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“Breaking Out of the Bubble”:
Becoming self-reflexive
in community-based learning classes
at Swarthmore College

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Fall 2014-Spring 2015

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Special Major in Sociology/Anthropology and
Educational Studies

“We must be convinced that the power of ideas is greater than that of the Pentagon and political parties. We must embrace the conviction that each one of us has the power within us to create the world anew.”

–Grace Lee Boggs

Abstract

In my Sociology/Anthropology and Educational studies thesis, I explore the processes of self-reflexivity in the context of community-based learning (CBL) classes at Swarthmore College. Drawing upon interviews with professors and students in CBL classes, written materials such as syllabi and students' reflections, and participant observation in CBL classes, my findings suggest that professors have a critical role to play in supporting students' process of becoming more self-reflexive. By pairing students' experiences with critical reflection in the curricula and leading by example, professors can guide students to have profound learning experiences about themselves as well as other communities. Such engagement in self-reflexive practices can enable students to work with (not for) communities in a meaningful way.

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Acknowledgements

Coming to Swarthmore College, I did not even know what a “thesis” was. Even as I entered my senior year, I was not quite sure what the process behind this graduation requirement entailed. But gradually, with the guidance of my generous and thoughtful advisors, mentors, and friends, I began to get a sense of the work and purpose behind crafting original research. While the moments of doubt, stress, and surprises in the research process was to be expected, I had not expected to find so much excitement and joy writing this thesis. Throughout this arduous and challenging process, I came to appreciate the truly collaborative nature of any research. The words provided by scholars guided me and gave me something to build upon so that I did not have to start from scratch. My thesis advisors’ insights and constructive challenges pushed my analysis in new exciting ways. Both my academic and activist communities have profoundly shaped my thoughts and reflections regarding responsible community engagement. A special thanks to my friend and transcriptionist Ali Roseberry-Polier, without whom I would not have been able to as attentively process and incorporate such a large and rich series of interviews. Last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to my family who have made possible my education and instilled in me the value of putting love into everything that I do.

Introduction

“Break out of the bubble with a community-based learning (CBL) class,” advertised a Lang Center handout with the CBL course options for the academic year. Having attended a rather insular boarding high school prior to coming to Swarthmore College, I was excited by the opportunities to apply what I learn in class beyond the classroom. CBL courses seemed to me like the ideal learning situation where I could make use of my education in a meaningful way to create positive social change. Thus, I eagerly signed up for CBL courses (Introduction to Education and Performing Arts Education) for both semesters during my freshman year.

The experiences I had in my CBL courses left an imprint on my thinking about social inequalities. I remember the tears I felt well in my eyes hearing about the death of a boy who had an asthma attack in the elementary school where my CBL class was based. His death could have been prevented, but due to the budget cuts in the school district, the school nurse was not around to respond when he had his attack. These stories, or more accurately, the real lived experiences I encountered raised the stakes of my studies, sometimes to the point of life-and-death. I saw how the things we studied in class had real consequences. This awareness made me recognize not simply an opportunity, but the urgent need to “break out of the bubble.”

Throughout my time at Swarthmore, I have been seeking to find ways to link education and social change. I looked to my courses to provide the keys to help me address these issues, and also got involved in various other social justice-oriented activities such as volunteering for a homeless shelter, writing for War News Radio (a student weekly radio program focused in conflict zones), and starting a student group

dedicated to fighting modern-day slavery. I sought guidance from my courses to inform my activism. But through my experiences, I realized how difficult it is to translate theory into practice (granted there is interest). And I was frustrated by the slowness of change and my own limited capacities as an undergraduate student to solve these urgent issues of educational inequalities, racism, and other injustices.

While I have somewhat become disillusioned by Swarthmore's glistening reputation as an institution for social change that had initially attracted me to the college, I think this disillusionment reflects my growing nuanced understanding of the complexities of social change rather than disenchantment about the prospect of social change. In fact, I feel more committed to being engaged in activism thanks to the mentorship and inspiring examples of some of my professors and peers at the college. Especially during what is now termed the "spring of discontent" in 2013 when students speaking on different issues (such as sexual violence, institutional marginalization and racism, environmental justice, etc) came together to demand greater institutional support and accountability, I came to face the fact that despite my naïve hope, Swarthmore was not a "bubble" exempt from the broader societal issues.

In addition, I experienced the complex politics behind coalition-building and creating intersectional approaches to social justice. I began asking questions like "Whose voice is being heard?" and "Where do I as an Asian American fit into the Black Lives Matter movement?" Questions on positionality and privilege arose as I sought to engage in issues that required working in solidarity with diverse groups of people with different stakes and experiences. Along with these questions came greater awareness about the ways in which I both benefitted and were oppressed by the larger systemic and

institutional inequalities. The awareness grew gradually with various experiences working with other activists and in different communities as well as reading various articles on social media and in classes.

I came to see that activists need to step back sometimes, not just to be heard, but also to listen and reflect. This kind of quiet activism that emphasizes the importance of listening and reflecting may be invisible, but still crucial to advancing social change. Such quiet activism needs to exist alongside the loud actions such as protests and marches. In the words of Grace Lee Boggs, a prominent Chinese-American activist who has been engaged in the major movements for over seven decades in America, “The radical movement has overemphasized the role of activism and underestimated the role of reflection” (2013). Boggs further argues that change has to start within ourselves. This pursuit to address the inextricable and necessary link between activism, reflection, and self-transformation that leads me to explore the question of self-reflexivity in this thesis.

In a previous Swarthmore thesis, Angela Meng explored the role and impact of Swarthmore College student volunteers in Chester, a neighboring city that faces many social and economic issues (2012). Her ethnographic exploration of Swarthmore students' experiences volunteering in Chester sought to understand why there was a lack of "sustainable, long-term impacts" of Swarthmore's volunteerism on Chester despite the decades-long involvement. She posed reflexive questions such as "Why do they (Swarthmore student volunteers) want to help the Chester community?" and "How do they feel obligated? Where do these feelings of civic responsibility come from and how are they reinforced?" (2012:15-16). She argues that the Swarthmore student volunteers failed to have long-term impact on Chester because they operate under neoliberal

ideology that encourages reliance on “private, not public, assistance” (2012:180). Thus, while students felt empowered from volunteering to address the needs of an under-resourced community, they failed to challenge the system that had created the need for their volunteering. Meng’s work remind me of the importance of being reflexive about our desire to volunteer and help communities. Good intentions do not always translate into productive results. But unfortunately, there is seldom evaluation of the impact of the college’s community engagement efforts. I seek to build on her research to continue to reflect on and question how Swarthmore can become more meaningfully engaged in contributing to positive and lasting social change not only in neighboring communities but also on our own campus through self-reflexive practices.

Self-reflexivity becomes critical particularly in CBL contexts where there is oftentimes the intention of addressing social issues through community engagement. There is a danger in going out to communities to “help” without having a thorough understanding of the issues and the circumstances involved in the college-community partnership. Why is it that certain communities are in the position of “helping” whereas others are the “helped”? Who determines what is the “help” the community needs? What is the role, or position of the college, its faculty and students (versus the community members themselves) in surrounding communities? Especially considering the power differentials often present between the institution and community, practicing self-reflexivity is essential to allowing students to be better listeners so that they are not assuming or planning things for the community, but rather, working *with* the community to undergo positive mutual transformations. Without a reflexive approach, students can

not only end up being ineffective in creating change, but worse, impose undesired changes in communities.

Self-reflexive practices entail students and professors in CBL courses to confront and investigate the ways in which they are implicated in the issues (e.g. racism, educational inequality, ableism, etc...) that they study and seek to address through their class and community engagement. Without self-reflexive practices, they may falsely view elite liberal arts institutions like Swarthmore College as exceptional from the social ills of society. Practicing self-reflexivity can allow one to recognize that the changes that they might be seeking to bring to their community engagements may also entail a change in their own selves, and their own institutions. Boggs argues that "self transformation" is an integral and necessary part of creating a sustainable change (2012). Unless we are able to see the ways in which we are implicated in the social issues we seek to counter and take the responsibility to change ourselves, our capacity for creating a lasting change in the world is limited. In other words, we have to "walk the walk" ourselves if we seek to transform the society to be more just. For example, can students make the jump from studying about sustainability issues and environmental injustice to transforming their everyday actions to live more sustainably?

Although I recognized that I had gradually become more self-reflexive through my time at Swarthmore, I was not sure exactly how I had become more self-reflexive. Being an education special major, I wanted to explore if there was there pedagogy to develop self-reflexivity. Are there activities to encourage practicing self-reflexivity? What are self-reflexive questions students can ask about their CBL experience? Thus, my two primary questions of my research became: 1) How do students develop self-

reflexivity? 2) and how do teachers encourage such development? I explore the answers to these questions in the context of community-based learning classes. I use interviews, participant observation, and written materials (student reflections and syllabi) in order to analyze the processes of self-reflexivity and identify pedagogical tools for developing self-reflexivity.

In my research, I find that while CBL courses can offer rich opportunities to foster self-reflexivity through its dynamic and engaging activities beyond the classroom, such self-reflexive practices can only develop through an intentional curricula design that pair experiences with critical reflection. Although self-reflexivity is not exactly a lesson one can transfer from professor to student in a single class, but rather, a *practice* that requires constant effort, there still is *pedagogy*, or tools especially pertinent to CBL classes that can help guide students to become more self-reflexive. Students in my research referenced various activities (e.g. walking tour, readings, discussions) in their CBL course for having instigated new self-reflexive questions about their own privilege, positionality, and epistemology. My research suggests that reflection exercises that put into dialogue students' experiences in the community engagement as well as from their own background with the academic content of the course are instrumental in cultivating the introspective reflections that lead to self-reflexive practices. Giving space in the curricula for students to share and reflect on their own lived experiences and identities in light of their readings and new experiences in communities allow students to make exciting connections to the course content and become more self-reflexive. Having both an inward and outward examination and engagement in CBL courses can lead to deep

transformative learning experiences that allow students to gain a stronger understanding of their own self as well as their surrounding communities.

In Chapter 1, I provide a literature review of CBL education exploring its origins and development in American educational philosophy. I examine CBL from a technical, cultural, political, and antifoundational/postmodern frameworks in order to situate CBL in the realm of education and also highlight its complex goals. Next in Chapter 2, I explore the concept of self-reflexivity and provide a few definitions using feminist, anthropological, and postmodern literature. In addition, I explain the importance of self-reflexivity in CBL since it brings into contact different “communities of meaning,” which oftentimes do not carry equal legitimacy (Sánchez-Casal et al 2002). In Chapter 3, I analyze interviews with faculty who teach CBL courses at Swarthmore to find that there are multiple motivations and goals behind their course that shape how they craft their curricula. I share their pedagogical tools that they employ to prepare and support their students to be more self-reflexive in community engagement. Finally in Chapter 4, I identify students’ processes of self-reflexivity based on my interviews. I note the importance of critical reflection in addition to concrete lived experiences, both from the site of their engagement during the course as well as their own personal experiences. The importance of having a constant cycle of experience and reflection to developing self-reflexivity are made clear through students’ reflections on their various classes.

Methodology

Defining community-based-learning at Swarthmore College

The first question I was confronted with when designing my research methodology was, “What constitutes as a CBL class?” The registrar designates Community-Based learning classes across various disciplines such as Engineering, English, Political Science, and Environmental studies. The “community-based” aspect of CBL classes varies widely in terms of kinds of activity, and relation to class material, and location. For some CBL classes, the “community” did not refer to some outside community, but to the Swarthmore College community. For example, students in “Environmental Justice: Theory and Action” class (Political Science, Environmental Studies) looked for ways to make Swarthmore College a more sustainable community through policy recommendations, some of which were actually implemented (such as replacing disposable salt shakers with refillable ones). In some CBL classes, multiple communities were involved in a single class since students had choice in determining where they went depending on their interests –such as in “Philosophy of Religion” where most students tutored children in an after-school program in Chester-but some chose to pursue their own interests such as volunteering in a radio station in Chinatown or playing soccer with kids with special needs in the local area. In “Social Problems of Philadelphia” (Sociology), small groups of students pursued different projects (such as designing curriculum, or building a greenhouse) at a single site, Jackson Elementary school in South Philadelphia. Some classes had highly interactive partnerships with other people, such as in “Literacy and Hard-of-Hearing or Deaf People” (Linguistics), where Swarthmore students partnered with deaf students from Gallaudet University to co-create

an e-book (which include videos telling stories in sign) for deaf children. Others required minimal human interactions, such as in “Water Quality and Pollution Control” (Engineering), students researched the quality of water in the creek in “Crum woods” (college’s forested area) as well as other nearby areas. These examples are just a few examples to display the great variety within the CBL program at Swarthmore College.

Defining the “Community” in CBL

To what exactly is the word “community” in community-based learning classes referring to? The Swarthmore CBL program engages with a variety of communities including non-profits, schools, faith-based organizations, medical institutions, etc. But is the “community” in CBL solely referring to the site of community engagement of the course? Or can the “community” also refer to the Swarthmore College or students’ own home communities? My interviews with students have revealed that CBL courses not only focus on experiences in the site of community engagement, but experiences more broadly in multiple communities, including Swarthmore as well as students’ own home communities. Expanding the notion of the “community” in CBL program has profound implications for students’ ability to be self-reflexive. By encompassing students’ diverse experiences beyond the specific sites of community engagement, students are able to make connections across communities and notice how their own community is implicated in the issues they focus on in class. This holistic view of “community” mirrors the notion of “ecology of education,” which recognizes that students have multiple sites of learning beyond the school that can support their education (Cremin 1976). Although my research focuses on students’ experiences in CBL classes, I recognize that their experiences do not occur in a vacuum since students’ experiences are always cumulative and shaped by experiences in multiple communities.

In addition to recognizing the variety of communities involved in Swarthmore's CBL program, it is also important to recognize that a "community" is not a static or definite entity. A single community embodies a complex amalgamation of different identities and values that may not always be harmonious with one another. Communities, like identities, are also multiplicitous and dynamic *processes* that can contain juxtaposing sets of ideals, values, and identities. However, it is important to note the process of contributing to and shaping the construction of the college community is not always democratic. Students who come from minority backgrounds often feel pressured to leave behind aspects of their home in order to conform to the dominant culture of the college (that is largely white, middle/upper class). So sometimes, the site of the CBL community engagement may be more familiar to the student than the Swarthmore community itself. Hence, when I discuss the relation between the "Swarthmore Community" with its neighboring communities, it is important to recognize that these communities are not always disparate settings and individuals can be a member of multiple communities simultaneously.

The Swarthmore "community" (by which I refer to the Swarthmore college community) is by no means a monolithic group since students, faculty, and staff come from (and bring with them) different backgrounds that inevitably shape the community. While the Swarthmore community may comprise of members from diverse backgrounds, the institutionalized culture of the community often mirrors the power imbalances in society. Despite the ideals of social justice rooted in the Quaker heritage of the institution, the college neither escapes nor is exempt from the inequities of the broader society. Therefore, in spite of the community's efforts to be socially conscious and active, Swarthmore is far from immune to the effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism,

ableism, etc. that exist in society. These effects are most evident in overtly hateful incidents such as the urination on the Intercultural center, or the chalkings of homophobic messages. But everyday, there are incidents of microaggressions that are perpetuated anywhere from class discussions to conversations in the dorm, to behaviors in party spaces. We can also observe the ways in which there is institutionalized discrimination when we note the failure of the institution in admitting more black students (despite organized demands), or the poor retention of women in the engineering department, or the lack of an ethnic studies department. Therefore, though many students may talk about Swarthmore as a “bubble” distinct from the “outside world” (maybe due to its geographic isolation), the boundaries of the communities are in fact quite porous. Recognizing how these oppressive structures function in students’ everyday environment will later be discussed as a critical component of practicing self-reflexivity.

Research Protocol

My research is based on interviews with eight professors (two of whom were also members of the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility) and nine students. I initially based my outreach to professors based on a handout listing the eleven CBL courses for the fall of 2014 designed by the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility (a primary resource on campus responsible for assisting the organization and design of CBL courses at Swarthmore College). I thought the handout gave a well-rounded sample of CBL courses across different disciplines. However, through time, I realized that the handout did not include Education classes (e.g Introduction to Education), although it is formally designated as a CBL course by the registrar. Perhaps school observations did not qualify to be "community-based" enough to be listed in the

handout along with other CBL classes that had a more interactive presence in communities. But as a result of my evolving conception of CBL education and practical need (to have more interview participants), I decided to also reach out to CBL classes in the Education Department mid-way in my research. Hence, I eventually ended up reaching out to all the professors teaching CBL courses in the fall of 2014 to invite them to be interviewed.

I must recognize, however, that while I solely looked at classes that are formally labeled as CBL by the registrar in my research, there are classes that do not have the “CBL” label that I think could be considered CBL. For instance, can biology classes that do fieldwork be considered CBL? Or a class that engages in a historical research project with former alumni about black student organizing at Swarthmore? What determines whether or not a class is a CBL class is still an ongoing question (further explored in Chapter 1) facing many higher education institutions, including Swarthmore. But there seems to be a growing effort to standardize and set a clear criterion for what is and is not CBL within Swarthmore (as evidenced by the creation of several part-time positions devoted to coordinating CBL) and around other institutions of higher education. But for the purposes of my research, I adhered to the institution’s designations of CBL classes as subjects of my research since they seemed to represent a diverse variety.

My research included interviews with both faculty and students in CBL courses in order to gain a better sense of both the intent and impact of the CBL program. I limited my research to include interviews with students and professors involved in CBL courses taught in the fall of 2014. I made this decision thinking that my interviewees would have a relatively fresh memory of their experience in the course (while still having time to

process and reflect retrospectively on their class). But I made a few exceptions to interview students who had taken the CBL courses prior to the fall of 2014 based on professor's suggestions. In addition, I interviewed two members of the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility, a primary resource for coordinating and supporting CBL at Swarthmore, in order to better understand the history and institutional support of the CBL program.

