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## Using Service-Learning to Promote Social Justice Advocacy and Cognitive Development During Internship

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# Using Service-Learning to Promote Social Justice Advocacy and Cognitive Development During Internship

## **Abstract**

Little empirical research has examined how to effectively prepare counseling students as social justice advocates. In a quasi-experimental design, a service-learning intervention was used in community counseling internship to promote students' social justice advocacy competency as well as cognitive development, including moral and intellectual development. Findings demonstrated a significant increase in social justice advocacy competency in both the experimental and control groups at the end of one quarter of community counseling internship. In addition, the experimental group had significantly higher scores on the Public Information advocacy domain sub-scale of the Advocacy Competency Self-Assessment Survey. Teaching strategies such as service-learning may prepare counselor trainees for community engagement when they are in practice.

## **Author's Notes**

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## **Keywords**

counselor training, service-learning, social justice, advocacy, cognitive development

In 1990, Dr. Loretta Bradley, then president of the American Counseling Association (ACA), challenged the counseling profession to return to its founding principles of social justice by setting the pursuit of justice and wellness for all people as a primary professional goal (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). According to Chang, Crethar, and Ratts (2010), social justice “is both a goal and a process for counseling professionals who believe in a just world” (p. 84). A social justice approach to counseling seeks to promote empowerment and access and to reduce barriers to human development (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Speight & Vera, 2004). In this approach, a counselor assesses what combination of action is needed for effective treatment, for example individual therapy in combination with specific client advocacy (Ratts, 2009).

Systemic social injustices like racism, sexism, and the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources underlie many of the problems and challenges that bring clients to counseling (Ratts, 2009; Vera & Speight, 2007). Discrimination, marginalization, and oppression have “a debilitating effect of human development” (Ratts, 2009, p. 166). Counselors, in work with individual, couples, and families, are often “painfully aware of the environmental factors” (Lewis, 2011, p. 185) that impact client mental health and wellness. As a result, counselors have the responsibility to intervene in order to address those factors at both the societal and individual level (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007; Ratts, 2009).

One way for counselors to work with communities to ameliorate the impacts of injustice and oppression is through counselor community engagement. This collaborative process allows practicing “counselors and community members identify, plan, and execute strategies that promote wellness and human dignity with the community” (Storlie, Shannonhouse, Brubaker, Zavadil & King, 2016, p. 53). It also provides counselors with a framework to engage their professional skills to advocate for clients and to support marginalized communities (Storlie et al., 2016). How

practicing counselors are prepared to engage with communities in this way while they are in training is unclear.

Unfortunately, in the areas of social justice and advocacy “traditional counseling training programs have not adequately prepared graduate students to work effectively” (Bemak & Chung, 2011, p. 204). Counselor education programs are being called to explicitly focus on social justice and to train students for advocacy (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010; Hoover & Morrow, 2016; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005). Toward that end, the purpose of this paper is to present the results and implications of a study in which service-learning strategies were applied within a masters-level community counseling internship course to promote social justice advocacy competency.

### **Social Justice Advocacy and Counselor Education**

To advocate means to argue or plead for a cause (Lee, 1998). As advocates, counselors collaborate with others to defend groups whose basic rights are threatened (Vera & Speight, 2007). Social justice advocacy refers to a specific form of counselor advocacy that is conducted with or on behalf of members of non-dominant, marginalized groups and that is intended to promote social justice by removing systemic barriers to healthy development and productive living (Wyatt, 2009). Social justice advocacy has been codified in two regulatory documents for counselors and counselor educators: the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics ([ACA], 2014) and the counselor training 2016 Standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs ([CACREP], 2015). Section A.6.a of the ACA Code of Ethics states: “When appropriate, counselors advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to examine potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients” (p.5). The 2016 CACREP standards state that accredited counseling programs are to prepare students in “advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede

access, equity, and success for clients” (p. 8) and prepare students to use “strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination” (p. 9). These standards highlight the significance of social justice advocacy for the professional counselor’s role and, thus, support the integration of social justice advocacy training in counselor education. What is not clear is the form that training should take.

