Enhancement of Student Preparation for Global Service

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ABSTRACT: *University students are expected to acquire proficiency in skills used in the profession and to serve globally as they graduate. Efficacy of this has been supported in studies in which skill mastery was enhanced through provision of experiential assignments. Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience. Problem-based learning provides active, hands-on learning that is centered on real-world problems or issues. A qualitative study was conducted by the researchers with five online courses in graduate counselor education and a total of 536 students over a 2.5 year period to assess student application of course concepts in a real-world environment with cultural diversity. Student projects focused on identification of needs and individual work to serve those needs, such as volunteering with a cultural group other than their own and development of websites to address collective population issues of need. This paper shares reflections and benefits found in student projects with these courses. Results of the study supported efficacy of Service Learning and Problem-Based Learning to enhance student mastery of course content and preparation for global service after degree completion.*
Keywords: Global learning, Problem-Based Learning, Service Learning, Student Skill Application

I.   INTRODUCTION

Students in many education programs are expected to acquire proficiency in practice of techniques and skills used in the profession. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) specifies in its standards for accreditation that programs include training in skills through courses as well as with student practicums and internships. Efficacy of this has been supported in studies in which skill mastery was enhanced through provision of experiential assignments. Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Problem-based learning is a pedagogical method of active, hands-on learning that is centered on real-world problems or issues. Both of these are used from elementary schools through institutions of higher education to allow students to frame educational concepts in the context of community and civic responsibility. Both of these connect the academic preparation of students to real-world usage of their education and the traditional public service role expected of institutions of higher education.

Eyler (2002) noted that while research on service-learning has been mixed, there is evidence to suggest that service–learning programs which thoroughly integrate service and academic learning through continuous reflection promote development of the knowledge, skills, and cognitive capacities necessary for students to deal effectively with the complex social issues that challenge citizens. While there is not much research in the service–learning literature that specifically addresses techniques of reflection, evidence from studies of problem–based learning, situated cognition, and cognitive development suggests approaches to reflection that will enhance the power of service-learning in attaining these important goals which facilitate full community participation.

Population changes in the United States alone support increased attention to academic preparation for students to use their degrees to serve a more culturally diverse world at home and globally. In 2016, (The U.S. Census Bureau 2016) projected that the number of Hispanics in the United States will triple from 31.4 million in 1998 to 98.2 million in 2050; African Americans will increase from 34.9 million in 1998 to 59.2 million; and Asians and Pacific Islanders will increase from 10.7 million to 37.6 million. America's foreign-born population, most of them coming from Asia and Latin America, will increase from 26 million to 53.8 million. The non-Hispanic white population will decrease from 72 percent of the total population in 1999 to 52 percent in 2050, and racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants will comprise over 50 percent of the nation's workforce (Henderson, 2002).

More research has been needed to further determine the efficacy of integration of problem-based and service learning as pedagogy in counselor education with theory application and skills practice. The results of the research discussed in this paper can further guide this pedagogy and will also provide foundation for additional study to enhance marketability of graduates to serve in a more culturally diverse work place.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Felten and Clayton (2011) described Service/Problem-Based Learning as historical tradition that began in colonial times of the United States as religious and civic leaders were prepared to serve in the colonies. These authors noted that service learning experiences promote the goals of learning, involve reciprocal collaboration among stakeholders, and "include critical reflection and assessment processes ..to produce and document meaningful learning and service outcomes" (p. 76).

Brooks and Schramm (2007) found that combining traditional university mission goals of research, education, and service into integrated activities within courses offered substantial benefit to all stakeholders – faculty, students, and the community served. The efficacy of problem-based learning is supported through a study by Tawfik, Trueman, and Lorz (2014) in which pedagogy of problem-based and service learning were applied with students in science, math, and technology disciplines. These authors reference many other studies to support the use of the following elements of problem-based learning in course work:Student-centered learning; Problems as the catalyst for learning; and Self-directed learning.

Student-centered Learning

Even though the use of service learning has grown in both P12 and higher education settings, Lee (2012), noted that this approach with student-centered learning is still under-researched and under-explored. These authors investigated the impact of service-learning on student learning and developmental outcomes. Their results indicated that service-learning has a positive impact with academic learning, interpersonal development, and personal development.

Efficacy of experience as a learning component exists even outside service-learning. An example is the teaching of group dynamics and leadership for students in counselor education. Furr and Barret (2000) found that an experiential group was essential for students in this training, because it provided opportunity for skill development and also increased student awareness of dynamics that occur within a group of people working together.