While I reached out to all professors teaching CBL, I selectively reached out to students enrolled in fall 2014 CBL classes taught by professors whom I had a chance to interview. My outreach to students entailed emails sent via the professor as well as personal class visits to briefly explain and invite students to participate in my research. The majority of my interviews with students were conducted early in the spring semester of 2015 since many students were unable to participate in the busy months during the end of the fall semester. This meant that by the time of the interview, students had completed the CBL class that which they were speaking about in the interview. As a result, my student interviewees had a few months since the end of their CBL class to process their experience and were reflecting on their experience in retrospect during their interview. The interview itself was an additional forum for students to reflect and be self-reflexive about their experiences in the course. The interviewed students voluntarily opted to participate in the research without the professor being notified of their decision (which means that the data may represent a self-selecting group of students who were more interested in the class, or held strong opinions).

While the CBL classes discussed in the interviews tended to be in the social sciences and humanities, students' academic interests were distributed across all

disciplines (including the natural sciences). However, I must disclose that I have bias towards the social sciences and humanities (as a sociology/anthropology and education major) and admit that my findings may be slanted towards these two disciplines. The interviewed students represented different class years, including three seniors, three juniors, two sophomores, and one freshman. Consistent with overall trends in service-learning/community-based programs, a large proportion of my interviewees (seven out of nine) were women. Most of my interviews with students were conducted individually and lasted about 40~70 minutes. However, two interviews were conducted in joint group discussions. Each group discussion had students who had taken the same class (though sometimes during different times or with different professors).

All the students' names have been changed in order to protect their confidentiality. This process of ensuring confidentiality of my interview subjects in many ways limited my presentation of data analysis. Especially considering the inevitably self-implicated nature of my research topic, "self-reflexivity," it was a difficult to find a balance of staying true to the specificity of unique personal reflections and descriptions and protecting my subjects' privacy. Although I have taken one class on qualitative research methodology, I felt I was still in the process of figuring out how to do qualitative research as this is my first extended independent research project. I must also add very gratefully that I was able to have the help of a transcriptionist due to medical conditions that limit my ability to type. While I was nervous about not having the intensive listening process of transcribing to help analyze my data, I was able to work in partnership with my transcriptionist with transparent communication about choices (such as whether to

include “um’s” in the transcription). I also checked and edited the transcription while listening to the interview recordings.

Unfortunately I was unable to include the experiences of community members, who are also crucial actors in CBL programs, due to time constraints and logistical challenges. However, in a CBL course I am currently taking, my final project entails conducting and analyzing interviews with community organization leaders about their experience with Swarthmore volunteers. While the focus of these interviews differs from my research for the thesis, it is part of my ongoing effort to hear about experiences in CBL programs from new perspectives.

Ch. 1

Community-Based Learning Education: A Literature Review

What is community-based learning? How did it emerge in institutions of higher education? What are the goals of community-based learning educational models? These are the questions I began with in my research. I first introduce a brief history of the CBL program at Swarthmore College. And I address the questions above using literature on community-based learning (as well as service-learning) education. In particular, I use the four conceptual models (technical, cultural, political, and postmodern/antifoundational) provided by Dan Butin, a scholar on service-learning, to guide my examination of the multiple goals as well as some of the critiques of service-learning (2005).

History of CBL at Swarthmore College

With its Quaker heritage, Swarthmore College has placed great value on civic engagement and social responsibility since its founding in 1864. While the institution may not have upheld its values as the glossy college publications make it out to be throughout its history (and presently), Swarthmore has fostered the intellectual and ethical growth of many socially responsible leaders. While it is difficult to pin down an exact year for the start of CBL classes at Swarthmore (since classes that engaged in communities probably have existed before CBL was formally conceptualized and instituted), the establishment of the Lang Center in 2001 signifies the beginning of formal institutionalization and conceptualization of the CBL program at Swarthmore. The center has emerged as an important resource to coordinate and support community-based

learning courses. The Purpose statement of the center's endowment agreement indicates an explicit goal of fostering CBL courses:

The (Lang) Center shall provide vision, leadership and support for the College's *central commitment to educate students* for civic and social responsibility. The Center shall serve...*as a primary structure to foster and facilitate courses and educational experiences that carry a community-based learning component*, and to establish an awareness of connections between courses and issues of civic and social responsibility.¹

The Lang Center has created grants such as the "Curriculum Development Grant," which provide funds up to \$5000 to support faculty members interested in using CBL pedagogies. In the grant guidelines, the center refers to CBL as the "methods by which students work and engage with external communities for academic credit." Surprisingly, one of the critical functions of the Lang Center that emerged from my conversations with faculty who teach CBL is its support for transportation. The Lang Center covers the cost of public transportation and also coordinates van reservations. Such support is critical especially considering the geographical distance between Swarthmore and its community partners. In addition to monetary support, the Lang Center staffs experienced community engagement leaders to help assist in finding community partners, and course planning. For example, Cynthia Jetter, the Director of Community Partnerships and Planning helps both students and faculty identify suitable community placements based on their interests.

In my discussion with some of the Lang Center staff about the start of CBL program at Swarthmore, they referred to a "let every flower bloom" philosophy. In other words, they wanted to encourage faculty to explore and create their course without having a top-down prescriptions and definitions about what constitutes a CBL course. In

¹ Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility. From the endowment agreement creating "The Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility, finalized 11/20/03. <http://www.swarthmore.edu/lang-center-civic-social-responsibility/about-lang-center>, accessed May 10, 2015.

this regard, Joy Charlton, the executive director of the Lang Center, contrasted Swarthmore's approach to CBL from the Praxis program at our consortium partner, Bryn-Mawr College. She said that Bryn Mawr had a much more definitive approach to establishing their Praxis program (Bryn Mawr's CBL equivalent). Their program delineated three levels (ie. Praxis I, II, and III) that specified the number of hours and the nature of community engagement, as well as set guidelines for how much of the course is constituted by the Praxis fieldwork (e.g. "Praxis I courses constitutes less than 25 percent of the total coursework assigned")².

It is only in recent years that Swarthmore has started trying to create a clear standard and definition for CBL. Recently, the Lang Center recently created two part-time positions for the explicit purpose of supporting the CBL program (ie. Coordinator of Community-Based Learning and Faculty Coordinator for Outreach and Engagement). They have facilitated group lunches, met with faculty members one-on-one, and visited CBL courses, and ran workshops for students in CBL classes (e.g. workshop on positionality). Nina Johnson, the coordinator of CBL, created a website as a resource for CBL faculty members where they can see definitions, guidelines, and models for CBL education. As CBL courses require tremendous effort to plan and execute, it is critical to grow institutional support and resources in order to make CBL courses possible and successful. Many of the faculty members I interviewed for this research expressed their appreciation and need for such support. While the Lang Center serves an important role in coordinating CBL classes, Charlton stated, "I want CBL to not just be a Lang center thing but a college thing." Her words echo the sentiments

² Bryn Mawr College. Levels of Praxis. <http://www.brynmawr.edu/ceo/programs/praxis/levels.html>, accessed May 10, 2015

of another professor of CBL courses who wished that community engagement was “front and center” to the college’s mission and practice rather than being “a valued, voluntary option.”

Definition of Community-Based Learning/Service Learning

Formal conceptualization and literature on the pedagogical method and philosophy behind CBL began emerging in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the term “service learning” was the standard when the literature emerged. But new terms like “community-based learning” and others (e.g. civic education, community-service learning) have emerged with changing goals and frameworks. The differences in the terminology reflect differences in priorities and frameworks for conceptualizing the nature or relationship of the educational model; however, they are all variations that grew out of the desire to promote community engagement in academic institutions. Therefore, I will draw on literature incorporating various terminologies recognizing that though they are not all entirely synonymous, they still share many common elements. So although the term “community-based learning” is the term used by my field site, Swarthmore College, I use the term “service learning” interchangeably in this chapter to be consistent with the literature.

There is no singular definition of service learning, but the most commonly cited definition is "a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle and Hatcher 1995: 112). This definition captures the essential aspects of service

learning, which is the combination of action through community engagement and reflections guided by the academic assignments and materials. Though service learning may encompass forms of community service such as volunteering (serving in food pantry, tutoring), research, or internships, it is the pairing of community engagement with an academic class that distinguishes services-learning from community service. The “credit-bearing” nature of service learning courses create more structured opportunities for students to engage and learn from their experiences.

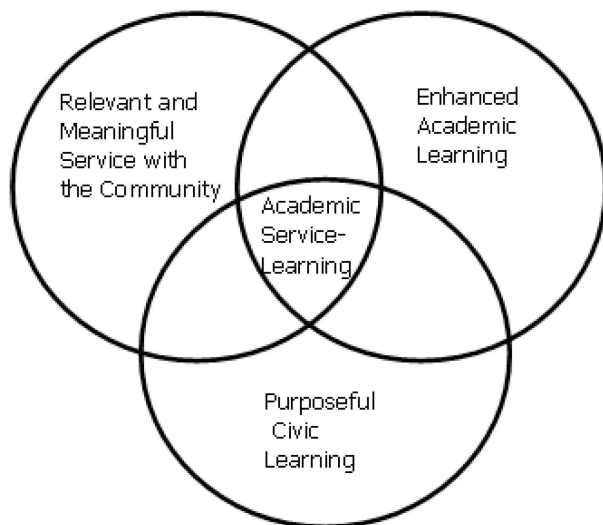
The history of service learning cannot be traced to a specific year since elements of what may be referred to now as “service learning” existed before its formal conceptualization. For example, the Morrill and Homestead Act Initiatives of 1886 gave land grants to colleges to focus on rural development (Stanton et al. 1999). However, in the 1980s, more formal conceptualizations and resources began to develop on service learning. For example, in 1985, Campus Compact, a national association for the promotion of civic engagement in higher education, was founded by three universities (Brown, Georgetown, Stanford). It was designed to support institutions integrate community-based initiatives; since then, more than 1,100 universities and colleges (including Swarthmore College) have joined.

While service learning programs has clearly gained interest in higher education (to varying degrees within each institution), the criteria for what exactly constitutes service learning is part of an ongoing debate among professors and administrators. There have been efforts to establish and clarify guidelines, principles, and goals of service learning by national organizations such as Campus Compact, National Service learning Clearinghouse, and Learn and Serve America. In addition, academic journals like

Michigan Journal of Community Service learning have created scholarly discussions on service learning. There are now many publications seeking to define, assess, and reflect on service learning: handbooks providing practical guidelines for teachers and administrators (e.g. Service learning Course Design Workbook, 2001) as well as for students (e.g. Cress 2005), compilations of narratives from service learning practitioners (e.g., Stanton et al 1999), and comprehensive books establishing, assessing, and critiquing the theory and practice of service learning (e.g. Butin, 2005; 2010).

But as leading service learning scholar Dan Butin notes, “service learning is never a singular, stable, or ultimately, controllable practice” (2010:4). The Michigan Journal of Community Service learning has created three necessary criteria for academic service learning programs. These criteria are: relevant and meaningful service within the community, enhanced academic learning, and purposeful civic learning. Figure 1 provides a helpful illustration for understanding the various goals of service learning. The extents to which each criteria is emphasized varies widely amongst service learning programs.

Figure 1. Academic Service-learning Goals



Michigan Journal of Community Service learning, Service learning Course Design Workbook, 2001, 12.

The Origins of Community-Based Learning

Community-based learning is a pedagogical method that was born out of and conditioned by the changing philosophical, socio-political, and historical contexts of the twentieth century. The expansion of access to public schooling led to the increasing responsibility of schools in shaping society. Therefore, tracing the roots of CBL can clarify the principles and goals of CBL. I will use Butin's four conceptual models of service learning to articulate the various philosophies and goals in CBL: technical, cultural, political, and postmodern/antifoundational (2005; 2010).

Technical

The technical conceptual model is primarily concerned with pedagogical effectiveness. The development of community-based learning has drawn heavily from the American educational philosopher, John Dewey. Dewey has influenced American education in countless ways, but in particular, his theory of experiential learning had a profound influence on the foundations of CBL. His reminder of the "intimate and necessary relation" between experience and education brought critical attention to the pedagogy of traditional classrooms (1938:7). While Dewey recognized that "experiences" still occurred within the traditional classroom of desks and blackboards, he argued that they were largely of the "wrong kind" because they did not engage with or relate to students' lives or surroundings (1938:14). Dewey encouraged educators to look to the "local community" as "educational resources" and challenged them to carefully select surroundings that are "conducive to having experiences that lead to growth" (1938:34-36). Following Dewey's philosophy, incorporating relevant and thoughtfully planned

“experiences” is key to teaching well. In other words, students can learn better through experience. Hence, CBL is viewed as an effective pedagogical method to encourage students to engage in “deep learning” (Butin 2010:9). Similar to the rationale for having labs for students in the sciences to perform experiments to test what they have learned, many CBL courses embody the idea that “We learn by doing.” The experiential nature of CBL courses allow students to observe and interact with the theories they may be learning about through real concrete experiences.

Cultural

The cultural conceptual model emphasizes increasing understanding of various cultures and raising students’ awareness of their own and others’ “meaning-making” processes (Butin 2010:9). The “border crossing” opportunities facilitated by CBL allows students to gain exposure to different ways people make meaning in their lives (Hayes and Cuban 1997). As culture is neither static nor monolithic, students can gain a more nuanced and complex view of different cultures through their interactions with different communities. Their interactions may highlight both the ways in which they are similar and different from other cultures. In effect, knowledge about different cultures and communities can allow students to make sense of their own culture and perspectives.

In addition to cultivating appreciation of multiple cultures, another important aspect of CBL under the cultural conceptual model is fostering civic engagement. Ernest Boyer, a former US Commissioner of education, propounded the idea of “engaged scholarship” and the notion of “institutional citizenship” (Boyer 1996). In his call for greater interaction between universities and communities, he wrote, “The Academy must

become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems” (1996:13). The exchanging of knowledge with communities in CBL countered the ‘ivory tower’ model of universities and pushed for the reconceptualization of universities as a “public good” rather than simply a “private benefit” (Bringle et al 1999: 96). The increase in the number of centers for civic engagement on college campuses (such as the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility at Swarthmore College) reveals the increasing interest in CBL in higher education.

However, it is important to recognize that the emergence of civic engagement initiatives by universities has mirrored the rise of neoliberal governmentality (Rose 1996). Neoliberalism with its ideologies of capitalism and free market has shifted the responsibility of the state onto individuals. Despite well-intentioned efforts to assist marginalized communities, a depoliticized view of CBL has the danger of excusing the lack of governmental accountability for “private act(s) of kindness performed by the privileged” (Clause and Ogden 1999:33). The next two conceptual frameworks (political and antifoundational/postmodern) are useful in providing further context for the implications of service learning.

Political

Similar to the civic engagement aspect of the cultural conceptual model, the political conceptual model focuses on understanding issues of power and legitimacy. The political perspective encourages questions such as “Whose voices are heard and whose are silenced?” and “Who makes the decisions and by what criteria?” (Butin 2010:11).

Notably, questions of power and the use of education to disrupt hierarchies link to the famous Brazilian educational philosopher, Paulo Freire. Freire urged for the fostering of students' "critical consciousness" to awaken them to the oppressive social and political structures of the world in which they lived (1970). Freire critiqued the traditional educational model of "banking" that restricted students to passive recipients of knowledge that is ruled by dominant ideologies. Like Dewey, Freire reminded us to think critically not only about what we teach, but *how* we teach. For Freire, how we teach carried significant political implications for either perpetuating or resisting hegemonic power. In service learning contexts, students may have more opportunities to have agency in shaping their own learning experiences as they direct their own community engagement projects and use their own experiences as a resource for learning. However, as Butin notes, "From a political perspective, service learning is both potentially transformative and repressive" (2010:11). He explains that while service learning may disrupt the hierarchy and authority of the student-teacher relationship, it often fails to mitigate the power imbalances in the college-community partnership.

During the last decade, there has been an emergence of critiques on the notion of "service" as patronizing and propelling unequal relationship between the academy and community (e.g., Peterson 2009; Clause and Ogden 1999; Stoecker and Tryon 2009). Many critics have pointed to the difference in "charity" versus "social change" or "transactional service" versus "transformational social justice partnership" (Stoecker and Tryon 2009, 129; Bringle and Hatcher 1995). The notion of "service" was prone to setting a dichotomy between the giver (academy) and recipients (community), similar to Freire's concept of "banking" (1970). Though service learning programs may have been

born out of the desire to counter the method of “banking” in classrooms, they may unknowingly be perpetuating the “banking” method of community service (1970). The criticisms on the notion of “service” may be one of the factors that led to diverging terminologies without the word “service” such as “community-based learning.”

In a sense, there has been a “reflexive turn” in service learning in the last decade with the emergence of new critiques and questions on the efficacy and reciprocity of service learning programs. The little empirical evidence of service learning programs having positive or sustainable impact on communities has also brought concern over the question of “who benefits” in service learning: the community or students? Many have criticized the “institution-centric” nature of service learning that prioritizes students’ learning over community impact as “exploitative” (Stoecker and Tryon 2009, 129). However scholars have also noted that it does not have to be an ‘either or’ situation. Stanton et al wrote, the debate on “who benefits” in service learning does not have to be “a competition of emphasis between campus and community” since “the practice of service learning is in fact the mutually interdependent integration of learning and empowerment needs of each partner in the relationship” (1999, 140). While the themes of “social change” or “social justice” are common in CBL programs, there have been growing efforts to critically reflect on and assess whether the intent is translating to impact.

