Assessing the Development of an Emerging Critical Consciousness through Service Learning

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Service learning has gained traction in higher education as an accepted pedagogical model, but practitioners question the types of learning outcomes that emerge from it. How does service learning contribute to student growth, particularly in the area of critical consciousness development? This study investigates how service-learning experiences impact the ways in which students think about issues of Inequality, Social Justice, and Power & Privilege. Qualitative data collected from 17 service learning courses were coded within these three major themes, and then further categorized within each major theme as statements that reflect Cognitive Recognition, Perspective Taking, or Student Agency.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (Leskes & Miller, 2006) advocates for the development of personal and social responsibility among college students as one of the important aims and outcomes of college level learning in the twenty-first century. This includes fostering the development of civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, and ethical reasoning and action that are "anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real world challenges" (p.3). Service learning, a pedagogical method that combines classroom instruction with community-based activity to help students gain a greater understanding of social issues and become lifelong civic actors, in many ways, was developed to meet such goals.

Over time, service learning has strayed from its initial intent (Pollack, 2013). Rather than providing an opportunity for students to participate in a transformative process aimed at informing social change, service learning goals have shifted to mastering content (Pollack, 2013). Instead of having students examine social structural conditions that lead to systemic racism, sexism, classism, traditional service learning is focused on exposing students to diverse environments, the concept of volunteerism, and skill acquisition. Conversely, *critical service learning* models are focused on helping students to gain a more nuanced and complex understanding of the root causes of inequality and oppression. These models are further characterized by their emphasis on questioning the distribution of power in society while informing critical praxis towards social change (Mitchell, 2007). This includes shifting the priority of service learning from a sole emphasis on student

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development, to one that also considers the needs of the community, and what is being done to create change in these neighborhoods (Stoecker, 2016).

Critical service learning has a purposeful goal of developing student-critical consciousness with an emphasis on praxis (Mitchell, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000). Critical praxis is enacted when students learn about the underlying root causes of circumstances and issues in the communities they serve (homelessness, poverty, etc.), and collaborate with those communities to disrupt the systems of oppression that maintain social injustice. Building on Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientizacao*, Rhoads (1997) argued that higher education can help students develop a critical consciousness by doing a better job of linking curricular knowledge to extracurricular experiences. Reflecting Freire's belief in praxis, he stated, "academic and practical knowledge may be integrated as students struggle to solve important social problems through action and reflection" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 35). In essence, educational initiatives like service learning should be focused not only on the acquisition of experiential knowledge, or student development, but to empower students to process new knowledge, see the world through their own lenses, and improve the circumstances of that world through community partnership and their own collective imagination. As Nieto (2000) contended, service learning should be a transformative experience of civic consciousness raising where students shift their view of education from an individualized utilitarian view (how their education will make them more money) toward an acceptance of social responsibility, and the application of knowledge toward critical praxis. This requires a degree of intentionality that appears to be rare in the traditional service learning context.

This study attempts to address this question by examining critical consciousness development among students in several service learning courses across a range of disciplines. Specifically, the study was guided by the following question: What do student reflections on their service learning experiences tell us about their development of a critical consciousness?

Literature Review

Critical Consciousness Development

Critical consciousness is most closely aligned with the work of Brazilian educator and social activist Paulo Freire, who defined his philosophy of education as a liberatory process through which individuals become aware of the conditions which lead to oppression, and by taking action against those conditions, are empowered to become agents of change (Freire, 1970; Peet, 2006). For Friere, becoming critically conscious was essential for individuals living in oppressive social environments to gain the social and political agency to free themselves from repressive conditions. However, while the concept is often examined within the context of facilitating a process of awareness and the development of agency among individuals living in oppressive conditions, critical consciousness is equally relevant to those whose lives may not be directly impacted by oppression in the ways Freire discussed, such as college students.

The purpose of critical consciousness development is to enable the expansion of one's understanding of the role of oppression within society, particularly the ways in which oppression serves as both a process as well as an outcome (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil,

1999). Doing so requires the ability to critically evaluate situations through a process of recognizing, intellectualizing, and acting upon knowledge of one's own personal earned and unearned privilege (Thomas et al., 2014; Freire, 1973). Furthermore, it entails an explicit acknowledgement of how systems of oppression, including racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and other types of overt and systemic discrimination assist in the preservation of privilege for protected groups of people (e.g., whites, males, heterosexuals; Rosenberger, 2000).

