

Service-Learning and Social Work Competency-Based Education: A ‘Goodness of Fit’?

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***Abstract:** As social work education moves to a competency-based approach, faculty are increasing their use of pedagogical tools designed to provide students with opportunities, in addition to traditional field placements, to develop practice skills. Faculty are no doubt turning to service-learning, and other forms of experiential education, to provide these opportunities and to offer an additional means for departments to demonstrate and measure student practice behaviors. To help focus the use of service-learning in social work education, this article uses sources from the larger service-learning field and from social work scholarship to examine the nature of service-learning, to review current service-learning trends, to summarize its use in social work education, and to raise questions about its goodness of fit with competency-based education.*

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

INTRODUCTION

As social work education moves to a competency-based approach, faculty are increasing their use of pedagogical tools designed to provide students with opportunities, in addition to traditional field placements, to develop practice skills. Faculty are no doubt turning to service-learning, and other forms of experiential education, to provide these opportunities and to offer an additional means for departments to demonstrate and measure student practice behaviors. The purpose of this article is to help provide a focus for the use of service-learning in social work education and to encourage a common disciplinary understanding and language about service-learning. A broad lens is first employed to examine the definition of service-learning and its role in the higher education civic engagement movement. Current service-learning trends are reviewed, and then the focus is narrowed to a discussion of its use in social work education. The article concludes with a section that raises questions about the goodness of fit between service-learning and social work competency-based education.

WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING? SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION CIVIC ENGAGEMENT MOVEMENT

In the context of higher education, service-learning is cited as one example of the various activities reflective of the higher education civic engagement (HECE) movement (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Jacoby, 2009a). Other HECE activities include participatory action research, public scholarship, and college-sponsored service abroad. In the past decade, numerous initiatives, both inside and outside higher education, have emerged to encourage and support the civic engagement of college students and

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their institutions. In addition, over 15 years' worth of research demonstrates positive impacts of civic engagement generally and service-learning specifically on student academic learning, critical thinking abilities, heightened sense of civic responsibility, and sense of personal efficacy (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Seifer, 2005). Researchers studying effective educational practices view engaged learning activities, such as service-learning, as "high impact" educational practices that improve the quality of undergraduate education (Indiana University Center, 2009).

The term "service-learning" emerged in the late 1960s at a time when national service initiatives such as the Peace Corps, Job Corps, VISTA, and university-community partnerships were drawing thousands of college students and other young adults into community service activities (Learn and Serve, n.d.a). By the mid-1980s, grass roots and campus-based organizations such as the Campus Outreach Opportunity League and Campus Compact were in place to encourage civic engagement among college students and to support service-learning initiatives in higher education. The federal government offered its support to the burgeoning higher education civic engagement movement through passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the creation of the Corporation for National and Community Service in 1993. Through its Learn and Serve America program, the Corporation provides grants, training, and technical assistance to community-service and service-learning programs in community, K-12, and postsecondary institutions.

The higher education civic engagement movement can claim success in encouraging student service involvement. By 2006, college students had logged 377 million service hours (NYLC, 2008), and at present there are over 1100 member colleges and universities in the Campus Compact national coalition (Campus Compact, n.d.).

Service-Learning Described

Service-learning projects and programs may be curricular or co-curricular. Curricular service-learning, sometimes called academic service-learning, is classroom-based and is used to meet course learning objectives. Curricular service-learning may also take the form of fourth-credit option courses, stand-alone service-learning modules, introductory service-learning courses, course clusters with service-learning, capstone service-learning projects, and service-learning majors and minors (Enos & Troppe, 1996). Co-curricular service-learning takes place outside the classroom and may take the form of school-wide service learning programs, campus leadership-development initiatives, residence hall or Greek organization projects, and athletic service-learning programs (Scheuermann, 1996). Both curricular and co-curricular service-learning "make intentional efforts to engage students in planned and purposeful learning related to service experiences" (Howard, 2001, p. 10).

