

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH ESERVICE-LEARNING: A Case Study

Abstract

This case study explores student learning outcomes from a student-led eService-learning (SLES) course. The researchers interviewed 12 participants in addition to evaluating final reflection papers. Data analysis yielded three general categories including leadership insights, personal growth and development, and overcoming community obstacles. Leadership insights were comprised of five emergent themes such as leadership lessons learned, collaboration, communication, influence, and other leadership theories. Personal growth and development included seven themes such as personal challenge, personal awareness, practical application, personal affect, personal self-efficacy, self-efficacy toward future involvement, and service-learning insights. The final category, overcoming community obstacles, was encompassed by three themes including community challenge, insights about others, and innovation. Transferability of the findings along with implications for practice are discussed.

Introduction

While the common aim of leadership education is to prepare students to meet the challenges of a constantly evolving and demanding work environment (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009), educators must also be able to adapt within this ever-changing landscape. There is a confluence of factors impacting higher education. Industry leaders expect schools to prepare graduates with a wide range of essential competencies and skills to meet the needs of working in a global environment (McMurray et al., 2016). These competencies include capacities such as influencing and persuading; teamwork and relationship building; critical and analytical; self and time management; leadership; ability to see the bigger picture; presentation; and communication (Azevedo et al., 2012).

Additionally, advances in technology have transformed the educational environment, giving rise to distance education which has become increasingly ubiquitous in higher education. Allen and Seaman (2017) reported that 29.7% of students enrolled in higher education within the United States take at least one distance education course. Furthermore, there were more than six million students enrolled in a distance education course during the fall 2015 term, representing a 3.9% increase over the previous year. We must employ researched-based best practices to ensure our students enrolled in programs at a distance are prepared to interact in a dynamic global environment.

Further, a broader and more diverse population seeks access to higher education. Among them is a growing influx of adult learners who possess a unique set of needs and experiences. Adult development theo-

ry (e.g., Kegan, 1994) ought to inform our practices as educators effectively address the needs of adult learners.

Forrest and Peterson (2006) asserted educators must adopt “an andragogical mindset in order to be congruent with the field’s new educational direction” (p. 114). Service-learning is one such teaching tool that employs an “andragogical mindset.” Arbaugh and colleagues (2013) asserted the growing interest in service-learning as an instructional strategy, and the authors suggested research was needed to understand its impact in online settings. There is a substantial body of research indicating that service-learning is associated with powerful, transformative learning experiences (Bamber & Hankin, 2011); however, much of this research is situated in traditional, face-to-face courses. Yet, comparatively little is known regarding its impact on learner outcomes when facilitated through distance education. The present qualitative case study explores the impact on student learning in an online, leadership education course.

Literature Review

Learner Outcomes

The competency-based reflective practice students engage in through service-learning is critical for integrative knowledge (Berdrow & Evers, 2011; Dehler & Welsh, 2014; Miller & Maellaro, 2016). Research reveals service-learning is positively related to important student outcomes (Carlisle et al., 2017). Several meta-analyses specifically examined the effect of service-learning on learner outcomes. These studies reported that service-learning is related to enhanced academic motivation and performance (Conway et al., 2009; Celio et al., 2011), including discipline-specific knowledge and grade point average, and cognitive development such as writing skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Service-learning also fosters personal development, which is comprised of personal insights (Yorio & Ye,

2012) such as self-evaluations, self-efficacy, personal well-being, and moral development (Conway et al., 2009). Additionally, it facilitates social skill development such as understanding and tolerating diversity and the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of those served (Conway et al., 2009). Service-learning also promotes citizenship attitudes and behaviors (Conway et al., 2009) such as personal responsibility (Warren, 2012) and civic engagement (Celio et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, none of these research efforts differentiated between service-learning experiences in face-to-face courses and those facilitated via distance education. It remains unclear whether the robust impact service-learning may have on learner outcomes will transfer into distance education, a pedagogical approach often labeled as eService-learning (Waldner et al., 2012).

eService-Learning

eService-learning is an “integrative pedagogy that engages learners through technology in civic inquiry, service, reflection and action” (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2008, p. 1). It affords online students with “opportunities for hands-on community service that deepens their engagement with course theories and, thus, learning outcomes” (Waldner, 2015, p. 20). When done thoughtfully and intentionally, online learning fosters student learning and participation (Comer & Lenaghan, 2013; Rollag, 2010), which suggests this may also hold true for eService-Learning.

