

Transforming Lives and Social Justice: Educational Psychology Students Working with At-Risk Youth

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This study connected a service learning project with the mission of the university by examining how students described the concepts of “transforming lives” and “social justice.” Twenty-one undergraduate students worked as mentors with at-risk children and youth. The roles of the students and the community partner had an impact on transforming the lives of the children and youth, as well as personal transformation. Social justice was discussed in terms of observed inequities and how the community partner was addressing the inequalities. Results suggest that this type of reflection component can be used to enhance students’ ability to explicitly connect with the mission of the university and the values it articulates.

Rockhurst University is a Jesuit institution whose mission focuses on several core values. One of these core values, “Contemplation in Action,” incorporates both issues of social justice and ideas of transforming lives (Rockhurst University, 2007). This value states that “We are committed to just action through leadership and service; therefore, we strive: ...To be agents of transformation especially in the areas of social justice and equality. To bring our best resources to bear on creative responses to problems and challenges...” (Rockhurst University, n.d., para. 8). As a recent designee of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, Rockhurst University is committed to service in the larger community. There are many levels of support given to faculty to incorporate service learning into their courses as a means to connect curriculum and community, and to enhance student learning. Service learning is one mechanism by which students may engage in

Contemplation in Action and understand issues of transforming lives and social justice.

Steeped in Jesuit tradition and Catholic faith is a rich history of promoting social justice, calling not only for social awareness of inequities that exist, but for action both in terms of direct aid and in correcting the structures that perpetuate the need. The focus of Jesuit education is to bring about a personal transformation in students so that they may, in turn, transform the world (Arrupe, 1973; Kolvenbach, 2000). Although there are various conceptions of transformative learning, such as Mezirow's (1991) idea of "perspective transformation" and the concept of "knowledge transformation" from critical social theory (Carrington & Selva, 2010), the Jesuit approach focuses on "personal transformation," which is specifically intertwined with social justice concerns. It is through an individual's experience with a social justice issue and reflection on that experience that a personal transformation occurs, leading to action to change the community for the better (Lowney, 2003). The Jesuit idea of personal transformation is not necessarily incompatible with other forms of transformative learning; for example, all of the concepts of transformative learning previously mentioned involve a long-term, fundamental perceptual or behavioral shift. But the Jesuit idea is unique in that it embeds the personal transformation specifically within the context of social justice issues. In keeping with the mission of the university, this paper focuses on the Jesuit idea of personal transformation as change for the better to improve the quality of life for the community.

Research has supported service learning as a pedagogy for promoting student learning and effecting change in the community (Berman, 2006; Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, service learning courses vary in many ways and not all courses necessarily foster student learning. Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, and Fisher (2010) examined the relationships between the learning climate of the classroom, motivational needs, and forms of motivation in the context of service learning courses. They examined three motivational needs: autonomy, referring to choices and options for the students; competence, defined as mastery provided by the learning environment; and relatedness, or a sense of connectedness provided by the learning environment. They also examined how these factors impacted the effects of service learning. As hypothesized, there were significant positive relationships between the learning climate and the three motivational needs. Only

competence was related to positive forms of motivation, such as high intrinsic motivation. Positive effects of service learning were observed when service learning was perceived by the students as enhancing the learning environment. Levesque-Bristol et al. also found that several key components were instrumental in effective service learning: direct involvement with individuals receiving services, opportunities for class discussion about service learning experiences, and written reflections were related to students' perceptions of positive learning climates.

Eyler and Giles (1999) have identified several components related to academic benefits of service learning: active and connected learning, acquisition of useful knowledge, development of critical thinking skills, and transformational learning. The component of transformational learning has been examined by scholars working in the field of service learning. For example, Eyler and Giles documented that while students' perspective transformation occurred, it did not happen frequently. Kiely (2005) described five categories of how students experience transformational learning before and after engaging in an overseas service learning program. Carrington and Selva (2010) utilized service learning reflection logs from pre-service teachers as a source of evidence to document transformational learning. Specifically, the pre-service teachers demonstrated an enhanced understanding of inclusive education and an increased understanding of the needs of a diverse population.

