

Women Educational Leaders' Narratives: The Dynamics of Service Learning on Training and Transformation

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Abstract

Service learning strengthens all involved: Students, faculty members, the community, and higher education institutions. Benefits of service learning for students include gaining real world experiences, personal and transformative outcomes (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien's, 2009), as well as higher order thinking from reflection on the experience (Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis, 2010). To understand the dynamics of service learning upon students' learning and transformation, this narrative case study chronicles women educational leaders' service learning and transformative experiences during doctoral study. These personal narratives are contextualized by the faculty member's service learning pedagogy and the types of service learning projects chosen. Data collection and analysis are achieved through reflective writing and journaling (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). A summary of results reveal the importance of service learning for students' academic and professional growth at the doctoral level, as well as the possibility of long-term benefits of service for the community and the transformation of leaders. Results also give faculty members and higher education support services insight into the design and delivery of service learning courses.

Keywords: service learning, reflection, transformative learning, personal narrative, higher education, women, leadership, teaching

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Introduction

In an effort to extend citizenship behavior beyond the walls of educational institutions and into the community (Parker, Myers, Higgins, Oddsson, Price, & Gould, 2009), faculty members incorporate service learning into their students' coursework. As a pedagogical strategy, service learning entails students applying concepts from their coursework to a service activity to meet a community need while learning from experience and earning academic credit (Correia, Yusop, Wilson & Schwier, 2010; Fiddler & Marienau, 2008; Parker, Myers, Higgins, Oddsson, Price, & Gould, 2009). The student selects a community organization (e.g., health clinic, a university department, a school, a local branch of a non-profit organization) and voluntarily completes work for them. These organizations act as service learning partners, linking the student from the classroom to the real world.

We intend to explore the outcomes of service learning for doctoral students of an educational leadership program. Our work employs components of service learning, reflective inquiry, and transformative learning as conceptual frameworks. The following describes each of these frameworks.

Service Learning

With a focus on real-world experience, service learning differs from authentic learning in that the former involves the student acting as project manager or partner rather than (as in the latter) the instructor acting as a project manager (Correia et al., 2010). Similar to experiences of authentic learning, service learning can result in personal and transformative outcomes for students (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien's, 2009). In particular, Conway and his associates' (2009) meta-analysis found that service learning students improve their academic knowledge, and to a lesser degree, personal and citizenship outcomes. Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis (2010) found that students nearer the end of their degree program demonstrated greater depth of learning and critical thinking than freshman. Some other outcomes for these students include demystifying their chosen profession and an increase in self-efficacy towards their prospective work (Correia et al.), including in the distance education modality.

Real world benefits for the students are not achieved without effort. Rarely does practical experience offer sequential or clear conceptual instructions for completing tasks. Therefore, students rely on instructors to close the gap between the textbook and real world application of course concepts. Instructors face the challenge of limiting student burnout, fostering a team approach to service learning, balancing the need to control with allowing the student to "blunder through" the project, creating diversely skilled teams or permitting team selection (Correia et al., 2010, p. 10), and deciding whether to allow unintended consequences of the process for reflection (such as the perpetuation of stereotypes) or to challenge such unintended learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). For these reasons, service learning pedagogy demands more time and emotional energy than traditional teaching (Correia et al. 2010).

Intending to benefit the community and students, service learning projects require an exchange of resources. The partnership strengthens the network and relations between two organizations, the service learning partner and the educational institution or other institution. Students, with guidance from instructors, must work with service learning partners to negotiate the scope of projects and provide strong customer service, in order to complete projects to the service learning partner's satisfaction (Correa et al., 2010). Communities not only reap volunteering students' labor but also the knowledge the students bring from their coursework. In exchange, service learning produces moderate positive changes in social awareness outcomes, as students improve their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about their service-learning partners (Conway et al., 2009). In addition, service learning fosters the value of volunteerism as part of students' professional development repertoire (Parker et al. 2009).

