Reflective Practice that Persists: Connections Between Reflection in Service-Learning Programs and in Current Life

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This study investigates the relationship between reflective practices in college service-learning programs and alumni's current reflective practices. Additionally, this study explores how graduates' present reflective practices help to shape their civic and professional identities. Mixed methods using survey and interview data explore reflective practice in the lives of alumni from three multi-term community engagement programs. The research reaffirms the importance of reflective practice in college-level community engagement programs in influencing reflective practice after graduation. The results of this study strongly suggest that multi-term, community engagement programs, where critical reflection is continuous and occurs in a variety of ways, support a reflective practice that persists in the lives of program graduates, helping them develop their civic and professional identities.

The Importance of Reflection

Reflection has long held prominence in service-learning. Scholars have defined reflection as the activity that "mak[es] meaning of experience" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p. 179), that "pushes us to step outside the old and familiar and to reframe our questions and our conclusions in innovative and more effective terms" (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996, p.13), and that "transform[s] our values" (Cooper, 2003, p. 93). One longtime service-learning practitioner even claimed, "reflection is so critical; there can be no higher growth for individuals or for society without it. Reflection is the very process of human evolution itself" (David Sawyer, quoted in Reed & Koliba, 1995, p. 6).

Critical reflection also holds a prominent place in civic and political learning. Theorists as far back as John Dewey have contended that civic identity development requires ongoing, active reflection, whether done individually or in concert with others, formally or informally (Dewey, 1933; Knefelkamp, 2008; Mitchell, Visconti, Keene, & Battistoni, 2011). In a study of the political impact of 21 campus-based courses and programs, the Carnegie Foundation's Political Engagement Project found strong connections between learning through structured reflection and what the project termed "politically engaged identity," which "involves seeing or identifying oneself as a person who cares about politics and has an overarching commitment to political participation" (Colby, Beaumont, Erlich, & Corngold, 2007, p. 17).

Critical reflection in civic and professional realms offers citizens the time and space to make "sense of contradictory options" and resolve "difficult tensions" (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997, p. 630) in order to develop a personal framework for citizen action (Roholt, Hildreth, & Baizerman, 2009). In a statement that certainly can be applied to civic practitioners, Donald Schön (1983) argues that practitioners need to

step back and think about their actions lest they "miss important opportunities to think about what [they are] doing" and "afflict others with the consequences of [their] narrowness and rigidity" (p. 61).

Yet with all the significance placed on reflection, there is limited research examining the impact of reflection in service-learning programs on reflective practice after students leave college. It would seem axiomatic that critical reflection, done well, would lead to a lifetime reflective practice that may impact a graduate's civic attitudes and actions, but no studies have looked at the persistence and benefits of reflection in the lives of service-learning alumni.

Reflection in Service-Learning

Service-learning and community-based experiences provide a rich context for learning. Dewey (1933, 2007) explained that reflection provides a framework within which students can address the uncertainties of a complex situation and make meaning of these varied experiences. As students are challenged by community-based experiences and find their preconceived notions inadequate to explain the realities of their experience, critical reflection helps students revise the misconceptions they have about the world to align with new realities. Reflection, thus, is a strategy that promotes a type of "objective reframing" of prior knowledge into a new understanding and meaning (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23).

Meaning can be made from experience in a variety of ways. Researchers have found that reflection during service-learning experiences connects knowledge of the academic subject to the application of that knowledge in community-based settings, leading to more complex representations of community issues (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler, 2002). Critical reflection during service-learning allows students to expand initial, simplistic conceptions of the world into more complex and accurate representations of messy "real world" problems.

Reflection not only helps students reframe complex problems but also challenges them to rethink civic values and social responsibility (Brookfield, 2000). Battistoni (1997) explains how service-learning, paired with adequate reflection activities, helps students develop "moral dispositions of civic judgment" that give students "the ability to use publicly defendable moral standards in application to the actual life and history of a community" (p. 153). Supporting these views, Mabry (1998) found that students who engaged in reflection at least weekly during service-learning courses showed the highest gains in responses to personal and civic value items, such as "[it is] important to you personally [to] help others who are in need," and "Adults should give some time for the good of their community or coun-

try" (p. 46). Similarly, Boss (1994) found that students who participated in service-learning and reflected on their experiences showed greater gains in moral reasoning than their non-service-learning counterparts. Reflection, therefore, allows students to "identify parts [of a community-based experience] and the connections among them as coherent patterns, to see *oneself* as part of those patterns, and simultaneously to step outside and reflect evaluatively on them" (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996, p. 113, emphasis added).

As reflection supports the clarification of civic values, it supports the reevaluation and development of civic identity as well. Jones and Hill (2003) found that college students' socially constructed identities (e.g., race, gender, etc.) influenced how they engaged in service and how they constructed meaning from the service. Mitchell (2014) similarly identified reflection on identity as a key process for service-learning students to understand their role in and responsibility to community.

Social and civic identity not only serve as antecedents to or components of reflection, but also as consequences of reflection. Jones and Abes (2004) recognized that students, given the opportunity to reflect on their service-learning experience, "came to understand that this learning was really more about acting in a manner consistent with their emerging sense of self" (p. 154). Mitchell (2014) describes this as a process of alignment between identity and action, while Jones and Hill (2003) explain it as a function of students expanding their view to see themselves as connected to others originally perceived as different. Shifts in self-identity as a function of service experiences with others are identified and recognized through reflection; this represents a core feature of service-learning (Mezirow, 2000; Rhoads, 1997).