The purpose of this study is to examine how students describe "transforming lives" and "social justice" by connecting those concepts to their service learning project. Students worked as mentors with children and youth who were considered to be at risk. Students who are at risk are "those who are in situations that can lead to academic, personal, and behavioral problems that could limit their success in school and later in life" (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2008, p. 424). Several characteristics of at-risk children have been identified in the literature. For example, these students often have difficulty learning basic academic skills (Pierce, 1994), low school engagement (Rumberger, 1995), poor school attendance (Finn, 1989), behavioral problems, or substance abuse issues (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996). For many of these students, there is often a lack of parental involvement, a high rate of poverty, and limited access to resources (McCluskey & May, 2004). Without special interventions, many of these children will be retained in school (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984), increasing the likelihood that at-risk students will drop out of school and not graduate (Connell, Halpern-Flesher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995), further compounding their problems later in life (Barton, 2005; Wu, Schlenger, & Galvin, 2003).

Mentoring programs are frequently used with students who are at risk. The effectiveness of these programs varies based on such factors

as the frequency of mentoring (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002), the method of evaluation (Broussard, Mosely-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006), and the goals of the program (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). But there is a modest and growing body of research that has found positive results of mentoring programs. For example, Welkowitz and Fox (2001) implemented a four-year program for high school students who were at risk for emotional and behavioral disabilities. Students worked in small groups, led by an adult mentor, to design and implement community service projects. Students also constructed individualized personal learning plans where they explored an area of interest. After four years, Welkowitz and Fox found improvement in students' problem-solving skills, conflict resolution abilities, and self-esteem. In addition, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik (1982) reported improvements in students' reading, school success, and general social skills in after-school mentoring programs with structured literacy components. Specific improvements in students' social competence and decreases in antisocial behaviors were reported by Caldarella, Adams, Valentine, and Young (2009), who evaluated a school-based mentoring program for elementary school children at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders.

Because at-risk children and youth often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and given that effective intervention is crucial to overcome current and future problems, a service learning project in which students mentored at-risk children and youth was developed. This was a pilot study to see whether and how students could connect the project to the mission of the university, specifically to the concepts of "transforming lives" and "social justice."

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Twenty-one undergraduate students enrolled in an Educational Psychology course during the Fall 2010 semester completed a minimum of eight hours at one of two sites. Nineteen of the students were Education majors and two of the students were Psychology majors. Two community partners were chosen.

Kansas City Urban Youth Center (KCUYC) provides a structured after-school program for urban youth located in two apartment complexes, one in Kansas City, Missouri (MO) and the other in Kansas City, Kansas (KS). Students worked as reading mentors and homework tutors. Thirteen students were placed at the MO site, which serves 30 youths, while four students were placed at the KS site, which serves 23 youths. Youngsters served at KCUYC range from K-8th grade, with the majority of children in the K-4th grade range. Students completed 139.5 cumulative hours of service. The volunteer manager gave a brief orientation to the center in class and students were required to complete a two-hour training session.

Gillis Center has both a day school and residential facility for youths, ages 5-18, with emotional/behavioral disorders who do not have the skills to function successfully in a public school setting. Students worked as tutors in the residential school or provided social mentoring during weekend activities for the residential boys. Four students were placed at this site. Students completed a total of 40 hours of service. The Senior Vice President for Campus-Based Services met with the students in a small group to give an overview of their programs. Students received an individual orientation at the start of their first visit.

The learning objectives specific to the reflection component of the written paper were that students would demonstrate application of both the idea of transforming lives and issues of social justice by connecting aspects of the service learning project to these concepts. A specific concern was how students would describe these concepts. Was the idea of transforming lives only personal so that they would only describe that their own lives were changed for the better? Or would they describe other ways that the concept of transforming lives could apply to the project? Would students focus only on socioeconomic differences when describing social justice issues? Or would students understand social justice in broader terms?

METHOD

Students completed a two-to-three paragraph pre-project paper that addressed what concerns and/or challenges they had about the project. They were not prompted to focus on issues relevant to transformation and social justice but merely asked to describe their concerns about the project. At the end of the semester, students completed a final paper for the course that contained: a short literature review relevant to their placement; a log of each visit with a brief description of each day's activities and ratings of their comfort level; a discussion applying course material to the project; and a reflection that addressed the most important thing they learned from the project, how the project addressed the idea of transforming lives, and how the project related to issues of social justice.

