

RESEARCH IN THE SERVICE OF CO-LEARNING:
SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

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This research, conducted with an introductory sociology class at the University of British Columbia during the 2001-2002 academic year, explored community service-learning as a pedagogy and philosophy. The theoretical focus of this paper is Nancy Fraser's (1997) criticisms of Jurgen Habermas' (1992) bourgeois liberal model of the public sphere. We analyzed the class experiences with community service that emerged from students' contributions to a database of community organizations, concept maps, and a student-driven course evaluation. The outcomes of this research include a description of potentially useful course strategies and a narrative of a unique type of community-service learning.

Key words: community-service learning, public sphere, citizenship, learning

Cette recherche menée dans le cadre d'un cours d'introduction à la sociologie à l'Université de Colombie-Britannique au cours de l'année universitaire 2001-2002 portait sur l'apprentissage par l'engagement communautaire en tant que pédagogie et philosophie. La théorie sous-jacente à cet article est tirée des critiques de Nancy Fraser (1997) au sujet du modèle libéral bourgeois de la sphère publique de Jurgen Habermas (1992). Les auteurs ont analysé les expériences du service communautaire qu'ont pu vivre les étudiants à travers leurs contributions à une base de données d'organisations communautaires, à des cartes conceptuelles et à une évaluation du cours. Les résultats de cette recherche comprennent une description de stratégies pédagogiques potentiellement utiles et un récit portant sur un type unique d'apprentissage par l'engagement communautaire

Mots clés: apprentissage par l'engagement communautaire, sphère publique, citoyenneté, apprentissage

Many educators are interested in teaching methods, learning theories, and philosophies that encourage university students to engage with the community. Some instructors attempt to promote community engagement through activities such as problem posing, critical reflection, and examining abstract concepts situated in their everyday communities (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wolfson & Willinsky, 1998). In support of community engagement, university and college educators have begun to integrate community service-learning into their courses.

A pioneer of community service-learning, John Dewey (1916) promoted an inter-relationship between education, learning in the community, and citizenship. Maintaining that the community is integral to educational experiences, Dewey believed that through experiential learning, or learning by doing within the everyday social community environment, individuals could be challenged to go beyond the bounds of traditional information transmission that was the norm in classrooms at that time. Dewey contended that if students could apply their learning within the community, they would not only improve themselves, but also contribute to their communities as citizens. According to Dewey,

Social efficiency as an educational purpose should mean cultivation of power to join freely and fully in shared or common activities. This is impossible without culture. One cannot share in intercourse with others without learning – without getting a broader point of view and perceiving things of which one would otherwise be ignorant. And there is perhaps no better definition of culture than that it is the capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one's perception of meanings. (p. 122)

For Dewey, the cultural awareness that emerges from hands-on experiences links everyday life and the classroom. The Deweyan classroom is a space where students are encouraged to test out theories and concepts, build capacity, and create their communities anew. Learning in this way becomes an ongoing process that supersedes the confines of the classroom.

In a similar manner to Dewey's call for education promoting democracy, adult educator Eduard Lindeman (1937, 1938 as cited in Brookfield, 1987) maintains:

Education is an agency of progress if its short-term goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-term experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order [through] learning associated with social purposes...to synchronize the democratic and the learning process. (1937, p. 4; 1938, p. 5 as cited in Brookfield, 1987, p. 19)

Dewey and Lindeman continue to inspire community service-learning. Table 1 describes contemporary principles, characteristics, and outcomes of community service-learning as synthesized by the following theorists and initiatives. (Anderson, 2000; Boyer, 1994; National & Community Service Trust Act, 1999; Waterman, 1997). The purpose of table 1 is to offer a brief description of community service-learning by outlining its general principles, characteristics, and outcomes. The reader is discouraged from reading across rows as the table is not designed to align any one principle with a specific characteristic or outcome; it is merely descriptive. Community service-learning valorizes learning through real-world voluntary experience that, hopefully, cultivates a lifetime of community engagement to promote citizenship.

In this article, we ask the following research question: Given that community service-learning is a form of community engagement, how does classroom-based research increase students' understanding of political participation, public involvement, and public spaces?

METHODOLOGY

This research is a heuristic case study, a type of case study that "finds out" via analytic induction (Eckstein, 2000). Patton (1990) reminds us that the word heuristic, Greek in origin, means to *discover*. For us, a heuristic case study was a way to focus our attention on the process of community engagement, linked to the related ideas of political participation, public involvement, and use and ownership of public spaces.