Changes in civic values and identity as a result of reflection in service-learning are inextricably tied to changes in motivation and commitment to act. Brookfield (2000) recognized that critical reflection was an essential part of the process of "informed action" (p. 47). Astin and Sax (1998) found that participation in service-learning and associated reflection activities resulted in significant increases in the belief that "individuals could…bring about changes in our society" (p. 256). Similarly, Fenzel and Peyrot (2005) found that alumni of service-learning programs showed the greatest levels of community responsibility and personal political involvement when their service-learning experiences included the highest levels of reflection.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the connection between reflection experiences and the commitment to civic action is provided by Astin,

Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Lee (2000) in a large-scale investigation of service-learning and community service. Among the most important (affective) outcomes of service-learning identified in this project were the students' self-efficacy and commitment to activism. The researchers found that reflection activities with other students were an essential component mediating the effect on learning outcomes. In sum, then, research suggests that reflection during service-learning experiences leads to a deeper sense of civic self-efficacy and a greater commitment to act on behalf of oneself and others within the community.

Reflection Post-Graduation

Reflection during service-learning experiences produces positive learning outcomes during or immediately after the experience. The question remains, however, whether reflective practice during service-learning leads to sustained practice and benefits for graduates of these experiences. In interviews with community-engaged professionals, Parks Daloz et al. (1996) found that reflective dialogue is "foundational to meaning-making and to the moral life" (p. 109). They explain that a recursive dialogue develops between professionals and their environment, as well as between the professional and others, which promotes a deep understanding of the person's role in community service and civic action. The practice of reflection developed during the college years, thus, may extend out toward civic and professional activities long after students graduate.

Reflective practice is viewed as a means to develop a deep sense of self-awareness (Horton-Deutsch & Sherwood, 2008; Smith & Trede, 2013) as well as a way of becoming aware of and caring for others (Parks Daloz et al., 1996). Bleakley (1999) describes this type of reflective practice as "an aesthetic and ethical act of participation in the world" that is "a practice of sensitivity to, and a caring for, the world" (p. 328). This deep level of reflective practice that touches on identity, meaning, and a commitment to civic action likely develops over time (Battistoni, 1997; Boss, 1994). And, as professionals cultivate greater capacity for action, they recognize the moral and ethical responsibility they have to use that capacity for the good of society (Colby & Damon, 2010; Hatcher, 1997; Sullivan, 1988, 2005). Awareness of these responsibilities in one's work likely manifests from reflection.

Schön (1987) suggests that self-initiated learning in the practicing professional is an important, recursive exercise that is a natural extension of practice. As the professional moves from predictable theories in textbooks to the complex and uncertain world of practice, critical incidents ignite a robust reflection and reframing of presenting problems. Reflective practice involves a recurrent inspection of disruptive moments that leads to innovative shifts in problem-solving intended to produce improvements in practice. Wilson (2008) considers this process so central to professional practice that it "probably [has] been undertaken since the dawn of time because it is an important means of learning from the past in order to improve performance in the future" (p. 178).

Just as reflection during service-learning challenges identity and civic commitment, practicing professionals have their identities challenged by ongoing reflective practice. In a longitudinal study of preclinical medical students, students who had developed the greatest commitment to reflective practice showed the greatest levels of personal identity development and the greatest certainty about their chosen profession (Niemi, 1997). As professionals explore their practice through doing and reflecting on doing, they must face the moral dimensions of their practice (Brookfield, 1995). Reflection activities within service-learning, therefore, likely build capacities of alumni to reflect on what might be useful in their civic and professional lives. Service-learning aims to engage students in reflection to develop a sense of civic responsibility and become "civic-minded graduates" (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011, p. 20). These graduates, with continued reflective practice, become civic-minded professionals (Hatcher, 2008). Reflective practice is the process by which students and professionals develop the capacity to act in and engage with their communities. Civic-minded professionals are ones who see a connection between their values and a commitment to act within their profession to produce positive change.

To date, there is no clear evidence as to whether reflection in service-learning programs leads to sustained reflective practice in civic or professional life. The current study addresses whether reflection in a community engagement program is connected to reflection in current life, and whether these reflection activities influence civic mindedness around one's social and professional identities. To investigate the connection between reflection in service-learning programs and reflective practice in the civic and professional lives of alumni, this study focuses on four research questions:

1) How helpful do alumni of service-learning experiences consider the reflective practices they participated in as undergraduates, and which activities do they consider most helpful?

2) How helpful do alumni consider the reflective practices they engage in now and how do they integrate reflection into their lives currently?

3) What benefits do they perceive result from that current life reflection?

4) What role does reflection play in the identity development of alumni as "civic-minded professionals" (Hatcher, 2008)?

Method

A mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2009) best describes the research design to study the reflective practices of alumni. The participants are graduates of three multi-term community engagement programs at three institutions of higher education. While the programs differ in their institution home (i.e., a private research-intensive university, a large public university, and a small private Catholic college), all share deep connections to the campus public service office. The programs differ in length—one year (three courses), two years (four courses), and four years (11 core courses)—but have a shared mission to build civic agency among their members, challenging participants to see themselves as engaged scholars and actors working for a better world (Mitchell et al., 2011).

The three campus programs recruit students to participate; engage their members as cohorts by encouraging participants to socialize both informally through program events and shared meals, and formally through retreats and common classes; and have curricular frameworks that provide opportunity for dialogue, values clarification, and knowledge acquisition. All of the programs' students are civically engaged, with program requirements that provide participants with opportunities to work in community settings and complete a capstone experience (either research or projects addressing a public issue). Reflection is an important, ongoing practice in the three programs, with participants involved in a variety of conversations, activities, and writing assignments aimed at continuously integrating curriculum, community participation, current events, and personal experience.

The alumni from the three programs participating in this research demonstrate the types of civic engagement that scholars and leaders in the field desire in their graduates. More than 97% of respondents were registered to vote, and more than 95% reported voting in the 2008 election. More than 82% had volunteered or participated in some type of community service in the last year, compared to 26% of the national population and 43% of the nation's college graduates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The commitment of alumni to civic action extended to their career choices, with 52% of alumni responding they were currently working in the nonprofit sector (including community organizing, nonprofit management, or social work) and another 26% working in the public sector (including government and public K-12 schools).