One of the challenges when investigating the impact on student learning via distance education is the variation that exists within eService-learning courses. A taxonomy of eService-learning classified four types of eService-learning: Hybrid Type I, whereby the service performed is fully on-site while the teaching is delivered fully online; Hybrid Type II, whereby the service provided is fully online while the teaching is delivered in a traditional face-to-face format; Hybrid

Type III describes a blended approach, where instruction and service provided are both partially online and on-site; and Extreme eService-Learning whereby all of the instruction provided, as well as all of the service, is conducted in an online environment (Waldner et al., 2012).

The present study investigated a Hybrid Type I eService-learning course, whereby the academic component was facilitated online while the service experience was conducted on-site. Yet even within the domain of Hybrid Type I, there remains substantial variation in the design and execution of the service-learning experience. For instance, as educators develop online coursework that integrates a service-learning experience, they must address the question, "Who will be responsible for the initiating and coordinating of the relationship between the student and the site where the service experience is to be conducted?" The geographic isolation of the student from their instructor and peers presents a significantly different environment. Unlike their peers in traditional face-to-face classes who were grouped into teams to work collaboratively with each other and their community partner, students in the online environment were required to find collaborators and foster change on their own.

Student-Led Service-Learning: An Andragogical Approach

Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching children whereby the emphasis is upon a teacher-centered approach of education. In contrast, andragogy is a learner-centered approach focusing on the art and science of adult education (Taylor & Kroth, 2009). Knowles (1977) originally defined four assumptions of andragogy: adults possess a self-concept and self-directed approach to learning; adults own an array of experience they bring to the learning process; adults bring a readiness to learn; and adults are oriented toward immediate application of learned knowledge.

Service-learning, as a high-impact teaching strategy, challenges learners to apply classroom knowledge to real-world problems and engage in structured re-

flexion (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rutti et al., 2016). Service-learning inherently resonates with andragogical principles as it features content with immediate and practical application by deploying knowledge toward real problems felt in the community (Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Additionally, service-learning commonly requires adult learners to "challenge old ways of thinking and develop new skills to address the ever-changing needs...of the world around them" (Aguiniga & Bowers, 2019, p. 2).

Since adult learners tend to be self-directed, instructional design ought to create environments allowing learners to discover knowledge for themselves and provide guidance, support, and challenge when mistakes are made (Knowles, 1984). Being mindful of the unique learning styles of the online adult learner, leadership educators should intentionally design meaningful service-learning experiences. Scholars have differentiated between student-led and faculty-led service-learning experiences (Goertzen & Greenleaf, 2016). Faculty-led service-learning projects involve the instructor arranging the non-profit agencies, negotiating the scope and determining the expectations of the service experience (e.g., Bennett & Green, 2001). Faculty also establish a predetermined expectation of the number of volunteer service hours to provide the non-profit agency (e.g., Andreu et al., 2020). In contrast, student-led service-learning assigns tremendous agency on the part of the students by providing them with the responsibility to identify the context and content to select the non-profit agency and negotiate the service experience to be performed (e.g., Guthrie & McCracken, 2010). Accordingly, student-led service-learning provides students the freedom to design the service-learning project. In collaboration with the non-profit agency, the students identify the civic need to be addressed, develop the initiative to be created, establish the outcomes to be achieved, and execute the service project (Goertzen & Greenleaf, 2016). Therefore, we assert that a student-led approach to service-learning more comprehensively addresses the assumptions of andragogy to provide online non-traditional students with meaningful and robust service-learning experiences when compared to conventional faculty-led service-learning.

