PEDAGOGY OF REFLECTION IN A NOVEL QUALITY MATTERS CERTIFIED E-SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

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WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning is defined as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (“National Service Clearing House”, n.d). It can also be described as a credit-bearing educational experience, which meets community needs, grants an opportunity for reflection on the service activity, fosters an appreciation of the discipline, and finally enhances civic responsibility. It could also be defined as a form of experiential learning in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs and offer structured opportunities designed to promote student learning and reflection (Ambady, 2018; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Strait, & Sauer, 2004). The above definitions capture the essence of service-learning as an activity and/or an exercise that benefits not only the community, but also the learner. Students receive hands-on active learning experiences with reflections on these experiences. As a pedagogical tool, service-learning fosters student attitudinal change towards their community and promotes leadership, health advocacy, and cultural competence (Long, 2016; Van Rensburg, Van der Merwe, & Erasmus, 2019). Service-learning grants offer the instructor and the learner an opportunity to participate in diverse geographic areas and provide community engagement (Shannon, 2016; Santulli, 2018).

According to Lim, Maccio, Bickham, & Dabney (2017), previous research has found service-learning in undergraduate social policy courses to increase students’ knowledge, skills, values, and competence. In their study, they assessed 60 graduate-level social work students who participated in a research-based service-learning (RBSL) project that involved collecting and analyzing data and reporting results to community partners. Quantitative findings revealed significant increases in students’ personal social responsibility. Qualitative findings indicated growth in personal social responsibility, civic awareness, policy advocacy, and personal values (Lim, Maccio, Bickham & Dabney, 2017). The benefits of service-learning continue to prove a positive impact for students, while also benefiting institutions of higher education in being transformative. Higher education institutions are being transformed as community engagement changes the ways faculty members teach and research, the ways students learn and develop, and the ways lines between campus and community are blurred and reconfigured (Mitchell, 2013).
SERVICE LEARNING IN PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION AND E-SERVICE LEARNING

It would be important to explore and understand the evidence-base for the application of service-learning as an effective pedagogical tool in public health settings and community health education scenarios. As a high-impact practice, it has certainly found empirical support in undergraduate public health education nationally and globally (Mason & Dunens, 2019). Some of the common themes that have emerged to be significant involve community-driven service, consideration of global citizenship, deliberate and demonstrable learning, and continuous and critically reflective practice (McKinnon, Smedley & Evert, 2016). In a hybrid service-learning based course where public health nurses were equipped with service-learning skills in a global setting, improved intra-professional collaboration, and improved competency implementation was observed (Brown, 2017). This reaffirms the impact of service-learning pedagogy on improved learning of curricular content and civic responsibilities across diverse student populations.

Students in higher education are increasingly pursuing their education online, yet few are exposed to service-learning in their online coursework. E-service learning occurs when the instructional component, the service component, or both are conducted online. In a typology which varies from Hybrid Type 1 (service fully onsite with teaching fully online to extreme e-service learning, the current course fits into the hybrid type 1 format) (Strait, Nordyke, & Furco, 2015).

In an era where online teaching and learning has shown substantial growth (Martin, Budhrani, Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2019), e-service learning holds great promise, particularly by freeing service learning from geographical boundaries (Waldner, McGorry, & Widener, 2012). The best practices of e-service-learning has the best potential to extend the reach and impact of students’ service-learning experiences, while ensuring that online relevance of content is preserved (Strait, Nordyke, & Furco, 2015).

ROLE OF QUALITY MATTERS: EVIDENCE-BASED BEST PRACTICE

Quality Matters (QM) is an internationally recognized peer-review process for online education based on evidence-based research. It is a faculty-centered peer review process designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses. QM is a leader in quality assurance for online education and has received national recognition for its scalable peer-based approach and continuous improvement in online education and student learning. Quality Matters Course review rubrics can be applied to entirely fully online and blended courses. The 2018 Quality Matters rubric (6th edition) for online and blended courses (www.qualitymatters.org) contains eight general categories, forty-two specific standards, and can be used as a tool for course review as well course development.

