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Piloting of a service-learning pedagogical model: Students' perceptions of the gender-based violence service-learning module at a school of nursing in the Western Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

Research indicates that most higher education institutions in South Africa fail to establish a standard practice for service-learning (SL) in the formalised systems of their respective academic programmes. An intervention study was undertaken to develop a service-learning implementation framework for the school of nursing, using the multi-phased design and development model of Rothman and Thomas. This article focuses on reporting the findings related to student perceptions of the gender-based violence service-learning module during the piloting phase. This was a quantitative, exploratory, descriptive study which used a structured questionnaire for data collection. Participants were 162 final-year nursing students enrolled in 2012. The students indicated the mutual benefits of community work in terms of the learning they had experienced, the service the community had received, as well as the transformation that had assisted them to translate theory into practice. Also, the students indicated that service-learning as a teaching methodology was demanding in terms of time, cost, and effort, and generally found it quite challenging to engage with the module content because the blogging and structured reflection were cited as new teaching strategies. Service-learning modules should bear a higher credit rating to compensate for demands of the service-learning pedagogy in terms of time and finances. Students should also be introduced to community partners and their expectations before the commencement of the project.

Keywords: Undergraduate nursing programme, gender-based violence, intervention research, service-learning pedagogy.

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Introduction

South African academics perceived service-learning (SL) – a form of community engagement (CE) – as a policy imperative because it was directly linked to the transformation agenda of South Africa, which included the higher education sector. Consequently, policy requirements that were considered to be essential for institutionalising SL in academic programmes were published within 5-7 years (Bender *et al.*, 2006) in South Africa, as opposed to the three decades it

had taken the USA (Stanton & Erasmus, 2013). Since difficulty existed about the understanding and definition of SL in the literature; the primary challenge that arose was to properly implement SL in academic programmes. Research indicates that most higher education institutions in South Africa fail to establish a standard practice for SL in the formalised systems of their respective academic programmes (Bender, 2009; Erasmus, 2009; Hall, 2010; Julie & Adejumo, 2014).

An intervention study was undertaken to develop an SL implementation framework for a school of nursing by using the design and development model of Rothman and Thomas (1994) cited in Julie (2014a). This article focuses on reporting the findings related to student perception of the gender-based violence (GBV) service-learning module during the piloting phase. The intervention (piloting the SL pedagogical model) was positioned in the emergent approach to organisational change because it accentuated institutional collaboration, such as (e-technology), teamwork (team teaching), shared responsibility (partnerships), and SL capacity building (Boltman-Binkowski & Julie, 2014).

The development of a gender-based violence service-learning (GBV SL) module guide as an SL pedagogical model for the undergraduate nursing programme was assessed against the five design criteria stipulated for SL modules by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (2006). Hence, the design of the GBV SL module embedded the SL projects in the GBV module outcomes, the teaching strategies were clearly explained, the SL project activities were connected to the module content during lectures, a detailed description of the SL requirements was integrated in the classroom-based activities, and the assessment of the SL component was clarified (Julie, 2014b; Julie & Boltman, 2012).

The implementation of the GBV module aimed at initiating a new organisational practice that embedded SL pedagogy in undergraduate modules. The organisational learning (SL workshops) was used as a management strategy to bring about closer alignment between the particular institutional vision and mission in relation to SL and the SL practice at the school of nursing (UWC, 2009).

The participating university advocates SL as a teaching methodology that embraces the “transformational potential of knowledge that emerges from this engagement” (UWC 2009). This framing resonates with the tenets of the emergent approach to organisational change, namely “change readiness and facilitating change” (Todnem By, 2005). Organisational change is considered to be the process of implementing SL pedagogy in the undergraduate nursing programme (Julie & Adejumo, 2014; UWC, 2009). The emergent approach also proposes that the change process should be driven from the bottom up instead of from the top down (Todnem By, 2005).