Problems as the Catalyst for Learning

A key in the academic process is preparation of students to use what they have learned in class for life application. Sveikauskas, Kirikova, and Leonas (2008) noted that problem-based learning places students in practical life problems that can very well encounter outside the class setting. They indicated that this learning approach includes both a scenario of a real-world problem and student self-education. Through their study, Sveikauskas, et al. found that the problem-based learning conditions improved social cognitive competencies of student participants.   Students also reported that the integration of problem-based learning increased their motivation to study. Michaelsen and Sweet (2008) explored the use of problem-based learning through assignment of group work in classes. They found that whether the assignment required individual or group work, problem-centered learning prompted students to use course concepts for problem resolution.

Self-directed Learning

As students integrate more into global service and work, service learning provides a useful modality for promotion of skills efficacy as well as increased commitment to social accountability. McMenamin, McGrath, Cantillon, and MacFarlane (2014) noted the following practice points of service learning: 1) Service learning is a complex educational approach which involves communities, students, and institutions into partnerships that are equally beneficial and reciprocal; 2) Service learning has been used to teach students social accountability – a core standard in the accreditation of health care education; and 3) Working in partnership with the "different other" helps students develop deeper appreciation of vulnerabilities of marginalized populations and nurture a purposeful sense of social responsibility.
(p. 291).

Exploration of life-span generations has indicated differences in learning styles from the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers of yesterday's college population to the Generation X and Millennials who fill today's classes. Baker College ((2004) provides training for faculty on these differences. The students of today are accustomed to group work, comfortable with active learning, multi-task with ease, and are motivated toward money and earning potential. (p. 31). Seccombe and Stewart (2014) noted that a new curriculum in a New Zealand nursing education program created challenges for students as requirements increased for Self-Directed Learning(SDL). In a study to further discern motivation for students to engage in SDL, Seccombe and Stewart found that students were most motivated when the SDL was strongly linked to class lectures and activities, effective feedback was provided from self-reflection and instructors, and the SDL was relevant for student goals and needs.

Multicultural Competence

As students enter undergraduate college or even pursue graduate studies, their life experiences can produce preconceived notions about cultures other than those of their life experience. Zaretsky (2016) examined modalities to help students get past preconceived notions through a teaching program and design experience for women in West Africa. She noted that she entered the experience herself with preconceived notions of her potential students' helplessness, low literacy levels, student passivity, and even student apathy. She found instead that her students were eager to learn and actively engaged – even to the point of directing the learning themselves. A key lesson for Zaretsky was that her role should be that of facilitator versus transmitter, especially when working with cultures other than her own. She reflected that Western educators can benefit from yielding to the expertise of the other culture versus "taking charge."

The theorist Vygotsky proposed that learning occurred in a sociocultural context with intelligence held by the group rather than the individual. Sigelman and Rider (2014) noted that learning is culturally shaped as those with knowledge and experience pass on problem-solving strategies to other people. Santrock (2015) also noted that Vygotsky's social constructivist approach emphasized the importance of sociocultural influences on development as integral to contextual factors in learning.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The proposed Service Learning Projects were conducted in courses as shown in Table 1 to provide students with integration of course concepts and practice of counseling skills and theories with community service and critical self-reflection. These Service Learning Projects integrated problem-based learning and provided a major component of the course experience and grade in real-world application of course concepts. At the end of the semester, an assessment was conducted to measure progress in attainment of initial goals. Students also completed a reflection to include the three levels of Service Learning as related to the objectives of the specific course. These reflections were submitted in class in a paper. The three levels of service learning are: 1) Mirror – Reflection on what student learned about self and possible future changes in self from the experience; 2) Binoculars – Reflection on the details of the experience and how those related to course concepts; and 3) Microscope – Reflection on the etiology of the issue and potential future resolutions for the issue.

