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Reflections on Community Macro Practice

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Beginning to See the Big Picture: BSW Student Reflections on Community Macro Practice

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This article describes an undergraduate social work macro practice course that included a service-learning project in which BSW students canvassed for a grassroots, community-based agency to increase voter participation in a low-income, disfranchised community. An analysis of students’ reflections prior to and during the course and project illustrates how this experience cultivated students’ perspectives about macro practice. Embedding a service-learning project into a macro practice course demystified this level of practice for students, increased their understanding of the relationship between the community and their social work practice, and motivated their interest in macro practice. Recommendations for social work education and further research are provided.

Keywords: social work education, macro practice, service learning, voter registration

Social workers are required to challenge macro societal inequities in their practice (Anderson, 2006; Hamilton & Fauri, 2001; Sherraden, Slosar, & Sherraden, 2002). For this reason, the future of social work is inextricably bound with macro practice, requiring that practitioners possess the ability to bring about planned change in organizations, communities, and policy (Netting, 2008;
Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 2004). Key competencies and skills for macro practice are contingent on a student’s engagement and flexibility in learning, the ability to foster relationships and to lead and manage projects, to apply critical thinking, to effectively articulate and follow through on goals, and on a commitment to social justice (Regehr, Bogo, Donovan, Anstice, & Lim, 2012).

To foster the relevant practice behaviors for developing competency in this area, social work students must have opportunities to successfully engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate macrolevel interventions (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). However, Kaufman, Segal-Engelchin, and Huss (2012) have found that some students’ perceived competence to engage in macro practice work declined while they were in their educational programs—possibly as a result of their increased understanding of the practice challenges and difficulties associated with this kind of work. In response, the authors speculate that courses in which students gain the concrete knowledge and skills required for this type of work may militate against this decline. However, opportunities for social work students to substantively practice macrolevel skills (e.g., policy advocacy) may be limited in academic settings (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001; Sherraden et al., 2002). Further, students may be intimidated by macro practice and/or do not perceive it to be within the scope of their practice as future practitioners (Anderson, 2006; Flynn, 1997; Hoefer, 1999; Manalo, 2004). For these reasons, social work education must seek ways to nurture students’ interest in macro practice (Deal, Hopkins, Fisher, & Hartin, 2007). This article describes a bachelor-level social work (BSW) macro practice course with an embedded service-learning project. Further, the article assesses the impacts this experience had on students’ perceptions about macro practice.
Review of the Literature

Seifer and Connors (2007) describe 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” (p. 4). It is a pedagogical strategy in which students learn course concepts through participatory community engagement. Through their engagement, students are provided with the opportunity to gain new perspectives, knowledge, and skills while contributing to community needs. A key component of a service-learning experience is the opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences. For this reason, it is critical for educators to create opportunities for students to reflect on their service in ways that may deepen their consideration of and engagement in civic life. Essentially, service learning can offer the opportunity for students to concretely apply and reflect on content they learn in the classroom while benefitting the communities in which they provide service. College students, for instance, have worked with community members to conduct participatory needs assessments to assess and reduce health disparities (Jacquez & Ghantous, 2013) and have conducted research with health providers and low-literacy individuals to promote better health-care access (Crooks & Bernstein, 2014). Service learning has demonstrated, among other benefits, increased rates of volunteerism among college graduates (Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker, & Wells, 2008) and has deepened graduates’ understanding of the structural versus individual causes of poverty (Seide, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2011). In each instance students had the opportunity to gain new knowledge, attitudes, and/or skills while promoting the well-being of the community.

Service learning is viewed favorably by social work educators (Madden, Davis, & Cronley, 2014). Gerstenblatt and Gilbert (2014) maintain that service learning is highly complementary of the values and mission of the profession and of social work education, and
Scott (2008) has asserted that social work students’ efficacy to influence social change has been strengthened as a result of their participation in social justice-oriented service-learning projects. More generally, social work students have had opportunities, for example, to engage in interdisciplinary practice (Nsonwu, Gruber, & Charest, 2010), gain enhanced knowledge and skills for conducting community-based research (Kapp, 2006), and participate in projects benefitting older adults (Conway & Jones, 2012; Singleton, 2009). Relevant to macro practice for social work, Byers and Gray (2012) found that students’ macro practice knowledge and skills were fostered when they were provided with opportunities that highlighted how community engagement can achieve social change. Their students experienced a transformation in terms of their appreciation for macro practice and their perceptions about the strengths of the communities in which they provided service—so much so that several continued to work with these communities after completion of the initial service-learning project.

