Community Engaged Scholarship

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Definition

In Ernest L. Boyer’s influential 1990 publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*, he stated that universities and colleges “were one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country” believed for this to occur, “the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call scholarship of engagement” (p.11).
Service Learning and Community Engaged Scholarship

* Expected to be mutually beneficial to community and students
* Involve university and community
* Community identified needs
* Relationships and respect
* Provide tangible results that are of interest to community, students, and academy
* Promote civic engagement
Benefits of Civic Engagement, CES, and ASL (Anderson & Douglass, 2005)

* Strengthen connections between “civic and academic achievement, research and teaching”

* Increase diversity, degree completion, and retention

* Enliven faculty in their scholarship

* Build relationship to policy makers

* Increase interdisciplinary research and teaching

* Bring in new resources and funding

* Build social capital

* Leverage multi campus structure (TIMELY)

* Increase university profile in a variety of areas unique to region (rural, refugee, arts, history, etc.)
Critical factors for CES

* Support faculty (training (concepts, best practice, PAR), T & P process, support for grants that are directed to CES and /negotiate/waiver F & A.

* Pedagogy that supports ASL, experiential learning, and the incorporation of the concepts, rationale, and methods of participatory practice and best ASL practice

* Involve and mentor students and community members in knowledge creation

* Use a variety of methods to engage community and leave lasting benefits (equity in finding and other tangible rewards)
Research on Service Learning

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

Qualitative research has utilized interviews, focus groups, journals and reflective papers; however, this type of research is relatively small in comparison.
Outcomes continued

The scant amount of research on communities suggests service learning is beneficial; however, these studies were exclusive to agencies, and did not include informal networks and individual community members (Cress et al., 2010; Driscoll et al., 1996; Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage et al., 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006).
Need for additional research

The bulk of literature related to service learning and college access focuses on service-learners rather than on the people they serve (Cress et al., 2010, p. 19-20)
Need for additional research

- Study the process of transformation and not just outcomes
- While outcomes are convincing, and lend institutional support to service learning programs, critical information can be skipped over in the tendency to quantify experiences that are multifaceted and far reaching.
- Future research must stay mindful of service learning’s roots and ideals, based on the establishment of land grant colleges and universities and the goal of a civic-mind education
- Ensure the benefits extend beyond academic interests and using participatory methods that co-create knowledge with the community
Who I am as a Researcher

* Came to social work as an artist

* Came to research as a practitioner with 25 years of multidisciplinary experience

* My primary societal concerns are linking pedagogy and the resources of the university directly to communities in the service of creating reciprocal relationship that benefit the university, students, and the communities in which we are all embedded. I practice this through academic service learning.

* Qualitative methods (arts-based, narrative, phenomenology, CBR, and PAR)
How it Began in Mart – With Art and Family
Setting: Mart, Texas

* Mart’s population is approximately 2,200
* Estimated median household income is $32,000, per capita income $15,05
* 21% of the residents have an income below the poverty level
* 74% of the students in Mart ISD are considered economically disadvantaged and 41% at risk
* Ethnic Composition of Mart: White Non-Hispanic (65.6%) Black or African American (27.5%) Hispanic (5.8%)
* Children below poverty level: Mart: 39.8% State of Texas: 22.9%
* Poor families by family type: Married-couple family (11.5%) Female, no husband present (83.2%)
* Breakdown by race of poor residents: 9.5% white, 40% Black or African American, 30% Hispanic

Treasure lost

* In 2008, there were 15 display cases in the Mart public library. Not one black face was present.

* When the former black high school was sold, the pictures, banners, trophies, all archival evidence of its successes were thrown away.

* Personal collections of photographs and archival documents were often lost due to faulty wiring of homes and subsequent fires.

* Sites of memory were either destroyed or left in ruin – what remained was silence.
Seeking a strategy for engaging this community in development and research projects with arts-based practice.
Reconnecting through art...
Theoretical grounding for community arts-practice and research

Social construction

- The processes by which people describe, explain and understand their world
- Who benefits and who loses because of how the world is defined or explained
- Simultaneous exposure to social practices at the individual, family, community and societal levels

Afrocentric theory

- Interdependence
- Reciprocity
- Collectivism
- Transformation
- Spirituality
- A critical tenet of Afrocentric research methods is that inquiry must be validated by the community participating in the inquiry (Reviere, 2001)
Reconnecting through art...
# Theoretical grounding for community arts-practice and research