Valuing the volunteer experience stems from reflecting on its personal and societal benefits. Service learning pedagogy also often entails students reflecting and reporting on the service work accomplished (Conway et al, 2009; Molee et al., 2010).

Reflection

Reflection involves building on prior knowledge or experiences and drawing conclusions to make meaning from it (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). Structured reflections generally produce greater outcomes than non-structured reflections (Conway et al., 2009). Instructors guide students through structured reflections, which can involve reporting and responding, relating, or reasoning and reconstructing of their service learning experiences. Another type of structured reflection involves the DEAL model: Describing the experience, examining the experience in relation to course objectives (that involved academic, personal, and civic learning components), and articulating learning achieved (Molee et al., 2010). As a result of extended guided reflection through writing, adult learners can better understand their own work, relationships, community involvement, and lives (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010).

Reflection fosters higher order thinking and, at minimum, requires the learner to identify their experiences and make meaning of it. Yet Molee et al. (2010) found that students demonstrated lower order thinking (i.e., identifying, describing, and applying learning) and poor to fair critical thinking in their reflections. In contrast, Stevens et al. (2010) found that extended reflective processes enabled adult learners to apply knowledge beyond the classroom and expand their critical thinking. Methods of the two studies, however, differed. Stevens et al. conducted an e-mail study of adult learners who completed a prior learning portfolio within the previous three years. The adults had time to apply the knowledge they gained from their reflections, whereas Molee et al. analyzed students' reflection products of two service learning undergraduate courses. Explaining the barriers to higher order thinking skill development in service learning reflections, Fiddler and Marieanau (2008) espoused that a student can reflect only on their cognitive and affective experiences filtered by the attention they give to an event. Actual reflection involves interpreting the experience through one's own or others' theories, roles, and ideas, thereby engaging students in meaningful learning.

Through the process of reflection emerges deep understanding or higher order thinking (as illustrated in Bloom's hierarchical taxonomy domains). Such levels of knowing go beyond perceiving different perspectives and contexts, towards improving personal theories (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2005; Eryaman, 2007). Besides cognitive progress from reflection, the learner can also gain psychologically, connecting their experience to their feelings to improve their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (or emotional intelligence) (Taylor, Fischer, & Taylor, 2009). Fiddler and Marieanau (2008) explained that students' meaningful learning in a service learning context, if applied, has the potential to influence the event (or service learning activity), thus beginning the learning process again. Reflection "has the capacity to change the learner's perspective on the meaningfulness of the experience" (Stevens et al., 2010, p. 401). If such deep learning and interaction with the learning environment occur, then the learner will have had a transformative experience through reflecting on the service learning project.

Transformative Learning

An internal metamorphosis defines the experience of transformative learning. In this process, the learner changes their old, perhaps neglected, frame of reference. This changes his or her basic personality to inclusive yet discriminating and open yet reflective, thereby strengthening emotional capacity and authentic discretion to guide action (Eryaman & Riedler, 2009; Ciporen, 2010; Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010). Thomas (2009) referred to transformative learning as a form of pedagogy that involves both problem solving and critical thinking, teaching students how to think rather than what to think. In

addition, Taylor, Fischer, and Taylor (2009) acknowledged the cognitive and emotional aspects of transformative learning, advocating for transformative curriculum to address the five factor model weaknesses specific to each gender (e.g., Openness and Agreeableness). For instance, to help males increase their emotional intelligence, they suggested applying a curriculum that teaches “emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal adeptness,” and for women, applying a curriculum that “fosters the abilities of self-confidence, optimism, and ability to handle stress,” thereby maximizing learning opportunities for students (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 28).