To achieve this level of recognition, the concept of power must be understood and grappled with, and individuals must realize the roles they play within social and political environments (Peet, 2006). As Thomas et al. (2014) observed, this realization necessitates engagement in consistent and active reflection in order to critically analyze and deconstruct one's own experiences with oppression. However, this is not a simple process because it requires one to reconceptualize the world from a perspective that acknowledges the pervasiveness of what Watts et al. (1999) referred to as an asymmetry based on the "unequal distribution of coveted resources among politically salient populations" (p. 257).

To better understand the process of critical consciousness development, Watts et al. (1999) proposed a five-stage model that predicts the stages that students might traverse in gaining a better understanding of the structures and systems of oppression. The authors engaged the concepts of critical reflection, political efficacy and critical action to build a model that distinguishes between five unique stages of awareness and enables a greater understanding of how individuals develop a critical consciousness. Of particular relevance to this type of development among college students immersed in service learning are stages three, four and five—the precritical stage, the critical stage, and the liberation stage. The precritical stage suggests an awareness of oppression and the onset of an inquiry process regarding what can be done about it. The critical stage signifies the process of building on this awareness based on the desire to learn more about issues of oppression and possible remedies. Stage five, termed the liberation stage, involves an awareness that "oppression is salient," and that action must be taken in order to change this reality. The Watts et al. model, however, is a linear model that assumes students will progress through the process from one stage to another in a predictive manner. Synthesizing the Watts et al. model with conceptions of critical consciousness development posited by other authors cited above, we incorporate a similar framework based on cognitive recognition, perspective taking, and student agency to assess the reflections of students who had participated in a variety of service learning courses. These three alternate stages offer a nuanced model that focuses on the connections between service learning experiences and student reflections, students' transitions from one stage to another, and the possibility that this is a continual process of disequilibrium that is non-linear and influenced by course primers (e.g., literature, discussions, community site experiences, cultural and racial backgrounds).

Cognitive recognition. Cognitive recognition in the context of critical consciousness development suggests a growing awareness of the nature of oppression and its manifestations. This stage represents the introduction, acknowledgement, and acceptance of new information regarding (a) the systemic nature and manifestations of inequality; (b) issues of social justice; and (c) the recognition of power and privilege. This process is akin to the precritical stage described by Watts et al. (1999) where students develop "…an awareness of and concerns about asymmetry and inequality" (p. 263). In this stage, students

connect new knowledge with past experiences, and/or to contemporary circumstances. Cognitive recognition is qualitative evidence that students are able to reconceptualize a world that is familiar to them, and an epistemology that reifies systems of oppression.

Perspective taking. Perspective taking is described as an increased ability to employ critical thinking in challenging previous perspectives, or world views, specifically as they relate to inequality, social justice, power, and privilege. This relates to the fourth stage of the model put forth by Watts et al. (1999), the critical stage, as it focuses on the progression from recognition to critical awareness. Perspective taking enables students to redefine their world views and experience sociopolitical paradigm shifts. It is the political act of "mastering their narrative," or using their voice to define the world around them while imagining its possibilities. In this stage, students may also begin to form the opinion that oppression is unjust and that change of some kind is justified, perhaps through their own participation (Watts et al., 1999). However, perspective taking is not simply a lens for sociopolitical analysis. Perspective taking can also become action. For example, service learning students must also navigate issues of power and privilege between themselves, the university, and the community they are serving. Who has the power to define the social issues, determine the correct interventions, or enact social change? What are the terms of these relationships? Is the priority of service learning student development, community social justice, or both?

Student agency. The third stage of our model represents the presence of student agency. This process correlates with the liberation stage proposed by Watts et al. (1999) during which oppression is experienced and understood as a prominent part of social and political environments, and the desire to act in response is realized through involvement in social action, community development, and other forms of civic engagement (Watts et al., 1999). Student agency connotes the belief in one's ability to have an impact in a given situation, or the responsibility to do so. Although intent to act, or the belief that one's action can have impact, does not necessarily constitute action in the ways described in the liberation stage, it can be argued that the belief in one's ability to have an impact is necessary for action, and therefore, can be included in this final stage of our model. Also, since the exposure to servant leadership through service learning courses are often limited at institutions of higher education – either because students wait to participate in service learning courses after completing general education requirements, or time-to-degree considerations inhibit multi-term course offerings – accepting responsibility to act may be the only measurable variable of "action" until a longitudinal study is conducted on the professional trajectory of service learning students.