## Social construction

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## Afrocentric theory

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* A critical tenet of Afrocentric research methods is that inquiry must be validated by the community participating in the inquiry (Reviere, 2001)
“Social problems are never solved. At best they are only re-solved – over and over again”  (Rittle and Weber, 1973, p. 160)
Wicked Problems: Social Messes

* Complex vortex of poverty, lost memories, racial disparity, environmental decay
* Messy and indescribable, often defy language.
* Solutions create new problems...
* Problem definition and scope depends on who you talk to
* The traditional method of problem formation, hypothesis testing with the intent of determining a solution/intervention is often ill fitted for complex societal issues that are iterative and ongoing.
* Since wicked problems are iterative, and informed by multiple of systems and problems, the idea of “fixing” should be abandoned in favor of a variety of responses.

Wicked Responses

* Throw many ideas at a problem and build from it
* Goal is not to solve problems, rather promote further production and relationships between people, space and ideas
* Cannot avoid language; however, it is at best ambiguous and often problematic, therefore the rationale for the use of art in practice and research
* Collage art enables us to depict experiences across time and space, and suggest how events, feelings, and objects are connected yet may not always be reduced to a single linear narrative
* Involve community members directly in the research through art – ownership and investment in the results
Stepping into the Silence
Art-Based Practice and Research Methods

* Art is a way to illicit stories and meaning when traditional methods fail us

* Art, in this case collage, engages people as creators in the research process (painting, adding artifacts and sayings, stories visually represented by artist/scholars/students/community members)

* Art gives stories back to the public in the way that journal articles do not

* Art reduces the power differential between researcher and subject and fosters reciprocity
Three applications of collage practice

1.) Creation of collage portraits as part of a narrative study
   * Family participation in an art installation at the site of the Davis family homestead prompted a research project – looking at the impact of the installation on the family members

2.) Mosaic Murals
   * Artists were brought to the community to tell stories with residents through the creations of three mosaic murals
     * high school cafeteria
     * on an abandoned commercial store front
     * on the façade of the concession stand at the abandoned Chambless Field, the former site of football games during the segregated era

3.) Interactive wall
   * Creating an interactive wall on the Chambless Field concession stand for residents to share memories and dreams for the field
First Application: Collage Portraiture - Building The Method
Research Question:
What was the experience of family and community members creating an art installation on family land?
Implications for qualitative research

* Collage portraits offer qualitative research a range of approaches to complement more traditional methods in gaining a deeper and authentic understanding of individuals and their challenges within cultural, political, and societal contexts.

* Collage portraiture’s utility is varied and flexible, and can be used by researcher and participant in the process of data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

* Capture the interactions between researcher and participants to create and share new knowledge.

* Reduces power differential.

* Collage portraits offer scholars a venue for producing research that is adaptable to diverse populations and conveys meaning beyond the constraints of language.

* Inform qualitative research by expanding the breadth and depth of voices contributing to the knowledge base.
Second Application: Mosaic Murals

- Mart High school cafeteria
- North Pearl Street
- Chambless Field
Mosaic mural on North Pearl Street
Visiting artists Muhsana and Kansi working on Mart High mural
Lunch at the Mart High cafeteria
Touching Stories of Chambless Field
Homecoming Reunion 2011
Third Application: Interactive wall at Chambless football field
Writing stories of Chambless Field: “The field was our universe”
Remembering on the Interactive Wall
Residents and UT students creating art for another installation wall
Summer Camp 2012 led by UT students: Layering the narratives
Resultant academic research:

* Social Work qualitative research projects (pedagogy, students and community experience)
* Writing and Rhetoric dissertation on community engagement
* MFA thesis (ethnography)
* Development of collage portraiture as a method of inquiry (in press)
* Three articles about the GPD course and impact on community and students
* Presentations at national conferences (SSWR, CSWE, CAAR, and Oral History)
Three Article series based on the community-university partnership

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

This research is focused on pedagogy and the found benefits of building on existing classroom teaching with direct community engagement from three perspectives:

- Interdisciplinary service learning that originates in social work
- Student experience in the community
- Community member experience of engagement with the university (including residents and informal networks)
Theoretical Framework

* John Dewey aligned experiential education to participatory democracy.

* Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy centers on a process of dialog, praxis and historical analysis.