Context

The present study examined a fieldwork in leadership course offered at a comprehensive state university in the United States. The intended course learning outcomes challenge students to apply leadership theories and concepts; explore personal values with respect to leadership and service; examine critical issues of diversity, social justice, and community and civic responsibility; and implement a community-based leadership project.

The course is offered via three modalities: 1) traditional, on-campus, face-to-face; 2) online, primarily to students residing across the United States; and 3) face-to-face to institutional partner universities in China. Whereas the two face-to-face modalities in the United States and in China require students to conduct the service experience as student teams, students enrolled in the online version of the course work independently on their student-led eService-learning (SLESL) projects with peer interaction facilitated through online discussion forums.

Assignments in the fieldwork class are designed to help students either advance their projects or reflect on their experiences. At the beginning of the semester, the students identify an issue on which they want to make progress. The purpose of the service projects is to create community change. As such, students are directed to create a new initiative or to expand upon a current service provided by the agency. This is a much greater expectation than merely volunteering for a predetermined number of service hours with a non-profit agency. In partnership with the non-profit agency, students negotiate project expectations, develop a strategic plan for the change initiative, and implement the plan throughout the remainder of the course. Students are expected to submit periodic progress updates and engage in self-reflections while interacting with each other by providing peer-to-peer feedback and support. The course culminates with students submitting a final comprehensive report and reflection of the project experience to the instructor.

Methods

When examining student learning from SLESL projects, it is important to understand the factors associated with the course design, delivery, student interaction with the instructor and other students, as well as the design and execution of the service-learning project itself. As such, the authors explored “what” questions associated with student learning within the context of a real-world setting, which is likely to involve important contextual conditions (Yin, 2014); therefore, a case study method is appropriate.

The authors triangulated the findings by collecting multiple forms of data (Yin, 2014), including one-to-one interviews and final student reflection papers. The interviews invited students to share the leadership lessons learned during their SLESL project. The researchers developed a series of interview questions based on a systems perspective of online education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012) to understand the impact of course design, technology used to deliver content, and faculty and student engagement upon their experiences. To achieve validity of the interview protocol, faculty who instruct the online service-learning course were invited to provide feedback on the interview questions.

The semi-structured interviews, ranging between 35 and 58 minutes in length, were audio recorded for the purpose of being transcribed. Data also included students’ final reflection papers, which required students to reflect upon their experiences and draw connections between leadership theory and praxis. Whereas the final student reflection papers are submitted during the final week of the course, all interviews were conducted between one to three weeks after the conclusion of the semester.

All participants were enrolled in the online fieldwork course during either the spring or fall semesters of the same academic year, and instructors nominated students whom they determined as having effective SLESL projects. A total of 82 students were enrolled in six sections of the course during the academic year. Twenty-two students were nominated for the study, and all were invited to participate. Twelve students

signed an informed consent document agreeing to participate and share their experiences through a one-to-one interview and an analysis of their final reflection papers from the course, resulting in a response rate of 55%. Participants ranged between 22 and 59 years old with a mean age of 40. Only one student was of traditional college age (22 years old). Six students were between 30 and 39 years old; two were between ages 40 and 49 years old, and three were age 50 and older. Eight of the 12 students were female. SLESL projects represented a wide spectrum of community needs such as public safety, services for families with special needs children, homelessness, and youth mentoring, among various other community needs.