Curriculum fostering personal discovery challenge students to internalize and attach meaning to new concepts or information, resulting in dramatic changes in how students view themselves (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010). For example, using the pedagogy of service learning and a reflection log, pre-service teachers demonstrated quality learning with a majority reflecting through four lenses of transformational learning: technical, cultural, political, and post-modernist/poststructuralist (Carrington & Selva, 2010). Because Stevens et al. found that most students who engaged in a reflective form of learning gain informative rather than transformative learning; they surmised that transformative learning depends on how ready students are in their lives for change when they start the learning process. This transformative process can be very fulfilling to students as they discover their capacity to change and gain self-confidence (Stevens et al., 2010).

Although students experience this process internally, they also gain an ability to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Transformative learning affects the leaders’ capacity to overcome obstacles, influence organizational outcomes, and demonstrate their knowledge and interpersonal capacity (Ciporen, 2010). Those experiencing personal transformative learning, compared to those who did not see more support (e.g., the love of learning and supportive colleagues) and barriers to implementing their new skills (e.g., lack of time or organizational resistance to change); generate greater outcomes and ways to overcome barriers with others (Ciporen, 2010). The leader, thereby, can transform their work environment in a pro-social way by transformational decision making.

Methods

The Narrative Approach

An exploration of the dynamics of the service learning experience is needed to better understand students’ experiences, learning, and outcomes in context of instructional pedagogy. We believe that understanding the dynamics of service learning through narrative help us to explore the outcomes of service learning, reflection, and the possibility of transformational learning experiences, especially among women educational leaders. Content analysis of course material, reflective writing, and journaling serve as the data for this work. Themes were extracted to summarize the findings.

Participants

To understand the outcomes of service learning, this narrative case study chronicles women educational leaders' service learning experiences in the context of the professor's service learning pedagogy. Educational leaders are defined broadly to include those who influence others in the field of education. The participants are leaders in educational positions and were enrolled in an Educational Leadership, Policy and Law doctoral program. They reflect on how their service learning experiences shaped their learning and practice by answering open-ended questions that served as prompts for focused reflective journaling.

Participants include three students within the context of the professor's pedagogy, all of whom are female. Two students are Caucasian. One student and the professor are African American. All participants are U.S. citizens.

Purpose and Research Question

Through active participation in the service learning project and reflective journaling, the students underwent an experience to foster deep learning that could possibly result in transformative learning. The purpose of this study is to explore the outcome of service learning for doctoral students of an educational leadership program. The overarching question is: What is the outcome of service learning during doctoral training? From this overarching question and a review of the literature, sub-questions emerged and were posed to participants, as follows:

- What efforts were exchanged between you and your service learning partner?
- What resulted from the service learning experience for you and the service learning partner?
- How did your service learning reflections contribute to your academic learning, thinking, socio-emotional growth, and behaviors?
- To what extent was your old frame of reference, personality, way of thinking, or view of yourself changed by the service learning experience?
- Have any aspects of your life have changed as a result of the service learning project?

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants answered the sub-questions that pertained to their service learning experience. Their answers are written in narrative form derived from the content analysis of the course materials and personal service learning reflective journaling (Davis, Coffee, Murphy, & Woods, 2014) required for their course projects. This qualitative method uses a personal narrative approach by which participants reflected on their specific life experiences (Reismann, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), particularly their doctoral service learning project and its outcomes.

These narratives serve as sources of data collection for analysis. As a method of data collection, the narratives document the experiences of the participants. "The product [of data collection] cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing." (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962) As a method of analysis, the personal narratives are used as a method of inquiry into the outcomes of service learning. In this way, writing is used as a form of thinking, discovering, and inquiry to construct knowledge (Richardson & St. Pierre). Analyzing these personal narratives also involves placing the stories in personal (and professional) context (Creswell, 2007). Because the authors both express and process their experiences in their personal narratives, "data collection and data analysis cannot be separated" and there is no model for this type of experimental writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971). Nevertheless, the researchers summarize the qualitative data by uncovering common and disparate themes across narratives and triangulating their findings (Creswell, 2008).

The following offers the faculty members' narrative to set the context for the students' course experience. We then feature the student narratives in addressing the aforementioned research question.

