Transformational Effects of Service-Learning in a University Developed Community-Based Agency

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is first, to provide a model for the development and implementation of a university developed, community-based agency that incorporates service-learning projects infused throughout the social work curriculum. The inspiration for the community-based agency was grounded in Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformational learning and designed to provide social services to underserved populations and a training ground for future social workers. Second, we examine the transformational effects on students engaged in a competency-based, service-learning course at the agency, Methods of Social Work Practice. Using Clark's (1991) adaptation of Mezirow's theory of transformation, results indicate students experienced three dimensions (psychological, convictional, and behavioral) of transformational learning while engaged in the course and provide evidence that service-learning is directly related to the developmental process of social work students.*

Keywords: *Service-learning, transformational learning, social work education, competency-based course curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

The education and professionalization of future social workers has long had roots firmly established in experiential learning. Experiential learning places students in a social learning context, with a range of learning environments, providing experiences on ways to help people deal with their challenges (Bialeschki, 2007). In social work education, experiential learning has been the keystone to cultivating needed skills for future social workers. The inclusion of a field practicum at the end of both the Bachelor and Master's degree program has served to ground social work as an applied profession. Field instruction may be identified as the "signature pedagogy" for the profession of social work (CSWE, 2008); however, this hands-on pedagogy should not be confined only to the experiential learning inherent in field practicum courses. As social work education moves toward a competency-based practice model, which includes the ability to fulfill obligations to the client, the community, society and the profession, it becomes apparent that experiential learning should be introduced early in a student's academic career in the form of service-learning projects.

Service learning is an approach to pedagogy that requires social work students to engage in direct contact with individuals considered to be part of a vulnerable population early in their educational careers, allowing students to apply classroom knowledge with real-life situations. In doing so, students become more aware of their own beliefs and

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practices and how they can contribute to a socially just society (Carrington & Selva, 2010. The positive effects of service-learning have been documented in numerous studies (Dauenhauer, Steitz, Aponte, & Faria, 2010; Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli, 2003; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002; Williams & Reeves, 2004); however, little research has examined if there is evidence of transformational learning in competency-based social work education curriculum that incorporates service-learning. Furthermore, arranging a service-learning project for an entire cohort of students at community-based agencies can be extremely challenging and time consuming, forcing many faculty within social work education to continue using traditional models for educating future social workers. To our knowledge, there has been no attempt to establish a community-based agency solely developed and supervised by social work faculty that not only provides meaningful services to the community but also a training ground for future social workers through service-learning projects.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is twofold. The first is to provide a model for the development and implementation of a university developed and supervised community-based agency that incorporates service-learning projects, which can be infused throughout the social work curriculum. The second is to examine the transformational effects on students engaged in a competency-based course that incorporates service-learning into the curriculum at the university developed community-based agency.

Service-Learning in Higher Education

Over the last two decades service-learning has become a prominent form of educating students in higher education. This trend to utilize service-learning models within the halls of academia is aimed at solving society's most challenging social problems (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). There are varying definitions of service-learning within academic scholarship. For the purposes of this article the authors have chosen to use the most cited definition of service-learning developed by Bringle and Hathcher (1996):

> We view service-learning as a credit bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of service responsibility (p. 222).

Service-learning places emphasis on three overarching outcomes: (1) service to the community, (2) enhanced critical thinking and problem solving skills, and (3) the cultivation of lifelong, morally just, democratic citizens (Harkavy, 2004). Service-learning models have one primary goal, to connect classroom theory with real-world experience (Dauenhauer et al., 2010). Considering social work's deep-rooted history as an applied profession, it is obvious service-learning occupies a compatible niche within social work education.

Service-learning activities can have a tremendous positive impact on students and the faculty that initiate their experiences. Students engaged in service-learning activities have

had changes in attitudes towards lower-socioeconomic groups (Sanders et al., 2003), significantly increased levels of perceived self-efficacy (Williams et al., 2002), growth in personal and professional learning (Williams & Reeves, 2004), and retain course content in a meaningful way (Dauenhauer et al., 2010).

Service-learning programs established at institutions of higher learning typically develop collaborative partnerships with community-based agencies, which provide students with direct contact with client groups considered to be vulnerable populations (Rothman, 1994). However, creating and sustaining partnerships with a community-based agency requires the goals of both the agency and the university to intersect, ultimately providing a mutually beneficial collaborative project (Rubin, 2001). This can be challenging, considering universities and community-based agencies have different cultures and agendas. In order to bring service-learning more closely into the curriculum construct of social work education, new and innovative models must be developed. These new models must be grounded in both theory and research, ensuring experiences that will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and human needs (Dauenhauer et al., 2010).