In “Anti-politics machine: ‘development, depoliticization and bureaucratic Power in Lesotho,” Ferguson critiques the self-serving state of development bureaucracies in “Third World” countries. He argues that their depoliticized view of and resource allocation, which ignores political and historical factors that have created poverty in

“Third World” countries in the first place, makes them ineffective in alleviating poverty. Ferguson’s analysis and critique of development agencies reminds us to think critically about power imbalances and the political history of places we view as “in need” of service. A depoliticized view of poverty supports misleading theories like Culture of Poverty, which attributes the cause of poverty to the characteristics of the poor rather than discriminatory structural inequalities (Goode et al. 2001). Especially since service learning programs tend to be involved in communities of marginalized people (race, class, sexual orientation, etc), having a politicized view of the community engagement and partnership is important.

Unless explicit attention is paid to the politics of community engagement and “service,” well-intentioned actions can still result in perpetuating unequal power relations and negative stereotypes. Without critical and reflexive awareness of the politics of community engagement or “service,” students in CBL may view communities as “needy,” “helpless,” or “unknowing” (Peterson 2009). And as mentioned before, the blindness to the neoliberal conditions which necessitates civic engagement can trap universities in a futile effort that leads to no significant structural change. The clues to achieving such a practice of mutual reciprocity may be embedded in the anti-foundational/postmodern framework.

Antifoundational/Postmodern

“One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (Freire 1970, 95)

The antifoundational (postmodern) perspective seeks to shake our very idea of what is “normal” or “true.” As Butin writes, “it is committed to denying us the (seeming) firmness of our commonsensical assumptions” (2005, 13). Consequently, it encourages humility and doubt about what we think we know or we conceive as true. Michel Foucault argued that “truth” is produced by dominant ideology of a specific historical time. There is no neutral “truth” divorced from its historical context. Postmodern questions on epistemology and subjectivity opened closer scrutiny of the very processes of knowledge production. The shifts in the conception of what constitutes knowledge or “truth” in postmodernity lent legitimacy to students to authors of their own knowledge from their experiences. Rather than simply relying on texts written by scholars for their learning, students in CBL classes are encouraged to use their own experiences to learn. However, critics of CBL shared concerns about the extent to which the professors and students of CBL are able to honestly confront or question their own epistemologies and listen to the community (Butin 2010). The concern about the unequal power relation between the academy and community (discussed in the political framework) connects to epistemological and ethical concerns in community engagement.

The concern over unequal power dynamics have led to greater attention to thinking about positionalities in relation to knowledge (ie. epistemology). Feminist scholars built on Dewey’s philosophy of experiential education and Freire’s concept of

consciousness-raising to call for “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988). The concept of “situated knowledges” highlighted the always political and subjective nature of knowledge. The feminists’ conceptualization of personal as political and valuable led to the questioning of the assumed superiority (or even existence) of “objectivity” and or “neutrality.” The notion of “situated knowledges” opened room for validating personal narratives as a legitimate source of knowledge as well as a means of building solidarity against oppression. Feminists and postmodernists contributed immensely to breaking the notion of having a preexisting and fixed body of knowledge that had to be transferred by the teacher to the student; and instead, opened the possibility of co-creating knowledge. Sharing many intersecting goals with CBL, feminist pedagogy emphasizes “dialogue” and “reflexivity” in the process of learning (Maher and Tetreault 1994, cited in Naples et al. 2002; Sánchez-Casal et al. 2002; Heffernan et al. 2000). This kind of pedagogy creates room for the unique experiences and perspectives of students in the production of knowledge. The reconceptualization of how meaningful knowledge has the potential to activate new sources (community and self) as sites of learning.

Ch. 2

An Exploration of the Notion of Self-Reflexivity

In this chapter, I explore the notion of self-reflexivity using anthropological, feminist, and postmodern literature. Put simply, self-reflexivity is making the self an object of contemplation and study. In trying to define self-reflexivity, I also highlight the purpose of self-reflexivity, especially in the context of CBL classes. One of the important functions of self-reflexivity is bringing to light the conditions that influence one's own way of thinking. Engaging in deep self-reflexive practices move from the question of "Who I am" to the question of "What do I bring?" For example, it is not enough to say, "I'm a Korean-American woman with a private liberal arts education." Self-reflexive questioning extends the analysis to thinking about *how* being a Korean-American woman with a private liberal arts education *affects* my understanding of the world. Through this process, one can gain a better sense of how one's perspectives have been conditioned or in other words, *positioned* by history. This awareness can help break down one's own "seemingly commonsensical view of the world" (Butin 2010:12). Questioning normalcy and neutrality privilege and consideration of norms.

A Literature Review of Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity has been gaining greater attention and articulation since the 1970s in particular (but not limited to) the discipline of anthropology, as well as in the theories developed by poststructuralist and feminist scholars. The growing recognition and concern about positionality and the relationship between knowledge and power urged scholars to more critically examine and understand their own position, or put in other

words, be self-reflexive. To begin, I will offer a few articulations of self-reflexivity which I have found to be useful in understanding the concept:

- the “practice of turning our gaze back on ourselves” (Keane and Colligan 2004)
- “an attempted deconstruction of one’s work and desire behind work” (Lather, 1991)
- “undoing the ‘I’” (Chaudry 1997)
- “analyzing one’s own worldview, assumptions, and values as part of interactions with others” (McCabe 2004)
- interconnecting producer, process, and product (Ruby 1982)

Understanding some of the roots of self-reflexivity may help clarify this complex concept. In the 1970s, there was what is now referred to as a “reflexive turn” in anthropology that was prompted by the recognition of the discipline’s shared responsibility in perpetuating the European colonialist project. With the recognition that the constructed knowledge of the “other” served to subjugate and oppress colonial subjects, anthropologists in the postcolonial era have become more cautious of the ways in which they research and represent different cultures (Keane and Colligan 2004). Therefore, it has become important to interrogate the impulse to study the “other” in order to become better aware of some of the assumptions and biases shaping the research. In addition, a more self-reflexive approach to research served to assist in uncovering the structural power imbalances implicated in the position of the researcher. Because even in the absence of malicious intent, anthropologists have recognized that the very practice of ethnographic research can perpetuate and legitimate unequal power imbalances. The “reflexive turn” pushed anthropologists to turn the mirror not only outward towards studying society or “the other,” but inward towards critically examining their own discipline as well as themselves. Works like *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of*

Ethnography and its response by feminists in *Women Writing Culture* sought to deal with the challenging questions of positionality, authority, and representation in ethnographic writing. These works addressed critical questions such as “how does the genre of ethnographic writing affect how and what we understand?” or “to what extent can anthropologists understand and represent another culture if one cannot escape one’s own subjectivity?” Anthropologists critically examined the limitations of the self and the discipline in trying to understand different cultures, and sought to find new ways of engaging in research.

Some contemporary anthropologists have intentionally engaged in self-reflexive practices in order to better understand their research participants via a greater understanding of self. For example, anthropologist Dorinne Kondo begins by explicitly situating herself in her study on identities in the Japanese workplace; in her first chapter, she writes,

So I tell the story of how I came to center my project on notions of identity and selfhood, through an ‘experiential’ first-person narrative I deploy in order to make several ‘theoretical’ points: first, that any account, mine included, is partial and located, screened through the narrator’s eye/I...”
(1990:8)

By admitting the “partial and located” nature of her ethnography (as well as that of “any account”), Kondo avoids writing a totalizing authoritative account of the culture she is interacting with and interpreting. Rather than presuming a “neutral” or “objective” standpoint, Kondo unconventionally uses the first person “I” and positions herself vis-à-vis her research participants; this positioning of the ethnographer reflects the idea that emerged during the anthropology’s reflexive turn that *who* the anthropologist is inevitably shapes the ethnography. Through sharing more information about herself and

her experience during the research (ie. her experience as a Japanese-American who visually, but not culturally nor linguistically, passed as Japanese to her research participants), she is able to highlight the contextual and complex nature of any identity, that of her own as well as of her research participants. This transparency of her ethnographic method and experience can also assist in making explicit the assumptions and conceptual frameworks of the ethnographer. Just as it is important for a natural scientist to carefully detail his research protocol, social scientists' self-reflexivity can help further elucidate the research methods, the tools they used. This includes describing the conditions under which their research was conducted. Therefore, by questioning one's own positionality, one can "excavate" the researcher's identity, which often are shrouded, or ignored (Carrick et al. 2000). The positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis the research participants can also assist in turning ethnographies into more intersubjective and reciprocal endeavors. Such efforts can help anthropologists better understand their research subjects and also help to mitigate the issues of power and representation always present in ethnographic practice.

Moreover, the relation between power and knowledge production has been well scrutinized by feminists. Alongside the theoretical and methodological transformations in anthropology, the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s contributed greatly to the need for and ways to engage in critical reflexivity. By questioning and challenging the male-centered nature of scholarship, feminists pushed for not only a greater inclusion of different epistemologies, but also a greater awareness about one's own position. In *Women's Writing Culture*, feminists critiqued the male-centered perspective and epistemology that falsely claimed objectivity and political neutrality, and fought against

the marginalization of women's voices (Olson et al 1995). As a result, feminists created new ways of understanding and knowing. Dorothy Smith's influential and debated "standpoint theory" argued that since knowledge is "socially situated," claimed that women were better situated to understand (1989). While the theory has been criticized as essentializing since there is no single generalizable "women's experience," Smith nonetheless emphasized the need and also the effects of having particular standpoints. Donna Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" validated and necessitated personal narratives, and lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge (Olson et al 1995). Feminists' conceptualization of the personal as political encouraged women to see their individual experiences in light of systemic sexism and unite in the fight for justice.

However, there have been pushbacks against this shift toward validating subjectivity and embracing personal narratives as legitimate knowledge in the world of academia. The inclusion of self has been called "unscientific," "overly personal," "or trivial." Yet, feminists argued that a more involved, reflexive, and personally invested scholarship is necessary in order to advance as a society toward equality. Similarly, the paradox facing anthropologists is that "the more scientific anthropologists try to be by revealing their methods, the less scientific they appear to be" (Ruby et al 1982:26). It can be difficult to distinguish what information is relevant in the self-reflexive exploration. There is a fine balance between being self-reflexive and self-centered. In reflecting on this tricky challenge facing anthropologists, anthropologist Jay Ruby writes, the "questions of narcissism, of turning oneself into an object of contemplation, of becoming a character in your own ethnography are very fundamental and complex" (1982:24).

Though feminists criticized the presumption of “objectivity,” scholars such as Sandra Harding, a feminist philosopher of science, argued that stronger reflexivity (defined as the awareness of one’s “social location”) can actually lead to stronger objectivity (Olson 1995:20-21). Through a process of reflexivity, one can help identify (and perhaps overcome the limitations of) the assumptions and interests that shape the conceptual framework and methods employed in the research. In other words, a self-reflexive understanding of one’s own position as researcher is not only more honest and transparent than the “presumed value-neutrality of normal science,” but allows a deeper understanding of the subject of study. As Harding reminds us, “we cannot escape our history,” therefore we must recognize and identify the conceptual frameworks that we have inherited which set our assumptions about what constitutes knowledge (24). Similarly, George Marcus notes, “even the best ethnographic texts -serious true fictions - are systems or economies of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control” (1986: 6-7). Therefore, it is critical to reflect on the roots of our very questions and methods by being self-reflexive. This reflexivity allows the researcher to step outside of their conceptual framework and perhaps even move beyond or at least recognize the limitations of their own position (23). Contrary to the fear of diminishing the validity of research, the reflexive recognition of one’s own situated-ness of the researcher does not diminish, but strengthens the authority or legitimacy of the research. By engaging in self-reflexivity, one can better understand how they came to their own understandings.

Understanding how self-reflexivity can strengthen one’s own research can help move its practice beyond a “confession,” or “disclaimer of privilege” to creating a more

nuanced and contextualized knowledge. I agree with Harding's claim that all positions, both marginal and dominant, can use their distinctive "social locations" to make varied contributions. So rather than viewing a particular position as a limiting identity that one needs to "confess" (ie. "I, a white woman from Newark, Delaware..."), an awareness of the position can be used as a resource to contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the knowledge (Olson 1995:18). This view recognizes that each position carries its own strengths as well as limitations and challenges. Such an understanding of the unique perspectives of each person avoids separatism that excludes and essentializes people (ie. Men cannot understand a woman's experience and therefore should not be involved in the feminist movement). Self-reflexivity can work toward "historicizing, rather than essentializing, our consciousness of difference" (Sánchez-Casal and MacDonald 2002:10). I later discuss the importance of this kind of historic contextualization of communities in helping to dispel stereotypes and assumptions.

In thinking about positionality, a fundamental recognition involved in the process of self-reflexivity, it is important to unpack the complexity of what we mean by "position." As Henry Giroux notes, the *self* is "constructed as a terrain of conflict and struggle" (2005; 53). In other words, the self is not a unitary or fixed identity, but rather, an emergent, dynamic, and changing construction. This recognition of the complexity of any identity helps us resist the common tendency to essentialize identities based on social classification (ie. race, gender, class, etc.). However, people often generalize identities and assume expertise using social markers. As an example, I think back to stories of the only black student in a predominantly white classroom being asked about the experience of "blacks in America." Such an incident reveals not only the false presumption that by

virtue of being a certain skin color, one can understand and represent the experience of a whole group of people. While Macdonald and Sánchez-Casal recognize that social categories are “real” in the sense that “there are real social, political, and epistemic consequences of identity,” they reject the notion that identity can “be fully determinate of what and how we know” (2002:3). They discuss the ways in which identity can both “enhance and obstruct our ability to know” because while there is a relationship among experience, identity, and knowledge, it is not definite or predictable. (2). Therefore, one cannot assume that certain identities afford a more accurate or truthful understanding. So statements such as “Because I am X (ie. White, woman, middle class), I know Y” is problematic and inaccurate.

By positioning, it does not mean one has to map and be constrained or defined by one’s identity, but rather understand one’s own relation in relation to others as well as one’s own history. This positioning helps disrupt the normalization and privileging of one’s own particular perspective as authoritative. An uncritical examination of positionality is what perpetuates hegemonic and often oppressive rules such as white supremacy. In her discussion of white privilege, Peggy McIntosh writes,

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as a morally neutral, normative, and average, also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow “them” to be more like “us.”

It is clear from the quote above why being self-reflexive may be particularly important in the context of CBL partnerships when there is often a disparity in terms or resources between the institution and community. Do we want to make “them” more like “us”

through the community engagement? What do we consider “normal” or “ideal”?

Practicing self-reflexivity can help unpack and cast doubt on preconceived ideas that we assume to be normal or ideal. From questioning norms, one can begin to ask more self-reflexive questions such as “What are the goals in CBL engagement? Who establishes them? Are they mutual?” In addition to questioning norms, being self-reflexive entails an acknowledgement of one’s privilege. As McIntosh notes, her schooling did not train her to see herself as “an unfairly advantaged person.” In other words, she had been unable to see how her privileged position in society was related to the wider social inequalities. Being able to see one’s own position in relation to broader social structures allows one to see that regardless of “moral will” or intent, one is implicated as both a beneficiary of an oppressive system.

The purpose of self-reflexivity is not about confessing your intent (though that can be part of the process), but more importantly, it is about recognizing how we have been conditioned and situated by our own culture and history. Since oppressions happen on a structural societal level, everyone is implicated in the system regardless of intent. Similar to McIntosh, Harding writes,

This is not an argument about individual intentions, it’s not an argument that individual philosophers are wicked, evil people...Instead, it’s an argument about how science and knowledge projects are located within particular cultural histories and particular cultural projects and help advance those projects in one way or another” (Olson 1995:23)

By *locating* our knowledge in relation to histories, we can become more aware of how our view of the world may be motivated by particular “cultural projects” (e.g. neoliberalism). The self-reflexive questioning can assist in deconstructing and

problematizing “objective” accounts or representation of cultures that have perpetuated hegemonic and oppressive conceptual schemes and “regimes of truth” (Foucault 1977). The need to be open to and respectful of different ways of knowing is in my view one of the primary functions of self-reflexivity. Similarly, Giroux notes the importance of border pedagogy like CBL in “challenging, remapping, and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities, and an objective representation of reality” (2005:18). Because even with the best of intentions, we are bound by our own assumptions and biases that have been born out of our own histories.

While practicing self-reflexivity cannot necessarily “free” us from the ways in which we have been conditioned by our history and culture, it can at least make us less blind and oblivious to their impact on our perspective. Exploration of the notion of self-reflexivity is an endlessly complex and fascinating endeavor. I believe practicing self-reflexivity is key to allowing those from the institution to become more conscientious and sensitive partners and listeners in CBL partnership. As Foucault wrote, the point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous...so my position leads not to apathy but to hyper –and pessimistic activism” (Foucault 1997:256).

Author’s Self-Reflexive Practice

Before I begin explaining the connection between self-reflexivity and community-based learning, the primary subject of my research, I will engage in the self-reflexive practice that I had begun in my introduction. Being self-reflexive entails a continuous process of questioning and examining how what I think have been conditioned, or positioned, by my social circumstances. Therefore, I hope to engage in this practice

intentionally throughout my research process. In my endeavor to be self-reflexive, I seek not to transform my thesis into an autobiography, but rather, to elucidate where my motivations for my research have come from and how I have been trained to engage in my research. Because I believe by writing on why I seek to know what I want to know, I can be more transparent about the motivations and perspective that colors my approach to my research.

Though it is difficult to distinguish what is and is not relevant or pertinent in my reflexive inquiry into my personal history, I will refer back to the question I posed earlier: How does the fact that I'm a Korean-American woman with a private liberal arts education affect my research? More specifically, I pose the question 1) "What kind of motivation, assumptions, and theoretical frameworks am I bringing into my research?", and 2) "How does experience attending schools in both Korea and the U.S. affect my view of education?"