Critical Social Analysis and Service Learning

Proponents of civic engagement initiatives in higher education would contend that academic service learning creates an ideal opportunity for students to develop the critical outlook that Freire (1970) deemed vital to the efforts for social change, with the intention that students carry this consciousness in the creation of life-long commitments to civic work. Freire argued that education was a vital tool in the expansion of not only equitable

conditions, but also what we consider student agency and participatory democracy. As Richard Shaull (1970) stated in the original foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

Service learning, then, is the type of pedagogical instrument by which faculty can become catalysts in the progression of their student's critical consciousness through individual moral development and growth in their personal efficacy for social change (Spiezio, Baker, and Boland, 2005). Research demonstrates that when instructors intentionally set out to have their students encounter conditions of oppression, service learning can produce changes in attitudes toward social justice, inequality, and civic engagement (Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell, 2014; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). For example, studies reveal that as students progress through their service learning experience, they begin to question the existence of social issues from a structural standpoint while turning away from attributional perspectives that place the blame for one's circumstances on individual deficits (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). One way in which this progression is revealed is through a developed inclination to look at power dynamics and the distribution of power within society. Often, this development is the result of empathetic advancement, as students develop relationships with those receiving aid from the service learning community partner (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Jones & Hill, 2001; Mitchell, 2007). Similarly, an awareness and questioning of one's own privilege often emerges as an outcome of participation in a community-based course where students are asked to reflect on their background in comparison to those clients with whom they work (Catlett & Proweller, 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Hill, 2001; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

In some instances, political efficacy also emerges as an outcome of service learning courses that are intentional about having students critically analyze the social conditions faced by their community partners. After participating in this way, students begin to understand that they are capable of, and need to engage in, political action to bring about social change (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Iverson & James, 2013). Iverson and James (2013) contended that civic-political engagement initiatives like service learning are a more mature manner of participating in one's community than simple volunteering. They cited Baxter-Magolda's (2004) concept of self-authorship to argue that one must develop cognitive maturity, intrapersonal capacity, and interpersonal ability to be an effective citizen where one takes action for both the personal and public good. Iverson and James (2013) reported that students enrolled in their critical service learning course developed along all three of these dimensions: (a) cognitive growth through a deepened and more complex understanding of citizenship; (b) intrapersonal growth through a greater sense of self-efficacy for creating change; and (c) interpersonal growth through their enhanced sense of attachment to a larger community. Thus, the model of service learning that combines structured critical awareness and reflection with experiential knowledge gained through activity presents an opportunity for students to advance in any or all of these

dimensions that are linked to the development of a critical consciousness (Cipolle, 2010; Iverson & James, 2013; Jones & Hill, 2001).

Methods

To understand this process, therefore, we undertook a qualitative phenomenological research process, which was ideal for this inquiry for three primary reasons. First, qualitative phenomenological methods allow for the exploration of a topic or concept through "lived experiences" (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Second, qualitative methods are the best approaches for answering "how," "what," and "why" questions. Thirdly, they allow for the three researchers – who work within a university resource center for civic engagement – to use our experiences as facilitators to understand those of the participants. Therefore, qualitative phenomenological methods were deemed appropriate for investigating the aforementioned research question by exploring the shared narratives of college students in service learning courses at an R1 university within multiple disciplines.

Site Description

This study was conducted at an R1 university on the West Coast of the United States.[1] In 2013, the county that the university resided in was home to the largest number of minorities in the US. That county boasted 4.84 million Latino/a residents, 921,571 Black residents, 1.46 million Asian residents, 400,683 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island (NHPI) residents, and 150,256 Native Americans (US Census, 2013). During that 2013 academic year, our university was one of two in our collective not to mandate a diversity requirement. While this university is surrounded by the most diverse population in the US, it has only recently committed itself to preparing our students for the challenges and issues of our extremely diverse society, where they will one day live, work and govern together.

Data Collection

Seventeen out of 37 service learning courses, addressing myriad topics from various disciplines, were included in the study (46% participation rate).[2] Course topics ranged from homelessness to human rights, educational disparities to healthy living, etc. In total, 245 evaluation forms were returned out of an aggregate enrollment of 268 (91% participation rate). Ten distinct disciplines participated in the study, with English being the most represented (six courses), followed by Math and Civic Engagement (two courses each).