A content analysis (Berg, 2001; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000) of the student papers was conducted to examine patterns in the student responses for their challenges and concerns, as well as their reflections on transforming lives and social justice. An inductive approach (Berg, 2001) was used to identify the thematic categories. One undergraduate research student and the author independently read all of the papers, noting words or phrases used by the students and grouped similar phrases into broader thematic categories. These categories were

both mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). There was 100% agreement between the two analysts in how the words and phrases were classified into each thematic category. The frequency of each thematic category was determined by computing the percentage of students who described aspects in each category (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Because students had different experiences at the two sites, the findings are separated based on location (KCUYC vs. Gillis).

RESULTS

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS

Student responses regarding their challenges and concerns were grouped into four different thematic categories for each site. The number in parentheses represents the percent of students who mentioned that response.

KCUYC

1. Not enough time to build a relationship (62.5%). Because the students were going to be working at the site once a week for one to two hours for eight weeks, the majority of students thought that there would not be ample time to build a relationship that was crucial to be an effective mentor.
2. Discipline issues (50%). Many students mentioned concerns about their ability to handle any disciplinary issues that may arise, especially because they were not part of the staff at the facility.
3. Differences between child/self (43.75%). Many students worried that differences in age, race, and socioeconomic status between themselves and the children may hinder developing a positive relationship.
4. Teaching issues (37.5%). Some students were apprehensive about their ability to work with the children in a teaching situation because they had not yet taken many education courses that covered specific methods for teaching reading.

GILLIS

1. Concern over saying the wrong thing (50%). Given that some of the children at Gillis come from dysfunctional families and many have a history of abuse, students expressed their unease about the possibility of saying something "wrong" to a child with whom they were working. For example, many of the residential boys at Gillis have experienced multiple foster home placements and as one student noted, "What happens if I have a conversation with one of the boys and make reference

to something like family or a parent in a positive context and he gets upset because his situation is very different?"

2. Out of comfort zone (50%). Some students explicitly mentioned that this project was going to take them out of their comfort zone because they had no previous experience working with children from this population.

3. Having enough patience (50%). One concern was that students felt that they might not have enough patience, especially knowing that these children often have difficulties with academic work.

4. Excited about opportunity (75%). Even with the trepidation that the students discussed in their concerns, the majority of them expressed excitement about the service project.

These categories identified by the students before they began the project reflect some ideas that may be related to skills necessary in transforming lives of others, such as the importance of building a relationship, teaching skills, and patience. The concerns also relate to issues of social justice, specifically the differences (age, race, socioeconomic status, abuse) mentioned by the students. Although students were not asked to specifically address these concepts in their challenges/concerns paper, some ideas were already present before they started the project.

COMFORT LEVEL RATINGS

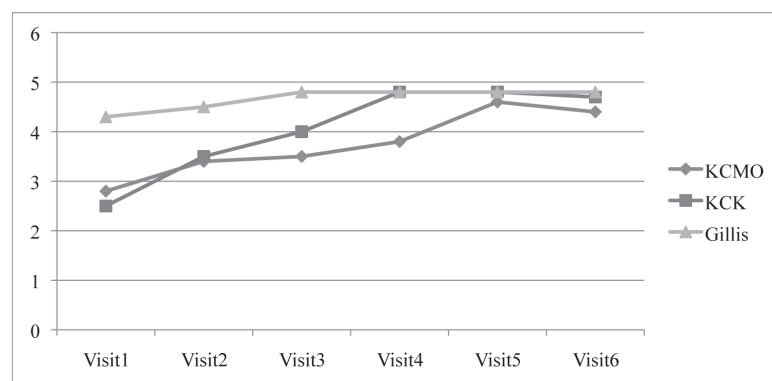
Students kept a log of the date of each visit, a brief description of what they did on that day, and rated each visit on their comfort level (1 = *extreme discomfort*, 5 = *high comfort*), with a reason for the rating.

KCUYC

Students at the MO and KS locations for KCUYC had different experiences based on the amount of structure and direction that was provided. The MO site had a new site coordinator, but the KS site had an established, structured routine. Students at the MO site reported a lot of chaos and felt like they were often given tasks that were not productive to mentoring or not effective uses of their time.

As shown in Figure 1, student ratings of their comfort level at the MO location generally increased, from $M = 2.77$ at visit 1 (*range* 1-5, $SD = 1.24$) to $M = 4.36$ at visit 6 (*range* 2-5, $SD = 1.02$). The same pattern was seen at the KS location, with $M = 2.5$ at visit 1 (*range* 2-4, $SD = .58$) to $M = 4.67$ at visit 6 (*range* 4-5, $SD = .58$). All students did a minimum of six visits at KCUYC.

