2020

The Effects of Service-Learning on the Moral Development of College Students

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract

In the last few years, several national reports on higher education have called for colleges and universities to take a more central role in providing moral and democratic education to college students. These developments suggest a renewed interest in collegiate goals that go beyond those that benefit the individual, continuing an emphasis in addressing the moral dimension of higher education that has existed for centuries. Courses with a service-learning component can be a powerful instrument for moral transformation. Working within Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory, this 16-week quasi-experimental case study investigated the extent to which service-learning advances moral development (movement from conventional to post conventional or principled judgment) in college students. Student outcomes were measured by using the Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) technique and follow-up interviews were conducted and analyzed. Results of this project suggest that students who participate in service learning projects reap many benefits, including enhanced personal skills, motivation to learn, and most important, an increased moral development. Further research into this area is needed to inform policies and practices of higher education institutions regarding the connection between moral development and service learning pedagogy.

Keywords

Author Bio

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Introduction

Thirty-four years ago, an article appeared in the New York Times (Lamm, 1986) that expressed concern that today's generation of college students are being permitted, in the name of scientific objectivity and value-neutrality, "to grow up as ethical illiterates and moral idiots, unprepared to cope with ordinary life experiences" (p. 35). The author contended that instead of being taught how to make effective moral judgments, students were being told that morality is all relative or a matter of personal opinion. Lamm (1986) also stated that this "counsel of despair" which is "often impressed on our students under the guise of tolerance" was taking its toll on our young people (p. 35). College ethics professor Judith Boss (1994) contended that she had students who fit this description. Boss argued that some college students seemed unable to make reasoned moral decisions and their lives too often seemed to be a series of poor judgments. Supposedly, certain courses had the potential to counter this trend toward relativism and despair. Boss maintained that colleges should provide students with the resources necessary to help them recognize situations that call for moral judgment and action, help students make more satisfactory moral decisions and correct harms resulting from poor past decisions or lack of decisions (Boss, 1994). Strain (2005) posited that service-learning courses can be powerful instruments for cognitive, affective, and moral transformations for college students.

This study did not broadly scrutinize higher education, but highlighted one of the functional tasks higher education institutions have been doing for years. This study argued that ethics and moral development training is presently included in the curriculum taught in most higher education institutions. The research on this topic supports the notion that ethics and morals can best be taught through service-learning projects. In addition, to provide a link

between academic objectives and moral development, service-learning offers a connection between community needs and higher education institutions.

One of the challenges is for institutions of higher education to determine how to implement elements of ethics or moral reasoning into their core curricula. Some contemporary college programs focus on technical development, rather than on preparing socially responsible students with a strong sense of citizenship (Colby et al., 2003). According to some, the separation of learning from its societal context is no longer acceptable.

> This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever considering how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision-making. We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship. (Chapdelaine et al., p. 339)

Education should be holistic and include moral values and consciousness of self and environment (Boyer, 1996). Many researchers agree that service-learning courses taught at the college level can be an effective method for cognitive, affective, and moral transformation (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Context and Purpose

Through a 40-hour service-learning experience, this study explored how undergraduate college students developed morally and ethically while working with residents at various nursing homes. In the university where the study was conducted, there existed a core group of five interdisciplinary faculty members who began collaborating on service-learning in 2013. This eclectic group (i.e. social work, speech language pathology, women's studies, education) worked in departments where it was compulsory to have a knowledge of

community needs and sought to bring "real-life" opportunities to students who would one day be professionals themselves. This group proposed that the students and our work on service-learning projects aligned well with the universities' core values of Grit, Humility and Heart. What better way to demonstrate our core values across the community and to the students than to use campus resources to serve the needs of the community? Members had their own service-learning interest, and one that has been an interest of mine was on the connection between service-learning and moral development.

This research study examined the concept of service-learning and analyzed some of the characteristics of quality service-learning projects. Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1984) provided the framework for this study and the Moral Judgment Interview (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) was selected to explore the impact of service-learning experiences in student's moral development. This interview method was developed by Lawrence Kohlberg (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) in an effort to explain the development of moral reasoning. The last portion of the study distills the data analysis, findings, and implications for future research.

The Concept of Service-Learning

The term service-learning was first used in the works of Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey in 1965 at Southern Regional Education Board (Eyler & Giles, 1994), and then in 1966 with Michael Goldstein's Urban Corps in New York City (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). In 1985, the presidents of Brown University, Georgetown University, and Stanford University formed the so-called Campus Compact (https://compact.org) to encourage and support efforts to involve students in the community in order to foster responsible social responsibility. Service-learning gained nationwide respect with the National and Community Service Acts of

1990 and 1993 (Eyler & Giles, 1994). In 1990 there were more than 140 different terms and definitions associated with service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1994).

According to Dunlap (1998), service-learning provides students with the opportunity to combine service to their community, critically analyze those experiences, and link those experiences back to academics. Community colleges and universities are utilizing service-learning at both the undergraduate and graduate level (Anderson, 2003; Cashel et al., 2003; Cleary, 1998; Jones & Abes, 2004; Reed et al., 2005; Schaffer & Peterson, 1998).

