

## **Resistance versus Transformation: Exploring the Transformative Potential of High-Impact Service-Learning Experiences**

Lisa Jakubowski  
Brescia University College

Martin McIntosh  
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

Guided by the Social Change Paradigm of Service (Morton, 1995), this case study focuses on the service-learning experience emerging out of the partnership between the Community Development Program at Brescia University College and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) in London, Ontario, Canada. Critical to the experience is a relationship based on trust and mutual learning between the professor and community partner. Service-learning is conceptualized as a transformational learning model that has as its foundation, Cranton's (2002) facets of transformative learning. Particularly important to this model are activating events. When an activating event occurs that does not fit with a student's expectation of how things should be, two outcomes are possible: resistance or transformation. When combined with personal reflection and dialogue, the sharing of lived experience by a person connected to RHAC has been a powerful activator for moving students from being resistant towards personal transformation.

**Keywords:** transformative learning, service-learning, community, partners, students, collaboration, social change.

Over a decade ago, one of the authors published a case study about the opportunities, challenges and lessons learned during the pilot phase of a community development program at a small liberal arts university college. For the purposes of clarification, we understand community development to be a process that is designed to promote collaboration in decision-making so that individuals can, in meaningful ways, influence decisions that affect their lives (Jakubowski & Burman, 2004, p. 160). This very student-centered case study focused on our first experience using service-learning as a pedagogical approach. Service-learning has been identified by the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) as a "high-impact practice" due to its positive association with student learning and retention. According to NSSE (2015), high-impact practices share a series of common characteristics, including the following: they are very labor intensive; they cultivate learning that occurs outside the classroom; they foster meaningful interaction among faculty and students; they encourage collaboration with diverse communities; and they call for providing frequent and substantive feedback to students. Service-learning we define as: "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve specific learning outcomes" (Jacoby, 2015, pp. 1-2).

According to Morton (1995), there are three distinct paradigms of service: charity, project development and social change.

Charity reflects "a giving of the self, expecting nothing in return and with no expectation that any lasting impact will be made" (p. 20). At the other end of the spectrum, social change or "transformation" models typically focus on process: "building relationships among or within stakeholder groups, and creating a learning environment that continually peels away the layers of the onions we call 'root causes' ... action emerges over time out of the relationships or most current understanding of root causes" (p. 22). In our work, we are continually striving towards the social change paradigm of service.

Much has been written on the student benefits of service-learning, including: personal growth and development; enhanced interpersonal skills; and improved academic performance from a more complete understanding of course content to better critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills (Jacoby, 2015, pp. 11-12). Quality service-learning programs may effectively meet these student outcomes, but, when these things become the exclusive or even primary focus, the power of service-learning to "effect broad-based changes in both the students and the communities in which they serve" (Wade, 2016, p. 1) is limited. Beyond the more conventional aforementioned outcomes, we strive towards a social change model of service-learning that is best evaluated by "the depth and integrity of relationships among people who come together for the purpose of bringing about positive change" (Morton, 1995, p. 22).

Significantly less research has been done on the community benefits of service-learning, but the research that has been done suggests that communities receive: “new energy and assistance to broaden delivery of existing services or begin new ones; fresh approaches to problem solving; enhanced capacity to conduct and use research; access to institutional resources; and opportunities to participate in the teaching and learning process” (Jacoby, 2015, p. 12). Of particular relevance here is the community's interest in participating in the teaching and learning process. In Jakubowski's ongoing work with the community, partners have noted that one of the most gratifying outcomes of authentic service-learning partnerships is being part of a pedagogical process where students can be transformed into engaged, active citizens.

We are particularly interested in how service-learning equips students with the ability to adapt and apply their skills and knowledge towards positive social change in diverse contexts. Additionally, we consider what elements must be included within the service-learning experience to increase the possibility that it might be transformative. With this in mind, this paper explores, within the context of a high-impact service-learning experience, how students' initial resistance to a new and controversial experience has the potential to be personally transformative. The specific case study focuses on the service-learning experience emerging out of the partnership between the Community Development Program at Brescia University College, a small liberal arts university college, and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC), a community-based AIDS service organization. Both are in London, Ontario, Canada. We wish to note that the data presented within is not based on systematic research. The community partner perspective, including the experience of collaboration, comes from Martin McIntosh, a long-time staff member of RHAC, who has worked side-by-side with co-author Lisa Jakubowski over a six-year period to fine-tune this particular experience. Furthermore, the excerpts are drawn from the narratives of former students who have remained connected to the community agency, and to the authors, following the completion of the course. While limited in scope, and not generalizable beyond this case study, the included excerpts exemplify themes in responses that may be useful to professors and community

partners engaged in critical service-learning work.