Table 1
Community Service-Learning

Principles	Characteristics	Outcomes
Active participation by students as learners	Service experiences that meet actual community needs	Stronger academic skills
Collaboration between students and those within community groups, agencies, and organizations	Blending of service activities with the academic curriculum	Learning through action
Social Responsibility	Collaboration with the school and community groups, agencies, and organizations	Promoting personal development
Classroom as Public Space	Reflection by students to connect learning and service	Applied research skills
		Contributing to community groups, agencies, and organizations
		Fostering civic engagement

The Case

The case is a 6-credit, 26-week introductory Sociology 100 class at the University of British Columbia (UBC) during the 2001-2002 academic year. Taught by co-author VanWynsberghe and supported by a teaching assistant, the course included 65 students, 40 were female and 25 were male. In general, all were in their first year of university. The class was an ethnic multi-cultural mix of Asian, Caucasian, and South Asian students with a number of foreign students from China also. As well, many students were first generation Canadians whose parents were

from Hong Kong. The syllabus outlined student objectives in the following way:

- To acquire an overview of the social world.
- To develop a conceptual and substantive understanding of the study of sociology.
- To gain knowledge of various theoretical perspectives for understanding human social activity.
- To investigate concepts of social life, such as culture and institutions.

By adding separate *teacher* objectives, we established our goal as a basis for introducing research activities for the students as part of the course requirements. We alerted students to the atypical nature of community service-learning so they could, as stated by some students, “decide if it was for them.” As a result, based on his use of community service learning since 1997 and inspired by Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, the Science Shop model from the Netherlands, and the Working Centre in Ontario, VanWynsberghe added a few instructor objectives to the course, including:

- To demonstrate the theoretical reasoning and open-minded consideration of the issues essential to sound sociological inquiry.
- To enhance students’ critical thinking skills while sharpening their “sociological imaginations.”
- To prepare students to undertake a social analysis that has public value.

At the beginning of the course, we encouraged students to choose community service, service-learning experiences that contributed to sustainability. We did not give students a specific definition of sustainability, but ideas like social justice, ecological integrity, and the well-being of all living systems were linked to the term. Sustainability, an emergent property, develops through dialogue. Imposing a definition might have inhibited students from contributing to the conversation. As a result, the students chose a broad spectrum of organizations for their community service-learning experiences.

Research in the Service of Co-Learning (RSL)

We specified and coined the type of community service learning that was employed in this case as “research in the service of co-learning” or RSL (Barazangi et. al, 2003; Reardon, 1998; Schutz & Ruggles; 1998; Weinberg, 2003; Wiechman, 1996). This term, where higher education meets the community in a classroom, describes courses that are re-envisioned to teach about ways to improve local conditions. This idea encompasses community engagement wherein a student serves as a vital bridge between higher education and the community by conducting research as the service (Barazangi et al. 2003; Reardon, 1998).

A few examples of RSL are useful to this brief discussion. Weinberg (2003) sees a natural link between RSL and sustainability. Weinberg’s students conducted service in small, multi-class projects designed to promote community economic development. Student teams consulted with community partners, conducted research, made presentations, outlined next steps, and reflected on theories of community development. Weinberg shows that because his undergraduates have the research skills to conduct surveys, focus groups, and interviews, they were well qualified to provide these kinds of service. Weinberg’s research supports our intention to apply the sociological skills that students were acquiring to community-based projects. Another example of the link between RSL and sustainability comes from Savan and Sider (2003) in their Sustainable Toronto research program. This program is a suite of action-oriented research projects. Students assist in the research through co-operatives, internships, and practicum courses.

Data Collection

We collected research evidence for this case study from a variety of sources. First, we used student contributions to the course database and website as a repository of experiences as well as a data collection and analytical tool. In the database, students analyzed the organization where they volunteered. In addition, we administered an eleven-question peer evaluation survey of students’ RSL experience (see Appendix 1). This survey was co-designed by the instructor (VanWynsberghe) and two students. These students had lost their RSL opportunities due to a teachers’ strike at the time that had closed local

school classrooms (considered as communities for this research) where they had been volunteering.