To address the question about my motivation and theoretical frameworks, I find it useful to speak about my academic interests as well as personal background and experiences. As an undergraduate student with a special major in sociology, anthropology, and educational studies, I am curious about the role of culture particularly within classrooms and schools. As schools function as one of the major sites of socialization, I view schools not only as a mirror to society, but a place capable of challenging and changing the current social and cultural dynamics. In short, I am motivated to learn about how schools can function as an incubator and generator of social change. In fact, I came to Swarthmore because I saw it as a place where my education could align with my commitment to social change. I was intrigued by the opportunities

oriented towards connecting theory to action. I wanted the link between what I learned in the classroom to have relevance and use for me to use in the world. I think my desire to dissolve the boundaries between the classroom and the surrounding world is what drew me to look at community-based learning (CBL) program at Swarthmore. I see CBL as a pedagogy full of promise for orienting and preparing students for engaging themselves to better the world, but also ridden with complex challenges.

Based on my own experience taking several CBL classes such as Performing Arts Education, Urban Education, and Introduction to Education, I recognized the value of the exposure CBL classes have provided, but also its limitations. I remembered feeling frustrated at the limited relationship I had with the communities (all located in the schools of Chester and Philadelphia) I was placed in for the course. I think having such a short period (8-13 weeks) of community engagement left me feeling disconnected from the community in which I was supposed to do “some good.” Although the activities of the course kept me busy, in the end, I wondered if I had made any last change in the community. Oftentimes, I felt that all I could do was sympathize and feel distraught at the economic, educational, and social injustice I observed in the communities.

While I recognize that I could have taken a more active role in creating and sustaining more meaningful relations with the community, I also am aware of the challenges of being engagement in a community outside of Swarthmore. Due to Swarthmore’s geographic isolation and also intense academic demands (that often had little connections to community engagement), I found it difficult to find the time and energy to go back to the communities I had learned and come to care about. But my desire to grow the potential connection between academics and community engagement

and belief in the capacity for growth and learning in the CBL model is what motivates my research.

While I have been heavily influenced by the educational philosophies of John Dewey especially concerning the importance of experience in learning, as well as Paulo Freire in thinking about the purpose of education, I have sought to increase my sensitivity and respect for different cultural philosophies of education. As a Korean-American who has spent roughly equal number of years in both Korea and the U.S., I found myself always reflecting on and comparing my experience growing up until the age of 10 in S. Korea and the subsequent years in the United States. Though I have my biases favoring pedagogy that are experiential (rather than “banking” or memorization based), I recognize that there is not one perfect method for teaching because context always matters. Spending my summers in classrooms in different foreign contexts such as teaching workshops on social issues in India or assisting my aunt in her classroom in Korea have challenged and broadened my ideas about “best educational practices.” There are always diverse cultural backgrounds, epistemologies, in any given classroom. Even the classrooms that may appear from the surface to be homogenous always contains differences in learning styles, priorities, interests, etc. I think being able to not only respect but grow and learn from diversity is one of the most challenging but important role of education (and purpose of self-reflexivity).

My primary question for my thesis topic, “How do students develop self-reflexivity?” developed after I had decided to research CBL program at Swarthmore. I believe this question grew from my experience at Swarthmore especially in light of my growing nuanced view of activism throughout my years at Swarthmore. My increased

awareness of positionality and privilege from my classes (particularly in anthropology) and activism led to a re-questioning of my past “do good” activities in high school such as volunteering in an orphanage in Ethiopia (for a week) or leading a Fair Trade campaign at Emma Willard school as a high school student. While I am still proud of the achievements and lessons learned from the two-year Fair Trade campaign, I was able to contextualize my high school’s ability to become the first Fair Trade high school in the nation in light of its position as a privileged institution as I became more self-reflexive. I also became more critical of Fair Trade (though I’m still its advocate) after situating it within the neoliberal and capitalistic context where our way of citizenship and agency has become limited to consumerism. While my optimism was necessary to cultivate a sense of empowerment, I now recognize the importance of stepping back and thinking critically before jumping into action even when filled with the best of intentions because social change is complicated.

Self-reflexivity and CBL

Self-reflexivity is particularly important in the context of community-based learning programs because it involves multiple positions and “communities of meaning” (Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002) coming into contact and being negotiated in the pursuit of knowledge. Swarthmore College is an example of a “communities of meaning,” which put in other words is a meaning-making community. These communities are “defined by a complex of factors including social location, cultural identity, epistemic standpoint, and political convictions” (Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002:11). Just as identities are emergent and changing, these “communities of meaning”

also are dynamic and far from being monolithic. Yet, there are certain trends and tendencies within communities for making sense of the world. For instance, reading academic journals, writing essays, or conducting experiments in labs represent constitute some of the methods used in the Swarthmore College community. While smaller subsets of communities of meaning certainly exist within the College (ie. social sciences, humanities, natural science), they all fall under the broader context of a liberal arts institution of higher education in the U.S. Therefore, the bridging of a Swarthmore class with another community that is separated not only by physical but social, cultural, economic barriers require reflexive and thoughtful planning.

Ideally, CBL strives toward a democratic dialogue that builds “coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the classroom” (Sánchez- and MacDonald 2002: 6). However, this “coalition” is difficult to build in the CBL context because of the “unequal weights of legitimacy” carried by Swarthmore and its community partners. Recent literature on service learning/CBL has cautioned this power imbalance and called for greater reflexivity especially on the part of the institution to be more attentive to issues of power. A more reflexive engagement of CBL practice can allow participants to be more aware of and therefore help to mitigate some of the power imbalances in the relationship. Because as stated before, intent is not really the primary issue necessitating reflexivity. Instead, it is the need to rupture the dominant privileged discourses and knowledge by historicizing, positioning and contextualizing.

The disconnect between intent and impact may be attributed to the lack of self-reflexivity which leads to privileging one’s own position as “neutral,” and “normal,” or

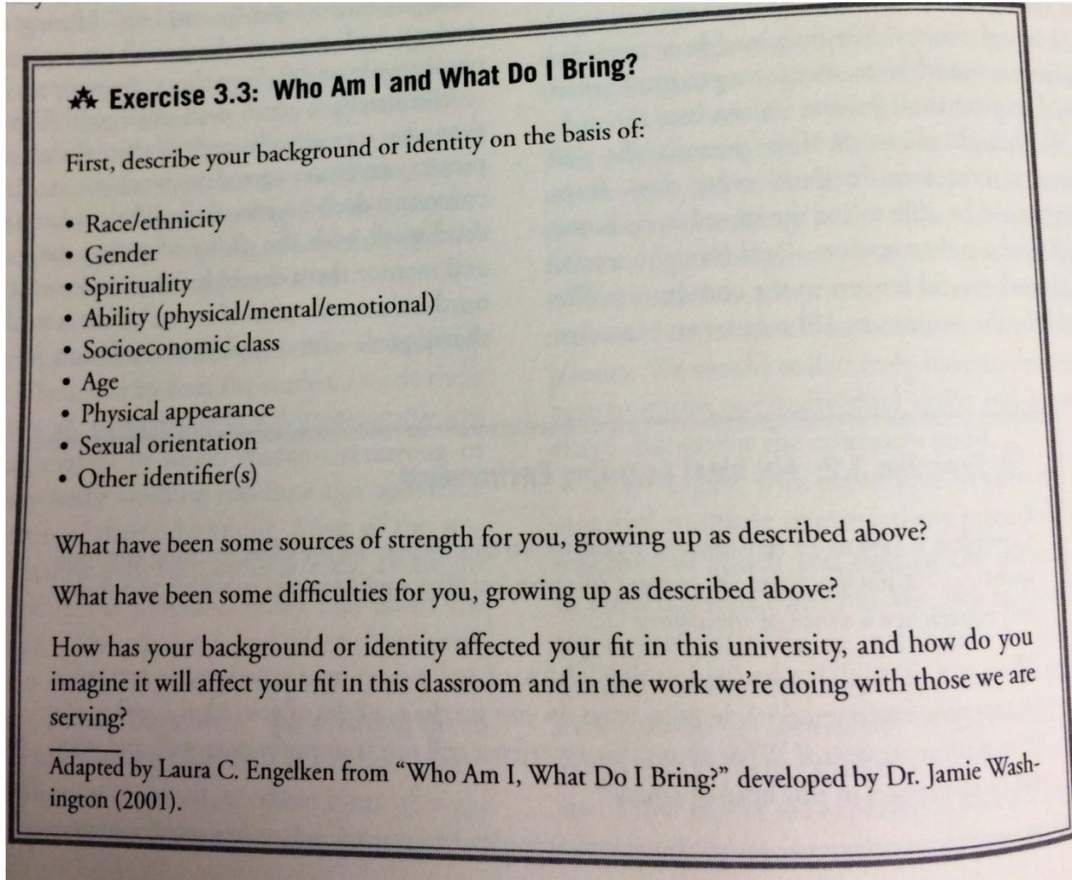
even “ideal,” and thereby dismisses other perspectives and worldviews. Many of the CBL classes at Swarthmore have been created out of the desire to engage in social and civic responsibility. While students and professors in CBL programs may be led by genuine intent to help and share resources of the college, it is critical to reflect on what is underneath the desire to “help” and also what we assume about the communities they seek to help. Because as Mindry states, “the language of privilege and responsibility to others is deeply imbued with a sense of hierarchy and superiority. Philanthropic work reinscribes the privileged status of those engaged in such work by emphasizing their superior position in relation to those who become the object of their caring” (1999). So while CBL may be seeking to redistribute power and resources, it may also unintentionally be reinscribing and legitimizing the power differentials between the institution and community. That is why it is critical especially in CBL programs to intentionally cultivate and practice self-reflexivity continuously.

CBL is a “border pedagogy” that involves crossing not only physical, but also intellectual, cultural, epistemological boundaries (Giroux). However, this “crossing” happens as a result of students’ openness to question their own position, privilege, and assumptions. Therefore, purely physical crossing into a different community is not the only journey students in CBL need to traverse in CBL programs. CBL gets rid of the “comforting boundary” that often exist between students and the object of study in traditional classrooms. By bringing students to smell, see, and feel the environmental pollution they read about in their classes, or interact with members of deaf communities, students are forced to “become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms” (Giroux, 20). Border pedagogy seeks to “interrupt” representational practices that

claim objectivity and universality, and otherize marginal populations; similarly, Freire speaks on the notion of *ruptura*, described as “a conflict that forces us to make a decision, to act, to break away from the old and familiar” (1990). This kind of break from the “old and familiar” can occur through a process of critical self-reflexivity. By allowing students to experience first-hand the communities they read and study, they are empowered to create their own narratives. However, this extraction of meaning, or translation of experience into narrative still needs to be attentive to the ever-present issue of power in knowledge production. By being self-reflexive and learning to think contextually, students can gain a deeper understanding of the different structural factors that have created various “social locations” and positions rather than othering or essentializing differences. Border pedagogy such as CBL “decenters as it remaps” the normative parameters of place, identity, history, and power.

There is no single answer to the question of how to best do in CBL. However, reflection is one of the most practiced and recognized pedagogical tool for practicing self-reflexivity. Figure 2 shows some of the questions for students in a workbook designed to help students in service learning.

Figure 2. Whom Am I and What Do I Bring?



Christine M. Cress, Collier, and Reitenauer. 2013. Learning Through Serving. "Who Am I and What Do I Bring?". p.36

Many CBL teachers have also incorporated journal writing and class discussions devoted to sharing experiences from the community as a way of providing a chance for students to practice self-reflexivity. What makes the CBL experience different from simply volunteering, interning, or even researching is the opportunity for collective reflection and learning. The combination of "in-the-field" experience with the classroom allows students to process both individual and collective reflection. The sharing of different reflections can lead students to question their own interpretation, which is critical in becoming more self-reflexive. Out of a collective reflections, the class can "cultivate a diversity of socially embedded truth claims" that can create "epistemic wholeness"

(Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002:3). Growing a critical awareness of one's own position and recognizing its implications is not a matter of being politically correct, but a way of better understanding what we know and how we know. Being self-reflexive can help orient ourselves toward what we seek to know, which is especially critical when the subject of inquiry involves a community.

Ch. 3

Pedagogical Interventions for fostering self-reflexivity: Perspectives from CBL Professors

Why do professors choose to teach CBL courses? How do they define and envision CBL education? How do their pedagogies facilitate the development of self-reflexivity? In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions based on my interviews with faculty members who teach CBL courses at Swarthmore. In the fall of 2014, I conducted seven interviews with professors who taught CBL courses that semester. They taught classes across disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Some had been in the college and taught CBL courses for a long time, and some others were very new to the college (but still had experience in CBL pedagogy).

Initially when “service learning” emerged in the 1980s, proponents shared optimistic assumptions of the positive impact of service learning for both the institution and communities without any critical evaluation or evidence of impact (especially on communities). This kind of optimistic yet unreflexive approach to community-engaged work led to a “just get out there and do it” attitude, sending underprepared students into communities which may have had adverse impacts on communities they were seeking to “help” (Deans 2003). However, as critiques on the reciprocity of service learning emerged, professors have gained a heightened sense of caution and responsibility in working towards a mutually reciprocal partnership. My conversations revealed careful planning of the course with intentional opportunities for contextualization, reflection, and reframing students’ experiences in order to encourage self-reflexive practices.

Motivations for CBL

To begin, I want to illustrate some of the motivations of the CBL faculty I interviewed to help contextualize the classes I incorporated in my research. For many professors, CBL facilitated their goals for students to become engaged citizens. One professor who has been teaching CBL courses for many years expressed, “I would want students in the short time that they’re in college, the four years that they’re in college or even the one semester that they’re in my course to think about what it means to participate in a community.” The focus on community engagement oftentimes blended with the professors’ own academic work and activism. Another professor spoke of how CBL was part of her own academic and activist work to connect communities together: “I see them [CBL classes] as part of my own research, part of my own activism, part of my own educational engagements as these multi-community, trans-community connections that get more inclusive and more connected.” CBL courses reflected her own commitment as an engaged scholar to create ties with communities.

The focus on broadening the construct of “community” beyond the classroom and the institution to connect with other communities emerged as one of the common goals shared by CBL faculty. Many professors viewed CBL as a way to leverage the resources of the College so as to move away from the “distanced ivory tower” model of the College. This idea of shifting away from the “distanced” position of the academia reflects Ernest Boyer’s notion of “institutional citizenship” discussed earlier. Boyer emphasized the responsibility of universities and colleges in building a more democratic society (Boyer 1996). Civic leadership was an explicit goal of a professor who frequently taught CBL classes. To him, civic leadership represented one of the main purposes of a liberal

arts education. Similarly, another professor noted how CBL represented “the whole point of education,” which to her meant “making life better for everyone.” She further added, “Obviously I’m going to get involved with a community who has needs that I have some expertise with respect to, so why don’t I work with them if they’ll let me.” This quote reveals the professor’s perception that she has obligations to share her expertise and the resources of the college granted that the community welcomes such involvement. These goals reflect the goals in the cultural and political dimensions of CBL following Butin’s frameworks (2010).

In addition, following the technical views of CBL, many of the interviewed professors shared the belief that CBL was effective pedagogy for not only cultivating social responsibility, but also for learning in general. They believed that the process of putting theory to action by engaging with real issues affecting communities took learning to another level. By engaging with “practical real life problems,” students have the opportunity to face relevant and pertinent issues. One professor in the natural sciences noted that even in scientific and mathematical projects that may not rely much on much human interactions, the implications of their research inevitably run into “social issues.” Unlike in most other non-CBL classes, the assignments in CBL courses may have direct consequences (both positive or negative) on communities. Having community members counting on students’ work may help instill a greater sense of responsibility in students. One professor noted how CBL courses taught students skills beyond the formal academic content of the class since there were given more responsibility in planning and executing actual projects in communities: “There are lots of other things, beyond the content of the class that I think are really important life skill kind of things. How do you motivate

people and coordinate people?” From working hands-on with communities, students may be able to develop interpersonal and problem-solving skills that may not be required in standard non-CBL courses.

For some, the relationship-based partnership was viewed as an inextricable part of their pedagogy and research methods. Given her belief that knowledge is created through relationships, CBL pedagogy was an integral to her teaching. Similarly, another professor when asked if the course had always involved partnership with the community, responded, “I would never ever in a million years think of doing such a project without being partners.” She stated that without the partnership, their class projects may be useless because it did not consult the expertise of the populations they sought to serve. In addition, she added that it could offend the community for having proceeded without their input. Moreover, several professors shared their view of CBL as not only an effective pedagogy, but a way to transform the way of creating knowledge. One professor noted, “I don’t think it’s simply a good educational experience for students. I think it’s actually a *transformation of research practices, how we develop knowledge about the world.*” The structure of CBL inherently runs counter to the dominant conventions of learning and research in the academia. Therefore, CBL classes may lead students to be reflexive about the production of knowledge as well as their own institutional culture.

Surprisingly, contrary to the generally enthusiastic portrayal and proud advertisement of CBL in the college’s websites and brochures, professors noted the precarious status of CBL within the college. Several professors spoke of the struggle to gain recognition and support for CBL from the administration and colleagues as a legitimate pedagogy. This reflects the still “marginalized” position of CBL in the realm

of higher education. At Swarthmore College as well as many other institutions, there is a lack of incentives (e.g. recognition for tenure) and support for faculty to incorporate community-based pedagogy. Echoing this, one professor noted, “The college marginally values CBL. It’s not like I get any rewards or any kind of support beyond the van support for this kind of effort.” In addition to the lack of structuralized support for CBL, there is still skepticism about the value of CBL as a legitimate pedagogy. For example, one professor noted, “A lot of my colleagues are like, we just do hardcore academics here, we don’t do any of this community stuff, so they really frown on it.” The view of CBL as less rigorous than standard non-CBL classes carry significant implications in terms of college’s willingness to actively support and grow the CBL program.