Figure 1. Comfort Ratings by Project Site Location, Based on Each Visit



GILLIS

Student ratings of their comfort level at each visit increased slightly, from $M = 4.0$ at visit 1 to $M = 4.5$ at visit 2, and then remained at this level. Despite the concerns that they had before they started the project, students felt comfortable during their first visit and remained at a high level of comfort during the course of their time at Gillis. Students made six visits to Gillis.

For the entire sample, there was a significant increase in the comfort ratings from visit 1 to visit 3 ($t(20) = -2.527, p = .02$), suggesting that multiple visits to the same site over time may assist students in getting the maximum benefit from the service learning project because they are getting more comfortable with being at the site.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Of primary interest was whether students could connect their service learning project to the idea of transforming lives and issues of social justice. If they could make connections with specific examples, what kinds of descriptions would they provide? Rather than being prescriptive with specific prompts to address, students were given a generic statement to discuss how this service project related to those two concepts.

TRANSFORMING LIVES

For the words or phrases to be counted as belonging to one of the thematic categories for transforming lives, the phrasing had to describe aspects of the project that related to changing an individual's life for

the better. If a student just defined what the idea of transforming lives meant to them, it was not counted. The responses were grouped into two main categories for those students who were at KCUYC and three categories for those students who were at Gillis. The number in parentheses represents the percent of students who discussed each issue. Every student mentioned at least one aspect related to transforming lives. Direct quotes from papers are provided to illustrate how the students described the different concepts.

KCUYC. 1. What the program provided to children/youth (88%). The majority of students described specific aspects of what the KCUYC program was providing to the children/youth in terms of helping to transform the participants' lives. Examples of the types of program aspects are:

- Help with schoolwork, especially reading, that they might not get elsewhere.
- A stable, safe, welcoming environment.
- Positive role models, for both current and future behavior.

2. What Rockhurst University students received (41%). Many of the students described ways that they believed their lives were transformed by participating in the project. Most of these students discussed aspects such as:

- Development/application of teaching skills, such as helping to think of ways to maintain the child's focus, explaining ideas in a way so that they could really understand them, and using praise and constructive feedback. For example, one student noted that she "had always planned on majoring in secondary education because my previous work in a daycare turned me off of working with younger school-aged children. But this experience at KCUYC gave me a chance to practice my teaching skills with students of different ages than are the ones I plan to teach. This forced me to think of ways to teach children and not adolescents, and therefore required me to think of different ways to teach reading comprehension at a lower academic level."
- Realization that their attitude mattered. For example, one student wrote about noticing how her positive attitude was important for the children to feel that their accomplishments were meaningful, and the more positive responses the children received, the more the children realized the significance.
- Understanding little accomplishments were important to the children.

Although many students described ways that they thought they had been personally transformed by the experience, two students explicitly stated that because of the poor organization in how they were being used as mentors, they did not think that they had been transformed. However, these two students did describe ways in which they thought the community partner was working to help transform the lives of the children in the program.

Gillis. 1. What Rockhurst University students provided to Gillis children/youth (75%). Most of the students discussed ways in which they helped to transform the lives of the children/youth at Gillis. For example:

- Someone to be there to engage with the boys.
- Although some students talked about being there to engage with the boys, some students discussed specifically that it was engaging in common activities that, such as “spending time doing ordinary everyday stuff (playing with them, watching them, eating with them, talking with them, and watching television with them) was good enough for the boys. I did not have to do anything extraordinary in order to have an impact on their lives. I was letting the small moments and actions count as something positive.” As another student explained, “The best way to make this small impact was by getting to know the boys, asking them questions about their life and being interested in what they had to say.”
- Being positive role models.

2. How Rockhurst University students were personally transformed (100%). All of the students described ways in which they thought they had been transformed by their experience at Gillis, such as:

- Possible change of course of study; for example, one student is considering changing her major from education to social work.
- Understanding the importance of patience when a student does not understand.
- I felt like I mattered to the boys. For example, “Seeing their excitement when I returned for another visit helped me realize that my presence had an impact on a couple of the students.”
[The students at Gillis are slow to warm up to visitors and wary of strangers.]