Analysis

During the course, a research assistant, who acted as a participant observer of the classroom, analyzed each student's assignment that was contributed to the website and the database. Her overall task was conceptual. She drew the available content from the website and database to provide a theoretical focal point for the RSL based classroom. Her observations were analyzed. Then, we (VanWynsberghe and Andruske) connected these to Nancy Fraser's (1997) theoretical framework of multiple public spheres. For our analysis, we summarized Fraser's ideas into five propositions that we used to analyze the material provided by the students' experiences in the Sociology 100 courses in relation to RSL. In terms of the survey, simple descriptive statistics were employed to understand student satisfaction and community engagement. This evaluation data tells the story of the classroom while also assessing its impact on the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fraser (1997) critiqued Jurgen Habermas' (1992) "liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere" (p. 89). For Habermas, the public sphere

[M]ay be conceived above all as the sphere of private people com[ing] together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere ... against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (p. 27)

Habermas established his criteria for the public sphere: critical, rational debate over matters pertaining to the common good. He asserted that common humanity is the basis for membership in the "public sphere" (pp. 36-7, 58). Fraser (1997) discussed the pivotal significance Habermas' (1992) attributes to the historical demarcation between the state and civil society. She defined civil society as "the nexus of non-governmental or 'secondary' associations that are neither economic nor administrative" (Fraser, 1997, p. 89), and proposed an alternative vision:

What is needed ... is a post-bourgeois conception that can permit us to envision a greater role for the ... public spheres than mere autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision-making a defensible conception must allow both for strong publics and for weak publics and [that] it should help theorize the relations among them. (p. 92)

In her conceptualization of citizenship, Fraser illuminated five properties that capture how individuals navigate and inhabit a multiplicity of social worlds during their lives:

1. Personal membership and critical dialogue in diverse organizations make accessible political participation in the public arena (p. 70).
2. Membership in community organizations and dialogue are commitments to achieving social equality. Critical discussions reveal differences in social status, gender, and culture (p. 70). Discussions are often centered on an absence of an ideological distinction between "public" versus "private" matters (p. 76).
3. Recognizing a multiplicity of 'publics' fosters participation in organizations and conversations (p. 89).
4. "Strong" and "weak" publics are necessary for policy creation because community groups (i.e., weak publics) challenge strong organizations (e.g., universities) (p. 90).

We have used these properties to explore this case study in RSL in relation to Fraser's (1997) ideas of a competing plurality of publics to promote "a step toward greater democracy" (p. 77). We take Fraser's assertion – that multiple publics can represent a movement toward greater democracy and social equality for students, the classroom, the university, and the community – and apply it to RSL. Making the connection between this classroom case study, Fraser explores how activities designed to promote RSL bring together multiple publics to promote dialogue about community-university engagement, decision making and power, and improving local conditions. Fraser did not base her reformulation of the public sphere upon some vague invocation or deliberation of "the common good." Fraser's flexible, reflexive, and adaptable model encourages participants to explore whose needs are met in these public arenas and how they can create tensions by adding

oppositional voices to expert dialogue. We see this conceptual rethinking of Habermas' theoretical framework as very useful to RSL.

ACTIVITIES CENTRAL TO RSL

Overview

Students in the Sociology 100 course were required to become positively involved with UBC campus organizations and community agencies whose mandate was sustainability. As previously mentioned, we analyzed their experiences that they documented in a database that resided in a course-based website that also contained the syllabus, course notes, readings, relevant websites, famous sociological quotes, and the concept map.¹ During the term, five, largely self-directed, students in the course, were responsible for maintaining various technological aspects of the website. This activity was consistent with our conceptualization of the classroom as a community. Called the "Dreamweavers," these five students developed and revised the website, minimizing student frustrations with the technology and logistics. The "Dreamweavers" accomplished their task by helping other students enter the research data that they had gathered in the field on their volunteer organizations. Furthermore, the "Dreamweavers" added creative design elements to the course website, largely as a result of feedback from their peers. They were graded on their ability to organize, improve the quality of the website, and provide a service to the course community.

Database of Community Organizations

Students' critical reflections on their volunteer experiences in the community organizations, groups, or agencies contributed to the database. Each class member was required to volunteer approximately 40 hours of his or her time. To prompt the necessary reflection, we asked students to answer a standardized series of logistical (e.g., contact information) and sociological (e.g., culture of the organization, networks) questions (see Appendix 2). These questions supplied the content for analyzing the nature and structure of the students' chosen community groups and agencies. We added this information to the database with a data entry form that was available on the course website. Students could enter their responses to these questions in the database at any point in

the course and change information at any time. Students received a grade for their contributions to the database. Grading criteria were made available in advance to guide students in making successful contributions.