* Dewey’s work serves as the primary theoretical and philosophical foundation for service learning, and the more contemporary radical political model is implicit in Freire’s critical pedagogy influenced by Marxist theories. (Political vs. apolitical, social justice vs. charity ASL model, and PAR vs. CBR).

* While Dewey and Friere represent both overlapping and distinct approaches service learning and community engagement, they support a theoretical framework that supports the service learning principles of study, service/reciprocity and reflection.
Article 1: Framing service learning in social work: An interdisciplinary elective course embedded within a university-community partnership
Authors: Gerstenblatt, P. & Gilbert, D.

* Academic service learning has grown in popularity across disciplines and universities.

* While its merits are well documented, criticisms of various approaches to service learning indicate improvements are needed to ensure communities benefit as much as students, that service projects are meaningful and students learn about the broader complex socio-economic issues of the communities they serve.

* As a relative newcomer to service learning, social work is well positioned to enter the discourse by further developing best practices for service learning pedagogy.

* After reviewing the underlying theories and the current state of service learning in social work, we present a 3-component service learning pedagogy model that capitalizes on the structure of a university-community partnership, mobilizes interdisciplinary teams of students for community-identified projects, and promotes reflection on complex economic and social justice issues.

* Implications for social work education and research are discussed.
Article Two: Blogs as a representation of student experiences in a social work academic service learning course: A phenomenological study

Problem statement: During the past two decades service learning has gained popularity in higher education as pedagogy that integrates student learning and a commitment to solving problems in local and international communities (Compact, 2011). While research on service learning has evidenced gains in the areas of student learning, personal and social development, a majority of the studies have been quantitative and focused narrowly on outcomes rather than the process of transformation or the challenges of working in diverse communities that may bear little resemblance to their home community (Cress, 2010; Eyler, et al. 2001).

To address this gap, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to examine the blogs of students enrolled in a service learning course working in a rural, poor, racially divided community written over the course of a semester.

Research question: The research question that guided the study was: What was the experience of students in a university service learning class as described in their blogs?
The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of students in a service learning class working in a rural community as described through their blogs. Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as a method of analysis because the data source provided descriptive text of the lived experience of the students.

Researcher was participant observer

Criterion sampling: The criterion was completion of the course and retrievable blog when the study commenced (n=17). The two cohorts were predominately white and female with eleven graduate students and nine undergraduate students. The breakdown by gender and ethnicity was 82% female, 18% male, with one African American female, one female student from Nepal, one Hispanic male, and two Hispanic females. Students enrolled in the class came from a variety of disciplines including social work, engineering, psychology, theater, government, community and regional planning, and political science.
Procedure

* The seventeen blogs used in this study began the first week of the semester and concluded at the end of the semester. Students were asked to respond to assigned readings and questions and blog weekly about their work in the town; however, they were given a great deal of latitude on frequency and media in their blog posts.

* The university IRB approved this study as part of a larger investigation of academic service learning classes.

* While the blogs were in the public domain, students signed consent forms to participate in the study.
Themes

The analysis resulted in the five essential themes:

1. implications of race,
2. working with the community,
3. deterioration of the built environment,
4. the capacity of art,
5. learning as a result of the course.
Shock at segregated spaces

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

The racial dynamic: “To hear [Pastor’s wife] say there were NO Black businesses or professionals was sobering. Here, in 2010, in the United States of America existed the same conditions as sixty years ago (in many cases worse; at least during segregation Blacks had an existence in the professional world). It [lack of black professionals] made me more driven to help this community.” (Carrie, undergraduate psychology student)
Theme Two: Working With the Community

Volition: “While it would be easy just to go in to Mart and tell everyone what we think they need to further develop their town, it is not up to outsiders to decide. We need to fully involve the community and ask rather what they need and want.” (Jane, graduate social work student)

Sustainability: “I am constantly thinking of ways to make this sustainable and have a large impact...I am always re-evaluating our progress.” (Mary, graduate social work student)

Facing challenges: “I was pretty excited about the program, so I'm disappointed that I might have to let go of the idea. At the same time, I'm definitely getting a lot out of my experience with the Sisters of Nia program; if that remains my focus for the semester, it will still be well worth it” (Anna, graduate theater student)
Working with the community cont.

**Student role:** “I am also starting to pick up a vibe on how important UT is to Mart. We bring a mood to the town - Excitement, Change, Inspiration, Possibility, Hope, etc.”