3. How Gillis helped transform the lives of these children/youth (100%). All of the students discussed ways in which the partner was working to transform the lives of the children and youth it served by engaging in such things as:

- Creating structure, permanence, and security in the boys’ lives.
- Long-term transformation by teaching necessary skills and keeping them away from negative influences.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

To be classified into a thematic category of application of social justice, the phrases had to describe aspects related to social inequities or discuss ways in which the injustices were being addressed at the service learning site. Phrases that merely defined social justice as the existence of social unfairness were not counted. Responses about social justice issues were divided into two categories for each site. The number in parentheses represents the percent of students who discussed each issue. Every student mentioned at least one aspect of social justice.

KCUYC. 1. How the program was attempting to address social justice issues, placing emphasis on support, success, and respect for each student (88%). Students discussed acknowledgement by the staff members of the hardships facing the children and their families and working with them to improve their situation, such as emphasizing the importance of education and providing nutritional snacks.

2. Students’ observations of social justice issues, focusing on lack of resources, hardships of the families, and quality of school (82%). One student noted: “By giving my time to the KCUYC, I was participating in creating an equal opportunity for all students to succeed. The students that do not receive help outside of school are not at the same advantage as those students who do receive help. Because of my time spent doing the service learning project, those students who do not typically get help outside of school were given an equal opportunity.” Another student explained, “The children I met during my weeks at the center come from a school and neighborhood where injustice reigns. They are denied a lot of the opportunities that other take for granted. Some do not have a teacher who believes in their abilities to learn. Some do not have parents committed to their children’s health and education. Some do not even have their basic needs met every day. This was hard for me to grasp until I saw it in person.”

Gillis. 1. Focus on how Gillis Center was addressing social justice, such as providing a safe and secure environment, giving boys a second chance, and recognizing that equality is not always achieved in the classroom (100%). Students described how they saw how the teachers are fighting to help the students learn despite the students’ circumstances, and the passion the teachers bring to the education process.

2. Application of Jesuit education, specifically Kolvenbach's (former Superior General of the Jesuit Society) philosophy and how the teachers and staff used some of these ideas (75%). Kolvenbach (2000) discussed such ideas as "learn to ...act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged," and recognize each person's dignity.

Remember that students were not given specific prompts about what to address in terms of social justice. Three of the students at Gillis explicitly tied the idea of social justice to principles of Jesuit education with examples. Four students (one at Gillis and three at KCUYC) made an explicit connection to the Education Department's conceptual framework, where teaching for social justice is a component. Although these students did not give specific examples of how the project reflected the conceptual framework, they did make specific reference to it in describing social justice in general.

ANONYMOUS SURVEY

On the last day of the course, 19 of the 21 students completed an anonymous survey where they rated several aspects of their service learning experience. The average score and standard deviation for each question based on service learning placement location is shown in Table 1. Questions 1-12 used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Students placed at the KS site of the Kansas City Urban Youth Center and at Gillis Center generally had favorable ratings of the project, indicating agreement that they made a worthwhile contribution to the community, believed that they learned something from the project that they would not have learned just from the textbook and classroom material, and that they have a better understanding of challenges facing these children/youth both at school and at home. The ratings for the MO site were lower, falling in the disagree to neutral range. Three of the 11 students at the MO site gave low ratings (all ones) to every question, which affected the average score. Only 18% of the students at the MO site indicated an interest in continuing at this site, compared to 100% at the KS site and 75% at Gillis Center.

Students at the MO site tended to be more negative about their experiences for several reasons. First, depending on which day of the week they worked, they may not have had as much one-on-one or small group interaction with the children because Fridays were often designated as "free" days and students reported that they did "a lot of standing around." Second, students reported that this site was characterized by general chaos and disorganization in that the adults in charge did not seem to communicate with one another about daily issues. Third, students reported that they felt that communication from the staff about what they were supposed to be doing was lacking. These

