in Social Work: Exploration of Student and

Community Lived Experiences Using an Interdisciplinary Course Model of

Community-University Engagement

By

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the change makers and silent heroes who make a profound difference every day, often unnoticed and unrecognized. Consider this a small tip of the hat to you.

Acknowledgements

Five years ago I built an art installation in Mart, Texas, the town where my husband grew up during the era of segregation. The art installation I created with family led to a dramatic departure from my life in the San Francisco Bay Area to the creation of the Mart Community Project, and a partnership with University of Texas at Austin and Baylor University Institute of Oral History that landed me in a Ph.D. program at age 52. I often describe my experience in Mart as an accidental journey; however, I have come to realize there is an often-undetectable path to learning and growth, one that leads to our next great endeavor. As with all great endeavors, there is a huge supporting cast. I owe a debt of gratitude to all involved, and while I have done my best to thank the good folks of Mart, my mentors and colleagues at University of Texas at Austin, and Baylor University, and my family and friends, I apologize in advance to anyone I inadvertently overlooked.

To the folks in Mart who allowed me to join their community and bring along a cadre of artists, university students, and faculty, my sincere gratitude for your generosity, hospitality, and willingness to grow and learn together. This includes, but is not limited to Pastor Willie T. and Sandra Hurth, Sue Davis, Todd Gooden, Lou Ann Wolfe, Carolyn Potts, Trezten Gray, Bill Reynolds, Henry Witt, Jeannie and Pat Smith, Inez Nobles, Bonnie Garrett, Julie Arenson, and Evelyn and Cowboy Clawsen. So many wonderful

people, far too many to mention here, have opened their hearts and minds to the UT-Baylor-MCP group.

The Mart Community Project team became an extended family to me, and our work together is the stuff dreams are made of. Thanks to the Baylor University Institute of Oral History part of our team Stephen Sloan and Beck Shulda. From UT Austin: Heidi Schamalbach, Anne McNamee, Lynn Osgood, Peter Hall, Eric Rousseau, Rebecca Reilly, Chesna Bowman, and last but never ever least, my dear friend and co-conspirator, Sean McCarthy. I look forward to creating more havoc together in the years to come. To Amadou Kane Sy and my sister Muhsana Ali, thanks for blessing us with your artistic vision, talent, and humanity.

I am fortunate to have a committee that has provided unending support and guidance over the past four years. I am indebted to Dr. Dorie Gilbert and cannot thank her enough for being an amazing advisor, committee chair, friend, and mentor. We have worked together in a variety of locations from Ghana to Mart, traveling in vans and cars, in deep discussions and long work sessions, and I have learned from her every step of the way. Dr. Juliet Walker is responsible for me coming to University of Texas, and has been cheering me on ever since. I treasure our many discussions via email and in her office, and her accomplishments as a scholar inspire me to reach higher and higher. Dr. Christopher Adejumo has provided support, hours of great intellectual discourse, and camaraderie as a fellow artist, community art practitioner, and scholar. I am appreciative of Dr. Michael Lauderdale's willingness to join my committee at a crucial time to lend

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his expertise in community work. Each one of you has made a unique and valuable contribution to my dissertation and development as a scholar, teacher, and community practitioner.

I cannot imagine making it through the past four years without my family and friends. My deepest and sincere thanks to Tommy Davis, my hero and friend since I was 18 years old for always being here when I need you. Love and thanks to my beautiful and amazing children Rena and Jonathan Davis - your belief in me helped me believe in myself. To my partner Gene Ransom, the best coach ever, thanks for helping me navigate a new organization and get through the fourth quarter with love and encouragement. Thanks to my brother Jeff Gerstenblatt for holding up my end with mom so I could focus on my work. Thanks to Yvonne Christensen and Menbere Aklilu for supporting me in more ways than one, and to Pamm Shaw and Karen Anderson for urging me on. I cannot imagine going through the past four years without my dear friend and fellow doctoral student Diane McDaniel Rhodes, we have been in lockstep since the day we met. Thanks to Farya Phillips for walking me through the method, to Linh Thy Doan and Lauren Eva Riley for keeping me sane and in the margins, and Miki Tesh for being just a text away. A special thanks to Sherry Melecki, Graduate Program Coordinator for PhD students at the School of Social Work, I often wonder what I would do without you.

I am extremely grateful and honored to have received the Social Work Education Student Research Award from *Social Work Education: The International Journal*. This funding enabled me to complete my research in a timely manner.

To my mother, Louise Gerstenblatt, thank you for reminding me how compassion and forgiveness lead us to our better selves. To my father Sidney Gerstenblatt who taught me to question authority, speak up and act out, and to never live a life of "quiet desperation" - I have a feeling you are looking down on me with pride.

And finally to my trio of Golden Retrievers: Pepsi, Pearl, and Pandy, thank you for sticking close to my side and dispensing huge doses of joy, love, and laughter every single day, particularly when I teetered close to the edge. We did it!

Academic Service Learning Pedagogy in Social Work: Exploration of student and community lived experiences using an interdisciplinary course model of community-university engagement

Publication No._____

Paula Gerstenblatt, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Dorie Gilbert

Academic service learning has grown in popularity at colleges and universities as a way to address social issues using study, reciprocity, and reflection. While the merits of service learning are well documented, gaps in the literature indicate a need for further development of pedagogical models, qualitative research about students' lived experiences, and research focused on community partners. This dissertation presents an interdisciplinary model for implementing academic service learning in social work education, in-depth understandings of student experiences in a service learning course, and insight into the experiences and perceived benefits of community partners. The first article presents a 3-component service learning model that capitalizes on the structure of a university-community partnership, mobilizes interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects, and integrates student, community and faculty reflection

on complex social structures. Article 2 offers a phenomenological analysis of 17 blogs written by service learning students working in a rural town through their blogs. The findings of this study suggest that the reflexive aspect of blogging fits well with the service learning principle of reflection, and reveals the students' emotive experience over the course of the semester. Additionally, blogging demonstrates the attributes of service learning pedagogy to support the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of complex problems in a real life setting not attainable solely in a classroom setting or through traditional classroom tools, such as exams and papers. Article 3 consists of a phenomenological analysis of interviews with 9 community partners, a combination of agency employees and active citizens that worked with a network of service learning classes in a rural Southern town. The findings support the contribution of service learning to communities, the importance of investing in reciprocal relationships, and the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents. The research presented in this dissertation informs the growing popularity of service learning in social work with findings that demonstrate a useful implementation model, highly meaningful transformative impact on students, the resilience of the community to challenges of hosting service learning, and the invaluable fostering of inspiration and hope in the community-university relationship.

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CHAPTER 1

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn."

-Benjamin Franklin

Problem Statement

Over the past two decades service learning has surged in popularity in higher

education as a pedagogy that addresses social problems through reciprocal relationships

with communities and reflective practices. Despite the documented merits of service

learning, service learning pedagogical models tend to focus more on students than

communities. In addition, the structure of service learning courses, in some cases, may

fail to develop reciprocal university-community relationships and lack an emphasis on

engaging faculty and students in reflective analysis of the socio-economic issues facing

the communities in which students serve. The service learning literature in social work

has not adequately how social work's principles and historical roots might be used to

address the existing limitations of service learning. Social work education's core

curriculum is based on values and ethics that emphasize diversity, social and economic

justice, and social welfare; therefore, it might be expected that social work as a discipline

be at the forefront of academic service learning's development and the Higher Education

Civic Engagement (HSCE) movement (Phillips, 2007). Service learning principles build

on the theoretical underpinnings of social work, including theories related to social

systems, the strengths perspective, and empowerment that integrate well into social work

coursework (Furuto, 2007). However, there is no mention of service learning in CSWE

Education and Policy Accreditation Standards, and social work has been virtually absent from federally sponsored projects and conferences related to community-university partnerships for community building (Johnson Butterfield & Soska, 2005).

While research on service leaning has evidenced gains in student outcomes such as grades and GPA, there is a scarcity of research that explores the lived experience, meaning making, and transformative process of students who participate in service learning courses. Furthermore, research on community partners is scant and has focused on the linkages with community agencies, overlooking the need to examine the impact on informal networks and civically involved community members who work alongside students.

Most service learning studies have been quantitative and primarily use instruments designed for course evaluations that have been adapted for research purposes (Steinberg, Bringle, & Williams, 2010). While the plethora of quantitative studies has advanced our understanding of positive service learning outcomes using surveys, scales, GPA measures, and questionnaires, less emphasis has been placed on qualitatively examining student outcomes. There is a need for research using qualitative methods aimed at understanding the meaning-making of service learning experiences for both students and community partners. Qualitative research methodologies are appropriate in cases where we want to move beyond exploring relationships and outcomes to understanding them, including the what and how of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thus far, the relatively few qualitative studies on service learning outcomes have examined journals, reflective papers, interviews, and focus group data. Technological

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advances such as blogs, You Tube, and other digital tools offer an array of new options in

qualitative research to gain insight about the complex and transformative potential of

service learning experiences for students and the community partners with whom they

work. These noted gaps in the service learning literature have framed the focus and

purpose of this dissertation research.

Background

Academic service learning (hereafter referred to as service learning) has gained

popularity as a pedagogy that combines student learning and a commitment to addressing

problems in partnership with communities. The principles of service learning - study,

reciprocity, and reflection - are intended to bolster student learning and civic

responsibility, address community identified needs, and support long-term mutually

beneficial community-university partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2010;

Eyler & Giles 1999). The increase of service learning has been documented by Campus

Compact, a national coalition of more than 1,100 colleges and universities that represent

about 6 million students dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement,

and service learning in higher education. The Campus Compact annual report in 2009-10

reported the following: 1) 35% of the students enrolled at Campus Compact schools

participated in service, service learning, and civic engagement activities; 2) 60% of the

institutions identifying service learning courses; and 3) 93% of responding schools

offering service learning courses during the 2009-10 academic year with an average of 35

faculty, or 7%, of all faculty, who taught courses that incorporate service learning into

their syllabi (Campus Compact, 2011).

Service learning has been an integral component of the higher education civic engagement (HECE) movement, a shift often credited to Ernest L. Boyer's influential 1990 publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*. Boyer, whose belief was that universities and colleges "were one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country" believed for this to occur, "the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call scholarship of engagement" (p.11). The historic commitment Boyer refers to, the Morrill Land Grant Act signed by President Lincoln in 1862 during the Civil War linked higher education to the nation's agricultural, technological, and industrial revolutions. Land grant colleges and universities were designed to provide a range of practical educational opportunities to all classes, and promoted service and civic engagement as part of the mission of education. This historic legislative accomplishment during the Civil War Congressional Session paved the way for public higher education and a mission to prepare students for civic life. The creation of national organizations, such as Campus Outreach Opportunity League (1984), Campus Compact (1985), the National and Community Service Act of 1990, and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 paved the way for civic engagement and service in higher education.

Roots of Academic Service Learning

As early as 1636, with the founding of Harvard College, there was an intention on behalf of the first American colleges to prepare citizens for active involvement in community (Kenny, 2001) and prepare civic and religious leaders (Boyer, 1996).

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Benjamin Franklin, the founder of the Academy of Philadelphia in 1740 that later became the University of Pennsylvania, envisioned this institution as a university dedicated to promoting civic engagement (Harkavy, 2010). In 1749 Franklin published a pamphlet titled *Relating Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* that described the goals of the Academy:

> The idea of what is true merit, should also be often presented to youth, explain'd and impresess'd on their minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve mankind, one's country, Friends and family…which Ability should be the great *Aim* and *End* or all Learning.

The ideals expressed by Franklin are similar to the founding documents of numerous private colleges after the War of Independence, reflecting a blend of idealism and pragmatism as the purpose of higher education. The development of character in students was equal to the development of the intellect in these early institutions (Kenny, 2001).

The 1862 Morrill Act, signed into law by President Lincoln, established land grant colleges and universities to teach agriculture, military tactics, mechanic arts as well as classical studies to access higher liberal, practical education to the working class, and with a democratic mandate of openness, accessibility, and service to people (Kenny, 2001; NASULGC, 1998). From the legislation and Senator Morrill's statements, the purpose of the Act is surmised as follows;

> Protest against the dominance of the classics in higher education, develop college level instruction relating to practical realities, of an agricultural and industrial society, and offer those belonging to the industrial classes preparation for the

"professional life" (NASULGC, 1998).

In 1873 Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College (presently Ohio State) trustees stated the goal was not only to educate students as farmers or mechanics but as "men fitted by education and attainments for the greater usefulness and higher duties of citizenship." In 1890, the second Morrill Act founded land grants for historically Black colleges and universities (HBSUs) to be directed toward work, service and learning (Kenny, 2001). To receive funding a state had to show that race was not an admissions criteria, or else designate a separate land-grant college for blacks, thus was born the HBCU 1890 land-grants (NASULGC, 1998). "Twenty-eight years after the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, Congress enacted a second Morrill Act establishing Black land-grant universities. The legislation gave states funds to establish state universities for persons of color if race was an admissions factor at the existing state university. Commonly referred to as 1890 Universities, these institutions have a track record of "serving the underserved" and "reaching the unreached." Today, these campuses are proud to remain the custodians of access to and opportunity for higher education in underserved communities" (http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=254). Ironically, land-grant status was not conferred on Native American colleges until 1994.

The mission of civic engagement and service was evident in progressive reforms across the Midwest in the early twentieth century and attributed by Charles McCarthy, first legislative librarian of the United States to "a combination of soil and seminar," with universities dedicated to solving significant and practical problems that affected the lives of farmers and other citizens across the state (Harkavy, 2010). 1903, when Charles Van

Hise became president of the University of Wisconsin, he and former classmate, Gov. Robert La Follette, resolved to make "the boundaries of the university…the boundaries of the state" (Harkavy, 2010). Social critic Lincoln Steffens visited Madison in 1909 and observed "In Wisconsin, the university is as close to the intelligent farmer as his pig-pen or his tool house" (as cited in Boyer, 1996). In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act established a system of cooperative extension services to bring people the benefits of current developments in the disciplines of agriculture, home economics and related subjects and expanded the mission of land-grant colleges and universities to include on-campus instruction, research, and off-campus extension work.

Commitment to service has also been a characteristic of many religious and faith-based institutions. Jesuit higher education has been committed to educating students to participate in a just society, reflect on experiences and become empowered through knowledge (Fleming, 1999). Although the purpose of the land-grant colleges and universities was built upon a democratic foundation to access higher education to all classes and races, preparation for citizenship and public service, there were several mitigating factors that detracted from this mission. In the 1950s the Cold War and competition with the Soviet Union propelled attention and funding toward the advancement of scientific knowledge with less emphasis on domestic agendas. The focus shifted to basic science research that trumped teaching, service and applied community-based research (Kenny, 2001) .

Status and prestige of the American university during and post Cold War was built upon research for defense technology development and educating a growing middle

class for the labor market (Kenny, 2001). The turbulence of the 1960s protest movements prompted a return to civic engagement, collective acts of civil disobedience, and prompted the involvement of students across the nation to include university campuses as a place of social action. The pendulum began to swing towards the original mission of land grant colleges and universities. After turmoil and initial resistance by many university administrations, change was ushered in and a new era of social responsibility in higher education emerged. Affirmative action programs were launched to recruit historically overlooked students, and to promote a belated social justice agenda (Boyer, 1996). In 1999, the Kellogg Commission report on the Future of Sate and Land-Grant Universities called for these institutions to return to their roots as "engaged" institutions serving "local and national needs in a more coherent and effective way". Over the past two decades, an awakening in higher education, and a return to civic engagement launched the service learning movement.

Recent History, Resurgence of Service Learning and the "Rebranding of a Civic Mission"

The term service learning was coined in the 1960s by Bill Ramsey and Robert Sigmon, community coordinators of research addressing regional problems in the South, to describe the reflective approach they used with their community-development interns (Campbell, 2007). The Oak Ridge Associated Universities was a consortium was formed in 1946 to promote scientific research in partnership with businesses and government agencies, and in 1966 first used the term service learning for a project on tributary development (Harkavy, 2010).

In 1987 National Society for Internships and Experimental Education (later renamed National Society for Experimental Education (NSEE) was established. In 1989, NSEE consulting with 70 organizations and associations hosted a meeting at Wingspread Conference Center at Racine Wisconsin that produced the "Principal of Good Practice in Service Learning" and provided important definitional guidance about the term service learning (Harkavy, 2010). Shortly after in 1990, Kendall published her seminal text, *Combining service and learning: A resource book for a community and public service* (Kendall, 1990). This publication served as an initial blueprint for service learning and book covers policies, issues, and programs in colleges and universities, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, and public agencies. Most articles in Volume I are aimed at educators, and her subsequent Volume II discusses a variety of practical issues and ideas for programs and courses that combine service and learning.

The Higher Education Civic Engagement Movement (HECE) inspired by Ernest Boyer's 1990 publication *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* called the academy to redefine the meaning of scholarship and suggested that social problems should inform scholarly investigation through what Boyer describes in his 1996 article *The Scholarship of Engagement*. According to Boyer, "The academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic and moral problems, and must affirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement" (p.13). The rally cry from Boyer echoed the voices of Ben Franklin, Senator Morrill, and others from the early establishment of education in the United States.

The National Community Service Trust Act of 1993 established the Corporation

for National and Community Service which sponsored three programs; Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America began funding grants for service learning, with federal support lending credibility to the newly introduced practice and pedagogy. This national legislation along with independent and institutional and community-based initiatives catalyzed academic service learning at all educational levels (Phillips, 2007). In1994, the American Association of Higher Education promoted service learning pedagogy and made a commitment to support a monograph series on service learning from multi-disciplinary perspectives under the editorial leadership of Edward Zlotkowski, and in the same year (1994) the *Michigan Journal of Community Service and Learning* was established as a venue for research in the area of service learning (Harkavy, 2010).

During this era, service learning was moving from the periphery of the academy to mainstream. Campus Compact was established in 1985, forming a national coalition of college and university presidents as an advocate of service learning civic engagement (Phillips, 2007). Campus Compact has grown from 3 institutions in 1985 to over 1,100 in 2009, one quarter of all colleges and universities in the nation. According to Campus Compact's organizational survey conducted in 2006, 28% of its member institution offered between 1-10 service learning courses 45% between 11-50, 12% between 51-99, and 7% more than 100 service learning courses during 2005. At Campus Compact institutions, 12,577 faculty members taught a service learning class within the past year (12% of total full time faculty at these institutions). This represents a rapid ascent of service learning across a broad range of campuses.

Academic service learning evolved beyond a volunteer and practice experience to

"an intentional, structured tool for social change" (Phillips, 2007) and as Jacoby and Associates (2006) define as a "philosophy of reciprocity, which implies a concerted effort to move from Charity to justice" (p.4). In the 1990s as service learning expanded, "educational institutions began to see developing graduates committed to their role as engaged, responsible citizens as a renewed priority in a world with increasingly complex problems" (Campbell, 2007, p. 212).

In 2002 the American Association of State Colleges and Universities initiated the American Democracy Project, an unfunded project consisting of over two hundred and twenty state institutions committed to use curricula to prepare informed students for meaningful civic engagement and contribute to a strengthened democracy. These institutions have been described as "Stewards of Place", committed to preparing the next generation of citizens. And with this expansion of service learning has come increased resources, including The National Service Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org), Campus Compact (www.compact.org), and peer reviewed publications such as the Michigan Journal of Community Service (http://ginsberg.umich.edu/mjcsl/).

The movement to educate and prepare citizens for active participation in a democratic society that began during the birth of this nation and the establishment of the pioneer colleges and universities has endured and rekindled over the past three decades in a scholarly and institutional commitment to service learning and civic/community engagement. While the numerous iterations of definitions, programs, and approaches of service learning and community/civic engagement continue to clutter and bewilder the

discourse, the groundswell of momentum and return to values that founded many of our revered public and private educational institutions nearly 400 years ago offers promise for authentic and meaningful community-university partnerships, and students who are prepared for active participation on a democratic society.

Key Concepts

Service Learning

Academic service learning is widely interpreted and defined in higher education. Kendall (1990) identified 147 definitions of academic service learning in the literature with programs designated as academic service learning varying from brief to intensive. The duration of service learning programs ranges from a one-time experience, several weeks, a semester course, and integrated programs consisting of a series of connected courses. Service learning is integrated into a broad range of disciplines and curriculum including education, law, social work, engineering, health sciences, arts, and humanities. In a paper prepared for the United States Department of Education (Finley, 2012), "Service learning is essentially an umbrella term which many activities and programs can fall, rather than a narrowly defined practice with associated outcomes" (p. 2). Eyler and Giles (1999) who have conducted extensive research on service learning, did not adhere to one definition of service learning in their research, rather they explored the outcomes of service learning programs and attempted to identify what types of programs were leading to particular outcomes.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defined service learning using four dimensions; a) Students learn and develop through participation in organized

experiences that meet actual community needs and are coordinated in collaboration with school and community; b) The program is integrated into academic curriculum and provides structured time to think, discuss, or write about their experiences; c) Students are provided with opportunities to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; d) Experiences enhance what is taught by extending learning beyond the classroom into the community, which fosters development of a sense of caring. According to Eyler & Giles (1999), service learning should balance community service and academic learning with reflection as a key element to maintain balance between service and learning. Despite a variety of definitions and applications, the emphasis is consistently comprised of study, reciprocity, and reflection.

However, at times, the translation of service learning principles, more specifically the goal of achieving reciprocal and sustainable relationships with communities, has proven to be difficult, and service-learning curricula can fall short of reaching the intended goal of benefitting students and communities equally. A frequent criticism of service learning is that students receive more benefits than the communities they partner with, the artificial timeframe of the academic semester is not sufficient to effectively engage with community partners, and faculty and students may fail to reflect on and address the complex, social structures facing the communities in which students work (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010). Because of these limitations, service learning is not always true community engagement.

Community/Civic Engagement and Service Learning: A Tangled Relationship

According to Altman (1996), "the purpose of service-learning is to promote the acquisition of socially-responsive knowledge" (p. 374) and [service-learning requires]…"linking the curriculum to community needs and engaging students in direct, academically based problem solving on social issues" (p. 374). Altman further states, "The goal of socially responsive knowledge is as follows: First, to educate students in the problems of society; second, have them experience and understand first-hand social issues in their communities; and third, and most important, give students the experience and skills to act on social problems" (p. 374–375).

Altman's emphasis is placed on educating the student to wider societal problems though engagement outside the classroom with relationships in the community to achieve the ultimate goal of preparing students to act on social problems as participants and citizens in a democratic society. However, students are not the only members of the university that benefit from engaging with communities, service learning has the capacity to "promote institutional citizenship" (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999) with the participation of faculty and administration in developing extended relationships with communities.

Emerging models of service learning emphasize civic engagement and social justice. Educating for citizenship is more complicated and complex in a democratic society where communities are diverse and multicultural, and do not share one set of social or cultural characteristics. For democracy to succeed with diverse populations, students need to understand their own identities and be able to communicate with those who are different from themselves, creating dialog and building a foundation for a more

diverse society (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003). The emergence of service learning as a pedagogy positions higher education to build civic minded graduates in addition to acquiring knowledge and achieving vocational goals (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Service learning is one component of civic engagement; however, while civic engagement is also used interchangeably with academic service learning, it is also related to meaningful and reciprocal relationships with communities that students work in. Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, and Stevens (2010) identified five critical ways that higher education can "create a culture of engagement" (p.18); (1) connect civic engagement to the institutional mission, (2) integrate civic engagement at all levels, (3) integrate civic engagement into tenure and promotion structure, (4) provide pedagogical support for community engaged faculty (5) provide support for increasing and maintaining community-university partnerships. The entangled relationship of civic engagement and academic service learning represents an interconnectedness that orders service learning as a component of civic engagement, or civic engagement as the philosophical linchpin of service learning partnerships with communities, particularly as it relates to reciprocity and community identified needs.