Stoecker and Beckman (2009) argued that while student learning is a key outcome of any service-learning project, it is critical that community engagement be deliberate and constructive to enhance community benefits. They have advocated that service learning should prioritize the needs of the community—as defined by the community. This requires that faculty build relationships with community partners prior to students entering into their service-learning experience. Further, students’ service learning may overlap with only part of a larger process. Though not a prohibitive issue, the authors have noted that this is an important challenge for faculty members and students to consider when engaging in this type of service learning.

This study describes a partnership with a community-based advocacy group, the service-learning project that emerged from this partnership, and students’ reflections about their participation in the project while enrolled in an undergraduate social work macro practice course.
The authors found that the experience demystified macro practice for students, increased their understanding of the relationship between the community and their social work practice; and, for many, motivated their interest in this level of practice.

**Establishing the Service-Learning Project for a Macro-Practice Course**

At the time of this study, senior BSW students at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) were required to take a one-semester macro-practice course that gave them the opportunity to analyze community concerns and learn about the strategies and tactics that could be used to address these concerns. Students often came to this course with limited knowledge, experience, or interest in macro practice. Furthermore, they often lived, worked, or were in internships in Long Beach but lacked knowledge about the social, economic, and political dynamics of access and power in the community. Though they may have expressed a depth of understanding of their own sphere of reference proximate to their homes and internships, students frequently demonstrated limited knowledge of the macro context of the city where they lived and served. Therefore, the lead author (hereinafter referred to as the author) sought an educational experience that would provide students the opportunity not only to witness the links between micro- and macro practice but also to gain a broader understanding of their city’s macroenvironment. Thus, the author sought a local community-based organization that would be willing to offer a service-learning project that would give students a meaningful chance to learn about their city and apply their developing macro practice knowledge and skills.
The Community Partner

In 2002 a group of concerned residents mobilized to address the shrinking stock of appropriate and affordable housing in Long Beach. Incorporated in 2011, the group was established as an advocacy organization committed to improving, preserving, and expanding affordable and appropriate housing in the city. The organization trained local city residents as leaders in their own communities and was dedicated to grassroots organizing, policy work, and system change to support the needs of an economically diverse community.

At the time of this research, Long Beach was the seventh largest city in the state, with an estimated population of 462,257. The city was one of the most diverse communities in the nation, with a population that was 40.8% Latino, 46.1% White, 13.5% African-American, 12.9% Asian-American, 5.3% bi- or multiracial, and 1.1% native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Although Long Beach was home to a beautiful coastline, beaches, and communities of wealth, in 2010 the percentage of people living in poverty was higher in the city (18.8%) than in California (13.2%), and Latino and African American families were more likely to live in poverty. Furthermore, 30% of youths (18–25 years old) were living in poverty, the highest rate in the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In addition, 25% of Long Beach residents were working poor, with full-time workers earning less than $25,000.

Focused on this income disparity, the organization successfully campaigned in 2012 to pass a citywide initiative to promote a living wage. In the process, the group recognized that voter registration was essential to building power and influence on key issues in traditionally underrepresented neighborhoods in the city. Although Long Beach was ethnically diverse, voting practices were skewed, leaving the decision-making process of the city largely in the districts that were highly represented by the White population (Long Beach Community Database, 2015).
White community members represented 30% of the population, but were 59% of registered voters. In contrast, Latino community members were 41% of the population, but were 22% of registered voters. Further, roughly 50% of city residents were registered to vote, but only 33% of residents actually voted in the November 2012 election, with the highest voting rates in the wealthiest, primarily White neighborhoods (City of Long Beach, 2012). In Long Beach the turnout for local city council and mayoral elections was as low as 13% (California Free Public Records Directory, 2012). In this context, and through their outreach in the community, the group found that the majority of voters they contacted preferred to vote by mail (VBM)—particularly those who were likely to be working long hours and unable to get to the polls. In response, the advocacy group designed a campaign to encourage residents to VBM.