Participants and Sampling Procedures

Online survey. Working with each campus, a database of almost 400 alumni across the three programs was built. All alumni who had graduated in 2011 or prior were contacted via email and invited to participate in an online survey through a distinct link provided in the email. Of the approximately 400 alumni receiving the survey, 49% responded (n = 195; 80% female; 84% White). The race and gender make-up of the respondents reflects the enrollment in the programs studied. Respondents typically completed the program between one and five years before completing the survey, with some respondents (36%) completing the program more than 10 years earlier (*Mdn* = 5). The response rate for this survey was high for online survey research (Nulty, 2008; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant 2003; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Whereas no incentives were offered for participation in the survey, the authors speculate that the high response rate may be due to relationships alumni maintain with program directors, preliminary invitations to participate sent by program staff the alumni knew in college, as well as the positive experiences that alumni had in the respective programs.

Phenomenological interview. Using a purposeful sample to ensure race, gender, and cohort diversity, 11 alumni from each program (n = 33; 72% female; 82% White), who had graduated between 1995 and 2008, were interviewed in-depth using a loosely structured protocol. To arrive at the 33 participants who were interviewed, the alumni database was divided into three categories based on graduation year (i.e., graduated prior to 2000, graduated between 2000 and 2004, graduated between 2004 and 2008). A random number generator was used to identify four alumni from each campus in each of the three categories. Identified alumni were sent an email asking them to participate in an interview. Twenty-nine of the 36 alumni initially invited to interview agreed to participate. Seven subsequent invitations were sent from which four additional interview participants were secured to arrive at equal representation (n=11) from each program. Interviews were conducted in person or via Skype and lasted an average of 81 minutes.

Measures

Online survey. The construction of the survey was informed by preliminary analysis of the interview data and prior research on service-learning and community engagement. The survey included several sets of questions about reflective practice. Respondents indicated "how helpful" different reflection activities (e.g., writing in a journal, structured reflection activi-

ties in class, informal dialogue with other students) were during the program on a seven-point Likert-type scale of "Not at All Helpful" to "Extremely Helpful." Within the survey, reflection was defined as "intentionally thinking about experience…includ[ing] making meaning from an experience, gaining understanding or insight, and taking new action." Participants also indicated the helpfulness of different reflection activities in which they engage in their *current life* using the same seven-point Likert-type scale. The scale included items such as "dialogue with colleagues at work" and "private reflection."

Alumni also responded to items from the Civic Minded Professional (CMP) scale (Hatcher, 2008). Items included: "I often feel a deep sense of purpose in the work that I do," "My personal values and beliefs are well integrated and aligned with my work and career," and "Others would likely describe me as someone who is very passionate about my work." Items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Phenomenological interview. The interviews used a loosely-structured protocol that covered a range of topics about alumni recollections of their time in the program as well as information about their current lives including additional education, career choice, political views, and community engagement. With regard to reflective practice, alumni were asked questions such as: Can you share an example of ways that you engage in reflective practice?, How often do you engage in this type of reflection?, and What makes reflective practice valuable to you?

Analysis

Data analysis in this mixed-method research aimed at integration and most closely followed a process Caracelli and Greene (1993) term data consolidation/merging. This procedure for analysis focused on "joint use of both data types" to "uncover fresh insights and new perspectives" (p. 200).

Online survey. The data generated by the completed surveys were converted into an SPSS file for analysis. The items of the Helpfulness of Program Reflection survey were combined into a single scale where higher scores indicate greater helpfulness of program reflection activities. Helpfulness of Program Reflection should be viewed as an indication not just of the number of reflection activities, but the quality and helpfulness of those activities to provide a context for framing and understanding community and civic engagement activities within the program. The researchers believed that, given the retrospective nature of the survey, helpfulness of reflection was a better measure of the impact of reflection practices than the recalled number of times students engaged in these reflection activities. The 10 items on the Helpfulness of Program Reflection scale demonstrated moderately high reliability (Cronbach's α = .81).

To examine Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection, nine items were loaded on a single factor and were combined into a single scale (Cronbach's α = .81). In addition, participants indicated what benefits they receive from reflection in *current life*, including items such as [reflection in current life helps] "clarify my sense of civic responsibility" and "challenges [me] to think more critically." These 11 items were combined into a single scale of Benefits of Current Life Reflection (Cronbach's α = .92) such that higher scores indicate greater perceived benefits of current life reflection.

Lastly, data from the five-item Civic Identity and Calling subscale (taken from the larger CMP scale), measured a sense of personal satisfaction and identity in work (Cronbach's α = .93). Higher scores indicated higher levels of civic mindedness with regard to respondents' professional identity and calling.
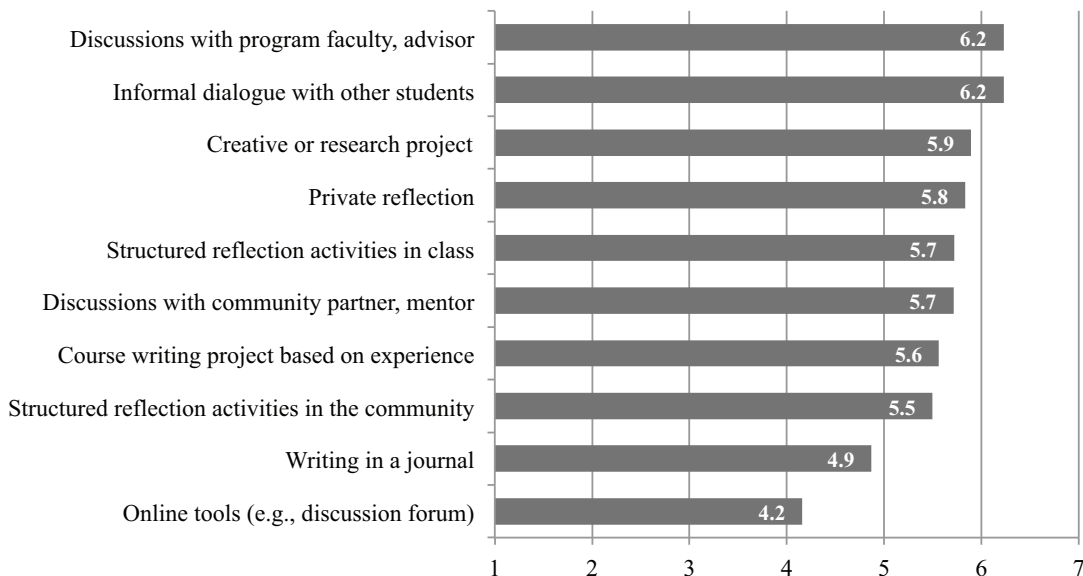
Phenomenological interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Qualitative analysis began with coding informed by the quantitative analysis (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Creswell, 2009). Codes based on the scales created for the quantitative analysis drove the descriptive analysis of the qualitative data. Comparisons were essential in the process of analysis (Boeije, 2002). As the interview transcripts were reviewed and coded, categories were developed, comparisons made, and connections identified that were able to further illuminate the quantitative findings and integrate the data. Pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was also important to analyzing the qualitative data. In considering the Identity and Calling subscale, patterns that reflected "sense of purpose," "career alignment," or "passion for work" were identified, comparisons were made across transcripts, and memos were written to discuss the patterns and themes and to consolidate those analyses with the quantitative findings.

