

Formative reflections of university recreation science students in South Africa as catalyst for an adapted service-learning program

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Community-university partnerships through service-learning have progressively developed as part of institutions of higher education's mission statements. This paper explores the qualitative reflections of 410 undergraduate students enrolled in an academic recreation science course on a first time service-learning experience in South Africa. The study asks the question: 'how can pre-service and formative reflections used in a social constructive approach impact on collaborative, in-depth learning?' Students were tasked to keep reflective journals to express concerns as pre-service-learning and formative reflections over a four week, twenty hour service-learning experience. The service-learning program aligned with the social constructivism principles of collaborative learning, which occurred under the guidance and

supervision of a lecturer, was embedded in a realistic problem, required collaborative problem solving and collaboration with the community partner and involved self-direction and self-management of students. Both pre-service and formative reflection themes changed over the three year study period. Results suggested that the initial service-learning experience did not contribute to a positive attitude towards community engagement and did not contribute to skill development. Results of the study confirmed the value of reflection as a tool in service-learning and commensurate with the overall aim and purpose of service-learning in institutions of higher education.

Keywords: *higher education, recreation science, reflection, service-learning, social constructivism, South Africa.*

Introduction

Universities as institutions of higher education have a tripartite mission of teaching, learning and service. At different times in the history of higher education one or more of these three parts have dominated (Millican & Bourner, 2011). According to their teaching and learning mandates universities create and disseminate knowledge and related activities enhance the outcomes and effectiveness of higher education (Hussain, 2012). The contribution of the university to society of which they are a part of is increasingly emphasised through significant community engagement initiatives such as academic service-learning. Researchers (O'Brien, 2009, Millican & Bourner, 2011) have postulated that university-society engagement and partnerships offer considerable potential for enhancing student social responsibility in order to develop the student's sense of social awareness. Scholars (Hussain, 2012, Millican and Bourner, 2011, Peters, 2011) advocate for higher education that is not only subject-centred (academic teaching) but also society-centred (academic service-learning). Such a dimension in higher education curricula would add value in the sense of increasing students' awareness of context-specific societal challenges, provide opportunity to apply classroom learning, develop interpersonal and leadership skills, enhance understanding and appreciation of diversity, gain opportunity for greater self-knowledge and expand students' capacity for reflective learning.

Over the past decades researchers have presented scholarly evidence on the benefits of service-learning in a range of academic disciplines and contexts (Giles and Eyler, 1998, Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Roos, Temane, Davis, Prinsloo, Kritzinger, Naude & Wessels, 2005; Keselyak, Simmer-Beck, Bray & Gadbury-Amyot, 2007; Steinke & Fitch, 2007; McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge, 2008; Coetzee, Bloemhoff & Naude, 2011; Jacobson, Oravec, Falk & Osteen, 2011; Peters, 2011). Some of this research could be the result of the World Conference on Higher Education convened by UNESCO in 1998 to re-examine educational policies appropriate for the current millennium. From this conference declaration fifteen principles emerged to guide higher education including the use of knowledge to benefit society, the importance of student reflection and a concern for strengthening the identities and values of students (Millican & Bourner, 2011).

At the end of South Africa's turbulent history of apartheid in 1994, the emerging democracy also placed strong emphasis on the transformation of higher education (Maistry & Thakrar, 2012). The White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education introduced community engagement in its diverse forms on the transformation agenda (Department of Education, 1997). Community engagement was proposed as a process to institutionalise universities' commitment to social responsibility by engaging with national priorities and the challenges it proposed in their immediate socio-economic contexts. Against this background the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Community Engagement Conference (2006) refer to students as both agents and beneficiaries of community engagement. Classroom activities must educate and prepare students for engagement with the social challenges of their academic discipline (Maistry & Thakrar, 2012).

The ongoing scholarly debate involving conceptualising and formalising the relationship between the university and society through community engagement in a developing country like South Africa is acknowledged (Council on Higher Education, 2010, Kruss, 2012). According to the Council of Higher Education's Framework for Institutional Audits (Council on Higher Education, 2004) community engagement encompasses all initiatives and processes through which universities apply teaching and learning to address relevant issues in their social environment. Initiatives and processes range from informal,

unstructured volunteerism to formal and structured credit bearing academic service-learning programs to create a shared vision among the community and partners in society. Shared vision results in long-term collaborative programs of action that benefit all partners equitably that in turn contributes to the sustainability of holistic service-learning initiatives (Thomson, Smith-Tolken, Naidoo & Bringle, 2011, Maistry & Thakrar, 2012).