Service-learning as pedagogy provides students with structured opportunities to learn, develop, and reflect through active participation in community projects. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) offered a very good definition of service-learning.

> Service learning is a course based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 505)

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse defines service learning as, "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (as cited in Diambra et al., 2009, p. 114). Accordingly, the National and Community Service Trust Act added the element of participation in thoughtfully organized service to the definition (Diambra et al., p. 115). Service-learning is different from volunteer work. Students spend classroom time on campus consolidating their field experience and

considering the relationship between what they are learning in school and what is being done in the field (Eyler, 2002).

Jay (2008) argued that service-learning needs to have an explicit academic component and advance the students' knowledge of the course content. "There needs to be an academic 'capture' of knowledge through written reflection or multimedia projects or other forms that express what the student has learned" (p. 255). James Dewey (1938) suggested "it is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of the experience" (p. 16). Developmental theorists like Anne Colby (Colby et al., 2003) posited:

> Experiential learning, including service learning, centrally acknowledges the context specificity of learning, providing educational settings that are less artificial than the classroom and much closer to the contexts in which students will later perform. When these settings are explicitly civic, as they are in service-learning, they provide stronger support for moral and civic development than most lectures or seminars can. (p. 139)

The reflective process is an extremely important component of the best service-learning programs. It provides the opportunity for students to examine their fundamental assumptions, exploring the roots of the disorientation they experience, thus enabling them to restructure the way they view the world and perhaps motivate them to work towards societal change (Eyler & Giles, 1999). "Critical reflection is about pushing students to explore the assumptions that underlie their own perceptions and the way that society is organized" (Eyler & Giles, p. 198). Anne Colby (2003), argued that the reflective process in service-learning programs can also provide support for moral and civic development. Strain (2005) asked,

"Toward what ends should the reflective exercises be directed? This becomes an especially tricky set of questions if we ask them with regard to students' moral development" (p. 62).

Service-learning has been shown to increase subject matter knowledge, cognitive skills and intellectual growth, and critical thinking skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Maher (2003) affirmed this by stating, "Service experience in communities helps in the cognitive development of college students. One important way in which this happens is by allowing college students to apply abstract concepts in the real world" (p. 91). Ernie Boyer's (1996) vision for service-learning was that "the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement" (p. 19).

King and Mahew (2002) proposed that an added benefit of service-learning is the moral development of the students that participate in such projects. "Service projects help students in their preparation for citizenship, character development, moral leadership, and service to society" (King & Mahew, 2002, p. 248). Boyer (1996) supported this view and further challenged higher education institutions to "bring new dignity to community engagement by connecting its rich resources to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, to our cities" (pp. 19–20). Student involvement in service-learning projects could possibly be a logical vehicle that higher education institutions could use to develop moral leadership qualities in the students they educate. Boyer's call is aligned with higher education rethinking about how community involvement can change the nature of faculty work, enhance student learning, better fulfill campus mission, and improve the quality of life in communities (Bringle et al., 1999;

Calleson et al., 2005; Colby et al., 2003; Edgerton, 1994; O'Meara & Rice, 2005; Percy et al., 2006). Bringle and Hatcher (2000) posited:

> Although there are many manifestations of civic and community engagement, curricular engagement in general and service-learning classes in particular are core components as campuses progress beyond traditional models of engagement, such as expert-based approaches to outreach and professional service, that develop broader and deeper impact across the campus and within communities. (p. 37)

Characteristics of Quality Service-Learning Programs

Service-learning programs come in many shapes and sizes. There seems to be little disagreement that while service-learning can make a difference, higher quality service-learning opportunities offer the greatest impact. As early as the 1930s John Dewey (1938) described the criteria of experiential education. He suggested that education should include some form of active-learning and experiential/contextual learning, be constructed with the teacher as the guide, and involve critical reflection. While the theory might rest with Dewey, service-learning practitioners believe that these very characteristics reside in high-quality service-learning programs.

Quality service-learning programs address a few vital components. These vital components are active learning, student centered learning, critical reflection, curricular connections, authentic community needs, and assessment (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Service-learning, with its active-learning characteristics, suggests that "we learn from what we do" (Dunlap, 1998, p. 26). For service-learning practitioners, a fundamental assumption is that academic material will be better understood if students can actively apply that material to their lives or to the lives of others (Waterman, 1997). Dewey upheld the notion that active

student involvement in learning was an essential element of effective education (as cited in Eyler & Giles, 1999). Keeping with this philosophy, service-learning practitioners embrace the theory that knowledge is actively constructed, not passively disseminated to students by the instructor. Richard Feynman (as cited in Eyler & Giles, 1999) argued that passive acquisition of knowledge may serve students well for testing; it does not serve as an instrument for lifelong learning nor prepare students for real-life problem solving or action.