Analysis of the interview transcripts and reflection papers employed a multi-stage process of first and second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). Seeking to retain authenticity, the authors employed in vivo coding; however, descriptive coding was applied when text segments could not be simplified with the participants' original language. After adopting inter-coder agreement processes (Creswell, 2013), the authors independently coded three transcripts, then met to discuss codes, labels, and corresponding text segments resulting in a codebook with code definitions and text segments. This constant comparative process continued as the authors independently coded four more transcripts, and again with the final five transcripts. Data analysis of the reflection papers followed a similar pattern, first focusing on four reflection papers and then the remaining eight papers.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity is defined as "thoughtful, conscious self-awareness" (Finlay, 2002, p. 532). The experiences and viewpoints of the researchers play a role in framing the study, collecting the data, and interpreting and representing the findings. The institutional context of the study has actively embraced distance education for more than 30 years. The institution has also intentionally supported service-learning as a high-impact instructional strategy for nearly 20 years.

The service-learning course examined in this study

has been offered online since fall 2001 and is a required course for students earning an academic credential in leadership studies (e.g., certificate, minor, and major). Even though the certificate has attracted students from majors across the institution, a possible self-selection bias exists as these students may be predisposed to enhance their leadership capacities. However, nearly all participants reported possessing limited knowledge about the SLESL course prior to enrolling.

One of the researchers possessed previous experience instructing other sections of the SLESL course from previous semesters. This provided the researcher with substantial familiarity with the course design and student experiences. The researchers did not directly instruct any of the sections from which the participants were sampled, thus affording the researchers substantial objectivity in interpreting participant experiences.

Another source of potential bias relates to the sampling process. With the secondary purpose of understanding the nature of effective SLESL projects, instructors nominated students for inclusion in the study. Additionally, since the purpose of the present study explores student learning, the research design presupposes an inherent relationship between student learning and effective SLESL projects and the corresponding corollary that ineffective SLESL projects are inherently associated with poor learning experiences. Future research should include a broader sampling approach to examine possible deep learning experiences from less-than-effective SLESL projects.

Findings

For the purposes of triangulation, the researchers gathered information regarding learner outcomes from two sources. Findings were drawn from the 12 participant interviews and their final reflection papers. Several categories emerged through the analysis, including (1) leadership insights, (2) personal growth and development, and (3) overcoming community obstacles.

Leadership Insights

The leadership insights category emerged as participants described and reflected on elements of the leadership process. These insights were divided into five themes including leadership lessons learned, collaboration, communication, influence, and other leadership theories.

Leadership Lessons Learned

The theme leadership lessons learned refers to novel insights resulting from an intentional reflection of the project. These insights include the application of leadership principles and community needs. Many of the participants reflected on specific leadership capacities that were helpful in their projects. These included topics related to communication and organization, collaboration, and persistence. For example, one participant commented, "Being able to adapt is the key thing. Being able to adapt to each individual that is in your group. Everybody is different, their followership is different...and I think early on I learned that." Other participants described personal and community insights they gained as they reflected on their experience. They described concepts such as how they were proud of their community and their willingness to get involved, how they were often surprised at how hard it was to stay motivated, and how they often had to take a step back to realize the scope of the project. One participant commented,

It is not all rainbows and sunshine. It took a lot of tough decisions or executive decisions, I should say. A thing that "I'm going to be the one to do this." This is how we need to start the process, even though maybe it was right, maybe it wasn't right. I learned that the buck stops with you if that is how you want to say it. Ultimately you are the person that started this. People look to you for directions. You have to set the vision out for people to see.

Collaboration

Even though the students were individually respon-

sible for their project, they often formed teams to help them accomplish their work. The collaboration theme emerged from the student reflections as they recognized the importance of collaboration and participation in the change process. These reflections focused on the application of teamwork principles throughout the project. For example, one participant reflected:

The ability to collaborate with my team and focus our combined energy towards a common problem within our community gave me a true understanding of what it means to collaborate on a project. The facilitation of innovative ideas in an open environment while building team cohesion allowed this team to prosper in our community's time of need.

Many of the comments related to collaboration discussed the importance of giving the work back and allowing the work to be directed by the collective throughout the process.