Establishing the Community Partnership

The author contacted the group prior to the beginning of the semester to determine whether a BSW cohort-wide service-learning project could be developed. Given the constraints of the university schedule, the project needed to be time-limited to ensure some level of completion by the end of the semester. In other words, the project needed a clear beginning, middle, and end. Fundamental to the success of the experience, the project needed to be mutually beneficial to the students, the organization, and the constituents of the advocacy group. It was determined that student engagement in the advocacy group’s ongoing voter registration campaign would accomplish these objectives. The following section describes the method by which the authors explored the benefits of students’ engagement in this project.
Method

This study explored BSW students’ reflections on their participation in a macro practice course that included a service-learning component. All participants were senior-year BSW students (N=44) in either of two sections of Generalist Social Work Practice With Communities at CSULB. For the purposes of the study, convenience sampling was used. The following research questions drove the inquiry:

1. How does participation in a macro practice course with a service-learning project affect social work students’ perceptions of macro practice?
2. How does participation in a macro practice course with a service-learning project affect social work students’ interest and motivation to engage in macro practice?
3. How does participation in a macro practice course with a service-learning project affect social work students’ understanding of the relationship between the community and their social work practice?

Course Activities

At the start of the semester, students were introduced to the course and learned about the service-learning opportunity. Key to the project and to the partnership with the advocacy group, staff members from the organization attended several classes to introduce themselves and the project to students and to train them in preparation for the service project. In addition, the course provided students with experiences and assignments that facilitated reflection and self-awareness in preparation for, during, and following the service-learning experience. From the advocacy group, students learned about the population of Long Beach, the assets and strengths of various communities in the city, residents’ voting patterns, and the local political climate. They also
learned about income inequality, the inequitable distribution of political power, and disparate access to resources in the city including affordable housing. Further, advocacy group staff members taught students the canvassing “rap” or standard discussion points that outlined the details of the voter registration campaign. Students role-played in the classroom in English (and in Spanish if they were bilingual), familiarizing themselves with the rap and information that could be used to respond to questions from community members. Through this process, students began to develop skills for engaging and building rapport with community members in door-to-door interactions.

After the introduction of the course, students were asked to write about their hopes and fears regarding macro practice and the canvassing activities. This allowed students to articulate and address their concerns about participating in community practice in a possibly unfamiliar environment as well as discuss their perspectives on macro practice in general.

During the following weeks students responded to two online reflection discussion questions linking video content, course readings, and their perceptions of the social problems related to accessible housing. First, students participated in a “Stance as Macro Social Worker” online discussion activity (from Brueggemann, 2013) that asked them to assess which, if any, aspects of macro social work practice best met their likes and strengths. Second, students provided online reflections on videos of local residents who had experienced living in substandard housing and participated in the advocacy group’s organizing activities.

During the semester course content was purposefully framed to connect students’ interest in direct (micro) practice to larger community issues while simultaneously providing them with a greater understanding of the link between structural inequalities and individual responsibility.
Also, students were introduced to foundational macro course concepts and content covering group and community social work.

On canvassing days groups of two or three students were assigned areas and sent to canvass in targeted areas for about 2 hours each day, for 2 canvassing days. They knocked on doors of identified community members in assigned areas, presented information from the rap about the impact of voting and the VBM option, offered residents the opportunity to register to VBM on the spot, and provided information about the campaign. This time-limited, hands-on experience was structured to not only provide benefit to the community, but also to afford social work students the unique opportunity to connect their classroom learning to grassroots community practice.

After each of the canvassing days students completed reflection papers that assessed the development of their knowledge, skills, and perceptions about community practice. The reflection papers required students to link their developing knowledge of macro practice with course reading and content and to reflect on their experiences working in the community. On the last day of class students wrote reflections and discussed what they had learned about themselves personally and professionally, the city, and macro practice during the semester. This culminating activity allowed students to explore how their perceptions regarding macro practice and of the local community changed during the semester. Students also reflected on how they perceived their current and future roles in macro practice and whether their perceptions were affected by the course and the service-learning opportunity.

*Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*
Data Analysis

Students’ reflections in each phase of the service-learning project were essential to understanding how their involvement in this process affected their perceptions as well as their interest and motivation to engage in macro-level work as future social work practitioners. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers believed that this approach was the best fit for this research. As Charmaz (2000) has noted, this type of analysis “tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. The story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed” (p. 509). The six sets of student writing activities/reflections were analyzed in this study: the hopes/fears discussion content, two preservice learning on-line reflections, two postservice reflection papers after each canvassing day, and a culminating reflection activity.