Social justice advocacy targets problems that are complex, multifaceted, and difficult to solve; counselor educators must consider students’ readiness to engage with these complexities. Creating solutions for social problems often requires greater complexity of thought, perspective-taking, and critical thinking skills than student counselors may have previously needed. Therefore, counselor educators should apply theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that promote students’ abilities to accurately conceptualize and effectively address the complex social problems they will encounter. Cognitive developmental theory provides such a framework.

### **Cognitive Development**

The term “cognitive development” refers to a group of theories that describe how humans move through processes of change, learning and growth through the lifespan. Several individual theories fall under the broad category of cognitive development, such as Piaget’s (1936) constructivist theory, Loevinger’s ego development (1966), Kohlberg’s (1971) moral development, Perry’s intellectual development (1999), and Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. While each of these theories has distinct elements, they share common assumptions.

First, these theories share the basic assumption that development requires the appropriate balance of support and challenge so that increasingly more complex situations and problems can be successfully navigated (Perry, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Next, developmental theory assumes that growth is unidirectional, predictable, and hierarchically sequenced, with higher stages of

development representing more adequate modes of functioning in a complex society (Loevinger, 1966; Piaget, 1936; McAdams, 1988). At lower developmental levels, people tend to be more rigid, concrete, and self-focused in their thinking processes and problem solving abilities, whereas at higher developmental levels, people exhibit greater flexibility, empathy, and ability to consider the good of society (Carlozzi, Gaa, & Liberman, 1983; Kohlberg, 1971; Loevinger, 1966; Perry, 1999). According to Foster and McAdams (1998), higher levels of cognitive development enable counselors “to advocate for social and community change, as well as to promote change and development in their clients” (p. 7). Therefore, looking to cognitive developmental theories as a framework for understanding students’ readiness to engage with complex topics is potentially useful in counselor education (Choate & Granello, 2006). Two strands of developmental theory are particularly relevant to the discussion of social justice advocacy: moral development and intellectual development.

Kohlberg’s (1971) theory of moral development describes how people think through and make decisions about complex ethical problems that have no clear answers. While the term *moral* evokes connotations in everyday language, Kohlberg used this term to refer to principles for how people should treat each other in a just society. Justice, as a central framework, was considered to be the “primary regard for the value and quality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations, [as] a basic and human standard” (p.14).

In Kohlberg’s theory, people who function at the highest levels of moral development are assumed to be most likely to work to create a just society for all (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Several authors have discussed the connection between higher levels of moral development and more effective treatment by counselors (Evans & Foster, 2000; Foster & McAdams, 1998; Hayes, 1994; Rest, 1994; Robertson, 2013; Sprinthall, 1994). Thus, because of

this theory's focus on justice and its connection to stronger counseling treatment, it provides a useful framework for examining counseling students' readiness to engage in social justice advocacy and was therefore selected for use in this study.

Perry's (1999) model of intellectual development helps counselor educators consider how students understand knowledge, truth, and their creation. Stages of intellectual development reflect increased personal ownership of knowledge, including perceptions of what is "true" and who is the source of "truth." Higher intellectual developmental levels reflect greater complexity of thought, greater ability to consider multifaceted information, and greater understanding that context can alter what is assumed to be right and true (Evans et al., 2010; Perry 1999).

The theory of intellectual development has been used often in the fields of counseling and counselor education because of its focus on conceptualizing cognitive complexity. Many authors have discussed this theory and its usefulness in counselor education (Ericksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Granello, 2002; Granello 2010; McAuliffe & Lowell, 2006). Given that themes and challenges that call for social justice advocacy work are often complex, intellectual developmental theory offers a way to conceptualize students' ability to engage with these complex topics and was therefore selected for use in this study.

Given the systemic and social origins of problems clients present in counseling, counselors need to think in more complex and systemic ways, linking their work with individual clients to the societies in which those individuals live. Cognitive developmental theories have been used for decades to conceptualize counselor training. While the theories of intellectual and moral development may seem dated, linking these well-established theories to the challenge of preparing students as social justice advocates offers a useful framework for counselor educators. Educational strategies that promote intellectual and moral development, as well as advocacy competency are

necessary. As an approach to engaging students with communities and complex, collective needs, service-learning offers a possible educational strategy for achieving this goal.

### **Service-Learning**

According to Jacoby (2015), service-learning is a “form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes” (p.2). Put another way, service-learning combines conceptual and experiential learning in an educational strategy that works collaboratively with community to address a community need that is relevant to curriculum (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Kronick, 2007; Preiser-Houy & Navarrete, 2006). Several studies have examined the impact of service learning in counseling programs and other educational environments such as in undergraduate programs.