QUALITY MATTERS (QM) EIGHT GENERAL STANDARDS:

1. Course Overview and Introduction
2. Learning Objectives (Competencies)
3. Assessment and Measurement
4. Instructional Materials
5. Learning activities and Learner Interaction
6. Course Technology
APPLICATION OF QUALITY MATTERS RUBRICS TO THE E-HYBRID SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

The purpose of the current e-hybrid service-learning course besides meeting the course content learning outcomes focused on meeting the following outcomes: a) a sense of personal and social responsibility, b) ability to apply theory to practice, c) enhanced critical thinking skills and d) enhance cultural and racial understanding (Jacoby, 2015). Although the current course doesn’t constitute a classic hybrid course as it is not associated with face to face instruction, it falls into a category of e-hybrid service learning where the service-learning project is face-to-face, but the course activities are fully online.

Interactive learning activities (included in General Standard 5 specifically standard 5.2) of the Quality Matters rubric Sixth Edition (www.qualitymatters.org) addresses learning by “doing.” Students in the e-hybrid service-learning based course mentioned below “learn by doing” in a face-to-face format. This is a strong example of “active learning” where students apply concepts and information learned in the course to a “hands on activity” (Trout, Murphy, & Vukicevich, 2019), which greatly assist them in processing course information.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

This course has an opening overview section and the instructor introduction in textual as well as video form to satisfy the needs of diverse learners. The course overview provides a succinct grasp of the course content, particularly the course purpose and student expectations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The instructor has made every effort to use and apply Bloom’s taxonomy while developing the course-related objectives which align with the module/weekly content objectives. An alignment map is included using “Trello” software (www.trello.com) which clearly demonstrates the alignment between course-module-objectives, which are further aligned with the course activities, and finally the course assessments. This map gives a “visual representation” of the course structure and an overview of course assessments to diverse learners.

ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

This section of the Quality Matters rubric: General Standard 3-specific review standard 3.5 aligns with use of “reflective pedagogy” such that it mentions that “learning is more effective if learners receive frequent and timely feedback. This may be from assignments and assessments which have feedback inbuilt into them” (www.qualitymatters.org). This course included multiple feedbacks to student “reflection essays” via the inbuilt rubric designed to assess these reflections as well as instructor’s paper and comment feedback.
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The instructional materials include videos, e-textbook access, power points from the publisher, and numerous web links which include documents, websites, and additional videos supporting student learning and research. These materials are frequently updated and made current.

COURSE ACTIVITIES AND LEARNER INTERACTION

Course activities include chapter reading assignments, optional quizzes, and discussions. The major assignments include the completion of a 20 hours service-learning project at a community health agency with multiple reflection assignments throughout the semester. Students are provided with a list of community health agencies to assist them in finding a community agency that suits their interests. They can contact the instructor and check with him/her if they want to do their service-learning activity at an agency other than the ones listed. There are ample opportunities for learner-content and learner-instructor interaction as well as learner-learner interactions.

COURSE TECHNOLOGY

There is a module for “technology support” embedded in the course menu with comprehensive information (with multiple weblinks) about the use of course-related technology and contact support.

This section of the Quality Matters rubric: General Standard 6 – “Use of e-portfolio based environments were used for ‘final end of course reflection’ for enhancing student learning” (Roberts, 2018).

LEARNER SUPPORT

The course menu has a link for ‘Blackboard Student Support’ which is the Learning Management System used in this course. Besides this there is a regular instructor support via course e-mails and via Blackboard Collaborate (synchronous video links if required).

Additionally, support related to “research” throughout the semester is provided via a “LibGuide” specifically tailored to the course requirements and includes a wealth of research related information along with the librarian support.

ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY

There is a special menu link titled “Accessibility and Privacy Policies” which provide the necessary weblinks related to accessibility and privacy statements.

USE OF REFLECTION AS A LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TOOL: A BRIEF REVIEW

Reflection is about students using their own thinking process and being able to convey this to others around them. Instructors and student learners should check regularly that the learning process will improve their skills (Claxton, 2008; Kobialka, 2016; Thayer, 2018). When students become reflective about the teaching and learning process, they are strengthening their own capacity to learn. The principal of reflection is that students are aware of and can describe their thinking in a way that allows them to know what they need to learn (Claxton, 2008, Kobialka, 2016; Thayer, 2018). The e-hybrid service-learning
reflective process initiated through teaching practices can guide students through their community partnerships. Fostering a student's reflection thinking process can be a powerful way to improve their achievement (Thayer, 2018).