Service-learning is conceptualized as a transformational learning model. Our work is informed by Cranton's (2002, 2006) approach to teaching for transformation, which is based on Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theory of transformative learning. Cranton's (2002) facets of transformative learning are at the heart of our conceptual framework. Connected to the service experiences are activating events. When an activating event occurs that does not fit with a student's expectation of how things should be, two outcomes are possible: resistance or transformation. Calling into question one's assumptions about what is true can serve as an effective trigger for some level of transformation. Stepping outside of one's comfort zone through an activating event, combined with critical reflection and dialogue, can mitigate resistance, prompt a revision of assumptions, and foster action among students. Finally, we highlight how the sharing of lived experience, as well as trust and a commitment to ongoing learning between professor and community partner, has been critical to creating a meaningful experience for all involved.

#### **Setting the Context: The Brescia-RHAC Partnership**

The partnership between Brescia and RHAC began almost a decade ago. RHAC articulates its mission as follows: “We are community inspired and dedicated to positively impacting the lives of individuals and diverse communities living with, at-risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C” (RHAC, 2016). Brescia approached RHAC and asked if the agency would be interested in hosting a group of 10 community development students for a 3-hour service-learning experience. In return for providing a community-based learning opportunity for students, the students would provide three hours of service to the agency. The service experience was determined by RHAC, related to its mission to serve those who, as a result of injection drug use, are at high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. Largely because of our collective lack of experience with collaborating on high-impact, short-term service-learning experiences, our relationship, in the beginning, was very “transactional”—that is, exchange-based and utilitarian (Bushouse, 2005, p. 33; Enos & Morton, 2003). It was not until much later in our partnership that we committed to creating an experience that had the potential to be personally transformative for students.

This experience was one of 12 being created for students. By way of an introduction to Community Development, students in this one semester course participate in three, 3-hour team-based experiences over the course of the semester. The course has a maximum class size of 40, translating into four 10-person teams. The week before going out for their first community experience, the entire class engaged in “knowing yourself” critically reflective activities designed to uncover, articulate and better understand the origin of their assumptions, biases and stereotypes. Here students reflected on: the concept of culture shock and their experiences of it; and how personal biography and history shape one’s observations of and participation in community. Students also worked on strategies for managing those assumptions, biases and stereotypes while interacting with diverse, marginalized groups within the community. Overall, this process involved participation in classroom activities like the “Privilege Walk” (Schmitz, 2012, pp. 169-173), and the Implicit Association Test (Project Implicit, 2011), which were supplemented with in-class written reflection and dialoguing with a partner, followed by a plenary group discussion. The group then brainstormed strategies for creating a more effective, open community experience and had the opportunity to participate in activities connected to cultivating these strategies (e.g., Hogan, 2013, pp. 65-86). Finally, each group of students was given an information sheet about the community organization that they would be visiting, with details outlining the service they would be doing while in the community. Students going to RHAC were advised that they would be learning about harm reduction and assembling safe injection kits. Debriefing and critical reflection about the RHAC experience and each of the 11 other experiences would happen in class the week following each experience.

When the time came for debriefing and reflection on the first RHAC experience, it was clear something had gone very wrong. While the students had a safe and engaging experience, it was obvious that emotionally, they were struggling to come to terms with their service for the agency. Unlike other community agencies with which students were more familiar, this community-based AIDS service organization caused a great deal of culture shock, nervousness and in

some cases, fear and resistance to service associated with harm reduction. Several students honestly reported that even by walking into the building, they were concerned with perception—for example, would someone see them and presume that they were people who were living with HIV or had AIDS? How would they feel about, and react to the staff and/or clients they might meet? But, the greatest challenge of all was the service: assembling safe injection kits that would be distributed to people who use drugs intravenously. Students noted that they left the agency feeling that they had just spent three hours on a task that enabled and legitimized drug use. Their understanding of right and wrong, and their sense of morality had been challenged to the point that students felt extremely uncomfortable at RHAC. Although the staff members were extremely kind and professional, the degree of discomfort led to students recommending that the class be sent to an alternative organization, or at the very least, have the option of doing a different kind of service.

The severity of reaction to this particular experience caused Lisa Jakubowski (the course director), in consultation with staff members at RHAC, to remove RHAC from the experience list for one year. During the year off, we made a commitment to each other to meet and plan how to more effectively offer this important learning experience to students, and how to meet this individual resistance head on. From RHAC’s perspective, one of the key insights coming out of the year off period of discussions and planning was that while the principles and practices of harm reduction are foundational to carrying out the agency mission of reducing the risk of HIV infection, these principles are not commonly addressed nor well understood in the broader community. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health defines harm reduction as: “Any program or policy designed to reduce drug-related harm without requiring the cessation of drug use. Interventions may be targeted at the individual, the family, community or society” (RHAC, 2016). For community workers at RHAC, an important element of harm reduction is the need to meet clients where they are. As we reflected on our first attempt at offering an experience to students at RHAC, we realized we could have done a better job of meeting students where they were.