Personal Narrative: Doctoral Faculty Member

The theoretical integration of Freire's Pedagogy of Freedom and Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning provide the foundation for my teaching (Davis, 2014). Freire's Pedagogy of Freedom holds the following: a) that teaching does not occur without learning from research, culture, and the students themselves; b)

that “to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge” (Freire, 1998, p.49); and c) that to teach is a human act and a form of intervention in the world (Freire, 1998).

Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning includes three domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor). Intellectual outcomes as illustrated in the cognitive domain are segmented into categories ranging from less complex levels of thinking to more sophisticated thought. These categories include a) knowledge; b) comprehension; c) application; d) analysis, e) synthesis; and the most advanced thought outcome of f) evaluation (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956) or knowledge creation (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Davis, 2014).

I have employed service learning consistently for over seven years as a faculty member; each time at the graduate level via either doctoral or master’s level courses. I have witnessed phenomenal benefits to students from service learning projects. These benefits include job opportunities, expanded professional networks, development of grant writing skills, successful receipt of grants (one master’s student received a grant to fund computers for a computer lab and another grant to fund a student garden), and the formation of a new program (a service learning student’s community “Daddy and Me Program”). Through these activities my students have constructed, applied, and evaluated knowledge; reinforced course content; and made positive interventions in the world.

Personal Narrative: Doctoral Student & Educational Leader 1

The partner for my service learning project is the Director of Professional Development for a public school system in the southeastern United States. The school system is the third largest school district in its state and consists of 59 schools, more than 32,000 students, and 4,500 employees. The 59 schools are made up of 32 traditional elementary schools, 10 traditional middle/junior high schools, 4 traditional high schools, 9 magnet schools, 2 alternative schools, and 2 special education centers. Of the 32,000 students, 85% are students of color (77% of those being African American) and 15% are Caucasian.

The director of professional development within the system is charged with providing high-quality, on-going professional development programs with intensive follow-up and support for all personnel. In doing so, he must ensure that professional development in the system is aligned to teacher quality, leader quality, and professional development standards; as well as to meet the needs identified in the individual schools’ and the system’s improvement plans. I wrote for [my service learning] project a literature review and presentation about decision making and the importance of communication for our service learning partner.

After an interview with the service learning partner, together, we agreed on three focus areas for the literature review: The flow of information in organizations; the communication process, channels, and barriers; and the impact of communication on the decision making process. The results of the literature review were shared with my service learning partner in both a PowerPoint presentation and in a completed document.

This was my first experience with service learning projects, and I sincerely hope that it will not be my last. Not only did I enjoy completing the project and enjoy working with the community partner, but I also benefitted greatly from the completion of the work. It allowed me to learn more, learn it more deeply, and apply it immediately. I sincerely look forward to future service learning projects.

I believe I provided the partner site with a resource they will draw upon for years to come. I also think I have given ideas to ponder which may generate creative solutions to decisions that may be made in the future. Not only was the partner provided with a guide for today, but also with ideas and perceptions to explore in the future.

The idea of working for such a large, established organization was daunting. I now feel that from my professional background, work experience, and the education I am receiving in the Educational Leadership program, I am prepared to do the type of work that the organization needs.

One of the things I learned about myself is that I am very concerned with pleasing others. Too often I caught myself dissatisfied with my work because I wanted to provide the partner with a cure-for-all that ails the organization. I wanted the resource to be a perfect example for my partner to hold up for the entire world to see. I learned that I can only compile the literature that is available and do my best to apply it to the site's concerns. I am unable to single-handedly solve all the decision making difficulties of my partner. My partner was happy with the finished product that I provided, even expressing excitement over certain sections.

I was challenged by this assignment, used the knowledge gained, and applied it immediately to a real-world situation. It was a bit uncomfortable knowing the document I was preparing was going to be read and utilized immediately, rather than simply being read and graded, never to be referred to again. However, the challenge proved to be exciting, knowing that I was providing a service for an entity within my own community.