Research on service-learning has shown it benefits to learners in a variety of settings and its positive impact on counselor development, intellectual development, and moral development. One study demonstrated that counseling students who completed 30 hours of service-learning in a community service setting during a pre-practicum course showed significantly greater self-efficacy and lower anxiety during internship (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003). In a mixed-methods study, Lee, Rosen, and McWhirter (2014) found that service-learning contributes to multicultural competence in counseling students, particularly across behavior, cognitive, and affective realms. Service-learning also has been shown to have merit in improving multicultural competence in counseling students, specifically in moving away from a “missionary ideology” (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004, p. 191). A study by Wang and Rogers (2006) demonstrated that undergraduate students in a course with a service-learning for social justice component demonstrated significantly greater cognitive complexity and tolerance for ambiguity than students



in courses without that component. Lies, Bock, Branderberger, and Trozzolo (2012) demonstrated that as a result of an eight-week service-learning experience, college students had significantly higher levels of moral development compared to a control group.

These and other studies have established the efficacy of service-learning to promote development in a wide variety of areas. However, research specific to the use of service-learning to promote cognitive development in counseling students is lacking. Service-learning is increasingly used in counselor education, yet more research is needed to demonstrate whether it can be effective in promoting specific competencies necessary for contemporary counselors.

### **Social Justice Advocacy, Cognitive Development, and Service-Learning**

In light of the theories, models, and studies described above, using cognitive developmental theory to conceptualize students' readiness to engage in social justice advocacy is useful. In addition, service-learning as a specific pedagogical strategy offers a concrete way for students to learn about and practice the skills of social justice advocacy. Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, and Bryant (2007) have proposed that service-learning may offer an appropriate pedagogical framework for preparing student counselors to be social justice advocates. They have suggested that service-learning may not only expose students to the broader issues of social justice and injustice, it may also deepen their ability to lead systemic change.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study sought to determine whether service-learning was an effective strategy for promoting social justice advocacy competency, as well as promoting increased moral and intellectual development. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) Will a service-learning for social justice intervention positively impact students' social justice advocacy competency for the experimental group compared to the control groups?

(2) Will the use of a service-learning for social justice intervention impact students' moral development for the experimental group compared to the control groups? and (3) Will the use of a service-learning for social justice intervention impact students' intellectual development for the experimental group compared to the control groups? It was hypothesized that using a service-learning intervention in the context of community counseling internship would significantly increase student's social justice advocacy competency as well as their moral and intellectual developmental levels for the experimental group compared to the control groups.

### **Method**

This exploratory study used a quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest design with non-equivalent control groups. Community counseling internship courses at three CACREP accredited counseling programs were the sites for the study. As the internship classes in the study were in CACREP accredited programs, they were all designed to meet accreditation standards; there was a great degree of similarity between them. Examination of the syllabi for each course demonstrated that the courses were structured to focus around clinical case presentations and group supervision. Each course required students to present video recordings and written case conceptualizations as assignments. Other requirements included evaluations by supervisors, and journal entries recording students' experiences. Each of the experimental and control group classes met once a week for approximately three hours. The experimental group maintained a focus on case presentations and conceptualizations, but also had the service-learning intervention, which will be described below. It was thus distinct from the others. The study was conducted in accordance with the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) and was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

## **Participants**

Participants were recruited from Internship in Community Counseling courses at three CACREP accredited community counseling programs in the Southeastern United States. All the programs in the study were in the final cycle of CACREP accreditation as community counseling programs at the time of the data collection. Participant groups were made up of intact class groups, meaning that all students in each class were assigned to either the experimental or control group and were not randomly assigned.

Forty-five students participated in the study, including 16 in the Experimental Group, 22 in the first control group (hereafter referred to as Control Group One), and seven in the second control group (hereafter referred to as Control Group Two). Of the 45 participants, four (7%) identified as African American, two (4%) identified as Asian American, one (2%) identified as Latino/Hispanic, and 38 (86%) identified as White. There were 38 (85%) females and seven (15%) males and the average age of participants was 29.87 years with a range of 22 to 70 years.