Additionally, active/experiential education offers an opportunity for spontaneity or improvisation. There is no way to prepare for the events that may occur while students actively participate in a service-learning project. Darling-Hammond (2006) suggested that the role of the instructor is to "bring knowledge, analytical ability, and adaptability to the task, if they are to help their students develop understanding" (p. 1540). Dewey (1938) offered, "the improvisation that occurs with experiential learning prevents teaching and learning from becoming stereotyped and dead" (pp. 96–97). Cooper and Julier (1995) posited, "An active-learning curriculum creates more unpredictable situations in the learning environment; yet satisfyingly, such curricula actually offer an opportunity to re-conceptualize the teaching-learning process" (p. 134).

Darling-Hammond (2006) suggested that teachers can get the most out of the active-learning experiences by planning student-centered lessons that present students with an opportunity to apply their learning in relation to their active involvement. "Student-centered learning can change an educational experience into a lifelong learning process in which students seek to find solutions to problems without complete dependency upon an instructor" (Dorman & Dorman, 2000, p. 131). When students develop their own understanding through active participation in a service project, the teacher must scaffold assignments to guide the

learning process and draw out the student's thinking process (Darling-Hammond, 2006). As students begin to participate in activities outside the classroom, the classroom is changed from a teacher-centered classroom to more of a collaborative classroom. "Instructors, students, and community all become collaborators in the course of the project which offers the potential for a more equitable distribution of power and greater personal growth in the students" (Eyler & Giles, p. 71).

Moral Development Theory

The theoretical framework for this research was Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1984). Lawrence Kohlberg's theory was built on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development which included work on moral judgment. Kohlberg found stages that went well beyond Piaget's theory. Kohlberg uncovered three levels and six stages, from simple punishment avoidance to principled reasoning about justice. Only the first three stages share characteristics with Piaget's stages. The six moral stages are grouped into three levels: pre-conventional level (Stages 1 and 2), conventional level (Stages 3 and 4), and principled or post-conventional (Stages 5 and 6). Authors Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated,

> College is linked with statistical increases in the use of principled moral reasoning to judge moral issues… However, the exact magnitude of the gain may not be as important as the movement from conventional to post conventional or principled judgment during college, which in itself is an important event in moral development. (pp. 345–346)

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also contended that "Kohlberg's theoretical framework is certainly not the only valid model of moral or ethical development, but it appears to be, by far, the dominant theoretical framework guiding inquiry into the impact of postsecondary

education on such development" (p. 346).

Each of Kohlberg's stages represents "a qualitative re-organization integrating within a broader perspective the insights achieved at the prior stages" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, p. 5). As individuals develop, their concepts of justice or fairness expand from egocentric to societal perceptions.

A person's understanding of fairness expands from a system that serves oneself (pre-conventional perspective, Stages 1 and 2), to one that serves one's family, friends and immediate communities (conventional perspective, Stages 3 and 4), and, finally, to one that also serves larger communities, including strangers (post-conventional perspective, Stages 5 and 6). This life-span theory of moral development describes steps   within the major shift in an individual's moral reasoning from a position of pure self-interest to one that is based on a conception of fairness that serves society where societal laws and social systems that are moral are designed to serve all members of society. (King & Mahew, 2002, p. 19)

Table 1 summarizes each stage and each level.

Table 1

Summary of Kohlberg's Sages of Moral Development

Level/Stage	Description
Level 1: Pre-conventional	
Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience	Avoidance of punishment
Stage 2: Individualism and Exchange	Satisfy one's own needs
Level 2: Conventional	
Stage 3: Interpersonal Relationships	Earning approval by being nice
Stage 4: Maintaining Law and Order	Maintenance of social order
Level 3: Post-conventional	
Stage 5: Social Contract	Emphasis on procedural rules and consensus
Stage 6: Universal Principal	Principals are abstract and ethical (the golden rule)

Research on the Relationship between Service-Learning and Moral Development

This section will detail the modest body of research that has attempted to estimate the impact of service-learning on the moral development of college students (Boss, 1994; Gorman, 1994; Fenzel & Leary, 1997). The results of this research are mixed. There were two experiments that found a positive correlation between service-learning and moral reasoning skills. The first was performed by Judith Boss (1994). In her study, one section of a two-section course was randomly selected to complete 20 hours of community service and made journal entries following each session. The instrument used during this study was James Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT). Rest developed the DIT in 1979. The DIT uses a Likert scale to give quantitative grades to six moral dilemmas that are read by the subjects.

All students performed a pre- and post-treatment (DIT) test. About half of the students participated in a community service activity and the other half did not. Boss (1994) hypothesized that the moral development would increase more over the course of the semester for the community service group than for the control group. The results of the study indicated that students in the service-learning section scored significantly higher on their DIT scores than did the control group. "The mean gain between the DIT pre-test and the DIT post-test was 8.61 for the experimental group, compared to only 1.74 for the control group" (Boss, 1994, p. 189). The hypothesis was supported by the results of this study.