For purposes of this investigation the researchers accepted service-learning as a pedagogical approach and drew on the definitions of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2005) that define service-learning as a teaching strategy that integrates significant and thoughtfully organised community service in a specific academic discipline with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen partners equitably. According to this definition service-learning as a pedagogical approach reflects student learning and development through active participation, integration into an academic curriculum with structured time for reflection, subsequent opportunity to apply feedback in real-life situations and extension student learning beyond the formal classroom space and time (McClam et al., 2008).

Sport and recreation constitutes significant and real life elements of the ongoing South African transformation agenda (Department Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2011b) and we contend that it provides context and rationale for service-learning in the academic discipline of Recreation Science at a South African university. As a national government department, Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA), endorses national government priorities and recognises that the success in the implementation of the plan depends, amongst other, on the ability to build partnerships with institutions of higher learning as well as sport and recreation governance structures (Department Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2012). Partnerships with institutions of higher education are encouraged to harness the power of students while at the same time empowering them to contribute to the overarching goals of building an active and a winning nation through sport and recreation (Department Sport and Recreation, 2011a). Designing service-learning engagements around sport and recreation activities could increase students' social awareness and provide common ground to link academic content and social context.

Context and aim

Given the increased emphasis on service-learning as a pedagogical approach in higher education it became necessary for the Department of Sport and Leisure to determine and analyse pre-service and students' formative reflections on the value, and their experience of credit bearing service-learning as an integral part of their academic curriculum. Pre-service and formative assessment of students' perceptions of this pedagogical approach provided an opportunity for feedback to improve the structure and quality of service-learning practice and demonstrate the impact service-learning can have on student learning (Steinke & Fitch, 2007). The academic context for the present study was the second year recreation science curriculum as part of a three-year undergraduate degree in Human Movement Sciences at a South African research university. Human Movement Sciences prepares majors as sport and recreation specialists able to work in various sport and recreation settings with a wide range of clients. Specific goals of this recreation science curriculum focused on the benefits of physical activity as recreation throughout the human lifespan, appreciation of social diversity, identifying appropriate motor development and physical activities and the development of teaching and facilitating skills of students to institutionalise lifelong sport and recreation activities in communities. In order for service-learning to be meaningful students at the Department of Sport and Leisure are immersed into a community setting that presents them with experiences related to their academic curriculum (Peters, 2011). Aims of the service-learning activities were intentionally linked to those of the particular undergraduate recreation science curriculum and were structured and organised into three categories of basic movement skill development (pre-primary school learners), life skill development through physical activity (primary school learners) and leadership skill development through physical activity (secondary school learners). The service-learning program activities were credit-bearing and contributed to the final assessment mark in this particular academic course and were organised and delivered annually over 25 weeks with two weekly contact sessions in the community. The service-learning component took place in a real-life context of a lower socio-economic urban area in South Africa where residents of mixed race origin resided in high density apartments. For 95% of the students this service-learning component was their first

contact with a lower socio-economic, coloured community.

At the start of the study the need to adapt and transform the community engagement was expressed and the decision was made to introduce and utilise student's pre- and formative reflections as input in the development of the program. Even though community engagement has been proven to be beneficial in enhancing a students' learning experience, it did not seem to impact student learning in this program. Students questioned the need to participate in the program and lacked the motivation to get involved. The community engagement program was also strongly based on instructive learning, which did not contribute to the proposed outcome of collaborative learning. The need to change the community engagement program in order to make it relevant for student learning was the driving factor behind this study.

The study was planned over a three year period, with a reflection diary introduced in the first year. Students were tasked to personally reflect on their experience and, in conjunction with personal reflections, were asked to reflect, as a group, on the following questions: What went well, and why? What didn't go so well, and why? What could we have done differently, and how? In order to simplify the relationship between the university, the community and the students, one lecturer was identified to lead the program.