Table 2 depicts a sample of organizations where the students in this study provided community service to the university and to the community. This table reveals a broad spectrum of organizations, ranging from schools and community centers, health agencies and hospitals, political parties and co-ops, environmental non-governmental agencies, and media, to religious groups. Choosing to volunteer with university organizations reflected students' perception of the UBC campus as a community like other publics. As Table 2 illustrates, students described their community service experiences as contributing to one of a combination of community, economic, environmental, health, or social sustainability projects.²

The Concept Map

In addition to the database, a series of linked assignments (as mentioned previously) led to the creation of an introductory sociology concept map (see Appendix 1 for an example of such an assignment). The "Dreamweavers" used this information to electronically create the course concept map. Students augmented the map with descriptions of how a concept (e.g., socialization) tied in with salient aspects of their experiences. Providing the entire map would be unwieldy because of its size; however, the map links theoretical concepts, often in surprising ways (e.g., socialism is one of four foundational concepts in sociology). The concepts were hyper-linked in the website to text, pictures, and other expressions of concepts (e.g., poetry) that illuminated prominent aspects of the community-service experience (e.g., socialization). We wanted to make concepts come alive by having students describe and analyze their applicability to students' service experience to aid them in making connections between the sociological course content and these experiences.

Table 2
Organization and Type of Sustainability

Organization	Type of sustainability
UBC - AMS Student Environment Centre (SEC)	Economic/Social sustainability
UBC Recycle (Part of UBC campus Sustainability)	Environmental and Social sustainability
UBC - Sustainable Development Research Institute (SDRI)	Social sustainability; Environmental sustainability; Economic sustainability
UBC Natural Foods Co-op	Environmental sustainability; Social sustainability
UBC Trek 2000 Community service Program	Social sustainability
UBC Alma Mater Society (AMS) Bike Co-op	Environmental sustainability; Social sustainability
UBC Farm (2 students)	Social, Environmental, and Economic sustainability
Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Centre	Social sustainability
Canadian Blood Services (CBS)	Health and Social Sustainability
Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP)	Environmental sustainability; Economic and Social sustainability
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)	Social sustainability
Carnegie Community Centre	Social sustainability
Planned Parenthood Association of BC (PPABC)	Social sustainability

One student discussed the concept of subculture in describing service to the Surrey off Road Cycle Enthusiasts (SORCE), an organization dedicated to the creation of a safe and positive community of like-minded mountain bikers. This student wrote: "Almost everybody

is part of a subculture. Media often conveys subculture in deviant [terms] and [with] negative associations. This is far from the truth. They will pay their taxes, respect the law, and support their government.” This student continued describing SORCE’s positive effects on health: [T]he very nature of riding a bike demands cardio-vascular exercise and promotes physical strength, translating into good physical health. The experience of riding in the great outdoors promotes the study and knowledge of the area both geographically and historically thus fostering a respect for the environment. (student response)

Another student performed service in an organization dedicated to saving the burrowing owl’s habitat. This student created a questionnaire to supplement the sociological concept of consumption. The questionnaire provided feedback to the respondents about how much effort they were putting into preserving the environment. The questionnaire itself was hyper-linked to the course concept map.

Taken together, the database and the concept map provided ways for the class to experience community engagement. What students learned from course lectures and readings changed as a result of their service experiences, and these changes were tracked through the collaborative development of the course concept map. To better understand how and what the students were learning about community engagement, we now turn to the findings.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two major sections. In the first section, we outline general findings from an eleven-question, peer evaluation survey. In the second, we briefly examine five student exemplars that illustrate Fraser’s (1997) critique of Habermas. The survey tells the story of the students’ perceptions, good and bad, of their community experiences and, thus, sets the context for the discussion of the five students. Brief comments about some of the implications are mentioned as well.

RSL Encourages Ongoing Community Service

After the course was over and the end of the RSL project, 86 per cent of the 65 students in the class indicated they were inclined to perform

community service again. In fact, another 35 per cent of the 86 per cent explained their experience as having “opened their eyes” to benefits of helping others. Student interest in community service work and community service-learning could be a catalyst to act as participating members in their communities. In the words of one student, “Community service is an important part of our society.” Representative of 19 per cent of the other students, this individual pointed out that always having wanted to engage in community service, but “because it was mandatory [for this class] it gave [him/her] that motivational push.”

RSL Helps Understanding of Sociological Concepts

Students noted the immediate benefits of community service to their understanding of sociological concepts, considering it to be a good approach to understand sociology because it was “hands on and applied to real life.” As a student explained,

I’m taking classes like sociology to learn, specifically to learn about society, people, and how the world works. If I wanted to learn about sociological [sic] and history I would have just bought a book. For me, the idea of learning through participation in a community organization was very exciting and in combination with the lectures on sociological concepts made it a much better way to learn. (student response)

Twenty-three percent of the class of 65 demanded that, in future, a greater effort be put forward to ensure that connections are being made to sociological concepts. One possibility would be to present a student-created concept map at the beginning of the year to aide new students in thinking about the course terms as both independent phenomena and in relation to other concepts. Another technique could involve the instructors having feedback sessions where class time is put aside to discuss student experiences in connection to course concepts. This would have to be included in the syllabus or described in the first class.