A second study that supports a positive correlation between moral reasoning and service- learning was performed by Margaret Gorman (1994). Seventy undergraduate students from Boston College participated in the study. Gorman randomly divided up the students in two of her ethics classes. The experimental group took the class and in addition participated in a community service activity. The control group had no service-learning component. The instrument used in the study was the DIT. The results indicated that "students who engaged in community service work showed a significant increase in moral reasoning on the Rest Defining Issues Test while the comparison group did not" (Gorman & Duffy, 1994, p. 430).

Fenzel and Leary (1997) performed a study very similar to the two mentioned above. They performed two studies at a parochial college to address participation in service-learning and moral development. The first analysis compared 28 students who were enrolled in a service-learning course with 28 students in a course without a service-learning component. The instruments used in the study were interviews, course evaluations, the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS), and the DIT test. In the second study, 134 students from seven service-learning classes completed questionnaires that measured their service

experience and whether service-learning aided in their learning. Fenzel and Leary did not find significant differences between the two groups in moral reasoning.

Results from these studies indicated that students in the service section did not show greater gains in attitudes toward personal responsibility or moral judgement (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 9). It is interesting to note that "service section students reported an attitude of compassion for the disenfranchised of society, a greater level of commitment to wanting to work in their communities to help solve social problems, and a stronger belief that they could make a difference in the lives of others" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997). The results of this body of research suggested that involvement in service-learning had an inconsistent impact on growth in moral development.

Research Questions

This study was based on the following three research questions:

1. How did the pre-service-learning moral developmental stages compare to the post-service-learning moral developmental stages?

2. What were the students' perceptions of their ethical and moral development after participating in a service-learning project?

3. What were the students' perceptions of what they learned from their service-learning experience?

Method

Participants and Service-Learning Project

The participants in the study were 10 college students (i.e., 1 freshman, 2 sophomores, 3 juniors, and 4 seniors) who were enrolled in an entry level Gerontology class. The reason this class was chosen was that a service-learning project was part of the curriculum and the

instructor had over twenty years of service-learning experience. This would be considered a convenience sample because the researcher knew the instructor quite well and was very familiar with the institution. In addition, the convenience sample was used to expedite collection of data. Each student was to spend up to 40 hours at a local nursing home and to keep a reflective log of his or her experiences on a weekly basis. These experiences would then be shared in small groups sessions every week in the Gerontology class. Patton (2002) states that as there are no rules dictating appropriate sample size within the context of a qualitative study, and that "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245).
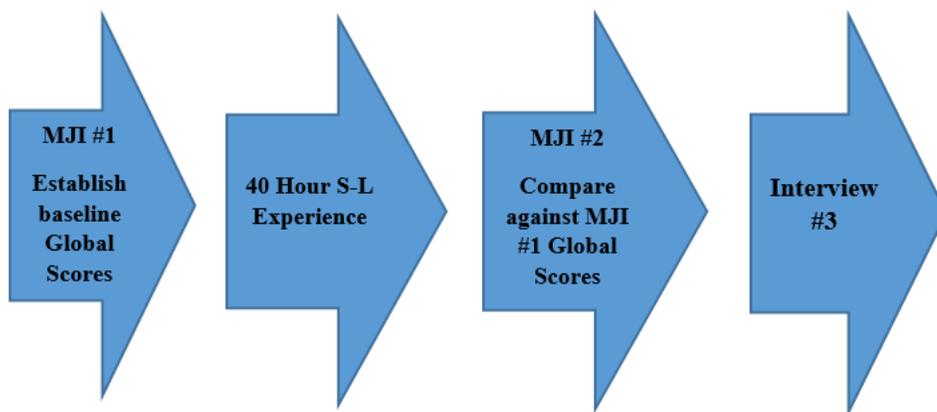
A collective case study approach was used for this research. More specifically, the study was an instrumental collective case study (Stake, 2005) with ten Gerontology students as cases. The unit of analyses was the student's perspectives of their ethical and moral development and what they learned after their service-learning experience. The parameters for bounding this collective case study were the institution and the timeframe. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested, "A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. In order to accomplish this, the researcher collects and integrates many forms of qualitative data" (p. 98). Besides interviews, the student's weekly journals and a copy of their final reflective papers were analyzed. Stake (2006) maintained,

> The benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than, say 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10. Two or three cases do not show enough of the interactivity between programs and their situations whereas 15 or 30 cases provide more uniqueness of interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand. (p. 22)

All of the students were interviewed using the Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) prior to beginning their 40-hour service-learning project. After their service hours were completed, all ten were interviewed a second time using the MJI once again. A week or two after the second MJI, each participant was interviewed a third time. See Figure 1 that outlines the interview sequence.