Methodology

The school of nursing offers both under- and post-graduate programmes approved by the nursing regulating body, the South African Nursing Council (Jeggels, Traut & Africa, 2013) and registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). This is the largest residential nursing school in South Africa and offers the Bachelor of Nursing (B Nursing) degree, a four-year undergraduate nursing programme (Jeggels, Traut & Africa, 2013).

The study population comprised 162 undergraduate nursing students who were registered during 2012 for the Gender-Based Violence module as a public health issue (inclusion criteria). The required sample size was 124 as calculated by the statistician using the Cochran formula (Cochran 1977):

$$n = \frac{N \times Z^2 \times p \times q}{(N - 1) \times d^2 + Z^2 \times p \times q}$$

where N = total number of students, n = sample size, $Z^2=1.96$ with $\alpha = 0.05$, d = margin of error (5%), p = probability of getting the correct response, and q = probability of obtaining an incorrect response. This formula was based on the following suppositions: The distribution of students was normal and the confidence interval was 95%, p = q= 50% and d = 5%.

With the assistance of a statistician, a structured questionnaire was developed in English. Section 1 consisted of five questions to determine the demographic profile of the respondents. Section 2 of the questionnaire contained both Likert-scale and open-ended questions. Question 6 requested students to identify the community partner they worked with. Questions 7 to 11 consisted of multiple statements and students had to indicate their level of agreement by using a Likert scale (Strongly agree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Disagree). Questions 11 to 14 were open-ended questions that explored how SL differed from other modules and suggestions for improvements.

The results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was in the range of acceptable values for questions 7 to 10 (.632, .856, .866, and .815 respectively). Descriptive data analysis was conducted with the assistance of the SPSS version 20 software and the findings were triangulated with a grievance letter received from a group of students.

A quantitative survey was conducted after informed consent had been obtained from respondents to use the module evaluation survey for research purposes. The data was collected by two academics during two rounds on 31 October and 15 November 2012 respectively, in order to reach the calculated target sample. Before the data collection process, ethical clearance to conduct the study had been obtained from the participating university.

Results

The findings are presented in the following sequence: the socio-demographic profile, students’ SL module experiences, the SL module design, difference between SL activities and other community experiences, resources, and strategies that facilitate the deep learning process and the assessment strategy of the SL module. Other results focus on reporting the significant responses to the open-ended questions.

Socio-demographic information

The demographic profile included gender, race, age group, year of study, and first language. The respondents also had to identify the community partner their SL project was linked to.

Table 1: Overview of the demographic profile of the sample

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender (n = 123):		
Male	20	16.1
Female	103	83.7
Age group (years) (n = 123):		
20–30	88	71.5
31–40	33	26.8
41–50	2	1.6
Race (n = 123):		
Asian	3	2.4
Black	53	43.1
Coloured	50	40.7
White	8	6.5
Foreign national	9	7.3
Community partner (n = 122):		
Belhar Lighthouse	68	55.7
RAEL	53	43.4

SL module experiences

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with statements related to their SL experiences. Table 2 summarises the general findings of the students’ SL module experiences. The interpretations that were formulated for particular items of the questions disregarded the responses in the neutral column because those responses were taken into account in the formulation of the concluding statement based on the interpretation of the mean and SD of each question.

Item 1 explored whether students learned from the community where they had worked. The findings in Table 2 indicate that the majority of the students n = 83 (67.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their learning was improved as a result of working in the communities. A similar trend was reported for Item 2, which stated that the communities were the primary beneficiaries of the SL project as indicated by an outright majority n = 105 (86.8%) who assented to the statement. Respondents regarded the SL project as mutually beneficial for

addressing a student's learning outcomes and the community needs. Hence, this SL module was successful in establishing equilibrium among the primary beneficiaries of the SL partnership.

Item 4 sought to establish whether the service-learning module took more of the respondents' time than other modules. A total of 67 (55%) respondents indicated that the SL was more time-consuming. Respondents indicated that they had to work harder, as well as spend more time on the SL module in relation to other modules.