Conceptual framework

Due to the need to enable collaborative learning, the conceptual framework for the study drew on the theory of social constructivism and the principles of reflective practice in service-learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), the founder of social constructivism as a departure from the cognitive constructivism views of Piaget, all of the cognitive functions, for example learning, originates in collaborative, human social interactions and must therefore be explained as products of social interactions. New knowledge is not simply assimilated through cognitive memory or rote learning but also by being integrated into a community where the learner creates subjective meaning of their experiences through collaborative human interaction in communities. A collaborative learning environment is fundamental in social constructivism. Yuzhu, Yunxiang, Lili and Yingjie (2010) identified the four basic elements of this collaborative learning environment as

the teacher, learner, task and context. From a social constructivism approach all four elements are crucial to the learning process and each element interacts, supports and develops the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) refers to this collaborative and assisted learning environment as “scaffolding” where the learner progresses to the next level of cognitive understanding with the assistance of the other elements in the collaborative learning process.

The notions of social interaction and collaborative problem solving and learning are central to social constructivism as well as service-learning. In both concepts the success of students’ learning is embedded in engaging with realistic curriculum related problems. Hanson and Sinclair (2008) contend that students learn most effectively when this engagement occurs under the guidance of the lecturer or educator. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2000) in Hanson and Sinclair (2008) argue for a carefully designed collaborative learning environment that needs to be anchored in a realistic problem, collaborative group work, teamwork where each member is accountable to the group, dialogue and negotiation of shared understanding takes place. In such a learning environment students have to exercise self-management in articulating problems, decide on how to understand and solve collaborative problems, educators’ roles develop from scaffolding to coaching where they facilitate critical formative reflection on group interaction and the outcomes of the collaborative engagement are generalised beyond a specific problem.

When service-learning is approached through the lens of social constructivism the role of the educator does not diminish but gets elevated to the indispensable function of planner, co-ordinator and guide (Yuzhu et al. 2010). Students are no longer passive receivers of knowledge but actively collaborate in creating own knowledge and understanding through discovering their capabilities and critical thinking skills. Service-learning in a social constructivism context is anchored in real life contexts that present a pedagogical tool and a medium or stage for collaborative interaction. Students bring to this stage their own perceptions and diverse cognitive understanding of a specific content and context resulting in individual learning strategies to construct meaning. This implies that students’ perceptions of reality are often challenged and affective factors such as feelings of incompetence,

a sense of being overwhelmed, loss of security or feelings of achievement and bonding influence learning. For this reason guided formative reflections on the individual process of constructing meaning becomes a cornerstone of service-learning based on social constructivism.

Researchers (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, Keselyak et al., 2007, Jacobson et al., 2011, Gibson, Hauf, Long & Sampson, 2011, Molee, Henry, Sessa & McKinney-Prupis, 2010,) agree that structured reflection is fundamental to effective service-learning. Dewey's (1933) educational philosophy provides a foundation for and a link to the role of reflection in service-learning. Dewey argues that as service-learning extends beyond the space and time of the formal classroom, students inevitably experience contexts that challenge their personal beliefs, thoughts and assumptions. This discrepancy could result in doubt and confusion, conditions that Dewey views as necessary starting points for critical thinking and reflection. As students debate, reflect on, interpret and evaluate the relationship between the experience and the goals of the academic discipline the potential for multi-dimensional learning increases (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, Gibson et al., 2011).

As reflection provides a bridge between theory and meaningful experience (Dewey, 1933) it needs to be structured along the principles of continuous opportunities to reflect before, during and after the service-learning experience, be connected to academic course goals, challenge students to apply civil discourse, reasoned analysis and reflective judgement and allow contextual reflection (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). Written journals are widely used as a method to record reflections (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, Keselyak et al. 2007, McClam et al., 2008, Molee et al., 2010) and were also used in the present study. Written reflections meet the requirements as set by Eyler et al. (1996) as they provide students with continuous opportunity to describe and interpret their feelings and learning experiences for the duration of the service-learning experience. The focus of the reflective writings were guided by the goals of the academic course and the social context of the service-learning engagement and required students to engage in social discourse with the community partner.