Figure 1

Interview Sequence

MJI #1
Establish baseline Global Scores

40 Hour S-L Experience

MJI #2
Compare against MJI #1 Global Scores

Interview #3

Moral Judgment Interview and Scoring

Each participant was interviewed using the Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) prior to (interview 1) and immediately after their service-learning experience (interview 2). The Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview consists of three forms, each composed of three hypothetical moral dilemmas (Heinz, Officer Brown, and Joe) and from 9 to 12 standard questions per dilemma. The Heinz dilemma is probably the most well-known. Heinz wife is dying from cancer and he does not have the money needed to pay for the drug that can cure her. Heinz breaks into the drug store and steals the drug. "Moral judgment interviews are structured around the judgments and justifications that are spontaneously generated by participants in response to moral dilemmas and a series of structured probe questions about

life, law, conscience, punishment, contracts and authority issues as they relate to these questions" (Dawson, 2002, p. 156).

Each MJI was scored using the Standard Issue Scoring System (SISS), and each participant was given a Global Score. The Global Score represents the current stage of moral development, or stage of reasoning (see Table 1) of each respondent. The study data, including the participant's responses to the interview questions were transcribed and coded for analysis.

It should be noted that the use of the Moral Judgment Interview for this research is somewhat unconventional. The standard use of the Moral Judgment Interview using a pretest, posttest scheme focuses primarily on the Global Stage Scores of the participants (Erickson, 1980; Gilligan & Murphy, 1979; Holstein, 1979; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969). In essence, the Global Stage score is a summation of the entire interview.

The procedure for using the MJI entails matching transcribed interview judgments (i.e., participant responses) with criterion judgments in Colby and Kohlberg's (1987b) scoring manual. Matched judgments are assigned stage scores that are then weighted and averaged to produce a global stage score on a 9-point scale (Stage 1/2, through Stage 5). The transcription and scoring for the MJI involves a lot of time on the part of the researcher. Even though the MJI is infrequently used today, Kohlberg's Standard Issue Scoring System (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987b), remains one of the best known stage-scoring systems (Dawson, 2002).

The 17-step procedure for scoring the Moral Judgment Interview is complex, rigorous, and outlined in a two-volume 1,200 page scoring manual (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987b). Using the scoring manual, the researcher matched each identified argument, or subject response, with a similar argument presented in one of a number of Criterion Judgments (CJ's). These

criterion judgments are intended to be structural in the sense that they reflect a particular sociomoral perspective or operational level. The six moral issues represent different conceptual categories and this system allows for the separate coding of moral norms and elements. Stage assignment is not dependent on which issue, element, or norm is used in an argument. Standard Issue Moral Judgment Scoring involves:

A)   Breaking down interview material into discrete interview judgments (steps 1-6)

B)   Matching these interview judgments with their conceptual counterparts, the criterion judgments, in the scoring manual according to strict rules (steps 7-14)

C)   Assigning stage scores at the issue and global levels on the basis of the interview judgment-criterion judgment matches (steps 14-17). (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, p. 158)

The final score is based on how well a respondent's argument matches exemplars on the same issue. In essence, scoring involves classifying the subject's responses by issue, norm, and element and finding matching criterion judgments in the Colby and Kohlberg scoring manual that specify their stage structure. Each interview judgment, or student response, was given a stage score.

It should be noted that the scores on the MJI, even though derived from interviews and text-based data, cannot be described as true qualitative research. Rather than seek to understand from the participants' points of view, the MJI attempts to assign codes to textual data and convert it into quantitative data. In this sense, the time based comparison of how the participants think about moral situations is really more quantitative than qualitative. Questionnaires and survey instruments, such as Likert scales, are designed to collect and

measure a participant's values, beliefs, and attitudes about selected subjects (Gable & Wolf, 1993). Saldana (2013) describes this as "magnitude coding":

> Magnitude coding consists of and adds a supplemental alphanumeric or symbolic code or sub code to an existing coded datum or category to indicate its intensity, frequency, direction, presence or evaluative content. Magnitude Codes can be qualitative, quantitative, and/or nominal indicators to enhance description. (p. 265)

Saldana further proposed:

> Magnitude coding is a method that applies numbers or other symbols to data and even to codes themselves that represent value on a scale such as: 3 = High, 2 = Medium, and 1 = Low. There are some methodological purists who object to combining qualitative data with quantitative measurement. But, I feel that as researchers we should keep ourselves open to numeric representation–when appropriate–as a supplemental heuristic to analysis. (p. 63)

The other interview data collected during the third interview are closer to classic qualitative data used to understand the world from the experiences of the participants.

A third interview was conducted shortly after the second MJI interview (see Figure 1). The protocol for this interview included questions that required the students to reflect on their service-learning experience in relation to what they learned and their moral growth. At the end of the third interview, each student provided the researcher with copies of their weekly reflective journals and their final reflective essay. A thematic analysis of both were conducted to help determine what the students learned and their perceptions of their moral development after their service-learning experiences.

Personal documents like journal entries "refer to any first-person narrative that describes an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007 p. 133). Such documents can tell the researcher about the inner meaning of everyday events, and give the researcher a snapshot into what the author thinks is important. Eyler and Giles (1999) asserted that "although the experience of service itself has an impact, reflection adds power to even the interpersonal dimensions of service" (p. 34).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for the first and second interview is explained in the previous section. The data from the information gathered at the end of the third interview were analyzed using the basic interpretive qualitative research approach. After all of the interviews were transcribed, each passage was coded and analyzed for similarities and differences. This research study followed Creswell's (2005) six steps during the data analysis process and, although these steps are described in linear order, Creswell described "an interactive practice" to analysis. That is, there is a recursive element to following these steps—the process is not simply a static, linear order of analysis.