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[1] This is a classification that is assigned based on an institution's commitment to (a) ongoing assessment of service learning practices and student outcomes; (b) developing community partnerships that are collaborative, reciprocal and mutually beneficial; (c) initiating research to promote and reward the scholarship of civic engagement; and (d) the collaboration between institutions to integrate disparate initiatives into more coherent community engagement efforts (NERCHE, 2015).

[2] All service learning courses offered during this time were invited to participate. Courses not included in the study represent those taught by instructors who declined to participate, or never responded to the invitation.

Survey

Upon the completion of the course, students were asked to respond to three open-ended questions related to systemic oppression as part of their course evaluation. Specifically, the questions asked: How has taking a service learning course helped you to think more critically about issues of inequality? How has taking a service learning course helped you to think more critically about issues of social justice? How has taking a service learning course helped you to think more critically about issues of power & privilege? These three structural-level concepts were used because they are generally understood by students who have participated in service learning courses, and we believed the open-ended questions would allow students to connect these core concepts with more specific social issues/topics experienced during their service learning course (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia). The survey construct was designed to establish whether critical consciousness development was taking place within the service learning courses of our university (Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, & Hsieh, 2006; Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Tatum, 1992). Although the evaluation form included quantitative items meant to provide a descriptive analysis, the data reported herein focuses on the qualitative portion of the evaluation. These surveys were administered by both members of the research team and by the individual service learning course instructors during the final week of instruction.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis was framed within the concepts of the study's theoretical framework. To ensure reliability of the research, the data was coded using three techniques within a constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2003). During open coding, or the initial stage of organizing the data, narratives were categorized into each of the 3 sub-categories (inequality, social justice, and power and privilege). Through axial coding, or the interconnecting of categories, student experiences and narratives were placed into the appropriate stages of our Critical Consciousness Development (CCD) model: *cognitive recognition*, *perspective taking*, and *student agency*. During the selective coding process, we attempted to understand whether participants' service learning experiences were associated with specific characteristics of CCD in a predictive manner.

Positionality

The authors are practitioners that operate in the roles of administrators, faculty and staff for a center dedicated to the development and fulfillment of civic engagement programming and curriculum. We believe in the holistic development of our college students, and that the mission statement of our university compels us to provide those students with curriculum, learning experiences and exposure to the symptoms of oppression that are endemic in our surrounding communities. Our goal is to assess the impact of service learning courses on student critical consciousness development (CCD): the process of acquiring new knowledge that redefines one's worldview, as well as the acceptance of responsibility for acting and engaging the world based on their paradigm shift(s). Our hope is that further research will help us to develop "best practices" for the

intentional CCD in college students, and provide other institutions of higher education a practical model that can be replicated.

Limitations

The study examines student evaluations to understand critical consciousness development outcomes after a single service learning course, and therefore is limited by the tradition of service learning on our campus to be restricted to a single academic quarter (10 weeks). A single-term engagement in the community through a service learning class does not provide enough time for students to develop authentic relationships with non-profit partners, or to gain deep knowledge about the issues confronted by that community. Accordingly, single-term service learning courses do not allow students to gain a full understanding of social justice or the efforts needed to create social change if they are unfamiliar with these concepts beforehand (Mitchell, 2007). More significant than the limitation of time, is the attempt to study students' developmental process from a one-time student reflection. A service learning course intentionally designed to develop and measure the student critical consciousness development process should use multiple points of reflection to understand what course primers and service experiences influenced their developmental process. Ultimately, a longitudinal study that follows student agency for multiple service learning courses, and after college, is desirable.

Input variables such as race, gender, class, etc. were noticeably left out of the data collection. It is our opinion that researchers should not determine how, or if, these input variables are relevant to students' critical consciousness development. Participation in service learning courses with intentional curricula guided by critical frameworks and student goals, however, will create multiple reflection points (i.e., racial autobiographies, discussions, journals, weekly reflections, etc.) after introducing vocabulary through course primers (i.e., literature, lectures, service experiences, etc.). This pedagogical process provides scaffolding for targeted conversations and reflections on race, gender, class, etc., and may contribute to a more meaningful understanding of how these factors influence student developmental processes. We find this methodology preferable to a descriptive analysis that can only infer the significance of those input variables, especially when the meaning of those variables are fluid within our students' own identity development processes.

Lastly, the critical consciousness development model herein provided the predetermined themes for *a priori* coding. The framework was sufficient for this study because the surveys took place at a single point in time, and was successful in determining what stages of critical consciousness students experienced during their service learning courses. However, we are unable to truly determine whether there were any transitions in students' developmental process, and what experiences helped them to move from one stage to another over the 10-week period. A more nuanced framework is needed to guide, or measure, the developmental process, and the pedagogical tools that influence it.