**REFLECTIVE PEDAGOGY WITH QUALITY MATTERS**

In higher education, faculty that teach online courses and are incorporating service-learning components need to be able to consider the students' background and learning preferences. Faculty need to recognize the importance of “regular” reflection with students participating in their chosen service-learning community project. This “regular” reflection and interaction with their respective students encourage them to view problems that might arise from different perspectives (Ambady, 2018). A recent study on award-winning practices of faculty mentioned “student reflection” on learning as one of the award-winning practices in online teaching, and this aligns with multiple Quality Matters standards including Standard 3 --Assessment and measurement (Kumar, Martin, Budhrani, & Ritzhaupt, 2019).

Reflective practice is the process of obtaining new insights through self-awareness and critically reflecting upon the present and prior experiences (Freshwater, Taylor, & Sherwood, 2008). One of the findings of this study of incorporating service-learning and reflective learning is the integration of Quality Matters best practices. Reflective pedagogy is a hallmark of a service-learning based course and although the entire course (in this case) is not a “service-learning” course, it forms an integral aspect of the course. The literature on “reflective learning” has identified some key components of this learning such as a) increasing one’s knowledge depth, b) personalizing and contextualizing knowledge, c) helping learners build structural and social connections (Chang, 2019).

Reflection takes active mental effort and involves diverse cognitive activities such as retrieval (recalling recently learned information), elaboration (connecting new knowledge to what one already knows) and generation (rephrasing key ideas and mentioning what would you do differently based on your current experience) (Brown, Roediger III, & McDaniel, 2014). The current course incorporates all these techniques when students create a reflection and submit post-reflection essays of their service-learning experiences. Furthermore, reflections were facilitated by structured guidelines as existing evidence-based best practices promote the usage of structured reflections with instructor feedback in promoting personal growth and self-efficacy among students (Sanders, Van Oss & McGeeary, 2016).

It is of great importance that service-learning based courses make every attempt to make a connection between course concepts and experiential learning. The instructor made every effort to maintain a bridge between current course concepts and contents and service-learning experiences via specific guiding questions, as literature supports the benefits of such an activity in terms of applying conceptual learning to real-life situations (Choi, Raymond, & Henschel, 2018). Although the Quality Matters General Standard 2 mentions the overall course alignment between course objectives, assessment and measurement techniques, instructional materials and learning activities, General Standards 1-5 strengthen this course to make it a Quality Matters Certified E-Hybrid service-learning course (www.qualitymatters.org).

Additionally, this course was designed and implemented using the following two theoretical models: Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (Fig 1) and a modification of the lens model for service-learning educators (Fig 2) (Cone & Harris, 1996).

**LIMITATIONS OF THIS COURSE**

Some of the limitations of this fully online (100%) course were not having group-based service-learning projects. Although this could be an effective and proven learning exercise, the geographically diverse and
dispersed student population precluded this undertaking. Additionally, no input from the health agencies (where students actively conducted service-learning based projects/activities), other than their contact information and contact person details to trace student follow-ups. Substantial input from community partners could greatly help in providing a balanced and nuanced understanding of student work and their project-based learning. Although not used in this course, a theory-driven approach to implementation of service-learning projects has some role to play in a successful outcome. Along with this, a clear structure backed by taxonomies of Bloom and/or Fink gives credence to a process that leads to an evidence-based student learning outcome of growth in personal and professional learning (Barnes & Caprino, 2016).

**BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO THE USE OF SERVICE-LEARNING PEDAGOGY**

A study conducted by Pribbenow (2005) investigated the impact of service-learning pedagogy on faculty teaching and learning and revealed that service-learning pedagogy led many faculty to more meaningful engagement in, and commitment to teaching. Faculty revealed that such practice benefited an enhanced understanding of their students, which often led to deeper student-faculty connections. It was also discovered that these connections allowed them to better understand students as individuals and learners. Which, in turn, is positive for both students and faculty. However, this is not always the case given that there are many challenges that faculty encounter within higher education when it comes to using service-learning pedagogy in the classroom. It was recommended that anticipating challenges will help faculty and administrators develop solutions that sustain faculty members’ continued engagement with this valuable pedagogy (Darby & Newman, 2014).