Table 1. Courses and Projects

Course	Project
Professional Orientation to Counseling	Students first conducted research on areas in school counseling for professionalism and ethics that seemed to need improvement. Students then each developed a website page to share information on a specific topic area from their research. The students used free website builders such as Weebly and Wix and built a website that included a name and content that reflected focus on this topic to inform school counselors of the importance of the chosen professionalism and ethics area for the profession. Students were required to include at list five resources included with a diversity, such as links to article, videos, other sites, a blog, etc. After the website was built, students were required to share this with fellow professionals for feedback and integrate that into their reflections on the project..
Lifespan Development and Learning	The course project for Life-Span Development and Learning was designed to provide students an opportunity for hands –on application of course concepts through interaction on a project with a person in a designated life-span stage. Students conducted research with at least five members of the chosen life –span stage to determine needs for that age group. Informed consent was attained from these participants. Students then developed a web-site page to address that issue and received feedback on the webpage from the five participants from the initial research. The results from the initial research and from the final feedback were included with the student's reflections at the end of the project.
Theories & Techniques of Counseling	As research indicates that most people have needs for improvement in areas of their health and wellness, that was the focus of this course project. Students integrated a selected theoretical approach and techniques from that approach to work with a volunteer of an age of their choice to assess current healthy lifestyle habits, plan goals and activities to strengthen those habits, and then conduct six sessions with the volunteer to practice course concepts in helping the volunteer attain improvement in the selected health and wellness area of focus. . Informed consent was attained from these participants, to include caregiver consent if the volunteer was a minor. This work was recorded in a journal that the course student and the volunteer completed together. At the end of the project, the journal was submitted with the student reflections on the levels of service learning.
Counseling Children & Adolescents	As research indicates that children of today have significant health issues that could impact their longevity as compared to previous generations (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm), that was the focus of this course project. Students integrated a selected theoretical approach and techniques from that approach to work with a child or adolescent to assess current healthy lifestyle habits, plan goals and activities to strengthen those habits, and then conduct six sessions with the volunteer to practice course concepts in helping the volunteer attain improvement in the selected health and wellness area of focus. . Informed consent was attained from these participants with consent from the caregiver and assent from the volunteer youth. This work was recorded in a journal that the course student and the volunteer completed together. At the end of the project, the journal was submitted with the student reflections on the levels of service learning.
Counseling	The CulturalImmersion experience required student service in an identified cultural context versus a

Multicultural Populations	student bringing elements of an identified cultural context into the student's sphere of familiarity. Students could focus their experience on any of a number of cultural identity factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc. While time parameters of this experience varied, the overall experience designed by the student was to be be sustained and on-going, ideally involving an extended duration over multiple weeks, with most experiences including several hours a day for several days. Some students also integrated actual residence in their selected setting for a period of time to facilitate a more full understanding of the culture and local needs.

IV.   RESULTS OF STUDY

Results of this qualitative study affirmed efficacy of the use of Service Learning and Problem Based Learning to support integration of course concepts into real life application. These results were assessed through student reflections on the three level of service learning and through feedback from volunteers with whom students worked, interviewed, or attained feedback on the completed project. Results included internalized student growth in awareness of self as change agent, increased understanding of course constructs, and commitment to advocacy for needs Results also indicated evidence of external positive impact on the issues of service. As the actual reflections of 536 students would take up to much space in this paper, some student responses and collective project results are shared below in the common themes of the results. These responses were selected as representative of all student reflections received.

Awareness of Self as Change Agent

This experience reminded me that while I may only be working as a school counselor at one school, my daily impact on students and their families may result in years of support in the future.

I have a better understanding on adolescents' transition into early adulthood now that I have done this project. I discovered various ways to encourage and guide them to a better future. The experience I gained by doing this project will help me in my future of counseling. I feel like I am more prepared to help teenagers discover what they need to do in regards to their future.

I am in an excellent position to help begin this change toward improved self image for youth. As a result of this project, I have decided I am going to give each of my cheerleaders a positive note each week after the game. It will be a note to encourage them and to help them realize the important aspects of life, which is not the number on the scale. As a teacher, I will also strive to build the confidence of my students, their views towards math and their selves. I will be more conscious of how I speak to them and how I treat them. Some students simply need someone to care about them, and I intend to strive to be that person.

Increased Understanding of Course Concepts

(From course on Professional Orientation) This learning complements what I have learned in this class. My research and learning have also shown that having professionalism in the workplace is important as well as following the code of ethics. These are both essential as a future school counselor.

(From course on Multicultural Counseling) As much as I do not wantto admit this, I did have some stereotypical visions of the elderly population. I have elderly family members, but all of mine have always lived in their own home or with other family members. I was unaware of the culture of retirement centers and nursing homes. As my stereotypes played out in my mind I assumed it would be a dull place, very drab in color, full of wheelchairs and reeking of old people and their terrible musky cologne. As shocked as I was, this was not the case. The retirement center was very colorful, full of action and activities and pretty much run by the residents. If they wanted something, it would happen. They want to Polka Dance on Saturday? The staff either finds

somewhere to take them or finds a band to come in and play for them. They want to learn to use an iPAD to FaceTime their grandkids? The staff finds someone to teach them. Almost everything I imagined about the retirement community was false. I will volunteer my time to go to this retirement community to help with residents.

(On work with addictions) I thought that I would leave this immersion experience more confused about addiction than when I went in, but I learned more than I ever thought I could. I learned that it is not that addicts do not want to quit, they just do not know how. Treatment helps addicts learn valuable tools for recovery and it is important that addicts stay on track with their recovery. I met people that I would have never thought would be addicted to drugs. Addicts are just like you and me. Some havegood lives and families, some do not, but they are all striving for the same goal, to have theirlife back.

Initially, I thought my research would just provide me with more information on knowledge I already acquired. I was thrilled to not only strengthen my previous knowledge but to gain more.