Service-learning is sometimes viewed interchangeably with volunteerism and internships. However, there is widespread agreement among service-learning scholars and practitioners that there are three necessary conditions for service activities to be considered service-learning: civic engagement, reflection, and reciprocity (Jacoby, 1996;

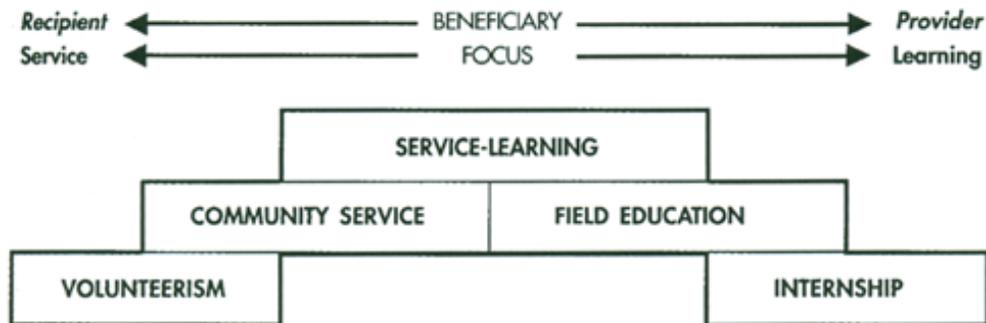
Howard, 2001; Welch, 2009). Regarding the first condition, student participants must engage in a service experience designed to address real community problems and to develop student civic engagement skills. The second condition requires that the service experience be grounded in curricular learning objectives that are facilitated not only through instruction and the service experience itself but also through intentional, deep, and structured reflection on that experience. Without routine reflection on the root causes of community problems, on the relationship between the service, community problems, and curriculum, and on the student's role in the service activity, the experience is solely volunteerism. Thirdly, service-learning requires a reciprocal relationship between all participants in the experience. In other words, students and their instructors take leadership from community members in defining and addressing issues, and community members are receptive to the contributions of their educational partners. There is mutual responsibility and accountability in the relationship. As Jacoby (1996) notes,

Service-learning thus stands in contrast to the traditional, paternalistic, one-way approach to service, where one person or group has resources that they share with a person or group that they assume lacks resources....Service-learning encourages students to do things *with* others rather than *for* them. (p. 8. Italics in original.)

Service-learning, then, is distinctly different from volunteerism due to service-learning's focus on intentional learning (both curricular and civic), and because of its emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between students, their instructors, and community members.

In addition to confusion with volunteerism, service-learning is often viewed synonymously with internships and field practica. Field training, however, places primary focus on student disciplinary skill development and little to no focus on development of civic engagement skills. In addition, the condition of reciprocity is generally absent from internships, with the student playing a traditional one-way service provider role in relationship to some service recipient.

In summary, the three essential components of service-learning outlined above set it apart from volunteerism and internships and ensure the equal weight of learning and service, as the term's hyphen represents. In a well-known conceptual tool, Furco (2003) highlights this required balance via demonstrating service-learning's distinction among other service programs on a beneficiary and focus continuum. As seen in Figure 1, service-learning is distinguished from recipient-oriented activity where the focus is primarily service, and from provider-oriented programs, in which the focus is on student learning.

Figure 1: Distinction Among Service Programs

Furco, A. (2003). Service-learning: A balanced approach to experiential education. In Campus Compact, *Introduction to service-learning toolkit: Readings and resources for faculty* (2nd ed.). Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

In addition to promotion of service and learning through civic engagement, reciprocity, and reflection, there is often an expectation that service-learning will promote the larger goals of democratic participation, improved community well-being, civic responsibility, and social justice (Calderon, 2007; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; Colby et al., 2003; Jacoby, 2003; Kelshaw, Lazarus, Minier, & Associates, 2009). Service-learning has been viewed as a “model for community development” (NYLC, 2008, p. 9), a pedagogy for shaping “student civic and moral values and dispositions” (O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009, p. 25), and a type of “justice-learning” (Butin, 2010; Conley & Hamlin, 2009). These expectations are reflected in numerous definitions of service-learning, including the following used by Learn and Serve America to describe service-learning at the K-12 and college levels: “Service-Learning is 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” (Learn and Serve, n.d.b.). While service-learning research may not yet be able to demonstrate the direct correlation between service-learning, social justice, and strengthened communities, it is clear that numerous scholars, practitioners, and organizations view service-learning as a tool for social, as well as academic and personal, transformation.

CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE-LEARNING TRENDS AND DELIBERATIONS

From the late-1980s through the 1990s, discussion about service-learning moved from debate about what constitutes service-learning to delineation of best practices and assessment of its impact on student learning outcomes (Furco, 2009). Over that time, numerous professional associations, publications, conferences, and university service-learning centers emerged to provide a broad array of texts, workbooks, discussion opportunities, and research all designed to support the novice or seasoned service-learning practitioner.

In the first decade of the 21st century, research, such as that conducted by the National Survey of Student Engagement, has demonstrated the importance of service-learning as a valuable pedagogical tool for promoting civic engagement (Indiana University, 2009). Service-learning scholars have also published models and processes for ensuring service-learning institutionalization and sustainability (Billig, Holland, & Bowden, 2008; CCNCCE, 2006; Chadwick & Polowski, 2007; Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2005). Grounded in what appears to be a solid foundation, new trends in service-learning practice and research, as well as deliberations about service-learning, are emerging. The following section reviews some of these areas.

Service-eLearning

As various forms of distance learning have exploded onto the educational scene (e.g., videoconferencing, computer-based courses, and web-based courses), faculty are developing pedagogical models which blend e-learning activities and service. "Service-eLearning" is the name given to this blend and it is defined as "an integrative pedagogy that engages learners through technology in civic inquiry, service, reflection, and action" (Dailey-Hebert, Donnelly-Sallee, & DiPadova-Stocks, 2008, p. 1).

Service-eLearning may involve the simple addition of a discussion board into a traditional face-to-face (f2f) service-learning course, or in the case of a completely online class, it may involve blogs, wikis, web-conferencing, Skype, or other e-communication methods for all academic activities. In addition, the service portion of service-eLearning may be conducted either f2f in the student's location, or take place purely online, with students providing an online service to a local or distant community (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2008; Guthrie & McCracken, 2010; Pearce, 2009). As Strait (2009b) outlines, service-eLearning may look different depending on the course delivery method, but the core components of service-learning such as civic engagement with community partners, course content, and reflection, are expected to remain constant. A variety of online resources are emerging to provide support for and dissemination of information about service-eLearning and other forms of civic engagement via the use of communication technologies. These resources include the *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, the *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, the *Journal of Community Informatics*, and university-related resources such as Minnesota Campus Compact's Center for Digital Civic Engagement, Massachusetts Campus Compact's Digital Engagement Initiative, and the University of South Dakota's *Service-Learning Handbook for Distance Learning*.

International Service-Learning

Although students have involved themselves in civic engagement through service abroad for many years (Chisholm & Berry, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998), the most rapidly growing service-learning programs today are those promoting international learning and global citizenship (Jacoby, 2010). Parker and Dautoff (2007) make a clear distinction, however, between study abroad and service-learning, noting that students are the primary beneficiaries of study abroad while international service-learning also benefits faculty and community members. In addition, international service-learning refers not only to students from the U.S. providing service abroad, but now "embodies

the many different models and methods used by international students and practitioners outside the United States in international settings” (Strait, 2009a, p. 5). There is a growing body of academic literature related to international service-learning that provides case examples, guidelines, and resources (e.g., Grusky, 2000; Metcalf, 2010; Sternberger, Ford, & Hale, 2005). In addition, international networks and associations exist to support global service-learning initiatives in a variety of countries, to link initiatives to each other, and to provide resources for examination and dissemination of research on international programs. Examples of these associations include The Talloires Network, the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership, and the Global Service Institute. While international service-learning is a growing area, Jacoby (2009b) notes that challenges to global service efforts include affordability and accessibility, concerns about exploitation of community partners, and questions about whether service abroad inhibits responsiveness to domestic social issues.

Service-Learning Research

In addition to the National Survey of Student Engagement mentioned earlier, service-learning practitioners are fortunate to have a body of research to support assertions that service-learning positively impacts student academic learning and personal development. Research by Eyler and Giles (1999; 2002), Astin et al., (2000) and other scholars whose studies are found in publications such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* and *Advances in Service-Learning Research*, have contributed to the evidence base of service-learning practice and pedagogy. Publications also exist to provide guidance to faculty for assessing service-learning outcomes in their own classes (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001).