Theory of Transformational Learning

The concept of the university developed, community-based agency's foundation lies in Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformational learning, which posits that learning is an understood process that utilizes prior interpretations to construct new and revised interpretations to guide future behavior. These new and revised interpretations are promoted through two major domains of learning, with different purposes. The first domain (instrumental learning) involves learning through task-oriented problem solving with the objective of improving a person's performance. The second domain (communicative learning) involves understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning concepts such as social justice, freedom, love, commitment and democracy. When these two domains of learning are coupled with critical reflection, a transformational process occurs. Mezirow defines this process as perspective transformation, which "refers to the transforming of a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20).

Since the inception of transformational learning theory, most researchers have concurred with Mezirow's original definition of perspective transformation. However, there is an increasing body of evidence that suggests Mezirow's theory is too narrow and places too much emphasis on individuals becoming more aware of their rational perspective, thus discounting other ways of learning (Clark, 1991; Courtenay, Merrriam, & Reeves, 1998; Hunter, 1980; Lucas, 1994; Neuman, 1996; Pierce, 1986; Pope, 1996; Scott, 1991; Van Nostrand, 1992). Characteristics of transformation that have emerged from other studies include three dimensions of transformational learning: psychological, convictional, and behavioral (Clark, 1991); new revelations of knowledge, mystical experience, and redefined perspective (Van Nostrand, 1992); an increase in personal power (Hunter, 1980; Pierce, 1986; Pope, 1996); compassion for others (Courtenay et al., 1998); creativity (Scott, 1991); and courage (Lucas, 1994; Neuman, 1996).

Over the last decade a number of researchers have suggested transformational learning can be fostered in a variety of settings. Based on a review of thirteen studies (Bailey, 1996; Carrington & Selva, 2010; Cusak, 1990; Dewane, 1993; Gallagher, 1997, Herber, 1998; Kaminsky, 1997; Ludwig, 1994; Matusicky, 1982; Neuman, 1996; Pierce, 1986; Saavedra, 1995; Vogelsang, 1978), transformational learning has occurred in settings such as respite groups for terminally-ill children, meal support for adult and child literacy programs, tutoring programs for fourth and fifth grade children, teaching for racial understanding, and self-help groups.

With the advent of new projects designed to promote transformational learning, much more research is needed to understand how educators in higher education establish the conditions necessary to produce positive outcomes. This includes the completion of course objectives, and the promotion of social work competencies, while still allowing for in-depth personal exploration (Taylor, 2000). The following section provides a brief historical outline of the university developed community-based agency, the competency-based service-learning projects integrated into the agency, followed by an overview of the competency-based course, Methods of Social Work Practice.

Community-Based Agency Designed to Promote Transformational Learning

The community-based agency was created by the Department of Social Work at a mid-sized public university located in Texas, for a dual purpose: (1) to provide social services to underserved populations and (2) to provide a training ground for future social workers through field practica and service-learning projects.

The first phase in the development of the community-based agency stemmed from a community needs assessment conducted as part of a class project for a macro-level practice course. The results of the needs assessment revealed a lack of comprehensive case management and free counseling for those who were homeless or at-risk of being homeless. From this groundwork, social work faculty submitted a proposal to a local charitable foundation to develop the agency. Faculty located space in a local outreach center, which houses a consortium of agencies providing services to the homeless and other vulnerable populations.

Senior field practicum students were the first to initiate services while more stable funding was secured. Initially, social work faculty supervised the students by holding office hours on-site. Funding was awarded through a local foundation, one year after the initial needs assessment. During the subsequent fall semester, two full-time and three part-time senior social work interns were placed in the agency and several graduate students offered counseling. While unstable staffing and funding was challenging initially, faculty and senior interns provided a measure of continuity and stability.

Two years after the agency was first awarded funding, the university was able to hire a full-time Director with over twenty years of experience practicing social work in the field. With a committed Director now in place and outside funding currently secured, the center continues to grow, change, and expand services. Bachelor's students provide case management to the homeless and other at-risk clients with administrative oversight. Additionally, students provide psychoeducational groups, such as anger management for

teens and adults, financial literacy, nutrition, and parenting instruction, as well as women's self-esteem groups, and grandparents parenting grandchildren support groups.