This obvious, yet incredibly significant realization during our deliberations made us

realize that we had to better prepare students for the experience by being more intentional with our activating events. “An activating event typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard or read” (Cranton, 2002, p. 2). As Cranton (2002) observes, it is much easier to stick with our already-existing assumptions, or “habits of the mind” than to change them. Furthermore, it takes something quite significant or dramatic to cause us to question our assumptions.

Given past student reactions, a collaborative decision was made to introduce a second classroom experience to better prepare students for the actual service experience in the community. We conceptualize both of these experiences as “activators.” Cranton (2002) notes that rather than being one single event, activation might be “an incremental process in which we gradually change bits of how we see things, not even realizing a transformation has taken place until afterwards” (p. 2). For Brescia’s Community Development Program and RHAC, the classroom visit thus becomes an incremental step towards the primary activation event—the 3-hour community experience. These activators become foundational to teaching for transformation.

#### **Service-Learning as a Transformational Learning Model**

Increasingly, being a service-learning community partner is garnering interest because of its transformative potential. This interest is connected to an emerging body of literature that advocates for a critical view of service-learning with an explicit goal of social justice (Jacoby, 2015, p. 9). A socially-just society may be defined as: “one in which all members have their basic needs met. In addition, . . . in a just society, all individuals are physically and psychologically safe and secure, able to develop to their full capacities and capable of interacting democratically with others” (Wade, 2016, p. 2). Critical service-learning programs encourage students to see themselves as change-agents, and to use service experiences to address and respond to injustice in communities (Mitchell, 2008, p. 51). Such programs strive “to develop in students an ethos of civic and social responsibility—an understanding of the engaged role individuals must play if communities and democracies are to flourish” (Zlotkowski, 2007, p. 43).

Discussing social justice issues can be challenging and controversial. Furthermore, activities geared towards social justice often focus on long-term change, rather than immediate, observable benefits. Yet, students who offer service to others in their communities, while simultaneously critically reflecting on that service, are in an ideal position to examine the historical context of the problems they are addressing and to consider what initiatives might be necessary, beyond direct service, to lessen the problems that they are witnessing first hand (Wade, 2016, p. 1).

Consistent with a critical approach, we conceptualize service-learning as a transformational learning model where emphasis is placed on how “people make meaning of their experiences and in particular how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the way people make sense of ill-structured problems, critical incidents and/or ambiguous life events” (Kiely, 2005, p. 6). Emphasizing the concept of resistance, Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) also highlight how service-learning has transformational possibilities. They note that when service-learning experiences take students outside of their comfort zones and expose them to the “underside” of service-learning, previously held assumptions, stereotypes and privileges are uncovered, and “student resistance often ensues as the service-learning experience makes claims on students . . . which they are not prepared to process” (p. 4).

While the idea of student resistance to an experience can have negative connotations, Jones et al. (2005) question whether it might be positively re-conceptualized. Specifically, service-learning experiences can cause students to question their identities because often while serving, all that they know is called into question as they experience “alternative ways of knowing and being” (Hayes & Cuban, 1997, p. 75). Thus, by situating students outside of their comfort zones in this way, service-learning experiences provide the potential both for critical analysis and “experimentation, creativity and possibility” (Giroux, 1992, p. 34).

Before considering how resistance to an individual experience or idea can contribute to personal transformation, it is helpful to first consider what elements must be included within the service-learning experience to increase its transformative

potential. According to Cranton's (2006) approach to teaching for transformation:

When something unexpected happens, when a person encounters something that does not fit in with his or her expectations of how things should be, based on past experience, the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs. (p. 19)

Transformative learning theory has constructivist assumptions; that is, people construct their own understanding of the world through their experiences. "Our experiences are filtered through our meaning perspectives or habits of mind, which include uncritically assimilated ways of knowing, believing and feeling. They include distortions, prejudices, stereotypes and simply unquestioned or unexplained beliefs" (Cranton, 2006, p. 23). The potential for learning occurs when one is faced with alternative perspectives that call into question one's meaning perspectives. If this alternative perspective causes one to revise a meaning perspective or habit of mind, learning becomes transformative (Cranton, 2006). Dialogue and critical reflection are fundamental elements of the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003).