Current service-learning research includes what Shumer (2009) describes as constructivist approaches. These approaches view knowledge as socially constructed and work toward inclusion of all participants in the development and implementation of research studies. Constructivist researchers view service-learning itself as “a constructivist process in which those being served create new understandings so that they can control their own destiny” (Shumer, 2009, p. 193). Examples of this kind of research include community-based research, empowerment evaluation, youth participatory research, and utilization focused evaluation and research (Shumer, 2009). Constructivist researchers are also attempting to extend the conceptualization of service-learning through a community inquiry framework that, instead of the classroom, identifies the “community as a locus and source of learning” (Bishop, Bruce, & Jeong, 2009).

In addition to the research on service-learning’s impact on students, the service-learning literature provides case studies and models of university-community collaborations and some research on service-learning’s impact on community partners (d’Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Jacoby & Associates, 2003; Kelshaw, Lazarus, Minier, & Associates, 2009). Additional research is still needed, however, to determine the effect of service-learning on partner organizations, community members, and on whether service-learning is having the larger transformative effects many intend it to have (Jacoby, 2009b).

Deliberations about Service-Learning's Function and Purpose

Service-learning is variously discussed as pedagogy, practice, theory, philosophy, or some combination of these. Authors trace its philosophical and theoretical roots to John Dewey's early twentieth-century experimentalist theory of knowledge (Rocheleau, 2004) and his advocacy of active learning tied to democratic participation. As a pedagogy and practice of civic engagement, service-learning is linked to Ernest Boyer (1990) and his influential work, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities for the Professoriate* which promotes civically-engaged teaching, learning, and scholarship (Colby et al., 2003). Stevens (2003) connects service-learning roots to African American social thought and action. Various authors also ground service-learning in the context of theoretical models such as the philanthropic model (Abel, 2004), the civic engagement model (Watson, 2004), or the communitarian model (Codispoti, 2004).

Building on, and responding to, the perspectives mentioned above, some authors have offered critical examinations of service-learning's functions and purpose in higher education. Mitchell and Donahue (2009) posit that service-learning is a pedagogy "that has traditionally targeted privileged students" (p. 173). Their work highlights the "service" in which students of color engage in the classroom, "helping White classmates learn about the communities where they serve and challenging their peers to understand that White and middle class are not normative perspectives" (p. 188). The authors' examination of the classroom experience and what constitutes "service" raises questions about the potential disconnect between service-learning's transformational aspirations and its functional reality.

Consistent with long-standing concerns raised about the purpose of service-learning and its potential to reinforce stereotypes and systems of privilege, (Chesler & Vasques Scalera, 2000; Morton, 1995), Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) found that service-learning activities can, in fact, uncover student stereotypes, assumptions, and privilege, resulting in student resistance. These authors promote a critical whiteness and developmental approach to address resistance and to promote critical awareness. Jacoby (2009b) also takes a critical perspective by asking if service-learning perpetuates the status quo and calling on practitioners to ensure that service-learning confronts "the structural inequities that create unjust and oppressive conditions" (p. 98).

Butin (2006; 2010), probably more than any other author, has challenged the service-learning field to take a hard look at the definitions, conceptualizations, and underlying premises of service-learning. For Butin, the most commonly accepted understandings of the purpose and nature of service-learning (described in this article's first section above) are grounded in a generally unacknowledged "modernist, liberal, and radical individualistic notions of self, progress, knowledge, and power" (2010, p. 7). He elaborates as follows:

Specifically, such a worldview is grounded in the notion that individuals are autonomous change agents who can effect positive and sustained transformations. It is the belief that we can consciously and deliberately bring about betterment (by the more powerful for the less powerful) through a downward benevolence whereby all benefit. (2010, p. 7)

Despite this benevolent urge, Butin (2010) points out that there is significant lack of evidence about the beneficial impact of service-learning on service recipients or communities in general. In addition, Butin interestingly uses the work of Stanley Fish to assert that any foundational declarations about the ultimate purposes of service-learning—to encourage democracy, support social justice, or whatever—actually work against achieving those purposes by shutting off critical examination of service-learning conceptualizations, practices, and underlying assumptions. As Butin notes, for service-learning to be “justice-oriented education,” it must be “antifoundational,” operating “from the presumption of service-learning-as-question rather than service-learning as answer” (2010, p. 63). Butin also asserts that service-learning has reached the limits of its ability to be institutionalized and would be more effective as a transformative tool if it were an actual academic discipline rather than a pedagogy used in various forms primarily by faculty in the “soft” disciplines.

