

VIEWPOINT

Service Learning as a Framework for Competency-Based Local/Global Health Education



Tamara McKinnon, RN, DNP, Cynthia Toms Smedley, PhD, Jessica Evert, MD
San Jose, Santa Barbara, San Francisco, CA

INTRODUCTION

Service learning is a field that can provide the foundation for emphasizing the relevancy and realities of local/global health. Service learning is now widely accepted as a form of experiential education in which students “engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.”¹ Service-learning courses are not just regular courses with community service for homework; rather, they are courses that unite service and classroom and include a rigorous pedagogy to maximize student development, as well as community priorities. As a result of these carefully drawn distinctions, service learning has survived throughout the years as a formal construct that allows for academic foundations, community engagement, and assessment. With the recent expansion in global health competency sets, including those with interprofessional applications, service learning becomes an increasingly relevant construct for competency-based global health education.¹ Service learning is a construct that optimizes the relevance and effect of local global health education and community engagement.

Global service learning (GSL) is a specialty within this field. GSL focuses on service learning in international settings, as well as cross-cultural engagement wherever it occurs. Like global health, GSL is not geographically specific or only applicable internationally. It builds on lessons and practices from domestic service learning, but borrows from both international education and international development literature to develop a distinctive set of values and principles. According to Hartman and Kiely,² GSL stands apart in 5 key ways:

1. It is committed to student intercultural competence development.
2. It has a focus on structural analysis tied to consideration of power, privilege, and hegemonic assumptions.
3. It takes place within a global marketization of volunteerism.
4. It is typically immersive.
5. It engages the critical global civic and moral imagination.

GSL has several definitions, including “a community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective practice to better understand global citizenship, self, culture, positionality, socio-economic, political and environmental issues, relations of power, and social responsibility in global contexts... It is a learning methodology *and* a community development philosophy. It cultivates a way of being in that it encourages an ongoing, critically reflective disposition.”² Although service learning of all types usually includes students receiving academic credit, many contemporary thought leaders do not consider this essential. Further exploration of the topic suggests it is “experiential educational programs in which students are immersed in another community and culture, providing meaningful service in partnership with a host community. Global experiences are not defined by geographic boundaries but are inclusive of experiences in which participants are immersed completely in another community and culture.”³ Whether local or international, immersive experiences provide opportunities for students to nurture global health competencies. Service learning and GSL are constructs to optimize the formality and intention of educational programs in global health.

CONNECTING LOCAL AND GLOBAL

A goal of local/global health education is to educate young people who are rooted in a given locality to have an eye toward global challenges and to see the local opportunities to address and engage in them. In an interconnected world, where decisions about resources in one locale can affect the lives of people in distant communities and where distant events and forces can have a profound effect on local endeavors, it is important to connect global themes with local action. In the sphere of international education, a new term *study away* is taking hold and broadening the traditional notion of study abroad.⁴ Study away is “a concept and educational strategy that integrates study abroad programs with domestic programs. Diverse cultures within a local, regional, or national community should be recognized for providing learning opportunities and experiences that can also be transformative.” An outcome of international study abroad is openness to diversity, suggesting that study away, which immerses students in a diverse community (one distinct from the one most familiar to them), is essential to nurture such student outcomes.⁵

Drawing on the concept of global citizenship, the connection is reinforced between the local applicability of student development that has happened during international experiences and vice versa. Global citizenship includes “recognizing an ethical imperative or willingness to reduce one’s ecological impact and support a sustainable footprint that may have no immediate personal value but ultimately benefits others around the world.”⁶ This is the local/global connection that helps to train a generation of global citizens who will one day harmonize across nation-state and cultural bounds to address challenges that face the entire human family. When combined with theoretical foundations and critical thinking activities, the experience of being the “other” in a global setting can challenge assumptions about oneself and others, foster cultural humility, and enhance self-knowledge.⁷ Reflection on the experience provides the learner with an opportunity for “assessing the grounds (justification) of one’s beliefs.”⁸

To meet the requirements of service learning as pedagogy, programs must have specific characteristics (Table 1). As service learning becomes increasingly common within graduate and health professions’ education, curriculum, and accreditation, understanding these requirements when working under the auspices of service learning is essential.⁹

Table 1. Required Components of Global Service-Learning Initiatives

Community-driven service
Intercultural learning and exchange
Consideration of global citizenship
Continuous and diverse forms of critically reflective practice
Deliberate and demonstrable learning
Ongoing attention to power and privilege throughout programming and coursework.
Safe programs ²

SYNERGY BETWEEN GSL AND COMPETENCY-BASED GLOBAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Although it is common to have a fieldwork or other experiential component within global health education programs, broadly known as short-term experiences in global health (STEGH), there is lack of uniformity or use of consistent or well-designed pedagogies within the field.¹⁰ Experiential learning theory (ELT) defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience.”¹¹ It is proposed that such learning occurs in a cycle of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. Global health educational programs occurring locally and internationally have maximum affect when they are intentional about this cycle and frameworks to encourage it. Service learning creates an intentional structure where the cycle plays out for the learner.

The requirement that service learning include “deliberate and demonstrable learning” aligns with increasing reliance on competency-based education. Competency-based education is a focus of health professions and global health training.¹² Recently, levels of proficiency that apply to trainees in all disciplines relevant to global health have been suggested as follows:

- Level 1: Global citizen level,
- Level 2: Exploratory level,
- Level 3: Basic operational level, and
- Level 4: Advanced level.

Service-learning frameworks are particularly relevant to structure the exploratory level of proficiency, which is competence “required of students who are at an exploratory stage considering future professional pursuits in global health or preparing for a global health field experience working with

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5676992>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5676992>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)