However, several CBL faculty members referenced the opening of the Lang Center for Social and Civic Responsibility as a critical step in providing more support for CBL classes. As Boyer noted, “Community problems simply do not come in convenient intellectual boxes” (Bringle et al 1999: 26). And thus, addressing social issues requires a interdisciplinary approach. And so several faculty interviewees mentioned the generous support from resources such as the ITS (Informational Technology Support) and other colleagues in assisting their CBL community engagement projects. Several professors I interviewed shared their hopes that eventually CBL education will become more validated and integrated throughout the college so that there is more support and recognition for the pedagogy. They hoped that the college could reconceptualize its view of legitimate or “rigorous” education to recognize the value of CBL education.

In addition to transforming the college’s identity and practice, a professor spoke of the potential of CBL for a “mutual transformation for both the student and the college

on the one hand and the community participant on the other.” Although the “mutual” aspect of CBL is difficult to achieve given the power differentials as noted earlier, I have found that most professors approached the design of their CBL classes well aware of these concerns of reciprocity. Many articulated their commitment to trying to create a mutual and reciprocal relationship with their community partners. Consequently, they planned their curricula to provide students adequate preparation for community engagement.

Preparations before class: *Building Relationship and determining clear expectations*

The foundations of a thoughtful and responsible CBL class lie in the vigorous preparation of the faculty. Though all courses require extensive preparations by the faculty, professors teaching CBL classes stated that planning CBL classes took extensive “front-end work” to prepare not only the academic portion of the class, but also to cultivate relationships with community partners and figure out logistics (e.g. transportation, technological equipment). This is because the integration of community-based work in the academic class was not simply treated as an “add-on” to tack onto the class at the end; but rather, the “community-based” component functioned as an integral part of a pedagogy built on principles of learning through relationships *with* communities. As one professor noted, CBL is a “pedagogy,” not simply a “field trip” (though they may be a part of the class). Hence, one professor commented that “Compared to a regular course that’s prepped, it’s probably four times as much work.” Despite the extra work and challenges that CBL classes presented, many professors who chose to teach a CBL

class were motivated by their commitment to certain communities and belief in CBL as a valuable pedagogy.

Many CBL classes were born of professors' personal relationships from their own activism and outreach. Many had long-standing partnerships with the community that they engaged in their classes, more than a decade for some. The newer faculty who may not have a long pre-established relationship with a local community partner still had prior experience and background working with similar organizations in the past. Given the personal relationships professors had with communities, professors bore great responsibility in maintaining the trust of the community.

The guidelines for "best practices" of CBL often stress the importance of having active faculty members who function as the intermediary between students and communities (Sandy and Holland 2006). One professor viewed faculty as serving a critical role as a "representative of the institution." He noted the importance of giving a "human face" to the institution for communities so that communities knew who to contact and seek support when needed. As a relatively new member of the college, he felt that he was not as familiar as he wished to be with the partnering schools in his CBL class. For such reason, some professors expressed desire to reduce the number of sites for student engagement in order to have greater familiarity and connection to places where students went as part of the CBL class. Professors can model responsible community engagement for their students through growing deeper relations with community partners

Several professors articulated the need to have clear expectations on both sides (institution and community) for a bound project that would be feasible within the span of

the 13~14 week (or more like 8~9 weeks since the first few weeks are generally devoted to preparing students) semester time frame. One faculty commented,

In building the relationship with the community partner, I, as a faculty member, would have already talked extensively about what kinds of research questions that the organization might need to support their own work, to support campaigns they might be involved in, and so I would have a sense of the fact that there's already an explicit and articulated set of questions, particularly around what kinds of knowledge, what kinds of research this organization would need that would again support and help build its own work.

These kinds of conversation figuring out organizational needs, while also valuable for students to also engage in, needed to commence before the class begins given the short semester timeline. And though there is the possibility that some students may choose to continue and expand their CBL engagement beyond the class (which is encouraged), it is important to have “really bounded project” that can be completed in eight to ten weeks. This kind of structure allows the professor to both monitor and assess the project, and also helps ensure that both sides can get something out of the short partnership. Such projects ranged from writing an organizational analysis for a community organization to creating an e-book to writing a policy recommendation to the College. Therefore, although students may be given some flexibility in choosing the particulars about their project, professors established a general format for students to follow so that their project would be feasible in the limited time frame.

Interestingly, I found that another crucial aspect of maintaining good relationship with communities entailed figuring out a reliable transportation system for students. While such logistical details may not seem pertinent to the question of self-reflexivity, these details were crucial foundations to enable students to develop a stable relationship

with their community partners. To illustrate the critical importance of having a strong institutional transportation support, one professor noted,

What happens if you sign up with people in the community and say I'm going to have two students come here tomorrow and every Monday for the next three months to do blah blah and then the students don't show up because somebody's car got towed and their mother wants the car back – it just, it actually creates more problems than it's worth. It's better not to do something than to do something and not do it well and disappoint community folk who have been disappointed forever.

This quote brings out the unpredictability and difficulty of having reliable CBL community relations. Considering the fact that most CBL classes are located in marginalized communities, which have been “disappointed forever,” it becomes especially critical to fulfill expectations and promises. While professors may not be able to control for the interpersonal aspects of the relationship between students and their community partners nor prevent unpredictable circumstances, they still had the capacity to establish the infrastructure (such as transportation support) and background knowledge (of the community's history, culture) necessary for forming positive relationships. However, as noted earlier, institutional support for the CBL program at Swarthmore is yet to be fully realized. Although transportation support for CBL courses exists, it seemed that transportation still required a lot of time and effort to coordinate. Increased institutional support for CBL can help alleviate the logistical challenges that professors face teaching CBL courses.

My interviews with professors revealed a high level of personal responsibility and accountability for students' engagement with communities. For example, in explaining the rationale for the need for an extensive preparation for students (such as one-on-one

meetings, readings, orientation session) before going out into communities, one professor noted,

“I mean, part of it is, these relationships mean a lot to me. So you want to, one, be sure the students follow through. That’s really important to me. But you also want to make sure that it’s a good fit between the organization and the student. Because the student has goals too.”

The professor’s personal investment in the community as well as her effort to find a good fit to serve the needs of both the community and student helps establish a more balanced partnership. Such attitude reflects the growing reflexivity and effort to become more reciprocal in the university-community partnerships demonstrated in the more recent literature on CBL.

Professors hold differing conceptions of the role of the faculty in the triangular relationship amongst students, faculty, and community partners. For some, they saw the faculty as the representative, the “primary investigator”:

This is my relationship that’s brought into the classroom and the trust that the organization has with me to then have me be in some ways the research primary investigator, the leader of the team in conjunction with a community leader in the organization leading what’s happening.

In contrast, another professor spoke of his intentional efforts to de-center himself in order to create a more student-centered curriculum:

I think I need to be even further behind the students, the students should be the leaders here and I’m just in the background again, my job is not to lead but to support and to infuse myself...I guess it’s about the student centered curriculum or whatever. I’m not totally absent, but I’m definitely decentered from some things.

While these perspectives on the position of the faculty are distinct, both recognize the need for the presence of the faculty in helping create a nurturing CBL experience. The faculty had a responsibility of not only planning but leading by example.

Fostering Self-Reflexivity

Though there were differing learning objectives in the diverse sample of CBL courses involved in my research, professors I planned their curricula so as to encourage students to be self-reflexive in their community engagement. Based on my interviews, I identified three critical pedagogical points of interventions for fostering of self-reflexivity: 1) contextualization, 2) reflection 3) and reframing. These interventions complemented students' experiences in communities to help further their ability to think reflexively about themselves and the community engagement. These interventions function in continuous cycles as students progress through the semester.

Contextualization

Students in CBL classes may be coming in with differing levels of experience in community engagement. Therefore, the professors cannot assume prior knowledge about responsible community engagement. Given Swarthmore's isolated geographical location from the primary sites of community engagement (Philadelphia and Chester) as well as stark socioeconomic differences between the institution and community, students needed to develop a more thorough understanding of the community. In addition, given the diverse backgrounds of Swarthmore students, students often were pretty unfamiliar with

the community they engaged with in their CBL course. Thus, contextualizing the community is particularly important in such situations. One professor spoke of the need for a preparation period to work through students' assumptions before going out into communities:

I don't expect students to be ready to go when they come into the classroom. A month, yeah, you need a month at least to be thinking about the issues and questions, to understand where it is you're going, to work through your own assumptions about that space, to work through your assumptions about expertise, to work through your assumptions about what spaces are valuable and what spaces have resources and what spaces don't, and to break down those things.

This professor always approached her CBL classes without expecting students to be ready to engage in communities. Therefore, the first month of the course was devoted to helping understand communities, as well as situate students in relation to the community. Many other CBL classes also began with an initial period mainly devoted to contextualizing the communities where they would soon be engaged in and "breaking down" assumptions through readings and discussions. Given the negative stereotypes of socioeconomically disadvantaged communities like Chester or South Philadelphia, the readings served to "un-do stereotypes" and put into critical perspective why certain areas have become the way they are now. The critical questioning of students' previously held assumptions emerged as a central theme in many professors' goals for the class.

To help break down assumptions and stereotypes, many professors spent the first few weeks of class with readings, discussions, and guided visits to help establish a better understanding of the communities that students would be engaged in for the class. Readings that laid out the history explaining the social, political, and economic factors of how a community came to be were fundamental to establishing the context of the course.

One professor highlighted the crucial function of readings in preparing students to notice the normalized social forces. For instance, she shared the experience one of her students had in seeing the gentrification in the city in their guided tour: “For them, it was really like, oh my gosh, look at this, look at this, but you can’t have that experience if you haven’t done the reading.” Having direct exposure and interaction with the places, people, and issues after having contextualized them through readings allow students to view things in a new light.

Some classes also had orientation sessions like Chester 101 or guided walking tours that also helped orient the students to the community. The purpose of the readings, discussions, and trips at the beginning of many of the CBL classes served to help students better understand not only *where*, but also *why* they are engaging in certain communities. Exploring the question of “why” allowed students to not only contextualize places, but also position students in relation to the communities. Given the negative stereotypes placed on socioeconomically disadvantaged communities like Chester or South Philadelphia, the readings served to “un-do stereotypes” and put into critical perspective why certain areas have become the way they are now. One professor noted the difficulty of developing a nuanced understanding of places stereotypically labeled “ghettos.” He posed:

So how do you come up with a nuanced understanding of under resourced areas that are true to the despair of those places without labeling them the ghetto? It’s really hard. I want to get into that complication. I don’t want to – I want people to face the hard facts and I also want to disabuse them of stereotypes and it’s hard to negotiate that.

Without properly understanding the history of how “ghettos” came to be, students may reaffirm negative stereotypes that echo the “culture of poverty” framework that blame the

poor for being poor without attention to structural inequalities. Part of the crucial responsibility of the faculty in CBL classes is to help prime students to see communities from a structural and historical lens because otherwise as one professor noted, “students just assume, neighborhoods just look like this, or there’s always a bad part of town, whatever that may mean.” By contextualizing places through readings and discussions, the professor can guide students to see that in actuality “this is the result of all of these different events, phenomena, changes, and the world is constructed in a certain way that yields well resourced areas and low resourced areas in terms of economics.” She also emphasized the need to avoid the deficit-oriented view of under resourced areas because “in terms of human capital and human possibility, there are lots of rich resources everywhere.” Building a thorough understanding of history, deconstructing assumptions, and recognizing the agency of the communities are part of the difficult but necessary preparations for engaging with communities in a responsible and respectful manner. Contextualizing communities builds the foundation for allowing students to critically reflect upon their experiences.

Becoming more aware of other communities can lead students to contextualize their own identity and experiences. One professor noted her efforts to encourage students to read about the issues facing a community then try to “see how it relates to their own lives.” By reflecting on one’s own position in society, students can begin to identify the differences as well as similarities they have with different communities and approach them in a more conscientious manner.

Reflecting

“Creating these opportunities to chat and talk about whether they be problems or successes or just funny, humorous things that were happening to them, I think students appreciated that because I think it allowed them a way to process things that you sometimes don’t get in doing field notes and observations”

-Professor of CBL at Swarthmore College

Dewey predicted the future challenges and shortcomings of service learning in his writings on the importance of reflection’s with his caution that “mere activity does not constitute experience” (1966:139). His keen attention to not just having an “experience,” but crafting the experience in such a way so as to help further inform subsequent experiences drew attention to the need for critical reflection in order to make the experience relevant and educational. Similarly, Fisher further calls to question the “authority of experience.” In other words, the having of experience is not the end in itself, but a means for further critical reflection. By urging students to engage in the critical reflection, students can engage in the self-reflexive process of interrogating “experience for its hidden assumptions and limitations” (Naples 2002:16).

I refer to reflection as the process of interpreting and meaning-making following experiences. Many scholars and educators have also called for the need for more intentional and critical reflection by professors and students in CBL programs so as to be more aware of their assumed predispositions. Engaging in critical reflections can help students and professors become more aware of their own priorities and assumptions they may unknowingly be bringing to communities. This process can work to counter some of the concerns about power and reciprocity raised earlier. In addition, creating time in class

for students to reflect also gave students a chance to debrief and try to make sense of their experiences in a more meaningful way.

While engaging face-to-face with different communities may help students break stereotypes associated with marginalized communities, it cannot be assumed that students will automatically think critically about their relation to the community on their own and change their beliefs, attitudes, and misconceptions (Naples et al. 2002). Though challenging one's own assumptions may be difficult and uncomfortable, a professor framed such process as an integral part of learning:

Of course, that's part of what education is, learning, developing knowledge, asking questions, being self-reflective, pushing yourself to challenge your own assumptions, your own background ideologies, and to push them a bit and even be a little bit uncomfortable.

Having some theoretical and historical knowledge of communities can allow students to reflect upon their own experiences and ask self-reflexive questions about their own assumptions and ideologies. However, as noted above, as self-reflexive reflections may emerge in "uncomfortable" realizations, professors can help support this difficult process by creating opportunities for reflection on both an individual and collective level. So in his class discussions during class, one professor asked open-ended questions such as "What are the differences you noticed?" and "Did you learn anything new?" In addition, he directed students to reflect on their experience in light of their readings with questions such as "How did the visit compliment, contradict, complicate the way that the readings made you think about things?" By encouraging students to draw upon the materials they had read about prior to the visit in their reflections, the professor led students to

make connections between the theories they were exposed to in class with their outside the classroom experiences. Through their conversations and exchanges of different experiences and perspectives, students can expand their own perspective and also get a better sense of their own perspective and position, an important part of being self-reflexive.

The opportunity for collective reflection is one of its unique features of CBL classes. Students in the class have an active role in listening to as well as challenging their classmates. For a CBL faculty member who strives to create a “democratic classroom,” he actively sought to voice their experiences with one another allowed students to be also involved in “informing and nourishing the development of their peers.” This follows Freire’s hope for a pedagogy that recognizes students’ agency in creating knowledge (1970). The professor viewed the cultivation of a more “horizontal and democratic classroom” through transforming the relational dynamics between the professor and students as central to also informing the relationship between the students and the community. Even though sometimes professors had to modify the planned curriculum in order to respond to students’ needs, this kind of flexibility proved invaluable to supporting students’ learning.

Despite the discomfort or shyness students may feel sharing their personal experiences in the class, a professor noted the importance of having a chance to talk openly to one another without worrying about being politically incorrect or offensive in order to learn; she said,

At the end of the day, throw away the safe space, throw away the “who’s going to offend you?” – who cares? Here we’re going to just talk about

what's happening, yeah, and we're going to assume everybody has the best intentions but you actually have to have the best intentions and you can't be in this class if you don't.

She also added that such open spaces for conversations allow students to challenge one another to clarify, or rethink certain assumptions. She noted that students have a chance to “push each other” during times for collective reflection. She remarked, “They (students) push each other. If somebody says, this is what I experienced, then they're like, what about this, what about that? I think that's the value of students going to different sites and then coming together to talk to each other, because they have a real ability to engage one another.” One professor noted the advantages of having diversity in her class:

I think that mixture gives us so many different perspectives and things people think about that other people wouldn't think about, like the why. I love that. We always need to ask why, and when you're so used to a space you're less inclined to have to ask why and I have to push you to ask why. It's really great to have that kind of mix.

Utilizing the unique opportunity for collective reflection can help students question and expand their perspective and become more self-reflexive.

One professor intentionally designed reflection sessions to occur between students and community leaders without the professor's presence in order to create a “third space.” In explaining the rationale for his intentional absence in his reflection sessions, he said:

A professor is weird, because they can see me as a supportive person, but I'm also evaluating them, so maybe they think if they raise the question of the hair braiding I'll think how could you be so stupid as to let someone braid your hair, or not let someone braid your hair, you know? I'm evaluating you. Whereas with the community discussion leaders, they're not doing that evaluation. I think it frees up students to talk without the threat of evaluation.

The professor recognized that students may not be comfortable sharing their questions and concerns for fear that they would be judged. By creating an opportunity to reflect without the “evaluator,” he sought to create a more comfortable space for students to share and reflect with the possibility of evaluation.

Along with debrief sessions, many CBL professors assigned weekly journals and reflection papers –some which may be posted on a blog so classmates could see and comment- as way to keep students engaged in actively trying to make sense of their experiences in a meaningful way. Some professors provided more guidelines for how to write journals. For example, a professor designed her journal entries such that on one column, students would write down observations (what happened), and on the adjacent column, students would write their reflections (what they thought about what happened). Having a structure that pushes students to keep reflecting continuously throughout the semester allows students to constantly process what they are experiencing in the field. One professor regretted not having a more structured timeline of when journals are collected because sometimes students would cram writing all the journals at the end right before the end of the semester. The constant process of reflections can allow students to see how they may be changing the way they see or interpret their community. One professor excitedly remarked on this process of change, “I think continually asking questions, but the way to look at progressing is asking the same questions. We ask the same questions over and over again. It’s exciting to see how the answers change every week.” This *change* may be an indication of students changing their previously held assumptions. By being guided to continuously reflect on their experiences, students can become more intentional and reflexive about their experiences.