Personal Narrative: Doctoral Student & Educational Leader 2

My service learning project involved collaboration between two of my cohort members in the Educational Leadership, Policy and Law program. We selected two admissions offices as partners. The aim was to deliver a professional development document about decision making in education.

My cohort members developed a qualitative survey to analyze our service learning partners' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis). From this analysis key needs were identified. My main role involved writing a literature review as a source to pull recommendations for an ethical process of decision making given the needs of collegiate admission offices. I also sorted through the SWOT analyses and collaborated with my cohort members to make recommendations to our service learning partners through a written manuscript.

We offered our theoretical, practical guide and MS-PowerPoint about decision making in collegiate admissions to our service learning partners. In this guide, I applied my consulting experience, as an industrial/organizational (I/O) psychologist, and the new knowledge gained from the decision making course. (I facilitate an I/O psychology course online and enjoy applying my organizational behavior knowledge.)

I have high hopes that through this project we offered guidance and structure for our learning partners, informing them how to make ethical decisions. I hope they will approach the decision making process with an informed point of view and with cogent arguments supporting their decisions.

The reflections contribute[d] to my learning and behaviors. By reflection on the service learning activity, I gained greater insights into the technological, political, and economic influences of decision making. Furthermore, I realized that through the interviews and SWOT analysis, very little could be ascertained about the reality of the group dynamics and political influences at the site. People fear

revealing such sensitive information. I realized that my research needed to generally encompass decision making practices in higher education management. Through reflection, I grew more confident in my ability to analyze information in a way that reflected our partners' needs, as the biggest challenge involved deriving practical advice for our service learning partner. Having not worked in collegiate admissions and with only limited experience as a consultant, I was surprised to find that my interpretation of the SWOT analysis and my recommendations from the literature review resonated with my team members on this project who had requisite knowledge as collegiate supervisors and who interviewed our service learning partners. Moreover, I realized the importance of working as a team to meet our service learning partners' needs. For this reason, I involved my team members in brainstorming recommendations for our partners.

The entire service learning experience changed me in some ways. My decision making abilities have been improved. I now carry as a mantra how we defined decision making in our guide. I see decision making as overcoming an ethical dilemma while putting students' academic interests first. This process involves seeking guidance from my professional community, as well as considering how my actions influence others' and are shaped by others on micro and macro levels. Likewise, I developed a greater respect for educational decision makers, having had a glimpse into the complicated array of decisions they make influenced by psychological, social-psychological, political, economics, and technological forces.

I look forward to incorporating service learning into an online classroom one day soon. I can see how this project would not only offer practical experience to the students, but also contribute to the community from whom the service learning partners would be chosen. As an added bonus, the project would offer professional development to the faculty member. The faculty member would be able to learn from their students' service learning projects, gaining insight into the practical application of concepts. This knowledge will help the faculty member deliver the content of their course in a more grounded way; something I could stand to gain in my own practice as a faculty member. Most important, the networking capacity that the service learning project offers is invaluable to both the student, who will have cultivated an important connection to the job market, and the faculty member, who will have resources to tap into for his or her courses.

My readiness for a life change from the service learning project was evident. I was in a transition period in my life; I still am. Having had two small children and a husband that planned to retire from the service, I enrolled in the doctoral program looking for a career path in higher education. I also teach online, which offered the flexibility I needed. I am right where I need to be in perfect time to be transformed by any learning project, particularly service learning because of its many benefits.

My life has not changed tremendously from the service learning project, but some of my interests were realized. My interest in service learning spawned my interest in innovative pedagogies, so I selected an internship site that nurtured that interest. I complet[ed] my doctoral internships with a teaching and learning center at a large research university. As part of my work there, I attended a class about facilitating service learning projects in the classroom.