Results

Helpfulness of Program Reflection Activities

Alumni indicated that a variety of reflection activities were helpful in supporting their learning (see Figure 1). Discussions with program faculty and advisors and informal dialogue with other students were rated the most helpful reflection activities *during the program*. The least helpful program reflection activities reported by alumni were journal writing and online discussion forums. Alumni rarely rated a reflection activity as "Not at all helpful," and the results indicate that alumni view a variety of reflection activities as helpful for supporting learning.

Figure 1
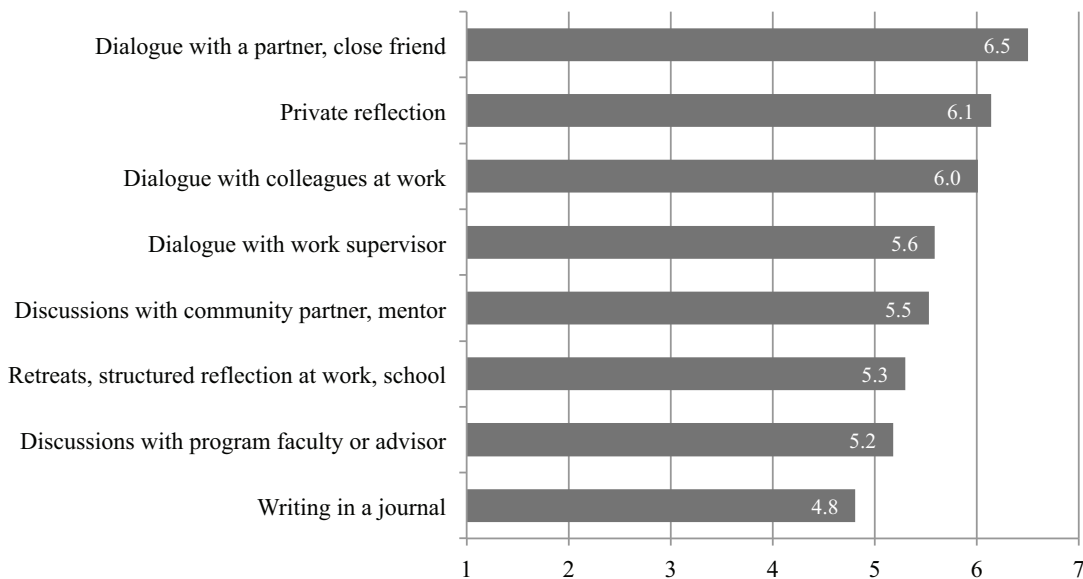*Reported Helpfulness of Program Reflection Activities*

Activity	Rating
Discussions with program faculty, advisor	6.2
Informal dialogue with other students	6.2
Creative or research project	5.9
Private reflection	5.8
Structured reflection activities in class	5.7
Discussions with community partner, mentor	5.7
Course writing project based on experience	5.6
Structured reflection activities in the community	5.5
Writing in a journal	4.9
Online tools (e.g., discussion forum)	4.2

Note: Scale: 1 = Not at all helpful; 7 = Extremely Helpful

*Helpfulness and Integration of
Reflection Activities in Current Life*

Given that graduates express the helpfulness of program reflection activities, one might question whether reflection ends when the program demand for such reflection ends. This was not the case. After alumni complete the programs, many find reflection in their current life to be helpful in their professional and civic pursuits (see Figure 2). In current life, alumni rated dialogue with a partner or a close friend and private reflection as most helpful. Alumni also find reflection activities with colleagues at work to be helpful. Again, writing in a journal was among the least helpful reflection activities in current life.

Figure 2
Reported Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection Activities

Activity	Rating
Dialogue with a partner, close friend	6.5
Private reflection	6.1
Dialogue with colleagues at work	6.0
Dialogue with work supervisor	5.6
Discussions with community partner, mentor	5.5
Retreats, structured reflection at work, school	5.3
Discussions with program faculty or advisor	5.2
Writing in a journal	4.8

Note: Scale: 1 = Not at all helpful; 7 = Extremely Helpful

Alumni find a variety of reflection activities in current life to be helpful, especially those that involve people who are important to them in their current personal life and profession. Although the majority of alumni find reflection in their current life helpful, a small percentage of respondents (6%) rated the helpfulness of current life reflection below the midpoint of the rating scale (less than 4 out of 7). The helpfulness of reflection in current life was not correlated with how long the alumni had been out of the program, $r(130) = .04$, *ns*. In other words, alumni find reflection in current life helpful regardless of how long ago they graduated.

The qualitative data illuminated why alumni from the community engagement programs find it valuable to integrate reflection into their current lives as well as how they choose to reflect. The reflective practices alumni exercise are both formal and informal, happen in a multitude of spaces and times, and occur for a variety of reasons.