What then is the nexus between transformative learning and service-learning, which is the pedagogical foundation for the Community Development Program here discussed? Community development students, through service-learning—that is, experience, critical reflection, dialogue with and mentoring by community partners—often come to recognize that they have had a limited and/or distorted view of their social worlds. Some resist changing their perspectives. Others seek to change that worldview and to translate changed viewpoints into action. Thus, the type of transformation that can occur is two-fold: (a) at the cognitive level (changes in "habits of mind"); and (b) at the level of personal engagement. In the context of service-learning experiences, what facets of transformative learning will lessen resistance and cultivate individual transformation?

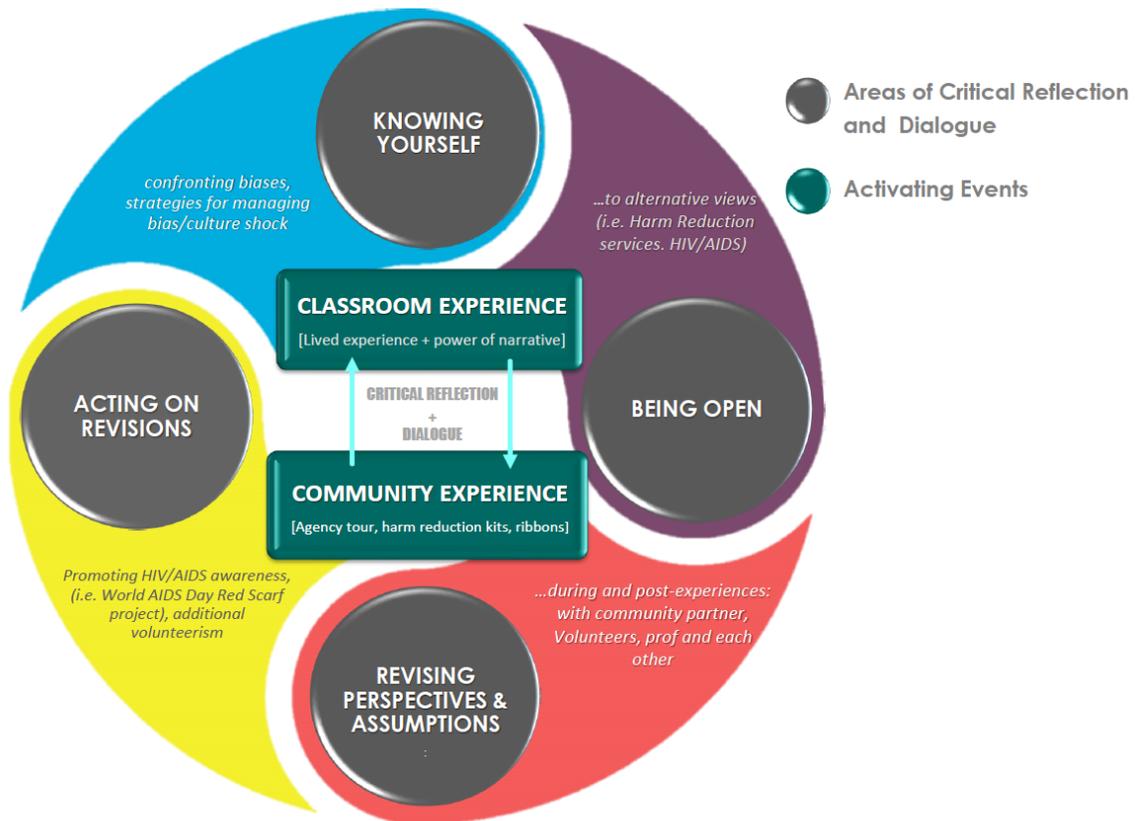
### **Facets of Transformative Learning**

Facets of transformative learning are designed to be a rough guide to facilitate the creation of learning environments which promote transformation. According to Cranton (2002), the following facets of learning foster transformation:

- An "activating" event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard or read.
- Articulating assumptions: recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious.
- Critical self-reflection: questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them and why they are important.
- Being open to alternative points of view.
- Engaging in dialogue.
- Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and justified.
- Acting on revisions; that is, behaving, talking and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives. (pp. 2-3)

In addition to these facets, learning environments, in both classroom and community, are dependent upon a commitment by both the university (represented here by Brescia's Community Development Program, its faculty members and students) and a nonprofit agency (in this case, RHAC), to cultivate and sustain authentic partnerships.