How does civic engagement differ from community engagement?

The Carnegie Foundation describes community engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. While civic and community engagement are very similar, the distinction is in the scope of the impact. Community

engagement impacts a specific localized problem or issue; i.e., located on the campus, the city or county or perhaps the state. Civic engagement is social responsibility in a larger context, instilling a life-long commitment to the resolution of global or national issues and preparing students as active participants and leaders in a democratic society.

Is civic engagement service-learning?

Civic engagement can encompass service learning. According to The Pew Charitable Trust, civic engagement is the broader motif, encompassing service learning but not limited to it. Service learning, according to Jacoby (1996) is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. While service learning has a civic dimension, civic engagement does not always include service learning; however, service learning is often a fundamental part of the civic engagement curriculum.

The question of whether service learning is civic engagement is still debated among scholars and practitioners, particularly if it is apolitical without engaging students in programs and processes that foster the building of democracy. Pivotal in the debate among scholars and practitioners is the principal that it is not enough for students to perform service in communities, they must also engage in skills and learning that prepares them to be proactive citizens in a democratic society including deliberate dialog, collaborative work and problem solving within diverse groups (Finley, 2011). It is possible for civic engagement to be embodied in service learning if the definition of civic engagement is expanded to include apolitical engagement with communities (Prentice,

2007). However, within service learning there are a multitude of perspectives including technical, cultural, political (social justice), and anti-foundational. The political perspective in service learning more aligned with civic engagement, with the presumption that conflict, not consensus, is the consequence of a service learning model that addresses power imbalance, silenced perspectives, and negotiations over neutrality and objectivity (Butin, 2010).

Civic/Community Engagement and Service Learning

The magnificence of these three concepts is they are never mutually exclusive; however, this becomes a double-edged sword in the search for a unified model. How and where these concepts and practices are situated is the source of confusion and debate among scholars and practitioners (Jacoby, 2009). The Carnegie Foundation describes community engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. There are a wide range of definitions of civic engagement for the purpose of educating students to become civically engaged citizens, scholars, and leaders (Jacoby, 2009). Service learning is one way for universities to engage with communities through a coursed based learning experience in the community for students from a variety of disciplines and durations based on the praxis of study, reciprocity, and reflection.

Another consideration is the institutional mandate and structure for civic engagement. The mandate and structure of service learning will vary per institution, therefore the definition and implementation of service learning, community, and civic

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engagement may result in a seamless continuum or distinct concepts unto themselves (Hatcher, 2010). Given the plethora of definitions it is important to identify the fundamental problem of aligning the guiding principles of civic and community engagement with service learning (Hatcher, 2010). While recognizing the overlap, it is also important to note the differences. Service learning is an institutional driven process of placing students in the community as part of their academic learning experience, while community and civic engagement is specifically attentive of reciprocal relationships with individuals or organizations in a community driven process. When universities enter communities through service learning, the constraints and limitations of the institution regarding potentially conflicting motives can result in an unintended collision in the implementation of practice. This leads to a free for all in terms of methodology, theory, research, and practice (Finley, 2012), therefore the task, or question, is not to track all the definitions and iterations, rather investigate why so many exist. In addition, the next step in the service learning discourse is to begin to frame a cohesive framework for service learning pedagogy, from which there can be strategies to examine its efficacy in terms of agreed-upon student and community outcomes.

This dissertation describes an interdisciplinary model that draws from both service learning and community engagement best practices. This new paradigm works simultaneously from within and on the periphery, not breaking the rules of institutions or funders, rather doing business differently, and advantaging a "powerful opportunity" as in described above to create models of service learning and community-university partnerships that authentically actualize best practices while breaking new ground.

Relevance of Service Learning to Social Work – A Natural Partnership

Early beginnings

Service learning has a strong theoretical grounding in the teaching philosophy and theories of John Dewey that promoted experiential learning as a means of furthering civic participation and the greater good. Dewey, though born in 1859, was an educational innovator, whose ties and friendship with Hull House founder Jane Addams and other settlement house workers, laid a theoretical foundation for service learning. Dewey's alliance with social work and settlement house work was highly influential and evident in his prophetic essay *The School as Social Center* and a call for making the school a social center in practice, not theory (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2009). Dewey and Jane Addams forged a close alliance in Chicago in the early 1900s; however, the work of Addams and Hull House was more profound on Dewey and his educational theory and practice than the reverse.

Service learning in social work education has been gaining momentum with its compatibility to social work values of capacity building, social support and strengths perspective, self-help, social justice, and anti-oppression; however, social work as a discipline has come relatively late to the table of more recent focus on academic service leaning and the HECE movement. While social work has not been at the forefront of the recent service learning movement, the profession's roots are evident in the evolution of social services that includes Dorethea Dix's campaign for the mentally ill, the Freedman's Bureau, the establishment of Jane Addams' Hull House in 1889, and in 1912 a network of over 400 settlement houses and guilds to help millions of new immigrants

settle in the United States. Jane Addams' Hull House and Lillian Wald in New York City and other settlement house workers were in large part responsible for the transfer of social, health, cultural, and recreational services to public schools in urban settings in the early twentieth century (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2009).

The professionalization of social work began at Columbia University in 1898 with the first school of social work. The foundation of social work as a profession with a mission has been attributed to Mary Richmond and presented in her seminal work *Social Diagnosis*, published in 1917, that articulated a theoretical belief system based on the person and their environment, and an orientation that gave clients a voice and set the stage for the professional status of social casework (Glicken, 2011). Government sponsored programs from President Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933 to President Johnson's Great Society created opportunities for social workers to play major roles as helping professionals. However, the shifting sands of the social work profession led social workers from neighborhood-based settlement houses and privately-funded charity work into the government created social support institutions during the New Deal, and later the Great Society of the 1960s.

Clinical practice in social work and social work education dates back to the establishment of the first psychoanalytical school of social work at Smith College to teach Freud's theories and application (ABECSW, 2004). . Although clinical practice is a long established tradition in social work, the shift to evidenced-based practice (EBP) and clinical, intervention-based social work, while not necessarily mutually exclusive to community based social work, has created two distinct schools of thought (Specht &

Courtney, 1994). While social work education includes both clinical and community options (with varying terms), the pendulum has swung toward a dominance of an evidence-based clinical orientation (Burke, 2011). The increasing popularity of clinical practice and evidence-based practice has heightened the prominence of the field practicum in social work education, and this has been speculated as one explanation for social work's latecomer status in academic service learning (Phillips, 2007). Service learning teases out this division with a focus that is equal part student and community centered, and is explicit that the community identifies the needs to be addressed, not the "experts" from the university whose motivation is more focused on student-learning and specific skill sets to be gained.

While the field practicum focuses on skill building, academic service learning provides a unique opportunity for social work students to experience a community and civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of the communities they will potentially work in through field placements and later on as professional social workers. The overlap between academic service learning and the core values of the social work profession, its history, and mission of social work education provide a strong rational for increased infusion of academic service learning in social work education.

The rationale for to incorporate service learning into social work core and elective curriculum has been written about since Phillips' 2007 review (Belliveau, 2011; Burke, 2011; Harder, 2010; Kropf & Mininder, 2002; Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Scott, 2008; Wells, 2006; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002). Although social work has been a relative latecomer to service learning pedagogy, service learning is well aligned with the NASW

six core values of social work (NASW, 2008) and NASW Ethical Standard 6.01, Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society "to promote social economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice" (NASW, 2008, p. 27). The values associated with civic and community engagement, a foundational concept integrated into service learning, reflects the values and philosophy of CSWE and social work education (Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, & Rose, 2010; Burke, 2011). Service learning as a pedagogical practice in social work education has the potential to positively impact the attainment of CSWE competency-based standards. With the 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), and the specification of ten core student competencies, CSWE encouraged the infusion of content across the curriculum (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). This allows for greater flexibility and creativity in employing methods and approaches such as service learning to respond to the needs of students and communities, and the call in higher education to make education more relevant and applicable to real world problems.

Research on service learning in social work

The gaps and limitations of existing research are evident in literature on service learning, including social work research that is dated and scant (Lemieux & Allen, 2007); however, social work education has recently shown an interest in service learning pedagogy (McGuire & Majewski, 2011). Lemieux and Allen (2007) conducted a review of scholarly publications that "specifically described and evaluated academic coursework undertaken by a group or class of social work students that integrated a community-based service component distinct from both volunteerism and field instruction" (p. 313). This

review yielded eight scholarly publications that reported on eight studies, with two qualitative and six quantitative. All but three of the studies were published prior to 2002 and mostly quantitative with the exception of one study that used mixed methods including focus groups, journals, and course evaluations (William & Reeves, 2004). Similar to other service learning findings, the authors report on evidenced gains in the areas of student learning, personal and social development, and limited demonstrated beneficial outcomes to communities for service learning in social work (Forte, 1997; Williams & Reeves, 2004; Williams et al., 2002). Lemieux and Allen's (2007) analysis showed a rather dire state of service learning research in social work, with all but three of the studies being published prior to 2002.

Two social work journals have recently dedicated entire issues to service learning, the Spring 2011 issue of *Advances in Social Work*, and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* in 2012, indicating an upswing in social work research on service learning. Articles in these two issues are mainly conceptual; however, six articles report on research findings. The findings from these studies suggest social work students participating in service learning increased their civic engagement (Byers & Grey, 2012), a greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research (Postlethwait, 2012), service learning aided in meeting course goals (Maccio, 2011), increased self-efficacy and responsibility to effect change (Ericson, 2011), enhanced outcomes for EPAS (Campbell, 2012), and increased cultural awareness and educational growth (Bolea, 2012). See table 1 below for summary of the recent research described above.

Table 1 Summary of recent service learning research in social work from *Advances in Social Work*, and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* special editions

Author	Description of Study	Outcomes
Byers & Grey, 2012	Qualitative (interviews)	Greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research
Postlethwait, 2012	Mixed Methods (survey and open ended questions)	Greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research using mixed methods
Maccio, 2011	Quantitative (surveys)	Student belief that service learning aided course goals
Ericson, 2011	Mixed methods (surveys and journals)	Enhanced outcomes for EPAS
Campell, 2012	Mixed methods (pre and post test survey and reflective paper)	Enhanced outcomes for EPAS
Bolea, 2012	Course evaluation	Increased cultural awareness and educational growth

Benefits of service learning and social work

The upward trend in social work education to utilize service learning offers many

potential benefits for students including increased growth, development and learning.

Additional opportunities include multi disciplinary collaboration, strengthening

community relationships, increased use of reflection, and opportunities for learning in a

variety of settings outside the classroom. As higher education increasingly mandates

service learning across campuses, social work has much to offer with an existing network

of relationships with community-based agencies. As a profession dedicated to educating

and preparing professionals to address the complex array of social problems social work

has much to offer service learning and is well positioned to take a lead in service learning research, pedagogy, and the development of collaborative and sustainable community engagement practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is based on the assumption of social construction, as well as the theories of John Dewey and Paulo Freire that link education and civic responsibility. While contemporary learning theories are associated with service learning, including Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, both of which are referred to by Giles and Eyler as "neo-Deweyian" (1994, p. 78), this dissertation builds on the philosophical and theoretical link of service learning to participatory democracy and social change grounded in the historic tradition, purpose, and responsibility of higher education to democratic ideals, civic engagement, and the greater societal good.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is one strategy for framing a phenomenological understanding of knowledge, one that is anchored in the liberating understanding that some things, ideas and experiences are the result of varied creations of meaning as opposed to being the fixed result of nature (Hacking, 2000). While the theories of Dewey and Feire provide the overarching philosophical framework for this dissertation, social constructionism can be a useful articulation alongside both theories. Dewey believed that learners are always in the process of constructing new meanings as they move between reflection and action (Felten, Gilchrist, & Darby 2006; Giles & Eyler, 1994), and Freire

was committed to dialogical, experienced oriented change. Social construction is the ontological ground articulating the philosophical and theoretical foundation of service learning of Dewey and Freire.

While there is no advocate articulating a universal social construction, constructionism typically describes reality as the result of complex shared agreements within a society. The building processes of naming, describing, understanding, explaining, and attributing meaning to objects, ideas or experience is seen as a collaborative effort by which a society, or culture, or family communicate about what is tolerated or not tolerated by the group. Social constructionism also involves looking closely at who benefits and who loses because of how the world is defined or explained. From this vantage point a single, shared, uncontested, or true definition of any concept does not exist (Hacking, 2000).

Social construction also views individuals as agents constructing meaning through their interaction and experiences inclusive of the social, historic, cultural and natural aspects of their environment (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). Social constructionism is concerned with the way individuals and groups construct meaning of their perceived social reality, and challenges the notion of an objective reality and positivist assumptions that "that the nature of the world can be revealed by observation" (Burr, 2003, p.3). Social constructionist research considers the context and influence of events and inherited social circumstances on the meaning making process and assumes that reality is not fixed, rather it is always in flux and experienced differently depending on the person and their perception (Grbich, 2007). This premise that reality is not a fixed process also recognizes

the possibility of change as people experience new and continuing phenomena. The constructionist significance of creating meaning is an essential feature of inquiry into the lived experiences of students and community partners involved in service learning projects, and how these collaborations influence learning, transformation, and meaning making when engaging in new phenomena in unfamiliar environments.

John Dewey: Innovator and Trail Blazer

Every social arrangement is educative in effect. As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need for formal or intentional learning increases. As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is a danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school (Dewey, 1916, p. 9).

The above quote illustrates the how prophetic John Dewey was in his belief that students come to school to engage in activities that provide them real, guided experiences and build their capacity to contribute to a democratic society. According to Giles and Eyler (1994), "For Dewey, pedagogy and epistemology were related – his theory of knowledge was related to and derived from his notions of citizenship and democracy" (p.78). Dewey's education philosophy was influential in the progressive movement education and launched the development of experiential education programs. His prominence in academic service learning literature spans across disciplines and is widely recognized as providing the theoretical foundation for service learning (Butin, 20110; Cummings, 2000; Felten et al., 2006; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Jacoby, 1996; Norris & Schwartz, 2009; Stoecker, 2003). Dewey's contributions to a

theoretical frame work for service learning relate to how learning occurs (study), what the learning is (reflection), and the relation of learning to doing (service/reciprocity) (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

Study

Dewey's theory of experiential education is based on two guiding principles, the Principle of Continuity and the Principal of Interaction. Giles and Eyler (1994) identify this The Principle of Continuity as the "linear dimension of experience and the learning derived from the continuity of experiences" (p.79). In the principal of continuity, Dewey endorsed that a system of education based upon the connection of education to experience, and if faithful to the principle, it must take into account physical and social surroundings beyond the school environment (desks, blackboard, school yard). In doing this he recognized the burden this could place on teachers when they become "intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc. in order to utilize them as educational resources" (Dewey, 1938, p.40). Dewey was aware this was one reason progressive education was more difficult to implement than traditional education; however, the context of the environment and institution is part of the holistic continuity of experiences, and teachers must not be excluded from this integration.

Giles and Eyler (1994) describe the Principle of Interaction as "the lateral dimension of experience where the internal and objective aspects of experience interact to form a situation" (p.70). For Dewey, situation and interaction could not be separated, an experience is what it is because of the action taking place between an individual and their

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environment which can be with another person, a topic, event, object, and where they are located geographically. This situational learning occurs between the learner/person and their environment and includes whatever the conditions that interact with "personal needs, desires, purposes, and capabilities to create the (Giles & Eyler, 1994) experience which is had" (p.44). Simply stated, learning results from interaction between the learner and their environment.

The principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other, they "intercept and unite… and are the longitudinal and lateral aspects of the experience" (Dewey, 1938, p.44). In Dewey's seminal work *Democracy and Education* (1916) he discusses the role of active and passive learning, and responds to the common view of students as consuming knowledge as "theoretical spectators" (p.78) rather than engaged in knowledge producing experiences. Dewey was also emphatic that "all thinking involves risk, that certainty cannot be guaranteed in advance" (1916, p. 82), and the unknown is an adventure that cannot be predicted, "there is no completion in the act of thinking, it remains suspended" (1916, p. 83). Dewey's position was that for knowledge to have purpose in recall and application it must be acquired in a situation or it will be segregated and forgotten, and not used or transferred to build new experiences (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

Reflection

Dewey's (1933) definition of reflective thinking is the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends…" (p.9), and that

"reflective thinking impels inquiry" (p.7). Inquiry in a scientific or educational

framework requires examination of a problem, phenomenon, or experience, with an

uncertainty that "perplexes and challenges the mind" (Dewey, 1933, p.13). Once the

problem is identified, the process of inquiry can occur. For Dewey (1916), thinking and

experience were inseparable; however, all experiences are not educational, and "mere

activity does not constitute experience" (p.78). Included in reflection is observation as an

empirical connection between what is experienced and how experience is processed to

produce knowledge and learning. "Data (facts) and ideas (suggestions, possible solutions)

thus form the two indispensable and correlative factors all reflective activity" (1933,

p.104). Dewey believed that learners are always in the process of constructing new

meanings as they move between reflection and action (Felten et al., 2006; Giles & Eyler,

1994).

While reason is at the forefront of the reflective process, Dewey also felt emotion

plays a significant though more subtle role (Felten et al., 2006). Dewey (1934) states,

"Emotion is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what

it selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to material externally disparate

and dissimilar" (p.42). Dewey's model of the reflective process set a precedent for later

theorists and practitioners such as Schon (1983) and Kolb (1984), proponents of

reflection in teaching, practice, and research.

Students working in the community in the midst of complex, often unpredictable

and generative situations, the reflective process allows for the student to assimilate and

synthesize theory, practice, and make connections to both personal and larger societal

structures and context. Dewey believed that intelligence is more than a consequence of

problem solving, action and experience; rather it is acquired and developed as a result of

reflective, strategic, real world problem solving in action and experience (Benson

Harkavy, & Puckett, 2009). Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001) described reflection

as "the hyphen in service-learning"; therefore Dewey's methodology of learning

establishes and substantiates a strong theoretical foundation of the role of reflection in

service learning.

Reciprocity

Dewey's theories and philosophy encompass more than pedagogy, they are a

vision of participatory democracy based on a democratic school system. Democracy and

education are synonymous for Dewey (Benson et al., 2009). A more generalized view of

Dewey's theory on participatory democracy can be found in his 1888 essay *The Ethics of

Democracy*, "it approaches most nearly the ideal of all societal organization; that in

which the individual and society are organic to each other" (as cited in Benson et al.,

2009,p. xii). For Dewey (1916), education was a social process, and though there are

many types of societies, a desirable society is a democratic one that enables and

encourages participation of its citizens on behalf of the greater good though its

institutions.

The democratic ideal in education was considered a mechanism to spark

individual capacity in a continuum of growth toward the advancement of social good.

Dewey's close relationship with Jane Addams and Hull House broadened his view of the

school beyond education alone, and the importance of partnerships between communities

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and schools communities in forming a true participatory democracy (Benson et al., 2009).

While Dewey's work establishes a platform for contemporary service learning, he never

developed or implemented an actual plan of realizing his theories in a real world contact.

According to Cummings (2000), "opportunities appear unlimited for applying Dewey's

principles of pedagogy (and democracy and community building) to the activities of

students engaged in community organizing, an arena of practice replete with stimulating

forked-road decisions, opportunities for experiment, and stimuli for reflection" (p. 98).

Dewey (1916) recognized the significant role education plays in creating a democratic

society and the importance of the "out-of-school environment" (p. 25).

Though Dewey's work focused on participatory democracy for the greater good,

he did not promote a specific political philosophy or orientation as found in Paulo

Freire's Marxist orientation. The two did share a rejection of what Freire (1970) termed

the "banking system of education" (p.72), and what Dewey (1916) referred to as

"acquiring knowledge as theoretical spectators" (p.78). While both shared a support for

experiential education, reflection, and participation, Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism

is in sharp contrast to Freire's Marxist influenced critical pedagogy that ventures far more

into the political (Stoecker, 2003).

A parallel to the Dewey and Freire's divide are two distinct approaches of service

learning, the charity service learning model (providing service) and the social justice

model (helping to instigate social change). While Dewey saw the integration of the

individual into society as plausible, Freire believed the individual could be free when the

oppressive social and economic structures were changed through collective social action

(Stoecker, 2003). These distinct approaches to service learning elucidate the contrast between the neutral and non-neutral education. Perhaps another way to describe the difference in these approaches is working within structures, or working to deconstruct them. While Dewey and Freire share an aspiration for a more democratic and fair society through experiential education, they diverge on how to accomplish it.

Paulo Freire: The Educational Practice of Freedom

As with Dewey, Freire is more than pedagogy. Freire's theory is based on a "critical understanding of the dynamics of political power and of the dialectical relationship between the word (language or text) and the world (cultural context)" (Deans, 1999, p. 15). Marxism, liberation theology, and phenomenology influenced Freire's philosophy, and his goal for individual and political/societal transformation through dialog, the praxis of action-reflection, and fostering the development of a critical consciousness (Deans, 1999).

Study

Freire (1970) is well known for criticizing the "banking concept of education", an analogy between education and depositing money into a bank account, with "students as depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p.72). This system involves memorizing and regurgitating information to receive, file and store the deposits (information). Freire (1970) stated, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (p.79) The underlying assumption is those who bestow the knowledge are considered knowledgeable and those who the knowledge is bestowed upon know nothing

thereby squelching a process of inquiry, and enacting a system of oppression where the world is neither revealed or transformed (Freire, 1970).

Freire advocated for a humanist approach where teachers and students are partners in the educative experience. While Freire's orientation and approach is decisively more radical and political than Dewey's, there is a similarity in the type of democratic education they espouse. To counter the baking system model, Freire (1970) posed a problem-posing education model for students to "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83). In this model students and teachers reflect simultaneously, establishing an "authentic form of thought and action" (Freire, 1970, p.83). Education and politics are one in the same for Freire, with the more traditional methods serving the dominant political regime (Deans, 1999).

Reflection

For Freire, reflection and action were interconnected, and if one is sacrificed, the other will suffer. The sacrifice of action leads to empty words, and the absence of reflection leads to "uncritical behavior" (Deans, 1999, p. 20). Reflection helps clarify and determine further action, a process that continually feeds itself. Freire's concept of conscientzation is the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality. The generative cycle of learning in Freire's praxis fits well into service

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learning's principle of reflection, and provides an epistemological rationale for reflection as a way of knowing.

In the introduction to 30th anniversary edition of the first printing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donald Macedo, a colleague of Freire's discusses the consequence of misinterpreting Freire's model. Macedo articulates a concern that in many aspects "waters down" Freire's dialogical method. Macedo (2000) describes as follows,

> The reason some of these educators invoke a romantic pedagogical mode that exoticizes discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice. At the same time, educators who misinterpret Freire's notion of dialogical teaching also refuse to link experiences to the politics of the culture and critical democracy, thus reducing their pedagogy to a form of middle-class narcissism. This creates on one hand, the transformation of dialogical teaching into a method invoking conversations that provides participants with a group-therapy space for stating their grievances and offers the teacher facilitator a safe pedagogical zone to deal with his or her class guilt (p.18).

