Interdisciplinary Service-Learning: Building Student Competencies through the Cross-Cultural Parent Groups Project

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Abstract: *Changing demographics and an emphasis on competency-based social work education call for innovative approaches to the delivery of curricular content. In an effort to introduce BSW students to the socio-political issues facing the local Latino immigrant community, a service-learning project was developed in collaboration with the Spanish Language Department and a local middle school. An analysis of outcomes from social work student evaluations showed that students engaged with the community and issues in new and unexpected ways. Through their engagement in a cross-cultural group project, students developed greater cultural sensitivity, honed their group practice skills in an unfamiliar context, provided a needed service to the community, and raised their awareness about the working conditions of new immigrants as part of a developing framework for social action. Details and implications of the project as a means to build student competencies are described.*

Keywords: *Cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, service-learning, core competencies*

INTRODUCTION

Demographic Shifts: Implications for Social Work Education

Given recent shifts in macroeconomic and social processes that have feminized migration flows and drawn immigrants to non-traditional receiving states, communities that were once homogeneous find themselves more linguistically, ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse than ever before (Greenlees & Saenz, 1999; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002; Singer 2002, 2004). As a result of growth in immigration from Latin America, the Latino population has become the largest ethnic and racial minority in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2003). In 2008, the largest percentage of immigrants in the U.S was from Latin America; 49.9% of all immigrants were female; and the children of immigrants accounted for 29.9% of all children in low-income families (Migration Policy Institute, 2008). With these trends, graduates of social work programs will most likely work with Latino families, prompting programs to review whether their curriculum is keeping pace with shifting demographics and contexts of need.

The region where the author's social work program sits is comprised of multiple Latino communities. The Latino demographics of the region reflect its geographic diversity, with a well-established Puerto Rican, urban community; a longstanding, rural migrant farmworker community; and a newcomer undocumented Mexican and Central American community that works in both the rural farming and urban and suburban service sectors. According to population estimates, the county where the university sits experienced substantial growth in its Latino population between 1990 and 2009. Between

1990 and 2000, the Latino population increased from 2.3% to 3.7% (Chester County Planning Commission, 2001) and to an average of 5% between 2005 and 2009 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Given that these are official estimates and may not account for the presence of undocumented immigrants (Bean, Corona, Tuiran, Woodrow-Lafield, & Van Hook, 2001), it is likely the population growth is even more significant. As a result, community-based social service and health care providers have struggled to serve monolingual Spanish-speaking newcomers with their largely monolingual English-speaking staff.

As one response to this changing context and in an effort to increase student awareness of the social, economic, political, and psychological issues facing the local Latino community, a service-learning project that matched social work students with Spanish language students was conceived; together students facilitated groups on the topic of adolescent depression for the parents of Latino middle schoolers in the community, a need identified by the community itself. Completed in the spring of 2009, the project crossed disciplines, cultures, fields of practice (university and local school district) and the roles of expert-recipient. Such crossings were consistent with the building of student competencies specified in the 2008 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) educational policy and accreditation standards and described below.

Pedagogical Shifts: Competency-Based Education

At the same time that U.S. communities are diversifying, the Council on Social Work Education has issued new, competency-based standards for social work education that allow programs to respond to such diversity with greater agility. The 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), in specifying ten core student competencies, encourage the infusion of content across the curriculum (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). This is different from the 2001 EPAS that used the lexicon of "sequences," tacitly underwriting, for example, the marginalization of policy within practice or cultural competency within social work competency. Under the new EPAS, course content is conceptualized as building the 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 (for example, the geographic region in which the university resides). This standard fosters greater flexibility and creativity in the development of a curriculum that responds to the changing and diverse context of a social work program.