Findings

Cognitive Recognition

The qualitative data collected from student narratives suggest that cognitive recognition is the most prevalent outcome of single-term service learning experiences. Even in this short-term setting of community-based learning, we do see a modicum of student responses reflecting the other two outcomes (perspective taking and student agency), but the majority of responses did not go beyond an increased awareness of the elements of oppression queried (inequality, social injustice, and power and privilege).

Inequality. Having a chance to engage the manifestations of inequality at their service learning sites seemed to impact how students thought about oppression on a systemic level, which seemed to complement in-class discussions and course literature. For those students whose service learning placement was with direct service providers, for example, many made the connection that while power differentials were apparent at their service sites, these differentials were merely a reflection of a broader inequitable society.

In tandem with our readings this quarter and interning at my placement site, I have been able to recognize and deconstruct the hegemonic structures of society that cause inequality. It made me think more critically about how non-profits operate and the power relations between clients and the staff.

In this narrative, we can see that a combination of literature primers and service learning experience influenced cognitive recognition of inequality, but not just conceptually, and not simply within the context of the literature. The student was able to see beyond the existence of haves and have nots, and consider the power dynamics between the non-profit service providers and the community members they were meant to serve. This cognitive recognition may afford the student more direct transitions to other levels of critical consciousness development.

Power and privilege. It is clear from the qualitative data that service learning courses are helping students to recognize oppression as systemic and structural processes that maintain inequality through the discriminatory distribution of power and privilege, rather than an inherent failing on the part of those who are underserved. In some cases, student participants were able to contrast the lack of opportunities and privilege of those they served, with their own opportunities and privileges.

Taking this course helped me empathize with younger, less privileged adults, which helped me develop a sense of gratitude while thinking more critically about systematic issues in my own community--not just at (my university).

The students typically reflect on their own privileges, which are mainly tied to their family's wealth (and access to resources) and the fact that they are college students, in comparison to those they encounter through their service learning work. This recognition

of their own privilege (which is how the students themselves often referred to it), is an important marker in critical consciousness development.

Many of the student participants spent their service learning assignments working at local schools (a typical service learning placement), where they were able to connect what they learned in class about educational disparities to their own educational experiences, and then to their service learning experiences in the schools. That said, as opposed to the question on inequality, they struggle to talk about power and privilege as structural issues. In other words, students often reflected on individual privileges, but rarely were they able to discuss where that privilege comes from, and how that privilege is a function of systemic advantage.

> *For patients with memory loss, they lose all power and privilege. At (the senior center), many are treated like children because they regress into childlike behavior. They lose their privilege to leave the compound when they want, and their power when it comes to interacting with caretakers.*

In this narrative, rather than considering power and privilege as functions of hegemonic social norms, the student views them as assets one possesses as a result of growing up in a certain environment, or as a resource that can be lost. For this student who worked at a care center for older adults, power and privilege are described as private and personal traits that diminish over time.

Social justice. In addition to thinking about inequality, students were asked to reflect on how their service learning experience affected their understanding of social justice. For some of the respondents, the course appears to have caused their perspective of social circumstances to transform. As was true in their reflections on inequality, encountering the effects of social injustice first-hand was impactful. To these students, the issues became more prevalent when they saw how populations are affected by the normalization of oppression.

> *Taking this service class has helped me see the practical side of social injustice. I study it, but to immerse myself in it was an eye opening experience. It made it more real and my passion for it intensified because I was seeing human beings suffering rather than just reading statistics.*

This narrative, however, suggests that our future research in the area of critical consciousness development may need to improve our model to consider a more nuanced understanding of cognitive recognition, and presumably perspective taking and student agency. This student identifies several stages that cannot be couched simply within our current model. The precritical stage, for example, seems to include 1) an introduction to literature (or vocabulary) where initial meaning making takes place, 2) an internalization process that disrupts the student's current world views, and 3) the reconceptualization of that world view.

Perspective Taking

In our model, the second stage of critical consciousness development is the evolution from awareness to paradigm shifts in a student's worldview, or what we call "perspective taking." Beyond recognizing and intellectualizing about the oppressive structures present in our social systems, sociopolitical critique requires that individuals develop positions on these conditions and the causal factors that lead to their existence. Within the service learning context, this means that students are not limited to simply reflecting on their encounters, but rather are asked to consider how this newfound awareness fits within their emerging critical worldview.