Because of the unequal numbers of participants between the Experimental and Control Group One (Experimental Group,  $N = 16$ , Control Group One,  $N = 22$ ), Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was conducted on pretest scores between these two groups. It revealed homogeneity of variance for all tests. A series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests conducted to determine whether any pretest differences existed between the Experimental Group and Control Group One found no significant pretest differences between groups on any measure used in the study. Since Control Group Two only took the measures at posttest, they were not included in this first analysis of pretest differences.

## **Procedure**

Two participant groups, one experimental and one control, completed pre and posttests respectively at the beginning and at the end of the fall semester of a two-semester, 600 hour internship experience. Instruments, which were all completed in paper-and-pencil format, were administered on the first day of the course and the last day of the course. A second control group completed only posttest measures at the end of the semester in order to determine the impact of testing effects with participants taking the measurement instruments multiple times. Students in the two control groups participated in a standard CACREP community counseling internship; the Experimental Group received a service-learning intervention during the first semester of a CACREP community counseling internship.

## **Instrumentation**

In addition to a demographic information questionnaire, participants completed several measurement instruments: (a) the Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment, (Ratts & Ford, 2007); (b) the Defining Issues Test II (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999); and (c) the Learning Environment Preferences (Moore, 1989). Each instrument will be described below.

**Advocacy Competency Self-Assessment Survey.** The Advocacy Competency Self-Assessment Survey ([ACSAS], Ratts & Ford, 2007) is a measure of counselors' self-perceptions of their advocacy competency. It was used to measure participants' self-perceptions of their advocacy competency. Grounded in the Advocacy Competencies developed by Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek (2003), the ACSAS includes six subscales which correspond to six domains of advocacy including client empowerment, community collaboration, public information, client advocacy, systems advocacy, and social/political advocacy. The measure consists of 30 total questions that span the six domains. Together, the six subscale scores comprise a total score on the

measure. The total scores can range from zero to 120, with scores between 100 and 120 indicating efficacy in social justice advocacy competency. Bvunzawabaya (2012) revealed the ACSAS demonstrated high internal consistency with a Coefficient Alpha of .93. The ACSAS's construct validity was mixed, showing significant correlation with the Multicultural Counseling Inventory, and no correlation with Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Bvunzawabaya determined the construct validity of the ACSAS was partially supported by the study's findings (2012). A factor analysis on the ACSAS showed no validity for the six domains structure. However, a small sample size (109 participants) limited Bvunzawabaya's conclusions and suggests a need for continued validation of the instrument. As the only measure of advocacy competency designed specifically for the field of counseling, the ACSAS was used despite its shortcomings.

**Defining Issues Test-II.** The Defining Issues Test-II ([DIT-II], Rest et al., 1999) is a measure of moral development that assesses how adolescents and adults understand, interpret, and make decisions about complex moral issues. This paper and pencil test includes five hypothetical moral dilemma stories and asks participants to rate 12 issues in terms of importance in making a decision about the dilemma. The 5-point Likert scale for responses ranges from "no importance" to "great importance." Participants then rank the three most important issues in deciding about the moral dilemma. Participants receive an N2 score that represents not only development of more advanced moral judgment, but also a reduction of lower developmental levels of thinking. A higher N2 score indicates that a person will more consistently use more advanced moral judgement and would be less likely to use lower developmental thinking. This score is considered to provide more powerful data than previously used scores (Rest et al., 1999). Internal consistency and test-retest reliability statistics for the DIT-II have consistently ranged from the higher .70s to the lower .80s. The validity of the DIT-II was determined on the basis of its differentiation with regard to age and

education (30-50% of variance accounted for by DIT level), its relationship to cognitive capacity measures (effect size .80), and its sensitivity to moral education intervention (effect size .41) (Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997).

**Learning Environment Preferences.** The Learning Environment Preferences ([LEP], Moore, 1989) assesses learning and epistemological stances and has been used widely across the United States in a variety of educational institutions, from community colleges to research universities. The LEP examines respondents' views on five domains of the educational experience: knowledge and course content, role of the instructor, role of the students and peers in the classroom, classroom atmosphere, and role of evaluation. Sentence stems are followed by statements which are rated on a four-point Likert scale by participants. Then, participants identify and rank the three options of greatest importance to them. The measure produces two scores. The first is the R index, which relates to the percentage of relativistic thinking. The second is called the Cognitive Complexity Index (CCI), which corresponds to a level on Perry's scheme of intellectual complexity development (Moore, 1989). Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for individual domains of the LEP range from .63 to .84, and overall test-retest reliability of .89 has been determined. Moderate levels of concurrent validity have been established in comparing the LEP with the Measure of Intellectual Development ( $r = .57$ ), an established measure of Perry's conceptual model (Evans et al., 2010).