In addition to the EPAS, the mission of the social work program in which the service-learning project to be described took place reflects that of the broader university, which as a public institution is to serve the residents of the region and state. Therefore, a service-learning project that could fulfill the mission of the university and social work program, while simultaneously meeting the unmet needs of the community, was well-suited to the mandates of the 2008 EPAS.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Service-Learning as a Pedagogical Tool

Service-learning in higher education has proven effective in helping students to develop their skills of civic engagement, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). University students that have engaged in service-learning credit their experience with better success in the job market and believe it should be practiced in more courses at their colleges (Prentice & Robinson, 2010). In professional programs like social work that include a field practicum, service-learning has been found to complement the practicum by providing students with a field experience where the primary focus is on service and not professional development (Eby, 2001). Moreover, by engaging in a project that meets a need identified by the community and its providers, the service-learning project becomes an authentic service activity (Eby) and socializes students to both the ethic of service and the practice of viewing clients as experts in their own experience, the latter of which is consonant with the EPAS standard for cultural competency.

Given this seemingly good fit between service-learning and social work education, educators have integrated service-learning into their courses, though literature on the subject remains limited (Bye, 2005; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Given the 2008 EPAS emphasis on field as the signature pedagogy, service-learning projects offer opportunities to connect classroom and field learning either concurrent with or earlier than the third and fourth year when the undergraduate practicum typically occurs, and to infuse the pedagogy of field throughout the curriculum. However, what distinguishes service-learning from the field practicum may ultimately be found in the role of the student as learner. Service-learning provides a field learning experience unmitigated by the traditional structure of the professional social work internship. Whereas in the field practicum students are socialized to take guidance from field instructors and other professionals, in service-learning students may have greater opportunities to learn directly from community members and stakeholders.

Cross-cultural service-learning has proven effective in facilitating social work students' cultural and racial understanding, preparing students for cross-cultural practice, and helping them to recognize racism and inequality (Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli, 2003). Importantly, cross-cultural service-learning has helped students make the connection between cultural competency educational goals stated in the curriculum and the real world (Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli), and moved them to social action. Of equal importance in the context of competency-based education for work with client systems of all sizes, service-learning has been effective in the teaching of group practice skills to social work students (Bye, 2005). Given that field placements do not always afford students the opportunity for groupwork, a service-learning project completed as a group and within a group can potentially bridge theory and practice outside of the traditional realm of the field practicum.

Building a Framework for Social Action

Given that the cross-cultural service-learning project was designed for the second of two generalist practice courses (in this case, practice with groups, organizations, and communities), students came with the foundation of social work practice with individuals and families. Larger systems were difficult to comprehend and intimidating, particularly when viewed as potential realms of social work practice. While students often take a social policy course prior to the second practice course, their framework for social change is based in a client-centered mode of practice. Using Pearlmutter's (2002) conceptualization of helping social workers (and in this case, social work students) progress towards social change, the project was designed to introduce students to the meaning and impact of oppressions so that they could eventually achieve the integration of individual client work and social change agent, an integration spelled out in the 2008 EPAS core competencies. According to Pearlmutter (2002), movement from client-centeredness to radical practice occurs along a continuum and is fostered through personal growth and skill-building. The service-learning project, in meeting a need that would highlight the marginality faced by Latino immigrant families in the region, was designed to move students along this continuum.

Critical to the learning process was the building of an affective connection between students and the Latino parents in the community. Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) argued that the building of critical consciousness in multicultural practice must be both cognitive and affective; if it is one to the exclusion of the other, practitioners risk engaging in oppressive practices. In order for students to become aware of the potential oppressive structure of the helping profession, they must understand on both a cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) level how clients construct their own realities. One method for doing this is for students to take the role of "ethnographer" instead of "expert" (Pitner & Sakamoto). The cross-cultural parent groups project facilitated this method in that social work students were placed simultaneously and purposefully in the dual role of learner and educator. This enabled students to recognize and value not only the challenges facing Latino parents in the community, but also their strengths.

THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT: INTERDISCIPLINARY, CROSS-CULTURAL PARENT GROUPS

The impetus for the project came from a bilingual, bicultural social worker in one of the local middle schools that serves the children of Latino farmworkers. The social worker served as a field instructor for the social work program and, on several occasions, had expressed her concern that she and her staff were not able to meet the growing needs of the Latino community. To illustrate, she described a meeting that drew approximately 70 Latino parents frustrated by the quality and level of their communication with their children. Among other things, families struggled with differential levels of acculturation between parents and children, as well as parenting in a foreign context. Of primary concern to the social work staff were the symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health issues that were at times dismissed or misunderstood by well-intentioned parents. The social worker wanted to hold informational and discussion

groups for parents at the middle school but had one problem: a shortage of bilingual social workers to facilitate groups.

At the same time these conversations occurred with the school social worker, the author discussed the possibility of collaborating with a colleague in the Spanish department who had a record of engaging her students in community service-learning projects in order to improve their fluency and fulfill a need. Therefore, a meeting was held at the local middle school between the author, Spanish professor, and social worker, and the project outline emerged. Small groups of students in the social work class would be paired with an advanced Spanish student who would serve as their language "consultant." The designation of consultant was made in order to fulfill the expectations of the Spanish course which was billed as "Spanish for Business." Spanish consultants would serve as translators in order to help prepare and facilitate parent groups.

Project Design, Preparation, and Goals

Design. Coordination of the project presented several logistical challenges, not the least of which was the matching of student schedules in order to facilitate their collaboration. This is a challenge of both group projects and service-learning within the context of one classroom; in the context of matching across disciplines, it became more daunting. It was decided that the author would create a timeline for the project based on the social work students' schedules, which took into consideration the meeting time of the advanced Spanish course. This would allow for some meetings to occur during class time, while others would have to occur outside of class time. Spanish language students would be recruited for the project by the social work professor in order to maximize the duration of student interest needed in order for the project to be successful.

Once the semester began, nine Spanish students were assigned to nine groups of approximately 3-4 social work students. Social work students were charged with creating a 5-minute role play and discussion questions in English; role-plays and questions were translated into Spanish by the Spanish student "consultants" and presented to small groups of Latino parents around the issue of youth depression and suicidal behavior during one night in April. Students planned and prepared for a group that could last up to one hour, including the time spent acting out the scenario in English and translating it into Spanish. Role plays were chosen as a medium to convey critical information based on the school social worker's sense that they would put parents at ease and engage them in a discussion of the issues. Table 1 provides the assignment description as it appeared in the course syllabus, as well as the timeline created for students to collaborate with their Spanish language consultants.

In addition to the schedule of assignments, both professors agreed to request funds through the university's office of service-learning and volunteer programs that had small stipends to support service-learning initiatives. Funds from the office covered the chartering of a school bus to transport college students to the middle school on the night of the cross-cultural parent groups.

Table 1.   Project Description and Timeline from Course Syllabus

Cross-Cultural Parent Group Project (20% of grade)
This group project presents a unique opportunity to (1) work in a group (2) plan for a group (3) work with a translator/consultant and (4) facilitate a group with a diverse population. This project has three partners: you the students, advanced Spanish-language students, and the Middle School. For this project students will be assigned to small groups and asked to design a single-session group for Spanish-speaking parents of middle-schoolers. Students will be assigned one Spanish language consultant in order to create a 5-minute role play and questions in English and Spanish for the parent groups, around the issue of youth depression and suicidal behavior. Student groups, with the help of their consultant, will facilitate their one-session parent group on the night of Thursday, April 2nd at the Middle School.

The following will help to prepare students for this project: an immersion trip to [rural areas of the County]; a visit from the social services liaison at the Middle School to discuss the issue of mental health and the Latino community; in-class time devoted to group meetings and preparation; out-of-class time to meet with the Spanish language consultant; and coordination with course content in SWO 395: Junior Seminar.