The agency has also secured funding to provide services to military personnel and their families previously or currently deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Various other projects have provided outreach and services to the elderly and persons with disabilities through a supplemental food program, micro-lending to a group of refugees through a local resettlement agency, and parenting classes to mothers in a shelter for homeless women. Most recently, the agency was awarded a sub-contract with local government in a city adjacent to the university. Clients are assessed and certified for rental assistance offered through federal stimulus monies and receive more comprehensive case management services in the process.

Since opening its doors, the agency has served over 3,500 clients, with faculty providing over 1,500 hours of supervision, and service hours provided by interns have totaled more than 9,500. Additional volunteer activities provided by social work students included child care, answering phones, researching resources, and assessments -- these hours have numbered over 4,500. The agency continues to operate year to year on grants, so agency continuity is always challenging; however, the university has recently begun to provide some monetary support and administrative officials often promote the agency.

Integrating Service-Learning into University Developed Community-Based Agency

With the need for more competency-based service-learning in social work education, coupled with the overall positive community oriented outcomes resulting from these activities, three service-learning courses were developed and integrated into course curricula at the agency. All three courses were designed to promote transformational learning through social work competencies. These courses, which included Group Processes, The Community, and Methods of Social Work Practice, allowed for the cultivation of relationships between students and underserved populations like the homeless and other at-risk groups in multiple settings. The following section provides an overview of course objectives, class activities, assignments, and core competencies addressed in the most comprehensive service-learning course offered, Methods of Social Work Practice.

Methods of Social Work Practice

The Methods of Social Work Practice course was designed to introduce students to a broad base of knowledge, skills, values, and ethics, which underlie all forms of social work practice: micro, mezzo, and macro. The generalist practice framework included exploration, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and termination as applied to multi-sized client systems. The course framework also included the processes of establishing professional relationships, communication, role taking, the principle of empowerment, and decision making around ethical dilemmas in practice.

Course objectives for Methods of Social Work Practice were developed in conjunction with the ten core competencies for social work practice identified in the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) Education Policy Standards (CSWE, 2008).

Of the ten core competencies, eight were addressed (see Table 1) in the course and their outcomes were measured using a variety of course assignments.

Table 1:   Core Competencies Addressed in Methods of Social Work Practice

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1. Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.

2. Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

3. Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.

4. Engage diversity and difference in practice.

5. Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

6. Engage in policy practice to advance social & economic well-being & to deliver effective social work services.

7. Respond to contexts that shape practice.

8. Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

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Utilizing the eight core competencies addressed in the course, seven course objectives were developed. Table 2 identifies the course objectives.

Table 2:   Course Objectives

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Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define the components of a problem solving method for social work practice: exploration, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation and termination by in class analysis activities, interview assignment and class project.

2. Demonstrate the application of the problem solving method at the various levels of social work practice by assessment with assigned clients and class project at community-based agency.

3. Recognize levels of theory and apply them for appropriate use of social work practice by client assessment, interventions and class project.

4. Define a professional relationship in social work practice, differentiate it from other relationships, and identify its benefits to clients by self-assessment in journals, exploring personal values in papers and developing a client relationship through community-based agency.

5. Relate social work professional values to a system of ethical reasoning for decision making in social work practice situations and explain how this reasoning aids the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

6. Demonstrate the understanding of the effects of culture, gender, age, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, spirituality, national origin, and other personal characteristics

on work with various client systems of social work concern through the community-based agency, and the development of interventions for clients.

7. Demonstrate good verbal and written communication skills that emphasize an understanding of the cultural, social, and economic factors that affect social work systems and their functioning through the final essay, individual handout exercise, in class exercises and class project.

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The Methods of Social Work Practice course was held in the training room at the community-based agency. Each week the class met with the instructor, where lectures were conducted on a multitude of topics, including case management process, contracting, interview skills, and methods of helping. Periodically, the instructor had local social work professionals with various areas of expertise provide presentations on community resources and information on working with different at-risk populations in the community. Student assignments included reflective journaling; papers on individual topics of interest with at least six readings, articles and other resources related to the topic; classroom presentations on individual topic papers; a write-up and processes for handling an ethical dilemma; response papers on mandatory course readings; and a summative reaction paper as to what each student learned from the course and how their new-found knowledge will be used in future social work practice.