Table 2: Student experiences of SL module

Items & n	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	\bar{x} = Mean	SD
Item_1 = 123	3.3 (4)	3.3 (4)	26 (32)	50.4 (62)	17.1 (21)	3.75	0.89
Item_2 = 121	1.7 (2)	0.8 (1)	10.7 (13)	41.3 (50)	45.5 (55)	4.28	0.82
Item_3 = 123	4.1 (5)	8.1 (10)	31.7 (39)	30.9 (38)	25.2 (31)	3.65	1.07
Item_4 = 122	4.1 (5)	14.8 (18)	26.2 (32)	18.9 (23)	36.1 (44)	3.68	1.22
Item_5 = 123	9.8 (12)	24.4 (30)	25.2 (31)	17.1 (21)	23.6 (29)	3.20	1.31
Item_6 = 121	2.5 (3)	13.2 (16)	28.1 (34)	25.6 (31)	30.6 (37)	3.69	1.12
Item_7 = 123	6.5 (8)	10.6 (13)	26 (32)	32.5 (40)	24.4 (30)	3.58	1.56
Item_8 = 123	17.9 (22)	12.2 (15)	30.1 (37)	26 (32)	13.8(17)	3.06	1.29
Total = 118						3.62	0.57

The findings indicated that more than half (n = 68; 56.2%) of the respondents agreed with the statement in Item 6 that the service-learning module required much more work than other modules.

Item 5 explored whether the service-learning module cost more money than other modules. Although many respondents (n = 50; 40.7%) concurred that the SL module was financially more costly than other modules, n = 42 (34.2%) thought otherwise.

More than half of the respondents (n = 70; 56.9%) felt that the service-learning module helped them to gain a deeper understanding of GBV, while less than half of respondents (n = 49; 39.8%) indicated that service-learning should be implemented across all year of study levels. It was not clear whether the cost and time implications for the respondents had an effect on this statement, but it was re-assuring that the respondents felt that this SL module assisted them with a better understanding of GBV.

The items with the highest and lowest mean and standard deviation were Item 2 (\bar{x} = 4.28; SD = 0.82) and Item 8 with (\bar{x} = 3.06; SD = 1.29) respectively. The mean indicated the students' agreement that the community benefited from the work they did. However, since the respondents rated Item 8 as neutral, they did not have a strong opinion about the recommendation that SL should be implemented across all year of study levels of the undergraduate programme.

The general rating of the mean and standard deviation ($\bar{x} = 3.62$; $SD = 0.57$) indicated that respondents agreed in principle that their community work was mutually beneficial in terms of the learning the students experienced and the service the community received. However, this finding should be interpreted in the light of the earlier findings when respondents indicated that SL was more demanding in terms of time, cost, and effort.

Design of the SL module

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with statements related to the module design that clearly linked the module outcomes to the service activities. The purpose of this question was to determine which sections of the SL module guide needed further development. Table 3 summarises the general findings of the students’ responses about their level of agreement with statements that the SL module design clearly linked the module outcomes to the service activities.

Table 3: Design of module – clarity and helpfulness of information in module guide

Items & n	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD
Item_1 = 120	16.7 (20)	13.3 (16)	38.3 (46)	29.2 (35)	2.5 (3)	2.88	-.42
Item_2 = 122	11.5 (14)	7.4 (9)	24.6 (30)	43.4 (53)	13.1 (16)	3.39	-.75
Item_3 = 121	13.2 (16)	15.7 (19)	35.5 (43)	24.8 (30)	10.7 (13)	3.04	-.18
Item_4 = 120	15 (18)	20.8 (25)	25 (30)	30 (36)	9.2 (11)	2.98	-.26
Item_5 = 120	15.8 (19)	18.3 (22)	27.5 (33)	32.5 (39)	5.8 (7)	2.94	.55
Item_6 = 123	32.5 (40)	25.2 (31)	23.6 (29)	12.2 (15)	6.5 (8)	2.35	-.35
Item_7 = 120	16.7 (20)	12.5 (15)	33.3 (40)	30.8 (37)	6.7 (8)	2.98	-.34
Item_8 = 121	13.2 (16)	14 (17)	32.2 (39)	31.4 (38)	9.1 (11)	3.09	-.64
Item_9 = 122	9 (11)	9.8 (12)	32 (39)	40.2 (49)	9.1 (11)	3.30	.22
Total = 81						2.87	.81

The items referred to in Table 3 focused on: Item 1 – the background of the SL module, Item 2 – contact details of the facilitation team, Item 3 – communication channels, Item 4 – general module rules and expectations, Item 5 – expectations

in respect of group work, Item 6 – expectations about blog posts, Item 7 – expectations of project presentations, Item 8 – weekly learning activities, and Item 9 – assessment tools.