   Inequality. Among a subset of the students in our study, we begin to see that having the experience of seeing inequality manifested directly in front of them, and then having the opportunity to discuss these issues in class, appears to cause some students to address inequality in a critical fashion. Particularly for those students who worked in low-income areas, or discussed the implications of inequality in class, the unequal distribution of wealth and resources that they witness had an impact on how they viewed the particular issues.

   [E]ncountering children who are growing up in backgrounds different from mine directly helped me to understand the implications of inequality, and the importance of the amazing work being done to make a positive difference.

   These types of comments were typical within the student evaluations on inequality and within the narratives coded as perspective taking. Our future work would like to be intentional about helping students to not simply consider the inequality that exists between their station and the communities they serve, but how that inequitable distribution of resources has created an education gap between those that impact policy and practice and the oppressed communities these students are exposed to during their service learning experiences.

   Social justice. The service learning context appears to have caused a number of students to not only focus their enhanced ability to think in a more critical fashion on the broader systems of oppression, but on those organizations whose professed missions are to heal the community from symptoms of social injustice. Rather than viewing these organizations through idealized lenses, some students were able to reflect critically on the organizations they worked for, and to assess whether their mission statements addressed surface or root issues.

   This course has made me question if social organizations actually promote social change or temporarily pacify situations at hand. It made me more aware of the organization's values and how it could eventually spark social change or perpetuate social injustices.

   This student illustrates a high level of critical awareness that does not simply consider the historical contexts of social issues and their relationships to contemporary circumstances, but delves into how organizations committed to social change could be

perpetuating the status quo. These types of reflections also hint at a critical understanding of power and privilege.

Power and privilege. Some participants were willing to critique the efforts of the community service providers, as well as offer some insight into what could be done differently. This is an integral characteristic of perspective taking, because it requires a cognitive transition from accepting the status quo as the way things are and should be, to reimagining and redefining a future of one's own making. This is the visionary process that must take place before meaningful, genuine, and authentic student agency can occur.

Taking this service learning course made me realize that although organizations may have good intentions, there is a chance that new ideas and a feminist praxis may improve the fight for social justice.

This student recognized the influence that power and privilege had in creating the paternal structures within their community organization, but envisioned improved outcomes based on a political framework that would redefine the way those organizations operate. This is important, because it calls into question how service organizations disrupt the structures, systems and symptoms of power and privilege impacting their clients when they cannot disrupt those processes within their own identity. Inherent in a critical model of service learning, and thus the kind of consciousness raising that we examined herein, is a consideration of how power and privilege are relevant both within the service learning site, and between the university and its community partners.

Student Agency

Recognizing that inequality exists, the transition from awareness to paradigm shifts in worldviews, and accepting that critical awareness comes with the weight and responsibility of critical action, are all part of the process of developing a critical consciousness. As the literature suggests, these components are incomplete if one does not believe that they can act for change. For some students, they have come to believe that they can impact efforts to reduce societal inequality and advance a more socially just humanity.

Inequality. With the recognition of the realities of social inequality also emerged an awareness of the extent that organizations are working to address it. This change in understanding, then, led some to express a desire to involve themselves more in these efforts. As with the earlier discussion, this was particularly true for those students who spent their service learning hours assisting in schools or other educational environments.

Working with students who have dropped out of high school due to being neglected by the school has interested me in searching (for) avenues of advocacy for equality in school.

Despite comments like this from a select group, most students did not go as far as to say that they were ready to take action on these issues themselves. A few others expressed vague intentions to help address inequality by "giving back" or wanting to "do something,"

but beyond those responses, students generally did not offer specific intentions to reduce social inequalities.

Social justice. As more critical students encounter the manifestations of educational and economic disparities, discrimination based on age, race, sexual orientation, and the effects of religious prejudice, they came to understand that recognition of oppression is merely a step in the process, and that reimagining a better world does not help the communities they serve without action.

I realized that unless you are actively doing something to support this particular population (LGBT), it won't get done. You can't THINK someone else is doing it. You have to do it.

Service learning can provide primers that can help students define inequality, social justice and to understand power and privilege, and even imagine what a better world might look like. However, perhaps the limited exposure of single term community engagement courses do not provide enough time to develop student agency towards social justice, because students rarely offered more than a recognition to act, and were rarely specific as to what that action would, or should be. For instance, only two students who reported that they intend to become teachers said that their service learning experience showed them the need to incorporate a culturally relevant curriculum in their classes.