The various deliberations about service-learning found in the literature and discussed at conferences may strike some service-learning practitioners as somewhat extraneous to their on-the-ground efforts. However, critical thought about service-learning is consistent with one of its core components, reflection, and is also indicative of the growth, influence, and discipline, of the service-learning field.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In the context of its disciplinary focus on service and empowerment, and with its traditional use of field practica, social work education has been viewed as an historic contributor to the development of service-learning (Zieren & Stoddard, 2004) and even indistinguishable from service-learning (Jarman-Rohde & Tropman, 1993). In truth, however, social work education has suffered from a lack of clarity about the nature of service-learning and, in comparison to other disciplines, has been late to incorporate service-learning into its curriculum (Phillips, 2007). In their review of service-learning in the social work education literature, Lemieux and Allen (2007) demonstrated that social work education has often confused service-learning, field practica, and volunteerism, ignoring service-learning’s focus on community-led activities and development of student civic engagement skills. The authors noted that this lack of “conceptual clarity and consistency” has posed problems for service-learning development and research in social work education (p. 312). They provided examples from the social work literature, however, which described service-learning experiences they considered to be based in established theory and practice from the larger service-learning field. Such established practice meant that the experiences were a part of academic coursework undertaken by “a group or class of social work students that integrated a community-based service component distinct from both voluntary service and field instruction (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 313). Examples included a cross-cultural service-learning project which assessed students’ perceptions of race and culture (Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli, 2003), a summer course at a camp for children with burn injuries which assessed student self-efficacy and value orientations (Williams, King & Koob, 2002; Williams & Reeves, 2004), and a housing needs assessment project conducted by a research class (Knee, 2002).

As Phillips (2007) outlined, the lack of conceptual clarity, along with the perception of field practica as service-learning, has resulted in social work's arrival as a late-comer to service-learning scholarship. In addition, such scholarship has occurred without a common language for service-learning and without broader disciplinary recognition of service-learning's role in supporting social work as a civically engaged discipline. As a result, articles have appeared in the social work literature related to "experiential education," "community-based learning," "participatory action research," "hands-on learning," "social change interventions," and "service-learning" (Phillips, 2007).

Despite the range of civic engagement pedagogical examples and the general lack of conceptual clarity in the literature about what constitutes service-learning (Lemieux & Allen, 2007), a body of work related to service-learning across the social work curriculum is emerging in the literature. Service-learning has been used to foster beginning-level knowledge and skills in introduction to social work and social welfare courses (Allen, Rainford, Rodenhiser, & Brascia, 2007; Watkins, Charlesworth, & House, 2007) and in the context of micro, mezzo, and macro practice courses (Bye, 2005; Norris & Schwartz, 2009; Sather, Weitz, & Carlson, 2007; Singleton, 2009; Williams, King, & Koob, 2002). Service-learning has been applied in policy classes (Droppa, 2007; Pierpont, Pozzuto, & Powell, 2001; Rocha, 2000) and social work research courses (Hyde, 2004; Kapp, 2006; Knee, 2002). It has been used to influence student attitudes, values, and self-awareness while working collaboratively with diverse community groups (Arches, 2001; Forte, 1997; Lowe & Medina, 2010; Sanders et al., 2003; Williams & Reeves, 2004). Service-learning has also been used to support the application of theory to a community project in the context of a human behavior and the social environment class (Ames & Diepstra, 2007). It has even been incorporated into social work internships (Poulin, Silver, & Kauffman, 2006).

All of the pedagogical projects listed above, and others in the social work literature, may or may not reflect the necessary components for designation as service-learning (as discussed in the first section of this article), yet all may represent a movement toward a more civically-engaged curriculum, with service-learning as a core component of the movement. In an effort to support both conceptual clarity and civic engagement, social work educators and authors are offering theoretical tools, pedagogical models, and discussion forums to promote a common language, purpose, and research agenda for service-learning in social work education. For example, Lemieux and Allen (2007) provide a review of service-learning practice and assessment issues for social work education, and the Nadel, Majewski, and Sullivan-Cosetti text, *Social Work and Service Learning* (2007) offers models for service-learning across the social work curriculum. Discussions about service-learning and social work education have taken place via the University of Nebraska's service-learning and social work education conferences in 2003 and 2004, Indiana University's service-learning conference in 2010, and this special issue of *Advances in Social Work*.