Table 1. Student Ratings Based on Service Learning Site

KCK KCUYC <i>M (SD)</i>	KCMO KCUYC <i>M (SD)</i>	Gillis <i>M (SD)</i>	Survey Item
5.00 (.00)	2.91 (1.58)	4.25 (.50)	1. Through this project, I felt I was contributing something worthwhile to the community.
4.75 (.50)	3.27 (1.10)	4.75 (.50)	2. Through this project, I learned something about at-risk school aged children or children with behavioral/emotional problems that I would not have learned through just lecture and reading my textbook.
4.25 (.50)	3.09 (1.14)	4.50 (.58)	3. This service learning project helped me to apply class/text material to actual people.
3.00 (1.15)	3.18 (1.40)	4.50 (1.00)	4. Through this project, I learned that I really liked working with at-risk or special needs children.
4.25 (.96)	3.36 (1.43)	4.50 (.58)	5. Through this project, I found that my comfort level of interacting with at-risk or special needs children increased (even though I might not want to work with individuals in this population).
4.50 (.58)	3.73 (1.27)	4.50 (.58)	6. Through this project, I have a better understanding of the challenges facing these children in school.
4.00 (.82)	3.09 (1.51)	4.50 (.58)	7. Through this project, I have a better understanding of the challenges facing these children at home.
5.00 (.00)	3.00 (1.55)	5.00 (.00)	8. I enjoyed participating in this project.
4.75 (.50)	3.54 (1.21)	5.00 (.00)	9. Even though I might not have enjoyed it, I'm glad that I participated in this project.
3.50 (1.00)	2.81 (1.17)	4.25 (.96)	10. Participation in this service learning project increased my interest in class material.
3.25 (1.50)	3.09 (1.04)	4.00 (.82)	11. Participation in this service learning project made me take more responsibility for my own learning.
4.00 (.82)	3.00 (1.25)	4.00 (.82)	12. Participation in this service learning project made me more aware of some of my own biases and prejudices related to at-risk or special needs children.
4.75 (.50)	3.36 (.92)	4.75 (.50)	For question 13, use the following scale: 5 = very interesting 4 = interesting 3 = neutral 2 = of little interest 1 = not at all interesting 13. Overall, I would rate this project
4/4	2/11	3/4	14. I would like to continue involvement with this service learning site. ("yes" responses/total responses)

comments on some of the difficulties that students had at this particular site reflect some of the service-learning "pathologies" articulated by Schwartzman (2010), most notably students feeling like they were sometimes engaging in marginalized activities. At this particular site, a few of the students admitted at the end of the semester that they did not take initiative to ask one of the supervisors to work with a child or to request tasks that were specific to the mentoring program. Only recently it was revealed that KCUYC partners with another organization at the MO site to run the program. This organization and KCUYC have different philosophies on working with children and discipline, which contributed to some of the issues that were raised by the students.

DISCUSSION

This project was a pilot study to examine whether students could apply the ideas of transforming lives and social justice in the context of a service learning project. This study had some methodological strengths as it utilized three different sites and multiple indicators of service learning effects, going beyond a reliance solely on student self-report data (Schwartzman & Henry, 2009). The research questions focused on how students described the aspects of transformation and social justice as related to the service learning project without being given specific prompts. Results from the content analysis indicated that a majority of the students described issues of transforming lives and some social inequalities that existed. In addition, some students were able to describe some immediate action components involved in social justice issues. That is, they reported on ways the community programs were working to alleviate some of the social inequities. The student descriptions are in line with the Jesuit conceptions of transformation and social justice.

Students discussed different aspects of the idea of transforming lives. The first aspect of transformation was personal. At both KCUYC and Gillis, many students described ways they believed they had been transformed by participating in the service learning project. From the anonymous ratings of the project, students at both the KS location of KCUYC and at Gillis thought that their service learning experience enhanced their knowledge and understanding of challenges faced by the individuals with whom they worked. Students at these two sites also thought that the project made them more aware of their own biases and prejudices related to these children and youth. Although these results are similar to those of Carrington and Selva (2010), these self-assertions of change and awareness are not necessarily indicators that transformation has occurred because personal transformation involves a long-term, fundamental perceptual or behavioral shift. The types of data collected and the short-term nature of the service learning project are not sufficient to measure transformation. Future studies on transformation should also examine behavioral outcomes using a longitudinal methodology. This will allow researchers to examine both short-term and long-term effects of the service learning project (Schwartzman & Henry, 2009).

The second kind of transformation discussed by the majority of students at both sites of KCUYC was the impact on the children and youth served, both by the students' role in the project and that of the community partner. The recognition of both kinds of transformation is an important learning outcome, especially because most of the research on transformation has focused on the transformational learning of

the college student (Carrington & Selva, 2010; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kiely, 2005). Although some students may feel that the service learning experience did not lead to personal transformation, they still may be able to see how participating in the project has potential to transform those who are served by the community partner. The descriptions of the students' role and the role of the community partner suggest that the idea of transforming lives has multiple dimensions. Even if personal transformation does not occur, understanding the impact that the program has on the participants may be important for social justice action. Although personal transformation may be a goal of service learning, we need to recognize that transforming lives can take many forms.