Personal Narrative: Doctoral Student & Educational Leader 3

We selected the college of business at a local university to serve. A strategic plan was prepared to help the college outline its road map for serving students for the next five years. Focus group interviews were conducted to determine the needs of stakeholders, including students, alumni, businesses, and governmental agencies in order to set goals and objectives. The vision of the college was obtained through interviews with college and university administration.

The service learning partners received an actionable document that they can implement immediately to improve operation or attain the stated goals of the institution. As a doctoral student, I received tangible experience that crystalized the content presented in course work and theory.

Reflecting back on the interaction with each partner, I can see how the experience informed my studies and enabled me to apply theory in a real life setting. As educators, we grapple with concepts, but my partners have real people and issues that need to be addressed. We are not just creating an academic body of work; we are creating opportunities to improve processes in organizations that can have real impact on the bottom line of organizations and, more importantly, improve the quality of education and thus the quality of life for the people working in or matriculating at these institutions.

As an educator, I realized the value of hands-on activities to the degree that I have instituted service learning opportunities into my pedagogy and approach to teaching undergraduate students. I see how the simple act of doing can be much more fulfilling and a strong method for imparting knowledge than traditional methods of delivery. I now look for opportunities to help deserving organizations or departments, while giving my students the opportunity to use the content they have studied in my class and others throughout our program.

Summary of Findings

The context comprised both the doctoral faculty members' pedagogy with a strong emphasis on knowledge creation and the descriptions of the service learning projects. In general, the doctoral students described their exchanges with their service learning partners and the outcomes in relation to academic learning, thinking, socio-emotional growth, and behaviors. Furthermore, the students described whether their old frame of reference, way of thinking, or views of themselves changed in any way. One also described her readiness for change resulting from the project.

Via theme development, we found strong evidence that service learning experiences contributed to academic and professional growth, some evidence of benefits for service learning partners, and some evidence of transformational learning for the students. All the students reported that their service learning projects enforced course content, offered higher level thinking, and increased students' interest in the application or study of service learning. It also enhanced their careers, specifically leading to career growth, career opportunities, or professional development. Some evidence of benefits for the service learning partners included a student receiving positive feedback for service from the service learning partner and two students suspecting that their work will have lasting effects upon their partners. Transformational learning occurred for one student who gained confidence in her skills. One reported attaining an understanding of self/inner psychological workings, and the other realized the value of working with a team. These results indicate the importance of service learning to graduate training, especially women educational leaders who strove to make a lasting difference for their service learning partners.

Discussion

The results add to the body of knowledge in teaching and learning in terms of the influence of service learning, specifically pertaining to graduate students who have a wealth of knowledge and experience from which to frame their service learning experiences.

Academic and professional growth emerged as a strong theme among these doctoral students and female educational leaders. The findings of higher level thinking reflected Sevens et al.'s (2010) findings about the effects of the reflective process for applying knowledge beyond the classroom and expanding

critical thinking among adult learners. Similar, Henderson and Brookhart (1997) found that doctoral students in a school leaders program employing service learning projects reported enhancements in existing and new knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks from their work with underfunded public institutions. Relationship building and connecting with others to make a difference, emerged as an important service learning outcome in studies of graduate students (Kelly & Miller, 2008; McCluskey-Titus, 2008). However, we found no evidence that professional skill attainment by students was influenced by age, contradicting findings in other studies (Lu & Lambright, 2010; Molee et al., 2010). Academic and professional growth as a benefit of service learning involves meeting new networks of people and building on existing professional knowledge and skill-sets in real world application to develop and realize new skill-sets, thereby improving students' competencies.

Besides students' enhancing their competencies, the community also benefits from the activities of the students and the relationships fostered by the service learning projects. Service learning partners often benefit from the projects of graduate students (Henderson & Brookhart, 1997; Kelly & Miller, 2008). Graduate students also discover the value of their work to those they serve and increase their commitment to their campus and community (McCluskey-Titus, 2008) (similar to undergraduates (Parker et al., 2009)).