Student groups will produce their plans in two stages: the first will be a rough draft of the role-play and a list of literature you read to prepare for the role-play and group (e.g. mental health access and the Latino community, running parent groups, adolescent-parent communication, signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescents). The second stage will be the final draft of the role play (in English and Spanish) and questions (in English and Spanish) that you have developed for the group.

Draft of Role-Play and References Due: March 9th

Role-Play and Questions Due: March 23rd

6. Reflection on Group Process (and Ratings) (5%)
*This should be a brief summary of your experience in creating and participating in the cross-cultural parent group project. What did you learn about yourself in this process? What did you learn about preparing for a group? Working with the parents? What challenges did you face? What strengths did you discover or use in the process? Suggested length: 2-3 pages. **Due April 10th.***

Project Timeline

Date	Task
Wed. Feb. 11	Meet with Spanish language consultant to discuss role-play and timelines, room reserved and specified.
Mon. Feb. 23	Submit draft of role-play and questions to Professor—NOT GRADED—will return by 2/25
Wed. Feb. 25	Meet with Spanish language consultant, review (and submit to consultant) role-play and questions in preparation for translation—room reserved and specified.
Mon. Mar. 9	Submit role-play, questions, and references (ENGLISH) to Professor
Wed. Mar. 25	Submit English and Spanish versions of role-play and questions to Professor
Week of March 23 and March 30	Find time to meet with consultant to practice role plays!
Thurs. April 2	Parent Groups Night at Middle School Meet in Parking Lot at 5pm

Preparation for the Groups. In order to prepare students for their work with Latino parents, two specific activities were planned as exercises in "preparatory empathy" (Cournoyer, 2008). The first was a visit to the social work class from the school social worker and another bilingual, bicultural mental health provider in the community to whom the school often referred families. The purpose of this visit was to give students an understanding of the unique issues confronting the Latino immigrant community such as low wages, long working hours, language barriers, and the generational differences between parents and children that were often exacerbated by adjustment to a new culture and language. In addition, the visitors described some of the signs and symptoms they observed in the students they helped, and how some of these were unique to first and second generation Latino middle schoolers. Finally, students learned about the impact of social stigma in the local immigrant Latino community on those that seek professional mental health services.

The second preparatory experience was a brief "immersion" into the county where most Latino families reside. With funding from the university's educational services budget that covered transportation and lunch, social work students spent the day visiting with four different providers in the community: a traditional multi-service agency with an emphasis on culturally and linguistically competent services, a faith-based mission organization that operated out of the ground floor of a small strip mall, a youth drop-in center, and a farmworkers' committee that emphasized capacity-building in the Latino community over the provision of services. This gave students the opportunity to immerse themselves in the strengths and challenges facing both the community and the providers that served them. It also connected students affectively to some of the struggles faced by local Latino families, a connection made more real when (coincidentally) one of the organizers for the farmworkers' committee attended the parent groups night at the middle school.

One final preparation for the groups was made by a social work student in the class that was engaged in an independent study. As part of the student's independent study, she surveyed the student groups and the resources in the area in order to create a resource list in Spanish and English to give to parents on the night of the parent groups. It was decided the best way to provide this information was in the form of a "wallet-size" card.

Goals of the Project. Learning goals (and corresponding competencies) for social work students were to: (1) Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and challenges facing the local Latino community of parents and children; (EP 2.1.3; 2.1.4) (2) Demonstrate an understanding of the social, economic, and political context of families' lives such as language access, work arrangements, and parenting, in order to lay the groundwork for social action; (EP 2.1.5) (3) Demonstrate an increased interest in bilingual/bicultural social work with the Latino community (EP 2.1.9); and (4) Demonstrate the ability to plan and facilitate a group, particularly in a cross-cultural context (EP 2.1.9; 2.1.10) (For linkage of competencies, practice behaviors, and project goals, see Table 2.) While not the focus of the author, there were also learning goals for the Spanish students such as improved comprehension and communication skills with native speakers and application of knowledge of the Spanish language and Latino culture.