Methodology

Investigators used qualitative methods to explore students' reflections on service-learning as a credit-bearing element of an undergraduate recreation science course with the secondary aim of considering the implications of their reflections on the organisational structure of the service-learning element and curriculum design. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the faculty ethics committee of the institution of higher education. The credit bearing service-learning element was structured to align with the social constructivism principles advocated by Bereiter and Scardamalia (2000) in Hanson and Sinclair (2008). Students organised themselves into groups and each group was assigned a 20 hour, four week block of service-learning. The service-learning experience occurred under the guidance and supervision of one lecturer and was embedded in a realistic problem (accessible lower socio-economic community), required collaborative problem solving and teamwork (students worked in groups in collaboration with community leaders) and involved self-management and self-direction (students designed session content themselves and assigned duties within the group). Scaffolding of the collaborative learning process took place, as the responsibility for problem solving gradually shifted from the lecturer to the students to construct learning where acquired knowledge could be generalised beyond the context of the lower socio-economic community. Four hundred and ten (N=410) students enrolled in a year-long recreation science course over a three year period, between 2012 and 2014, used written reflective diaries to record their subjective feelings and attitudes prior to their first exposure to service-learning as well as during the service-learning experience. Sixty three percent (63.2%) were female and 36.8% male. Students were also asked to supplement their written reflections with visual photos or videos. The researchers attended and observed all contact service-learning sessions over the period of three years, made notes, provided continuous feedback and awarded a grade that counted towards students' academic performance in the particular course. Prior to the academic service-learning experiences students were briefed on the expected conditions in their service-learning context, were introduced to the community partner, the duration and aim of the service-learning experience were explained and general logistics were clarified. As written self-reflection journals were used as qualitative data collection method, students were

briefed prior to the service-learning experience on the basic principles of reflection. In terms of pre-service-learning reflection they were asked to reflect on their expectations, attitudes and concerns. Students were also required to continuously reflect on challenges, successes, attitudes and lessons learned over the duration of the four week, 20 hour contact sessions (formative reflection) by using the three questions: What went well, and why? What didn't go so well, and why? What could we have done differently, and how? Upon completion of the service-learning experience students submitted their written reflections supplemented by the visual material. Researchers independently analysed the pre- and formative service-learning written reflections and applied inductive content analysis to identify patterns and themes in both sets of data. Researchers then met and reached agreement on provisional themes. Input from students were utilised in the structuring of the program for each following year. This was followed by constant comparison to the provisional themes with visual data collected by the students and their personal notes taken during the contact service-learning sessions. Final agreement was then reached on pre- and post service-learning themes and changes to the program

Results

Results for the study are presented per year as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Pre-service and formative student reflections

	Year 1 2012	Year 2 2013	Year 3 2014
Pre-service learning reflections	Antagonism	Interest	Ownership
	Fear	Uncertainty	Confidence
	Low level of motivation	Higher level of motivation	Higher level of motivation
Formative service learning reflections	Changed attitude and perception	Positive attitude	Positive attitude and future perception
	Relief	Skill development	Skill and personal development
		Translation of theory into practice	Translation of theory into practice

Pre-service-learning reflections

Three major themes emerged inductively from the pre-service-learning reflections of the participants in the first year (2012): 1) antagonism, 2) fear and 3) confidence. Antagonism against the credit bearing academic service-learning component of the academic course surfaced very strongly. Reflections like *“waste of time”, “it could be a life-threatening experience – is the university crazy to send us there?”, “I do not want to get out of my comfort zone, I do not want to mix with groups other than my own”, “not excited, I have to sacrifice 4 weeks of working time, I will lose money”* and *“I do not like working with children or non-elite athletes”* expressed students’ antagonism. Fear of the unknown was another strong emotional reflection. Students described their fears using words like *“terrified, nervous, apprehensive and stressed.”* In particular, students expressed fear for their well-being and safety at the service-learning point as *“I’ve heard that it is a scary place. Gangs abound – almost like the Cape Flats? My mom is not happy about this!; concerns on their language ability as the language of the community differed from the home language of some students, their skills profile and fear of assuming leadership roles in an unknown context. At the end of the first year student reflections were used as input into the following year’s program. Second years were also given the opportunity to share their experiences with the first years in a two-hour session. During the discussion students reflected on how first years can get involved in order to facilitate the second year program and the suggestion to introduce first year students was implemented in the second year of the study.*

Three major themes emerged from the pre-service reflection of the second group of participants, with a slightly more positive predisposition towards participation in the community engagement project. The three themes included: 1) interest, 2) uncertainty and 3) a higher level of motivation. Interest in getting involved in the community engagement module was expressed as *“after the presentations and the briefing by the second years last year, I was quite excited about also helping the little kids out there. I’m a little bit nervous now, but a good nervous, you know?”* Uncertainty about involvement was conveyed in statements such as *“I’ve never worked with toddlers before. What will happen if they don’t want to do the activities that we’ve planned?”* A higher level of motivation to participate in the community engagement

project was observed with students reflecting that *“the second years told us that anything you can do to put a smile on these kids’ faces is fantastic. If you make one child happy for that day you have succeed. I’m going to make sure that I have fun with them.”*