As service-learning is adopted by growing numbers of higher education institutions, there is an increasing interest in understanding the factors necessary to sustain service-learning for the long-term (Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon, 2010). According to Hou (2010), despite extensive research regarding student involvement with service-learning (SL), there is limited research in the area of faculty participation with this pedagogical approach. Therefore, to better develop resources and to encourage faculty participation in service-learning pedagogy, it is essential to understand the benefits and barriers that faculty members across different service-learning involvement statuses perceive. Hou’s Web-Based Faculty Service-Learning Beliefs Inventory (wFSLBI) revealed some interesting findings.

A few of the perceived SL benefits included enriching classroom discussions, enhancing teaching and learning experience, relationship building with students, and purpose found in interaction with service to the community (Hou, 2010). Barriers included time constraints in coordinating the service-learning experiences, balancing classroom instruction, and challenges in student assessment. Institutional barriers to SL were also measured and findings revealed the barriers to be recognition of service-learning during the promotion and tenure process as well as support from colleagues and administrative leaders (Hou, 2010).

Previous research has investigated the benefits and challenges of academic service-learning pedagogy for faculty. However, as service-learning continues to be institutionalized and to mature as a discipline, theoretical approaches are needed to connect concepts and guide future research. As colleges and universities seek to further institutionalize academic service-learning by creating more formal faculty support systems and programs, it is critical that they understand the complexities of faculty motivation and help faculty to achieve their cognized goals and outcome expectancies (Darby & Newman, 2014).

**TIPS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some of the tips for faculty new to service-learning or its use in online courses would be as follows:
A) INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND LEARNING:
It is important for faculty to be open to trying new and innovative approaches for teaching and learning in their courses, such as applying an e-hybrid service-learning component to a fully 100% undergraduate online community health course. Course enrichment and awareness about the positive student and community impact of the course further adds to faculty professional and personal growth.

B) FACULTY WORKLOAD:
E-service learning course design and implementation involve high workload demands on the faculty. Faculty must take this into account when devising healthy work-life balance goals. So, it makes better sense to start small with a course with mini-activities and then try a larger activity and then transition to multiple courses with intended activities. This rule should guide most faculty in their endeavors while designing and implementing service-learning and similar experiential education approaches.

C) REFLECTIVE COMPONENT:
The purpose of a service-learning-associated course is to provide an experiential approach towards learning and to provide a critical discourse on an understanding of concepts, theories, personal biases, values, and their relationships and how they shape global knowledge of an individual learner. Additionally, it supports personal growth and the most important, civic responsibility (Bringle and Hatcher, 2009). Reflective assessment includes students and faculty in the process of measuring their own learning experiences. Developing current assessment models for reflective learning that can be incorporated in the teaching and student learning e-hybrid format is certainly needed (Thayer, 2018).

D) DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE-LEARNING NARRATIVES:
To gauge a meaningful understanding of what “service-learning” means to the participants, it would be good to conduct a mixed-methods research study exploring the application of service-learning in a course-based scenario but also its impact on student lives related to personal and professional growth. This would greatly enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning in experiential education and enhance academic rigor (Schwegler, 2019).

IMPLICATIONS
There are many benefits of online education course delivery. However, when Quality Matters best practices are the foundation of a course this ensures the highest standards are being met and benefiting the student learner in many aspects. When you add a service-learning component to a virtual classroom this experience provides students with an enhanced overall learning experience. The combination of Quality Matters & service-learning helps foster additional benefits to learners that will allow them to embrace a quality online classroom environment and while also granting them opportunities to engage in service-learning.

Based on the experience of designing and implementing an evidence-based 100% distance learning course infused with best practices in e-service learning the implications, we have noticed a great improvement in student learning experiences expressed anecdotally via student reflections on their service-learning projects and via the end of course reflections. At this point, the authors aren’t aware of a formal published research study that assesses the implications of infusing best practices in e-service learning in a Quality Matters designed course. We feel ours may be the first Hybrid Type 1 e-service-learning course (Strait & Nordyke, 2015), which is also a nationally certified course via Quality Matters. We plan to conduct a formal research-based “content analysis” of student reflections next year to substantiate our anecdotal findings.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

KOLB’S MODEL OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (CONE & HARRIS, 1996) (FIG 1)

A. Kanekar, J. Snyder, and B. Prince, “Pedagogy of Reflection”