Table 2: Linkage of Competencies, Practice Behaviors, and Project Goals

EPAS Competency	Relevant Practice Behavior	Project Goal
2.1.3: Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.	Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge and practice wisdom.	(1) Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and challenges facing the Latino community of parents and children
2.1.4: Engage diversity and difference in practice.	--Recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power. --Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups. --Recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences. --View themselves as learners and engage with those with whom they work as informants.	(1) Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and challenges facing the Latino community of parents and children.
2.1.5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice.	--Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. --Engage in practices that advance social and economic justice.	(2) Demonstrate an understanding of the social, economic, and political context of Latino immigrant families' lives.
2.1.9: Respond to contexts that shape practice.	Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services.	(3) Demonstrate an increased interest in bilingual/bicultural social work with the Latino population. (4) Demonstrate the ability to plan and facilitate a group, particularly in a cross-cultural context.
2.1.10: Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	--Substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. --Use empathy and other interpersonal skills. --Assess client strengths and limitations. --Help clients resolve problems. --Critically analyze, monitor and evaluate interventions.	(4) Demonstrate the ability to plan and facilitate a group, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

ANALYSIS OF OUTCOMES: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SOCIAL ACTION

In order to evaluate the project and assess student learning outcomes, students were asked to submit (1) a copy of their role play with empirical references; (2) a self and group evaluation form; and (3) a reflection paper on the experience. In addition, feedback offered in the classroom was recorded in notes and analyzed. For the paper, students answered the following questions: What did you learn about yourself in this process? What did you learn about preparing for a group? What did you learn about working with the parents? What challenges did you face? What strengths did you discover or use in the process? Student role plays, qualitative comments from self and group evaluation forms, reflection papers, and classroom feedback were coded and categorized; analysis of data was inductive, with themes emerging directly from the multiple sources of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). "Comparative analysis" of the different sources of data for each category allowed for the latent pattern in students' words to emerge (Glaser, 2002). A small number of codes were "theory-driven" (Boyatzis, 1998) and consistently checked against and revised according to codes created from the data. For example, consistent with CSWE Accreditation Standard E.P. 2.1.4, one facet of cultural awareness is the ability to recognize and communicate the importance of difference in shaping life experiences. This practice behavior served as the basis for coding data for instances of recognition.

For the most part, student role plays focused on the theme of miscommunication between parents and children that resulted from generational splits, differential acculturation, and parents' work schedules; symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation in children; and the challenges of peer and school relationships faced by Latino middle-schoolers on account of their "outsider" status. Based on an analysis of student role plays, evaluation forms, papers, and notes from class discussion, four key learning outcome themes emerged that corresponded to the goals for the project and laid the foundation for social action: language, challenging stereotypes, understanding the social and political context of Latino immigrant families' lives, and personal and professional growth. While some student learning was anticipated, some was not and could only occur as a result of "live" learning in the context of a field-based project. Each of the four themes is described below.

Language

The majority of social work students described their experience on the night of the parent groups as the first time they had ever experienced the powerlessness of being in the linguistic minority. One student commented that she had lived in an international context in the past but had never needed to deliver vital information in that context. Another student expressed the empathy she developed for the Spanish-speaking parents: "This project showed me how frustrating it is to be on the receiving end of not knowing the language…while the parents were speaking with the translator in Spanish, us English-speaking students did not know what they were saying." For some students, the experience validated the Spanish-speaking skills they had developed through their university studies; for others, the experience spurred them to further their language study

either through the college curriculum or supplemental language study. Two students spoke of revaluing their own bilingual/bicultural identities. Prior to the parent groups night, one Latina social work student had not believed that she could engage professionally by using her Spanish, the language of "home." After the project, this student had not only used her Spanish to communicate with parents when her consultant struggled to translate more complex ideas, but she secured a senior-year field placement at the school based on her bilingual competence.