**Figure 1: The Brescia-RHAC Partnership: Our Process**



In Figure 1, we have conceptualized a transformative learning model that has as its foundation Cranton's (2002) facets of transformative learning. The organization of these facets is designed to illustrate that a process moving towards transformation is ongoing and fluid. In this collaboration, the community partner becomes a teacher in the classroom and community (activating events). Our students are at the heart of the transformative process of knowing yourself, being open, revising perspectives and assumptions, and acting on revisions. Finally, the professor is facilitating the process of critical reflection and dialogue throughout the experiences. Here we draw inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire, who was a strong advocate of critical pedagogy. According to Freire (1970/1989), education, through a constant unveiling of reality, invites students to develop a critical awareness of their social worlds. It promotes both consciousness-raising and societal intervention. While everyone has a role to play in this educational process, we suggest that the teacher, the community partner and

the students become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow (Freire, 1970/1989, p. 67). The relationship is more balanced and everyone at different times, both teaches and learns. This idea corresponds with the following Freirian (1998) principle:

Although teachers and students are not the same, the person in charge of education is being formed and reformed as s/he teaches, and the person who is being taught forms her/himself in this process....Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning. (pp. 30-31)

Let us now turn to a more concrete application of this model, beginning with the classroom experience.

### **Key Elements Underpinning Effective Classroom Experiences in the Brescia-RHAC Partnership**

#### **Meeting Students Where They Are**

Earlier in this paper, we described the process by which students come to better “know themselves” prior to participating in any community experience. Yet in relation to this particular community experience, our efforts to prepare students to step outside of their comfort zones were simply not enough. We needed to meet students “where they are” and incorporate an incremental activation event into the classroom. The earliest classroom activation event featured a community relations staff member delivering a standardized overview of RHAC’s programs, services and the guiding principles of harm reduction. From the agency perspective, this additional activation event—that is, coming to the classroom and offering a formal presentation, and facilitated conversation, allowed staff to effectively meet students where they are, in very much the same way RHAC’s staff work with harm reduction clients.

By starting “where they are,” the introduction of the RHAC classroom activation event has significantly contributed to students’ coming to “know themselves.” Knowing yourself is at the heart of transformation and is guided by critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection may be defined as “undergoing self-examination and conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions” (Cranton, 2006, p. 95). Critical reflection moves beyond the self by “critically questioning the values, assumptions, and perspectives presented in the world” (Cranton, 2006, p. 94). By having the RHAC staff come into the classroom learning environment and discuss their work and the guiding principles of harm reduction, we have managed to create a safe space for students to confront their personally identified biases and begin to explore strategies for managing them prior to visiting the agency. By allowing time for questions and discussion during the classroom visits and also additional time for further dialogue and critical reflection following the visit, individual resistance can be addressed head on as students become open to alternative views. This incremental step sets the stage for reduced culture shock as students are introduced to the harm reduction equipment that they will be

assembling during the community-based activation event.

#### **Towards Greater Exposure to Lived Experience and the Accompanying Power of Personal Narrative**

The first iteration of the classroom activation event was definitely a step in the right direction. However, in subsequent years, different approaches to the in-classroom experience were actively explored. An alternative approach involved having members of the Client Services Harm Reduction team come in to the classroom to deliver a more harm reduction-focused agency overview (bringing their front-line experience and humanizing narratives of the clients they serve with them). The most recent approach to the classroom activation event has proven highly effective in reducing resistance to the community experience. This involves having someone with lived experience share his/her personal narrative in direct relation to RHAC’s mission and services. The sharing of experiences by individuals who self-identify as having “lived experience” has historically played a central role in social change (Costa et al., 2012) and in empowering the individual who is sharing his/her personal narrative. Specifically, with respect to HIV/AIDS, Jesse Hooper (2014) notes: “There is no stronger way of delivering a message or getting a point across than through a story...through sharing the lived experience of living with HIV, we are ultimately taking HIV out of the closet and humanizing it. I believe that the more we humanize HIV, the less stigma and discrimination we will face” (para. 3). In our context, the agency’s Community Relations Coordinator, Martin McIntosh, has fulfilled this role—that is, shared his story of lived experience with the class, for the last five years.

Through feedback from students, it was found that having Martin McIntosh share his own personal narrative about going through active addiction while using drugs and living with HIV has proven highly valuable. Consider the following reflection by former community development student, Victoria:

While attending school at Brescia, I was quickly introduced to the idea of community service-learning while enrolled in Lisa Jakubowski’s class. In this class we would learn about different social problems within society and then were able to gain a hands-on experience at a local agency. While at these agencies it

allowed us to gain a better understanding of how social service agencies work and the many challenges they face. One of the agencies I was introduced to during this class was RHAC. When discussing HIV and AIDS there are so many negative stereotypes and assumptions that society had brought forth that people believe unless they know otherwise. I, for a fact, can say that I too believed these stereotypes until I was educated on it through Lisa, Martin and other workers at RHAC.

I remember the day that Martin came into my class as if it was yesterday. He arrived with a huge smile on his face and talked with such confidence as though he had done this presentation a million times, when in reality it was his first time. It is safe to say that Martin inspired every single individual in that classroom that day since there was not a single person not in tears throughout the presentation. He explained the difficulties he had faced in both the past and the present, and how he plans to help individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the future. Through this presentation, Martin gave the individuals in the class motivation to want to learn more about HIV/AIDS and led us to believe that each of us had the ability to help create change.