Reflection opportunities open room for students to learn from the lived experiences of others as well as one's own self. One professor encouraged students to write keywords from the reading assignments and relate how they related to students' own experiences in "their everyday life." Such exercises help puts students' own personal histories into conversation with the class. Although personal narratives are often seen to be at odds with the academic conventions of "objective" scholarly studies, this same professor intentionally began her semester with testimonials that told stories related to the themes of the course given her firm belief in the educational value of lived experiences. She said,

I always start with the testimonials or testimonies and have people dig deeply into the theories that are emerging from testimonies. Theory is defined and looked at differently in my classes than simply that which is in fancy journals or books. We raise questions of how you can learn about analyses of the world through stories and then I have people think about their own stories and consistently, one of the fundamental questions is how did you get that idea?

She encouraged her students to draw theory from these testimonies. The practice of drawing theory from lived experiences also allows students to learn from their own lives. From reflecting on their own lives, students may create the link between how they live their day-to-day lives and what they are learning in class. For example, students in a class on environmental issues may begin to question where their trash goes, or students working with deaf students may notice more of the challenges facing deaf communities in their day-to-day lives. One professor noted that sometimes there is a "hardened resistance to looking at positionality" because it is difficult seeing how oneself can be implicated in perpetuating injustice. However, experienced professors can help make personal the knowledge students are creating in class and empower them to take action.

In addition to the question of positionality that may emerge from learning about different lives, the focus on lived experiences can lead students to reflect on their own epistemologies as they're confronted with the question, "How did you get that idea?" Answering this critical question can push students to reflect on their own histories and try to trace why they think the way they do. This is one of the important aspects of practicing reflexivity –the ability to identify how certain norms may have conditioned our way of thinking. Being self-reflexive does not necessarily mean that one needs to dispel previously held beliefs, but rather better understand *why* they think the way they do. This understanding allows students to be more sensitive to the possibility of others having different perspectives. Reflection can entail conversations with one's own self, with classmates, or with community members. These conversations are crucial in order to recognize how one may be positioned differently but also see how there may be common goals. To this end, one professor noted:

To me, the value of the conversation and the relationship building is to actually identify the differences and the historical and economic construction of these different social conditions, and at the same time to see the common, the sense of common purpose and also the varieties of knowledges about the world.

Especially in CBL relations where a well-endowed institution is engaged in communities with very different circumstances, guiding students to interrogate the relation between power and knowledge is critical. Reflecting on whose voice carries weight in the relationship may allow those from the institution side to be more mindful of the needs of the communities. Professors can push students to question and reflect on their assumptions and frame communities as also agents and knowledge-creators rather simply than as beneficiaries.

Reframing

“I have them code or underline some of the problematic language and think about, ok, what’s the message that’s intended here and how might we reframe this. Adapting the language. It’s a fine line between, I don’t just want them to be politically correct and beautify something, I want them to go through a linguistic paradigm shift where they are shifting the language that is used but gets at a similar point.”

-Professor of CBL at Swarthmore College

The quote above illustrates an exercise the professor led in his class where he shared an old student journal (from a different institution) to demonstrate an example of deficit-oriented language. After having students read and annotate the journal, they identified the problematic aspects of the writing and discussed how to reframe the journal. Recognizing his students’ “search for language” in thinking about their field experiences, he organized exercises such as these as well as guidelines for writing observation notes in order to provide students with critical frameworks and language to “make sense” of their observations and experiences. Having developed a contextualized understanding of urban schools, many students had a hard time believing that the journal had actually been written by an actual student. While the journal showed perhaps an extreme version of “what to avoid,” microaggressions can often be subtle and go unchecked. Having a thorough contextualization and reflection may lead students to notice these instances and reframe their way of thinking. By equipping students with the critical framework and language, students can reframe their analysis in their process of reflection. And as the same professor noted, shifting the language used to describe a certain community is not simply a matter of being “politically correct,” but a way to grow our way of perceiving and appreciating communities.

In addition to reframing students' experiences, one professor noted her efforts to reframe students' thinking about CBL itself. She wanted to frame CBL as an opportunity for students to *learn from* communities rather than “*serve*.” She noted,

It isn't altruism. It isn't philanthropy. It isn't community service. We are there to listen and learn. Certainly there are things that students bring to the table, skills, but we certainly don't overestimate those, and we don't assume that where we're going, people don't have skills and knowledge and expertise. That's why we're going – because they have skills and knowledge and expertise, and we're going to learn.

By reframing CBL as an opportunity to learn rather than serve, there can be a shift in the view of “expertise” and also “resources.” By leading students to ask question such as “Who has ‘expertise?’” or “what they mean when they say thing like ‘a poor place like Chester?’” understandings of communities can be reframed to recognize the different kinds of resources in a community. These reconceptualizations can recognize that even in struggling underresourced communities, there are incredibly resilient and hardworking people. The balance of recognizing the challenging realities facing communities while also recognizing the agency and resources of the community requires attentive efforts on behalf of the faculty to help students grow a nuanced understanding of communities.

Figure 3 provides some of the activities and questions I identified in the three pedagogical intervention points for fostering self-reflexivity. Through planning their curricula with explicit attention to contextualizing, reflecting, and reframing students' experience, professors can foster self-reflexive practices that form deeper learning experiences in their classes. My interviews with students discussed in the next chapter affirm the importance of these pedagogical interventions in supporting students' development of self-reflexivity.

Figure 3. Pedagogical Interventions for Fostering Self-Reflexivity

	Contextualization	Reflection	Reframing
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Readings, discussions, films -Orientation sessions, walking tour, allyship workshop -Panel/conversation with community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Class discussions (small groups and whole class) -Individual meetings with professor -Reflection sessions with community leaders -Journals, reflection papers *Double column journal: one column writing on observations, the other on reflections *Keywords journal: students reflect on their readings and identify keywords that also relates to their own lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rewriting or reviewing old journals -Class discussions where students can challenge one another's point of view -Readings with critical theories on the intersectionality of race, class, gender, etc.
Questions	<p>“What are the social, political, economic factors that have shaped the community?”</p> <p>“Why are we engaging with this community?”</p>	<p>“Whose voices are heard?”</p> <p>“What are the communities’ needs? Who is determining them?”</p> <p>“How is the community different/similar from Swarthmore?”</p>	<p>“Who has expertise?”</p> <p>“What is progress?”</p> <p>“How is social justice achieved?”</p> <p>“Where does change need to happen?”</p>

Ch. 4

Making Sense of Self and Place: Perspectives from students of CBL

In an era when volunteering experiences have become critical to gaining entry to higher education, many students may have had various experiences outside the CBL context to engage with different communities. However, what distinguishes CBL experiences from other volunteering, internship, or research opportunities students may have pursued on their own is the classroom component that accompanies these experiences. Unlike individual volunteering experiences, CBL classes have structured readings, discussions, and assignments that complement the experiences they have working in a community. The parameters of the class create additional spaces for guidance and support to create a cycle action and reflection. These spaces can help guide students to become more self-reflexive in ways that are not only limited to the context of their class, but also extend beyond in their everyday lives. Through creating space in the class to incorporate students' own past lived experiences, students are able to see the ways in which their lives are connected to and implicated in the communities that they engage with in their course. My research suggests that providing such opportunities to reflect on students' personal experiences is key to developing self-reflexivity.

Since many CBL classes deal with social issues such as environmental racism, or deaf literacy, or educational inequality, it is important to cultivate self-reflexive practices to remind students that these social ills are not simply something "other" or "outside" the realm of the Swarthmore community or students' day-to-day lives. As already discussed, Swarthmore College is not a "bubble" that is separate from societal issues. Self-reflexive reflections on concrete experience can allow students to break the sense of Swarthmore

exceptionalism. The experiential aspect of CBL coupled with self-reflexive questions about one's own implications has the potential to transformed issues such as educational inequality or sustainability from abstract concepts for intellectual growth to opportunities for personal transformation.

Although students seldom used the term “self-reflexivity” directly in their responses, their reflections on their changing perception of “self,” and their surrounding environment reveals the processes of self-reflexivity in progress. In this chapter, I will share students’ reflections that offer insight into their experiences in CBL course and the impact of the course on developing self-reflexivity.

Reading and Seeing with a Critical Lens

Contextualizing Communities

Students have an endless stream of readings during their time in college. But what is changed when students get an opportunity to see the issues and communities they read about in their studies? And vice versa, how do the readings inform students’ perception and understanding of what they see outside the classroom? Readings informed students’ experiences in the community and provided a critical lens through which to notice and identify otherwise “invisible” social constructions. The combination of both readings and community-based engagements created a back-and-forth relation between theories and lived experiences that emerged in new self-reflexive insights.

Many professors intentionally began their CBL classes with readings to help orient students to the community before beginning their community engagement. Ron, a first-year student, commented that the combination of having readings and the actual

opportunity to be involved in a school that faced budget cuts provided a “good balance of the big picture and also a small-scale example of an outcome of those issues.” Having the theoretical and historical background information allowed Ron to see the “big picture” about educational and economic inequalities while working with a school that was impacted by these issues. Equipping students with the “big picture” is important in CBL courses because by contextualizing communities, students can dispel stereotypes and interrogate assumptions they may have about communities.

Several CBL courses included a walking tour of certain neighborhoods guided by the professor so that students can see some of the issues read about in the course. One student discussed how the “tangible experiences” of actually being in communities “breathed life” into the issues they were dealing with in class. Rachel, a senior student, spoke about the profound experience of going on a tour of the toxic facilities in Chester, a neighboring community severely impacted by environmental racism. On reflecting on the tour, she noted:

It’s one thing to read about it, it’s another things to go there and smell all the things, like you said, I feel like you’re breathing in toxins, and then see ten feet away people are living there, on those fencelines, and you see kids passing by and cars passing by and cats passing by and all these living people and creatures. To be there and know that I am contributing to this really opened my eyes in a way that – I mean, reading about it can do that too, but it’s not as visceral. It’s a visceral feeling. Actually being there.

Rachel highlights the difference between reading about an issue to actually “being there.” The “visceral feeling” she describes highlights the powerful potential of the experiential aspect of CBL classes in creating powerful experiential learning opportunities. Having accompanied the same tour, I recall wanting to hold my breath given the stench of the air near the incinerator. I could not imagine how schools, the boys and girls club, entire

neighborhoods lived so close to the toxic plant from day-to-day. Hearing statistics about the amount of trash that is burned daily at the site, I started to think about how much waste I may have contributed to the site that is causing harmful health effects on the community. In a technologically advanced period when we are inundated with information, we may have become desensitized to statistics. However, CBL course can help re-sensitize and bring to life the tissues students read about through personal exposure and interactions in various communities. The firsthand sensory experience of the social issues students read about in CBL courses can have profound consequences on students' relation to and understanding of social issues. However, it is important to note that mere exposure is not the key to learning. It is the contextualization and reflection that allows students to draw meaning and personal connections to what they are seeing and experiencing in the communities.

While the tours served as significant learning experiences, Sophia, a sophomore student, shared her reservations about tours. In reflecting on the same tour as Rachel, she shared her discomfort with the voyeuristic aspect of tours in general. However, she said that having a local resident as one of the tour leaders made a big difference since it shifted the dynamic of the tour from “we’re going to come in and look at you,” to “here, come, we’re going to show you, let’s fight against this.” But nonetheless, Sophia noted, “If I lived somewhere shitty, I wouldn’t want somebody coming to see.” From trying to put herself in the perspective of others, she asked reflexive questions that made her reassess her class activities.

However, despite her reservations about the tour, Sophia recognized its important function in making the issues feel more “real”:

Both the background the readings provided and the tangible experience walking around definitely made the issue more real, because when you read something in a book, it's easy to be like, wow, this is such an extreme, and it made me realize how something like this could go unnoticed, because if you don't make a point of poking around, a lot of the things aren't visible.

In this passage, Sophia echoes other students' reflections comparing the difference between simply reading about something versus being immersed in an environment. However, she also alluded to how it was "both" the readings and the tangible experiences, which allowed her to notice the issues that may otherwise easily "go unnoticed." She recognized that while issues may appear "extreme" in readings, they could go unnoticed in the everyday environment since they are so normalized. Similarly, Rachel pointed to how the distance between Swarthmore College and Chester and the normalization of the "everyday mundane" conditions have made "invisible" the effects of racism to Swarthmore students. She said, "We're also four miles away. There's a spatiality aspect to it too as well as an everyday mundane aspect that we never think about it. It's totally invisible to us." However, from visiting communities that had been severely negatively affected by environmental racism, she was able to witness firsthand the effects of the issue that she herself was "contributing to." The readings serve a critical role in making "noticeable" the normalized conditions of the environment.

While many at Swarthmore College are at least vaguely aware of the challenging conditions in Chester given the college's relation to Chester, Rachel shared frustrations that most people at Swarthmore College seldom question their own implications and complicity in maintaining the current conditions of Chester. Realizing that she is "contributing to" the pollution, Rachel began to change her everyday habits by trying to recycle more, walk a little extra to compost, and consume less. But she was frustrated that

“the College is still contributing so much to this and people have no idea.” She suggested that more students should have this kind of experience of seeing what is on the other side. Her suggestion reveals her desire for a more reflexive and conscientious Swarthmore community. Rachel’s ability to make the connections between her everyday actions and social issues demonstrates an example of a self-reflexive practice that recognizes one’s own implications.

In addition to contextualizing communities, readings could also provide students with critical theories regarding social change and activism. One student highlighted that even if the readings and discussions were not explicitly rooted in the local communities, they still presented “reoccurring themes that are problematic in any movement” and therefore gave her a critical framework to assess her actions. Again we see the importance of theory in guiding students’ framing and understanding of their experiences and actions. Another student referenced a reading from class (*Decolonizing Methodologies* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999) to explain how it led her to reassess many charitable efforts in light of colonial perpetuation. Similarly, Lori Pompa wrote, “Unless facilitated with great care and consciousness, ‘service’ can unwittingly become an exercise in patronization. In a society replete with hierarchical structures and patriarchal philosophies, the potential danger of service-learning is for it to become the very thing that it eschews. And it can happen in subtle ways.” (Butin 2005:176). The critical theories on social justice can help students scrutinize their own community-based work so as to avoid the colonizing and patronizing tendencies of unreflexive service-oriented community actions.

Looking Inward: Re-examining own lived experiences through critical reflections

A well-designed CBL class can establish a dialectic relation between students' experiences and theories, where one informs the other and vice versa. In other words, students' lived experiences help make sense of theories as theories also help inform how they think about their lived experiences. In discussing the experiential nature of CBL courses, I use an expanded view of "experience" to include students' past lived experiences as well as the class activities in community engagement.

Unlike traditional classes where students' experiences outside the course may not enter into class discussions and assignments, CBL classes deliberately rely on using experiences outside the classroom in class activities. The valuing of students' experiences outside the classroom as follows Lawrence Cremin's notion of "ecology of education," which recognizes that opportunities for education are not limited to the confines of the school (1976). CBL courses' explicit valuing and incorporation of students' experiences beyond the confines of the classroom walls can help merge the "inside" and "outside" the classroom divide to see the connections between the two. In this way, students can draw from their own experiences and identities outside the class context to contribute to creating a more comprehensive and self-reflexive understanding of the course materials. By centering students' experiences as one of the crucial elements of learning in CBL classes, students are able to become "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (as well as community members in the CBL context) (Freire 2000, p.81). Through class activities, students are given the space, time, and the support of their fellow classmates and professor to make sense of their experiences in self-reflexive ways.

The structured opportunities to read, write, and discuss students' experiences in CBL courses greatly compliment and assist their process of *making sense* of and creating personal connections to the course materials. Ron noted how the reflection assignment after his tour helped him make "personal connections." He described,

And then we came back (from a walking tour) and had a reflection assignment, which I think was a good way to think about our experience and draw some personal connections to what we saw, what we read about, and bring it together for us on the personal level.

By providing opportunities to debrief students' experiences vis-à-vis theory, students are able to make deeper and more personal connections to what they are studying in class.

Sam, a junior who has taken several CBL courses, noted how his CBL course gave space to talk about race grounded in students' lived experiences:

I feel like Swarthmore students are pretty hesitant to talk about race explicitly and – it's like, or it becomes this totally abstract theoretical thing, but in this class I feel like people were just talking about their lived experiences and things that they were observing rather than this super abstracted theory.

The incorporation of students' own lived experiences as part of the class discussions allowed this student to discuss race not solely on an intellectual or theoretical way, but in a personal way. Such incorporation utilizes students' unique experiences as valuable assets to the learning process. So rather than having a detached and abstracted relation with the contents of the course, students in CBL classes are able to develop personal connections that can prompt self-reflexive questions about their own experiences.

Creating opportunities for such personal connections allow students to think about how they relate to concepts such as race in their everyday life. Questions such as "How does race affect me?" or "What has been the racial make-up of my neighborhood" are able to

bring the concept of race to a personal level. This process of linking self to critical theories can formulate self-reflexive questions about their own experiences. The grounding of theory in personal experiences can transform the learning experience into an opportunity to make sense of one's own self through theory.

Although two years had passed since Anna, a junior who has taken several CBL courses, had taken a CBL course that introduced her to Sonia Nieto's concept of culturally responsive education, she enthusiastically recalled its transformative effect on her perspective of her own experiences: "It blew my mind and it changed the way I saw everything about my schooling experience." From reflecting on her past schooling experiences in light of the new critical educational theories introduced to her in class, Anna was able to reassess and *make sense* of the privileges that she had been afforded in her educational opportunities. Reflections using critical frameworks can raise new perceptions of students' own realities and their position in the world. The dialectical relation between theory and experience often generated new perspectives or understandings about privilege and positionality for many of my student interviewees. Many others referred to particular readings during my interviews highlighted their importance in establishing frameworks to help students make sense of their experiences. Such reflections reveal the crucial role of readings in enhancing students' ability to learn from their experiences.

