



SERVICE–LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING EDUCATION: WHERE IS THE REFLECTION?

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Service–Learning is recognized as a valuable pedagogy that involves experiential learning, reflection, and reciprocal learning. Reflection is a critical component because it assists students to develop critical thinking and social awareness as they reflect upon their experiential learning with community partners. Although there is a proliferation of literature about service–learning, upon closer examination, it is apparent that some authors do not place emphasis on reflection when reporting on service–learning projects. This begs the question, “Where is the reflection?” The purpose of this article is to provide an overview and describe misrepresentations and exemplars of service–learning. After providing an overview of service–learning, examples of how service–learning is misrepresented in the literature are discussed. Exemplars of service–learning are also cited. Calling attention to how service–learning is reported in the literature will increase awareness about the need to critically evaluate articles for evidence of reflection. (Index words: Service–Learning; Reflection; Undergraduate; Nursing education) *J Prof Nurs* 32:48–53, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE PUBLIC DEMAND for college graduates who are critical thinkers and good citizens of the world creates a mandate for nurse educators to implement learning opportunities that foster these attributes. Service–Learning, recognized as both pedagogy and philosophy, is a well-established educational strategy known for challenging students to critically think about the world and how their service can achieve community goals. Service–Learning is defined as “a structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection” (Seifer, 1998, p. 274).

In service–learning, reflection is used for “the development or refinement of critical thinking skills such as being able to identify issues, being receptive to new or different ideas, and foreseeing the consequences of one’s actions” (Rama & Battistoni, 2001). Using reflection sets service–learning apart from other types of service. Without reflection, learning experiences are not authentic service–

learning, rather they are examples of volunteering or community-based learning. Although having nursing students serve meals to individuals who are homeless constitutes service in a community, it is not authentic service–learning unless there is a reflective requirement for this experience.

The literature is replete with examples of service–learning in undergraduate nursing education; however, there is inconsistency as to how reflection is addressed by authors. Some authors fail to mention reflection in their definitions of service–learning and descriptions of student experiences (Alexander, Canclini, & Krasner, 2014; Balakas & Sparks, 2010). Others refer to reflection in their definitions of service–learning but make no further mention of activities related to reflection (Weingarten, 2009). There are even cases when authors label their projects as service–learning without providing a definition or referring to reflection (Janke, Pesut, & Erbacher, 2012). Given the key role that reflection plays in service–learning, surprisingly few authors provide the warranted amount of detail about how reflection was accomplished. When published papers about service–learning do not include information about reflection, it calls into question whether the experiences being described are authentic service–learning. The purpose of this article is to provide

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an overview and describe misrepresentations and exemplars of service-learning. Calling attention to how service-learning is reported in the literature will increase awareness about the need to critically evaluate articles for evidence of reflection.

Overview of Service-Learning

Service-Learning is considered to be a pedagogy and philosophy designed to engage students with communities in ways that enhance their academic experiences and simultaneously serve the needs of communities (Champagne, 2006; The International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership, 2006). Service-Learning is a teaching method that links educational objectives with service designed to meet community needs. Originating in the early 1900s, John Dewey proposed three essential elements that distinguish service-learning from other learning experiences: (a) experiential learning, (b) reflection, and (c) reciprocal learning. According to Dewey (1938), it is critical that educational strategies include experiential learning that connects students to the realities of society. Rather than using traditional teaching strategies that may tend to promote passivity on the part of students, service-learning involves active engagement to address social concerns while fostering learning. Students come to understand phenomena, rather than simply know them, by reflecting about social justice and one's responsibility to others. Reciprocal learning involves collaborative partnerships among universities and communities. To achieve long-term success, particularly in health-related venues, individual and community empowerment is critical (Champagne, 2006; The International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership).

Service-Learning benefits students and faculty and academic institutions, community organizations, and community members (Seifer, 1998). Students demonstrate enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Nokes, Nickitas, Keida, & Neville, 2005; Simoni & McKinney, 1998). Through reflection, they also can achieve a heightened sense of civic responsibility (Casey & Murphy, 2008; Groh, Stallwood, & Daniels, 2011; Hunt, 2007; Simoni & McKinney, 1998), sensitivity to cultural diversity (Casey & Murphy, 2008; Jarosinski & Heinrich, 2010), and a willingness to volunteer in the future (Astin et al., 2000; Champagne, 2006). Service-Learning has been shown to positively affect the interpersonal, spiritual, and moral development of students (Hester, Daniels, & Adonis, 2005). Reflection through the use of journaling has been shown to empower students and promote self-direction (Harris, 2005). Faculty report increased satisfaction with the quality of student learning and stronger relationships among students and faculty, when service-learning strategies are used (Champagne, 2006). When students are involved in service-learning, the visibility and reputation of academic institutions are enhanced, and opportunities for collaborations on research and social policies can ensue (Champagne, 2006; Seifer, 1998). Community organizations benefit by reaching more people and increas-

ing the variety and quality of services provided (Champagne, 2006). Evidence shows that changes in health behaviors result in improved health outcomes through service-learning projects (Reising, Allen, & Hall, 2006a).

In the United States, there has been a resurgence of interest in the use of service-learning as an educational strategy in higher education. For example, under the auspices of Pew, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health was initiated in 1997 for the purpose of fostering partnerships between universities and communities to improve health (Champagne, 2006). In addition, an accreditation criterion of engagement and service has been established by The Higher Learning Commission (2003). To address this criterion, educational institutions must identify their stakeholders and create service-oriented programming.

Service-Learning is a popular teaching strategy in nursing education. Service-Learning, with its emphasis on reflection, provides opportunities for students to develop the core values of professional nursing identified by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN): altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity, and social justice (AACN, 1998). This methodology is especially compatible with recent efforts to infuse nursing curricula with community-based experiences. The shift from traditional education models to community-based curricula has been endorsed by the AACN (1999). Community-based nursing education involves emphasis on the integration of clinical experiences in the community. Within the past 15 years experiential learning has expanded from hospital-based settings to a variety of community settings where health care can be provided.

At first glance, it appears that the nursing literature is infused with examples of service-learning; however, a more critical appraisal reveals that many of these examples give insufficient detail about the reflective component of service-learning. At times, reflection is completely absent and at other times, reflection is included but to a very minor degree. This is concerning because service-learning is being potentially misrepresented. To implement best practices, detailed and clear descriptions about reflection in service-learning are needed for replication. It is recommended that authors explicate service-learning pedagogy, acknowledge reflection in their definitions of service-learning, and provide details about the student reflection activities.

Misrepresentations of Service-Learning

The literature cited in this article is not meant to represent a systematic review. Rather, over the course of time, the authors collected articles as they explored the literature for ideas to implement in nursing curricula and prepared manuscripts. All articles were associated with the search term *service learning* in databases. Through critical reading, the authors found articles that contained comprehensive descriptions about service-learning while others were vague or lacking in detail. Patterns emerged about the type of information that was included or

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