The researchers first immersed themselves in the data, looking for similarities and patterns for themes. The data were coded, organized into categories, and labeled. Data that were conceptually different were given a new label. When all the data were coded and organized, links between the themes, causal conditions, and outcomes were identified (Charmaz, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researchers used the techniques of bracketing (epoche) and peer review to mitigate researcher bias and enhance the trustworthiness of this study. The researchers met regularly to discuss their interpretations of the data. They independently reviewed all of the data looking for major themes and patterns, and then met as a group to compare notes and discuss the core category and emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work
Findings

Students who participated in this study began the class with varied motivations to engage in macro practice; however, most had limited experience. These results showed that the combination of their participation in the service-learning project, the course readings and content, and the opportunity to reflect affected their perception of course concepts and practical application of skills. Three centralizing themes emerged from the data: the impact of practical application on (a) perception of macro practice, (b) perception of professional and personal student growth, and (c) perception of the city and community.

Perception of Macro Practice

Students found meaning in the impact of macro practice and made links between the knowledge and skills they had in micro and mezzo practice with macro applications. Many students expressed hesitation about macro social work at the beginning of the semester due to limited experience and knowledge. Students saw macro practice as an amorphous world of social work they could not easily define, or they reduced macro practice, as one student observed, to simply “understanding research and policy.” After participating in the class and canvassing, students expressed an expanded understanding of tangible skills and tactics. One student spoke specifically about how the addition of the service-learning experience to course work enriched her learning. She said, “Being in the field allowed me to notice and think more deeply about some of the concepts discussed in class such as structural social problems, disempowerment, empowerment, and social capital.” Other students had similar observations. As one student stated, “It made me realize that macro practice is not all about research and policy, which helps my understanding in that there is more to it which makes it more interesting for me personally.”

Students were able to link their own practice interests once they had a clear
understanding of how they could integrate the skills they knew with the skills they were learning:

Throughout this course I was exposed to macro level social work, and have learned that macro social work can also include clinical practice. It has opened my eyes and interest in a different field I had not yet considered. I have learned that trying something new, though scary, can leave one with valuable experience from which one learns new intervention skills.

All students expressed a desire to advocate for marginalized people, but most equated their understanding of advocacy with individual work in clinical practice prior to the course. They often understood that policy work was involved in macro practice; however, participation in the class and canvassing activities allowed students to find practical application for advocacy at the macro level. One student discussed his greater understanding of how to facilitate change to address social inequalities:

The canvass is an example of macro-practice because the source of creating change is by empowering the community members. In order to address the societal issues of the imbalance of power and having an impact in the decision making process the community members need to be educated about methods to create change. In this case it is to register to vote by mail.

Many students mirrored this sentiment of wanting to advocate for social change. Although some students expressed frustration that social change takes long-term time commitments, they understood that sustainable change was a worthwhile commitment. As one student said, “No matter the reason, this experience has helped me become a more effective community advocate by teaching me to never giving up [sic] and always try to make progress.”
Perceptions of Professional and Personal Student Growth

Involvement in the service-learning project during the senior year of their social work program helped the participants grow professionally and personally. When initially asked about their stance as a macro social worker, many students felt that they did not understand what macro practice was, felt large social problems were too expansive to tackle, or simply had no experience in community practice. For some students, learning and participating in this course and service-learning opportunity expanded their knowledge but affirmed for them that social work with individuals was still their preference. For many students, the experience of learning macro concepts and linking those concepts to action helped them better understand how they were already inadvertently participating in macro-level social work practice as part of their internships.

Some students’ interest in macro practice was piqued, but they felt strongly that a path in community social work would not suit them. Several students reflected that they needed more exploration of macro practice before they would continue further involvement in this area. Several students described their interest in community practice as low because, as many said, “I have not had enough experience/exposure in this area.” One student spoke specifically about how the direct connection to clients was still most valuable to her, stating, “Mainly, my exposure to macro practice at my current internship made me realize that I do not want a career in developing policies. I enjoy working with people directly.”

As the last quote suggested, many BSW students had a strong desire to have direct connection with clients. Though the canvassing opportunities with the advocacy group allowed students to meet with individuals directly, some students felt frustrated about not knowing the long-term impacts of their work. They wanted to have longer-term relationships and to better
understand the outcomes for community members. However, several students who had interests in micro practice felt that, later in their careers, they would have a strong interest in administrative social work to ensure larger impacts in communities.