The third year concluded the study. An important impact on the pre-service reflections of the participants in this group was that they have already been to the community engagement site and have assisted the previous second years and therefore had prior knowledge on the program. Two major themes emerged from the pre-service reflections of the third group of participants: 1) ownership of learning and 2) confidence. Students reflected that they know the requirements for a successful community program and understand that they are ultimately responsible for how valuable the learning experience might be. This was expressed for example as *“I want to work with people one day. This gives me the opportunity to actively learn how to engage with people I don’t know.”* The majority of the students were, confident and looking forward to the service-learning experience. They expressed confidence using phrases like *“I will keep an open mind and a ready to learn attitude”, “I have high hopes to impact the lives of people living in a lower socio-economic community”, “I am sure I can teach these people new things”, “I do not know what to expect but am looking forward to it”* and *“practical experience is important in the real world.”*

Formative service-learning reflections

Students were required to reflect continuously on their perceptions and experiences during the 20 hour service-learning experience and submit it on completion of the experience. Themes that emerged from the formative service-learning reflections obtained in the first year included: 1) changed attitude and perception, 2) relief and 3) knowledge required. A change in attitude and perception was a distinctive theme with students expressing this as *“Once you’re in the community, it’s ok. Not really dangerous”,* and *“Although I didn’t want to do this, I actually learnt a lot. I think the most important thing that I’m taking from this experience is that - even though people may be poor – they’re still human beings”.* A strong sense of relief of being done with the project was evident, which was indicative of the crucial need to change the program. Students expressed relief as: *“It was better than I thought, but*

I'm glad we're done!" and "Our activities worked in the end. Although everything worked out I'm glad we're done!". Several students reflected that they did acquire knowledge through participating in this project with one student saying "My leadership skills have definitely improved. You need to keep going even if nothing works out!"

In the second year of the study the lecturer provided the students with a basic framework of what is expected, however refrained from taking on an instructional role. Scaffolding of learning content occurred by means of group reflection guided by the lecturer before and after each session. Three major themes emerged from analysing these formative reflections: 1) a positive approach to community engagement, 2) skill development and, 3) translation of theory into practice. A positive approach to community engagement was evident in reflections such as: *"We were disappointed when our turn was over. Maybe we can do the activities we have left one day in the holiday?"*; *"I'll definitely want to stay involved"* and *"every day I learned something from the people in the community"*. With the scaffolding of community development skills coupled with active group reflection skill development resulted as a strong formative reflection theme with students expressing their learning as *"now I realise the importance of time management and detailed planning"*; *"I have to keep activities simple and give instructions that the children understand"*. Reflections such as *"It finally clicked why we have to learn all of this theory"* demonstrated both their construction of understanding as well as the translation of theory into practice.

The third year of the study was a culmination of changes to the community engagement program and involved students as co-constructors of meaning and knowledge by focusing on their strengths. In collaboration with the community engagement lecturer, students redesigned the program, which resulted in a program imitating programs in higher socio-economic communities. The program now provided music, arts and crafts, soccer, motor skill, aerobics, dance, walking and a variety of activities as suggested, planned and presented by the students. Themes that emerged from the third year participants included: 1) positive attitude and future perception, 2) skill and personal development, and 3) translation of theory into practice. Students not only expressed a positive attitude towards community

engagement, but demonstrated future perception of staying involved in community outreach programs: *“I will definitely stay involved. There is a community close to where I live – I’m going to start a soccer club there for the kids”*. With few exceptions students reflected on their own personal development, changes in attitudes and skills during the period of service-learning. Reflections such as: *“it was a humbling eye-opening experience”*, *“a rewarding and challenging experience”*, *“I discovered I like working with children and make a difference in their lives”*, *“Thanks for the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life”*, and *“this project changed my life”*, illustrated the change in attitudes and is in stark contrast with initially expressed antagonism and fear of the first group of students.