As in the larger service-learning arena, social work education will best utilize service-learning if it understands its distinction from internships and volunteerism, builds on its current best practices as pedagogy, and undertakes research to determine its effectiveness and encourage its development. These activities are particularly important

in the context of social work's current focus on competency-based education (CSWE, 2008). It is natural that social work educators would seek to use service-learning as a tool for enhancing and assessing student competencies. But social work programs may want to move this agenda forward with some caution, taking the questions and accompanying discussions in the following section into consideration while determining the "goodness of fit" between service-learning and competency-based education.

SERVICE-LEARNING AND SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Question 1: What is at risk in the application of service-learning to social work competency-based education?

Educational Policy 2.1 of the Council on Social Work Education's *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* states the following about competency-based education:

Competency-based education is an outcome performance approach to curriculum design. Competencies are measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills. The goal of the outcome approach is to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. (CSWE, 2008, p. 3)

The current CSWE EPAS lists 41 practice behaviors and skills and states that "practice behaviors may be used to operationalize the curriculum and assessment methods" (p. 3). Developing curricula and assessment around the teaching and learning of practice behaviors to ensure the competency of graduates makes undeniable sense and, in fact, a competency-based approach is not new in social work education (see, for example, Arkava & Brennen, 1976). With such an approach, educational programs must then provide students with the opportunities to practice the behaviors. Since it may be difficult for all practice behaviors to be measured in internships or field practica, and since programs are required to undertake multiple measures of the behaviors, additional active and experiential learning activities such as simulations, role plays, and service-learning offer opportunities for behavior development and assessment.

Competency-based education focusing on the development of student practice behaviors is just that, though – a focus on student practice behaviors -- and any active or experiential learning experience which has student skill development as its singular goal is ultimately reflective of the learning-side focus of Furco's (2003) diagram shown earlier. In other words, using service-learning for practice behavior development runs the risk of losing the service/learning balance, and particularly runs the risk of losing service-learning's focus on service to the community informed by reciprocal relationships with community members. In addition, if the focus is on learning a prescribed set of practice behaviors, service projects may be developed for the purpose of practicing some subset of those behaviors but none of the behaviors may be related to civic engagement—and developing civic engagement skills is another intended by-product of service-learning.

Lastly, unpacking the relationship between service activities, community issues, and learning objectives through structured, critical reflection is a *sine qua non* of service-learning. However, the breadth and depth involved in critical reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009) may be more than what some instructors feel is manageable, or necessary, for practice behavior development.

In summary, using service-learning for competency-based education risks the watering down, if not complete loss, of service-learning's critical, civically-engaged, and transformative potential. This is not a problem if social work educators choose to define service-learning in ways other than that outlined in the first section of this article. Nevertheless, it is possible for educators to use service-learning as outlined above to develop practice behaviors which would require intentional application of the elements that characterize service-learning. This should not be difficult given the close alignment of these elements to the mission of the social work profession.

If there is a risk to service-learning in the context of competency-based education, could the opposite also be true? As referenced earlier, service-learning has been viewed alternately as a pedagogy potentially promoting the status quo (Jacoby, 2009b) or "a progressive and liberal agenda under the guise of a universalistic practice" (Butin, 2006, p. 483). These perspectives highlight the fact that service-learning, or any pedagogy, is not a value-free, objectivistic endeavor, and that the act of using service-learning is also a philosophical, if not political, statement. Social work education was attacked just a few years ago for "having ideological proclivities and a strong penchant for advocacy" (National Association of Scholars, 2007). While the profession might be inclined to dismiss such statements as coming from a fringe sector, social work educators might want to be aware that adoption of service-learning for competency development could raise further questions about the ideology, and resultant competencies, into which social work students are being indoctrinated.

Question 2: What are some practical considerations for the use of service-learning in competency-based education?