Many students felt motivated and empowered by their canvassing experiences. Several students initially expressed hesitation to engage in community work because they felt shy or unsure that anyone would listen to them. The experiences with this service-learning project allowed these students to demonstrate micro and macro skills and have interactions with community members that made them feel more capable. At the beginning of the class, students were asked what limited their interest in macro social work practice. One student discussed her hesitation to use her voice. She said, “My interest in macro social work in community is limited because of my shyness. It is difficult to take initiative in large groups because I am afraid of other’s negative reaction to my opinions.”

However, after the canvassing days, students reflected that they had increased confidence and a willingness and ability to talk with community members. Students used the opportunities to offer information about voting and also to expand their skills in engagement and rapport building. As one student observed, “I left this canvass feeling accomplished because I tried my best to give the information to as many people that were home and willing to hear my information.”

Many students expressed initial hesitation and reservations about the project. In some cases students’ initial perspectives about macro practice in general and strategies used by the advocacy group specifically inhibited their willingness to participate. Students expressed doubt that community members would be interested in thinking about exploring voting habits. As one student said, “I did not go into this project willing to make a change because I did not see how
this will help make a difference.” However, after the canvassing experience the student stated that participating in the project gave her a new perspective: “Not only did my attitude about the project change, but my knowledge expanded and my hope for change within the community strengthened.” Students recognized that participating in community activism could make an impact. For many students, participating in the project helped link their passions to engage in social justice, anti-oppression, and empowerment strategies:

I think that I have a strong interest in macro social work and working with communities to see the bigger picture and change social injustices. My motivation for this type of practice is helping to alleviate oppression of minorities and institutionally underprivileged communities.

This change in perception of macro practice, community action for social justice, and the students’ place in the process provided them with the opportunity to reframe not only their thoughts about macro practice in general but also their perceptions of work they had already been doing in their field placements. Completing activities, reading articles, and then linking specific tasks and intended outcomes to macro practice in general and to the advocacy group project helped students discover macro social work as a possible career path. This student discussed work she had enjoyed in her internship placement:

Until now, I did not realize that I was actually doing macro-social work [at her internship]. … I am excited to learn more about macro level social work and experience it even further as well because my knowledge of it is limited.

Perceptions of the City

Although, the students had been attending CSULB, they knew little about the city in which the
project occurred. Even though many students were BSW interns in local agencies and several students lived in Long Beach, all of them discussed learning about the area in ways they did not know it before. Students reiterated the concept of “tale of two cities”—a framework the advocacy group repeatedly used to problematize the imbalance of power between the wealthiest and most influential and the lowest-income and most disenfranchised neighborhoods. Students discussed seeing “the huge discrepancy and divide that exists” in Long Beach. They noticed the city was ethnically diverse, but “clearly divided into two socio economic groups.” As one student said, “The most important thing I learned about Long Beach is that there is so much inequality and the city is clearly divided in two sides.” Another student spoke about living in the city, but never noticing the stark differences until she was required to as a part of the course:

On my daily commute to school I am approximately ten minutes away from the west side area of Long Beach, but did not take it upon myself to explore that area. I was able to notice the difference between the neighborhoods on the first canvass to this new area. When seeing the percentage of how many people vote in Long Beach and seeing the percentage of the disparities within the districts of Long Beach, it is an eye opener.

Many of the students linked their increased knowledge of the city to opportunities to better serve the community as social workers once they graduated. As one student suggested, “It was also a great opportunity to become exposed to the community so if in the future I work in Long Beach, I will be aware of the macro aspect of possible issues my clients might be facing.” For students who did not envision themselves in the city, curiosity about other areas emerged. One student said, “It inspired me by not only wanting to change the housing situations in Long Beach, but it
also made me curious about my own community in [a nearby city] and see if the same issues were happening here.”

The students expressed that they were inspired to see that there were organizations dedicated to leveling the inequities they had observed:

Overall, [the agency] is continuing to empower [the] community to advocate for themselves and the people who are not able to as well. [The agency] envisions a healthier and more livable Long Beach and surely they will accomplish this by continuing to do the great work they do.

This analysis of students’ reflections about the course and their service-learning experience revealed the evolving perceptions of BSW students. Further, the research highlights the value of including a service-learning project in a BSW macro practice course.