RSL Fosters Students’ Sense of “Making a Difference”

Students were asked if they felt that they made a difference to the organization through their community service work. Seventy-four per cent of the class of 65 decided that they had made a difference. Five

students felt that they contributed new ideas to the organization. Those working in areas of environmental sustainability seemed to have had the greatest number of positive experiences. The physical nature of much of the work, often taking place in the outdoors, made it easy for those students to see their personal impact on the environment. One student explained that her major contribution was “the smile on [her clients’] faces, dignity, and renewed or newly gained self esteem.” While another had the following reaction couched in terms of sustainability:

In my own words, I believe sustainability is when we preserve and transmit cultural traditions and values. I believe I did this in my organization because I taught people about our English language and our own customs here in Canada, therefore, preserving and passing down our culture to new students in our country. (student response)

Those stating that they felt they had not made an impact on their organization pointed out that they had been given menial tasks. They had felt “lost in a big organization.” One student complained: “A monkey probably could have done my job.” Another stated: “The organization would have gone [on] fine without me.” In fact, 15 per cent believed their expectations of the experience had not been met because they had been given too little responsibility. Other students complained that their skills had not been properly utilized. However, these students were not completely negative. One said, “I don’t think I made a difference to the organization per say because it is such a large, well-organized place already. I think it made more of a difference on me.”

RSL Fosters Students’ Interest in More RSL

Many of the students (86 per cent of the class total of 65) discussed reasons for wanting to do more community service work in the future. For 35 percent of these respondents, their “eyes were opened”; as one student stated, there were “too many issues [that] I simply can’t ignore. I’m sure that for the rest of my life I will continue to be active on the issues that matter to me.” Another student noted: “Yes, it made me much more interested in my surroundings and what was going on. Now, I am more inclined to say yes to any of these activities than to say no. It helps me just as much as it helps others.” Others acknowledged the difference

they could make in their communities by pointing out: "It has made me more inclined to be active in my community because now I see what a difference I can make." Another student made connections to the world by saying, "To change the world, I learned we have to be willing to [perform] community service."

Students' Definitions of Sustainability Changed

At the outset of the course, 65 per cent of the class had chosen the environmental field, and 28 per cent had selected community service in the health sector. Originally, students had associated the concept of sustainability with the environmental sector. However, by the end of the term and the RSL experience, 50 per cent, as opposed to 38 per cent, of the students had changed their definition of sustainability to include the concept of social sustainability. Of these, 62 per cent had altered their thinking of sustainability from solely an environmental framing to include social and health sustainability. After completing the course, 88 per cent of students had a specific, inclusive, and concrete definition of sustainability.

Student Constraints Associated with RSL Experiences

Despite the overall positive experiences of the class, a few negative responses about community service-learning emerged from students. Initially, some reacted adversely upon finding out that we were asking them to engage in this type of activity. As a result, 21 per cent of the group thought about switching out of the class, citing timetable issues or other socially acceptable excuses. Some mentioned unsatisfying responsibilities within some of the organizations. One individual pointed out he/she would have felt better about community service if it had not been forced by the teacher, but rather had been done out of student good will. However, students who felt that the community service aspect of the course had been "hugely" unsatisfactory only made up fewer than 12 per cent of the class.

The less favorable perceptions did not emanate from a negative view of community service itself but rather from circumstantial factors, such as time and availability as well as personal issues with the way particular organizations were run. For example, one student summed up

these factors in his/her response: "It is too far from where I live, and I'm not really interested in environmental sustainability. Also, I don't have that much time, since I work and go to school full-time." The other side to this is the six students not inclined to community service elsewhere or attend public forums rationalized their answers by saying, "I have always found excuses not to, I always will," to "I see no point." Another contended that students need money so desperately that "There is no time to do something that does not financially benefit them." One response is representative of some of the negative comments: "The community service work I did does not make me want to [do] community service elsewhere nor more often, considering I could be getting paid for those hours I put in elsewhere."