Reflection often happens through assorted conversations: intentional and deeply meaningful dialogues; unstructured, brief, and informational chats; brainstorms; and highly structured technical reviews. An alumnus of the one-year program described "regular email correspondence" with another alumna of the program as his most "formalized" reflection. His correspondence "makes [him] write and express really explicitly a lot of the ways in which [he is] thinking about service and career and professional tracks and whatnot" (Class of 2006). Conversations happen with colleagues, classmates, friends, life partners, personal therapists, supervisors, supervisees, students, and even faculty from the community engagement program. Alumni credited these conversations with helping them make sense of their work as well as think critically and clarify their values.

In the professional realm, alumni reflect by talking with co-workers about the dynamics of a situation in order to gain insights, put pieces together, and consider how to make things better. For example, several alumni who are teachers, social workers, therapists, or nonprofit program staff frequently have reflective conversations with colleagues about improving lessons and programs. By embracing and taking advantage of opportunities to reflect, they contribute to the culture of their workplace, making it a space for critical reflection to regularly occur. An alumnus of the four-year program specifically referenced how it is helpful to have a group of people with whom trust is established so that "you're able to really have honest reflection" (Class of 2000). The opportunity to reflect with people who also have a reflective approach to work forged "the best connections professionally" (four-year program alumna, Class of 1997). Alumni also named as reflective practices more

structured mechanisms through which reflection occurs in the workplace. A teacher described a highly systematized process for performance review that included self-review, review with the director, and group reflection with other teachers about the curriculum and students. In the group conversation, teachers thought through together what pedagogical strategies worked for students who were having difficulty and what the next steps should be (two-year program alumna, Class of 2007). Another alumna, a social worker, described a process of structured reflection at board retreats for her agency (four-year program, Class of 2006). Teaching alumni from all three programs, now utilizing service-learning pedagogy in their own practice, described planning and facilitating opportunities for their students to reflect. Alumni pursuing graduate studies described different reflection opportunities as part of class assignments and in class discussions.

Alumni who did not maintain a structured reflective practice, discussed reflecting several times a week in informal ways. An alumna of the two-year program described reflecting during her "40-minute commute" as "a ritual" that allowed her to "think about things really deeply" so that she can "then go back and do a better job" (Class of 2002). Common practices of writing, reading, and exercising were important spaces of reflection for alumni. While journaling was inconsistent for most of the interviewed alumni, some shared alternative methods of recording their reflections. An alumna of the four-year program typed thoughts, feelings, and poems into her phone (Class of 1998), and another kept a running document on her computer's desktop of ideas and questions about which she wanted to think more deeply (Class of 2006). Similarly, an alumnus of the one-year program recorded thoughts and quotes into a smart phone app (Class of 2005). Reading, both in choices of text and quiet time afforded by spending time with a book, were spaces where alumni described reflecting regularly. The time of physically moving the body in solitary exercise provided the opportunity to focus, think, and relax; therefore, representing an important space of reflection for alumni from all three programs.

Benefits from Reflection in Current Life

Given that alumni express that reflection continues to be helpful long after the service-learning program ends, we asked alumni about a number of perceived benefits to reflecting in their current life (see Figure 3). In their professional lives, reflection helps alumni change their practice, improve the quality of their work, and improve skills and competencies. Reflection in current life supports alumni in their civic engagement, including raising new questions,

Figure 3
Reported Benefits of Current Life Reflection

Benefit	Value
Raise new questions for you to explore	6.1
Make decisions about changing practices	6.0
Improve the quality of your work	6.0
Clarify your personal values	6.0
Clarify your career goals, professional identity	6.0
Challenge you to think more critically	6.0
Gain feedback from others about experience	5.8
Improve your skills and/or competencies	5.7
Understand your own social identities	5.6
Understand the foundations of social problems	5.6
Clarify your sense of civic responsibility	5.5

Note: Scale: 1 = Not at all helpful; 7 = Extremely Helpful

clarifying their values, and understanding their own social identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, etc.). Researchers have hypothesized that reflective practice has a number of benefits for civically-engaged professionals. The results from the survey indicate that alumni of these community engagement programs perceive a number of civic and professional benefits of reflection in their lives well after they graduate.

In interviews, alumni portrayed reflective practice as fully integrated into their sense of self. An alumna of the four-year program described it as "the air I'm breathing" (Class of 2000). The nature of the intense professional work in teaching, medical, social work, and legal fields led alumni to view reflection as a way to "decompress" (one-year program alumnus, Class of 2005) and to "put things in perspective" (two-year program alumna, Class of 2002) so as not to get overwhelmed by the details.

Alumni from all three programs discussed reflection as a way to ground or center themselves. "Being in the moment" helped an alumnus of the two-year program be more effective in his work and assisted him in creating stronger connections with people (Class of 2001). An alumnus who is a physician and professor of medicine talked about reflecting before meeting with patients to "center [him]self" in order to actively listen to them. If he did not feel centered, he found it important to take "at least 30 seconds" before meeting with a patient. It was an important practice that "will put you in a place where you can take better care of your patients," and from that understanding he has come to include this practice as

a skill that he teaches his medical students (two-year program alumnus, Class of 2001).

An alumna, currently pursuing research abroad on grassroots labor organizing, discussed reflection as essential to ensuring she is "the best person I can be" as she is meeting with laborers and listening intently "since people are telling you things about their lives that are really awful, basically how they're desperate, and miserable, and they don't know what to do. It's really heavy stuff" (four-year program alumna, Class of 2004). It was important for her to be intentional in taking the time to process what she had experienced, was feeling, and had learned in order to both respect the generosity of the laborers trusting her with their stories and to properly and appropriately understand what was being shared in those conversations.

Alumni of all three programs spoke to the role of reflection in their daily life choices, including consumer choices (e.g., "the food I eat, the clothes I buy"), conversations they decided to engage in, and political decisions (two-year program alumna, Class of 1999). Reflection for the alumni was an exercise in consciousness that allowed them to "reflect on my impact" (one-year program alumnus, Class of 2006) and "[try] to be as socially just as I can" (two-year program alumna, Class of 1999).