Commitment to Advocacy for Needs

(On the need for individual initiative in school counselors) Initiative has to begin by having the ability to say "I Can". Without initiative in this world, we would not have or know a lot of things. If we do not push ourselves to have initiative or continue to teach others to take initiative, our world will fall to pieces very quickly. Initiative is

something we have to instill in our kids daily. Combining initiative with ethical standards together only makes a person stronger and wiser, no matter what the profession may be. Taking initiative to follow ethical standards and gain more knowledge, will only make me grow more consistent and professional every day. My attitude has grown to be more positive towards school counseling and towards myself and learning. I'm ready to begin my journey to being a school counselor.

(On working with children) This alters my future by giving me an even more positive outlook on shaping my future children and being a strong system of support and motivation for my age group and others. I empathize with those who are less fortunate and don't show concern for their livelihood and satisfaction of life; this means there is a lack of support and motivation. As far as my career goes, physical therapy involves being supportive and motivational to others. Therapy provides treatment and relief in many capacities. Motivation and support plays a major role in an individual's success rate and happiness.

(Also on working with children) Through this project, I have learned that I have ignored some of the issues my children may be experiencing at school. I have now gained more empathy on these issues since doing this project. I will now actively and openly communicate with my children and those I may work with about these issues.

After spending twenty hours immersed in learning more about the trials and tribulations of thehomeless in my community, I am heartbroken and hopeful. I am heartbroken to hear of themany stories behind homeless families, and hopeful that I can now make a difference in the livesof homeless students and families in the valley. Until we take the time to hear the background ofwhy someone is homeless, we must not judge. While I was disappointed to see public assistancebeing abused by addicts, I was pleased to see that there are resources available for those whotruly need them. I have a much clearer understanding as to why homeless students are oftentired, hungry, angry, and cannot focus at school. I also feel like I am more aware of theresources available in my county, as well as how to go about obtaining those resources to better aid homeless students and their families. I have been moved and enlightened by thisexperience, and I feel I have a better overall picture of homelessness in my county.

External Positive Impact on Issues of Service

Results from the two courses that addressed volunteer wellness needs during a spring semester included both weight loss and increase of health behavior to prevent obesity. The total weight loss over the six weeks of intervention and mentoring was 129 pounds for 14 participants. Two graduate students reported that the project encouraged them to also work on their weight and these two students together lost 18 pounds. Through their weekly journals, participants reported increase in regular exercise, increase in consumption of water, fruits, and vegetables, and increase in management of stress such as dealing with conflicts and use of meditation or yoga. Participants reported decrease in consumption of sodas and snacks.

(On financial management by adults) The issue of finances for adults has several underlying factors, but a main one I found while doing my studies was debt. Massive amounts of debt are causing a lot of stress and burden upon many early adults. School loans for young adults are becoming one of the biggest issues in today's society. Large amounts of money are being spent on school and often times the job after college doesn't make large amounts and individuals are stuck paying on loans for several years. Another big issue is that individuals are spending way more than they have. Credit cards are creating debt that ends up handcuffing adults that could possibly take them years to recover from. A solution would be to raise the credit card age limit, in hopes to cut down on the irresponsible and thoughtless spending. Another option I thought of was to start with financial education courses in high school and into college that are mandatory for students. Education and early financial planning could be extremely beneficial in keeping early adults from debt and other financial issues. Since doing my studies, I have since sat down and made my own financial plan. I have set a goal and made the steps necessary in order to meet that goal. I look forward to hopefully living a more financially secure, less stressful life.

V.   CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Economic considerations and needs of a global society dictate a need for university graduates to move from academia into work and service that makes a difference to resolve needs and promote viable world, national, and individual economy. Traditional classwork in academia has focused on learning course content in isolation within a brick and mortar classroom or an online learning management system. Upon post degree employment, university graduates have found a dichotomy between what was learned and what was practiced in the real-world. This study examined integration of Service/Problem-Based Learning as a modality to increase student exposure to real-world needs that matched their academic preparation. Student reflections indicated that their projects increased awareness of real world needs and their role in meeting those needs to an extent that could not be attained through just "book-learning." The study supported increased need for courses to help students to learn by doing. Student reflections also indicated a depth of personal commitment to contribute time and effort toward issue resolution, even through personal volunteerism.

Continuing research is needed on efficacy of integration of Service/Problem-Based Learning within academic preparation of students to actively contribute to the world they live in as they graduate. This integration can promote student personal growth, can promote student preparation toward better meeting the needs of a global work force, and can contribute more effort and commitment to resolution of societal issues of need. As students connect with others to serve diverse needs, they will increase in efficacy to serve diversely. Students will not only learn and be, but will also learn and do.

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