Anna's classmate Nancy also noted the importance of the ideas she was exposed to through the class readings in having changed her "self perception" and "relationship to the rest of the world." For both Nancy and Anna, the concepts introduced to them through their readings provided a new "lens" that helped them make sense of their current

and past experiences. Nancy admitted that it was difficult for her to recall specific things she had learned in class since the concepts from class became “so integral to the way I think now.” The readings and the reflective practices structured into class discussion or writing assignments can stimulate students to engage in self-reflexive practices that may lead to new understandings of self.

As a student who has had few opportunities in which her minority background was reflected upon in her classrooms, Nancy was surprised by the opportunity to reflect upon her own experiences and identity in her CBL class. She noted, “the experience I had in (the CBL course) was kind of more about a personal experience rather than just school, if that makes sense...” Nancy’s comment reflects the disconnect between “personal experience” and “school” commonly found in many traditional American classrooms. The personal connections students are able to make in CBL allowed students to examine and make sense of their own identities. Critical reflections based on students’ experiences can not only deepen students’ understanding of academic concepts, but also more importantly, have an empowering effect on allowing students may develop a strong sense of identity. Nancy further discussed the impact of her CBL class on making sense of her identity:

I am from a place where, despite having an incredible community of people whom I love and without whom I could not imagine living, my identity has never been discussed, let alone affirmed. I struggled with this aspect of identity my entire life, and I have in the past few months finally come to a place in which I feel I understand myself and my experiences, not just accepting the narratives I have been told about myself.

CBL classes, with its emphasis on helping students make sense of their own identity and lived experiences can create a multicultural classroom that affirms students’ diverse backgrounds. Critiquing the culturally oppressive practices of Euro-centric

education, Nieto called for a multicultural education that affirms and incorporates the rich resources of students' diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom. When students' experiences are centered in the classroom and their individual subjectivities and cultural backgrounds are valued, we can create a more democratic classroom. By putting the focus "inward" toward examining students' own lived experiences and reflecting on of their experiences in light of critical theories, students can not only develop self-reflexivity, but also affirm and make sense of their own identities.

Recognizing Privilege

Privilege is insidious because it functions in invisible ways unbeknownst to the privileged. Through critical reflection on their own lives, students began to see their own privilege. There were many examples in my interviews that suggested the influential role of the CBL course in exposing students to their own privilege. As members of an elite liberal arts college, many students reflected on their own educational privileges and unequal distribution of resources as they studied and grappled with the effects of inequalities in their courses. Studying about educational inequalities in his class, Ron spoke of how he realized during the course that a lot of the things he "took for granted" were because of his "positioning" as a white male. He reflected on his wealthy suburban neighborhood where he grew up in contrast to his observations of the socioeconomically marginalized communities in his course. Having read about and witnessed the gentrification in the community in which his CBL community engagement was based, he was able to contrast his own experience with that of others and identify the sociopolitical forces that have constructed the disparities.

Similarly, Anna reflected on her moment of recognizing her privilege while reading Jean Anyon: “When we read Jean Anyon people were like, oh yeah, that’s what happened in my class when I was like woah, I was in the CEO category my entire life.” In Anna’s response, we can yet again see the important function of readings in stimulating new reflections about her own experiences. The theoretical framework of Anyon’s “hidden curriculum” brought attention to the ways social class is tacitly reproduced through schools (1980). Reflecting upon her own experiences in schools in light of this theory, Anna realized that she had been in the “CEO category” throughout her life. This recognition is the result of not only her reading of Anyon, but also her awareness of the diverse educational backgrounds of her classmates as well as her observation in different types of schools in the local area (as part of several of her CBL classes). When students’ own lived experiences become intentionally incorporated into the class, they become resources for dynamic learning. A wealth of diverse experiences is made available through can lead From hearing about their classmates’ own background and different experiences in communities, students may be prompted to consider new perspectives and create new understandings.

In addition to readings, the face-to-face interaction with members of a different community also led to recognition of privilege. Throughout the semester, Grace worked with a partner (who was deaf) from Gallaudet University, a university for the deaf and hard of hearing located in Washington DC, to create an e-book for deaf children. While it is impossible to ever completely put oneself in “someone else’s shoes,” being immersed in a different environment allowed students to gain a new level of understanding and

empathy. Grace vividly remembered her experience visiting Gallaudet University for the first time:

when we came up here we were the ones who were able to communicate easily with everyone around us, and I sort of know on an intellectual level that's sort of how it is for their interaction with a lot of the world, but when we went down to Gallaudet everyone was signing all the time and it was a straight reversal of, we could communicate with each other but not with the people around us. That was really interesting and it really drove home the idea that they have more difficulty because the community that actually speaks their language is much smaller, but there's not actually a difference within the community, it's just, they speak a different language

The experience of suddenly becoming a minority as a hearing person in an environment dominated by the deaf allowed Grace to gain more empathy for the difficulties facing the deaf population. She recalled that she felt like she was “going to a different country.” She confessed that while she had intellectually understood the challenges facing deaf communities, her visit to a deaf environment drove “home” the struggles that they face as a small community. From her visit, she also saw that the only difference in the deaf community lies in the fact that they speak a different language. Such remarks show how the “otherness” of different communities have been deconstructed and debunked through personal interactions and experiences. These concrete experiences allow students to reflect on their own privileges that they may have taken for granted before.

Grace's interactions with her partner and the partner institution made her recognize the privilege she has had as a hearing person in a society dominated by hearing people and policies:

It definitely made me feel really privileged to not have to deal with this stuff and the fact that I didn't even realize that it was going on before. I knew deaf people existed but I hadn't really thought about the deaf community and the specific problems that they face before.

There was a theme of “didn’t even realize before” sentiments across my interviews when it came to thinking about privilege. The new awareness about one self evidenced in my interviewees supports the idea that “*Through the other, we come to experience the self*” (Rhoads 1997:139). As identities are constructed *in relation to* others and the surrounding environment, the understanding of the “self” emerges through an understanding of others. Both the differences and similarities help us identify what aspects of our experiences are unique as well as shared. Through her concrete experiences and interactions in her CBL course, Grace began to think about the challenges deaf communities especially when it came to access to education faced in a de-abstracted concrete way. From personal experiences working on a joint project with a deaf partner, Grace was able to move from a theoretical understanding of deaf literacy to a personal level.

Echoing others, Nancy wrote of her first realization of privilege in her written reflections,

This was also the first time I realized that privilege was acting in my life, that my experience was not somehow exempt from those conversations that happened during orientation week about racism/classism/etc...these issues had affected and were affecting my life.

In this passage, we can also see Nancy examining how she may be implicated in the oppressive forces of racism, classism, etc. Her realization that she is not “exempt” from the issues of oppression demonstrates self-reflexive thinking about one’s own implications in systems of oppression. In her journal, Nancy continued discuss how she had to examine the ways in which inequalities both “benefitted” and “harmed” her. From connecting the social issues and their everyday lives, students developed self-reflexive thinking about their own implications. Like privilege, oppression is rendered invisible through hegemonic discourses that normalize the status quo. Thus, pedagogy that

incorporates critical theories and reflection opportunities can help make visible the norms and conditions of society.

Anna, in reflecting on her educational privilege, noted that her awareness did not result in “some kind of icky like privilege walk thing” but instead made her think about how to “leverage” her skills to help redistribute resources. She recognized the skills she acquired given her positioning such as the ability to use certain jargon or familiarity with structures of power she has acquired given her positionality. She explained that her awareness of privilege instilled the need to use her position responsibly in order to navigate the bureaucratic channels that are often made inaccessible to marginalized populations. The opportunities to work across difference on a common goal in CBL classes can allow students to engage with social issues such as deaf literacy or educational inequality in a more intimate and relatable way.

However, for many, the awareness of one’s own implications in the oppressive system understandably led to feelings of “guilt” and discomfort. However, one student noted the importance of working through one’s own positionality to take responsible action rather than using positionality as an excuse for inaction:

And they say ‘I’m not going to do anything because it’s going to be somewhat problematic in this one way because I’m a white person coming into do something.’ You can’t just do that. Nothing will happen if everyone takes that attitude. Not everyone as in just white people, but everyone everyone, because everyone has something.

In this example, we see the student’s recognition that all people regardless of their status –whether dominant or marginalized- has positionality. As everyone is implicated in systems of oppression, she emphasizes the need for everyone to think and work through their positionalities in order to find a responsible way to counter oppression.

Professors serve a critical role in supporting students through the emotionally difficult process of confronting issues of oppression on a personal level. Anna noted the importance of her professor's guidance in facilitating this "emotional work" that allowed classmates to get to learn about one another so as to figure out their role in working in a new unfamiliar community. Part of the "emotional work" entailed acknowledging the "deeply troubling and emotional work of working with a community that is seeing so many difficulties." Being able to confront the harsh realities, while still retaining a sense of hope for change is a difficult to achieve. But students sometimes credited the role model of their professors' commitment and engagement as an encouraging example of working towards change. In addition, the "emotional work" entailed getting to know her classmates and also her own sense of self:

A lot of that class was actually doing a lot of deep emotional work within the group of people who were there, so it was about us learning about each other and taking that very seriously as an important thing to do.

She credited her professor for "pushing us to answer really hard questions and guiding us along our personalities in order to try to figure out where do we fit in this kind of work, and what is our role in this kind of work." Through her professor's guidance, Anna was able to think through her own positionality and responsibility working in a new community setting.

Other interviewed students noted how the experiences in the CBL community engagement helped them figure out their strengths and preferences. Anna discussed how her experiences in the course made her realize that she doesn't like being "front and center" and instead preferred "doing background work." Another student recognized that she actually preferred doing computer work to effect social change: "I'm not someone

who's a community organizer, I'm not that go-getting. I feel like the way I'm going to contribute to helping make the world a better place is probably at a computer." Through developing awareness about their preferences, students affirmed that there is no single way to be an activist. They were encouraged to value different skills and personalities because as Anna recalled, "not everyone engages in the work in the same way, and not everyone has the same skills." In discussing the diversity of the group projects within his CBL class, Ron complimented his professor's "holistic approach" to the class, which allowed the professor to "harness the intrinsic motivation of people to do what they're passionate about." A greater awareness of one's own privilege, implications, and strengths helped students develop increased responsibility and accountability as well as what Anna called, a "sense of place within a place that wasn't our own." Effective participation in community requires a thoughtful reflection of one's own positionality as well as knowledge of one's own strengths. From doing this kind of reflective and emotional work, students can move beyond the uncomfortable guilt of privilege to thoughtful and responsible action.

Taking on Responsibility

All the students I interviewed felt a high degree of personal responsibility in the issues they were reading, seeing, and grappling with in class. As one student noted, "You can study the theory, but it's not enough without the action." CBL courses provided different opportunities for students to engage in action so that they could apply and utilize their learning to practice. Another student who has been continuing her work on her CBL project beyond the class discussed how she initially had not "expected to get into the community and activism side" of the course.

The process of trying to effect change often led to reconceptualization of students' views on activism and academic disciplines. Despite her political science background that had oriented her towards viewing social change in terms of change in larger political structures and policy, Rachel began to see the significance of grassroots community-based activism through her experiences in the course. Rachel noted that although people want "one big sweeping panacea," effective change is often taken "at a smaller level." These changes reflected her burgeoning questions about who holds power and ideas about where change can start. Rachel discussed how this reconceptualization of activism allowed her to combat the sense of "hopelessness" that she sometimes faced regarding endemic and large social ills. She noted:

You can see progress, you can be involved and actually see projects be executed and see your part in it as well as other people's parts in it, and two, it helps local people by finding solutions for local problems or local desires, like one place will have different problems or desires from another place.

From re-conceptualizing her idea of social change from a grassroots level, Rachel was able to "see progress." She recognized that grassroots action took time, but was more confident that gradual change from the ground up will be more able to reflect the "local desires." She concluded noting the importance of everyone becoming an "activist." She said that although Swarthmore students may "have the luxury not to be an activist or to think it's hopeless" because our livelihoods were not put on stake, she recognized that "for a lot of people they don't have that luxury." Such reflections demonstrate the student's awareness of her positionality and responsibility as a privileged individual to contribute to contributing to positive change in marginalized communities.

Recognizing Swarthmore's implications in social issues, some students (encouraged by their professors) also turned their attention to issues on their own campus. As Diane Anderson, a student dean of Swarthmore College and coordinator of Learning for Life³ noted, "community service from the perspective of a college community is usually thought of as service *outside* the immediate community, often in a disadvantaged community nearby." While this perspective of service as located "outside" the immediate community is reflected in the trends in the CBL program at Swarthmore, some CBL classes encouraged students to take locally-rooted action to effect change on their own campus. For example, one student decided to begin conversations with members of the dining hall staff and students about bringing refillable salt and pepper shakers to replace the disposable ones in the campus dining hall. Through dialogues, she was made to consider the potential extra labor for the dining hall staff in refilling the shakers. Being intentional about hearing from different perspectives allowed the student to solicit input that allowed her to be more conscientious (and self-reflexive) about the ways in which she planned her sustainability project. Redirecting the focus of "community-based" to students' familiar community of their college campus community provides rich opportunities for students to practice self-reflexivity. The ability to recognize the potential and need for change on campus in conjunction to creating stronger relationships with surrounding communities is part of becoming a self-reflexive activist.

Many students referred to their professors' own involvement in community activism as important models for their approach to social action. This gives evidence to support the validity of the classic advice, "lead by example." In the chapter presenting

³ a program that pairs Swarthmore students with college service staff in mutual learning partnerships

data from faculty, I had elaborated on how professors' choice to teach CBL reflected their personal background and interests in doing community-based work. This meant that many professors had years, if not, decades of trial-and-error and hard-earned firsthand experience of how to effectively and responsibly do community engaged work. Students looked for mentorship from their professors to guide their projects. In conceptualizing a new sustainability project for a community in Philadelphia, one student looked to her professor's past project as a blueprint for her plan. She admired and looked up to her professor's "skillset" to do participatory action research and community building work that allowed her to build sustainable projects. Another student complimented her professor's ability to put herself in the "backseat" so that she can actively listen and "immerse herself in the needs of the population." One student reiterated her professor's concept of being a "good neighbor" in explaining her approach to developing responsible community partnerships.

New Ways of Knowing and Listening

"Working with (community organization) provides a much-needed breath of fresh air from the academic, highly structured, scheduled, cerebral, elite world of Swarthmore"

-Nancy in her written reflections

CBL is a "border pedagogy" that traverses not simply physical boundaries but also the boundaries of what constitute "knowledge" (Giroux 2005). A border pedagogy "makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of the borders that we inherit and frame our discourse and social relation." In other words, it is a pedagogy disposed to address concerns regarding epistemology. Students in CBL are

often challenged to re-think the authorities of knowledge as they are called upon to consider new sources of knowledge. Through their personal reflection journals (which is a common assignment in many CBL classes) and class discussions, students in CBL have many opportunities to insert their own lived experiences into the discourse. In effect, students become agents (rather than simply consumers) of knowledge as their experiences (both in the past and in their current community engagement sites) enter the discourse and become part of the learning process. In addition, students are able to learn from the experiences of those they interact with through the course of their class. As a result, CBL challenges and broadens the notion of what constitutes “knowledge” by incorporating new sources of knowledge. One student noted, “one thing that makes me think about, that I haven’t thought before, is that there are just many ways to learn.”

Questioning Epistemology

The Swarthmore College community practices certain ways of knowing, or “communities of meaning,” such as empirical scientific research that favor written and individualized forms of research (Sánchez-Casal et al 2002). These ways of knowing are conditioned by particular ideologies that shape the customs on how truth or knowledge is attained. While scholarly and academic knowing are legitimized and rewarded by the dominant cultures, other “communities of meaning” are often silenced. Therefore, it is especially critical in CBL partnerships between Swarthmore and other communities to be reflexive about epistemological questions that address this power dynamic.

In reflecting on the meaning-making practices of the college, Nancy noted the “dissonance” between academic work on social issues and the realities facing communities impacted by those issues. She highlighted how scholarly works often did

not fully represent or accurately speak to the issues facing communities. Such observations demonstrate reflexive thinking about the distant of position of the academic community from its research subjects. In fact, Nancy critiqued the academia's "active distancing from the world's social problems" and its "lack of accountability to the world outside its sphere." These reflections show reflexive thinking about the positionality of her institution and its relation with society.

One professor shared her belief that "knowledge is created through a relationship." She further added that cultivating genuine relationships with communities to co-produce knowledge is not simply to create "a good educational experience for students," but part of transforming research practices and "how we develop knowledge about the world." She envisioned this transformation to be a part of the purpose of education. She said,

Of course, that's part of what education is, learning, developing knowledge, asking questions, being self-reflective, pushing yourself to challenge your own assumptions, your own background ideologies, and to push them a bit and even be a little bit uncomfortable. That's what good research is, too. So, you know, there's not sort of that above the fray safety distance of a researcher.

She constantly posed the question "where did you get that idea?" to encourage students to think about how their knowledge is situated. Oftentimes, we assume we know what we know without questioning why. Questions of *how* we know or think we know often goes unasked. This is because our epistemological biases operate beyond our conscious awareness, unless reflexive questions such as "where did you get that idea" are asked. Answering such questions can allow students to be reflexive about their assumptions and make them more sensitive to the possibility of different ways of knowing and perceiving.

However, there are limitations to the extent to which self-reflexive questioning can free students' from their own conditioned ways of thinking. Nonetheless, Chin eloquently explains that the goal of becoming more aware of our own biases is not "to rid ourselves of biases" since that would be "impossible, but rather to "find ways to prevent biases from interfering with our capacity to understand lives very different from our own" (Chin 2004, p.62). Hence, the goal of self-reflexivity is not necessarily to discount or let go of our own subjectivities, but to recognize that our own knowledge is "partial and located." In fact, one student painfully admitted her awareness of her limitations as a hearing person interested in deaf studies:

you're hearing and never really going to be part of it, which is frustrating part about trying to work in deaf studies as a hearing person, because no matter how far you go, because you're still not deaf, so you're opinion's sort of second tier, which is completely understandable, but even academically, you're still a hearing person writing about deaf people. You're like a white person writing about people of color, it's like, yeah, you can try, and it's cute, but at the end of the day you don't really know what you're talking about.