Negative ratings by some students at one particular location were traceable to site management issues. Placement quality has been identified as a factor in service learning effectiveness (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Individuals who are designing service learning projects should pay careful attention to site issues. Although students were repeatedly asked in class how things were at each of the sites, students at the one site that was rated negatively did not indicate that there were big issues. It could be that those students who were having particular difficulties did not feel comfortable speaking up in front of the other classmates, especially if their perception was that the other students were not having any issues. One way to attempt to stave off potential problems is to have students complete anonymous, frequent comment cards describing specific issues that need to be addressed. By keeping the comments anonymous, students can be assured that they will not be singled out. It may also be important to remind students of the need to take initiative and ask questions of the site personnel. Site personnel may not be aware that the students were not given a task, especially at sites where a lot of clientele are served or students are working in different areas of the facilities.

The majority of students, regardless of whether they were at KCUYC or Gillis, not only described the types of social justice issues that they observed but also recognized how the organization was attempting to alleviate some of the inequities. This acknowledgement of the role that the community partner plays in the lives of these children/youth and their families is noteworthy because many of the students mentioned in their final paper that before the project began they had not thought of what the program meant in terms of the impact it has on the clients' lives. Most of the observed social justice issues mentioned at KCUYC revolved around socioeconomic status, but surprisingly most students did not specifically mention socioeconomic status. Rather, they discussed the effects that socioeconomic status has on creating social justice issues, such as poor quality of schools and lack of resources.

Although the majority of students described the social injustices at their community site and how the site was attempting to alleviate these issues, a few students ($n = 4$) went beyond the descriptions of inequities to discuss possible reasons for why they existed and why they persisted. For example, relative to poverty, some students did address immediate contexts such as lack of resources at the family level (e.g., minimal education of the parents, poorly paying jobs with lack of opportunities for advancement) and lack of opportunities in the neighborhood. Other students ($n = 3$) also described issues at a systemic level such as lack of access to quality education, how the state and federal governments allocate resources, and issues of discrimination. These descriptions suggest that these students may be developing a deeper awareness that social justice issues go beyond the immediate community site. However, because no specific reflection prompts or other types of measures were used, it is unknown whether this ability was limited to a few students. Therefore, to connect educational theory and practice of service learning with social justice agendas, more specific pedagogical methods need to be employed and systematically researched.

The next step would be to clearly focus the service learning project with the goal of examining whether students can address these larger systemic problems. This could be done in several ways, either separately or in conjunction with each other. For example, class discussions around systemic issues, an assignment that asks students to investigate the social justice issue beyond the immediate community site to larger levels (local, state, and/or federal), or carefully designed reflection questions to address systemic issues could be used. For instance, in the case of poverty, students could be asked to research how widespread the issue is at local, state, and national levels and identify possible reasons at each level. In addition, students could be asked to research what is currently being done at any of these levels to address some of these inequities.

Being able to articulate the systemic nature of these social inequalities, however, does not fully address the issues of transformation and social justice from a Jesuit perspective. In both concepts, action is called for to correct the structures that continue the need for assistance and to transform the world. A few of the students ($n = 3$) did begin to address the action piece by indicating that they believe that merely recognizing the inequities is not enough, but rather some kind of action to address the issues is needed. As one student described, "Social justice is more than just helping out, it is about becoming aware of the injustices that surround us and trying our best to solve those issues. Social justice does not have to be some huge action but merely is actually trying to make a difference in the world." Again, because students were not specifically directed to discuss action as a component, it is hard to

determine whether they have not made the leap to a full awareness of the relationship between personal transformation, social inequities, and action, or if they have but did not articulate it in the assignment.

Knowing that action is important does not necessarily mean that students will actually act. To complete the transformation/social justice cycle, future research needs to track students' action and the types of actions that are involved. For example, once the service learning project is completed for the course, do students continue to serve at the community partner? Or do students get involved in other ways, such as attempting to act at the larger community, state, or federal levels? Follow-up data on students' behavior would be important to investigate.