Power and privilege. Most of the students whose narratives reflected student agency within issues of power and privilege were driven to act on behalf of individuals or communities they believed lacked power and privilege.

Now that I have first-hand experience with underprivileged communities, I have a greater understanding of privilege...I see a lack of privilege every day that I volunteer and it's made me want to take action to change the status quo.

Some students were able to recognize their own power and privilege, even when they were a part of an underprivileged group, and some were able to recognize the inherent power and privilege associated with their college education. These students' narratives suggested that they are driven to act by social responsibility, a concept learned and internalized through their service learning experiences.

This service learning course has helped me identify my role in the university and my responsibility as a university student to reach out to underprivileged groups. Even though I have always been aware of this chasm, I did not realize I could be an instrument to help close it.

In the entirety of the study, very few students responded in such a way that demonstrates that they see themselves as change agents in the future. Perhaps because at this stage in their critical consciousness development they view power structures as "the way things are," inherent components of our current normative neoliberal social structure, or what Freire (1970) called neoliberal fatalism: the belief that capitalism, individualism

and greed drive human society.[3] The lack of student agency suggests that despite the commitments these students have demonstrated in completing the service learning requirements for the course, the belief that they have the power to bring about greater equality and social justice, and reduce disparities in social power, may not emerge after only one term, particularly if the curriculum does not specifically encourage the development of civic agency.

Discussion

Ultimately, the goal for critical service learning courses should be the improvement of circumstances in the communities we serve. This goal ensures the development of students who are more analytical of the social conditions around them, and who feel invested in creating change. Critical service learning courses should challenge students to venture outside their "circles of certainty" (Freire, 1973, p. 20), and push students beyond the recognition of privilege, causing them to understand privilege as a "trigger" for their participation in fighting inequality, social injustice, and the systems of oppression that are maintained by power and privilege. The reason for "serving" is not to "give back," but to dismantle the structures that provide some with privilege, while denying it to others.

With such goals in mind, this study was meant to explore what student reflections reveal about their service learning experiences, and how those experiences influenced their critical consciousness development. While cognitive recognition was a prevalent development among service learners, learning to take critical perspectives on social issues and committing to taking action against those issues were not. Complicating those outcomes was the fact that students were more prone to recognize issues of inequality, but not social justice or power and privilege. This suggests that service learning courses are helping students to *begin* to develop a critical consciousness (as we define it), but they are only "grazing the surface." Since students appear less able to talk about issues of social justice in specific ways, or to discuss power and privilege in terms of the systemic implications of these concepts, we interpret this to mean that experiences of cognitive recognition are not transitioning to other stages of critical consciousness development. The fact that students are developing cognitive recognition skills and abilities during community engagement courses does, however, demonstrate one of the true values that service learning has as a pedagogical model. In this mode of teaching, experiential knowledge is gained by the coupling of service experiences and course materials to improve cognitive recognition, and therefore, empathy. Freire (1970) would say that empathy is the first step towards love, and that love is the incentive, or motivation, to act towards social justice. While the ultimate goal of critical service learning curricula may be student praxis, knowledge must first inform action.

It seems we do need to do a better job in service learning to discuss privilege from a social standpoint. The majority of students that participated in this study failed to question dominant politics of knowledge that normalize the standards and values that determine what it means to have power and privilege, and why common sense perspectives frame community engagement through deficit lenses. These levels of awareness require the

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[3] Freire (1970) suggested that this fatalistic belief has become an excuse not to act, or not to participate, towards overcoming oppressive systems and circumstances.

development of critical perspectives during the service learning experience, which our findings demonstrate that students were largely unable to decipher on their own, and/or for which the curricula was unprepared to introduce and provide scaffolding. If, however, service learning is meant to have a deeper impact on both our students and our community partners, the development of more purposeful and intentional curricula is necessary.

Just as concerning is the fact that only a minority of the students discuss the impact of the experience as causing them to want to take action. While we would not expect to see a student producing substantive change in local communities within a single term, the potential in service learning is that it might spur an interest on the part of that student to continue to engage, with an eye toward becoming a social change agent in the future. Student agency is a central tenet in the development of a critical consciousness, but perhaps part of the model too must become more nuanced to include the development of student praxis that can one day transition into servant leadership and social change. When the evidence does not suggest a call to action, as educators, we must evaluate why we teach within this pedagogical model, and what we must revise to encourage such critical outcomes.