While the products of reflection can be meaningful and positive, the moments that cause alumni to reflect are complicated. Alumni reported reflecting when they felt frustrated or in distress. Reflection was seen as an opportunity to "deal with conflict" (four-year program alumna, Class of 2000) and help

people explore multiple perspectives. In these instances, finding reflective partners with whom alumni could reflect "safely" (one-year program alumnus, Class of 2005) and make sense of everything became important. Reflection also happened during major life transitions, like losing a job or moving to a new location. The questions that emerge during these times encourage alumni to think about where they are in life and what their goals are. Reflection provides an opportunity to gain perspective and refocus.

Developing a Civic-Minded Identity

The authors hypothesized that the helpfulness of program reflection activities and continuing reflection after graduation would contribute to a civic-minded identity as graduates connect their profession to their public life. As mentioned before, the Civic Identity and Calling component of the CMP scale reflects the sense of satisfaction and alignment that alumni of community engagement experiences sense between their work and values (Hatcher, 2008). It represents the integration of personal and professional commitments and values that result in civic engagement through their profession. Civic Identity and Calling was not related to program configuration, $F(2,174) = 2.22$, $p = .11$, nor was it related to the length of time since graduation from the program, $r(137) = .11$, $p = .20$. Regardless of program or graduation year, the alumni of these programs frequently saw their work as a direct expression of their values—that they were using their experiences, intellect, and passion in service of a better world ($M = 6.02$ out of 7, $SD = 1.30$).

To test the role of the helpfulness of program reflection in supporting Civic Identity and Calling, we used a mediation model approach (Baron & Kenny, 1986). To test the mediation model, we first determined that Helpfulness of Program Reflection was correlated with Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection, $r(170) = .61$, $p < .001$. In a second step, we determined that Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection and Civic Identity and Calling were related, $r(169) = .41$, $p < .001$. Helpfulness of Program Reflection and Civic Identity and Calling were moderately positively correlated, $r(181) = .30$, $p < .001$. To test the mediation effect, we then tested to see if the relationship between Helpfulness of Program Reflection and Civic Identity and Calling was no longer significant, $r(164) = .11$, $p = .176$ when controlling for the shared influence of Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection (see Figure 4). According to the Sobel test, this change is statically significant ($Z = 2.99$, $p = .003$). Thus, Helpfulness of Current Life Reflection mediated the relationship between Helpfulness of Program Reflection and Civic Identity and Calling. Although discovering helpful program reflection activities supported the development of a deep sense of civic identity and calling in one's profession, that relationship was dependent on the continued reflection practices after the program was over. Helpful reflection during the program contributed to the perceived helpfulness of reflective

Figure 4

Current Life Reflection Mediates the Relationship between Program Reflection and Civic Identity and Calling
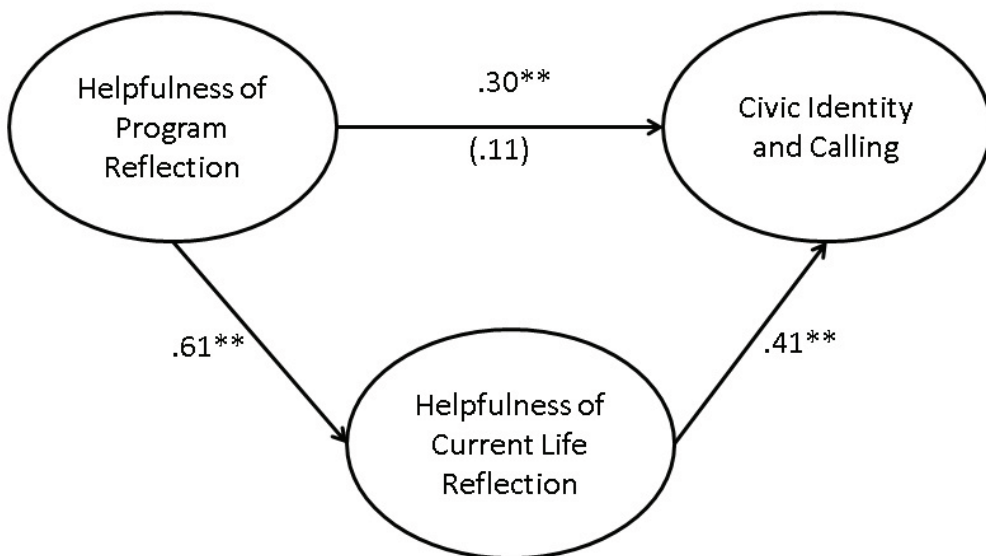
Note: **p < .001; values in parentheses are *ns* (*p* = .176).

practice in one's current life, supporting the continued development of civic identity and calling. In this way, civic identity and calling is supported through current life reflection, which is associated with helpful reflection during the program.

The qualitative data show that reflection is a way that alumni are able to understand and clarify their civic identity and sense of purpose as realized through their professional work. Referencing how integral reflection is in her life, an alumna of the one-year program, a university professor, reflects not only with her partner and colleagues but also through the publications she writes. "Making reflection a regular part of life is important" (Class of 1999). An alumnus of the two-year program explains, "I don't want to find myself 20 years from now just, wow, I just put my head down and started doing stuff without really thinking about it" (Class of 2003). It seems that, with practice, reflection becomes a way of being for these service-learning alumni. Their work choices, conversations, and understandings of the people around them come from being reflective.

The qualitative data also revealed many similar themes of the importance of reflection in current life and how this reflection lets people clarify and explore their civic identities and responsibilities. In the survey, over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that "Others would likely describe [them] as someone who is very passionate about [their] work," an item from the CMP Civic Identity and Calling subscale. This sentiment echoed in the responses of interviewed alumni who described talking with friends and colleagues about the passion they have for their work so much that peers chide them. Their friends may tell them that they are "doing enough" or that they "should slow down" (four-year program alumna, Class of 2000), but the alumni always seek to challenge themselves further. "I never want to be complacent. I always want to be positively changing…but I think that always requires constant reflection" (two-year program alumna, Class of 2002). They want to use their intellect as well as the privilege of their education for doing good in the world.