Herein lies the danger of diluting and undermining the authentic purpose premise of Freire's work which is highly political and often collides with more mainstream approaches in higher education. As Freire reminded us, "what these educators are calling diological is a process that hides the true nature of dialogical process of learning and knowing" (Freire, 2000, p.18). This is of particular concern regarding the use of reflection in service learning, and Freire's belief that "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world" (2000, p.125). Heading

Macedo's warning in the above passage, reflection and dialog in the service learning experience that omits a connection to the economic, political and social structures of society misappropriates the intention of Freire's critical pedagogy, thus perpetuating the oppression he fought to dismantle.

Reciprocity

Given the highly political and radical nature of Freire's critical pedagogy, he does not mask his goal of a "revolutionary restructuring of the political and economic status quo" (Deans, 1999, p.21). Freire's theories and approaches fit well with the social justice service learning model where social change becomes part of the practice. Using Freire's dialogical, action-reflection praxis, and historical analysis, this model directs students toward a critical examination of the structural causes of social problems and integrates community development principles. While Dewey did not see capitalism as an obstacle to increasing democracy in society, for Freire, capitalism and the disequilibrium of the power was in itself a barrier to democracy (Stoecker, 2003).

A social justice service learning model based on Freire's philosophy and critical pedagogy would favor engaging the community in social change. This is contrary to the more dominant charity model associated with Dewey that is more student than community focused. Institutional structures including credit hours, grading, and time constraints are so deeply embedded in mainstream service learning that when tensions surface they are seldom attributed to a rift between the community and university, rather identified as within the university and resulting from the barriers mentioned above (Stoecker, 2003).

Freire's popular education and critical pedagogy address the central discourse of community engagement and reciprocity in service learning. There is no masking of Freire's agenda that favors grassroots social change rather than agency or institutional placement and partnerships. Another shared characteristic between Freire's popular education and a social justice service learning approach is the belief that structural barriers of race, class, and sex/gender are obstacles to individual and societal transformation (Stoecker, 2003). Attempts to authentically implement the social justice service learning model instigate a discourse on the sometimes-conflicted responsibility of institutions to both maintain the status quo and be vehicles of change. How far are institutions of higher education willing to go in upending their own historic practices in the classroom and the community? Implementing a social justice service learning that is well aligned to Freire's model would certainly go a distance in answering that question.

Literature Review

Research has evidenced positive outcomes of service learning for students and communities (Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Eyler et al., 2001; Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007); however, the body of research to date disproportionately focuses on student outcomes over the community partners they work with (Cress et al., 2010; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennet, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006). The majority of research on students and service learning has focused on outcomes such as improved academic performance, social and personal development, educational motivation, course satisfaction, and self-efficacy using GPAs, surveys, course evaluations, and scales. Qualitative research has utilized interviews, focus

groups, journals and reflective papers; however, this type of research is relatively small in comparison. The scant amount of research on communities suggests service learning is beneficial; however, these studies were exclusive to agencies, and did not include informal networks and individual community members (Cress et al., 2010; Driscoll et al., 1996; Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage et al., 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

The evidence regarding the impact of service learning on students' grades or GPA is mixed. Some studies report a positive effect of community service or service learning on students' GPA (Astin & Sax, 1998; Gray et al., 1998; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Strage, 2000); however, other research has found no difference in the effect on GPA between service-learning and non-service-learning students (Boss, 1994; Hudson, 1996; Kendrick, 1996; Miller, 1994; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). A consideration in the conflicting reports is the suggestion that service learning involves higher-order thinking, therefore grades or GPA are not the most appropriate outcomes for measuring the cognitive effects of service-learning experiences, and while grades are a relatively convenient and inexpensive way to collect data, a combination of grades, surveys, content analysis of reflective writing, and validated scales and observation tools (Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, & Zlotkowski, 2000).

"The impacts and effects of community service learning on educational outcomes includes more than improved cognitive skills" (Conway, et al., 2009, p. 154). A meta-analysis of courses incorporating a service-learning component conducted by Conway et al. (2009) found that students in a course with service-learning had an average increase of 43 points between pre and posttest measures of academic and other variables. In addition

to increased knowledge, GPA and grades, other outcomes included positive changes in academic motivation, self-esteem, course attendance, attitudes towards programs and institutions, and satisfaction with classes and teachers (Conway et al., 2009). Correspondingly, a meta-analysis conducted by Novak et al. (2007) showed that across studies those participating in a service-learning component produced an overall increase of 53% on learning outcomes attainment for students in these courses compared to students not engaged in service-learning; however, this study was limited to a comparison of nine studies of communication courses only.

In addition to learning gains, the literature suggests participation in service learning has a significant impact on students' intrapersonal and social development. Eyler et al. (2001) cites 33 articles and dissertations that connect service learning with increasing "student personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development" (p. 1). Conway et al. (2009) found in their meta-analysis of 58 service-learning studies an average increase of 21 points between pre and posttest evaluations in personal outcomes for students participating in service-learning activities. Eyler et al. (2001) cite 32 studies and dissertations linking service learning with "reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding" (p. 1). Similarly, service learning has been shown to increase students': knowledge of, and ability to get along with people of other races and cultures (Astin & Sax, 1998), tolerance and decrease use of stereotypes (Eyler & Giles, 1999), ability to work with other diverse groups (Osborne, Hammerich, & Hensley, 1998), and ability to put themselves in someone else's shoes irrespective of their background.

Conway et al. (2009) argue that, "service-learning places teaching and learning in a social context, facilitating socially responsible knowledge" (p. 233). A meta-analysis of quantitative studies by Conway et al. (2009) found that service-learning experiences corresponded with a small mean increase on outcomes related to citizenship, with an average increase of 17 points between pretest to post-test means. Citizenship outcomes included measures of personally responsible citizenship, participatory citizenship, justice-oriented citizenship, and combined types. Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of 209 institutions with a sample of over 12,000 students. Three surveys were administered to entering freshmen, the second survey four years later and the third four years later to then former students. After controlling for level of civic engagement prior to college, students' engagement in volunteer service during college was significantly linked with attending graduate school, donating money to the undergraduate college, frequency of socializing with diverse people, helping others in difficulty, developing a meaningful life philosophy, promoting racial understanding, participating in community action programs, participating in environmental cleanup, a sense of efficacy, highest degree earned, hours spent volunteering, career preparation, and degree aspirations.

Summary

The literature indicates that service learning results in documented growth and transformative student development in domains such as student learning and personal and social development (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Conway et al., 2009; Eyler et al., 2001). However, there is a need for advancing the discourse from a social work perspective, and

how the values and mission of social work that are well aligned with service learning

principles can make a contribution to further research that addresses the range of program

options and approaches, the perspective of the community including and not limited to

agencies and organizations, and the institutional impact on faculty and administrators.

Additionally, research is needed to investigate the how service learning impacts

university mandates, attitudes and practices in the community including community

based research, and its contribution to pedagogy beyond service learning classes.

To capture the rich and complex experiences of service learners, faculty and

community, studies need to include a more expanded repertoire of qualitative and

quantitative methods, particularly in depth analysis of student generated course materials.

The increasing use of digital methods for reflection, reporting, and evaluation open new

possibilities for research and deeper understandings of the service leaning experience.

While many of the landmark studies are dated, this significant body of research offers

great promise and rationale for higher education to pursue additional resources to develop

service learning across disciplines, provide training to faculty, and cultivate and expand

relationships with partners in the community including grassroots organizations and

movements.

Consistent with recommendations by Cress et al. (2010) the following

recommendations for further research are contained in their report for Campus Compact,

A Promising Connection: Increasing College Access and Success through Civic

Engagement

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There is a need for further research that can inform institutional practice and deepen understanding of the possibilities and limits of civic engagement as a strategy for producing benefits beyond improving student learning and civic outcomes—and in particular for increasing college access and success. Several general areas warrant attention:

• The link between civic engagement and student access to and success in college. Not until recently have some civic engagement programs been designed with student retention and success as an outcome. Research is needed to understand more about the impact of these programs on students, taking into account different student groups (i.e., graduate or undergraduate level, discipline, prior experience, etc.), institutional settings, and program variation.

• Role of institutional context, including a range of experiences, including, international service learning, yearlong participatory action research projects, and graduate service learning programs.

• Process of civic engagement: We have tended to study outcomes rather than the process of transformation. The use of blogs, reflective papers and journals, and portfolio methods of assessments are ways to help capture the complexity and richness of service learning experiences. We need to redirect our focus from studying instrumental activities like voting to researching individual civic transformation and the development of a sense of civic and personal efficacy.

• Impact of civic engagement on the community: The bulk of literature related to service learning and college access focuses on service-learners rather than on the people they serve (19-20).

The above recommendations raise an important consideration for research, specifically, the need to study the process of transformation and not just outcomes. While outcomes are convincing, and lend institutional support to service learning programs, critical information can be skipped over in the tendency to quantify experiences that are multifaceted and far reaching. Future research must stay mindful of service learning's roots and ideals, going back to the establishment of land grant colleges and universities and goals of a civic-mind education extends beyond the benefits to the student, and as Dewey and Freire would remind us, to the greater good and creation of a more fair and just society.

Table 2: Summary of Studies (adapted from Eyler et al., 2001)

Author/Publication	Description of Study	Outcomes

Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How Undergraduates are Affected by Service Participation. *Journal of College Student Development,* 39(3), 251-263.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Description; Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 11,822 **Final Sample** 3,450 (29%) **Study Design** Pre/post survey, Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey self-report, Institutional records **Outcome Variables** Civic responsibility; Educational attainment; Life skills	The study reported increases in knowledge; student self-report measured civic responsibility and life skills. The analysis also indicated that the more time devoted to service the more positive the effect on students.
Berson, J. S., &Younkin, W. F. (1998). *Doing Well by Doing Good: A Study of the Effects of a Service-Learning Experience on Student Success.* Paper presented at the American Society of Higher Education, Miami, FL.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 286 **Study Design** One shot; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey-self report; Grades; Course evaluations; Interviews; College Records **Outcome Variables** Grades; Satisfaction; Attitudes; Faculty Expectations.	Results indicated that service-learning students achieved significantly higher mean final course grades (.26 difference) when compared to the control group; however, grade composition was not the same for each course. Service-learning subjects also reported a significantly greater level of satisfaction with the course, the instructor, the reading assignments, and the grading system. Service-learning faculty reported that class discussions were more stimulating, included more student involvement and were more challenging academically.
Boss, J. A. (1994). The Effect of Community Service on the Moral Development of College Ethics Students. *Journal of Moral Development,* 23(2), 183-198.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 71 **Study Design** Pre/Post survey; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey-self report; Grades; DIT measurement scale **Outcome Variables** Moral development; Class participation; Learning	On post-test, students in the service-learning section scored significantly higher on their Defining Issues Test (DIT) scores than did the control group (pre- to post- mean gain was 8.61 for first group, 1.74 for the second). In the experimental group, 51% of the students were using principled moral reasoning compared to 13% in the control group. Grades were similar for both classes. Class participation through discussion was also positively correlated with the students' DIT test scores within the experimental group (p<0.01). Students in the experimental group also assigned higher ratings of their improvement as moral people in course evaluations.
Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2000). Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education. *Journal of Higher Education,* 71(3), 273-290.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Description **Sample** Faculty **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 176 **Study Design** One shot **Data Sources** Survey-self report	Faculty felt that their institutions had progressed further in planning and awareness activities than in activities such as research and evaluation. There was greater institutionalization among those who attended a Campus Compact planning institute, established a central office, funded that office with university funds, and located the office under the chief academic officer.

Driscoll, A., Holland, B., Gelmon, S., & Kerrigan, S. (1996). An Assessment Model for Service-Learning: Comprehensive Case Studies of Impact on Faculty, Students, Community, and Institutions. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 3, 66-71.	**Methodology** Quantitative; Qualitative **Purpose** Process; Description; Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 4 classes **Final Sample** 4 classes **Study Design** Pre/Post survey; Case study **Data Sources** Survey-self report; Interviews; Focus groups; Document analyses **Outcome Variables** Varied by sample type	Preliminary findings supported the legitimacy of the predicted impact variables for students, community agencies, and faculty. Service-learning affected students in their: awareness and involvement in the community; personal development; academic achievement; and sensitivity to diversity. The impact on community agencies was evident in that they perceived an effect on their capacity to serve clients, received economic and social benefits, and were satisfied with student interactions. Finally, faculty members felt that community service experiences could be fertile ground for research and other scholarly work.

| Eyler, J. S. & Giles, D. E., Jr. (1999). *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc. | **Methodology** Quantitative; Qualitative
Purpose Outcomes
Sample Students
Original Sample 2462
Final Sample 1535 (62%)
Study Design Pre/Post; Quasi-experimental
Data Sources Survey-self report; Problem-solving interviews; Attitude measurement scales; Interviews
Outcome Variables Citizenship skills & attitudes; Personal development outcomes; Learning; Problem analysis; Critical Thinking; Cognitive development | Analysis of the survey was performed using hierarchical multiple regressions controlling for SES, gender, previous service, minority status, the pre-test measure, and closeness to college faculty. Results were that service learning had a positive impact on such outcomes as personal development, social responsibility, interpersonal skills, tolerance and stereotyping, learning, and application of learning.
A second analysis, which examined the impact of program characteristics on outcomes using only the service-learning sample of 1100 students, showed that the quality of service-learning classes impacts outcomes significantly. Program characteristics such as a placement quality, link between the academic subject matter and service, written and oral reflection, diversity, and community voice were predictive of many student outcomes.
In the problem solving interviews, students had the chance to demonstrate their analysis of a social problem linked to their service. Over the course of a semester, students in service-learning classes in which service and academic study were continuously and closely linked showed significantly more change in the complexity of their problem analysis, their assessment of the locus of problem and solution and in their critical thinking ability than did students in programs with little linkage between the service option and the course of study or students with no service options. Students in the well-integrated service-learning courses were also more likely to apply subject matter knowledge to their problem analysis and to have well developed practical strategies for community action. In both the survey and the single interviews, students reported greater learning when they had higher quality experiences. The pre/post-semester interview data also support this finding. |

Eyler, J. S., Giles, D. E., Jr., & Braxton, J. (1997). The Impact of Service-Learning on College Students. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 4,5-15.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 2462 **Final Sample** 1535 **Study Design** Pre/post; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey self-report; Problem-solving interviews **Outcome Variables** Citizenship skills; Personal outcomes; Learning	Though several studies were included in the project; this one examines the impact of service learning on outcomes and pre-service differences. Students who chose service learning differed from those who did not in the target attitudes, skills, values, and understanding of social issues. Participation in service learning and closeness to faculty increased student's belief in personal efficacy, and that can solve problems. Service learning was also predictive of a career of valuing people, of volunteering and of attempting to influence the political system. Service-learning was also predictive of: students' post-test assessments of their political participation skills and their tolerance for others; students' ability to place themselves in someone else's shoes; and students' ability to remain open to new ideas. Finally, service learning may have also facilitated faculty-student relationships. Based on their findings, the authors recommend including service learning in the core curriculum rather than keeping it a co-curricular option.
Gazley, B. & Littlepage, L. (2006). Understanding service learning form a volunteer management capactive. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the association for research on nonprofit organizations and voluntary action, Chicago, IL.	**Methodology** Quantitative; **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Community partners **Original Sample** **Final Sample** 2,000 non profit a **Study Design** **Data Sources** Survey **Outcome Variables** How community agencies use volunteer management tools and differentiate the various forms of student involvement including service learning	The study revealed that although most students working in community-based learning work in non profit settings, very few university administrators or faculty have much knowledge about how the agencies operate, their expectations of students, or the impact of students on the agency. Though the agencies reported challenges of working with students as mentioned above, they results indicated the benefits outweigh disadvantages.

Gray, M.J., Ondaatje, E. H., Fricker, R., Geschwind, S., Goldman, C. A., Kaganoff, T., Robyn, A., Sundt, M., Vogelgesang, L., & Klein, S. P. (1998). *Coupling Service and Learning in Higher Education: The Final Report of the Evaluation of the Learn and Serve America, Higher Education Program.* The RAND Corporation.	*Note: Study includes secondary HERI data from Astin & Sax, 1998* **Methodology** Quantitative; Qualitative **Purpose** Evaluative, Description, Outcomes **Sample** Students; Community organizations; Institutions **Original Sample** HERI survey NR: Rand survey 3376 Students; 1245 Institutions; 1347 Community organizations **Final Sample** HERI survey 2171 Students (approximately 21%); Rand survey 1320 Students (21%); 930 Institutions (75%); 1347 Community organizations (67%) **Study Design** One shot **Data Sources** Survey, self-report; Interviews; Journals; Direct observation **Outcome Variables** Learning; Life skills;	Data from the Annual Accomplishments Survey, which was administered to institutions receiving funding, showed that the most common capacity-building activity undertaken was course development. Between 1995-97, there was an increase of 3000 service-learning courses offered. Another survey for students conducted in the spring 1997 compared 725 service-learning students to 597 non-service-learning students. These two groups did not differ in their perceptions of the course impact; however, students who reported strong effects of service on their development were more likely than others to report that course content linked to their service experiences. The service learning group had slightly higher grade point averages and were more satisfied with their courses than the non service-learning group, and reported that they engaged in some kind of reflection either through writing or discussion. Students who volunteered more than 20 hours per semester applied course to their service experiences and discussed these experiences in class, reaped the greatest gains on academic and life-skills outcomes.
Kendrick, J. R. (1996). Outcomes of Service-Learning in an Introduction to Sociology Course. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 2, 72-81.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 123 **Study Design** Pre/post; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey, self-report; Grades; Course evaluations; Attitude measurement scales **Outcome Variables** Social responsibility; Personal efficacy; Application	Students in the service-learning section showed greater improvements than did the control section in measures of social responsibility, personal efficacy, and they also reported greater ability to apply course concepts to new situations. Compared to the control group, service-learning students indicated that it was more important to work toward equal opportunity and volunteer time to help others. The control group subjects showed a significant change in attitudes about their involvement in community, but were less likely to agree that they could make a difference. There was no significant difference between the service learning and the control group in grades. Seventy-two percent of students from both groups showed low motivation for service learning by either "disagreeing" or "strongly disagreeing" that they felt motivated to learn.

Markus, G. B., Howard, J. P. F., & King, D. C. (1993). Integrating Community Service and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results From an Experiment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 15(4), 410-419.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 89 **Study Design** Pre/post; Experimental **Data Sources** Survey, self-report; Attitude scales; Course evaluations; Grades **Outcome Variables** Social and personal learning	Results included the fact that at the end of the semester, service-learning students attached significantly increased importance to equal opportunity, volunteering, and finding a helping career. For the most part, control groups students did not show significant changes in these areas. However, participating inservice learning increased students' intentions to help others in need. Service-learning students were also significantly more likely to self-report that they learned to apply, and had significantly better course grades.
Miller, J. (1994). Linking Traditional and Service-Learning Courses: Outcome Evaluation Utilizing Two Pedagogically Distinct Models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 1, 29-36.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 658 **Final Sample** 125 (19%) **Study Design** Pre/post; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey, self report **Outcome Variables** Personal and academic growth	Students who selected service learning did not substantially differ demographically from the control group. Service-learning students did differ in that they had significantly higher expectations than their peers that the service-learning experience would be helpful and valuable, and would more positively affect their educational experience. At posttest, service-learning students rated their experiences as being significantly more valuable than the control group, but did not differ in their reports concerning gains in personal development or in the final grades they received. They did, however, report an enhanced ability to apply concepts outside of classroom.
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, 5-13.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 95 **Study Design** Pre/post; Experimental **Data Sources** Survey, self report **Outcome Variables** Self-worth; Cognitive complexity; Social behavior; Competence	Service-learning groups showed significant positive improvements when compared to no-service learning groups on cognitive complexity, social competency; perceived ability to work with diverse others; and self worth in social situations. There was no significant change in the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, but service-learning students were more realistic about their sense of self-worth.

Parker-Gwin, R. P. & Mabry, J. B. (1998). Service-Learning as Pedagogy and Civic Education: Comparing Outcome for Three Models. *Teaching Sociology,* 26, 276-291.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 525 **Final Sample** 260 (49.5%) **Study Design** Pre/post; Quasi-experimental **Data Sources** Survey, self-report **Outcome Variables** Academic and civic outcomes	Pre- and post-surveys included Likert-type measures of personal social responsibility, the importance of community service, civic awareness, motives for volunteering, self-ratings of analytical and problem solving skills. The post course survey also included perceptions of course effects. Contrary to expectations, paired t-tests revealed that at the end of the semester, service-learning students rated the importance of community service significantly less favorably than at pretest, and students agreed significantly less with the statement that adults should give some time for the good of their community. These results, however, are specific to the type of service-learning course taken. Scores decreased on the measures only for students in courses requiring service learning. A positive result was that students in the placement-service optional courses significantly decreased in self-oriented motives for volunteering. Students in the consulting model service-learning classes and in the placement-service optional classes also reported increases in their critical thinking ability over the semester.
Reeb, R.N., Sammon, J.A., &Isackson, N.L. (1999). Clinical application of the service learning model in Psychology: Evidence of educational and clinical benefits. Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 18(1/2), 65-82.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** **Study Design**Quasi-experimental **Data Sources**: Multiple choice exams/essays, post semester course evaluation **Outcome Variables** Academic performance	Students in the service learning section received an extra credit hour; however, all students completed the same exams in determining their grade. Service learning and traditional students achieved similar grades on the first exam, though as the semester progressed students in the service learning section demonstrated higher academic performance, and gave higher ratings on a post-semester course evaluation on level of learning, ability to apply course concepts to new situations, interest and motivation, personal development and quality of the instructor
Roose, D., Daphne, J., Miller, A. G., Norris, W., Peacock, R., White, C., & White, G. (1997). *Black Student Retention Study: Oberlin College.* Oberlin College.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Description **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 305 **Final Sample** 170 (48%) **Study Design** One shot **Data Sources** Survey, self report; Interviews	The data for this study were interviews conducted by telephone with African American students from 1987-1991 (final n = 170). For African-American students who had attended Oberlin, involvement in community service was the factor most strongly correlated with graduation in the entire study.

Sandy, M. & Holland, B. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 13(1). 30-43.	**Methodology** Qualitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Community partners **Original Sample** **Final Sample** 99 partners of 8 campuses **Study Design** Focus groups **Data Sources** Focus groups	Identified by the community agencies were ways that service learning students contributed to client outcomes and the increased capacity of the agency to take on new projects. The community partners also expressed a dedication to student learning as a reason for their participation with service learning classes. A limitation identified by the researchers was the study did not include community partners who were not working with service learning students.
Strage, A. (2000). Service-Learning: Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes in a College Level Lecture Course. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,*7, 5-13.	**Methodology** Quantitative; Qualitative **Purpose** Outcomes **Sample** Students **Original Sample** NR **Final Sample** 477 **Study Design** One shot **Data Sources** Grades; Journals **Outcome Variables** Learning	Grades on midterms and finals were compared between service-learning and non service-learning students using ANOVAs. The service-learning students scored significantly (4.9%) higher on course exams than non-service-learning students. However, the increase was not distributed evenly between the first through third exams. Service-learning students scored higher on the second midterm and the final, but their first mid-term scores did not differ from non-service-learning students. This gain in points is due to service-learning students scoring highly on the essay questions. There was no difference between the two groups on multiple-choice questions. The final was a take-home, all essay exam. These results indicate that it took time for the positive academic effects of service learning to manifest. Furthermore, the effects of service learning on mastery of course material were best seen in student narratives. The researcher did a second set of ANOVAs to determine if site placement (preschool, elementary, middle or high school) impacted student learning. Site placement did not have an effect on the first midterm or the final, but scores of the essay portion of the second midterm did vary significantly by placement, with students serving at middle/high schools performing more poorly than others. Journal entries suggested that students were making links between course material and service, and that the reflection on these links increased through the semester.