Development in students’ personal skills set were depicted in reflections like: *“I feel confident now to work across cultural and language barriers,”* *“I learned how to work in groups and respect diversity”*, *“discovered my strengths and weaknesses”* and *“our group got stronger as time went on – we developed not only as a group but also as individuals.”* The reality and challenges of translating theory into practice emerged strongly in the formative reflective journaling of the third group of participants. Students identified their lack of teaching skills as a major barrier preventing them from translating theory into practice. Challenges such as physical activities not being age-appropriate, lack of control and discipline in the service-learning sessions, low levels of motivation and boredom in the groups due to inappropriate activities, inability to cope with the realities of the venue, communication barriers and not reaching outcomes were emphasised. One student expressed her initial frustration as follows: *“It was not as easy as I thought it would be. We have to go back and plan and organise better. We have to prepare better. We over-estimated ourselves and under-estimated the task”* and *“I discovered the huge gap between paper and reality.”* Entries in the reflective journals, however, noted a marked improvement in perceived teaching skills after the first contact session and continuous in-depth discussions with the lecturer as group supervisor. Strong evidence of enhanced civic responsibility and awareness was evident from formative reflections. Students appreciated the opportunity for cross-cultural community involvement, to give something of oneself, to get out of their comfort zones and reach out to people and communities different from themselves and

expressed a desire to get involved on a deeper level in communities. Students experienced social reality in a broader context and expressed it as follows: *“Participants were so thankful for the smallest things we did”, “I will never complain again about my circumstances”, “I did not realise there were communities like this so close to the university”* and *“it influenced my attitude towards other South African communities. I want to actively get involved in volunteer work in future.”*

Discussion

This study explored both the pre-service and formative reflections of students' first exposure to service-learning as credit bearing element of an undergraduate academic course. Reflections provided insight into and qualitative evidence of students' experiences and allowed students to freely express their feelings and opinions. The results of this investigation resonate with the essence and rationale of service-learning as a pedagogy with the aim of influencing attitudes through developing critical thinking and problem solving in real-life contexts (Steinke & Fitch, 2007, Thomson et al., 2011, Millican & Bourner, 2011, Kruss, 2012). In general, the results supported findings of studies reporting positive benefits of service-learning in contexts of higher education (Wilson, 2011, Thomson et al., 2011, Coetzee et al., 2011).

The need to change the project in order to achieve the beneficial outcomes of service-learning was strongly indicated in the reflections of first group of participants. The impact of adopting a social constructive approach and a strong emphasis on the use of reflection resulted in a community engagement program supporting collaborative learning; a focus on learning and not only performance; reflective learning and most important, students who foresee themselves as active in communities in the future.

Specific analysis of students' formative reflections indicated a transition from pre-service-learning fear and antagonism to an increased awareness and understanding of social inequities. The researchers are of the opinion that the expressed feelings of fear and antagonism needed to be interpreted and contextualised within the socio-economic and cultural profile of the research participants and the legacy of a post-apartheid segregated South African society. As the majority of the participants were white and represented cultural

and socio-economic groupings different than that of the partnership community, this particular group of students had limited cross-cultural and socio-economic exposure and as such stereotyped the partnership community through their reflections of fear and antagonism. The researchers contend that exposure to and experiences of societal inadequacies and diversity in the partnership community disrupted and questioned notions of norms, self and others and guided students towards appreciation of diversity and attention to micro aspects of the service-learning experience, for example, discipline within groups, selection of appropriate activities and the use of language, as postulated by Butin (2005) in his postmodern views on service-learning in higher education. Through the formative reflections students sensed and experienced the reciprocal nature of service-learning. This shift in attitude became evident through reflections commenting on how their knowledge and skills were influenced by the participants: *“every day I learned something from the people”*. On completion of the experience the majority viewed community service-learning positively. They experienced the positive reciprocal impact the service-learning component had on themselves and the community partner and were able to conceptualise and internalise the benefits of service-learning. In this case, although not recorded in their formative reflections, some students transferred their learning through volunteering for similar experiences. A group of students, for example, retained their involvement with the community partner beyond the institutional academic requirements to assist in fundraising.

Conclusion

It appears that first time participation in service-learning may foster student development in the areas of problem solving, teaching skills, civic awareness, decision-making, and collaborative teamwork if approached from a social constructivist perspective. Although the researchers acknowledge the exploratory nature of the present study, it confirmed the need for service-learning in a particular degree program at a South African institution of higher education. The realities and challenges of the collaborative and reciprocal nature of service-learning, for example, interaction with diverse and cross-cultural target groups and socio-economic contexts must be emphasised. The scaffolding role of a lecturer is a key dimension in achieving the aims of holistic service-

learning. It is therefore recommended that lecturers are also orientated and educated to adequately perform their significant contribution. This paper presented the results of a service-learning experience only from the perspective of the student. The perspectives of the community partner and the lecturers remain unexplored at this stage. Future research will explore the reflections of the community partner and lecturers on the impact of the holistic service-learning experience.

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