While students within this fieldwork course conducted their SLESL projects independently from one another, many students enlisted support and involvement from their social networks to accomplish project aims. Many responded that their teams worked well together. In describing their team's effort, one student explained,

Our team functioned very well together. Although our team was small in size, we were able to accomplish our goals at each stage of the project. Each team member brought a specific level of knowledge to the project which allowed us to execute our strategic plan with ease.

However, in addition to describing the successful working relationships between team members, participants also reflected on personal insights gained from working within the team:

Completing this project has allowed me to gain insight into working with other people

to achieve a common goal...In working with other people, I gained an understanding and respect for others that want to make a difference in their community.

Communication

With respect to communication, participants reflected on the role that communication played. This included the importance of gathering information from individuals involved in the project prior to starting a process. One participant was quoted as saying, "To be an effective leader one must be able to listen to their surrounding individuals to ensure that success is achieved." The continued ability to effectively communicate a message and ensure it was received the way it was intended was considered to be of critical importance for sustained progress on the change initiative.

Influence

The influence theme emerged as participants portrayed the process of how they worked to gain support from community partners. Participants described how they were careful to treat the community partners with respect because they possessed no formal authority over others. Regarding the process toward influencing community partners, one participant described,

I will admit there were a few times I wanted to tear my hair out. The people that have been putting quite a bit of time into the project were getting frustrated with [the] lack of participation from other individuals. Instead of talking about it or confronting them, they stood back and grumbled and glared. That is no way to get others to help! I have shared parts of this class with the people that have attended meetings. That was challenging as it is hard to nonchalantly bring up better ways to deal with the people around you.

Other Leadership Theories

Several of the participant reflections included an emphasis on different leadership theories or concepts that were applied to various situations. Participants reflected generally on leadership theories and concepts with comments such as, "This project gave me the opportunity to put all my leadership classes to use by implementing various leadership styles." Others, however, were more specific reflecting on theories, including but not limited to social change, followership, power and influence, transformational, and behavioral theories.

Personal Growth and Development

The personal growth and development category emerged as participants described and reflected on the ways in which their experiences changed the way they viewed themselves and their attitudes towards community engagement. This category arose from seven common themes including personal challenge, personal awareness, practical application, personal affect, personal self-efficacy, self-efficacy toward future involvement, and service-learning insights.

Personal Challenge

This theme refers to internal obstacles that participants faced as they interacted with others and engaged in their projects. Participants often recounted their anxieties and fears related to the project as well as their concerns to successfully complete the project. Participants who identified these challenges described how they had no experience with projects like this and how it stretched their comfort zones. Participants often forced themselves to engage in their projects, and one participant shared:

When it comes to getting in front of people and when it comes to doing stuff like this, this was not my strong suit. But, I thought for me to get where I needed to go, I needed to take this class and force myself.

Personal Awareness

In reflecting on their experiences, participants described how they became more aware of personal attributes throughout the project. The theme included an understanding of default behaviors such as needing to be more flexible or underestimating the amount of time required to complete a project. For example, one student reflected,

I know that I am guilty of becoming so focused on doing the daily things that are required such as work, school, and family that I tend to overlook the broader concerns of the community. This semester's course requirements forced me to take a close look at my community, the needs of my community, and how I can make a difference in my community.

Participants also described how the project revealed different lessons. This included the need to trust people more, the need to reflect, the need to stretch themselves, and other personal attributes that needed improvement. In the words of one participant, "Another insight I had was how impatient I am. Not a good trait for a leader to have...."

Practical Application

Participant reflections also pointed toward an element of practical application with respect to leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities. They described how the SLES� project created a space for them to directly test the theories and concepts learned in class. One participant commented, "When involved in a service-learning project, the academics are visualized in the real world providing a sound understanding and facilitating the real-world experience that academic learning can never provide." Several students recognized the hands-on nature of the class. One student expressed, "I do feel that service-learning is an important teaching method, at the very least it is hands-on...Your success and failures all are valuable learning experiences."