Vogelgesang, L. J., and Astin, A. W. (2000). Comparing the Effects of Service-Learning and Community Service. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 7, 25-34.	**Methodology** Quantitative **Purpose** Description **Sample** Students **Original Sample** 22,236 **Final Sample** 19,268 to 20,254 **Study Design** Pre/post survey **Data Sources** Survey self-report **Outcome Variables** Behaviors; Values; Learning	Findings included the fact that all eleven dependent variables changed significantly when service-learning or community service was performed. For some variables community service with no ties to coursework has a more positive impact than service learning. Indeed, the self-efficacy and leadership outcomes would not show significant changes unless students were also participating in generic community service. There are also some variables for which service learning is a superior predictor of outcomes, including some affective measures (commitment to activism, and promoting racial understanding) and all three learning measures. Participating in service learning than by performing generic community service also impacted choosing a service related career more positively.

Review of Gaps in Service Learning Literature and Research

Despite the documented merits of service learning, service learning pedagogical models tend to focus more on students than communities and at may fail to address socio-economic issues of the communities in which students serve. The service learning literature in social work has failed to discuss how social work's principles might be used to address the existing limitations of service learning. Social work education's core curriculum is based on values and ethics that emphasize diversity, social and economic justice, and social and welfare policy; therefore, it might be expected that social work as a discipline be at the forefront of academic service learning's development and the Higher Education Civic Engagement (HSCE) movement (Phillips, 2007).

While research on service leaning has evidenced gains in student outcomes, there is a scarcity of research that explores the lived experience, meaning making, and transformative process of students who participate in service learning courses. Furthermore, research on community partners is scant and has focused on the linkages

with community agencies, overlooking informal networks and civically involved community members who work alongside students. Further research is needed using qualitative methods aimed at understanding the service learning experience and the meaning it has for students and community partners with whom they work.

Methodology

Phenomenology

Phenomenology provides a rich and descriptive source of data and is well suited to better understand the meaning of lived experiences though their words and descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological inquiry helps researchers gain understanding of the essential meaning of lived experiences from the participants' perspective and descriptions; therefore this method was employed in this study. I was interested in the common themes and shared experiences of the students and community partners, and while they were a diverse group.

The data for these studies were weekly blog entries by 17 students and 9 interview transcripts of one on one interviews with community members engaged in service learning projects in a small rural town, approximately an hour and half away from the university. The service learning projects were done over the course of 2009 – 20012. The blogs were written and interviews conducted contemporaneously with that work. A phenomenological analysis of the texts was done following the final data collection. I used a combination of the various approaches to phenomenological analysis as described by (Moustakas, 1994). The steps used in this study to analyze the blogs and interviews were incorporated from Moustakas' (1994) modification of several

phenomenological methods that work with the descriptions of participant experiences in a form of text, most often transcripts. The use of blogs as a "living text" create a "feeling and understanding of the phenomenon" (Willis, 2004, p.8, 10). My involvement in this course was more than co-instructor; my husband's extended family are decades-long residents of the town and I am the founder/coordinator of a community project aimed at revitalizing the town. As co-instructor, I was a participant observer who interacted with and observed the students and community partners over the semester. In these two studies I have focused on what the text reveals about the participants' lived experiences; however, my position in the classroom and community cannot be ignored and was addressed through adhering to the phenomenological procedures of writing assumption statements, bracketing, writing field notes throughout the analysis process, and peer review (Armour et. al., 2009).

Procedures of phenomenological analysis were used as follows: (1) recording a list of assumptions to approach the data with "a sense of newness" (Anderson & Spencer, 2002, p.1331); (2) bracketing my experience working in the community, as a student and blogger; (3) conducting a naïve reading to study the entirety of the data; (4) reducing and eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experiences of the participants; (5) creating meaning units from the significant statements (Table 1); (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into clusters of meaning (themes); (8) test themes against the entirety of data (validated by the full text of blogs or interviews). The reliability of themes was assessed with two peer readers familiar with the methods and topic.

The clusters of meaning resulted in the five essential themes. The validated themes were used to write a textural description or "what" the participants experienced. Additionally, the themes were used to write a structural description of the setting and context - also referred to as the "how" participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). From the integration of the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the essence of the phenomena was constructed, synthesizing the common experiences of the group as a whole. Pseudonyms were used in reporting specific comments.

Research Questions and Components of Three-Article Dissertation

Article One: New frontiers for social work and service learning: An interdisciplinary, reflective model of reciprocal community-university engagement

RQ1: How can social work utilize service learning pedagogy to strengthen university-community engagement?

Academic service learning has grown in popularity across disciplines and universities. While its merits are well documented, criticisms of various approaches indicate improvements are needed so ensure communities benefit as much as students, that the service projects are meaningful and that students learn about the broader complex social issues of the communities they serve. As a relative newcomer to service learning, social work is well positioned to enter the discourse by developing best practices for service learning pedagogy. After reviewing the underlying theories and state of service learning in social work, we present a 3-component service learning model that capitalizes on the structure of a university-community partnership, mobilizes interdisciplinary teams

of students for community-identified projects, and integrates student, community and faculty reflection on complex social structures. Implications for social work education and research are discussed.

Targeted Journal: *Social Work Education: The international journal*

Article Two: Blogs as a Representation of Student Experiences in a

Service Learning Course

RQ2: What was the experience of students in a university service learning class as described in their blogs?

Abstract

Research on service learning has demonstrated positive outcomes in the areas of student learning, personal and social development, and increased civic engagement; however, there is a scarcity of research examining the lived experiences of students. This study consisted of two cohorts of 17 students in a service learning class who described their experiences working in a rural through their blogs. The current study suggests that the reflexive aspect of blogging fits well with the service learning principle of reflection, and reveals the students' emotive experience over the course of the semester, including their epiphanies, discomfort, disappointment, excitement, and satisfaction. Additionally, blogging demonstrates the attributes of service learning pedagogy to support the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of complex problems in a real life setting not attainable solely in a classroom setting or through traditional classroom tools, such as exams and papers.

Targeted journal: *Michigan Journal of Service Learning*

Article Three

RQ3: What was the lived experience of community members working with university service learning classes?

Abstract

The bulk of research on service learning has focused on student outcomes; however, there is a scarcity of research examining the lived experiences of community partners. Additionally, the few studies that exist to date involve agencies and have not included informal networks and civically active citizens. This study consisted of interviews with nine community partners, a combination of agency employees and active citizens, residing in a rural Southwestern town that worked with a network of service learning classes on a variety of community-identified projects. The current study supports the contribution of service learning to communities, the importance of investing in reciprocal relationships, and the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents. Recommendations for further research and strategies to support reciprocal and meaningful community engagement are discussed.

Targeted journal: *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*

Chapter 2: New frontiers for social work and service learning: An interdisciplinary, model of community-university engagement

Abstract

Academic service learning has grown in popularity across disciplines and universities. While its merits are well documented, criticisms of various approaches to service learning indicate improvements are needed to ensure communities benefit as much as students, that service projects are meaningful and students learn about the broader complex socio-economic issues of the communities they serve. As a relative newcomer to service learning, social work is well positioned to enter the discourse by further developing best practices for service learning pedagogy. After reviewing the underlying theories and the current state of service learning in social work, we present a 3-component service learning pedagogy model that capitalizes on the structure of a university-community partnership, mobilizes interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects, and promotes reflection on complex economic and social justice issues. Implications for social work education and research are discussed.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the growing momentum of academic service learning (interchangeably used with service learning) among institutions of higher education is attributed to an increased commitment to solving social problems (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Service learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development (Jacoby, 1996). A

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major strength of service learning is that the model allows universities to place equal importance on three outcomes: student learning, community service, and the creation of collaborative, respectful and reciprocal relationships between students and the community members with whom they partner (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010). However, at times, the translation of service learning principles, more specifically the goal of achieving reciprocal and sustainable relationships with communities, has proven to be difficult, and service-learning curricula can fall short of reaching the intended goal of benefitting students and communities equally. A frequent criticism of service learning is that students receive more benefits than the communities they partner with, the artificial timeframe of the academic semester is not sufficient to effectively engage with community partners, and faculty and students may fail to reflect on and address the complex, social structures facing the communities in which students work (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010).

As a relative newcomer to service-learning course offerings, social work is well positioned to develop innovative, best practice models for service learning. The foundational constructs associated with civic and community engagement are clearly aligned with the core tenets of social work (NASW, 1999), the values and philosophy of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008), and the mission of social work education (Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, & Rose, 2010; Burke, 2011). The realization of the compatibility of service learning by social work educators has resulted in more frequent use of service learning in core and elective courses (McGuire & Majewski, 2011), but the pedagogical methods for implementing service learning lack a cohesive framework.

To illustrate the potential for addressing these challenges, this article highlights one pedagogical approach based on 3 critical components: (1) the structure of a university-community partnership; (2) community identified projects for interdisciplinary student teams; and (3) integrated reflection on complex economic and social justice issues. We begin with an overview of service learning, including the status of service learning in social work education, the theoretical framework that undergirds our approach, and then discuss how the model can inform social work's ability to develop best practices in service learning pedagogy.

Literature Review

Service learning

Academic service learning is widely interpreted and defined in higher education. Kendall (1990) identified 147 definitions of academic service learning in the literature with programs designated as academic service learning varying from brief to intensive. The duration of service learning programs ranges from a one-time experience, several weeks, a semester course, and integrated programs consisting of a series of connected courses. The following definition of service learning developed by Bringle and Hatcher (1995) is the most comprehensive and frequently cited in the literature:

> We view service learning as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary

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service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentation. Unlike practice and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education (p. 222).

Despite various definitions and applications, service-learning praxis consistently includes study/academic credit, community service, reciprocal relationships with the community, and reflection. Service learning is one way for universities to participate in community engagement, and occurs through a coursed-based learning experience in the community for students from a variety of disciplines across a growing number of campuses.

Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents that represent some 6 million students dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service learning in higher education. In 2009-10, 35% of the students enrolled at Campus Compact schools participated in service, service learning, and civic engagement activities with 60% of the institutions defining and identifying service learning courses, and 93% of responding schools offering service learning courses during the 2009-10 academic year with an average of 35 faculty, or 7%, of all faculty, who taught courses that incorporate service learning into their syllabi across a broad range of disciplines (Campus Compact, 2011).

Service Learning in Social Work Education

Service learning is emerging in social work education. Social work education's

core curriculum is based on values and ethics that emphasize diversity, social and economic justice, and social welfare policy (NASW, 2008); therefore, it might be expected that social work as a discipline be at the forefront of academic service learning's development (Phillips, 2007). Instead, the lack of an earlier impetus behind service learning is perhaps due to social work's focus strong clinical orientation and field education.

The shift to evidenced-based practice (EBP) and clinical, intervention-based social work, while not necessarily mutually exclusive to community based social work, has created two distinct schools of thought (Specht & Courtney, 1994). While social work education includes both clinical and community options (with varying terms), the pendulum has swung toward a dominance of an EBP clinical orientation (Burke, 2011). Service learning teases out this division with a focus that is equal part student and community centered, and is explicit that the community identifies the needs to be addressed, not the "experts" from the university whose motivation is more focused on student-learning and specific skill sets to be gained.

There is also a misperception that service learning and field work serve the same purpose (Kropf & Mininder, 2002). There may be a temptation to view the field practicum as social work education's service learning component; however, the two are distinct in many ways. Students in field are typically separated from one another and closely supervised; whereas, the service learning experience affords students "a rare opportunity to collectively solve problems and engage in long-range planning within a learning community" (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 319). Community engagement is at the

forefront of the service learning experience, and while skill building is a desired outcome, the linkage of classroom learning to reciprocal relationships with the community sets it apart from the objectives of field education. Service learning places equal importance on student learning and benefit to the community, whereas, the field practicum prioritizes student skill building (Kropf & Mininder, 2002; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). This is a significant point of departure that distinguishes service learning from the social work field practicum (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). This distinction is important in allowing social work to respond to the recent upsurge in university and student demands for civic engagement through both core curriculum and elective courses.

Despite the latecomer status of social work in service learning, the integration of service learning in social work is growing. Service learning has been integrated in social work core and elective courses (Kropf & Mininder, 2002; Nadel, Majewski, & Sullivan-Cosetti, 2007; Norris & Schwartz, 2009; Schmid & Blit-Cohen, 2009; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002). Social work courses integrating service learning include Social Welfare Policy and Services (Droppa, 2007), Introduction to Social Work (Watkins, Charlesworth, & House, 2007), Research Methods (Harder, 2010), Human Behavior and the Social Environment (Ames & Stephen, 2007), Human Diversity and Social Justice (Blundo, 2010; Yoakam & Bolanos, 2007), Introduction to Social Welfare (Allen, Rainford, Rodenhiser, & Brascia, 2007), and special off campus projects (Nadel et al., 2007). While not exhaustive, Table 1 lists social work programs that utilize service learning in their curriculum based on a database of social work journals and an Internet search of social work programs.

Table 3: Service learning and social work programs

Social Work Program	Service Learning Program
University of Georgia School of Social Work	Domestic and International
New York University, Silver School of Social Work	Elective service learning courses
Boise State University	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Seton Hill University School of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Nazareth University Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of Nebraska School of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
North Carolina State University at Raleigh Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
College of St. Benedict/St. Johns University Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Iona College Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Trinity College Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
West Virginia University in Morgantown Division of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of Tennessee at Knoxville College of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Mississippi State Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
Louisiana State University School of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of Iowa School of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum, International Programs
Jackson State School of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of North Carolina at Wilmington	Elective and special project course
Christopher Newport University Department of Social Work	International service learning project
University of New Hampshire	Integrated into core curriculum
University of West Florida	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of Southern Maine	Integrated into core curriculum
West Chester University Department of Social Work	Service learning courses including core curriculum
University of Texas at Austin	Elective courses and international program

Research on service learning in social work is also expanding. Lemieux and Allen (2007) conducted a review of scholarly publications that "specifically described and evaluated academic coursework undertaken by a group or class of social work students that integrated a community-based service component distinct from both volunteerism and field instruction" (p. 313). This review yielded eight scholarly publications that reported on eight studies, with two qualitative and six quantitative. All but three of the studies were published prior to 2002 and mostly quantitative with the exception of one

study that used mixed methods including focus groups, journals, and course evaluations (William & Reeves, 2004). Similar to other service learning findings, the authors report on evidenced gains in the areas of student learning, personal and social development, and limited demonstrated beneficial outcomes to communities for service learning in social work (Forte, 1997; Williams & Reeves, 2004; Williams et al., 2002).

Two social work journals have recently dedicated entire issues to service learning, the Spring 2011 issue of *Advances in Social Work*, and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* in 2012, indicating an upswing in social work research on service learning. Articles in these two issues are mainly conceptual; however, six articles report on research findings. The findings from these studies suggest social work students participating in service learning increased their civic engagement (Byers & Grey, 2012), a greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research (Postlethwait, 2012), service learning aided in meeting course goals (Maccio, 2011), increased self-efficacy and responsibility to effect change using a mixed methods (Ericson, 2011), enhanced outcomes for EPAS (Campbell, 2012), and increased cultural awareness and educational growth (Bolea, 2012). Most studies See table 1 below for summary of the recent research described above.

Table 1: Summary of recent service learning research in social work from *Advances in Social Work*, and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* special editions

Author	Description of Study	Outcomes
Byers & Grey, 2012	Qualitative (interviews)	Greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research
Postlethwait, 2012	Mixed Methods (survey and open ended questions)	Greater appreciation, comfort, and interest in conducting research using mixed methods

Maccio, 2011	Quantitative (surveys)	Student belief that service learning aided course goals
Ericson, 2011	Mixed methods (surveys and journals)	Enhanced outcomes for EPAS
Campell, 2012	Mixed methods (pre and post test survey and reflective paper)	Enhanced outcomes for EPAS
Bolea, 2012	Course evaluation	Increaded cultural awareness and educational growth

Despite its merits, there can be flaws in the way service learning is implemented pedagogically. Those calling for a more cohesive framework note that service learning tends to designed more for the students than the communities, raising concerns about actual and perceived value of the communities in which students work. In addition, most service learning projects are bound by the artificial timeframe of the academic semester, potentially presenting an ethical quandary and casualty with the perpetual motion in and out of communities (Tryon, Stoecker, Martin, Seblonka, Hilgendorf, &Nellis, 2008), often without sufficient time to transfer new knowledge or resources to the community. Also, deep reflection may not be a required part of the service- learning course, allowing students, and sometimes faculty, to gloss over the complex, socio-economic and social justice issues facing the communities in which students work (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010). A number of social work principles are brought to bear on addressing these criticisms, including social work's long history of university-community engagement, focus on student reflection, and commitment to empowering communities. More than any other discipline, social work's commitment to social justice and the profession's responsibility to alleviate social problems is a conceptual fit for service learning which is

built on reflection, community service, and reciprocal relationships with community partners (Lemieux & Allen, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The philosophical and theoretical foundation of service learning has been attributed to the work of John Dewey who aligned experiential education to participatory democracy (Cummings, 2000; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Harkavy & Hartley, 2010). More recently, Paulo Freire has been included in the theoretical dialog on service learning based on his critical pedagogy centered on a process of dialog, praxis and historical analysis (Deans, 1999). While Dewey's work serves as the primary theoretical and philosophical foundation for service learning, the more contemporary radical political model is implicit in Freire's critical pedagogy influenced by Marxist theories and invites the discourse about political and apolitical service learning. These two theories represent both overlapping and distinct lenses to view service learning; however, they support a theoretical framework that addresses diverse models of service learning and its intricate relationship to community and civic engagement. Dewey believed that intelligence was more than a consequence of problem solving action and experience; rather it is acquired and developed as a result of reflective, strategic, real world problem solving in action and experience (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2009). Thus, the methodologies of both Dewey and Friere establish a strong theoretical foundation for the role of reflection in service learning.

Dewey's theories and philosophy encompass more than pedagogy and his close relationship with Jane Addams and Hull House broadened his view of the school beyond

education alone, and the importance of partnerships between communities and schools in forming a true participatory democracy (Benson et al., 2009). In his 1902 essay, *School as a Social Center*, Dewey argued for making the school a social center in practice, not just theory. As with Dewey, Freire's work also transcends pedagogy. Freire's theory is based on a "critical understanding of the dynamics of political power and of the dialectical relationship between the word (language or text) and the world (cultural context)" (p.15). The influence of Marxism, liberation theology, and phenomenology is evident in Friere's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* in which he promotes the critique of oppressive structures and institutions. Freire's goals for individual and political/societal transformation was to be achieved through dialog, the praxis of action-reflection, and fostering the development of a critical consciousness (Deans, 1999).

A social justice service-learning model based on Freire's philosophy and critical pedagogy would favor engaging the community in social change. This is contrary to the dominant charity model associated with Dewey's principles that are more focused on the student's learning and future civic engagement. Freire's popular education and critical pedagogy address the central debate of community/civic engagement and reciprocity in service learning. There is no masking of Freire's agenda that favors grassroots social change rather than agency or institutional placement and partnerships. This model is also more process than outcome oriented. Another characteristic of the merger between Freire's popular education and a social justice service learning approach is the belief that the structural barriers of race, class, and sex/gender are obstacles to individual and societal transformation (Stoecker, 2003).

A parallel to the Dewey-Freire divide are two distinct approaches of service learning, the charity service-learning model and the social justice model. The charity model that dominates service learning is focused on providing service rather than social change by questioning the oppression and acting for solutions as the social justice model does. While Dewey saw the integration of the individual into society as plausible, Freire believed the individual could be free when the oppressive social and economic structures were changed through collective social action (Stoecker, 2003). Perhaps another way to describe the difference in these approaches is working within structures versus deconstructing them. While Dewey and Freire share an intention for a more democratic and fair society through an experiential educative process, they diverge on how to accomplish it; yet the work of both theorists particularly supports a service learning pedagogical model which seeks to create just society through increased resources to communities while educating students through experiential learning and deep reflection. This theoretical foundation informed the development of our service-learning pedagogical model.

Pedagogical Model

Grounded in social work principles and designed to avoid previously identified service-learning drawbacks, we embedded the service-learning course within the framework of 3 critical components. First, the structure of a university-community partnership wherein projects can be conceptualized as ongoing helped transcend the boundary of a single semester and provided the means for entering and maintaining relationships with communities. While the duration of service learning varies, the

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university involvement through service learning runs the risk of leaving a trail of unfulfilled promises in the community or agency, and a sense of abandonment after the community served their purpose to the university (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig, 2010). Second, because service learning is a growing university-wide practice, interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects support the reality that community projects often require the expertise of more than one discipline. Third, reflection on complex social issues was built into the course content and teaching methods addressed the need to have students, faculty and community members engaged in real dialogue about socio-economic concerns which frame the need for many of the service learning projects.

Figure 1 depicts the service learning projects in play with the 3 components of the model (see Appendix I).

The Course

The Global Project Development course (GPD) was co-developed and co-taught by the first author, a social work PhD student, and second author, an associate professor of social work at a large, southern university. The course components included service learning project work in the community, required readings, blog posts to respond to specific assignments and ongoing experiences, and a presentation at the end of the semester. The course utilized the Learning Record (LR), a portfolio based assessment system for gathering, organizing, analyzing, evaluating, and reporting evidence of student progress and achievement. The principles of the LR model include review of various student assignments over time in the course and observations that focus on what students

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demonstrate they know and can do. Students argue their grade using their work samples as evidence. The LR system is an optimum method of grading when the focus of a course is on a process rather than a product.

The class was scheduled to meet once a week for three hours; however, once students chose their projects, class time was often allocated for travel to the community either individually, in small groups, or collectively as a class. Throughout the semester the instructors were available via email and phone, and often accompanied students to the community on days outside the designated class time. An internet based Wiki served as a collective workspace that housed students' folders, group project folders, articles, videos, calendar, links to student blogs, and a course talk section for class communication. The Wiki enabled a notification to be sent to all users when pages and files were added, as well as for logistical updates.

As a backdrop to development of the course, both authors had previous experience with taking students abroad for service learning projects and realized that the current U.S. discourse on global development is often limited to a "location abroad" while domestic project development needs abound. Thus, the course engaged students in readings, reflection and critical analysis of significant social, political and economic problems confronting local and global communities, with an emphasis on underdeveloped communities in our "own back yards". For the local community, we chose a rural town 90 miles away because of the first author's existing relationship with the town's current revitalization initiatives, which were already supported by a university 15 miles from the town. The course was designed to place interdisciplinary teams of

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students directly into the community to develop and implement projects to support the town's revitalization efforts over the course of several semesters.

The Community

Located two hours away from our campus, the rural community has an estimated median household income of $32,000, a per capita income of $15,050, with 21% of the residents' income below the poverty level. District wide, 74% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and 39.8% of children under 18 are living below the federal poverty level. Like many small towns across the American South that once thrived, this rural town experienced a decline in population and economic prosperity when the railroad discontinued passenger service, the manufacturing base evaporated, and corporate land acquisitions diminished the agriculture. As a result many residents left to seek employment in larger cities. Most of the commercial storefronts are vacant, either repurposed as storage units for the few families who own commercial property or in a state of disrepair. The low property tax makes this a desirable option for those who amassed enough wealth to ride out decades of decline. The structural blight coupled with the potholed streets make for a disparaging picture to the first time visitor.