Although the study used multiple indicators to examine the effect of the service learning project, a critical area that is frequently lacking in service-learning research is data on the views of the community partner (Schwartzman & Henry, 2009). In respect to the issues of transformation, future research needs to examine how the community service providers and both the children/youth and parents are identifying transformation. A mismatch between the parties could impact transformation. It could also affect future action behavior on the part of the student.

Results of the present study indicate that students were able to apply the concepts of transforming lives and social justice to their service project in multiple ways, demonstrating that this type of reflection component can be used to enhance students' ability to explicitly connect with the mission of the university. Providing experiences that connect the curriculum with the idea of transforming lives and social justice may be a way to deepen students' understanding of the university's mission to prepare them to act in ways that promote action within the larger community.

CONCLUSION

Ideally, the outcome of a service learning project would be that students go from awareness and understanding of social justice issues, including knowledge of the systemic nature of social injustices, to action. In the discussion section, some suggestions for furthering service learning research along these lines were offered. These suggestions apply to disciplines other than teaching and to institutions that are not faith-based. What is important is to pick a project that involves a social justice issue that connects with the course content and provides enough discrepancy between students and service clientele to challenge students by taking them out of their comfort zone in moderate ways. It may be important to monitor the students' comfort zones and make modifications. For example, in an Adult Development and Aging

psychology course, students are paired with a resident at a local nursing home. Sometimes a student is paired with a resident who is not interested in engaging with the student. In that case, the student's comfort level is so low that there is too much discrepancy and the project will be less meaningful and beneficial to the student. At this point, a change in the resident pairing is in order. Also, the comfort level changes reported in the current study point to the importance of having a longer duration service project. A service experience lasting for several weeks or months rather than a one-time project is going to be more beneficial for stimulating transformation and allowing students to become aware of social inequities. A benefit to using KCUYC is that the programs are located in the apartment complexes where these children live, so students got to see firsthand some daily aspects of poverty affecting these children that they might not have otherwise been aware of if the programs were located in a more neutral location, such as a church.

Although this project is framed within the Jesuit philosophy, this study can be generalized to service learning projects at non-faith-based institutions. The current research was truly a pilot study illustrating how personal and social consciousness can be stimulated through service learning. The issues of transformation and social justices were mechanisms by which students discussed these issues of consciousness. There are many ways to stimulate social consciousness. Some suggestions are to have class discussions and/or targeted critical reflection questions that ask students to examine what their involvement in the project means to them personally and to the community partner, and what the program means to the participants and to the community. Having students respond to such questions at multiple points during the project may assist them in seeing how their views have changed. Involving the community partners and/or the clientele in such discussions can raise different issues that students may not have considered. This service experience required students to write about their pre-project concerns and challenges. Having students re-examine these during the project and describe why an issue is or is not still a concern may make issues of personal and social consciousness more salient. Another suggestion is to use directed readings that are specific to the service learning project and have students write short papers that summarize how the reading relates to the project.

The findings of the current study suggest that within the context of the service learning project, a relational transformation may occur. The college students and the children/youth engage in a mutual discovery of their capabilities as both parties extend the boundaries of their perceived limits. For example, one perceived limit is the comfort zone. In the current study, by the end of the project most of the students reported feeling more comfortable interacting with the children and youth and being at the site. Other researchers can use comfort rating data to track

changes over the course of the project. Coupled with descriptions of the session, these ratings can assist in understanding how the relationship between students and clientele evolves. For example, during one visit at Gillis, the students were outside playing basketball with a group of boys when a scuffle broke out among a couple of them. The students' visit was cut short as all the boys were sent back to their cottage. Both students rated the visit as a 5 (*high comfort*). That incident occurred toward the second half of the project. The students had ascertained during the course of their earlier visits that they could handle such an incident without it affecting how they felt being around the boys. The boys discovered that even though there was a behavioral outburst, the students felt comfortable enough being there and would be back.

The types of benefits that students reported receiving from the service learning experience reported in the present study, such as teaching skills, knowledge that attitude is meaningful, and the importance of small accomplishments for these children and youth, are valuable skills and information that they will be able to utilize as most move forward in their careers of working with children and youth. The types of occupations that these students want to pursue, such as educator, school psychologist, and counselor, are professions in which an understanding of the concepts of transforming lives and social justice are crucial. Providing experiences that connect the curriculum with the ideas of transformation and social justice may be a way to deepen students' understanding in order to prepare them to act in ways that promote action within the larger community.