Personal Affect

It became clear in the reflections that there were moments throughout the projects where participants were personally affected. Several students described the pride they felt and the sense of accomplishment when they experienced success during their projects through their efforts. One participant commented, "It gives you a feeling of deep satisfaction to see something positive happen." Others described the desire to empathize with community partners in a way they had not experienced before. One described,

I invested a lot of myself into this project...I tried to empathize with the families to fully understand the struggles they deal with and the feeling of isolation and lack of resources. My goal was to let them know that our community cares about their family and will do what we can to help.

Personal Self-Efficacy

Participants often described increased self-confidence in their own abilities and how their effort can make a difference in their community. Many of these reflections focused on the participants becoming involved and staying involved in the community setting. Participants described how they felt they had left an impact and that they actually did have the time to give back to the community despite their busy schedules. In the words of one participant,

When I visited the [organization name] I met some great people that are actually working and volunteering in community service. This was very inspiring to me. By completing this project, I realized I do have time to take action to make a difference in my community and not just write a check.

Others described how they felt they "needed a push to get involved" and that they probably could have done more if they had the opportunity to do it over again. One participant commented, "I'll admit that I

would not have become involved in this project if it were not for this course. To me this shows that I need a 'push' to become involved."

Self-Efficacy Toward Future Involvement

Another emergent theme involved the participant's self-efficacy toward future involvement. Consistently expressed in student reflections, they expressed an adamant desire to remain engaged in their community after completing the project. Some planned to continue the work they began during their project, and others expressed a general commitment to finding new ways to engage after the project was completed. One participant commented, "I plan to continue this endeavor...I plan on incorporating [what I learned from] service-learning into future projects."

Service-Learning Insights

Many of the participants reflected on the importance of service-learning; this included understanding the importance of service-learning. Participants gained a new appreciation for service-learning through their work on the projects. One participant conveyed distinctions between community service and service-learning with comments such as:

One of the first things that I learned from this course was the distinct difference between community service and service-learning. Community service is basically volunteer work that allows an individual to help in a specific area...by contrast, service-learning teaches individual learning strategies that will benefit service to the community. It also teaches civic responsibilities and creates a stronger community...this has truly been a very fulfilling experience for me.

Another participant commented, "Service-learning is definitely an important teaching method for instructors because it teaches the student how to be a servant leader. This means the student is able to serve the organization in a unique manner which reciprocates the learning experience."

Overcoming Community Obstacles

The overcoming community obstacles category emerged as participants described and reflected on insights gained regarding the challenges of group work. These insights were divided into three themes including community challenge, insights about others, and innovation.

Community Challenge

The community challenge theme refers to obstacles that participants faced during the community project and interacting with the community members. These included challenges with both specific events that caused setbacks, as well as personalities or preferences of community members. Events that participants described as challenging included having to wait on permission for aspects of the project, setbacks due to illness, background checks disqualifying applicants, weather, and even property theft experienced during the project. One participant described how a "once in a thousand-year flood" forced them to push back their project timeline. Other participants described community challenges related to interpersonal challenges. These included long-held grudges in the community and misperceptions of the project's purpose. As one participant described,

It is sad. There is one thing that I learned... there are grudges held between a few people...they are rooted back to like 20, 30 years ago. And they just absolutely won't let it go and go on and look at the future. There were a couple of those members that have literally been in the community but not participating for that long because of this.

Insights about Others

In contrast to the interpersonal challenges, participant reflections also indicated that they gained positive insights about other people through the process of completing their project. Participants described how surprised they were about the generosity and outpouring of support they received from community

members in reaction to their projects. They described how they felt like the other community members shared their passion and were excited that something was being done. In the words of one participant,

At no point during the project did I encounter any resistance or negativity. I think many people are looking for a way to become involved, but simply may not know how to go about it, or just keep postponing involvement because other things come up. This project allowed them to be presented an opportunity to become involved and most overwhelmingly accepted the challenge.