Overall, despite some negative comments, most students had a positive RSL experience throughout the Sociology 100 course despite the extra work they perceived it to involve. In fact, 34 per cent of students mentioned that community service work was constructive because they had learned about their surroundings and developed new skills. The majority of students came away from the course with an expanded understanding of the concept of sustainability after having performed community service in a community organization, group, or agency. In sum, students are, indeed, interested in community service work. They engaged sociological theory by experiencing the multiple publics that Fraser (1997) says comprise the everyday world of community organizations. Activities associated with RSL, namely service, reflection, and active engagement with community had positive outcomes for the Sociology 100 students. Many of the student outcomes, such as increased participation in community service, connecting ideas and theories to everyday life, and making social change, represent common goals for educators interested in community issues, sustainability, conceptual understanding of social scientific concepts, and the development of students as citizens.

Student Exemplars

In this section, we illustrate Fraser's rethinking of multiple publics through the research in the service of co-learning (RSL) experiences of five students in the Sociology 100 class.³ Through these students' service,

one can see that they were exposed to and participated in a diverse body of public strata. They also learned about the political orientations of their organizations. Furthermore, these students became more committed to future political action within the community. Distinctions between private or public areas became less clear as students worked with relative equanimity on political agendas ranging from human sexuality and abortion counseling to environmental conservation. Moreover, because these organizations shared their own commitments to addressing numerous manifestations of social inequality, students recognized the hierarchical relations of domination and subordination in the social milieu. In the following paragraphs, we have described the community experiences of specific students. In addition, we have connected these experiences to Fraser's five tenets of the public sphere. Where possible, we present a brief description of each organization to illustrate the connections to individual student experiences.

Sharon and the Carnegie Community Centre. Fraser (1997) encourages sociologists to understand the public sphere as a space where people can ignore different statuses and where they can connect with one another. Sharon's community service work with Carnegie Community Centre supports this assertion. Her experience offers an example of a service organization that is a bridge across social positions. Sharon explained that Carnegie "provides a range of social, recreational, and educational programs for the poor and alienated residents of the Downtown Eastside." Sharon also noted that Carnegie hosts a number of other community organizations. Participation in programs and events is free. This is important in a space where "the survival and well-being of its members [is] a first priority." Carnegie's work inspired Sharon to call the centre a "living room," "haven," and a place that "build[s] up the community and create[s] opportunities for its members." Sharon's ability to offer sophisticated metaphors for Carnegie Community Centre reveals that experiences such as hers enable students to look beyond the circumstances in which agency users usually find themselves to consider the kinds of interaction that its programs foster. She discovered that part of Carnegie Centre's mandate was to examine marginalized individuals' access to leisure and education. Sharon felt that Carnegie encouraged citizenship by fostering a sense of belonging to society. Sharon connected

the concepts that she learned in the classroom to their manifestation within the community. Through her active community engagement, Sharon took on a citizenship role to assist in improving the lives of individuals at Carnegie Centre. In doing so, she learned about differences in social position and about the need to provide opportunities to improve local conditions for marginalized people.

Liz and the Canadian Mental Health Association. Liz's experiences while volunteering with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) buttress Fraser's (1997) argument that the public sphere is fluid and malleable. Liz described her experience with the Routes to Real Work project, an initiative that helps nearly 50 per cent of its participants find employment. Liz attempts to convey the desire for clients to take on a new principal status (i.e., employee rather than patient) through integration into the workforce:

The Routes to Real Work project is related to social sustainability by integrating people with mental illnesses into the workforce. Through the help of this project, participants were able to contribute positively to the community, gain independence and skills, and, therefore, not need to rely on public support as much. It is a process of re-socialization where a person is able to develop life skills, live independently, and be a part of the community. It also decreases the stigma surrounding mental illness so the public becomes more involved in helping people with inflections [sic]. Through this project and others, the CMHA provides a medium between a total institution and complete independence by providing community support. It helps stop the cycle many people with mental illness go through: being in a psychiatric hospital, living in the community without support, and then revolving back into the hospital. Through this project, participants feel better about themselves, and their mental well-being is sustained. (Liz's response)

Liz employed Sociology 100 course concepts (e.g., stigma, re-socialization, institution) to show that Routes to Work clients believed in the fluid nature of an individual's social position. Especially important is the sense of transformation she described. This awareness is illustrative of Fraser's (1997) overall theoretical focus. In this example, individuals with mental illnesses are able to participate within their communities by taking part through active living. Liz used Sociology 100 concepts to explain the fluid nature of social position in this organization

and the possibility for marginalized individuals with mental illnesses to become active participants in their communities.