The service-learning component of the course, offered exclusively to junior-and-senior bachelor's level social work students, required students to work approximately three hours per week, or a total of fifty hours over the semester at the university developed community-based agency. Tasks were assigned to each student based on community needs at that given time. This is a critical distinction to make. In order for the task to truly be considered service-learning, student roles must be "determined by the needs of the community they are serving, not the learning goals of the student or institution" (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 311). Through the course of the semester, students spent time talking to clients who came into agency, visited clients at their homes, conducted psychoeducational groups, or provided case management to clients served at the agency. Students were required to keep a log of their hours at the agency and their activities. This log was turned in at the end of the semester and verified by the Director of the agency by comparison with the log kept on-site.

There were three primary assignments integrated into the Methods of Social Work Practice course structure. The first assignment, designed to provide opportunities for service-learning engagement, required students to conduct a recorded interview, utilizing clients engaged in services. Before conducting interviews, students developed realistic goals to meet during the interview process. Once the interview was completed, each student exchanged recordings with a peer to evaluate. Peers were required to address strengths and weaknesses in the interview, goals for the interview, and if those goals were met. The evaluation of the interview was provided in a one page summary and given back to the student with the recording. Using peer feedback, students conducted a second interview in order to address peer identified weaknesses from the first interview. Each student was to then listen to the second interview and required to self-determine the

quality of their interviewing skills and if their original goals had been met. Finally, students submitted a two-to-three page paper answering the following questions:

1. How you think you did in this interview as compared to your first one?

2. Have you met your working goals, or where are you on the goals you initially set for yourself?

3. What were your strengths during the interviewing process?

4. What are ways you could improve the interview process?

5. Identify what you learned from the clients you interviewed in this process.

Summative papers, along with the two recordings, were then turned at the end of the semester and counted as a substantial portion of the final grade.

The second assignment focused on the policy side of the community-based agency. At the beginning of the semester each student was given a copy of the policy and procedures manual and given a brief introduction to all of the policies and procedures that play an integral part in the agency's social service structure and success. After spending at least thirty-five of the mandated fifty hours at the agency and familiarizing themselves with agency processes, students were required to develop a policy that could potentially be added to the policy and procedure manual.

The third and final assignment required students to write a two-page reaction paper in reflection of their experiences at the community-based agency, what they learned from these experiences, and how they would use this new found knowledge in future social work practice. Students were also encouraged to describe any personal changes made, as a result of their experiences, along with any concerns or challenges they may have encountered.

Since the inception of the community-based agency, seventy-five junior-and-senior bachelor's level social work students have completed the Methods of Social Work Practice course and submitted reaction papers regarding learned experiences. As stated earlier, much of the research regarding service-learning in social work education has suggested that service-learning provides an opportunity for positive outcomes; however, there is a lack of empirical research that has examined the transformational effects of service-learning in a competency-based course in social work education. Thus, the purpose of the following research was to examine the transformational effects of students engaged in a competency-based, service-learning course, Methods of Social Work Practice.

METHOD

Selection of Participants

All seventy-five students that completed Methods of Social Work Practice were invited to participate in the study; however, the majority of students selected had since graduated from the university and dispersed throughout the United States. In order to obtain proper consent, emails and phone calls were made to all students and all were given the option of a verbal or electronic consent. Additionally, all students were given the option of receiving a hard copy of the consent for their records. Students were assured of the confidential nature of their responses and were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without question or prejudice. Ultimately all seventy-five students agreed to participate in the study and consisted of one male (1.3%) and seventy-four (98.7%) females. Prior to obtaining consent the research design and all corresponding forms were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Analysis of Data

In order to examine the transformational effects of competency-based, service-learning, student reaction papers were analyzed. Initial coding of data began by reviewing all seventy-five reaction papers. In the coding process each line was reviewed and scrutinized. In order to identify dimensions of transformational learning, themes were coded using qualitative techniques developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). To uncover and develop concepts, open coding was first used to expose broad recurring ideas and the meanings contained within them. Data were then dissected into parts, examined for similarities and differences, and then grouped into broad categories. Broad categories were then further scrutinized, regrouped, and developed into core concepts or subcategories. Data were initially analyzed using Mezirow's (1978) original theory of transformational learning. However, once patterns emerged, it became evident Mezirow's original theory of transformational learning was too narrow. Thus, an adaptation to the original theory developed by Clark (1991) was utilized. Clark argues that transformational learning does not occur in two domains (instrumental and communicative); rather, transformational learning occurs in three dimensions: psychological, convictional, and behavioral. This adaptation of transformational learning will be expounded upon in the next section.