In many ways, Martin represented the “happening of something unexpected” as being integral to increasing the transformative potential of service-learning (Cranton, 2006, p. 19). Specifically, Martin does not in any way fit the students’ stereotype of a person who went through active addiction, or who is living with HIV. The critical reflection and dialogue that immediately follow Martin’s classroom visits speak directly to the transformative power of his personal narrative in leading students to both question their expectations of what a person who is HIV-positive and a recovering drug addict should be; and begin to revise their perspectives and previously held assumptions. Thus, the classroom visit and sharing of a personal narrative has become a critical incremental step leading up to the primary activating event, in this case, the 3-hour community experience.

### **Key Elements Underpinning Effective Community Experiences in the Brescia-RHAC Partnership**

In the history of the Brescia-RHAC partnership, it has become increasingly clear that there are several key elements that contribute to a high-impact, potentially transformative community experience: having the same staff person lead both the classroom and community experiences; having a walking tour and orientation to the agency upon arrival; keeping students meaningfully exposed to lived experience throughout their time at RHAC; and finally, offering an alternative service experience as a means for mitigating resistance.

Having the consistency of a dedicated staff member as a lead for both the classroom and community experiences is seen as beneficial to ensuring a strong bridge between the two activating events. Familiarity from the classroom visit can help to reduce culture shock and ground students as they continue in their transformational learning experience through ongoing reflection, the revising of perspectives and assumptions, and the movement towards some form of action on the basis of their revised assumptions.

Students are greeted at the service entrance used by all clients and taken on a walking tour to orient them to RHAC, with a focus on the harm reduction exchange where clients access service. A best practice highlight is having staff in each department briefly speak to the key elements of the services and programs they provide as students are taken through the agency, again with a focus on the importance of harm reduction and meeting clients where they are, with both dignity and respect.

Students are no longer left alone after being briefed on their assigned service for the day, in this case the assembling of safe injection kits. Instead, they are engaged throughout the experience by agency staff, peer clients and their professor. This integration of staff and peer volunteers with lived experience allows, through open dialogue while working, for ongoing revision of perspectives and assumptions to occur. Former Community Development student, Amy, reflects on her community service-learning experience at RHAC:

While I was unsure of what to expect when entering RHAC, I was struck by the kindness and compassion the employees and volunteers showed for each and every individual that entered the

building. As we toured the facilities, the staff explained what I believe to be an extremely important aspect of the work they do: providing clean needle kits and support for drug users is not going to be the reason they continue to use. However, it may lessen the negative long-term effects of drug use and be an important step towards recovery. Having engaged in the experience with an open mind but a notable lack of knowledge on the topic, I felt as though I gained a new perspective on the issue. I was then able to address the issue with fellow students, family, and friends with a stronger understanding of the issue as well as a more compassionate view of the “less-popular viewpoint.” With this knowledge, I was able to reconsider my position on related situations and it allowed me to better understand the course material that we had discussed around bias and the importance of educational growth. The staff at RHAC noted that the clients' visit to RHAC may be the only smile that these individuals get through the entire day. RHAC is an invaluable resource for them, regardless of [one's] personal opinion on the goals of the organization.

The ongoing dialogue among students, RHAC staff or peers, and the professor also serves as a very effective meter for observing and addressing individual and or collective resistance that may emerge as result of exposure to any facet of the community experience.

We learned through the ongoing dialogue with students at each experience how very important it is to honor the notion of starting “where students are.” Towards this end, we offered an alternative service activity option to those students who saw value in much of the work RHAC does, but experienced significant levels of resistance to being exposed to harm reduction equipment. This has proven necessary for a handful of students, and when adopted, has created a safe outlet through which they can confront and manage their prior assumptions while doing service that is once removed from harm reduction, but equally valued by the agency. This alternative service involves helping RHAC with preparations for World AIDS Day, specifically the Red Scarf Campaign, which is a project designed to

promote HIV/AIDS awareness in local communities (<http://hivaidconnection.ca/event/red-scarf>). Students assist by preparing and attaching information packages to hand-knit red scarves that will be displayed and distributed throughout the city on World AIDS Day. This alternative service is typically perceived to be less personally threatening and allows for a more meaningful dialogue about individual resistance to occur between RHAC staff and the student.

### **The “Bigger Picture” Benefits of the Brescia-RHAC Partnership: Looking Beyond the Transactional**

From the agency perspective, involvement with Brescia's Community Development students extends far beyond simply meeting the practical and immediate needs in the capacity to deliver harm reduction equipment to their injection drug user client base. Specifically, this partnership has led to: the meaningful engagement of people with lived experience; increased personal transformation among students; and adopting this service-learning approach with other community partners.