(Carol, undergraduate government major)
Theme 3: Condition of the Built Environment

“Downtown Mart is desolate and broke down.” (Carrie, undergraduate psychology student)

“One of the most notable aspects of the town was the large number of run down, abandoned buildings.” (Gail, graduate social work student)
“During our visit we learned that not many people were excited by the prospect of a mosaic mural on a business front, but once they saw the finished product (at the Mart Co-op), many wanted to learn more about how they too could get involved and maybe even create a mosaic of their own!” (Mary, graduate social work student)

“I feel it is important for people to live in beauty because what we see everyday affects the way we feel.” (Andrea, graduate social work student)
Theme 5: Learning as a Result of the Course

“It is so surreal being in this course and very difficult to describe. I kept having to remind myself that I was in school.” (Mike, undergraduate political science student)

“Beyond this initial trip, I have great expectations for the mutual learning and transformation process that will take place. In other words, my expectations and hopes are more tied to ongoing processes, rather than completion.” (Roberta, graduate social work student)

“Come-on - Who goes to church with their professors? – strange.” (Carol, undergraduate government student)

“I went into this process feeling like I had so much information to provide and I must admit I think I am learning more than the girls!” (Carrie, undergraduate psychology student)
Discussion

The current study suggests that service learning pedagogy and its core principles of study, reciprocity and reflection provide an option to gain knowledge that is not attainable solely in a classroom setting.

Service learning provides opportunities for students to grapple with and learn about the complex issues of community engagement, race, and poverty through personal encounters and experience. While students acknowledged the difficulties encountered along the way (scope, distance, work-school schedules, engaging the community) they wrote of seeing themselves as agents of positive change and felt a sense of accomplishment regardless of the end result of their project.

There is a scarcity of research in service learning literature that examines the importance emotion plays in reflection (Felten, 2006). The reflexive aspect of blogging provided insight to the students’ emotive experience over the course of the semester, including their epiphanies, discomfort, disappointment, excitement, and satisfaction.
Conclusion

The use of blogs, journals, and reflective papers offer unique insight into the lived experiences of students in their own words that surveys, scales and other quantitative measures are not able to provide.

Future research might also include the analysis of multi media incorporated into the reflective process, for example photographs, video, poetry, and other creative expressions used in blogs.

Student comments posted on their peer’s blogs could offer an opportunity to study the value of building a collective discourse and learning partnership between students and faculty.

The use of blogging can serve as a tool to strengthen the reflective requirement of service learning and provide students a flexible and creative way to share experiences, resources, and become generators of knowledge.

Service learning pedagogy that adheres to the core principles of study, reciprocity, and reflection can result in mutually beneficial outcomes for students, universities, and communities, and assist higher education in achieving a broader civic mission.
Problem statement: There is a gap in the service learning literature that focuses on the community response to service learning. Previous studies primarily identify agencies and agency staff as the “community” and do not include community members, informal and grassroots networks.

Research question: What was the experience of community members who worked with university service learning students?

Method: Phenomenology
The bulk of research on service learning has focused on students with little attention paid to community partners.

Additionally, the few studies that exist to date involve agencies and have not included informal networks and civically active citizens.

This study consisted of interviews with nine community partners, a combination of agency employees and active citizens, residing in a rural Southern town that worked with a network of service learning classes on a variety of community-identified projects.

The current study supports the contribution of service learning to communities, the importance of investing in reciprocal relationships, and the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents.

Recommendations for further research and strategies to support reciprocal and meaningful community engagement are discussed.
Five essential themes emerged from the interviews:

1. encouraging community involvement;
2. students as inspiration;
3. community learning;
4. community response to students; and
5. lasting imprint of students in the community.
Conclusion

* The current study supports the value service learning offers communities and underscores the importance of investing in relationships with community partners.

* Additionally, the study also elucidates the potential value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents to service learning experiences and research.

* Further research is needed to build a useful understanding of the lived experience of community participants in service learning projects, and might include focus groups, arts-based method and multimedia documentation, and longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effect of this type of community-university partnership. Such understandings will assist in the development and support of best practices for engaging the community in service learning programs.

* The results of this study suggest that the community gained direct benefits when students engaged informally with individual community members in addition to the formal institutional/agency based engagement. Those benefits included increased civic participation, gaining new knowledge and skills, inspiration to try new things, new ideas and energy, and recognizing a positive effect beyond the students' time in the community.
Our Mart:
Photo voice video project

* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnKA_PVFOxc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnKA_PVFOxc&feature=related)
Questions?