The respondents rated the following three items as most useful to link to the module outcomes with the service activity: Item 2 – the contact details of the facilitation team (n = 69; 56.5%), Item 9 – assessment tools (n = 60; 49.2%), and Item 8 – weekly learning activities (n = 49; 40.5%). The respondents did not find blogging (Item 6) useful for this purpose. These findings indicated a preference for face-to-face contact. Having access to the contact details of the facilitation team enabled respondents to contact the team telephonically to clarify issues. The assessment tool and weekly learning activities involved input and feedback from the teaching team, either individually or in small groups. Blogging might have been rated as the least useful, since there was no face-to-face contact with the teaching team and it involved the most independent study and critical thinking; this confirmed the preference of the respondents for personal, directed contact in their learning.

The items with the highest and lowest mean and standard deviation were Item 2 ($\bar{x} = 3.39$; SD = 0.75) and Item 6 ($\bar{x} = 2.35$; SD = 0.35), respectively. With regard to the rating of Item 2 as reflected by the mean, the respondents agreed that the contact details of the facilitation team were helpful. However, the respondents disagreed about the helpfulness of the blog posts for clearly linking the module outcomes with the service activities, as indicated by a mean of 2.35 for Item 6. On the other hand, the general rating of the mean and standard deviation ($\bar{x} = 2.87$; SD = 0.81) indicated that respondents were mainly neutral to all these statements. Respondents did not clearly indicate which sections of the module design were most helpful for linking module outcomes with service activities.

Difference between SL and other module-related community activities

This question had to ascertain whether respondents regarded these SL community activities as different from other module-related community activities. Table 4 summarises the general findings of the students' responses about their level of agreement with these statements.

A slight majority of the respondents (n = 68; 54.8%) felt that their service-learning project focused on relevant and meaningful service to the community. A fairly equal number of respondents agreed (n = 45; 36.3%) and disagreed (n = 47; 37.9%) on whether the service-learning module guide clearly connected the module outcomes with the service activities.

The majority of respondents (n = 84; 68.3%), however, agreed that the service-learning module provided structured opportunities for reflection to transform, clarify, reinforce, and expand concrete experiences into knowledge. Less than half of the respondents (n = 52; 41%) felt that the service-learning module purposefully connected their learning experiences to civic and social responsibility.

Table 4: Difference between SL and other module-related community activities

Items & N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Item_1 = 124	4.8(6)	14.5(18)	25.8(32)	37.9(47)	16.9(21)	3.48	1.08
Item_2 = 124	11.3(14)	26.6(33)	25.8(32)	26.6(33)	9.7(12)	2.97	1.17
Item_3 = 123	8.9(11)	13.8(17)	33.3(41)	35(43)	8.9(11)	3.21	1.08
Item_4 = 124	8.9(11)	9.7(12)	39.5(49)	31.5(39)	10.5(13)	3.25	1.06
Item_5 = 123	13.8(17)	22(27)	29.3(36)	26.8(33)	8.1(10)	2.93	1.17
Item_6 = 123	22(27)	27.6(34)	26.8(33)	20.3(25)	3.3(4)	2.55	1.14
Total = 87						2.87	.86

Although the benefits of SL were evident, respondents displayed flexibility in engaging with SL, even though they were adequately prepared and guided by the community. Almost half (n = 61; 49.6%) of the respondents indicated that they were not adequately prepared for working with the community on this service-learning project, although they agreed (n = 43; 34.9%) and disagreed (n = 44; 35.8%) fairly equally about whether they were given clear rules and guidelines by the different service-learning partners for working in the community.