Another item from the Civic Identity and Calling subscale, "My personal values and beliefs are well integrated and aligned with my work and career," to which more than 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, mirrored the statements of interviewed alumni. Being fully engaged in one's work in order to make it better was an important theme. A 2007 alumna of the one-year program offered:

> I think one of the worst things that I could do would be to like charge into situations and things that like I was this enlightened person who has a master's degree and…knows what's the problem and how to fix it. So I feel like to keep sort of

thinking about myself and my relationship to the work I'm doing is a way of checking that and also just like acknowledging, you know, if I have any biases with people I work with or things like that. And I think that's really important, making sure that I can be the best sort of like advocate and like provider of whatever that I can be.

Another alumna mentioned reflecting with her life partner about the leadership problems or employee conflicts they both witness in their respective lines of work. They end up discussing, as young leaders within their fields, how they might do things differently or what needs to change in order for systems to work more smoothly (two-year program, Class of 2007).

Finally, the item from the CMP Civic Identity and Calling subscale, "I often feel a deep sense of purpose in the work that I do," to which 74% of surveyed alumni either agreed or strongly agreed, was explored in the interviews as alumni used reflection to understand their civic identity by helping them to see the "bigger picture" (one-year program alumnus, Class of 2006). He continued:

> [Reflection] fulfills me and continually sort of challenges me, and makes me revisit and think about where I've been and what I'm doing, and then it also allows me to look into the future and envision future possibilities for myself and where I'd like to be.

Similarly, another alumna expressed a desire to always "feel like the work that I'm doing is working towards a better world" (two-year program, Class of 1999). Reflection reminds people of why they do the work they do and why that work is important.

An alumnus of the two-year program who works as a community organizer mentioned that when he gets caught up in the details, it is really easy to get frustrated "and not feel good enough about the small victories and feel a lot worse about the small or big losses" (Class of 2008). But, when he steps back and is able to put matters in context, to be reminded of "our larger progressive worldview" and how his work serves to build a different future, he shared, "[T]hat's the part that transforms our world. That's the part that leads us towards different relationships with each other."

In contrast, another alumna of the two-year program feels hopeless when she looks at the larger picture because she realizes how many young people our current systems are failing. But, through reflection, she often gets an idea that she can take action on, gains energy, and is able to enact change, which gives her more hope (two-year program, Class of 1999).

Overall, it appears that reflection assists alumni in elucidating and acting in ways consistent with their civic identity. It helps them remain committed to their work, grounds them in their life passions, and

aids them in developing thoughtful practices.

An alumnus of the two-year program was so convinced that reflection was beneficial that he sought to increase his engagement in reflective practice. He felt he should create a more standardized habit of reflection and "reflect for [a certain] amount of time, even if I don't feel like there's something totally important to reflect on at that moment…it might be a good idea, just to make sure that I'm sort of thinking about where I am" (Class of 2003). An alumna of the four-year program discussed engaging in reflection daily with her co-workers in order to better understand the dynamics within their in-patient counseling program. To provide the best possible mental health care, she spends time talking with her colleagues to "connect the essential dots of patient information" (Class of 2006). Thus, rather than trying to work in isolation, she purposefully engages colleagues in reflection to provide quality care. The statements from interviewed alumni support the idea that reflective practice is helpful in current life, producing specific benefits related to their civic and professional identities.

While there were differences in survey respondents' perceptions of the helpfulness of reflective practice in their current lives, interviewed alumni did not echo this finding. Rather, interviewed alumni admitted that their reflective practice was limited or that they do not take as much time as they would like to reflect. In these instances, they pointed to their busy schedules and efforts to balance the responsibilities of raising young children and their careers. For example, an alumna of the four-year program who runs a childcare center remarked that she does not set aside time to reflect. While she thinks about her work and her values, she believes that she does not do it in a purposeful way. She explained, "It's just go, go, go, go, and when there is a chance—like, there are a few women that work with me and I have a chance to kind of chat with them and talk about what's going on, or—but not…as much as I could or should. It just doesn't fit in" (Class of 1999). Another alumnus bemoaned that he does not reflect enough. He "used to keep a daily journal in college" but no longer takes the time to write as much (four-year program, Class of 1997). Similarly, when asked if she takes time to reflect, an alumna of the one-year program guiltily responded, "Honestly? Not really" (Class of 2003).

Although not all alumni have an active reflective practice or find reflection helpful in their current lives, their perception of the benefits of current life reflection were positively related to a sense of Civic Identity and Calling, $r(171) = .41$, $p < .001$. These alumni derive benefits from activities that they may not explicitly define as reflection but that involve critical evaluation about how to engage in their work and with those around them. The alumna of the one-

year program quoted earlier expressed a preference "to be busy and get things done [rather] than to sit and reflect" (Class of 2003). However, she went on to talk about a time that she took "off" after working at a corporate job to figure out where she was in life, "take a deep breath," and determine what she wanted "to go do next." Another alumna of the four-year program said that she did not set particular time aside to reflect but that she "s[a]t back and th[ought] about [her work]" (Class of 2003). While these particular alumni may not engage in what they would consider regular reflective practice, they shared about intermittent moments when their actions show that they critically think about their work in the world.

Additionally, helpfulness of current life reflection was related to Civic Identity and Calling, $r(171) = .39$, $p < .001$. The alumni confirm this connection, as they discussed using their intellect, education, and experience in service of social change. "How can I be more of an agent of change?" asked an alumna of the two-year program (Class of 1999). An alumna of the four-year program suggested, "I think it's really important to figure out what grounds you, and figure out a way to keep coming back to that" (Class of 2004). This is how she integrates her values and civic identity into her work, the essential task of civic-minded professionals.