Challenging Stereotypes

On the night of the groups, approximately 35 parents showed up to the middle school, all of them expressing concern for their children. While this was nearly half of what was expected, it was still considered a strong turn-out for an evening program held at the school. Based on the content of their questions and their willingness to come to the school at 7pm on a weekday evening, the parents conveyed a commitment to their families that students did not necessarily expect to see based on some of the stereotypes they held of first generation Latino immigrants, many of which they formed through their readings and the media. Students expected parents to be either skeptical of outside professional help or disinterested, both of which were dispelled. Instead, parents conveyed a willingness to work with professional systems of care, but a lack of information about how to do so. Fortunately, students were able to explain and demonstrate the role and purpose of professional help and link families to potential services by reviewing (in person) the resources on the wallet-size card.

As the students presented their scenarios and the parents responded, students were impressed by the thought and knowledge about parenting that mothers and father brought to the groups. While students had been encouraged to describe the evening as a "partnership" with parents, they still viewed themselves in an instructive role. While parents did refer to students as "teacher," they also engaged in mutual aid, in part due to the lag time in translating from Spanish to English and back. In one group, students could see that parents were responding to each other and encouraged this mutual aid process to unfold, asking the Spanish consultant to translate the words being exchanged between parents. As "problem-swapping" occurred (Shulman, 2009), students gained an appreciation for the mutual aid process, but also viewed the parents as experts in their own experiences. This forced the students to respond to the needs of the parents as defined by the parents themselves. This latter learning outcome had particular salience in a socio-political context where parents' voices were marginalized on account of culture, language, and economic status.

Understanding the Social and Political Context of Families' Lives

One of the learning outcomes of the project occurred as a result of unanticipated circumstances. The parent groups night, as advertised through the school social worker, was to be held from 6-8pm. Parents were to gather in the school cafeteria to be welcomed, and would then divide into smaller break-out sessions where the role-plays and discussions would occur. At first, only a few parents arrived, something that puzzled the school that had received several responses indicating parents would attend. However,

word soon spread that one of the local factories had let its workers out late and that several parents were still on their way. As a result, the groups started later than expected. Importantly, the situation highlighted the tenuous working conditions that Latino parents in the county faced. Students commented on the work arrangements of parents as a possible impediment to securing services for their children. In recognizing some parents did not control when their workday ended, students understood the nuances of access for parents, not only to services that required set daytime (or evening) "appointments," but to the afterschool and evening lives of their children.

As a result of this experience, several students dedicated their time to the farmworkers' efforts to improve their working conditions. During the academic year that followed the parent groups project, the social work student honor society sponsored a panel to raise awareness of the migrant workers' plight for the campus community and held a fundraiser on behalf of the farmworkers committee. Other students worked directly with the committee in the development of a survey to document the working conditions at farms and factories in the county. Such community-based research and capacity-building occurred as a result of the affective and cognitive connection forged between parents and students through the service-learning project.

Personal and Professional Growth

As stated previously, some of the learning that occurred though the project was both unanticipated and only possible through the field-based project. This was the case in terms of both the structure and content of the evening. For example, due to an ultimately smaller group of parent participants than expected, student groups doubled-up in order to perform their role-plays (under the supervision of a bilingual social worker or one of the professors), circumstances that forced students to collaborate and recreate on-the-spot. Students developed a newfound appreciation for the importance of "flexibility" in social work practice, a skill not easily taught in the context of the classroom. Students wrote about their initial negative reactions to the loss of their anticipated "scripts," but that they learned how to think critically and engage with clients in situations where even the best-laid plans must be altered in order to meet client needs. In addition, students described their struggles in working with a translator, a cross-disciplinary experience that they might not otherwise have had in the field practicum. In reflecting upon this experience, and the experience of working with students that were not trained translators, social work students demonstrated recognition of the need for truly bilingual workers or translation services.