### **The Service-Learning Intervention**

Experimental Group participants received a service-learning intervention that included two distinct components: (a) the didactic Social Justice Advocacy Curriculum, and (b) an experiential Advocacy Project. The Social Justice Advocacy Curriculum was delivered each week of a 16-week semester during the first 30-45 minutes of class time. The remaining time was used for group

clinical supervision consistent with CACREP standards which included student case presentations. Through the Social Justice Advocacy Curriculum, students were engaged in readings, lecture, case studies, small and large group discussion, guided group reflection, and multi-media elements that introduced them to the concepts and guiding tenets of social justice, counselor advocacy. The Social Justice Advocacy Curriculum, which was based on the Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2003), is summarized Table 1.

Table 1

*Weekly Social Justice Advocacy (SJA) Curriculum Timeline and Project Tasks*

Week	Class Activities
1	Overview of SJA curriculum topics, goals and expectations
2	Student introduction and orientation to the semester-long SJA Project
3	Topic discussion - "The Meaning of SJA"; Formation of project work groups
4	Topic discussion - "Advocacy Competencies"; Group selection of community partners
5	Topic discussion & case study analysis - "The Counselor as Social Justice Advocates"
6	Topic discussion - "The Art of Empowerment"; Community partners felt need identified
7	Work group reflection on Project to date; Full SJA Project proposals due to instructors
8	Topic discussion - "Facilitating Community Collaboration"; Projects approved/initiated
9	Topic discussion - "The Counselor as Systems Advocate"
10	Topic discussion & case study analysis - "Providing Public Information"
11	Topic discussion - "Social and Political Advocacy"
12	Topic discussion - "Overcoming Resistance to Change"; Work group progress reports
13	Reflection on Project impact; Project completion and evaluation with community partners
14	SJA Project presentations to the class; Instructor-guided reflection on the experience
15	SJA Project presentations to the class; Instructor-guided reflection on the experience

In order to carry out the Advocacy Project, students self-selected into small groups and identified a marginalized population or social issue with which they wished to work. They identified and collaborated with community partners who were working with that population or

issue. Students met with community partners to identify a focus of their project. Once a plan had been established, the students designed and implemented their advocacy projects.

To promote student investment in the project, students were given considerable latitude to design and carry out their projects, and were given only three rules: (a) each project had to be completed within one academic semester, (b) each project had to result in a tangible product that the community partner could continue to benefit from, and (c) in collaboration with the community partner, each project had to include formative and summative evaluation. Participant projects included a community directory for the local gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual population, and a resource guide for medically vulnerable adults entering the hospital.

Through guided reflective journals and class discussion, instructors encouraged students to connect their experiences at each stage of the advocacy projects with the Social Justice Advocacy Curriculum. Course instructors remained available to students and community partners beyond class time for consultation and support. At the conclusion of the semester, students formally presented their projects to their peers, instructors and community partners in order to fully recognize and document their collaborations, experiences, and learning.

## **Results**

In this section, results of the data analysis will be reported. First, each research question and its attending hypothesis will be reiterated. Then, results of statistical analyses will be stated.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question focused on social justice advocacy competency. Specifically, the question asked the following: Will a service-learning for social justice intervention positively impact students' social justice advocacy competency? It was hypothesized that the service-learning intervention would cause significantly raise total scores on the ACSAS in the Experimental Group.



A 2 x 2 repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if any significant differences existed between the Experimental Group and Control Group One at posttest. Results indicated that there were no significant differences between the Experimental Group and Control Group One scores by group ( $F(1, 31) = .001, p > .05$ ), or in the group by time interaction effect ( $F(1, 31) = .85, p > .05$ ). Participants in both the Experimental Group and Control Group One showed significant gains on ACSAS total scores at posttest. A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA of pretest and posttest total scores for the Experimental Group and Control Group One on the ACSAS revealed a significant ( $F(1, 31) = 10.32, p \leq .05$ ) main effect by time. While the intervention did not cause significant growth in the Experimental Group over Control Group One, both groups made significant gains in their advocacy competency during internship.