The findings indicated that the design of the community activities in the SL module was different from other community service modules in terms of fostering civic-minded students, and being an engine for knowledge translation. However, although respondents were generally appreciative of the uniqueness of the module design, they indicated a concern that the respondent preparation and orientation aspects of the SL module were inadequate. That was confirmed by the mean and standard deviation. The items with the highest and lowest mean and standard deviation were Item 1 ($\bar{x} = 3.48$; $SD = 1.08$) and Item 6 ($\bar{x} = 2.55$; $SD = 1.14$) respectively.

However, the general rating of the mean and standard deviation ($\bar{x} = 2.87$; $SD = 0.86$) indicated that respondents were fairly neutral to all the statements in this section, hence no conclusion could be made in terms of the differences.

Resources or strategies most helpful for facilitating deep learning

Table 5 provides a summary of the general responses of the students in relation to the resources or strategies they regarded as most helpful for facilitating deep learning.

Table 5: Sources and strategies facilitating deep learning

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Item_1 = 119	15.1(18)	16(19)	24.4(29)	31.9(38)	12.6(15)	3.11	1.26
Item_2 = 120	20(24)	18.3(22)	25.8(31)	30(36)	5.8(7)	2.83	1.22
Item_3 = 118	16.1(19)	21.2(25)	28(33)	24.6(29)	10.2(12)	2.92	1.23
Item_4 = 119	16.8(20)	12.6(15)	17.6(21)	32.8(39)	20.2(24)	3.27	1.37
Item_5 = 120	17.5(21)	9.2(11)	20(24)	25.8(31)	27.5(33)	3.37	1.43
Item_6 = 119	10.9(13)	12.6(15)	29.4(35)	34.5(41)	12.6(15)	3.25	1.17
Item_7 = 117	7.7(9)	8.5(10)	20.5(24)	35(41)	28.2(33)	3.68	1.19
Item_8 = 120	5.8(7)	6.7(8)	32.5(39)	36.7(44)	18.3(22)	3.55	1.05
Item_9 = 121	26.4(32)	26.4(32)	24.8(30)	18.2(22)	4.1(5)	2.47	1.18
Item_10 = 120	20(24)	19.2(23)	30.8(37)	22.5(27)	7.5(9)	2.78	1.22
Total = 87						2.98	.82

The majority of respondents ($n = 74$; 63.2%) agreed that previous exposure to community work (Item 7) was most helpful in facilitating deep learning. A slight majority ($n = 64$; 53.3%) agreed that Item 5, the clinical supervisor, and ($n = 63$; 53%) Item 4, the lecturer, were the most helpful sources to facilitate deep learning. Less than half of the respondents ($n = 55$; 47.1%) and ($n = 53$; 44.5%) regarded the SL partners (Item 6) and the module guide (Item 1) as most helpful. In other words, they valued those strategies.

However, the agreement-disagreement gap was very close for Item 2 – e-teaching postings, and Item 3 – the community entry seminar. In terms of the e-teaching postings, some respondents appreciated the contribution of e-teaching towards their learning whilst another group had no such appreciation. The same held true for the community entry seminar.

It was unexpected that respondents rated a student's independent activities as the least helpful for facilitating deep learning. They indicated that small group activities ($n = 66$; 55%) (Item 8), blogging ($n = 64$; 52.8%) (Item 9), and journal articles ($n = 47$; 39.2%) (Item 10) were the least helpful. These findings indicated that the respondents preferred face-to-face interactions and were dependent on the teachers rather than their peers to facilitate engagement of higher-order skills.

The general rating of the mean and standard deviation ($\bar{x} = 2.98$; $SD = 0.82$) of resources or strategies that respondents regarded as most helpful for facilitating deep learning indicated that respondents were mainly neutral to those statements. Respondents did not indicate clearly which resources or strategies in the SL module guide they found most helpful for facilitating deep learning.