Being able to acknowledge the limitations of our own positioned perspectives is however the key to being able to expand one's own awareness of new perspectives. Questioning the limits of one's own perspective and actively listening to new perspectives are important self-reflexive practices to have in CBL contexts.

Listening to the Community

I was pleased to find that "actively listening to community members" emerged as a universal theme across my interviews with students. Many students talked of the importance of taking into account the perspectives and needs of stakeholders, those impacted by the actions, when planning any community-based work. Rachel went further than simply "listening" to needing to "amplify" the voices of people who are affected by

the project. She especially cautioned against the tendencies of institutions to speak “over” or “for” community members. This relates to Giroux’s explanation of border pedagogy as a way to create a language that speaks *with* not *for* others:

As part of a radical pedagogical practice, border pedagogy points to the need for conditions that allow students to write, speak, and listen in a language in which meaning becomes multiaccentual and dispersed and resists permanent closure. This is a language in which one speaks *with* rather than exclusively *for* others

(2005, 21)

With its emphasis on lived experiences, CBL courses have the capacity to recognize diverse ways of knowing and perspectives. However, in her reflection, Nancy wrote of the challenges to carrying out the “simple idea” of listening to communities:

Prioritizing the needs, wishes and concerns of a community that you are working with seems like a simple idea, but in many cases of privileged communities “helping” less privileged communities, there has been a history of failing to give their concerns adequate, or even any, attention.

What does *listening* to communities entail? It can entail humility in accepting the fact that institutions do not have the answers for its surrounding communities; but in addition, the willingness to listen and engage with different communities to leverage the different resources that each member bring to the partnership to create change together. Recognizing the importance of establishing mutual goals, one student said, “It requires passion on both ends.”

As noted earlier, the student who took the initiative to replace the salt and pepper shakers was able to recognize new implications (ie. the extra labor of refilling the shakers) from having spoken to the dining hall staff. The student referenced the various examples of “social projects gone wrong” she read about and discussed in her environmental studies class as the reasons why one needs to be reflexive and also intentional about listening to the community’s desires. For example, she talked about the

long-term toxic implications of sending used computers to Africa. While the donation of used computers may be seen as a positive repurposing of old computers in the short term, the question of “how long will the computers last?” and “how will they be disposed?” brought out the negative consequences of the shortsighted action. The importance of listening repeatedly emerged as an essential step to not only gaining trust of the community, but also ensuring the success and sustainability of the community-based projects.

One student shared that he actually wanted more interactions with the members of the community in which his CBLs project was based so that he could have a better sense of whether the project was serving the needs of the community. While he recognized the practical challenges (e.g. time constraints—of both student and community, transportation) to facilitating more interactions between students and community members, he felt that he was “convinced by” sources other than the community. He noted,

I’m certainly convinced that they were issues worth solving, but I was being convinced by my professor, I was being convinced by things written by people I didn’t know, academics, I wasn’t sensing it from those stakeholders, members of the community, that this whole project was built around.

This student’s reflections demonstrate critical and self-reflexive questions about “whose voices or perspectives are being heard?” in the project’s decision-making process.

Although he did not doubt the presence of issues “worth solving” in the community, he remained slightly skeptical and unsure of his project’s benefits to the community since he lacked opportunities in his class to converse with the community members. These are logistical constraints that carry implications for the relationship building and the development of self-reflexivity.

Another student in the CBL course partnering with deaf students from Gallaudet University wished that she had more time to get to know her partner in a more personal way. Although the class did have informal opportunities to get to know one another such as lunches, they were limited to seeing the partner in person only four times in the semester due to time and budget constraints (considering the fact that their campuses were at least a 2~4 hour drive apart). While both partners shared a clear mutual goal (ie. creating an e-book for deaf children), the big task of creating an engaging e-book forced their interactions to be primarily logistical in nature. In addition, there was a linguistic barrier posed challenges to communicating things that were more personal in nature. The student noted,

you're kind of insecure about your signing. They kind of expect very low signing levels. It's kind of like, I feel like that stagnates communication at first, and because we only see them three times, if you don't have that face to face interaction it's kind of hard to build relationships.

However, students in this CBL course had been part of an allyship workshop that made explicit the need on the part of the hearing Swarthmore students to make greater effort to use sign language since the deaf accommodating to

Building Relationship

“Building relationships, sharing ideas and stories is the direction that academia, if it intends to be a force in the changes that are and have been taking place in communities, must go.”

-Excerpt from Nancy's written reflection

Nancy recognized that pursuing community partnerships is a *choice* that requires a lot of effort and patience. Furthermore, she clearly saw the political implications of her partnership with the community in disrupting the status quo of stratified social relations:

Doing work in relationship is a choice. It is a choice to trust others to help meet your needs and to try to meet the needs of others. It can involve active disruption of hierarchies or unequal relationships. It can involve planting flowers, or bringing food to share in a sacred space, and recognizing the significance of acts typically considered “small.”

Again we see a reconceptualization of social change as composed of acts “typically considered ‘small.’” An explicit willingness and effort to disrupt hierarchies is part of an important step towards leveling the playing field in terms of power in CBL partnerships.

Many students discussed the complex implications of being a member of a privileged institution when working in outside communities. In fact, several students acknowledged the problematic trends in Swarthmore’s involvements in Chester. Some of the students actually had experiences outside their CBL class in being engaged in some volunteering work based in Chester such as tutoring in afterschool programs or gardening. One student, demonstrating self-reflexive thinking, critiqued her own past involvement in Chester in retrospect:

I just went in and volunteered and helped, but I didn’t think about making a lasting solution, a sustainable solution, I just kind of – the analogy we use is parachuting in and leaving, and not really setting up something that’s really – it can be prolonged and continued.

This student’s desire for a “prolonged and continued” action rather than a “parachute” model of service may indicate maturity in self-reflexivity prompted by the layers of experiences and critical theories regarding social change over time. Another students echoed the need to shift away from treating Chester as “study grounds for helping and

teaching” in order to develop a more mutually reciprocal relation that can lead to sustainable change.

Interestingly, one student talked about her positionality as someone “from a place where there are people helping my place” in explaining her sense of commitment to responsibly engage in community action. She said,

I’m not really from a place where you go help other people that much. I feel like part of my commitment to not doing this wrong is knowing the risk, you know? ...part of it is like, this is people’s homes. You don’t want to mess up.

Viewing communities as “homes” rather than simply “needy” communities allows students to develop much more respectful and conscientious approach to creating positive change.

Thinking Sustainably

Although not all students were able to sustain their CBL efforts beyond their semester, many claimed that their course instilled important perspectives on community-based work and social issues. Some students have developed a long-term relation to the community engagement site beyond the duration of her CBL class. One student even intended to continue her work with her community partner organization from her CBL course beyond graduation from the college. The importance of the role of the class in providing support and stimulations for her activism is captivated in this student quote:

I’m worried that without weekly exposure to issues and to readings I’ll slowly fall back but it definitely changed my perspective in the long run for sure. I think you have to be an activist and be active in your life. Even if you’re not reading theories and long books, I think it definitely changed me for the long run.

While this student felt that the CBL course had change her “for the long run,” she still shared her fear that her activism may dwindle without the support of having a class. The sense of responsibility and awareness of positionality students developed through their self-reflexive practices will probably have lasting impact on the students beyond the course. Student’s increased awareness of their own implications in social issues as well as practical hands-on experience working in communities may provide skills to help them continue to engage in community involvement in their future.

Conclusion

The opportunities to see, feel, and grapple with the problems students read about in their classes present rich opportunities to facilitate the development of self-reflexivity. While the focus of self-reflexivity is primarily centered on questions regarding the “self,” such a process inherently entails a greater awareness of one’s own context in which one is situated. The opportunities to be immersed in different surrounding communities beyond their college campus in CBL classes often resulted in new heightened awareness about one’s own self and the surrounding environments. The experience of being *in* a community had the effect of making “real” the issues presented in the class. Through experiential activities such as building a rooftop garden for an urban school, or touring the toxic facilities in a community, or creating an e-book for deaf children, students were able to make more personal connections to what otherwise may have been an abstract theoretical knowledge.

But as John Dewey states, “Mere activity does not constitute experience” (1966:139). In other words, mere exposure to an environment (e.g. through tour, or service action) does not automatically translate into a meaningful learning experience. Exposure is one step in the learning process. Learning is born out of intentional reflection that synthesizes experience and theory. Professors serve a critical role in providing the structures to guide students through a constant cycle of experience and critical reflection so that they can make sense of and learn from their experiences. By incorporating activities to contextualize the communities CBL students are engaged in with an understanding of history, faculty can help students dispel the stereotypes that are imposed on marginalized communities (that CBL courses tend to work in). In addition, examining

students' own experiences in light of the academic materials can bring to life the theories and issues presented in the course and raise questions on positionality, privilege, and epistemology. Through critical reflection centered on students' experiences, students can *make sense* of their own lives and how they relate to the things they are studying in class. This process can transform the educational experience from learning about a distant "other" to learning about themselves, about their own implications, relations, and responsibilities. It is the *combination* of these various exercises (e.g. readings, walking tours, community project) that can lead to the development of self-reflexivity.

Although being self-reflexive often raised uncomfortable questions of privilege and about one's own implications in an oppressive system, the support of faculty and fellow classmates helped students push through this discomfort to make sense of their positionality and privilege. Through both an inward and outward examination about the various lived experiences presented in their CBL courses, there can be powerful collaborative learning experiences that lead to powerful mutual transformations for themselves, their college, and community partners.

Making any lasting change is time-consuming and requires a very thoughtful approach to make sure that our intent is reflected in our process and impact. Even with the best of intentions, we may fall short of or even go against our intended goal. In order to avoid having unintended consequences, we need to pay attention to the potential gaps and silences in our understandings, whether that means having more conversations with diverse constituents or reflecting critically on the origins and potential limitations of our own worldviews. Through self-reflexive practice, we can begin our process of working

towards change in ourselves. And from changing ourselves, we can join hands with others to work together towards creating a more just and sustainable world.

Recommendations

CBL classes require tremendous effort on behalf of the faculty to prepare a class that aims to bridge the college with another community. I commend the educators who have chosen the “road less traveled by” deciding to cultivate a relationship with surrounding communities despite its challenges. To reiterate what one long-time CBL professor had said, “It’s just really hard to connect the bubble with the community. It’s just really hard to do that. It’s never gotten easier. It has always been hard. It will always be hard.” While the rhetoric supporting CBL programs exists at Swarthmore College, there is a lack of *material* resources and infrastructure in supporting the program. Many of my faculty interviewees shared the challenge of securing transportation for their CBL courses. Given the geographic distance between Swarthmore and many of its community partners, the importance of having transportation support cannot be underestimated as a small logistical detail. Can we as an institution support CBL on a more structural level so that these logistical details do not have to take up as much time for the faculty? Expanding our institutionalized support for transportation may be able to alleviate part of the burden of planning CBL courses so that the faculty can invest more of their time in building their curricula and relationship with communities.

Although recent steps (i.e. creating positions to support faculty interested in CBL) show promise for increased institutionalized support for CBL, community-based pedagogies still occupies a marginal status at the college (and in the realm of higher education). Currently, despite the rosy mentions of CBL program in college brochures, CBL has little material value or in other words, legitimacy, in the academia due to doubts about whether community engagement can be considered a scholarly endeavor. These

doubts have material consequences for the faculty who are discouraged from pursuing community-based pedagogies because it is “risky” and considered as not “scholarly” enough. One possible change is in reevaluating the qualifications we consider for tenure. No matter how much work professors spend to carefully plan their curricula, there is still a large degree of unpredictability since there are always unforeseen circumstances and changes in communities. As one of my faculty interviewee said, “I could not have imagined doing CBL pre-tenure.” This sentiment was echoed by some others throughout my research process. Can we give room for the patience and flexibility necessary for community-based pedagogies instead of relying on a predictable and controllable outcome in our educational process? As one professor noted,

It’s not like doing an experiment in the lab where the professor knows what’s going to happen at the other end and puts them through a chemical experiment that comes out the other end. It’s just not like that. There’s a lot more uncertainty. To a certain degree, as a professor, you have to feel kind of comfortable or see uncertainty as generative and productive and ripe with possibilities.

CBL classes, while unpredictable, are “ripe with possibilities.” In order for the CBL program to be as effective as possible, we need greater institutionalized support and incentives so that faculty can be encouraged and supported in creating strong relationships with communities. Can we reconceptualize community engagement as a scholarly endeavor so that professors and students are drawn towards learning from and working with communities? Can CBL courses become the norm at the college?

Making community engagement an integral and valued (not only in rhetoric but also in terms of resources) part of colleges will entail a fundamental rethinking about the colleges’ identity and their conception of education. Colleges will need to engage in self-reflexive reflections on their model of education and whether their current practices

reflect their larger mission. This will entail a critical re-examination of the college's relation with surrounding communities and its responsibility towards society in the present (as well as the future). Because as Paulo Freire once said, "The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present" (cited in Boggs 2012:147). In order to educate students to be socially conscious leaders of tomorrow, our model of education must reflect and cultivate the kind of leadership we need.

A letter to self (and other educators),

To conclude this thesis, I wanted to end with a letter. Recognizing that this is a dense and long (my longest yet) piece of academic writing, I want to be self-reflexive about how I present my research and offer a short list of the main takeaways I have learned from my research. As an aspiring educator myself, these are the lessons I hope to remember not just in CBL contexts but in any shared learning opportunities:

- 1) *Cultivate relationships.* Creating opportunities to get to know classmates and community partners are instrumental in growing the trust necessary for being able to learn from one another and work together. Interpersonal relations (professor-to-student, student-to-student, and student/professor-to-community) can help establish the foundation to be able to tackle difficult problems.
- 2) *Look at our own histories.* Affirm and utilize the lived experiences students already bring to the classroom as a resource. This can help us connect our own lived experiences with the broader narrative of history so that we can understand how we came to be. Recalling and sharing our own histories can also help affirm

our identities and allow us to get to know our fellow co-learners (classmates, professors, community members) as people. Looking at our own history can also entail critically examining our institutions and academic disciplines to help situate our endeavors.

- 3) *Create intentional spaces for reflections.* In my time at Swarthmore, I have often felt like many of my classes packed the semester with as many readings and activities (e.g. labs, projects, papers, etc.) as possible into the semester without much chance for reflection. But I have found that the opportunities to simply reflect on all that we had been exposed to were the most enlightening and memorable experiences I had in the class (even if it meant compromising the pre-established curricula –e.g. cutting down on the number of readings, or reducing the number of pages required for a paper). Through open and reflective conversations, I was able to share and hear the different connections that my classmates made across authors and also to their own interests and experiences. Although many of my classes had an end-of-the-year evaluation form we filled out silently (and often hastily) in the last 10 minutes of class or after class, the opportunities for collective and critical reflections on the course *during* class time generated new and insightful perspectives on the class. While it can feel uncomfortable creating such open-ended spaces for critical reflections from an educator standpoint, providing these moments of honest reflections can lead to mutual growth.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Interview Questions (Professors) Can you describe the course (its goals, focus, activities)?

- 1) In what ways do students interact with the community?
- 2) What motivated you to design a community-based learning class?
- 3) Have you taught similar courses or other courses involving community engagement?
- 4) In your own words, can you describe what “community-based learning” means to you?
- 5) What obstacles and challenges have you faced in teaching a community-based learning class?
 - a. How have you reacted in the face of these challenges?
 - b. What kind of resources or support did you use in designing a curriculum?
- 6) What are some of the goals you have for your students?
- 7) Could you describe some of the ways you help prepare students to engage with the community? What kind of challenges have you observed your students facing in the class? Can you give an example of a challenge students faced and how they resolved it?
- 8) In what ways do you think your students are impacted by their interactions with the community? By the class assignments/discussions/lectures?
- 9) How do you guide your students to connect the class material with their experiences in the community?
- 10) To what extent do you think your students learn about their own role/position in society through your course? What elements of the course do you think contribute most to this learning? Or how do the different elements of the course contribute to this learning?
- 11) Some of the critiques on community-based learning caution against the unbalanced nature of partnership between the institution and community. How do you view your class’ relation to the community partner?
 - a. How do you guide your students to think critically about their relation with the community?
 - b. Do you build in specific activities/assignments for reflection in the course? If so, how?

Appendix II: Interview Questions (Students)

- 1) How would you describe the community-based learning class that you are taking this semester?
- 2) What made you want to take the course?
 - a. To what extent did the CBL component influence your decision to take the class?
- 3) In what ways do you interact with the community?
- 4) How did you feel about interacting with the community partner?
- 5) How familiar were you with the community partner before this course?
 - a. What kinds of things did you learn about the community through this course?
 - b. What were some of the commonalities you found between yourself and the community members? Differences?
 - c. In what ways do you view your role in/relationship with the community?
 - i. Has this view changed from the beginning of the semester?
- 6) What kind of challenges did you face in the class? If any?
 - a. How have you reacted in the face of these challenges?
- 7) To what extent has this class encouraged you to think about your own identity?
 - a. What kinds of things did you take notice of about yourself in this course?
 - b. Did this class lead you to explore or challenge any of your own personal values, ideology and/or ethics? If so, how?
 - c. What elements of the course do you think contribute most to this change/awareness?
- 8) In what ways do you see connections between the class readings and discussion with the community engagement?
- 9) Did you learn anything surprising or unexpected?
- 10) How does this course compare with other classes you have taken at Swarthmore? How is it similar or different?
- 11) What do you think is the biggest take-away from taking this course?