While there were no posttest differences between the Experimental Group and Control Group on posttest ACSAS total scores, 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted on individual subscale scores to determine if any significant differences existed between groups at posttest on subscales. One subscale, Public Information, showed a significant interaction between group and time, ( $F(1, 25) = 8.96, p < .05$ ). Scores for the Experimental Group were significantly higher on the Public Information subscale than for Control Group One at posttest. This finding indicates that the intervention significantly impacted participants in the Experimental Group on their ability in the Public Information domain of advocacy.

A univariate ANOVA was conducted between the Experimental Group and the two control groups to determine whether any significant differences existed on ACSAS total score at posttest. Results showed no significant differences between any groups on the total score at ( $F(2, 42) = .447, p > .05$ ). These findings show the intervention did not significantly increase the ACSAS posttest scores for the Experimental Group in comparison to the control groups.

## **Research Question Two**

The focus of the second research question was on students' moral development. The question was: Will the use of a service-learning for social justice intervention impact students' moral development? Researchers hypothesized that DIT-II N2 scores would be significantly higher in the Experimental Group than Control Group One at posttest.

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to test for significant differences in the N2 scores between the Experimental Group and Control Group One. While the posttest means for the Experimental Group increased more than for those of Control Group One, the results of the ANOVA showed no significant effects for time ( $F(1, 34) = 2.59, p > .05$ ), the time by group interaction ( $F(1, 34) = .10, p > .05$ ), or group ( $F(1, 34) = 2.30, p > .05$ ). The service-learning intervention failed to produce a significant increase in N2 scores for the Experimental Group over Control Group One.

A univariate ANOVA of posttest DIT-II N2 scores for participants in all three groups indicated a significant effect for group ( $F(2, 43) = 3.73, p \leq .05$ ) which, followed by Tukey post hoc analysis, demonstrated significantly greater posttest N2 scores for students in the Experimental Group than for students in Control Group Two. Because Control Group Two only completed the posttest, it cannot be stated that the intervention caused this significant finding.

## **Research Question Three**

For the final research question, researchers focused on intellectual development. Research question three asked: Will the use of a service-learning for social justice intervention impact students' intellectual development? It was hypothesized that intervention would cause significantly higher scores in the Experimental Group at posttest on the LEP.

Because two dependent variables were being measured (the R and the CCI score), a 2 x 2 repeated measures a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine whether any significant differences existed between the Experimental Group and Control Group on these scores. Results of the MANOVA indicated that for the R score, there were no significant effect for group ( $F(1, 35) = .89, p > .05$ ), or time ( $F(1, 34) = .83, p > .05$ ). Similarly, no significant differences were found on the CCI score for group ( $F(1, 34) = 1.43, p > .05$ ), or time ( $F(1, 34) = .001, p > .05$ ). Further, there was no significant interaction of group and time for the R score ( $F(1, 34) = .21, p > .05$ ) or for the CCI score ( $F(1, 34) = .48, p > .05$ ). Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes by Group on Dependent Measures*

Measure	Experimental			Control One			Control Two		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
DIT-2 N2 pre	51.6	10.1	15	45.1	14.2	22	-	-	-
DIT-2 N2 post	53.1	10.0	15	46.9	13.8	22	37.2	15.0	7
LEP R pre	34.4	15.33	16	27.0	15.4	22			
LEP R post	29.3	13.6	16	26.1	15.2	22	31.7	18.6	7
LEP CCI pre	377.8	48.1	16	346.9	80.7	22	-	-	-
LEP CCI post	368.2	52.3	16	354.0	46.3	22	366.0	69.6	7
ACSAS TS pre	61.0	21.5	16	64.9	17.4	18	-	-	-
ACSAS TS post	73.6	15.5	16	70.9	16.2	20	67.1	14.7	7

A univariate MANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were differences between the three groups on the R score and the CCI score at posttest (Table 4.9). Results indicated that there were no significant differences between groups on either the R score ( $F(2, 41) = .43, p > .05$ ), or the CCI score ( $F(2, 41) = .37, p > .05$ ). The service-learning intervention did not significantly increase the LEP scores in the Experimental Group as hypothesized.