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis (p. 185).

Step 2: Read through the data (p. 185). This step also aligns with Esterberg's (2002) directive to "get to know your data".

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with the coding process (p. 186).

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories for these for analysis. (p. 189).

Step 5: Advance how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189).

Step 6: Interpret the meaning of the data (p. 189).

Findings taken from this approach were developed through the inductive analysis of data to identify recurring themes that best represent the experiences and understandings of research participants.

Results

The following is an examination of the findings of this research project with excerpts from participant interviews that support each finding. The findings are reported in order of their relation to the research questions of this study.

Research Question One: Were post service-learning moral developmental stages higher than pre-service-learning moral developmental stages?

The results obtained after an analysis of the first and second MJI showed that all of the participants demonstrated an increase in their Global Stage Scores following their service-learning experience. The MJI attempts to elicit the stage of moral reasoning predominantly formulated by the individual in response to a series of open-ended probe questions presented at the end of each moral dilemma. These responses enabled the researcher to identify a single or combination of stages of moral reasoning used by the individual to explain the reasons why a particular action should be taken in resolving the moral dilemma. Eight of the participants' Global Scores began at Stage 2/3 and two began at Stage 3. Stage 2/3 indicates a Global Score between stages 2 and 3. Nine of the participants ended the study with a Global Score at Stage 3/4 demonstrating growth in moral reasoning of 1 stage. Global Stage Score growth of 1/2 to 1 was demonstrated for all participants in the study. A summary of these data can be found in Table 2.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development is based on the assumption that as individuals develop, "higher stages displace (or, rather integrate) the structures found at the lower stages" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, p. 7). Eight of the participants were using Stage 2 reasoning skills at the beginning of the study, but none of the participants used Stage 2 reasoning skills by the end of the study. The vast majority of the participants remained at Stage 3 reasoning throughout the study. Only one participant exercised Stage 4 reasoning during the first Moral Judgment Interview.

Table 2

Global Stage Score Growth from Moral Judgment Interview #1 Compared to Moral Judgment Interview #2 by Participant

Participant	Global Stage MJI #1	Global Stage MJI #2	Global Stage Increase
Amanda	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Evlyn	Stage 3	Stage 3/4	+.5
Lenae	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Mellisa	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Rosie	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Pati	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Abby	Stage 4	Stage 4	0
Kathy	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Hanah	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1
Terry	Stage 2/3	Stage 3/4	+1

Stage 4 moral reasoning increased dramatically by the end of the study for all of the participants. Stage 4 moral reasoning is characterized by an emphasis on law and order. Other features of this stage are an orientation and respect toward authority, upholding fixed rules, and maintenance of social order.

Research Question Two: What were the students' perceptions of their moral development as it relates to their service-learning experience?

The results from the third interview and the data obtained from the reflective journals and essays produced one theme related to question two. These analyses showed that most of the students indicated that they learned that developing relationships and taking on some measure of responsibility during their service-learning project had a profound impact on them.

The relationships that some of the participants developed were formed by simply talking to the residents and engaging in conversation. Other participants were put in a situation where they were required to work one-on-one with one of the residents. Rosie summarized her service-learning experience in regard to relationships during the third interview. She stated,

> If you're doing your service-learning just to get your hours in, it's defeating the purpose. The major purpose is to bring something back with you or how is it going to change you in a certain way. It's like if it's Bam, let's get this done and instead if you say hey when am I coming back next and you get passionate about it you start thinking about how this person's doing and what you're going to do with them the next time you visit. I've gone back to country manner once or twice and it wasn't part of my service-learning but I just wanted to see how the people that I got to know where doing and talk with them little bit. I know that at first I thought well, doing service-learning is going to get me out of writing this huge paper on the abstracts. But since then I've really come to enjoy my experience and like I said I went back and even visited some of the people that I built relationships with.

Examples of responsibility include the responsibility of performing simple tasks, responsibility to keep the residents informed, and the responsibility to bring a good attitude to

the service-site each and every visit. Many of the participants shared that they were responsible for minor tasks but they still considered them quite important. Amanda wrote in her final essay,

> At the nursing home I was responsible for making sure that no "Falling Stars" were left alone. Like you always had to make sure that they were in the proper position when you were pushing them, little things like that. I think it taught me to be more careful, and the littlest things could make a big difference. I think this experience forced me to act more responsibly.

Relationships and responsibility are related to students' senses of moral development and to development as defined by Kohlberg (1981). According to Kohlberg, at the third stage of morality, people think right is to be good to others. They learn to give respect and gratitude to others. "This stage takes the perspective of the individual in relationship to other individuals. A person at this stage is aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 410). By the end of their service hours, none of the participants took a stage two "what's in it for me?" position but instead focused on those that they were building relationships with.