Innovation

In describing their projects, several participants described ways in which they were creative and innovative in finding solutions to various challenges. Participants described the need to inject new perspectives and take different approaches. As one participant described when faced with exhaustion from community partners,

People were burned out and, even though they knew it needed completed, [they] couldn't find the energy to do anything about the situation. I am certainly not saying that it was all me because I have to give credit to dozens of people to make this happen. But, I can say that by initiating a set plan for fundraising and coming up with ideas for future community projects that are of interest to people, we have set a fire under the community!

Discussion

Evaluation of Findings

To establish the credibility of the findings, several steps were taken. Participants were selected from different fieldwork course sections and different instructors, and an analysis of the findings continued until signs of theoretical saturation emerged. Additionally, since the information was gathered after the

completion of the semester, there was no potential for the participant interviews to have an impact on the final grade the participant received in the class. This resulted in what appeared to be a very frank and straightforward conversation about the course and the learning outcomes. With respect to the interviews, researchers also utilized a member checking process with regard to the emerging theories (Miles et al., 2014). This confirmation served to further enhance the credibility of the findings. However, it should be noted that, even though the interviews were conducted within four weeks from the end of the semester, some participants did have minor challenges in recalling all the information that was asked of them. The analysis of the reflections from the course provided a means of triangulation.

In many ways, the findings of this study align with previous findings related to more traditional, face-to-face service-learning. In particular, the development of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy (Sessa et al., 2008; Seemiller, 2006), as well as the development of positive psychological capital (McElravy et al., 2018). Leadership practitioners should consider how these findings might be transferred to other settings (Shenton, 2004). Learner outcomes associated with categories such as leadership insights, personal growth and development, and overcoming community obstacles are relevant to settings outside of the fieldwork class, especially in settings where students are applying leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities. Certainly, the transferability of these findings is limited in some ways. Whereas some eService-learning experiences are created specifically for a given community issue (Mironesco, 2014), students in this particular fieldwork course were given a high degree of autonomy in selecting, creating, and implementing their projects. For this reason, it is possible that personal or social motivators for engaging with their chosen project could have impacted the amount of effort and commitment the students exhibited in the class.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand the outcomes associated with student and community partnerships through service-learning projects, and

Table 1.*Study Themes and Other Models of Graduate Characteristics*

Categories and Themes	Student Leadership Competencies (Seemiller, 2014)	Graduate Capitals Framework (Tomlinson, 2017)	Graduate Competencies (Azevedo et al., 2012)
Leadership Insights			
Leadership Lessons Learned	Learning and Reasoning		Leadership
Collaboration	Group Dynamics		Teamwork and Relationship Building
Communication	Communication		Communication
Influence	Communication		Influencing and Persuading
Other Leadership Theories			
Personal Growth and Development			
Personal Challenge	Personal Behavior	Identity Capital	
Personal Awareness	Self-Awareness & Development	Identity Capital	
Practical Application	Self-Awareness & Development	Human Capital	
Personal Affect	Personal Behavior	Identity Capital	
Personal Self-Efficacy	Personal Behavior	Identity Capital; Psychological Capital	
Self-Efficacy toward Future Involvement	Civic Responsibility	Identity Capital; Psychological Capital	
Service-Learning	Civic Responsibility	Cultural Capital	
Overcoming Community Obstacles			
Community Challenge	Learning and Reasoning	Cultural Capital	Teamwork and Relationship Building
Insights about Others	Interpersonal Interaction	Social Capital Cultural Capital	
Innovation	Learning and Reasoning; Strategic Planning	Social Capital	

the findings suggest that these types of partnerships produce benefits for the student. This aligns with previous research on leadership education competencies. For example, Seemiller (2014) identified competencies common among leadership degree programs including, but not limited to, learning and reasoning, group dynamics, communication, personal behavior, self-awareness & development, personal behavior, civic responsibility, interpersonal interaction, and strategic planning. As illustrated Additionally, these experiences appear to result in the development of new knowledge, skills, and abilities, which are often conceptualized as graduate competencies (Azevedo