Alumni of these community engagement programs utilize reflection as an ongoing practice that helps them assess how their way of being in the world aligns with the values they hold for themselves and the world they want to create. Through reflection, they are able to gain an understanding of ways that they can improve their practice and themselves, and find meaning in their work.

Discussion

The results of the current study point to a clear connection between program reflection, reflection in current life, and Civic Identity and Calling years after graduation. Helpfulness of current life reflection mediated the relationship between the helpfulness of program reflection and the identification alumni have with their civic and professional calling. The qualitative results point to an integration of personal and professional values that result in high levels of civic and community engagement many years after graduation from service-learning programs. Reflective practice after graduation was associated with a deep commitment to civic and community action.

Limitations

The results of the current study are limited, however, in that alumni were reporting the helpfulness of program reflection, in some cases, many years after

graduation. The relationship between reflection in the program and reflection in current life may be an artifact of past recollection of reflection activities being influenced by current reflective practices. It also is possible that alumni are not able to reflect on how helpful different types of program reflection activities were so many years after their use. The qualitative results, however, bolster the claim that reflection continues in current life and that alumni of multi-term service-learning programs find such reflection meaningful and helpful. A longitudinal study looking at levels of reflection from the beginning of the program to many years after graduation would provide better support for the apparent connection between reflection in the program and reflection after graduation seen in the current study.

Another possible limitation within the study is that some of the authors of the article were affiliated with the programs under study. While this provides an advantage with regard to understanding the nuances of the programs and yielding high survey response rates, this may impact how the data was interpreted. However, rigorous methods were used during each step of the process to correct for this possibility, including engaging members as part of the research team who were not involved in the programs under study.

Implications for Practice

Reflection is a mainstay in service-learning programs. If reflective practice is to extend to professional practice and life after graduation, reflection during service-learning should include carefully constructed and incremental practice in reflection on professional, personal, and civic dimensions (Battistoni, 2002). The data from this study show that journal writing is not considered to be as helpful a reflective activity by program graduates. Instead, alumni found reflective practices centered in dialogue with others to be the most helpful, both during their service-learning experiences and in their current lives. Students need a variety of structured and unstructured reflection activities (Bringle, & Hatcher, 1999; Eyler, 2002) that incorporate civic and professional identity dimensions (Jones & Abes, 2004). Alumni of these programs experienced multiple modes of reflection during the program that gave them a "toolbox full of different ways to reflect" on their experiences (two-year program alumna, Class of 2008). Alumni from these programs have a broader perspective of what reflection can look like and, therefore, reflect in myriad ways.

Students progressing through service-learning curricula should be challenged to identify not only the immediate impacts of their actions, but the broader implications of the challenges they witness and expe-

rience in community work. If a central aim of having college students engage with the community is about partnering in the creation of a more just society (Mitchell, 2008; Soltan, 2014), reflection needs to include critical thinking about the short- and long-term effects of service. Alumni of these programs demonstrated the importance of reflection for understanding the "bigger picture" in order to sustain commitment. They also described reflection as an important practice for understanding their role and impact. Consumer choices, voting, financial contributions, and civic action all have immediate and future consequences. Encouraging a reflective practice that explores both short- and long-term considerations is important to instilling a civic identity that considers both self and society.

An important component of reflection during service-learning must be the exploration of identity. Researchers have noted the importance of positionality, particularly privilege, to the experience of service-learning (Mitchell, 2008, 2014; Souza, 2007; Tetreault, 2004). Understanding social location in the complexity of difference and inequality is imperative to a critical reflective practice that emphasizes working for change and the improvement of social conditions (Brookfield, 2000). As this research demonstrates, alumni of these community engagement programs reflected on their identities and the ways their identities informed their professional and civic work. This self-awareness shapes how the alumni choose to act in the world—civically and professionally. The ability to situate one's social identities within the broader landscape of inequality can provide a space for individual agency as opposed to being mired in the complexities of injustice (Yep, 2011). Learning to recognize and be critical of structural inequality was encouraged through reflective practice in the programs studied, and also serves as a lens in the alumni's current reflective practices.

Students should be encouraged to connect their experiences to deeper perspectives on their future work as well as their professional identity and calling (Colby & Sullivan, 2009; Hatcher, 2008). If students develop these skills while in college, they may apply those skills to their professional practice and connect their professional calling to their civic identity. Sustained, deep reflective practice brings about transformations in habits of mind that produce long-term impact (Mezirow, 2000).

Reflection in community engagement experiences should be designed and practiced with intention and purpose to access the transformative potential of service-learning. Stewart (2011) emphasizes mindful reflection focused on understanding experiences and exploring "thoughts, feelings, or sensations as they consciously arise" (p. 43). Alumni of the three com-

munity engagement programs embraced mindful reflection to engage with the complexity of their identity, work, calling, and life. A conscious and persistent practice of reflection supported the alumni in finding satisfaction and alignment with their work and values.

Conclusion

Critical reflection is central to service-learning educators' claims about learning. This study affirms the importance of reflective practice in college-level community engagement programs by connecting reflective practice in college to the helpfulness and benefits of reflection in the current lives of service-learning alumni. Moreover, this study strongly suggests that multi-term, community engagement programs—especially ones that create cohorts of students, faculty, and community partners working and learning together, where critical reflection is continuous and occurs in a variety of ways—can support students in developing a culture of reflective practice that persists. Alumni continue to value reflection and recognize the benefits resulting from reflective practice. Its significance in their lives and its centrality to the way they think about their work and their civic identities are clear.

The results from this study also signal the need for more extensive research on the long-term impact of service-learning reflection activities on the reflective practice of college graduates. For example, while this research reveals perceptions of helpfulness and benefit, we do not know the frequency with which alumni reflect. Additionally, research that utilizes a pre-test about the benefits and helpfulness of reflection before students engage in service-learning programs, in addition to responses after graduation, might further illuminate the connections this study reveals. There are many more findings to analyze and release from this data set, for this is a rich area for further research and comparisons between and among the graduates of different service-learning and community engagement programs.

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