Research Question Three: What did the students learn from their service-learning experience?

The results from the third interview and the data obtained from the reflective journals and essays produced three themes related to question three. These analyses showed that most of the students indicated that they learned personal efficacy, that they should do something for society, and improved learning of class content through their service-learning project. In this section, these discoveries will be broken down into the various components identified by participants as informing their perceptions. The emphasis throughout is on letting the participants speak for themselves in an attempt to capture the fullness and sophistication of

the service-learning experience. Fetterman (2008) referred to this as an emic account, one that represents the meanings and perspectives of the participants, not simply those of the researcher.

Personal Efficacy

Personal efficacy, for the purposes of this study, was defined by the students expressing a sense of personal effectiveness, empowerment, or making a difference. For some participants, their service-learning experience made them realize that giving a small amount of their time each week wasn't too difficult. Mellisa stated during her third interview that her service-learning experience made her realize that a few hours can really make a difference. She explained,

> I want to say that it makes me feel like a better person. You do feel a better sense of self-worth after you have volunteered because you feel like you have helped. I know that being a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and having the experience of being a CNA I know that so many of the residents don't have any family members coming in to visit at all and especially towards the holidays and so I know that being there, even if they can't remember you, especially when working with the Alzheimer's patients, even being there for a few hours really makes a difference.

Patti had a similar experience. In her essay, she stated that she came to realize the impact her time at the nursing home was having on the residents.

> I think maybe that has changed or maybe have a better understanding. I came to realize that maybe one of the main reasons I was there was to make a difference in someone's life even if it is only for a couple of hours. When you are there it is like time just flies and it is fun.

Doing Something for Society

Some seemed to have learned that they want to be active in the community, volunteering and doing something for society. Rosie stated that her service-learning experience made her realize not only that she needs to volunteer more, this experience had

made her feel like she was a member of the community. During her third interview she

commented,

> I think it is just like, I feel like I just need to help more with the elderly, like help people in the community in general. Even if like before I didn't think that it would make much of a difference, it wasn't a big deal. With this service-learning it really does, you really do help them out. They can't always get that one-one attention from that person. Sometimes that is all they need. Be more involved with the community, with the people, with what is going on, it has opened my eyes, broadened my perspective on everything around me. You can't just be here in the community. Help out a little bit, it doesn't take that much time, it is the least you can do**.**

Kathy also mentioned the positive benefits of giving back to society in her

essay. She explained,

> I felt that I really did do something for these people, these individuals and I guess I just   got such a positive outcome out of it that it made me feel better that I actually helped someone out and made their day better than what it might have been even if it was just a couple times a week. I think my service-learning has taught me to take other people's point of view into account instead of thinking only of yourself. Doing things for other people, not just a person that runs errands or passes out bingo cards. It makes you feel good to actually help other people. I think it makes you think about others and put them before yourself.

Improved Learning of Class Content

Some of the participants commented that they seemed to learn more from class by

virtue of performing service-learning. The activities they performed at the service site could

be related to what they were learning in class, and in essence, their experiences seemed to

have improved the learning of the content in the course. During the third interview, Amanda

connected some of what she learned in her Gerontology class to her service-learning

experience. She stated,

> Completing my service-learning project at Country Manor Campus left me with many experiences related to what we have learned in class. My experiences with the residents helped me to better understand the issues that they face, and to understand that they all have a different story to tell about their aging experience. At the end of my service- learning experience, it was

clear to me that all of the residents just wanted to be understood and cared about.

Linda talked about the difference between learning in the traditional classroom setting and service-learning during her third interview. She maintained,

> I guess it is definitely different because you are actually put in a situation where you can see what is going on. We learned a lot of this stuff in class, how elders are treated. Just being able to see it has created a lot of empathy, with community. It was nice to see people working together for one purpose and that is to take care of these elderly people.

The second finding of this research is that the participants experienced increased personal efficacy, they learned that they should do something for society, and that performing service-learning enhanced their learning of class content. Examples of increased personal efficacy are that some participants realized that giving a small amount of their time each week wasn't too difficult, they felt that being at their service site made a difference in the lives of the people they worked with, they felt connected to the greater community, and the experience had a positive effect on their lives. Examples of doing more for society are that some participants realized how good they felt knowing that they are helping others and the benefits of putting others before oneself. Examples of improved learning of class content are that some had a better understanding of the issues the residents faced and they were able to relate their experiences at their service site to what they were studying in class.

Discussion

Stage 5 Moral Reasoning Skills

One of the results of the current study was that very few participants attained Stage 5 moral reasoning skills. Democratic government is theoretically based on Stage 5 reasoning. An explanation for lack of Stage 5 scores is supported by moral development research using the MJI and the SISS is that moral development continues into adulthood (Armon & Dawson,

1997; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a; Nucci & Pascarella, 1987). Two independently conducted longitudinal studies, Kohlberg's original 20-year study of approximately 60 males (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a), and Armon's 12-year lifespan study of 43 respondents, ranging in age from 5 to 86 (Armon & Dawson, 1997), provided convincing evidence for "adult" moral reasoning stages. Similar adult forms of reasoning have been found by King and Kitchener (1994). These studies provided evidence that the highest measured stage of moral reasoning was Stage 4. Stage 5 levels are normally found in the performances of individuals with at least some graduate work (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a; Kohlberg & Higgins, 1984).