Transformational learning that stems from service learning goes beyond mere professional benefits for the student and service learning partner. This involves a change in frame of reference within the student that stems from interactions with the partner (Ciporen, 2010; Stevens et al., 2010). Such change-oriented service learning experiences among doctoral students can contribute to the development of ethical, change-oriented educational leaders (Henderson & Brookhart, 1997). From service learning experiences, a high percentage of doctoral students reported improvements in their understanding of the community's needs, realizations of personal biases and prejudices, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of obligation to serve the community with plans to continue such service (Kelly & Miller, 2008). Some remnants of transformational learning through the service learning projects could have occurred when graduate students' expressed an appreciation for resources and supports in comparison to those underprivileged partners that they served (McCluskey, 2008) and undergraduates' increased social awareness (Conway et al., 2009), yet these instances do not indicate strong transformational learning signified by a change of behavior because of that experience, as Kelly and Miller found. In our study, the improved confidence experienced by two students in applying their academic work is in accordance with other findings (Correa et al., 2010; DeLaGarza et al., 2010) and offers some evidence of the application of a transformative curriculum with the potential to enhance emotional intelligence in women (Taylor et al., 2009).

The summary of results indicating the benefits of social learning also exemplifies how service learning may be applied at the graduate level. To improve service learning projects, structuring reflections has demonstrated value to the overall service learning experience (Conway et al., 2009). Faculty can build a practice reflection activity for students to gain feedback on their journaling and structure the reflection journals by asking specific questions aligned with course objectives (Kelly & Miller, 2008), such as the DEAL model of reflection (Molee et al., 2010). Further building in structures to the service learning course can entail ensuring application of course content and students' service to their community (McLaughlin, 2010). For example, faculty can introduce students to service learning partners' concerns to frame students' experiences and increase their awareness, use course material to reinforce service learning experiences, and offer class discussion time about service learning projects to allow students to share and benefit from others' learning (McCluskey-Titus, 2008), expanding students' repertoire for reflection (Fiddler & Mareianau, 2008). These practices proved successful in our experiences. Furthermore, faculty and service learning partners can build relationships with each other to enhance the benefits for both the partner and the student (Kelly & Miller, 2008) by planning faculty-partner communication into the course

to check on students' progress and evaluate the projects. Enhancing service relationships can also involve structuring the course specifically for students' career development (McLaughlin, 2010), including networking with key service learning partners. This was achieved by allowing students to choose their service learning partners, in our case. The opportunity for in-class reflection time and students' autonomy with the projects' progress enhanced the experiences of the women leaders in this study, as it did for students enrolled in a master's of public accounting course completing service learning projects (Lu & Lambright, 2010). Such in class reflection time is recommended in planning service learning courses. Also, students can work together as teams to provide graduate-level, professional mentoring to each other (McCluskey-Titus, 2008). Instructors can provide instruction about working as a team for service learning to increase successful outcomes.

Conclusion

Service learning proves invaluable at the doctoral level, as the training doctoral students receive should result in higher level thinking skills. As practitioners or researchers, doctoral students must independently apply, analyze, synthesize, and create knowledge upon completion of their doctoral training. For this reason, service learning provides a platform for gaining these necessary skills with the scaffolding from students' service learning partners (i.e., practitioners in the community) and students' professors. Service learning fosters such higher level thinking and practice among doctoral students.

Given the summary of results for women educational leaders completing service learning projects in a doctoral educational leadership program; of salient professional and academic growth; some evidence of benefits for the service learning partner; as well as transformational learning for students, we recommend further inquiry into the outcomes and implications for improving service learning as a teaching method at the doctoral level. A strength-based study of the benefits of service learning may further the teaching method's influence on students' transformative learning and strengthen relationships with service learning partners. Service learning has the potential to create a win-win situation for students, faculty, campuses, and communities.

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