While many residents contend with poverty and unemployment concerns, the African American neighborhood, still referred to as "black folk's town" has suffered the consequence of the economic decline more severely. The legacy of segregation is evident in the lack of African American representation in city government, community boards, businesses, and in the school district where there is not one African American teacher or administrator. In addition to the overall economic and built environmental decline, there

are few civic, cultural, or recreational engagement opportunities for youth and residents other than a variety of sports events, though none more celebrated than football. Youth centers and programs that provide social or recreational activities for young people are largely absent. Similar to the younger generation, the elderly lacked crucial support services as well as lack of public transportation services.

The most significant community assets include the numerous churches that play a prominent role and form the hub of social networks for many residents, an academically successful school system with dedicated administrators, a relatively new public library and community center. Building on these community strengths, a budding revitalization project initiative served as our entering point into the community.

Structure of a university-community partnership

The initial partnership grew out of a nearby university from which faculty in the history department trained local teachers and residents on oral history interviewing techniques. The enthusiasm of the community partners who were willing to try out the idea of student and university involvement and the growing solidarity around the community's revitalization initiatives laid a sufficient foundation to bring our first cohort of students to work in the town. Thus, our course was embedded into the structured, albeit informal, framework wherein each university campus and the community agreed that students would be engaged in community-identified projects in the community from semester to semester, as needed, over the life of the project.

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggest that service-learning instructors capitalize on university-community partnership phases of relationships (i.e., initiation, development,

maintenance, dissolution) and the dynamics of relationships (i.e., exchanges, equity, distribution of power) to develop healthy campus–community partnerships. University-community partnerships have gained increased popularity among higher education institutions as an important component of the academic learning process. They also serve as an effective foundation for engaging students in a mutually beneficial dyadic civic responsibility that encourages learning and teaching through academic and community activity (Lockwood, Lockwood, Krajewski-Jaime, & Wiencek, 2011). Service learning provides universities and communities with the opportunity to collaborate and develop new ideas to meet communities' needs, and therefore the creation of community partnerships is essential to service learning (Campbell, 2012). While service learning is recognized as a viable solution to enriching communities, and university-community partnerships are mutually beneficially to higher education institutions and communities, our pedagogical model combines these two methods.

Interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects

Interdisciplinary service learning in social work has included a MSW social justice and film class working on oral history projects (Blundo, 2010) and BSW and Spanish-language students collaborating on a cross-cultural, parent education project (Belliveau, 2011; Blundo, 2010). As a social work elective flagged as a university-wide, service-learning course, students from across the campus showed interest. The desired enrollment was no more than 12 students and the final enrollment was 10 for both the fall

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and spring semesters including students from social work, government, international studies, engineering, psychology, theater, community and regional planning, and political science. The majority of the first cohort was from social work, and the second cohort was more mixed with three out of the ten students being social work majors. Of the eight total social work students in the first two cohorts, seven were MSW students. In the first year, there were equal numbers of graduate and undergraduate students.

Prior to the first course offering, we consulted with active citizens already involved with the town's revitalization initiative to ascertain the community's identified project priorities, working closely with the hubs of the city council, school, library, churches, and other informal networks and civically active residents. The first class was provided an introduction to the community and presented a menu of possible projects already underway or suggested by the community; however, students were encouraged to pursue ideas with community members during the first trip to the town through pre-scheduled meetings with representatives from the school district staff, City Council, churches, and active residents involved in informal networks and projects. Students formed groups based on their interest and would make a final project decision after their first visit to the town when they had a chance to engage with the community and experience the town first hand. Students divided into teams based on the intersection of their interests (micro and macro) and discipline with some serving on more than one team as they sensed their knowledge base was needed over the semester. To build authentic collaborative relationships, students developed the ability to listen to what community residents had to say about their strengths as well as needs.

The textbook, *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* (Knight and Schwarzman, 2006) is user-friendly guide on use of the CRAFT (Contact, Research, Action, Feedback and Teaching) model for community engagement. The text is applicable to projects of any discipline that focus on community engagement and is specifically written for students and aligned with the principles of service learning. The CRAFT steps are non-linear, encouraging reconsideration and reflection at various stages of projects, and recalibration when needed.

Integrated student, community and faculty reflection on complex social issues

As instructors bringing students into this confounded and complex mix, an important aspect of preparing students to enter the community was to ensure that reflection was integrated into the curriculum. Course readings, blogging assignments, and students' informal dialogues with community members, along with continuous faculty feedback focused on helping students analyze and explore the community dynamics of race and class, and acknowledge the complexities and messiness of working in communities, particularly for limited periods of time. A series of articles were assigned weekly for comparative analysis of community development in the United States versus abroad, rural versus urban communities, and the significance of race and class.

Blogs were used as the main tool for reflection, and also as a way to maintain dialog once the students were spending more time working in the community. Students were asked to write blog posts and also comment on the blog posts of at least two peers weekly. Additionally, blogs were used to discuss the required readings and share relevant feedback, videos, photographs, and links to stories about similar projects. In addition, as

part of the course objectives, students were challenged to think imaginatively and creatively about public problems and their solutions, particularly from a multi-disciplinary perspective and in partnership with community members.

Discussion

Academic service learning pedagogy should be constructed in such a way that students enter and leave communities with an array of options to support reciprocal relationships and reflection on the larger social issues at play. This university-community partnership conveyed that faculty and the social work program were committed to the community beyond the completion of discrete, bounded projects; therefore students drew from this perspective and demonstrated interest in fostering reciprocal relationships. Relationship building included working through road bocks as part of the process, which allowed students and community members to rethink expectations and project goals, when needed.

One strong evidence of reciprocity was the creation of a City Council sub-group which consisted of 2-3 students from each cohort who kept track of the progress of all team projects and attended the monthly city council meetings to dialogue with the mayor, city council and residents about the status of planned and ongoing service learning projects. Rather than have their end-of-semester presentations in the classroom, student teams presented final progress reports to the city council and residents. Ideally, service learning approaches should include a sustainability plan when a semester long project is inadequate to transfer technology to the community and include continuity from semester to semester (Vogel & Siefer, 2011). By embedding the projects within the larger structure

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of the university-community partnership and town's revitalization project, students realized that the projects would not be suddenly abandoned at the semester's end. This encouraged students to think long-term and anchored their commitment to coming back to discuss projects at the beginning of the subsequent semester for the next cohort. Additionally, some students chose to continue their work in the town beyond the semester.

The multidisciplinary aspect added unique value to students and the community over the two semesters. For example, when social work and education majors working on the school garden project hit a wall in their plans after the school district expressed concern about the lack of a summer watering plan, a mechanical engineering major and fellow team member stepped in to design a water catchment system as an option to resolve this problem. Government majors worked alongside social work students to develop surveys on transportation needs, research and disseminate information on programs to improve transportation options for residents. Graduate students (social work and architecture community planning) came together in a grant-writing project for rural town development that by the end of the semester resulted in a national revitalization grant to further the current revitalization projects. Psychology and social work undergraduate students implemented a cultural-enrichment and self-esteem building group for young girls in coordination with one of the town's Black churches, working closely with the pastor's wife. As indicated in Figure 1 (see Appendix I), a number of projects were initiated all of which were implemented in a recursive, ongoing process with community members and transferred to new students entering the course in the

second year.

Reflection was critical to our work, especially given our students were working within a rural environment and exposed to the complex trajectory of economic decline, a mostly unspoken and pervasive legacy of segregation, lack of public transportation to access jobs and higher education, and a decimated infrastructure with little possibility to obtain the resources for repair. Lectures, readings, in- class and online discussions, speakers, documentaries, blogs, and community engagement all contributed to students' rich learning experience. More specifically, the inclusion of digital environments such as wikis, blogs and other multimedia tools enabled reflective practices and fostered a collective dialog to account for the fact that students were spending significant amounts of time in the community. Reflection was in constant play, between blogs and van rides to and from the community, and from interacting with residents at the churches or school football games to the end-of-semester BBQs hosted by the city council for the students.

Overall, our model involved a comprehensive but flexible approach to learning and reflection that occurred both in the classroom and in the field. This introduced the activist, non-neutral approach proposed by Paulo Freire, and built on Dewey's ideal of reflective, experiential education as a mechanism to develop citizenry prepared to participate and advocate for a more democratic society. Strier (2011) notes that the overall focus of the service learning experience should support stronger representation of social justice, increased development of resources, and enhanced, higher utilization of these resources among residents. This was the intention of our approach.

This article proposes a way forward for social work in developing structured, service-learning courses. The 3-component model reflects one way that social work may create leading-edge, service-learning curricula that is interdisciplinary and builds on the structure of a university-community partnership while providing students and the community with mutually beneficial experiences and outcomes. The range of service learning projects implemented by students were both micro and macro; and regardless of sequencing, the service learning and field experience can be complementary. For instance, two social work students inquired about developing a field placement in the rural town, as a result of their positive service -learning experience. Overall, the university offered resources and support, while the community provided a unique learning experience that cannot be produced within the four walls of the classroom.

Implications

There is great potential for service learning to influence social work education. Consistent integration of experiential learning throughout a range of social work curricula based on service learning principles offers students an array of real world experiences and opportunities to apply theory to practice. Service learning reduces the dissonance that students often experience between what is taught in the classroom and the reality of application. They experience personal and professional growth when given the opportunity to design projects based on their passions, encounter trial and error, learn flexibility, and work through the reality of community-based work from a macro, micro, and mezzo perspective (Stoecker et al., 2010). Transformation becomes more possible when students are exposed to new knowledge, have the opportunity to apply the core

values of the profession, and are actively involved in experiential learning and reflection (Campbell & Bragg, 2007). In addition, students will likely develop a deeper understanding of the communities they will potentially work in through field placements and later on as professional social workers.

Although service learning and field education take place in a community context, they are not interchangeable; while the field practicum necessarily focuses on skill building, academic service learning provides a unique opportunity for social work students to experience a community and civic engagement. The appreciation of their distinct contributions to student transformation directly addresses the lack of a clearly delineated definition between service learning and field. Moreover, the integration of service learning and its principles into a philosophically aligned discipline such as social work also confronts a rift that exists in social work education and practice, namely the profession's clinical leaning (Burke, 2011; Specht & Courtney, 1994). The roots of social work are grounded in the settlement house movement and community social work, and service learning provides students with meaningful opportunities for community-based organizing and social justice focused systems change (Burke, 2011). While this upends many current practices in social work education, it also builds on the historic roots, social justice philosophy and civic values associated with CSWE and the social work profession. Service learning students experience unfiltered exposure to diverse populations while advantaging opportunities to actively develop problem solving strategies in real world situation, negotiation, advocacy, and social justice skills (Scott, 2008). These kinds of learning experiences are invaluable for students embarking on

careers in social work where effective practice skills require the ability to enter communities.

Service learning principles build on the theoretical underpinnings of social work, including theories related to social systems, the strengths perspective, and empowerment that well integrate into social work coursework (Furuto, 2007). While still nascent, service learning in social work can be designed to address the existing gaps in service-learning pedagogy by integrating social work principles and CSWE standards. CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), passed in 2001, covers eight major areas within the curriculum; values and ethics, diversity, populations at risk and social and economic justice, human behavior in the social environment, social welfare policy and services, social work practice, research and field education (CSWE, 2001). The gaining popularity of service learning in social work education can operate in tandem with CSWE competency-based standards, providing a differentiated way to identify students' practice behaviors and evidence student mastery (McGuire &Majewski, 2011). However, there is no mention of service learning in CSWE *Education and Policy Accreditation Standards*. Further, social work has been virtually absent from federally sponsored projects and conferences related to community-university partnerships for community building (Johnson Butterfield & Soska, 2005).

The call in higher education to make education more relevant and applicable to real world problems has spurred the Higher Education Civic Engagement (HSCE) movement for participation in civic engagement. For example, the establishment of Community Engagement Divisions and administrative positions to promote and

coordinate community engagement through service learning and volunteerism is on the rise. These efforts are also aimed at increasing the diversity of students and faculty on campuses (Strum, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011). There is also growing discussion about linking service learning and community engagement to tenure and promotion for faculty, as a way to encourage community-engaged teaching and scholarship (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). This requires institutions to develop strategies, pedagogy, and practices to increase campus diversity and retain engaged faculty and scholars.

With colleges and universities under pressure to prove their relevance in tight fiscal environments, social work cannot rely solely on its perception as a practice or helping profession. A review by Phillips (2007) of titles and abstract in social work education journals published in the last ten years revealed that the dialog about civic engagement has been "present but sporadic" (p.7). The "town-gown" divide is prevalent in social work as it is across the academy, and while field education is an integral part of social work education, this does not necessarily equate to collaborative relationships with the community (Johnson Butterfield & Soska, 2005).

The upward trend in social work education to utilize service learning offers many potential benefits for students including increased growth, development and learning. Additional opportunities include multi disciplinary collaboration, strengthening community relationships, increased use of reflection, and opportunities for learning in a variety of settings outside the classroom. As higher education increasingly mandates service learning across campuses, social work has much to offer with an existing network of relationships with community-based agencies. The overlap between academic service

learning and the core values of the social work profession and mission of social work education provide a strong rational for increased infusion of academic service learning in social work education. In turn, the example set by social work can go a long way in swaying broader institutional mandates for community engagement and influence the academy as a leader in service-learning pedagogy that genuinely engages communities.

Furthermore, research on service learning pedagogy is lacking. This would increase if researchers employ a rage of evaluation methods that capture student, faculty, and community transformation to better inform pedagogical practices. For example, specific research is needed to determine the cumulative effect of service learning and internships and field education, and how they are best sequenced, infused, and complemented. Future research should also employ innovative methods that capture academic service learning experiences, particularly making use of new digital tools in pedagogy including blogs, Wikis, portfolio methods of assessment, and other reflective materials produced by students. These methods inform evaluation and research while providing a vehicle to capture service learning experiences, academic growth, and personal transformations using innovating approaches to advance service learning research.

Additionally, there is a dearth of research that focuses on community partners, particularly those who are not part of formal agencies and organizations. Given the emphasis in academic service learning on community engagement and reciprocal relationships, a better understanding from the perspective of the community is critical to understanding the broader picture and long-term goals of sustainable, collaborative

partnerships. To ensure necessary institutional and community support, further research in these areas must be undertaken to support academic service learning's continued growth and implementation. We suggest that the next step in the service learning discourse is to begin to build a cohesive framework for service learning pedagogy, from which there can be strategies to examine its efficacy in terms of agreed-upon student and community outcomes. With its commitment to social justice, ethical standards, and required field education, social work is well positioned to become a leader in the advancement of service learning and authentically actualize best practices while breaking new ground.

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Supplemental Data A

Figure 1: 3 Component Academic Service Learning Pedagogical Model

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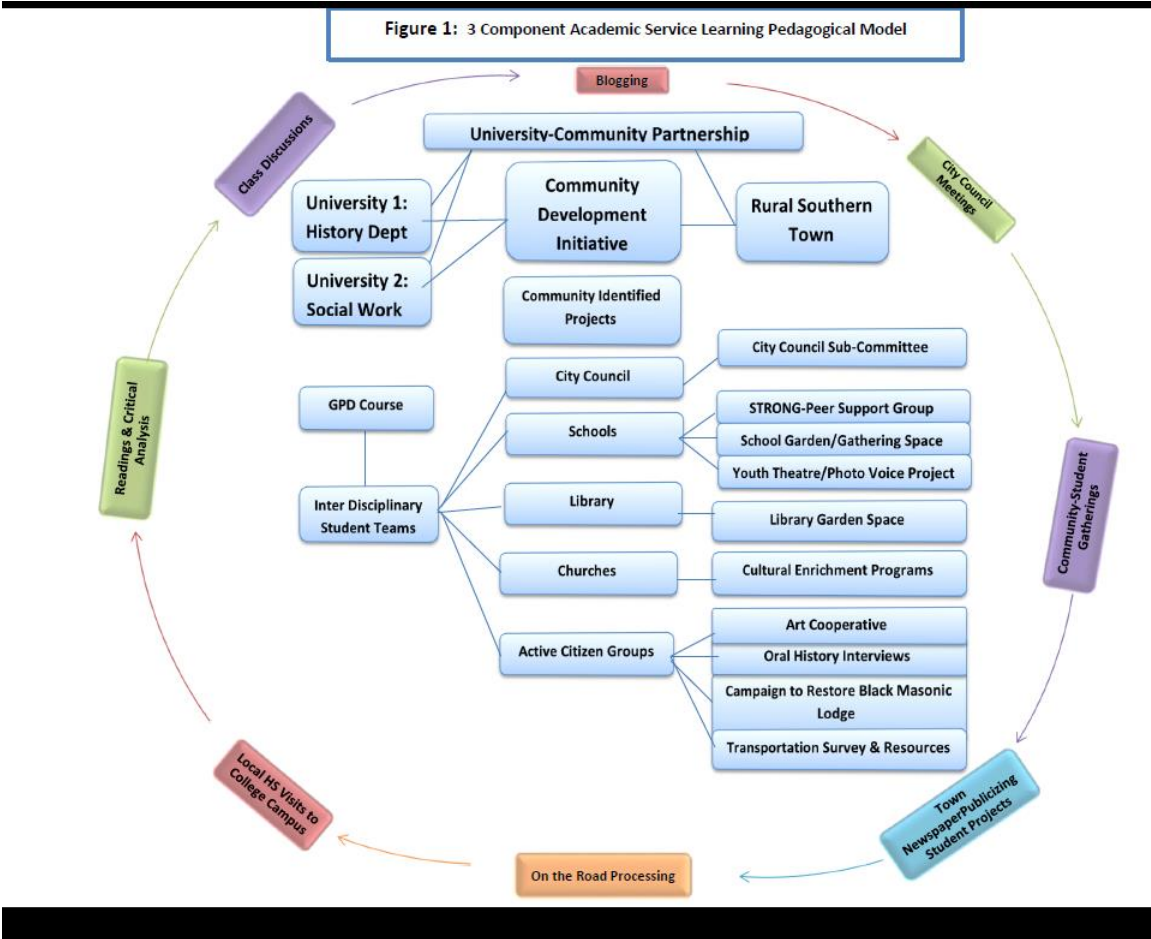
Chapter 3: Blogs as a Representation of Student Experiences in a Service Learning Course

Abstract

Research on service learning has demonstrated positive outcomes in the areas of student learning, personal and social development, and increased civic engagement; however, there is a scarcity of research examining the lived experiences of students. This study consisted of 17 students from 2 cohorts of students enrolled in a service learning class who described their experiences working in a rural town through their blogs. The current study suggests that the reflexive aspect of blogging fits well with the service learning principle of reflection, and reveals the students' emotive experience over the course of the semester, including their epiphanies, discomfort, disappointment, excitement, and satisfaction. Additionally, blogging demonstrates the attributes of service learning pedagogy to support the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of complex problems in a real life setting not attainable solely in a classroom setting or through traditional classroom tools, such as exams and papers.

During the past two decades service learning has gained popularity in higher education as pedagogy that integrates student learning and a commitment to solving problems in local and international communities (Campus Compact, 2011). The principles of service learning - study, reciprocity and reflection - are intended to bolster student learning and civic responsibility, address community identified needs, and support long-term mutually beneficial community-university partnerships (Bringle &

Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2010; Eyler, Dwight, & Astin, 1999). While research on service leaning has evidenced gains in the areas of students' increased learning and personal and social development, most studies are quantitative and narrowly focused on outcomes rather than the process of transformation or the struggles students encounter working in diverse communities which may bear little resemblance to their home communities (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

To address this gap in the literature, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to examine the blogs of students enrolled in a service learning course working in a rural, poor, racially divided community over the course of a semester. Student blogs, reflective papers, and journals, as well as portfolio methods of assessments offer the opportunity to capture the richness of service learning experiences (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Cress et al., 2010). The lived experiences of service learning students can provide educators valuable information to further develop pedagogy that supports the service learning principles of service, reciprocity, and reflection.

In this study I was a participant observer as co-instructor of the course, a first time offering at a social work program at a major university located in southern United States. The course brought two interdisciplinary cohorts of twenty undergraduate and graduate students to a rural town to work on community development projects partnering with local residents. Projects included a campaign to restore a historical building, a community garden, supporting an art co-op, a high school essay workshop, a teen social support group, writing a National Endowment of the Arts grant, youth art exhibit, public transportation project, establishing a sub-committee with residents and the City Council,

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oral history project, and a cultural enrichment program for young African American girls. Students worked with the library board, school district, churches, local artists, civically involved residents, staff from the juvenile detention facility, and the African American Prince Hall Masons. The research question that guided the study was: What was the experience of students in a university service learning class as described in their blogs?

Background

Consistent with theories of student learning from experiential education (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Kolb, 1984), research on service learning has sought to understand the impact on students. A wide range of empirical research indicates positive results for students who participate in service learning, including increased intrapersonal and social development (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Eyler at al., 2001), enhanced application of knowledge and ability to reframe complex social issues (Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007), greater problem solving ability and critical analysis (Eyler et al.,1999), increased commitment to service and civic engagement (Astin & Sax, 1998, Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999, Eyler et al., 1999, Gray et al., 1998) and, for some studies, improved GPAs (Astin & Sax, 1998; Gray et al., 1998; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Strage, 2000).

Eyler et al. (1999) report on 3 studies indicating students in service learning courses showed significantly enhanced skills in assessment, analysis of complex problems and critical thinking ability than did students in programs with little linkage between the service option and the course of study or students with no service options. Data sets for those studies included pre and post-test surveys of 1500 students (1100

service learning and 400 non-service learning students) from 20 colleges and universities across the nation; in depth pre and post semester interviews with 66 students from 6 colleges and universities; and in depth interviews of 65 college students from 6 institutions. This meta-analysis examined the impact of program characteristics on student outcomes. These characteristics included placement quality, connection between course content and service, written and oral reflection, diversity, and community voice. In both the survey and the single interviews, students reported greater learning when they had service learning experiences that included the above characteristics. The pre and post-semester interview data also supported this finding.

Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah (2004) found the integration of academic content with the service learning experience and reflection activities that were structured, consistent and aimed at clarifying student's values contributed to high quality service learning experiences. They suggest are a variety of ways that reflection activities can be structured and dispersed throughout the semester using journal entries and mini papers to identify and clarify values, including their own and those of the community.

In addition to learning gains, the literature suggests participation in service learning has a significant impact on students' intrapersonal and social development. Eyler et al. (2001) cites 33 articles and dissertations that connect service learning with increasing "student personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development" (p.1). Conway et al. (2009) found in their meta-analysis of 58 service-learning studies an average increase of 21 points between pre and posttest evaluations in personal outcomes for students participating in

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service-learning activities. Eyler et al. (2001) identify studies that link service learning with "reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding" (pg. 1). Two quantitative studies using large data sets also found that participation in service learning was related to students actively promoting racial understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang &Astin, 2000).

A meta-analysis by Conway et al. (2009) found that service-learning experiences corresponded with a small mean increase on outcomes related to citizenship, with an average increase of 17 points between pretest to post-test means. Citizenship outcomes included measures of personally responsible citizenship, participatory citizenship, and justice-oriented citizenship. Conway et al. (2009) argue that, "service-learning places teaching and learning in a social context, facilitating socially responsible knowledge" (p. 233).