As mentioned earlier, if social work programs begin using service-learning more frequently in their curricula, they may want to hold faculty discussions to clarify their definition of service-learning and for what purpose it will be used. It would also be useful to review best practices from the service-learning and social work literature for replication purposes, and to make assessment plans to measure not only practice behaviors but also other service-learning outcomes. In addition, programs may want to think strategically about the placement of service-learning in their curricula. Service-learning has been used variably in a number of disciplines in introductory classes to introduce new majors to the field, in methods or practice classes to enhance disciplinary skills or to prepare students for practica, and in capstone courses to demonstrate cumulative knowledge and skills. Since service-learning courses generally require substantial work in and out of the classroom on the part of both instructor and students, programs may want to determine the best strategic location for service-learning. In other words, consideration should be given not only to service-learning's best fit in a course,

but also its best fit in the curriculum as a whole, taking multiple issues such as faculty time, community needs, and practice behavior development, into account.

Another practical consideration already alluded to is the effort and time needed to develop and implement quality service-learning courses. A service-learning center may exist on campus to assist with course mechanics and community placements, but most faculty who use service-learning probably have a very hands-on approach to their courses to ensure course/service compatibility, reciprocity with community partners, student support, and meaningful assessment. Many such faculty also choose to use service-learning courses for their scholarship, undertaking action research, community-based studies, and collaborative inquiry projects. While a scholarship of engagement has been recognized as a viable endeavor for at least two decades, an individual college or university may not always value it. As Driscoll notes (2008, as cited in Sandmann, 2009), “most institutions continue to place community engagement and its scholarship in the traditional category of service and require other forms of scholarship for promotion and tenure” (p. 41). Social work programs that decide to incorporate service-learning for competency development will need to ensure that faculty are not penalized in the professional evaluation process by their use of service-learning for scholarship or teaching.

The questions above and the challenges they raise are intended to stimulate dialogue about service-learning and competency-based education. However, individuals new to service-learning may be reading this special issue in search of tools for competency-based education. Also, as of the writing of this paragraph, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed a federal funding bill which would eliminate the Corporation for National and Community Service and all its programs (including Learn and Serve America). For both these reasons, a summary of the benefits of service-learning in competency-based education is certainly appropriate and timely. The benefits are many and the list below comes primarily from those already mentioned throughout the article and from this author’s own experience. Additional service-learning adherents can easily add to the list.

1. As mentioned earlier, the CSWE Educational and Policy Accreditation Standards define competency-based education as “an outcome performance approach to curriculum design,” the goal of which is to “demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice” (CSWE, 2008, p. 3). Key words here are “performance,” “application,” and “competencies.” It is not enough for students to demonstrate *knowledge about* competencies; they must also demonstrate *ability* in the *performance* of them. The more opportunity students have to use skills and behaviors, particularly in practice courses, the more able they will be to demonstrate competence by graduation. Service-learning is an experiential methodology which can be adapted to any social work course and which aptly serves the purpose of providing opportunities for skill integration and application in practice.
2. Since social work programs are required by the EPAS to undertake multiple measures of student competencies, service-learning offers programs an initial

point-in-time course-based measurement of practice behaviors before a second measurement which could occur during internship. Service-learning is also an educational method with a substantial body of literature providing implementation and assessment tools (see the “Service-Learning Research” section above). Some of these tools could be useful in the development of assignments and assessments related to social work practice behaviors.

3. Service-learning has been used effectively as preparation for field practica and for development of skills in areas which practica may not offer (such as macro practice). Service-learning projects give programs the opportunity to measure practice behaviors not used in internships, and if sequenced appropriately, service-learning activities may give students a beginning-level exercise in certain skills, which they can then deepen and develop once they are in capstone field experiences.
4. Finally, service-learning offers social work education an additional mechanism to reinforce to students the core values of the profession. Service-learning’s primary conditions of civic engagement, reflection, and reciprocity (see “Service-Learning Described” section above), support all social work values, but particularly the values of “service,” “social justice,” and “the importance of human relationships.” These values are reflected in the core competencies outlined in CSWE’s Educational Policies (e.g., EP 2.1.5 and EP 2.1.8). To the extent that social work educators who use service-learning meet its core conditions, they will be enabling students to act out of the profession’s core values while developing core competencies of social work practice.

Service-learning and social work competency-based education would seem to be a good fit given their shared values, social work’s history as an engaged profession, and the opportunities service-learning affords students to apply knowledge, values, and skills. Yet, as I hope this article has reinforced, a head-long rush to use service-learning in social work competency-based education without consideration of their unique purposes, reciprocal impacts, and practical implementations may result in an outcome that does not do justice to either or to the constituents they intend to serve.

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