In addition to learning the value of flexibility, students applied the social work concept of "use of self" in the creative act of performing their role plays. This creativity not only stimulated strategies for students to communicate across cultures, but made parents comfortable enough to engage with "outsiders." Similarly, students viewed themselves in a professional role that night, whether they intended to or not. One student was able to connect a family with the afterschool program where she was placed in her practicum; another student, after the groups had ended, walked the school's hallways with a family in order to find and connect them with the bilingual mental health specialist who was there that night. A third student commented that she recognized how

empowerment was as much about providing direct answers as it was supporting an individual through the decision-making process.

Finally, learning outcomes for the project were presented by the author and two undergraduate social work students that participated at the annual Baccalaureate Program Directors' (BPD) Conference in the spring of 2010. In presenting on their own learning outcomes from the project, students were able to demonstrate competency and hone their professional communication skills in a national, professional venue. Among the social work practice skills the students discussed having honed were their skills in planning for and facilitating a group, integrating theory and practice through the application of concepts, and talking to clients about taboo subjects (such as depression and suicide), significant in that, up to this point, social work students had primarily talked about these subjects "amongst ourselves."

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Several lessons emerged from the cross-cultural parent groups project. For one, the logistics of such a project are challenging and must be accounted for in the development and delivery of the project. Given the value of the project, advocacy may be needed in departments to demonstrate the time and resources needed for faculty to prepare and execute such learning experiences. While the project was well-supported by the author's department, it still required more preparatory and teaching time than the standard group assignment. Similarly, students must be prepared for the amount of time such a project requires outside of class in preparation for one evening in the semester. While some collaborative time was built into the class schedule, the parent groups project required that social work students spend approximately 10 hours of time outside of class in order to meet with consultants, meet with one another to prepare role plays and questions, and travel to the middle school on the night of the parent groups. This amount of time does not include the hours spent on the day-long immersion trip into the county, nor the time expected from students to complete assignments without a service-learning component (for example, time spent doing the literature review for the role plays). However, it was this investment of time and preparation that facilitated the delivery of content to build the core competencies.

One key lesson learned highlights the limitations of any assessment of the project's effectiveness. While the social worker for the school deemed the night a success where "a lot of intervention happened" based on the reactions she heard from parents, the parents themselves were not surveyed. In future, such a project would need to be evaluated from both the perspective of the students and the individuals or community served. Similarly, students recommended that any future parent group nights allow more time and opportunity for parents to network with one another.

IMPLICATIONS: LINKAGE TO COMPETENCIES AND TEACHING OF GENERALIST PRACTICE

The goals and outcomes of the cross-cultural learning project supported the building of several core competencies under the 2008 EPAS: to apply critical thinking (E.P. 2.1.3), to engage diversity and difference in practice (E.P. 2.1.4), to advance human rights and social and economic justice (E.P. 2.1.5), to respond to [changing] contexts that shape practice (E.P. 2.1.9), and to engage, assess, and intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities (E.P. 2.1.10). (See Table 2.) Moreover, the project enabled students to build the professional skills of cross-disciplinary collaboration and working with a translator.

The project was also beneficial in terms of program development. Partnering across disciplines to better serve the surrounding community fulfilled the mission of the social work department as well as that of the university. Under Standards One and Two of the 2008 EPAS, a program must demonstrate how its mission and goals respond to the unique context of the program, how the goals are derived from the program's mission, and how the mission and goals are consistent with the core competencies that define generalist practice (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). Changing demographics and needs call for unconventional approaches to the delivery of social work practice and policy content in the curriculum.

With its emphasis on field as the signature pedagogy and the infusion of content throughout the curriculum, the 2008 EPAS implicitly supports the development of additional field-based opportunities to build the core competencies. Whether offered to students that are already in the field practicum or those that have yet to enter, cross-cultural service learning projects hone practice skills, meet a community need as identified by the community, and raise student awareness of the socio-political conditions faced by different groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, new immigrants, and migrant workers. Moreover, service-learning in a cross-cultural context creates opportunities for students to take risks, develop their critical thinking skills, and build the foundation for social action.

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