### **Discussion**

This exploratory study focused on whether a service-learning intervention was an effective strategy to promote social justice advocacy competency and intellectual and moral development in counseling students. The study's hypotheses were not supported by the statistical results. Other findings, however, may contribute to the understanding of promoting social justice advocacy competency in counselor trainees. This section will discuss the study's findings and their implications.

While no significant differences were found between the Experimental and Control Group One in social justice advocacy competency levels at posttest, both of these groups had significantly higher social justice advocacy competency scores at the end of the semester. This finding can be interpreted in different ways. Participation in community counseling internship for one semester may have caused significant gains in social justice advocacy competency. However, maturation (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007) could also have caused this difference. Constantine et al. (2007) have suggested that acquiring social justice advocacy competency is a developmental process. Further, this development has been called a "lifelong process" (Ratts, Singh, Nasser-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016, p. 30). As counselor educators seek to prepare students as advocates (CACREP, 2015), the finding that community counseling internship increases students' level of advocacy competency is encouraging. However, more research is needed to determine the

mechanisms by which social justice advocacy competency levels are increased during internship to determine whether and how they could be intentionally integrated into counselor education curriculum.

When examining posttest subscale scores between the Experimental Group and Control Group One, results demonstrated that the Experimental Group made significant gains in their self-reported ability to engage in public information aspects of advocacy. As stated in the Advocacy Competencies, participants therefore were able to better “awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity” (Lewis et al., 2003, p. 3). Other skills in this advocacy domain include the ability to prepare and disseminate information about factors that relate to protecting healthy human development. Because a number of the Advocacy Projects were focused on disseminating information, this finding suggests that through engaging in the Advocacy Project, participants were able to grow their advocacy skills in this domain. It is possible that Advocacy Projects focusing on other advocacy domains may impact students’ skills as well, but more research is needed to determine whether this is the case.

The findings related to moral development were inconsistent with previous research on the impact of service-learning and moral development. Previous research has demonstrated that an eight week service-learning intervention caused significant increases in moral development in college students (Lies et al., 2012). In this study, there were no significant differences found between the Experimental and Control Group One in moral development at posttest. The reason for this inconsistency is unknown, but may relate to the strength of the service-learning intervention. More research on specific service-learning techniques that impact moral development is needed to more fully understand this connection.

The study found that the Experimental Group had significantly higher N2 scores on the Defining Issues Test-II than Control Group Two at posttest. As Control Group Two completed the instruments only at posttest, it cannot be concluded that the service-learning intervention caused a significant difference in moral development scores between these two groups. This finding calls for more research to determine whether or not a service-learning intervention promotes significantly higher moral development in counseling students.

The lack of significant findings related to intellectual development scores was surprising because a previous study by Wang and Rogers (2006) demonstrated that the use of service-learning with a social justice focus significantly increased intellectual development scores. Wang and Rogers (2006) stressed that effectively teaching social justice requires addressing three content areas -- the underlying causes of social injustice, knowledge of how to address issues of social justice, and actions to combat injustice. In the current study, the experimental intervention was framed around the tenets of the Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2003), which deal directly with two of the three content areas stressed by Wang and Rogers (2006) (knowledge of how to address issues of social justice and action to combat social injustice), but less directly with the third (examining the underlying causes of injustice). The current study's relative inattention to examining the causes of injustice in the experimental intervention may explain why significant gains in intellectual development were not found. Further research that integrates all three elements is needed to determine the potential impact of service-learning on counseling students' intellectual development levels.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study's limitations may have impacted the findings. The first limitation involves the length of time given for the intervention. Promoting growth in moral and intellectual development

requires adequate time. The current study was conducted over one semester (approximately four months), which may not have been a sufficient timeframe for the promotion of developmental growth. Although successful developmental interventions of shorter duration have been reported (Foster & McAdams, 1998), six to nine months has been the suggested minimum length of time to promote significant development of these capacities (Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983). In future research, extending the experimental intervention across both semesters of the CACREP internship is recommended to give sufficient time for measurable developmental growth.

A second limitation is related to the small number of participants that may have made it impossible to detect significant differences between groups. While the number of participants was considered sufficient for an exploratory study, future studies should include more participants in order to determine whether or not a service-learning intervention impacts social justice advocacy competency and cognitive development in counseling students. This may require a multi-campus effort. Therefore, it is recommended that faculty from multiple CACREP accredited programs collaborate to examine this question further.