Jennifer's and the Canadian Blood Services. Jennifer's experience with the Canadian Blood Services (CBS) grounds Fraser's assertion that conflating the public and the private realm is an important facet of the public sphere. To explain this idea, we draw on Jennifer's contribution to the database. Jennifer described the CBS as an agency that "provides a safe, secure, and affordable source of a national blood supply system." She also traced the history of the organization and its educational and recruitment strategies. Most significant, Jennifer, like Fraser (1997), recognized how private issues, such as blood transplants and surgeries, have public implications. She depicted blood as a "public" or "common good." It connects individuals throughout the country through a national service that relies heavily on community services. In addition, by providing community services or by donating blood, private individuals are performing a type of caring service work to the larger public. In other words, private people become active as public actors to benefit the larger community (Tronto, 2001, p. 82).

Mary's and Planned Parenthood Association of British Columbia. Mary's work with the Planned Parenthood Association of British Columbia (PPABC) is another example of civil society meeting public needs while also addressing those of private individuals. In her analysis, Mary focused on decision making because of its central position in the day-to-day activities of the organization. According to Mary's contribution, Planned Parenthood's mandate is to reduce unplanned pregnancy and promote reproductive health. She noted that the organization was formed in 1961 when a number of family planning agencies around the province merged with the use of funding from the United Way, local fundraising activities and events, community organizations, and private donations. The PPABC believes clients (members) have the right to information, access, choice, safety, privacy, confidentiality, comfort, continuity, expression, and treatment with dignity, courtesy, consideration, and attentiveness. Membership is open to everyone. Clients are ensured quality clinical care and education on reproductive health issues. Theoretically, this organization connects private, individual reproductive health to a healthy public community.

Promoting, enabling, and rewarding good decisions about contraception and planned parenting foster a healthy citizenry and society over the long-term. The organization's goals focus on individuals making good decisions. What is noteworthy about Mary's community service experience is her emphasis on this organization's serving needs of the public. Her work also highlights that needs and choices of the strong public may produce tensions with the weak publics even through the process of good decision making.

Jim and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. Fraser (1997) discusses the need for public dialogue and the overt politics that characterize what is acknowledged as a part of civil society. Jim's community service work with the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) led to his assertion that marketing coffee was a political issue and worthy of dialogue and political action. Jim was involved in a project that planned and coordinated a Just Coffee fundraising project to sell Fair Trade organic specialty coffee. In his contribution, Jim questioned the motives of big coffee retailers in advocating the need for fair trade brands that he considered to be "virtually unknown." He explained that fair trade is an alternative system with the objective of aiding:

[S]mall holders and members of democratic cooperatives in various Latin American countries and in Timor [where] a fair price is paid per pound of coffee beans produced by these coops. The beans are processed and exported by cooperatives in order to cut out the local middle [level managers], often referred to as "coyotes," who exploit the growers. The Fair Trade system allows small farmer families to reinvest in sustainable agriculture and community development projects. By purchasing Fair Trade products, individuals help these families cover their production costs and receive a livable return for their labor. (Jim's response)

Jim considered the everyday practice of coffee consumption in relation to the more public national and international issues of globalization, aid, and development, as such, consumption patterns are a political issue and, therefore, part of the public sphere. Above all, Jim's example reinforces the need for conversation and dialogue between marginalized coffee producers, retailers, and consumer groups. This

example raises questions about the Catholic Church's role in this kind of work as well as the consumer's part in social change. Jim considered the topic with a critical eye. By becoming a community activist interested in supporting the rights of others, Jim engaged as a political actor in shaping not only his own decisions, but those of other coffee consumers and larger companies as well. While seeing citizenship in the form of political action, Jim's experience speaks to the need for public dialogue to counter the concealed politics of civil society.

Taken together, these students' community service experiences exemplify and connect Fraser's (1997) theory of an expanded notion of community engagement by enacting it. Finally, these community service experiences provided an avenue for students to examine their roles as citizens within a variety of publics while linking their experiences to sociological theory learned in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Community service-learning provides an opportunity to ground concepts in organizations whose work contributes to a more democratic society. We used Fraser's (1997) framework to support the argument that community organizations can instruct students in a number of areas. Organizations provide access to the public arena of political participation. This access is enacted through association and discursive relations (p. 70). The opportunity to challenge private matters by reconceptualizing them as public issues has been illustrated through the students' reflections about their volunteering (p. 76). The students' RSL experiences encouraged them to confront differences in individuals' social statuses, gender, and diversities. In her theoretical discussion, Fraser explains such encouragement as fostering participatory parity (p. 89) and increased political awareness. Lastly, these student examples illustrate the necessity of dialogue between strong and weak publics in public decision making (p. 90).