et al., 2012; McMurray et al., 2016), but more recently theorized as graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2017). The themes coalescing within the leadership insights category of the present study align directly with important graduate competencies (see Table 1). Students consistently initiated and engaged in collaborative praxis resulting in combined energy to address real community problems. These themes are analogous to Azevedo and colleagues' (2012) competency of teamwork and relationship building. Furthermore, the themes of communication and influence parallel competencies reported by Azevedo and colleagues' (2012) dimensions of communication and influenc-

ing and persuading, as students reported that not only was communication essential when overcoming community obstacles but also that communication takes the form of influence and persuasion when necessary to engage others to participate in their service projects.

The findings of the present study also parallel many of the graduate capitals proposed by Tomlinson (2017). Identity capital refers to the process an individual uses to draw upon meaningful “experiences and articulate a personal narrative” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 345). Reflection, an essential feature of service-learning, is the process of challenging students to extract meaning from service experiences. The themes of personal challenge, personal awareness, and personal affect, among others, represent important lessons that students formulate into self-narratives.

Psychological capital represents the psychological resources that “enable graduates to adapt and respond proactively to inevitable career challenges” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 347). Students described the process of developing important capacities such as personal self-efficacy as well as self-efficacy toward future involvement from the service-learning experience. These themes correspond to psychological capital in that students described how their self-confidence improved by determining proactive pathways around emergent challenges.

Social capital is defined as the “opportunit(ies) to discern and exploit opportunities, particularly when significant others in their lives have (or not) played a bridging role in helping them learn about and access employment opportunities” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 343). Social capital is analogous to the themes comprised of the category of overcoming community obstacles. Students often utilize social networks to achieve successful outcomes for their community-based projects, effectively preparing themselves to make use of social networks for other aims (e.g., working in other community contexts).

According to Tomlinson (2017), cultural capital refers to “the culturally valued knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors that are aligned to the workplaces that

graduates seek to enter” (p. 343). Many of the participants in the study are working adult students and therefore not necessarily intending to change fields or industries. However, they are seeking to expand their leadership repertoire to prepare themselves for advancement within their organizations. The service-learning experience required students to interact with adaptive challenges and complex interpersonal dynamics as they navigated socio-cultural milieus and interacted with individuals within their communities, non-profit agencies, and civic institutions. These behaviors and dispositions are readily transferrable to students’ own contexts as they prepare themselves for advancement in their places of employment.

Moreover, the service-learning experience reported here may be a viable pathway for the development of human capital. Human capital is characterized as the foundational knowledge and skills graduates acquire which are necessary for securing intended, future employment (Tomlinson, 2017). The case study presented here represents the culmination of a three-course sequence comprising a certificate in leadership studies. It intentionally affords students a venue to deploy the knowledge and skills developed in the prior coursework as students frequently reported the value placed on relating academic content to real-world problems. The theme of practical application affords students opportunities to connect theory to praxis and thereby developing the capacity to make similar connections with academic experiences into real-world applications.

Conclusion

Service-learning is widely perceived as a high-impact teaching strategy (Jenkins, 2012). The projects described in this case study demonstrate student growth and development through eService-learning. The findings reveal general outcomes associated with leadership insights, personal growth and development, and overcoming community obstacles. While these findings provide helpful insights into the nature of a Hybrid Type I student experience, additional re-

search is needed to understand these experiences at a deeper level. Further, more research could be conducted on the differences in student experiences in a Hybrid Type II or Type III classroom setting.

The findings of the present study suggest that integrating service-learning within online distance learning courses may provide a viable pathway to facilitate the development of desirable graduate capacities. Programs aiming to intentionally adopt a comprehensive approach to competency development (Azevedo et al., 2012) in online-based academic programs ought to seriously examine the role in which service-learning can play a meaningful part in facilitating student learning. It is recommended that leadership educators take these findings into consideration as they determine how best to integrate or enhance service-learning in classes that take place in the online environment.

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