**Discussion**

Students’ interest in macro practice needs to be fostered (Deal et al., 2007). However, as noted, social work students are often unsure or unclear about the relevance of macro practice to their future work (Anderson, 2006; Flynn, 1997; Hoefer, 1999; Manalo, 2004). Embedding a service-learning project in an undergraduate macro practice course provided an opportunity to address this uncertainty while fostering BSW students’ learning about macro practice and supporting an ongoing community empowerment project.

Consistent with Seifer and Connors’ (2007) conceptualization of the service-learning model, the project described here included opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences. Students’ commentary prior to, during, and following this experience revealed that their understanding about and appreciation for macro practice was positively impacted. They

*Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*
discovered the relevance and value of the work. Some students recognized that the work they were already doing in their field placements was, in fact, a form of macro practice. Other students appreciated the importance of macro practice social work; however, they became clearer in their focus on direct practice with individuals and families. Still others were inspired by their experience, discovering an interest in this type of work as their future social work practice.

Although levels of motivation and interest may have varied, students’ understanding and appreciation for macro practice grew as a result of this class. Further, regardless of their motivation and interest, these students contributed to the community by supporting a community effort to disseminate important information to disfranchised populations.

A secondary benefit of the project emerged from students’ discovery of their community. Although living and working in Long Beach may have situated them close to the neighborhoods they canvassed, the students’ proximity had not revealed the need in these communities until they took this course. This was an important lesson learned—not just about the students’ understanding regarding the tale of two cities in Long Beach, but also about their previously narrow field of vision regarding their environment. It is anticipated that the students will now be more likely to discover needs in the broader social environment and become better able to identify the organizations in the community that may or may not have been addressing these needs. Even for students who saw themselves as direct practice social workers, the experience in the project expanded their vision of the interrelationships between clients’ needs and the macroenvironment. Importantly for undergraduate social work education, students better appreciated the important role social workers can play in the community. In effect, they deepened and expanded their understanding of the relationship between micro and macro social work practice. These links are critical for BSW graduates if we expect them to effectively
address social inequities through their practice. We must prepare them with the confidence and competence to recognize and respond to emerging contexts that may shape their clients’ lives.

**Recommendations for Social Work Education**

Service-learning projects in BSW courses can provide students with educational experiences that help them connect class based learning to real world macro practice in the community. It is critical to recognize that undergraduate students may approach this experience with some trepidation. For this reason, it is important to provide students with the opportunity to individually and collectively express and reflect on their possible fears and hesitation about entering the community so they can acknowledge, normalize, and address their feelings. Creating both informal (e.g., class discussions) and formal (e.g., written reflections) opportunities for students to process their experiences during and after the project is also important, because their perspectives and insights may evolve through their involvement in the course and project.

In addition, this kind of learning experience requires the educator to thoughtfully scaffold the education and tools the community partner provides onto existing course content. For the project described here, the advocacy group’s focus on voter registration in underserved neighborhoods allowed the instructor to expand on and illustrate content on related community empowerment approaches already included in the course curriculum. For this reason, educators should approach service-learning projects with flexibility and a willingness to accommodate and expand on content introduced by the community partner.

Finally, there is value in partnering with a local organization working on a project in the community where social work students may live, work, and intern. As indicated, this experience for these BSW students was illuminating in many ways. But this proximity also allows a
community agency to more readily meet with and educate social work students about its work. Creating service-learning projects for BSW students potentially deepens the organization’s links to advocates in the professional social work community who intend to live and work in the same neighborhoods the agency serves.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The perceived and actual risks social work educators must face during service-learning projects need to be investigated. For example, which institutional factors may facilitate or inhibit this work? Further, although positive outcomes were demonstrated for the BSW students in this study, how they might use this learning in their post-graduation practice (i.e., to what extent are they engaging in macro practice?) should be investigated. There is also a need to explore the perspectives of community partners regarding the impact of students’ participation in projects (i.e., are the students’ contributions valued as enhancing the work of the partner?). Finally, an exploration of the long-term community benefits of ongoing service-learning projects is needed. In other words, are these partnerships meaningfully affecting the community issues they purport to address?

Even as they realize the complexity and intensity of this work, bachelor-level social work students can benefit from projects like these—particularly given their preconceived notions about the relevance or irrelevance of macro practice. Service-learning projects have the potential, at a minimum, to garner an appreciation for the work; but as found in this study, ideally, they can inspire BSW students to embrace the work. Perhaps most significantly, these projects provide social work programs with another means to empower the communities they serve.
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