Finally, the online resources created as part of the project represent the culmination of the community service-learning projects. In particular, the organizational database and the concept map functions of the website reflect public sphere participation in several ways. First, their accessibility via the Internet meets Fraser's criteria for some level of

participatory parity. The World Wide Web is accessible, provided that one owns or has public access to a computer, source of dialogue, and information for students in higher education. In addition, the definitions of sociological terms used by the students for these online resources were developed through discursive interplay between classroom dialogue and lived experience. As students worked with concepts that were introduced via lectures and course readings, and throughout the process of students' critical reflection upon their community service endeavors, the terms and definitions took on a discursive-interactive character. From the perspective of sociology, notions of "difference" and "the other" were brought to the fore as students asked themselves what parts of, and how, their experiences related to theoretical concepts. Stereotypes and subcultures emerged as two foundational concepts in the Introductory Sociology concept map. Exercises based on these concepts helped students recognize the existence of multiple social worlds. This is an important counterbalance to the normative social world that is sometimes seen as completely overpowering. In short, community service-learning can challenge concepts typically delivered in the Sociology 100 course while promoting experiences that foster community engagement.

Furthermore, RSL provided the opportunity for students to engage as citizens in field experiences that took place either on or off campus. In this case, community service-learning facilitated the production of student-created tools for promoting information exchange (e.g., websites, databases, and video). This can further encourage collaboration between the university and the community. These information exchanging tools promote a fuller, richer public sphere – on and off campus – as well as the integration of teaching, research, and community service. RSL's ability to bridge theoretical knowledge between the public sphere and the learning of abstract theoretical concepts can be reinforced by creating interactive websites that are maintained over time. Thus, RSL can provide an avenue for students to activate theory through participation as citizens within local communities.

In this article, we have argued that community service-learning can foster community engagement. We have presented a theoretical and applied argument for offering methods for conducting community

service learning. We have illustrated how community service learning can introduce students to their roles as engaged citizens in “affairs and their community” (Dietz, 1987, p. 14). The university can, and must, foster critical, reflective, and participatory dialogue within and outside its strict geographical boundaries. Learning through community engagement offers a space for interaction with a multiplicity of publics, and, in doing so; it provides a pathway between the community, students, classroom, and university.

NOTES

¹ The database is no longer available for viewing because the server is gone.

² Students were expected to explain the rationale for their choices of organizations in the context of sustainability. One student defined the role of an anti-poverty resource centre as contributing to social sustainability as “every project organized and run by the Harvest Project is related to the social.”

³ The names of the five students in this section have been changed to protect and ensure anonymity.

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Appendix 1. Concept Mapping Assignment

Name _____

Concept _____

Objectives:

1/ Connect your volunteer experience with the concepts that we are learning in Sociology 100-005.

2/ Improve the course web site (<http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca/soc100/>) as:

- Collaborative learning space
- Research tool for service learning

Task:

You are responsible for making one of these concepts “come alive” by handing in a two-page document (print, not electronic) that accomplishes both objectives. Items 1-3 must be included, a minimum of two options from items 4-8 are also necessary.

Required

- 1) Description of the concept (one paragraph)
- 2) Analysis of how the concept applies to your experience
- 3) Link to other concepts
Choose a minimum of two of the following.
- 4) Identify interesting, related web-sites
- 5) Create sample assignments to teach the concept and/or service learning
- 6) Find images that capture the reality the concept describes
- 7) Provide analogies that help to explain the concept
- 8) Photos, quotes, stories

Audience:

The cross between the “ho-hum” and the “oh-here-we-go-again” crowd. You are going to turn these folks into the “on-the-edge-of-their-chairs-with-face-smashed-up-to-the-computer-screen-‘cuz-they-can’t-believe-they-got-by-without-this-information” types.”

Rationale:

One of the most difficult parts of the service learning part of this course is making the connections between the course content and your experiences. I am sure that many of you have successfully done so “in your heads” but that rarely means reflection. The point is that sharing these experiences against the backdrop of Sociology 100 will add tremendous value to the whole endeavour. The Dreamweavers will take each of your two-pagers and use the information to create a course concept map.

Appendix 2. Questions for Database

1. What is the name of your organization?
2. Who is the main contact (the boss)?
3. What is its mandate?
4. What kinds of projects is it currently working on?
5. Who are its funders?
6. How would you describe the culture of the organization,
7. What other organizations does it work with?
8. What sociological concept or concepts reflect this organization?