Research on service learning has been advanced by the development of several validated scales and questionnaires. While results from studies using these questionnaires are promising and evidence positive outcomes of service learning, relying on surveys and questionnaires alone does not capture the complexity and nuance of service learning experiences or the process of civic engagement. In their mixed methods study, Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, and Kerrigan (1996) found that service learning impacted students awareness of and involvement with the community, including history, strengths, and problems. The study used pre-post course surveys, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and analysis of journals from four service learning classes. This is one of the few studies that used a mixed methods approach to look at converging results

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(Bringle & Steinberg, 2010).

One possible reason there has been an emphasis on quantitative measures maybe related to a frequent criticism of service learning is that faculty and students may fail to reflect on and address the complex, social structures facing the communities in which students work (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010). While there are a few qualitative studies that look at reflective papers and journals that reveal insight to the student transformative processes, blogs offer an openly collective reflective process. The current study builds on the qualitative approach to understanding the lived experience and construction of meaning through analysis of student generated products including blogs, reflective papers, and journals to explore in-depth understanding of the students' lived experiences (Cress et al., 2010).

Methods

The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the experiential and emotional impact of a service learning class working in a rural community as described through the students' own words. Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as the method of analysis most able to answer the research question, and because the data source provided especially dense and descriptive text. Hermeneutic phenomenology is well suited to the goal of understanding subjects' lived experiences and the concern with "the relationship between researcher and the object of research and the co-creation of meaning" (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009, p. 106). This is particularly important when the researcher is a participant observer. Phenomenology addresses questions that reflect the researcher's "passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced…and has a

personal interest and is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). While the majority of research about service learning is quantitative and makes a valuable contribution; qualitative research provides a textural in depth examination of the student's experience that is not quantifiable.

Criterion sampling was used in this study. Students were enrolled in a 3-component service learning pedagogy model that capitalizes on the structure of a university-community partnership, mobilizes interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects, and promotes reflection on complex economic and social justice issues. The criterion was completion of the course and a retrievable blog when the study commenced (n=17). Although twenty students were enrolled in the two cohorts, the sample included seventeen students for the following reasons: one student removed online access to the blog at the end of the semester before the study began, another did not complete the class, and one student had an insufficient number of blog posts. Students enrolled in the class came from a variety of disciplines including social work, engineering, psychology, fine arts-theater, government, architecture-community and regional planning, and political science. The two cohorts were predominately Caucasian and female with eleven graduate students and nine undergraduate students. The breakdown by gender and ethnicity was 82% female, 18% male, with one African American female, one female international student, a Hispanic male, and two Hispanic females.

Procedure

The seventeen blogs used in this study were initiated by students the first week of class and concluded 13 weeks later at the end of the semester. Students were asked to respond to assigned readings and questions and blog weekly about their work in the community; however, students were given a great deal of latitude on frequency and style of blogging. Students could choose to blog more than the required weekly post and some supplemented written entries with media and art. The required text, *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* by Knight and Schwarzman (2006), presents a theoretical model, CRAFT (Contact, Research, Action, Feedback, and Teaching) that guided community engagement and project implementation. Other assigned readings included journal articles, which engaged the students in comparative analysis of community development in the US versus other countries, rural versus urban development, and websites and newspaper articles describing models relevant to the student projects.

Although photographs and peer and instructor comments were included in student blogs; this analysis did not include the photographs and comments; however, they are used in this article as an illustration of the students' experience. The university institutional review board for research with human subjects approved this study as part of a larger investigation of academic service learning classes. While the blogs were in the public domain, students voluntarily agreed to have their blogs made available for analysis and signed consent forms to participate in the study. After students completed the course, blogs were retrieved from the web and cut and pasted into a Word Document. A Dropbox folder was created as a workspace and location for all documents including student blogs,

field notes, and all iterations of the data as the analysis progressed. Access to the

Dropbox folder was provided only to the researcher and peer readers.

Data Analysis

I used a combination of the various approaches to phenomenological analysis as

described by Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994). The steps used in this study to analyze the

blogs incorporated Moustakas' (1994) detailed modification of several phenomenological

methods that work with the descriptions of participant experiences in a form of text, most

often transcripts. The use of blogs as a "living text" create a "feeling and understanding

of the phenomenon" (Willis, 2004, p.8, 10). Before beginning the analysis it had been

nearly two years since I had read the blogs. My involvement in this course was more than

co-instructor; my husband's extended family are decades-long residents of the town and I

am the founder/coordinator of a community project aimed at revitalizing the town. As co-

instructor, I was a participant observer who interacted with and observed the students

over the semester; including holding conversations with students during our three hour

round trip drive to the town, in class, and via emails. In this study I have focused on the

content of the blogs and what the text reveals about the students' lived experiences;

however, my position in the classroom and community cannot be ignored and was

addressed through adhering to the phenomenological procedures of writing assumption

statements, bracketing, writing field notes throughout the analysis process, and peer

review.

Procedures of phenomenological analysis were used as follows: (1) recording a

list of assumptions about the students and their experiences in the town to approach the

research with "a sense of newness" (Anderson & Spencer, 2002, p.1331); (2) bracketing my experience working in the community, as a student and blogger; (3) conducting a naïve reading to study the entirety of the data; (4) reducing and eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experience of being a student working in the community; (5) creating meaning units from the significant statements (Table 1, See Appendix I); (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into clusters of meaning (themes); (8) test themes against the entirety of data (validated by the full text of blogs). Consistent with Armour et. al., (2009) the reliability of themes was assessed with two peer readers familiar with the methods and topic.

The clusters of meaning resulted in the five essential themes. Table 2 (see Appendix II) contains an example of a theme cluster that emerged from their meaning units. The validated themes were used to write a textural description or "what" the participants experienced. Additionally, the themes were used to write a structural description of the setting and context - also referred to as the "how" participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). From the integration of the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the essence of the phenomena was constructed, synthesizing the common experiences of the group as a whole (Table 3). Pseudonyms were used in reporting specific comments.

A social constructionist perspective framed this research. Social construction is well suited for phenomenological research (Grbich, 2007) as humans are constructing meaning through their interaction and experiences inclusive of the social, historic, cultural and natural aspects of their environment (Crotty, 1998). Lock and Strong (2010)

discuss meaning making from a social constructionist perspective as follows, "Meaning

making, being inherently embedded in socio-cultural processes, are specific to times and

places. Thus the meanings of particular events, and our ways of understanding them, vary

over different situations" (p. 7). Social constructionist research considers the context of

events and the larger social circumstances on the meaning making process (Grbich,

2007). Insight into how service learning students working with diverse communities

construct meaning and provide valuable information that can contribute to service

learning pedagogy and community engagement that is reciprocal and authentic.

Table 4: Synthesis of Student Experience

> The experience of students in a service learning class that worked in a rural, impoverished, and segregated town was characterized by an initial shock at the segregated spaces, pervasive disparities in status between white and black people, and the deterioration of the built environment. The students approached the semester with a sense of optimism for the potential they and their project could make. At the same time, they expressed a strong belief that if their project and larger efforts to revitalize the town were to be successful, the community had to be the pivotal force of change.
> The initial excitement was tempered by the challenge of starting projects from the ground up. Students learned to regroup, develop new strategies, and focus on the process and relationship building as a way to engage the community. They saw the tangible outcomes of their work and the potential for projects to continue to develop. Students grew personally, academically, and developed skills they could use in their future endeavors. They began to see themselves as change agents and their work as part of a larger effort beyond the semester. Students learned by "doing" and through the relationships they built with their peers, professors, and community partners with mutual benefits to themselves and the community.

Results

Five essential themes emerged from the blogs: (1) implications of race, (2)

working with the community, (3) deterioration of the built environment, (4) capacity of

art, and (5) learning as a result of the course.

Theme 1: Implications of Race

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The issue of race, racism, and segregation threaded throughout the students'
experience in the town. This theme was divided into four subthemes to recognize the
complexity and significance of race.

Shock at segregated spaces.

Students expressed shock at the segregated cemeteries, neighborhoods, and the
disparities between the white and black parts of town, openly described as "black and
white folk's town" by residents.

Another highlight was driving around the town and visiting the two separate
cemeteries - the black one and the white. The disparity was vast and astonishing.
The black cemetery, located in black folks town of course, was overgrown and
poorly maintained. A resident showed us an area hidden around a corner that had
been basically turned into a dumpsite. It was ridiculous and offensive. The white
cemetery, in contrast, was well kept and quite large in area. I couldn't believe that
in this day and age, two separate race based cemeteries still exists. (Jill, graduate
social work student)

Another student connected the economic and environmental decline of the town to the
deeply rooted segregation,

Our two trips to [the town] have helped us understand its history and how
segregation still impacts the way the city looks and functions today. The tours
showed us the different sides of the city and we were able to see first-hand the
run-down homes and abandoned buildings that serve to illustrate both the history

of segregation and the current lack of economic opportunities that affects the entire community. (Mark, undergraduate Bridging Disciplines major)

Figure 1. House in African American neighborhood

The racial dynamic.

Students worked with a variety of residents during the semester. Community partners included active citizens, city council members, pastors, and school district staff. However, regardless of the group's composition, students expressed awareness of racial discord. As one student wrote, "Can't put my finger on the details, but my sixth sense picked up some definite racial tension before, during, and after the meeting." Students also noted the absence of black professionals in city government, the schools, and businesses. One student responded to the lack of representation as follows, "From our limited time in the town, it was pretty evident that it is still a racially divided community in many ways. For example, we met with board members of the public library during our visit, all of who were white." And another student remarked,

To hear [Pastor's wife] say there were NO Black businesses or professionals was sobering. Here, in 2010, in the United States of America existed the same

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conditions as sixty years ago. It [lack of black professionals] made me more

driven to help this community. (Carrie, undergraduate Psychology major)

The response to the racial dynamic in the town was ongoing in the blog posts throughout

the semester, as it permeated their experience working in the town with a variety of

residents.

Confronting personal issues about race.

Students also confronted their own personal biases and grappled with the deeply

rooted segregation in a personal way. One student working on a project designed to

bolster the self-esteem of young black women wrote, "I continue to think critically about

my role as a white woman helping to facilitate a program that centers so much on black

identity." Students became more aware of their assumptions and biases as the semester

unfolded and articulated this in their blogs. A white student conducting oral history

interviews wrote,

> I went into this interview with Mr. G. with a strong sense of apprehension. His
>
> home is not as well put together as Mrs. S., and for whatever reason that made me
>
> uncomfortable initially. He is an older, blind black man, who I was expecting to
>
> be calloused toward me. I started to run so many stereotypes and expectations in
>
> my head that it made me nervous and far too conscious racial aspects. I really
>
> thought it was going to be a short lived interview because he wasn't going to want
>
> to open up to me, but at the same time I shut myself off to the interview and I
>
> don't feel like I was able to go into it as warmly as I had with Mrs. S. I was
>
> uncomfortable to say the least. But why? And I think I am still processing that

while I type this. However, the interview really did go well. Overall, it was a

fantastic interview, and I really enjoyed my time with Mr. G., and I am

disappointed I went into it with such a racist mindset. (Michael, undergraduate

Political Science major)

Students were able to make connections in a real life setting through relationships and

encounters. As one student blogged, "Visiting the town was a great experience. It put into

perspective all the things I have studied during my college career surrounding

institutional racism coupled with the effects of hegemony on individuals' psyche."

Helping to close the racial divide.

Students saw their projects and themselves as having a positive impact on the

racial divide. A student who started a social support group with high school students

wrote about a breakthrough moment with two of the participants,

So last weeks group I had an a-ha moment/teaching moment/inspired reaction to

two students. An African American girl and an Anglo guy were talking about

their families; the guy had a very difficult life, although he made his stories

humorous, but deep down they sounded very traumatic. The girl was responding

and talking about her life, and then she said "Hey, we should sit together at lunch

tomorrow, I never see you, I'll go sit with you!" as he responded, "Okay,

cool!"   That moment two students from different races, backgrounds and families

decided to bridge that gap. This is why I do groups like this...because of moments

like that. (Emma, graduate Social Work student)

Theme 2: Working with the Community

Working in partnership with versus for the community, was the centerpiece of the course. Students wrote extensively about the need for community volition, ensuring sustainability, clarifying expectations, and how community members perceived the university students.

Volition.

Students were vigilant about not asserting their voices over the community's. One student wrote, "Forcefully pushing a project onto a community will most likely lead to a failed or unsustainable result." and "Community residents should be involved in deciding what changes they want to see in their communities." One student noted the importance of community volition as follows,

> While it would be easy just to go in to the town and tell everyone what we think
> they need to further develop their town, it is not up to outsiders to decide. We
> need to fully involve the community and ask rather what they need and want.
> Jane, graduate Social Work student)

Students also expressed uncertainty about strategies to engage the community, "Right now, I am just not sure what the best way to get community input is." Students also experienced varying reactions from the community partners, "I felt somewhat of a disconnect between what we were envisioning [for the garden project] and the [middle school] principal" and "It made me so happy to know that this [youth social support group] is something that not just the high school wanted, but the community wanted in

general." The process of working with community members to define needs, set goals and implement projects was written about throughout the semester.

Sustainability.

The potential for projects to continue beyond the duration of a semester was a common aim, "Dreaming big, I hope that I can experience true and sustainable community transformation from the inside out." Ideas for work beyond the semester were often discussed in the blog, "I would like to do more work with the artists co-op, developing a leadership body which can carry on activities in the space after the class work concludes." Students also realized this was a major concern of the community as well, "It was made very clear to my team at the garden project meeting that this would have to be a project with low sustainability." Students recalibrated their expectations and projects to increase the potential of sustainability, "I am constantly thinking of ways to make this sustainable and have a large impact…I am always re-evaluating our progress." Student concerns for sustainability was threaded throughout each blog.

Facing the challenge: It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Students encountered time limitations, a sometimes over ambitious scope of work, balancing school and work, lack of community participation, local bureaucracy, and the difficulty of distance. When permission to install a water catchment system at the middle school was denied, the student who designed the system wrote, "It looks like we didn't get permission for the rain water catchment. I was afraid this might happen, there is no way to get around public school bureaucracy." Another student wrote of the enormity of the scope of work and the wisdom of taking it slow,

The hardest part of action, for me, was the overwhelming nature of what to do. But with these small steps, hopefully we can shape the lives of at least a few people since nobody can change the world overnight. (Lauren, graduate social work student)

Scheduling demands and getting to the town more frequently to work on projects was a common obstacle as one student described; "I am getting increasing requests from residents to be interviewed which is encouraging. However, I am finding it very difficult to balance my schedule and find time to do more interviews". Lack of participation threatened a project for one student, "I was pretty excited about the program, so I'm disappointed that I might have to let go of the idea." Another student summed it up as follows; "There is nothing easy in this type of work".

Student role.

The presence of university students in town was a new experience for most community members outside the high school, which had previously worked with students from another university. Some community partners that were new to the experience of university partnerships erroneously viewed the students as "the experts" and over- relied on them to implement projects.

To be honest, the lines are a little blurred for me at this point regarding ownership of the project. As beneficiaries, this group does not seem interested in developing the plan themselves. I am confused at this point, because it's not as though the three of us have any more knowledge or experience in developing such a plan

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than the library group themselves. Yet, we are being asked to develop this aspect

of the project. (Pat, graduate social work student)

Overall, students felt welcome and high regard for the university presence. One student

expressed this as follows, "I am also starting to pick up a vibe on how important the

university is to the town. We bring a mood to the town - Excitement, Change, Inspiration,

Possibility, Hope, etc." One student wrote of her curiosity about how the students were

viewed by residents, "This town is still a work in progress, and I personally would like to

be a fly on the wall when community discussions involve our presence in town."

Theme 3: Deterioration of the Built Environment

Figure 2. Historic Prince Hall Masonic Lodge

The dire condition of the built environment and the decay of the town, including

abandoned buildings and homes, historic buildings on verge of collapse, empty

storefronts, people living in homes that were dilapidated, and public spaces in disrepair

was unfamiliar and disturbing. Some students described the town in great detail and

others were blunt, "Downtown is desolate and broke down." One student described the

potholes in the roads as "giant craters" and another wrote, "One of the most notable

aspects of the town was the large number of run down, abandoned buildings." The

students had not experienced this level of environmental decay; therefore these types of observations were frequently shared in their blog posts.

Theme 4: Capacity of Art

Figure 3. Mosaic mural on empty storefront

The arts-based initiatives underway in the town are part of a larger strategy to revitalize and increase community cohesion. While some students were involved in arts-based projects, those who were not were exposed to how art was being used to stimulate positive change, "The new Art CO-OP is the only building with a creative storefront and only one that has began to be renovated/ remodeled" and "I can imagine the town becoming an artist destination too".

Students articulated their feeling about the relationship of art to their projects and the development of the town, "I feel it is important for people to live in beauty because what we see everyday affects the way we feel." One student decided to incorporate art as part of her reflection, "I will definitely make a collage as a means of recording the process of this project implementation." Whether it was in response to the community art projects underway, their own passion for art, or using it in their project as an art novice, students engaged in art in some way over the semester.

Theme 5: Identifying Learning as a Result of the Course

The experience of being in a service learning class was a new experience for a majority of the students. They identified a combination of trepidation and excitement about a new approach to learning and entering a community. Students wrote about the uniqueness of the course, "It is so surreal being in this course and very difficult to describe. I kept having to remind myself that I was in school" The characteristics of the community, the poverty and segregation, and traveling three hours round trip were a completely new way to experience higher education. One student wrote, "Besides our class, I do not know of many opportunities for students [at our university] to get involved in rural issues." Students began the class with hopeful expectations, though not always for a set outcome, "Beyond this initial trip, I have great expectations for the mutual learning and transformation process that will take place. In other words, my expectations and hopes are more tied to ongoing processes, rather than completion."

As part of their community engagement efforts students attended church, community events, and ate dinner with their community partners, peers and professors. One student remarked, "Come-on - Who goes to church with their professors?" These informal interpersonal experiences helped students build relationships with the community; "It has been an interesting experience in regards to meeting with and growing relationships with the people of [the town]", and another student wrote, "Spending time with him [community partner] has allowed me better understanding of the town and what is going on in the community."

Students described the learning process as reciprocal with the community, "I went into this process feeling like I had so much information to provide and I must admit I think I am learning more than the girls [I am working with]!" Another student wrote, "The crazy thing is I don't think they will ever know how much of an impact they have on us." Students also identified a variety of skills they developed as a result of the course including confidence, ability to listen, comfort speaking in public, interpersonal skills, and grant writing. One student who helped write a successful national grant wrote, "I realized that it [writing the grant] integrated a variety of skills and goals for the course, and most importantly it was an incredibly valuable experience that I'll use again." Students saw tangible outcomes of their work and the impact on the community. A student blogged about the social support group she started for high school students, "I went home with a content feeling... and an inspiration...that this group is making a difference." A graduate student nearing completion of her degree wrote, "It's so funny and appropriate that I should find this course in my last semester of course work, since it directly engages in all the things I wanted to take away from graduate school."

Discussion

There is a scarcity of qualitative research in service learning that articulates the lived experiences of students working in communities (Ash et al., 2005; Cress et al., 2010). While previous research has focused on student outcomes, this study was concerned with gaining insight into the service learning experience of students through the reflexivity of their blogs. Dewey (1933) stated, "reflective thinking impels inquiry" (p.7) and "perplexes and challenges the mind" (p.13). Students blogged throughout the

semester, therefore capturing the experience of working in a diverse and unfamiliar community as it unfolded over time. The current study suggests that student blogging fits well with service learning pedagogy and its core principles and addresses some of the previously identified shortcomings related to the lack of in depth processing of complex socio-economic and social justice related concerns. Reflection through blogs provides an option to gain knowledge about student transformation and growth that is not attainable solely in a classroom setting or through traditional classroom tools, such as exams and papers.

Learning about segregation and its persistent legacy through personal encounters was very different from deconstructing racism in a classroom. Students wrote descriptively about the lessons they learned from community members they worked with, and how the experience enabled them to apply and understand the academic knowledge they previously acquired in school. Students grappled with the complexity of racial issues as they built relationships with people who shared their experiences about the era of segregation, as well as "walking" in the segregated spaces and seeing first-hand the disparity between black and white environments. Reading about or seeing a picture of trash dumped in a black cemetery was one thing, stepping over it was another. In their blogs students disclosed both the discomfort and growth that resulted from working in an environment where deeply rooted racial divisions are so pervasive.

Students blogged about their desire to see tangible results and sustainability of their projects; however, they came to appreciate how time-consuming community development and relationship building really is. Students expressed a realization that

outside of the university a semester is not necessarily a relevant timeframe, therefore they wrote about adjusting expectations, setting the stage for future cohorts, and the value of process. Plans were often recalibrated many times over causing frustration and disappointment; however, the blogs revealed that students continued to subscribe to the importance of community volition over project completion without full participation despite setbacks. As projects unfolded, there were many stops and starts; however through their attempts to engage residents students came to realize that there is "nothing easy" about community work.

While traveling three hours round trip was an obstacle to visiting the town more often, students wrote about the relationships they developed with their peers and professors, and the conversations that occurred as a result of the van rides together. Additionally they wrote about how the service learning class differed from their other academic experiences, specifically the opportunity to work in a community, build relationships, create projects from the ground up, and develop useful skills such as grant writing. Students wrote about the uniqueness of course activities, including eating dinner with peers and professors, attending community activities (church, City Council meetings, and Homecoming), and how these experiences bonded them to each other and the community. The act of blogging itself was a way students created an extended dialog, shared insights and support, and formed a learning community.

The blogs elucidated the connection students made between assigned readings and their application to the work underway in the community. The CRAFT model used in the text was referred to in all the blogs and used to guide community work that focused on

process and relationship building as a foundation for projects and engagement with the community. The use of art based community practice was new for most students; however they wrote of the role creativity played in their own lives, their admiration for the art created in the town, and capacity of art to bring people together and stimulate positive change.

The reflexive aspect of blogging provided insight to the students' emotive experience over the course of the semester, including their epiphanies, discomfort, disappointment, excitement, and satisfaction. There is a scarcity of research in service learning literature that examines the importance emotion plays in reflection (Felten, Gilchrist, & Darby, 2006). Dewey (1934) discussed the importance of emotion in the experiential learning experience, "Emotion is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what it selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to material externally disparate and dissimilar" (p. 42). The flexibility of blogging allowed students to blog at any time and capture moods and emotions as they occurred.

Students wrote of learning opportunities they received through the course that they had not previously experienced in a traditional classroom. Through their blogs students articulated their growth and development in their own words. They shared fears, anxiety, joy, disappointment, confusion, camaraderie, optimism for the future, sadness to leave the community, and how the class and working in the town had changed and transformed their lives. These transformations included a renewed determination to make change in their home community, confront discomfort about difficult issues, acquire useful skills, and build confidence to take on new challenges.

While students candidly acknowledged the difficulties encountered along the way, they wrote of seeing themselves as agents of positive change and felt a sense of accomplishment regardless of the end result of their project. The initial excitement was tempered by a strong dose of reality and shock at the racial segregation and disparity, poverty, and the decaying environmental conditions of the town. Starting projects from the ground up was overwhelming at first, and caused students to regroup, develop new strategies, and redefine success. Dewey (1916) believed that education should offer students real life guided experiences that build their capacity to contribute to a democratic society. Toward that end, the blogs written by students in this study describe a lived experience that supports the promise of service learning pedagogy to provide mutual benefits to both students and communities.