RESULTS

Building on the work of Clark (1991), the results of this study identified three dimensions of transformational learning: psychological-structure or understanding of one's self was altered; convictional-belief systems were revised; and behavioral-lifestyle was changed. These dimensions were identified in a variety of the service-learning experiences at the agency but in different proportions. The following will illustrate how transformations were triggered and the dimensions of transformational learning students experienced.

Behavioral Dimension

The service-learning model established in the Methods of Social Work Practice course created an environment that allowed students to combine classroom theory with real-life situations by being placed into direct contact with clients considered to be vulnerable populations. This type of interaction creates what Clark (1991) refers to as an "integrating circumstance." Integrating circumstances are considered "indefinite periods in which a person consciously or unconsciously searches for something they are missing in their life; when they find this missing piece, the transformation is catalyzed" (p. 117-118). By placing students into direct contact with clients, students are introduced to the missing piece of the puzzle, creating an environment for a transformational experience. In this case, students enrolled in Methods of Social Practice experienced a behavioral transformation, meaning students' lifestyles were transformed. One student explained her experience by saying:

> *I feel like I have grown tremendously during this semester and feel more dedicated than ever to the social work profession... In the beginning I was really worried about how little I knew from our community. Now I find myself helping friends and even family find resources...this class gave me the real life perspective that social workers can really impact lives.*

Overall, students enrolled in the Methods of Social Work Practice course expressed that this unique interaction acted as a catalyst for students to experience a dramatic behavioral dimension of transformational learning. More specifically, students were empowered to work with other vulnerable populations, were motivated to find new avenues for resources and donations, became more assertive in their personal and professional lives, and were enabled to build friendships beyond the classroom.

Convictional Dimension

Before engaging in the service-learning component of the course, students were provided with demographics, social characteristics and risk factor associated with the homeless. Students were also encouraged to participate in classroom dialogue regarding their current attitudes and expectations when interacting with the homeless. Additionally, throughout the entire Methods of Social Work Practice course students were required to submit a weekly journal to be posted anonymously to an online discussion forum, creating a reflective community that is essential in triggering a transformational experience (Mezirow, 2000).

When examining students' reaction papers, most expressed that the open classroom dialogue and journaling process allowed for the discovery of hidden prejudices that existed. Students were uncomfortable with the notion of working with the homeless population. Some even expressed that they had "no desire to work with the homeless" prior to beginning the service-learning portion of the course. For most students, the root of these prejudices resulted from prior experiences with the homeless or was shared by members of their primary group. "I was raised by someone with the stereotype that all homeless individuals are bad people who will take anything from you and was told to just stand clear of them if at all possible." Students did not realize the extent of their prejudice

until they were faced with the challenge of working with the population, producing a disorienting dilemma or acute internal or personal crisis (Mezirow, 2000). Once students realized the extent of their prejudice a remarkable convictional dimension of transformation occurred; according to Clark (1991) this can be described as an actual revision of one's belief system. One student exclaimed:

> *I had really bad misconceptions and assumptions about the homeless population...those feelings went away the further I got into my hours...I will never think of people that are homeless the way I used to. I have more compassion and am more aware of the facts that surround the issue of homelessness...I learned that the homeless population is not scary, their[sic] people just like you and me, who just need a little boost, and a lot of them are eager to share information about their life experiences. The skills that I've learned will never be forgotten, they will be so valuable to me in the future.*

Clark (1991) argues that when a convictional dimension of transformation is primary, a secondary behavioral dimension of transformation can occur. In the current study, the majority of students experienced this secondary dimension of behavior change. One student exclaimed:

> *I did not want anything to do with the homeless...after my first interaction with a client, it all changed...it completely changed who I am on the inside, and it also began to be reflected in the way my family perceives the homeless.*

Psychological Dimension

During the course of the service-learning project students were required to interview at least two clients engaged in services at the agency. Students expressed an overwhelming fear of interviewing clients on their own, "the first interview I was so scared and shaking that I could barely talk." Many believed that they would "mess up" a client psychologically or would be unable to provide the client with solutions needed to overcome their current problems. This event triggered a disorienting dilemma. Once students initiated conversations with clients, their fears (acute internal or personal crises) began to lessen. As their experiences progressed throughout the semester this self-expressed fear of interviewing seemed to vanish, prompting a primarily psychological change, what Clark (1991) describes as transformational understanding of oneself. "I have overcome my interviewing fear and believe that I could do this more out in my field work because I have had this experience." Student also realized that "it is ok not to know everything." It is important to note that most students credited the recorded interviews as the key for identifying critical points in the interview process.