In essence, the results of our study suggest that full development of a critical consciousness (comprehensive and critical understanding of oppression and a commitment to social change) would likely require greater intentionality on the part of the course instructor, because the incorporation of service learning into one's pedagogy does not inherently produce higher levels of critical awareness or praxis. As Einfeld and Collins (2008) discovered through their research, simply encountering oppression is not sufficient. "The overall lack of commitment to pursue systemic social change by the participants in this study is evidence that being exposed to situations of inequality and serving underprivileged populations does not automatically foster a commitment to social justice" (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, p. 106). As the authors point out, it is imperative for the instructor to connect the experiences in the community to these broader goals through an intentional curriculum and teaching practice.

Significance and Implications

This study exemplifies the potential of service learning courses to produce critical student outcomes. This analysis did not identify how to do so intentionally, or optimally. The data we collected from this research project has led us to the realization that there is a need for critical service learning courses that use specific student goals to create intentional curricula that purposefully introduce literature, encounter experiences, and critical reflection to students in achieving specific student goals. Going forward, we plan to study how critical service learning courses will empower institutions of higher education to create meaningful civic engagement programs that form partnerships with the communities that surround them, and will develop socially just and empathetic leaders who understand privilege, structures of power that stratify oppressed communities, and their social responsibility to cultivate and enact critical praxis as Agents of Transformational Resistance (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003).

We operationalize this by using four specific critical frameworks as student goals: (a) cultural and racial development; (b) critical consciousness development; (c) critical praxis development (social change); and (d) servant leadership. By familiarizing students with

these critical models, we introduce concepts and vocabulary that empower students to contextualize their own individual experiences, and to develop their own narratives within critical reflections. In this way, students can become the authors of their own critical consciousness development and cultural and racial identity development. Institutions of higher education can then customize their civic engagement programs based on their mission statements, using one or more of the aforementioned critical frameworks to identify the desired student goals for their critical service learning curricula.

The literature review has helped us develop a number of tenets, stages, or student goals for each of our critical models. By identifying the tenets, or stages, of these guiding frameworks as student goals, we can purposefully design curricula that integrate specific activities in specific sequences to steward students through each developmental process. For instance, after introducing various racial identity development models (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1992), a racial autobiography could be used as a primer that (a) illustrates students' understanding of the literature; (b) provides a critical reflection connecting new knowledge to personal experiences; and (c) defines the influences on their own developmental process. Journals and weekly reflections provide the same knowledge assessments and qualitative data that track students' developmental processes. We see the potential for critical frameworks to work in unison, meaning, a student that can reflect and understand their own racial identity development, servant leadership, or social change, inherently participates in the development of their own critical consciousness. By using multiple points of reflection, faculty can better understand what experiences trigger, or influence, "aha" moments, paradigm shifts, or transitions in that process. A more nuanced framework is necessary to understand the longitudinal process of critical consciousness development, however, and the primers and experiences that optimize that process. Our current study has determined that this longitudinal process has at least six stages: (a) introduction to vocabulary and student meaning making; (b) disrupting "circles of certainty;" (c) reconceptualizing past and present experiences; (d) envisioning a world of their own making; (e) the formation of student praxis; and (f) servant leadership and social change.

Conclusion

Freire (1970) argued that love is necessary to create transformative change, because without love, the motivation to create a better world for others cannot exist. Knowledge of oppression is complemented by an agency to fight and resist oppression only when individuals have the capacity to love, or to show compassion and empathy. Therefore, it is imperative that colleges and universities provide curriculum designed with these goals in mind, and in doing so, maintain higher education's role in democratizing society by developing empathetic and civically engaged citizens that have a "sense of justice."

The findings herein reveal mixed inferences about the ability of colleges and universities to create generations of leaders intent on solving systemic issues of inequality, social justice, and to disrupt systems of oppression maintained by power and privilege. While traditional service learning courses seem to achieve varying levels of cognitive recognition and perspective taking, this is not as apparent when it comes to student agency: the belief in one's ability to impart change or a commitment of action towards social change. Even within these stages of critical consciousness development, social justice and

power and privilege seem more difficult concepts to grasp, even for a pedagogical model that causes students to leave the campus "bubble" and encounter diverse environments. If we are to meet the critical potential of service learning to develop transformative agents who will tackle the inequities impinging the health of our communities, we must design our courses accordingly.

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