As a community-inspired AIDS service organization, RHAC is committed to actively and meaningfully engaging people living with HIV/AIDS in delivering their service mission. By engaging people with lived experience in this unique service-learning opportunity (both in the classroom and during community experiences) they not only build critical self-esteem, helping to redistribute problematic power dynamics, but they also achieve a strong affirmation of their skill sets and abilities to positively impact social and political systems. In reading some of the reflections that were reported by students, such as Victoria's excerpt presented earlier, it was clear to Martin McIntosh that sharing his personal story had a significant impact in changing perceptions that subsequently led towards positive change.

Throughout the entire service-learning experience, students not only revise their perspectives and assumptions, but for some, there is a measured change in engagement whereby they act on these revisions. These actions have included committing to additional on-site agency volunteering, actively promoting HIV/AIDS awareness in the community (for example, the Annual Red Scarf Distribution Drive for World AIDS Day), and/or actively challenging commonly held misconceptions and stereotypes regularly experienced by those living with

HIV or who use drugs. Further reflection from Victoria, former Community Development student and Co-President of Brescia's Social Focus Club, is a case in point. After participating in Martin's classroom and community experience, Victoria was inspired to do more. The year after taking this course, Victoria took on an extra-curricular project with RHAC:

Martin gave the individuals in the class motivation to want to learn more about HIV/AIDS and led us to believe that each of us had the ability to help create change. This motivation inspired me to want to create a partnership between Brescia's Social Focus Club and RHAC. Brescia's Social Focus Club is for Sociology, Family Studies and Community Development students to come together to have an inside look at social problems within their community. Each year the Social Focus Club partners with an agency to help spread awareness, educate and fundraise for this local agency. [My co-president] and myself decided that the Brescia community needed to be educated more on the topic of HIV/AIDS and felt that the team at RHAC were just the ones to do it. Throughout the year long partnership, we participated in a Harm Reduction Talk, a Raffle with the proceeds going to RHAC and our most successful event, the Red Scarf Project. Within two and a half hours, we distributed over 150 scarfs across our campus, each scarf with information about HIV/AIDS and RHAC. Partnering with RHAC was not only a success for the Social Focus Club as a whole but has impacted the lives of the many students who worked alongside them. The lessons that I have learned from the staff at RHAC are ones that a textbook could never teach me and the relationships I have made with the staff are ones that will last a lifetime.

The approach to this particular community experience that emerged out of the ongoing collaboration between Brescia and RHAC, has been adapted and is increasingly utilized within RHAC in answering calls from community groups, and corporate partners seeking to come into the agency and do group service activities. RHAC is now at a place where it actively

promotes lived experience and the power of personal narrative as part of group service experiences with the aim of delivering transformational learning instead of transactional volunteering.

#### **On Developing Authentic Partnerships: The Agency Perspective**

The commitment to developing and sustaining an authentic partnership has served to deepen RHAC's commitment and passion to the ongoing relationship with Brescia's Community Development Program. Over time, the staff at the agency have observed a wonderful shift in perception among students. A decade ago, RHAC was asked to take a year off. Today, agency staff are told that the RHAC experience is now the coveted, high-demand experience among Brescia's Community Development students. Thus, RHAC has chosen to host three groups of students, as opposed to one, in the upcoming year. This is a true testament to the importance of authenticity in building an effective service-learning partnership.

Throughout the duration of the partnership, it has been highly rewarding to have an ongoing voice in the changing direction of the service-learning pedagogical approach employed by the faculty associated with the Community Development Program. The team at RHAC has been highly impressed by Brescia's commitment to teaching for transformation, and to a collaborative process that allows for power sharing between an institute of higher education and a community organization. For example, RHAC's Community Relations Staff have been co-authors with Brescia's CD Program in challenging the process for creating and executing short term, high-impact service-learning experiences. There has been continual review of successes, and open-minded learning from the experiences that did not work well or as intended. A considerable amount of trust has been placed in RHAC staff at critical points in the relationship as they developed and tried different approaches to meet the objectives of the course. Honesty and trust is foundational to the Brescia-RHAC relationship and process. The sharing of frank and candid feedback has been essential to building this partnership to where it is today.