Patterns within reaction papers revealed that students not only had an initial fear of interviewing but also possessed a deeper overall fear of working with clients faced with real problems, needing real solutions. "It may have been more intimidation than fear but either way I did not feel comfortable at all." The idea of confronting these fears produced varying levels of anxiety among the majority of students; however, once these fear were confronted, students experienced increased levels of confidence that did not exist prior to client interaction, again prompting a significant psychological change.

I get nervous doing anything that is out of my comfort level...I have never had a high level of confidence...Working at the agency has taught me that I am educated enough to handle most situations. If I didn't know the answer I was able to find the answer out. I look back at certain situations and how I handled them, and I am proud to say that I handled them professionally. I was surprised at how easy it was to interact and help those that I came in contact with... gaining confidence is the biggest tool that I will take with me from my time at the agency.

Clark (1991) also argues that when a psychological dimension is primary, convictional and behavioral dimensions of transformation can exist, however, only secondarily. The changes students experienced by overcoming their initial interviewing fear and larger overall fear of interacting with clients also had a secondary impact on their behavior (behavioral dimension). Initial interactions inspired students to work with more clients from vulnerable populations, educate themselves and persons in their primary groups concerning community resources, and motivated some to solicit community businesses for monetary support or hygiene products distributed at the agency to the homeless. Although these experiences produced both psychological and behavioral dimensions of perspective transformation, there was no evidence suggesting a secondary convictional dimension.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the research was to first provide a model for a university developed, community-based agency that incorporates service-learning projects into competency-based social work courses. Second, the research demonstrates the transformational effects on students engaged in a competency-based course that incorporates service-learning into the curriculum.

The results of this study revealed that a university developed, community based-agency model provides a rich environment for both service-learning and transformational learning. The introduction of client interaction through service-learning allowed students to utilize concepts learned in the classroom and connect them to real-life situations, while also providing a service to the community. The primary difference between this model and traditional models of service-learning is this type of model alleviates the challenges of collaborating with local community-based agencies. The university developed, community-based agency model also allows faculty to integrate appropriate measures for examining course effectiveness, without the constraints of agency policy. Finally the model encourages students to examine agency policy and to find areas that need improvement. This type of openness allows students to experience necessary policy practice with the potential for real-world application.

Shifting to the transformational impact service-learning had on social work students, results indicated that this service-learning course promoted three dimensions of transformation and provided evidence that service-learning is directly related to the developmental process of social work students. This first dimension of transformation, behavioral, instilled a new found confidence to work with vulnerable populations,

motivated students to identify new avenues for community resources, and produced more personal and professional assertiveness in students. This type of transformational experience also gave students the confidence needed to establish new social networks amongst their peers. The second dimension, convictional, allowed students to uncover hidden prejudices towards vulnerable groups and forced students to confront those prejudices. For the majority of students this resulted in an overall positive behavior change towards the group. Finally, the psychological dimension of transformation prompted students to overcome fears of interacting with vulnerable groups. The psychological dimension of transformation also invoked a secondary behavioral change, leading students to seek further education about groups such as the homeless.

The implications of these findings are wide-ranging. For students enrolled in Methods of Social Work Practice, dimensions of transformation produced varying levels of personal and professional growth, interpersonal and moral development, and commitment to serving the community. For social work education, incorporating the three dimensions of transformational learning used in this study can provide a format for exploring the impact of other service-learning, volunteer, and field experiences students experience during their education. It also provides a framework for discussing these experiences with students and helping them to see the ways they are impacted by their learning, increasing their self-awareness and appreciation for the processes involved in their education.

Although students experienced revisions to both their behavior and belief systems, a critical question remains unanswered. Once these transformations occur, do they have a lasting positive effect when students enter the field? It is unknown whether or not the transformations experienced in their service-learning project produce a permanent behavior and belief change and this is an avenue that needs to be explored in the future. Additionally, the findings described in the study also come with some limitations. First, the overall sample was relatively small and confined to students from one university, making the results of the study difficult to generalize. Second, the study utilized student reaction papers, which can only capture organized thoughts retrospectively. This made it impossible to access actual changes in meaning structures during the process of transformational learning. Therefore, longitudinal studies examining transformational learning are needed, studies that incorporate social work students from a variety of universities, in a number of settings, creating a framework to examine the immediate impact service-learning has on the restructuring of meaning systems in social work education.

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