Proto Internship

Many of the participants treated their service-learning experience as a proto internship that enhanced their career development process. The progression of the career development process through service-learning is supported in prior research (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 1999; Driscoll et al., 1996; Fenzel & Leary, 1997; Greene & Diehm, 1995; Keen & Keen, 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Astin et al., (2000) suggested,

> Service participation appears to have its strongest effect on the student's decision to pursue a career in a service field. This effect occurs regardless of whether the student's freshman career choice is in a service field, a non-service field, or undecided. (p. iii)

Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) affirmed by arguing that service-learning appears to impact career outcomes in two different ways. First, it affects students' career choices indirectly by providing an opportunity to participate in generic community service. It impacts career outcomes directly by facilitating students to solidify their decision to pursue a career in the service field.

Many of the participants thought of their service-learning experience as something more or "deeper" than volunteering. The perception of being more than just a volunteer could be attributed to a class discussion in the participant's gerontology class or a speech that all the students were given by their instructor about how their service-learning is something more than volunteering.

There is considerable research on the distinction between volunteer work and service-learning. Unfortunately, there is very little empirical research that compares volunteer work with service-learning. In fact, this researcher found only one study that compared outcomes between service-learning with volunteering. Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) performed a study that compared service-learning with volunteer community service. The results of this study confirmed that course-based service-learning offers certain benefits over standard volunteer opportunities.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this research project is that it was conducted with participants from one mid-sized college in Minnesota. The limited geographic nature of the college does not provide for an ethnically diverse sample. A more diverse sample may present different factors important to moral development in service-learning projects. Of the ten participants, only one identified themselves as something other than white. A larger and more diverse sample could have explored potentially interesting racial group differences. Another potential limitation is that the sample included a disproportionate number of females. Of the ten participants, only one was male. Eyler and Giles (1999) stated that women often times outnumber men in participating in service-learning programs. They go on to assert, "for many outcomes, being female was a significant predictor of positive changes over the course of the

semester of service over and above the impact of program characteristics" (p. 180). Gilligan (1977) devised dilemmas, different from the ones used in this research study, to account for gender. Jacoby (1996) states,

> In her own research using the Heinz dilemma, Gilligan found that young girls often focused on issues concerning the relationship between Heinz and his wife. Gilligan proposes that girls employ a different voice, another context of moral reasoning, one of care and responsibility that contrast with Kohlberg's. (p. 66)

The Standard Issue Scoring System used in this study does not account for gender differences.

Eyler and Giles (1997) posited that the quality of the service-learning experience is dependent upon both the service experience duration and reflection experience intensity. Forty hours of service may have been insufficient for the theorized changes in moral development to occur, yet the changes did occur. This study represents a snap-shot of one semester which for most was their first experience in a service-learning project. Eyler and Giles suggested that "lack of findings in the service-learning literature may be due to relatively short and low intensity experiences that have been studied, and suggested that a service-learning experience must endure at least one year to have a significant impact" (p. 68). However, the Boss (1994), and Gorman, Duffy, and Hefferman (1994) studies did confirm an impact in less than a year.

Another limitation to the study is that the quality of the community service and classroom experiences is not measured. Eyler and Giles' (1999) research suggest, "the quality of the service-learning makes a difference" (p. 187). Quality elements would include integrated learning, reflection, collaboration between school and service site, and civic responsibility. Mabry (1998) and Zlotkowski (1996) suggested that further research should

focus on the specifics of the service experience. For example, how do factors such as training, type of experience, and length of experience affect student development?

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Interviewing students from different types of institutions (community colleges, private, small or large 4-year) would be beneficial for future research on this topic. This may enable a more diverse sample size which may influence research findings as well. This may allow future researchers to acquire a wide range of student perspectives that may affect the relationship between service-learning and moral development not represented in the current research project. One advantage to this study was that everyone had roughly the same service-learning experiences and the same instructor. If the participants all had different placements and instructors, it would be much more difficult to draw firm conclusions.

This research found that the student's perception of what they learned from their service-learning experience was self-efficacy, enhanced career skills, and the belief that their service-learning experience was something more or "deeper" than mere volunteering. Enhanced self-efficacy and career skills is well documented, as is the distinction between service-learning and volunteering. Future research may benefit by analyzing experiential differences between students who volunteered versus those that performed service-learning. This research found that the student's perception of their moral development was enhanced as a result of the relationships that were developed and the responsibilities that were given to them during their service-learning experience. The importance of relationships in service-learning is well documented. Additional research should be done to further explore how the role responsibilities contribute to moral development through service-learning.

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