Conclusion

Further research into the lived experiences of students participating in service learning courses is needed to explore the ways this pedagogy facilitates mutually beneficial outcomes to students and communities. The use of blogs, journals, and reflective papers offer unique insight into the lived experiences of students in their own words that surveys, scales and other quantitative measures are not able to provide. Future research might also include the analysis of multimedia incorporated into the reflective process, for example photographs, video, poetry, and other creative expressions used in blogs. Student comments posted on their peer's blogs would offer an opportunity to study the value of building a collective discourse and learning partnership between students and

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faculty. Additionally, mixed methods research would present an opportunity to correlate student outcomes with experiential data.

Based on the results of this study, service learning pedagogy provides students with an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills, apply theory to practice, experience reciprocal community engagement, and further their academic, social and personal growth and development in a way not solely attainable in a traditional classroom environment. Additionally, the use of blogging can serve as a tool to strengthen the reflective requirement of service learning and provide students a flexible and creative way to share experiences, resources, and become generators of knowledge. Service learning pedagogy that adheres to the core principles of study, reciprocity, and reflection can result in mutually beneficial outcomes for students, universities, and communities, and assist higher education in achieving a broader civic mission.

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Supplemental Data B

Table 1 Example of significant statements and meaning units

Significant Statement	Meaning Unit
Visiting Mart was a great experience. It put into perspective all the things I have studied during my college career surrounding institutional racism coupled with the effects of hegemony on individuals' psyche.	Applying what I have learned in school to a real life situation
To hear Mrs. Hurst say there were NO Black businesses or professionals was sobering. Here, in 2010, in the United States of America existed the same conditions as sixty years ago (in many cases worse; at least during segregation Blacks had an existence in the professional world). As we drove and passed the numerous abandoned houses and I was speechless. I was baffled by the lack of progress or effort to improve the conditions and more intrigued by the persistence of such conditions.	The segregation is deeply rooted The situation is worse in some ways than during segregation when blacks had professionals in their community. Shock at the abandoned houses. Perplexed by the lack of effort to improve conditions (built environment)
It is amazing to know that these girls may complete this program with totally different worldviews than the ones they have began with.	Seeing self and project as a change agent

Supplemental Data C

Table 2 Example of a cluster and associated meaning units

Racial Issues: Shock at Segregated Spaces:
The three neighborhoods are designated by race. People use the black cemetery as a dumping ground, which I find outrageous. It is hard to fathom that segregated cemeteries still exist. I was shocked that the white cemetery is well kept and the people dump trash in the black one. The condition of the black part of town was appalling. Now that black people live in the former white part of town it is run down as well. The segregated Masonic Lodges do not interact though they are all Masons. The juvenile facility is located in the black part of town, which seems like no accident. I see the effects of deeply rooted segregation. The dismal condition of the African American Masonic Lodge and the rest of Mart, particularly the African American part of town was shocking to our group.

Supplemental Data D

Table 2 Example of a cluster and associated meaning units

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Chapter 4: Community as Agency: Community Partner Experiences with Service Learning

Abstract

The bulk of research on service learning has focused on student outcomes; however, there is a scarcity of research examining the lived experiences of community partners. Additionally, the few studies that exist to date involve agencies and have not included informal networks and civically active citizens. This study consisted of interviews with nine community partners, a combination of agency employees and active citizens, residing in a rural Southern town that worked with a network of service learning classes on a variety of community-identified projects. The current study supports the contribution of service learning to communities, the importance of investing in reciprocal relationships, and the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents. Recommendations for further research and strategies to support reciprocal and meaningful community engagement are discussed.

Service learning and its core principals of study, reciprocity, and reflection has gained prominence in higher education as a signature pedagogy that places equal value on mutually beneficial outcomes for students and the communities with which students they partner with (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Harkavy, 2004). Service learning is one of the most valuable ways to support community-university partnerships, and requires an investment in relationship building as part of collaborative

problem solving (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). The bulk of research on service leaning has focused on student outcomes, with little attention given to the communities they work with (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010). Additionally, existing research on community partners does not include the perspective of informal networks or individual residents involved with service learning students (Cress et al., 2010; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006). To address this gap in the literature, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to examine the experience of community members who worked with students on a variety of service learning projects in a rural community.

The lived experiences of community members involved with service learning students can assist in the further development of best practices that support mutually beneficial community-university partnerships. The research question that guided the study was: What was the lived experience of community members working with university service learning classes? Phenomenology is a method that seeks to understand the meaning and essence of a phenomenon (Grbich, 2007); therefore it is well suited to a study investigating the common experience of community members who worked with university students on projects to improve the conditions of their town.

Background

Very few empirical studies have focused on the impact of service learning on community outcomes or the identified community partner (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Research done to date indicates positive outcomes for the agencies involved with service programs; however, the literature is scant and dated and does not include informal

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networks or individual civically active citizens. Driscoll et al. (1996) conducted a comprehensive case study of four service learning classes at Portland State University that used both qualitative and quantitative methods including surveys, interviews, and focus groups with community partners. As a result of participation in service learning programs, community agencies perceived a positive effect on their capacity to serve clients, felt they had received economic and social benefits, and were satisfied with student interactions.

Sandy and Holland (2006) conducted a qualitative study of focus groups with 99 community partners across eight Californian campuses. Partners discussed their perceptions regarding benefits to the academic institutions, the organization's impact on student learning, and ways to improve the partnership. Community agencies identified ways that service learning students contributed to client outcomes and the increased capacity of the agency to take on new projects. The community partners also expressed a dedication to student learning as a reason for their participation with service learning classes (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

In a quantitative study, Littlepage et al. (2012) surveyed non-profit and religious agencies in two Indianan counties to learn about the ways community agencies use volunteer management tools and how they differentiate various forms of student involvement, including service learning. Service learning students required additional agency time than other volunteers because of the expectation of reciprocal benefits to students and the agency; however, they also reported the students brought other benefits such as increased visibility and client outcomes. Results also showed a willingness to

continue to work with service learning students (Littlepage et al., 2012). Similarly, in a mixed methods study by Gray et al. (1998), a majority of community organizations gave high marks to student volunteers and felt the benefits of working with student outweighed the costs.

One critique of service learning has been that the benefits to students outweigh those of the community (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010). Yet, research engaging the experiences of community partners working with service learning students is scarce. This study addresses gaps in the literature by investigating the lived experiences of community partners that included both agency staff and individual residents who worked with university students.

Methods

The interviews were conducted with community members who partnered with university students on a variety of projects. In this study I was a participant observer, co-instructor of one of the service learning courses, the founder and director of a community development initiative, and family member by marriage to several extended family members residing in the town. The network of courses included electives in social work, Writing and Rhetoric, and art at a major University located in the Southern United States. Over a two-year period approximately 130 students from a range of disciplines worked in the town including social work, psychology, English, government, film, theater, engineering, political science, architecture, and art. Projects included a campaign to restore a historical building, a community garden, supporting an art co-op, a high school essay workshop, a teen social support group, writing a National Endowment of the Arts

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grant, youth art exhibit, public transportation project, establishing a sub-committee with residents and the City Council, oral history project, design mapping projects, multimedia documentaries, public art projects, and a cultural enrichment program for young African American girls. Students worked with the library board, school district, churches, local artists, civically involved residents, and the African American Prince Hall Masons.

Interviews were conducted over a 4-month period. Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as a method of analysis to gain descriptions of the lived experience of the community members working with a steady stream of university students - a first time experience for the town. Phenomenology provides a rich and descriptive source of data and is well suited to better understand the meaning of the experiences of community members though their words and descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological inquiry helps researchers gain understanding of the essential meaning of lived experiences from participants' perspective and descriptions; therefore this method was employed in this study.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used in this study. The criterion was residency in the town and involvement with university students in at least one project over the course of one semester (n=9). Community partners worked with students on a variety of projects, often more than one at a time, and for more than one semester. The sample included the school district superintendent, high school principal, two high school teachers, a Pastor/City Councilman, local newspaper editor, and three civically active residents. The breakdown

by gender and ethnicity was 67% female, 33% male, 56% white, and 44% African American.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to gather the community member's description of the experience of working with the university students. The questions were drawn from the literature as well as my experience as a participant observer and comprised of nine items about the community member's experience working with university students (see Table 4). I conducted the interviews, which lasted between 25-45 minutes and immediately after each interview I wrote field notes. The university institutional review board for research with human subjects approved this study as part of a larger investigation of the impact of the community-university partnership in this town.

Data Analysis

All audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Procedures associated with phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) were used in the analysis. As a participant observer in this study I focused on the lived experiences of community members working with students; however, my position as a the founder of the community development initiative, co-instructor of the service learning course, and family member was taken into account through the phenomenological procedures of writing assumption statements, bracketing, writing field notes throughout the analysis process, and peer review. The steps of phenomenological analysis were as follows: (1) recording a list of assumptions about the community partners and their experience

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working with students; (2) bracketing my experience working in the community; (3) conducting a naïve reading to absorb the entirety of the data; (4) reducing and eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experience of being working with university students (5) creating meaning units from the significant statements (Table 1, see Appendix I); (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into clusters of meaning (themes); and (8) test themes against the entirety of data (validated by the full text of transcripts). The reliability of themes was assessed with two peer readers familiar with the methods and topic.

The clusters of meaning resulted in the five essential themes. Table 2 (see Appendix II) contains an example of a theme cluster that emerged from their meaning units. The validated themes were used to write a textural description or "what" the participants experienced. Additionally, the themes were used to write a structural description of the setting and context - also referred to as the "how" participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). From the integration of the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the essence of the phenomena was constructed, synthesizing the common experiences of the group as a whole (Table 3). Social construction provided a wider frame for this analysis and is well suited for phenomenological research (Grbich, 2007). Humans are constructing meaning through interaction and experiences with their environment, inclusive of a historic and social perspective (Crotty, 1998). Constructionist research assumes subjectivity and that reality is not fixed, rather it is always in flux and experienced differently depending on the person and their perception (Grbich, 2007). Recognition and insight into the meaning

making of the community participants contributes valuable knowledge for building

effective service learning practices and pedagogy.

Table 5: Synthesis of Community Partner's Experience

> Community members who worked with students felt they were generally well received and welcomed in the town. Residence to the students, their projects and university presence was attributed to a variety of causes including local power struggles, fear of change and unknown, and lack of awareness of the students and projects. Overall they felt students were well liked and the projects were valuable and appreciated by the community, particularly the youth. They described numerous ways they had learned from students including how to be an advocate of positive change, new skills such as technology, art activities, and new pedagogy, African history, to see the town more positively, and exposed youth to new horizons and the possibility of higher education. Students were a source of inspiration to try new things, to believe positive change is possible, to be creative, and overcome roadblocks, and inspire youth to attend college. As they became more involved with the students they also worked hard to engage others in the projects. Though students left after a semester or the summer, they felt the work lived on, and they missed them and hoped more students would come in the future.

Results

Five essential themes emerged from the interviews: (1) encouraging community

involvement; (2) students as inspiration; (3) community learning; (4) community

response to students; and (5) lasting imprint of students in the community.

Theme 1: Encouraging Community Involvement

As a result of working with the students on specific projects, community partners

increased their involvement in town's revitalization and attempted to enlist others to do

so as well. They discussed determination to overcome obstacles and use their social

capital to ensure projects were successful. Participants in the study remarked on how their

relationships with students had engaged them and others in the community; however,

they expressed a desire to "see more residents involved in the community". They also

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described how the demands of their lives at times prevented them from working with the students, "Due to health reasons I have been kind of out of touch, I am not in contact with what's in the now. I want to catch up on things". One community member spoke of his conflicting obligations and yet he still made time to work with students,

> [I haven't] been able to go as much as I would like to due to work and activities, I
> have put as much as I can, I stop by and support and try to get people to go out
> and support what is going on. (Bill, Pastor and City Council member)

For some community partners, their involvement increased their determination to overcome obstacles,

> After two years, I am the one looking for the different ways to make things
> work… I don't want them [students] to hit a roadblock now and I am the one
> trying to get them around the corner. (Jim, School Superintendent)

The community partners recognized the value of relationships in encouraging community involvement, particularly in a small town, "They have done a really good job of working and interacting with people. That's not easy. There is a natural distrust that's overcome now, I really believe that." The local newspaper editor spoke of using her position and platform to publicize the students and projects, "I always promote them and help them. I am very positive as to what they are doing for us."

Theme 2: Students as Inspiration

Community partners felt students inspired them to become more civically active, try new things, awaken the possibly of higher education for youth, believe in positive change, generate new energy and ideas, meet new people, and be more proactive.

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Community partners in the study described a newfound optimism for positive change, "I see that we have something to build on, they [students] have shown us ways we can improve and how we can get things to happen for the city". One community partner spoke of how the students helped her recognize the potential of maximizing existing social capital, "If you want {things to get better] there are plenty of people here that can make it better. I think the students and the whole program shows [the community] that". One resident spoke of how the students inspired her to "get out of her rut" and try new things,

> If they never came I probably would never have gotten into this stuff here. I would just see myself coming home and cooking and just looking at TV. Makes you get up and go, constantly keeping you going…whereas when they came I enjoyed getting out because there were new people and I got to learn different things. (Sara, stay at home parent)

A community member described her renewed commitment to the community,

> I couldn't believe it myself because I am the change, these people have inspired [me] to where I know I am the change. There was a time I felt like I need to get the hell away from here, married or not, because there was nothing here, dead, nothing here. But seeing the students come in with different ideas and listening to students here [in the town], seeing the smiles on their faces changed my mind, saying you need to stay and do what you can. (Iris, community advocate)

> Students working in the town inspired fresh ideas and new approaches. A

community partner from the school district spoke of the "new perspectives" that students

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brought and the "propensity to be stagnant when you don't have people from the outside come in and provide some input. Yeah, I think it stirred my thoughts." All of the participants in the study spoke of how the university students inspired youth in the community to consider higher education as well as expose them to a world beyond the town. The high school principal described the university students as "a very positive impact to our students to say, no you can do it, you can go on to college."

The local newspaper editor articulated her decision to get more involved directly to her work with the students,

> I [began to] think that my energy and my thinking could actually make a
> difference of changing something, trying to revive the chamber and do some
> projects, get some younger people into town, a lot of my deciding that it was
> possible to do has to do with my meeting the students and seeing they are
> interested in helping the [town]. (Carrie, local newspaper editor)

Theme 3: Community Learning

Community partners in the study described a number of ways they learned and grew as a result of working with the university students including meeting new people, becoming a better community advocate, youth learning about life outside of the town and possibilities for college, technology, art activities, and teaching techniques.

> I grew from it. How I grew was getting to be around different types of people and
> get well versed in what they do, and just pick up on things. I have learned by
> looking and listen and seeing what's going on. (Bill, Pastor and City Council
> member)

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For older community partners there was an opportunity to learn as well, "Even at my age I learned some things…experience I had was great". Another active citizen spoke about becoming "more patient" at City Council meetings "because these things didn't come about over night, and they are not going to go away over night, so I have learned patience". A school district official noted, "I have learned a lot from the resilience of these students who come here". School district staff and residents spoke repeatedly about the learning benefits of youth in town, specifically about working side by side with university students and visiting the campus. They all felt that the relationships they formed, participating in projects, and having local high school students visit the university campus exposed the youth in town to the possibility of attending college, and "allowed students to be on a university campus that otherwise wouldn't have gotten the opportunity". Another area of learning that was attributed to the university students was knowledge about technology, particularly for school district staff.

> I am just now embracing technology in education for the classroom. To also realize that it is here to stay, and that we might as well now set up Facebook for high school is from listening to [the university student] and just knowing that it's here to stay. He helped me get rid of some of my fears of technologies. (Lori, high school principal)

A high school teacher described his professional development as a result of working with the university students.

> When you are a school teacher you spend so much of your time within these four walls and it was neat to get out and see what's happening beyond here, some of

the new trends, particularly talking with [the university student] about the digital revolution and media, and I was really impressed with the energy that the university students brought to the town. The whole concept of the blog, I know on our campus we have a couple of teachers who are incorporating blogging into the curriculum. (Brad, high school teacher)

Increased civic mindedness was not only for the adults in the community, "It's given them [youth] outlets for their creativity and their particular skills and they are thinking in terms of public service and higher education, when perhaps before they might not have". Another teacher who worked with a graduate university student in her classroom over the course of an academic year spoke of her professional growth, "If nothing else, it gave me a few more tools in my arsenal to teach. It was really good."

Theme 4: Community Response to the Students

When asked about the community's response to the students, participants in this study described a mostly welcoming and favorable reception; however, an element of resistance was also identified. This resistance was explained differently depending on the community partner. The explanations ranged from power struggles, lack of awareness of the students and projects, and general mistrust of outsiders and change. The participants in this study expressed appreciation and a hope that students will continue to come to the town, and felt most of the community was in agreement, "I think they were received by most that I know with an open heart, open head, gracious and friendly".

A member of the City Council spoke of those in power feeling their position compromised by the students' presence and infusion of new ideas.

It shifts the balance all the way around, everything should be on an even keel, but some people don't see it that way. They felt like we allowed these people to come in and make things better and then others will be able to progress, them they will lose power, it's a power struggle type thing, and it's an ego type thing. (Bill, Pastor and City Council member)

Resistance was coined in a number of ways; however, a push back to the students and projects by certain segments of the community was acknowledged. A school district employee talked of anticipating resistance from certain sectors in the community when he was first approached about the prospect of service learning projects and a new university presence in town, "I knew they [people with power] would be apprehensive and unhelpful I think they were and they still are, and the people that I thought would be open and ready for some change and hope were". Despite what one community partner described as "naysayers", the resistance to new ideas was something participants in this study saw being chipped away over time as trust was built. When asked what made the partnership and projects successful, one participant replied, "I would have to say trust". Another community partner felt a permanent space would address resistance and increase involvement.

The one failure that we have had, and there is nothing we can do about it, I talked about this from the onset, I wanted a permanent home, a permanent base for this project down town, some that so when new students came it, it didn't matter… if [certain] people could see some type of permanence I think the people who are skeptical would be less so. (Jim, School Superintendent)

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Overall, there was a deep sense of gratitude expressed by the community partners in this study for the commitment and contribution of the university students.

> I haven't seen anything really negative. It's gotten people thinking, maybe even ideas that didn't take hold, ideas that were mentioned at a city council meeting or chamber of commerce meeting I thought was wonderful that people from outside were actually giving us ideas that could actually be implemented here. (Brad, high school teacher)

A retired teacher who was active in several projects described her experience with the students, "The students were there and we had a good time. They were up at the school working with the kids. We think that that was a wonderful thing".

Theme 5: Lasting Imprint of Students in the Community

Participants spoke of student projects having a "lasting effect" that continues to live on. They also discussed the need for community members to "carry on, keep up the work" and "get enough people to fill in the gap" to ensure continuity after the semester concluded. There was a strong belief expressed that "If you can reach a few people, it's worth the time", particularly when it came to the youth. The school superintendent spoke of the long lasting impact the university students had made on the school district students.

> You know they are going to leave so it's not a shock, but you don't really leave when you leave the impression. You stay infinitely and you put thoughts in the minds of kids, things they would not have been exposed to. I think that you leave a little bit of a legacy when you reach a kid. (Jim, School Superintendent)

When high school students visited the university campus, school district staff and other community partners in the study spoke of the imprint it made on those who participated.

> They went to the campus and that made a forever a memorable experience to them. If we impact one it's a success. Just that there is world outside the town - not that it is bad, but to really be a productive citizen, viable citizen you have to broaden your horizons and experiences and that's one of the avenues this program has offered kids that would not have the opportunity. That's the essence of it.
>
> (Lori, high school principal)

A social support group started by university students for high school youth was a program frequently mentioned in these interviews as a successful program, "Students are still asking me today that were part of that the group if they were ever going to start it back up", "I have seen a smile on their faces [when they] talk about how their participation was [in the group]", and "I would love to see that [social support] program continue, that really made an impression…it really made an impact". Youth frequently asked the community partners in the study if the university students would be back, particularly to school district staff that interacted with all the youth who worked with the university students, "I just say next year is next year and there are budget issues we are dealing with them, and I said I can't make any guarantees. There was a void though, knowing that's its gone". A high school teacher who worked with one university student over the course of the academic year spoke of having to explain to her students why university student would not return.

I do know that the students would {ask] when is she coming back, and I would

say she's not coming and they would say "What? why not?" and wanted to know

why she wasn't coming back because she had become a part of them. (Susan, high

school teacher)

The participants in the study spoke of a sense of loss they felt when students left, "I miss them terribly when they go on and look forward them being here every year, I will be extremely sad if you decide not to come." Community partners expressed a hope that a designated space for students would ensure they continue to return, "I would love to see us use that space somehow to have you guys come in all the time." Another community partner who worked on a variety of projects reflected on his experience with the students,

It's just been a good journey. It could have been better, wish it would have been

with more support from people that have authority and able to financially help.

All together it's been good, I would do it all again. If we started from scratch I

would be right there on the board. No matter that it's a cliché, an old psalm they

used to sing, *Ain't no stopping us now*. (Bill, Pastor and City Council member)

Discussion

A core principle of service learning is the establishment of reciprocal relationships that result in mutually beneficial outcomes for both communities and students (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Research on service learning has primarily focused on student outcomes with very few studies examining the community's experience (Cress et al., 2010). The relatively few studies to date are informed by agency staff and have not explored the involvement of informal networks or individuals who are active in their

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community, therefore this study engaged a wide range of community partners, school staff, civic organizations, agencies and civically involved residents. While previous studies that include community partners focused on their perception of the effect of service learning students on their organization, clients, and the students themselves (Driscoll et al., 1996), agency satisfaction with students and ways to improve the partnerships (Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage et al., 2012; Sandy and Holland, 2006), this study was concerned with the community partner's lived experience and the meaning of having university students involved in their community. Findings from the current study suggest that communities partnering with service learning students receive a range of potential benefits including increased civic participation, the opportunity to gain knowledge, inspiration to try new things, an infusion of fresh ideas and energy, and experience a lasting positive effect beyond the students' time in the community.

The community in which this study took place is a small, rural town that has experienced a severe economic decline that has taken its toll on both the quality of life and the built environment. Many residents lament the passing of a more prosperous time when the town was a thriving railroad and agricultural hub, and the condition of the built environment was attractive. Power, class and racial divides run deep throughout generations, and often a distrust of outsiders and their motives. This is congruent with findings that show the benefits to students and the university can supersede the community's best interest (Ringstad, Leyva, Garcia, & Jasek-Rysdahl, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig, 2010). The arrival of the first cohort of university students was met with mixed reactions from a warm welcome and a feeling

that help was on the way to skepticism and worry about broken promises. Over the course of two years relationships were built and trust evolved. While participants acknowledged challenges such as the time limitations of the semester, the difficulties of enlisting community participation, and a void once students left, they felt the benefits outweighed the shortcomings.

Community members in the study increased their involvement as a result of working with students and made efforts to engage others in projects they worked on with students. One of the reasons they felt the projects and students were successful in engaging the community was the relationships students built with them and other residents. These relationships developed over time, and eventually helped to minimize distrust and skepticism towards the students and the motives of the university involvement. Participants in the study leveraged their position and social capital to encourage other residents to work on projects with the students. While students made consistent efforts to publicize projects and invite community participation, the community partners felt they were in a stronger position to convince neighbors, friends and colleagues to get involved.