#### **Conclusion**

My experience at RHAC went beyond learning about harm reduction or the components of safe injection kits. It was also a transformative experience because I was able to

witness the importance of treating individuals with respect and kindness and giving them the opportunity to reduce harm associated with drug use. I left RHAC that day recognizing the importance of helping individuals where they are and not judging them because of it. – Sarah, former Community Development student

This paper has explored, within the context of a controversial, high-impact service-learning experience, the transformative potential of resistance. The specific case study focuses on the service-learning experience emerging out of the partnership between Brescia University College's Community Development Program and the community-based organization, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. Our case study highlights a distinct paradigm of service—social change. The social change paradigm of service emphasizes relationship-building, long-term, sustainable change and is designed to illuminate and challenge the "root causes" of social inequality and injustice. In becoming partners in service-learning, one of the most gratifying outcomes for the community is having a role in the process where students can be transformed into engaged, active citizens. It is the transformative potential of service-learning that is of particular interest to those working for social justice every day in their non-profit agencies.

With this in mind we have here considered what elements must be included in the service-learning experience to increase the probability that it might be transformative. Relying heavily on Patricia Cranton's work, we noted that transformation can occur when, through an activating event, something unexpected happens. More specifically, when an event occurs that does not fit with a student's expectation of how things should be, two outcomes are possible: (a) resistance to an experience—that is, a student might reject the unexpected; or (b) personal transformation. An activating event that calls into question one's assumptions about what is true serves as an effective trigger for transformation. By stepping outside of one's comfort zone in this way and engaging in critical self-reflection and dialogue during and after the activating event, resistance can be mitigated, assumptions can be revised and one can experience a desire to act on those revised assumptions.

In the context of the Brescia-RHAC partnership, "activation" is an incremental process, starting "where students are." It begins with a classroom experience and the sharing of a personal narrative. This initial step towards activation reduces the degree of culture shock and resistance students might experience during the actual community experience at RHAC. While we recognize the process towards personal transformation is ongoing and fluid, we remain committed to creating service-learning experiences that maximize its possibility. These are experiences that: are grounded in authentic campus-community partnerships; begin "where students are;" incorporate a personal narrative that connects lived experience to the work of the agency; and ultimately immerses students in a powerful, organic community experience which includes ongoing reflection and dialogue.

#### Author Note

The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. We also wish to express our appreciation to Victoria Devet, Amy Dvorkin, and Sarah Pol. Thank you for your invaluable participation in this project, and for sharing your stories with us. Your enthusiasm for civic engagement is an inspiration to us both.

#### References

- Bushouse, B. (2005). Community non-profit organizations and service-learning: Resource constraints to building partnerships with universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning, 12*(1), 32-40.
- Costa, L., Voronka, J., Landry, D., Reid, J., Mcfarlane, B., Reville, D., & Church, K. (2012). Recovering our stories: A small act of resistance. *Studies in Social Justice, 6*(1), 85-101.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA.: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Cranton, P. (2002). Teaching for transformation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 93*, 63-71.
- Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby and Associates (Eds.), *Building partnerships for service-*

- learning (pp. 20-41). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Freire, P. (1989). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published in 1970)
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy and civil courage*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hayes, E., & Cuban, S. (1997). Border pedagogy: A critical framework for service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 4, 72-80.
- Hogan, M. (2013). *Four skills of cultural diversity competence: A process for understanding and practice*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Hooper, J. (2014, September 29). Sharing a story. *Queensland Positive People, Latest News*. Retrieved from <https://www.qpp.org.au/latestTha/sharing-story>
- Jacoby, B. (2015). *Service-learning essentials: Questions, answers, and lessons learned*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jakubowski, L., & Burman, P. (2004). Teaching community development: A case study in community-based learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 32, 160-176.
- Jones, S., Gilbride-Brown, J., & Gasiorski, A. (2005). Getting inside the "underside" of service-learning: Student resistance and possibilities. In D. Butin (Ed.), *Service-learning in higher education* (pp. 3-24). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kiely, R. (2005). A transformative model for service-learning: A longitudinal case study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 12, 5-22.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformational dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformational theory. In J. Mezirow and Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58-63.
- Mitchell, T. (2008). Traditional vs. critical service-learning: Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* 14(2), 50-65.
- Morton, K. (1995). The irony of service: Charity, project and social change in service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* 2(1), 19-32.
- National Survey on Student Engagement (2015). Engagement indicators and high impact practices [Measurements of student engagement]. Retrieved from [http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/EIs\\_and\\_HIPs\\_2015.pdf](http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/EIs_and_HIPs_2015.pdf)
- Project Implicit. (2011). The implicit association test. Unpublished instrument. Retrieved from <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
- Schmitz, P. (2012). *Everyone leads: Building leadership from the community up*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wade, R. (2016). "... And justice for all": *Community service-learning for social justice* (Issue Paper). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from the Augustana College Faculty Newsletter: <http://www.augustana.net/Documents/facultynewsletter/Service%20Learning%20for%20Social%20Justice.pdf>
- Zlotkowski, E. (2007). The case for service learning. In L. McIlrath and I. Mac Labhrainn (Eds.), *Higher education and civic engagement: International perspectives* (pp. 37-52). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.