Third, community partnerships, as well as meaningfulness and intensity of experiences are important contributors to the impact of service-learning on students (Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983). These variables were not measured as part of the current study. It is possible that Experimental Group participants did not reach the level of meaning or intensity in their engagements with community partners that could have created a significant impact in their measured outcomes. Future studies should experiment with the amount of time students spend with community partners and what role time and intensity have on student outcomes.

A fourth limitation includes the instrumentation used for the study. While the DIT-II and the LEP are well-established measures, the ACSAS has mixed validity results. It was selected

because it is the only measure of advocacy competency specifically designed for the counseling field, its limitations potentially impacted the study's findings. More research is needed to improve the ACSAS and to create other reliable and valid measures of counselor advocacy competency. Without valid and reliable measures, it will remain difficult to determine the effectiveness of educational interventions that seek to promote advocacy competency in counselors and counselor trainees.

The current study attempted to respond to the call for new approaches in preparing counseling students as social justice advocates (Constantine et al., 2007; Ratts et al., 2016). This research begins to outline what a service-learning approach for social justice advocacy training could look like. While the study's results did not support the hypotheses, the study's attempt to establish a method for preparing counselor trainees as social justice advocates provides a useful basis for future research. Specific pedagogies and teaching methodologies must be developed and tested for counselor educators to utilize. Researchers are encouraged to build on the limitations in this study to further examine the use of service-learning in preparing counseling students as social justice advocates.

### **Implications for Counseling Practice**

Service-learning can offer many benefits for practicing counselors. First, counselors can extend the services their organization can provide through partnerships with service-learning classes. Counselors can create partnerships with universities and counselor education programs and ask for assistance in specific projects that can meet client needs. For example, a counselor at a community mental health organization could partner with a faculty member teaching a course in group counseling. The counselor could request that students develop a group curriculum on social skills for young adults experiencing social anxiety that the counselor then uses at the organization.



In this partnership, students gain a significant learning experience through researching the topic, creating a group curriculum, and getting to know the needs of the population and the organization. In addition, the organization gains a new group curriculum that can be used with clients. Second, counselors can provide opportunities for students and faculty to become familiar with their organization. This can benefit counselors through opportunities to recruit quality interns when the time comes. For example, a community partner who built a relationship with a student through service-learning can have more confidence in hiring that student as an intern. Additionally, the new student intern already comes with familiarity of the organization and may need less time to acclimate to their new role. Finally, engagement in service-learning as a community partner can provide counselors with opportunities to engage in larger advocacy activities. For example, a counselor and a faculty member could join forces to educate a local city council on the mental health needs of people who experience homelessness in their community. Students could participate in research and in the development of public information campaign. For counselors who see the need for prevention and policy level interventions, service-learning can provide a team to work with to forward issues that are important to the counselor. In these ways, practicing counselors play a role in both promoting advocacy and community engagement, and help to prepare future counselors for this role as well.

### **Conclusion**

Over 20 years ago, the then president of the ACA, Dr. Loretta Bradley, called on counselors to become advocates who would work to defeat the systemic injustices that stifle wellness and development among marginalized groups in society (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Since that time, the oppression of marginalized populations has continued, and the preparatory path for professional counselors to become effective social justice advocates has remained unclear. To

address that lack of clarity, this study examined whether a service-learning intervention designed to promote cognitive development and social justice advocacy competency could effectively prepare counseling trainees to become advocates. The finding that students' advocacy competency increased as a result of participation in internship is encouraging. While the mechanism for this increase is still unclear, the CACREP internship appears to prepare students for the role of advocate. The service-learning intervention significantly increased participants' sense of competence in the Public Information advocacy domain. As the field of counseling strives to engage with communities in order to prevent and ameliorate mental health related issues, competence in connecting with communities and disseminating information will be important. This study demonstrates that service-learning projects that focus on acquiring specific advocacy-related skills can be a useful tool in preparing students to engage communities through advocacy upon graduation. Despite its limitations, the study set a necessary baseline for future research that will hopefully contribute to the creation and validation of best practices for preparing counselors to productively advocate in the social justice issues they will undoubtedly face as professionals.

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