Students working in the community inspired participants to "get out of a rut" to try new things and meet new people. As a result, community partners forged new relationships and became more optimistic about the possibility of positive change. They saw themselves building on the energy and commitment of the students, and "becoming the change". The intention of service learning is not to do for but to do with, and through collaboration with the students, community partners began to see themselves as the

ultimate change agents whose bore responsibility for carrying on the work. Participants in the study were most impressed with how the university students exposed youth in the town to the possibility of attending college and venturing beyond the rural town through the project activities, including visits to the campus located in the state capital.

While research has demonstrated a variety of ways students grow and learn as a result of participation in service learning experiences (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Finley, 2012), the current study suggests non-student participants increase knowledge and personal growth as a result of engagement with university service learning programs. For some it was overcoming a fear of technology and learning new skills they applied in their professional and personal life. Teachers discussed new pedagogical methods modeled by the university students that they later employed in their classrooms such as blogging, communication exercises, and technology. In addition to learning new skills and techniques, participants spoke of improving their ability to advocate through their work with the students, particularly by developing more patience and resilience.

While the participants in this study expressed appreciation for the university students, and generally felt the town's reception to them was welcoming, they spoke of a resistance towards the students by certain members of the community. Resistance was attributed to fear of the unknown, lack of awareness, long-standing power disputes, and, and small town mistrust of outsiders. There was a degree of anger and frustration when the participants spoke of the resistance; however, it was not unexpected or something they had not encountered before in other civic or professional efforts. Despite the

resistance, participants overall felt the town welcomed the students and valued the contributions the projects had made, particularly for the youth.

One of the challenges of service learning is the eventual departure of students when a semester concludes; however, the duration of a relationship is not always the indication of its value (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Participants in the study responded to questions about the semester timeframe and the number of students coming and going, specifically if it was it worth them being there even though they would leave at some point. While they recognized the drawbacks of forming attachments with students and the possibility that much needed programs may not continue, participants felt the work and presence of the students lived on in a positive way. For participants in this study the value of working with university students transcended a particular set of outcomes; rather they spoke of an imprint that could positively shape one life or even the direction of the town. Participant comments also speak to several related criticisms of the artificial timeframe of the semester including insufficient time to engage with community partners, lack of ability to transfer knowledge (Tyron, Stoecker, Martin, Seblonka, Hilgendorf, & Nellis, 2008), trails of unfulfilled promises and a sense of abandonment in the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Stoeker et al., 2010). This study suggests that community members felt engaged with the students, as if they had learned enough from the experience to go forward, a sense of completion and an understanding of the fitness of the departure of students from the community.

Conclusion

The current study supports the value service learning offers communities and underscores the importance of investing in relationships with community partners. Additionally, the study also elucidates the potential value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents to service learning experiences and research. Further research is needed to build a useful understanding of the lived experience of community participants in service learning projects, and might include focus groups, arts-based methods, providing community members copies of research results, a comparison of student and community responses to extend the dialog between particpants, and multimedia documentation, and longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effect of this type of community-university partnership. Such understandings will assist in the development and support of best practices for engaging the community in service learning programs.

The results of this study suggest that the community gained direct benefits when students engaged informally with individual community members in addition to the formal institutional/agency based engagement. Those benefits included increased civic participation, gaining new knowledge and skills, inspiration to try new things, new ideas and energy, and recognizing a positive effect beyond the students' time in the community. Recommendations for increasing the benefits of service learning community – university relationships include the intentional provision of opportunities for informal relationships between community members and students, as well as recognition of the meaning making of community partners as an important project resource.

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Supplemental Data E

Table 1 Example of significant statements and meaning units

Significant Statement	Meaning Unit
Well, when we had the time to sit down and plan and really advertise what's going to happen, I think it's been a rousing success. I know these students came in late, the three that I met yesterday, but I think we have already started long range goals for next summer. I think we have got some really good ideas and we can plan in advance, I think we can some pretty wonderful things and expose our kids to some ideas and some instruction that they would not get otherwise.	I have worked with the students to get the summer program going and plan for next year and I think we are doing really good work together that would not happen without students coming to the town.
I marvel at their resilience, so many road blocks were thrown up, and I know in social work in general, I can't imagine how many road blocks they will see because, you got a lot of people that want see great things happen here, but even with that they throw up road blocks, and its more roadblock and skepticism than anything and I have learned a lot from the resilience of these guys who come in here. They, I am not going to say they won't take no for an answer because that sounds negative, but they look for alternatives until they find a crack and then they get in there.	I have learned from the students and they have inspired me with their perseverance and refusal to be deterred despite obstacles.
Well I think the summer enrichment program probably sticks out most because kids a year later about the video game designs, the oral history project, because it uses concepts that they are comfortable with and familiar with, and the digital age. It exposed them to some possibilities for their careers that perhaps they had not considered. Sean was somebody they still come back to and talk about. The video you guys put together was something they really great.	There are many excellent projects students have done that have made an impression on the youth.

Supplemental Data F

Table 2 Example of a cluster and associated meaning units

Endurance of student work beyond the semester
- Worth it even if more do not come   - Worth it even if only one or two youth benefit   - The work they did lives on beyond their time here   - People still talk about projects they did   - It is our responsibility to keep the projects going when they leave   - We miss them when they leave   - I stay on touch with some of the students   - Need a permanent space for students so they will return   - Hope they come back

Table 6 Interview Schedule

Mart Community Project   INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me a little about yourself? (age, race/ethnicity, community role, student rank)
2. How did you come to be involved with university students working on projects in your town?
3. Tell me about the activity/project you were involved in with the UT students. What was your role in this project?
4. How do you feel the students were received in the town?
5. What was their contribution to the town? Do you feel their contribution extended beyond the semester?
6. How would you describe your experience working with the university students? Do you feel as though you grew from this experience? If yes, how?
7. How did you feel when the semester ended and the students were no longer in the town?
8. How did working with the university students influence your thinking about your community? Did it change your perspective of your community in any way? How?
9. How has the town been affected by the university presence in the community?

Anything else you want to share?

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

Major Findings

Universities are moving rapidly to institutionalize service learning and community engagement to foster reciprocal and meaningful community-university partnerships that expand their civic mission (Campus Compact, 2011). The three articles in this dissertation each address distinct areas of the service learning continuum; however, in combination they form a whole that informs and supports the use of service learning pedagogy, community engagement practices, and provides directions for further research. Article 1 presents a holistic, interdisciplinary service learning model that offers social work a way to become a leader in the further development of service learning pedagogy and community engagement built on the discipline's history, mission, and value for social justice. Additionally Article 1 offers the current state of service learning and social work, the historic and theoretical foundation of service learning, the linkages between social work and service learning, and offers a 3-component course model that addresses criticisms identified in the current research. The study discussed in Article 2 reveals insight into the educational and transformation experiences of service learning students enrolled in the course presented in Article 1 as described in their blogs. This is the first study identified to date to use phenomenology and student blogs as data to examine the student's service learning experience. An area of service learning research that has been long overlooked is the impact and experience of community partners (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010). The experiences of community members described in Article 3 provides insight into the meaning of working with university

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service learning students for community partners including residents and agency representatives.

The major findings of this dissertation support the value of service learning in social work education, the importance of interdisciplinary collaborations, and investment of the time needed to cultivate reciprocal partnerships with communities. Service learning is gaining stature in social work education; however, it still lags behind the overall momentum in higher education to promote a civic mission, educate students to become civically active, and deploy resources to address social problems through reciprocal community-university partnerships. Based on social work's mission and core values, it is well suited to assume a leadership role. The 3-compoent service-learning model presented in Article 1 demonstrates how social work can facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration with students and faculty to work in partnership with key stakeholders and residents on community-identified projects that offer mutually beneficial outcomes. Being willing to invest in relationship building over time, allowing for missteps, respecting the community's will, and not entering communities as the expert or "fixer" are critical to establishing trust and sustainable relationships. The use of a relational vs. transactional model addresses some of the criticisms of service learning, more specifically that it benefits the university and student more than community partners (Beran & Lubin, 2012). Additionally, the integration of service learning into social work education can help remedy an imbalance in social work education between clinical, intervention-based social work, and community based social work. While clinical concentrations continue to dominate nationally across schools of social work (Burke,

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2011), service learning is an opportunity to provide both macro and micro learning experiences and relationships with communities that reciprocal and mutually beneficial.

The analysis of student blogs in Article 2 revealed five essential themes: (1) implications of race; (2) working with the community; (3) deterioration of the built environment; (4) capacity of art; and (5) learning as a result of the course. Learning about segregation and its persistent legacy through personal encounters was very different from deconstructing racism in a classroom. The use of blogs, journals, and reflective papers offer unique insight into the lived experiences of students in their own words that surveys, scales and other quantitative measures are not able to provide. Students in the study grappled with an array of complex issues, including race and a legacy of segregation. Blogs revealed how students navigated the opportunities to learn about and address social and economic injustice, and how personal encounters with community partners and the relationships they built helped facilitate their learning process. The findings suggests that service learning pedagogy provides students an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills, apply theory to practice, experience reciprocal community engagement, and further their academic, social and personal growth and development in a way not solely attainable in a traditional classroom environment.

Article 3 illustrates how community partners increase knowledge and personal growth as a result of engagement with university service learning programs. Five essential themes emerged from the interviews: (1) encouraging community involvement; (2) students as inspiration; (3) community learning; (4) community response to students; and (5) lasting imprint of students in the community. While community partners

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recognized the drawbacks of forming attachments with students and the possibility that much needed programs may not continue, participants felt the work and presence of the students lived on in a positive way. For participants in this study the value of working with university students transcended a particular set of outcomes; rather they spoke of an imprint that could positively shape one life or even the direction of the town; therefore the current study supports the value service learning offers communities and underscores the importance of investing in relationships with community partners. Additionally, the study elucidates the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents to service learning experiences and research. The results of this study suggest the community gained direct benefits when students engaged informally with individual community members in addition to the formal institutional/agency based engagement. Those benefits included increased civic participation, gaining new knowledge and skills, inspiration to try new things, new ideas and energy, and recognizing a positive effect beyond the students' time in the community.

Limitations

The goals and purposes of qualitative research are necessarily distinct from those of quantitative methods. While qualitative research is an essential complement to quantitative measures, the rigor of text-based research is measured via evidence of trustworthiness, data thickness, theoretical integrity, confirmation of findings, and the breadth of larger applicability. In qualitative research, limitations are addressed through the trustworthiness of the results, which is achieved by adherence to the methodological

criteria (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) identified five areas to access the quality of results; "objectivity/confirmability of qualitative work; reliability/dependability/auditability; external validity/transferability/fittingness; and utilization/application/action orientation" (p.686).

The research in this dissertation includes two phenomenological studies in which I was a participant observer; therefore field notes, an audit trail, memos and bracketing were used to ensure confirmability and dependability. Peer readers were engaged in lengthy discussion based on thorough review of data that provided triangulation for the soundness of interpretation. The research participants were purposefully diverse in age gender, social standing, and education. The data generated was particularly thick with a richness of immediacy to experience and detailed descriptions. However, the studies have limits that negatively affect the extent of the project's rigor. Additional member checking post analysis, a larger group of participants, and longitudinal data collection would have increased the overall validity of the research; however, these were beyond the scope of this research. While both studies have limitations, they represent needed exploration of student and community lived experiences.

Strengths

A majority of studies in service learning on student are quantitative and focused on outcomes rather than experience, therefore phenomenology was chosen as the method of analysis to identify participants' own categories of meaning. I adhered to rigorous procedures and steps associated with phenomenology including a lengthy and detailed audit trail, field notes from interviews, research memos, and peer readers.

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Phenomenology offers detailed personal description of the meaning of phenomena; therefore a major strength of this research is that it provides insight to the lived experience and interpretation of phenomena, building on the emic viewpoint. Overall, this research builds on and extends existing service learning research and sets a foundation for further research to holistically investigate and gain understandings of student and community learning and transformational experiences to further develop best practice and pedagogy.

Discussion

All three articles explore innovative models, methods, and strategies to further mutual benefits to students, communities, and universities through service learning. The development of a course model originating in social work comprised of students from a range of disciplines produced a range of learning opportunities for students and community partners, brought needed resources through projects and grants, and instigated transformative experiences for community and university participants. The use of blogging strengthened the reflective requirement of service learning and provided students a flexible and creative way to share experiences, resources, and become generators of knowledge. Service learning pedagogy that adheres to the core principles of study, reciprocity, and reflection can result in mutually beneficial outcomes for students, universities, and communities, and assist higher education in achieving a broader civic mission.

Integrating service learning pedagogy in social work helps bring social justice issues and community engagement to the forefront of social work education. Students

experience first-hand the complex realities of class, race, economic decline, and gain an understanding of the legacies of past injustices through interactions, stories, archival data, and being in segregated spaces of the past and present. The combination of "real life" experiences with course readings, discussions, and reflection are an opportunity for social work to build on the mission and values of the profession in educating future practitioners and scholars. Additionally, service learning can complement field education's necessary emphasis on skill building by and strengthening the ability of students to reciprocally engage with communities.

The model presented in this dissertation furthers a conversation about how increased use of service learning in social work is a way to assert a leadership role in the community engagement movement that is becoming increasingly popular at institutions of higher education. The rising number of community engagement centers and leadership positions at colleges and universities is an indicator of the importance of connecting the resources of higher education to communities. These efforts are also aimed at increasing the diversity of campuses, and reducing the town-gown divide (Strum, Eatman Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011). Social work's mission and values make it a natural choice for assuming a leadership role in the growing movement to establish reciprocal and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships of which service learning one such strategy to accomplish this goal.

Recommendations

Additional research on the integration of service learning pedagogy into social work curriculum is needed to develop a range of options for social work education to

increase community engagement and reflection, collaborate with other disciplines and explore ways that service learning can complement and extend the field education model. Further research into the lived experiences of students participating in service learning courses is needed to explore the ways this pedagogy facilitates mutually beneficial outcomes to students and communities. The use of blogs, journals, and reflective papers offer insight into the transformative experiences of students that surveys, scales and other quantitative measures are not able to provide. Future research might also include the analysis of multimedia incorporated into the reflective process including photographs, video, poetry, and other creative expressions used in blogs. Student comments posted on their peer's blogs would offer an opportunity to study the value of building a collective discourse and learning partnership between students and faculty.

The lack of attention to community members in previous service learning research is a gap that requires a concerted effort to build a useful understanding of the experience, needs, and perspectives of community participants in service learning projects. Future inquiries ought to include focus groups, arts-based methods, and multimedia documentation, and longitudinal studies that explore and explain the long-term effect of this type of community-university partnership. Such understandings will assist in the development and support of best practices for engaging the community in service learning programs. Recommendations for increasing the benefits of service learning community – university relationships include the intentional provision of opportunities for informal relationships between community members and students, as well as

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recognition of the meaning making of community partners as an important project resource.

Linkages Between the Articles and Contribution to the Knowledge Base

The articles in this dissertation address three distinct, yet interrelated areas of service learning. The articles address gaps in the literature on service learning and social work education, student experiences rather than outcomes, and a lack of research on community partners, particularly community members who are not part of agencies (Cress et al., 2010; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Article 1 examines the present state of best practice in service learning, the current stature of service learning in social work education, the link between the theoretical and philosophical foundation of service learning and social work's roots, the critical issues of service learning and reciprocal community engagement, and presents a 3-component model of interdisciplinary service learning grounded in both social work and service learning values and principles. Article 1 posits that social work is well positioned to take a more active leadership role in the further development of service learning. Article 2 offers a unique vantage point into the experiences of service learning students enrolled in the course model described in Article 1 though a phenomenological analysis of student blogs. This study reveals student reflection over time as described in their words. Reflection is a core activity of service learning and has been identified as an area that needs strengthening (Ash, Clayton, &Atkinson, 2005). Article 3 provides a much-needed voice of the community members who partnered with a network of university students, including the course presented in Article 1. The voice of community has received little attention in service learning

research, and of that research the focus has been on agencies. Article 3 includes the experiences of community members who are active in their community, or became active as a result of working with service learning students and university presence. The findings suggest that despite the limitations of a semester and frequent student turnover (Tryon, Stoecker, Martin, Seblonka, Hilgendorfm & Nellis, 2008), community partners found positive benefits in having service learning students in the community. The combination of these articles presents a holistic model of service learning and insight on the transformative potential of service learning for students and communities with social work well positioned to assume a more active leadership role.

Agenda for Future Research on Dissertation Topic

My agenda for further research on service learning in social work and as a viable pedagogy across disciplines will include analysis of data already collected under an approved university institutional review board. This data includes student blogs with comments and multimedia, student Learning Records, film footage, and interviews with community members, students, and artists. While we focused on the students and community members for the purposes of this dissertation, we have not included the voices of faculty from a network of classes that worked in the town. This is a gap in the literature that I intend to pursue.

Future research will also focus more specifically on the experiences of visiting artists and those students and community members that worked alongside them, and the potential of arts based practice as a way to revitalize communities. We received two National of the Endowment of the Arts grants and have collected a plethora of data to

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analyze. Most recently, the community has assumed the reins of the community development project, which I founded and nurtured for four years. Research on the transition of university led projects to the community is an important area that remains under researched. In all of the areas mentioned above, there is a need for longitudinal study that utilizes a relational model and is a corollary to long-term investment in communities by higher education.

From an overall perspective, I am interested in further research in service learning pedagogy and community-university partnerships applying a wicked problem framework developed by design theorist Horst Rittle to community engagement. This approach identifies social problems as wicked problems, complex and unsolvable, rather they are resolved over and over with responses and not solutions (Rittle & Webber, 1973). This contradicts the notion of "fixing" problems, or that a problem can be defined by one source since identifying a problem depends on whom you ask. After nearly 30 years working as a community practitioner and being disappointed with the slow pace of positive change, I see great potential in Rittle's wicked problem theory to inform new and innovative strategies and provide much needed paradigm shifts. This represents an ambitious agenda; however, I see my dissertation research and work in Mart, and at UT over the past four years as a solid launching point that can inform institutional practice and deepen our understandings of the possibilities and limits of service learning and civic engagement.

Implications for Social Work

Social Work Education

The gaining popularity of service learning in social work education has the potential to positively impact CSWE competency-based standards. With the 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), and the specification of ten core student competencies, Council on Social Work Education encouraged the infusion of content across the curriculum (CSWE, 2008). "Under the new EPAS, course content is conceptualized as building core competencies that are demonstrated through a program's practice behaviors and assessed through multiple measures. In addition, programs must specify how their mission and goals not only connect with core competencies but reflect the context of the program" (Belliveau, 2011, p.80). This allows for greater flexibility and creativity in employing methods and approaches such as service learning to respond to the needs of students and communities, and the call in higher education to make education more relevant and applicable to real world problems.

Service learning is also a way for social work to increase cross-discipline course offerings. Service learning also creates opportunities for faculty to collaborate on community projects that are well served by the involvement of multiple disciplines. Students also benefit from being exposed to a variety of expertise and can enhance their skill set by working along side peers and faculty from other disciplines. Additionally, students who enroll in a cross-listed social work service learning class may find themselves excited about social work and consider switching majors. An indication of this upswing in service learning in social work is the recent dedication by *Advances in Social Work* (2011) and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* (2012) of the entire issue to service learning and competency–based education. While the majority of articles were

conceptual, six studies were included that offer promising findings for the future of service learning in social work. The conceptual articles provided examples of course models, community-university partnerships the US and abroad, and how the incorporation of service learning in social work advances solutions for the most pressing social problems. Specific examples of how service learning pedagogy, including reflections structured around identified practice behaviors, supports the shift to competency-based education and identifying ways to evidence student mastery (McGuire & Majewski, 2011).

Although service learning and field education occur in a community context, service learning places equal importance on student learning and benefit to the community, whereas, the field practicum prioritizes student skill building (Kropf & Mininder, 2002; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). This is a significant point of departure that distinguishes service learning from the social work field practicum, "In field work students are typically separated from one another and closely supervised, in studies described the service learning experience afforded students a rare opportunity to collectively solve problems and engage in long-range panning within a learning community" (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 319). This raises questions as well as an opportunity to explore how service learning and field education are they best sequenced, infused and complimentary.

While service learning may occur in an agency setting, it is not restricted to formal placements. Based on the service learning principal of community identified needs and reciprocity, projects may take on a more non-traditional form resulting in a

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generative and fluid depending on the arrangement. This provides a rich opportunity for authentic learning experiences that are difficult to replicate in a highly structured field placement, much less a classroom. Service learning students experience unfiltered exposure to diverse populations while advantaging opportunities to actively develop problem solving strategies in real world situation, negotiation, advocacy, and social justice skills (Scott, 2008). These kinds of learning experiences are invaluable for students embarking on careers in social work where effective practice skills require the ability to successfully enter communities.

Another potential benefit to service learning in social work is the opportunity to promote a more active stance on advocacy and community organizing in social work education and ultimately the profession. Increased social and civic-minded graduates become the next generation of practitioners, scholars, and policy makers. Authentic reciprocal relationships with communities offer students an opportunity to engage in research practices such as community-based participatory research (CBPR) that are collaborative, equitable and sustainable though transfer of technology and longitudinal studies (Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, & Rose, 2010).

Social Work Practice

Based on the current body of literature, service learning shows great promise in cultivating social work practitioners that are more attuned to effective community engagement based on collaborative and reciprocal partnerships. The principles of service learning encourage students to listen and engage rather than fix and dictate solutions. Students who have participated in service learning and grasp the significance of

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reciprocity and community identified needs are well positioned to design programs in "partnership" with the communities they serve rather than "for" them as a collaborator rather than expert. This results in a new paradigm of practice that offers increased opportunities for shared responsibility, equity and promotion of social justice that build upon the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of social work as a profession (Furuto, 2007).

Summary

Over the past three decades, colleges and universities have been responding to a call to make education more relevant and applicable to real world problems through increased service learning and institutionalizing community engagement on campuses across the nation (Campus Compact, 2011). Service learning has been identified as one way to accomplish this broader civic mission. The three articles included in this dissertation combine to provide an understanding of the richness and complexity of students and community partners who participate in service learning experiences. The findings underscore the potential of service learning as pedagogy, and as a strategy of community engagement that produces mutual benefits to students, communities and institutions of higher education.

Based on the core values mission, and history of the profession, social work is well positioned to take a lead in service learning research, pedagogy, and the development of collaborative and sustainable community engagement practices. While existing service learning research in social work research is outdated and scarce (Lemieux & Allen, 2007), social work education has begun to take a strong interest in

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service learning pedagogy (McGuire & Majewski, 2011). There are mutual benefits afforded to social work, higher education, and communities though service learning including opportunities for student learning, multi disciplinary collaboration, strengthening community relationships, increased use of reflection, and opportunities for learning in a variety of settings outside the classroom. As higher education increasingly mandates service learning across campuses, social work has much to offer with an existing network of relationships with community-based agencies. As a profession dedicated to educating and preparing professionals to address the complex array of social problems social work has much to offer service learning and is well positioned to take a lead in service learning research, pedagogy, and the development of collaborative and sustainable community engagement practices.

The research in this dissertation informs the growing popularity of service learning in social work with findings that demonstrate a useful implementation model, highly meaningful transformative impact on students, the resilience of the community to challenges of hosting service learning and the invaluable fostering of inspiration and hope in the school/community relationship. Service learning can provide strategies for social work education to build on its existing strengths and values to explore new and different ways to foster authentic, reciprocal community engagement, student learning and personal and social development, and the role of faculty in implementing innovative pedagogical tools are critical areas of research to advance social work education, policy and practice.

Supplemental Data

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