Difference in the assessment of the SL module

This question determined whether respondents had experienced the assessment of the SL module to be different from the other modules of the programme. A total of 124 respondents responded to this question. The majority ($n = 80$; 64.5%) of respondents agreed that the assessment of the SL module was different. However, $n = 38$ (30.6%) of the respondents regarded the assessment of the SL module as similar to the other assessments in the undergraduate programme.

Difference in assessment

Respondents were asked whether and how the assessment of this service-learning module was different to the assessment of other modules. The themes captured in Table 6 were derived from the students' responses.

The themes reflected divergent views that could be linked to the respondents' learning styles as reflected under the themes *lack of clarity* and *confusing*. The remarks of the respondents indicated that they had not yet progressed to the level of being independent learners.

Comments like "more input from lecturer", "new terms not explained", "assessment tools wasn't made clear", etc. suggested that these respondents' insights were teacher-dependent, which refuted the goal of SL to develop reflective practitioners. The comments under the "negative framing" theme indicated that the respondents never became involved, which could be linked to the personal qualities needed for SL practitioners.

Table 6: Differences between SL and other modules

Themes	Codes
Innovative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Something [SL] that was never done. -We haven't communicated via blogging with lecturers and students. -Blogging and posting were newly introduced to me. -Evaluating a lot of aspects because it asks all the things on GBV and how they can improve.
Authentic learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Yes, SL helps you to communicate easily with other students from your group. -It focuses on the core of the matter and is honest. -Had to review every week and built up where and how we worked with vulnerable people. -New experience – enjoyed the community interaction. -We were doing actual community work. -Very detailed.
Learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Used different strategies to facilitate. -Does not focus on groups [but] the individual assessment of students on the group work through blogging. -Blogging was implemented as a new learning experience. -More in-depth. -Blogging and continuous work with community.
Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It was challenging. -Asks too much. -More was required from us.
Lack of clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There weren't clear guidelines on what to be assessed on. -Assessment tools wasn't made clear. -Outcomes were not clearly stated.
Confusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Was a bit confusing, new terms not explained what is meant by it. -This module was very confusing for the first couple of weeks. -Module and expectations were not thoroughly explained and most of the time was confused and did not know what was expected. -Blogging session was confusing and new to us especially individual blogging.
Negative framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wasting my time, I didn't know what it is all about, was confusing me. -It had contributed minimally to my education. -It took most of my time, not even understanding what I was doing. - Very unorganised compared to other modules.
Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Each group should be assessed individually, not as a class. -There is a lot more space for people not to participate.
Time-consuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should not be different but it must not involve the project as it is time-consuming and need a lot of attention. -Did not have enough time to work with community.
Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Appropriate and adequate introduction to the module and clear understanding of facilitators should be ensured in order to guide students. - Stop blogging, there should be more tests. -More communication can be done between the partners and the university. -I would rather we do presentations on the work for each week, let groups present. -More input from lecturer.

However, attention should be paid to their listed suggestions; especially those that were related to orientation and the training of facilitators when refining the SL module.

Suggestions to improve the SL module

Table 7 provides a summary of the themes that emerged from the open-ended question: What could be improved in SL and how?

Table 7: Suggestions to improve the SL module

Themes	Codes
Reflective space	-Don't think there's something to improve as it makes us realise our weakness and strengths. -Good, because it makes one think and be acquainted to real situations.
Timing of module	-Module to be presented in first year of study. -There wasn't enough time to carry out SL. -If this module can be in the first term so that students can have enough time for it and lecturers must be well organised and prepare on time.
Student preparation	-The proper training or preparation of students for blogging we did not have any form of introduction to this programme. -Student must be given clear instruction and be taught what to do expect and objectives before they go to SL so that they can be prepared and effective. -Blogging and posting, students should be taught how to blog and not having just one session. -Community entry seminar to be given in time.
Communication challenges	-Better communication between facilitators, lecturers, supervisors, and students. -More clear guidelines could be given about what is expected for students to accomplish.
Learning strategies	-We couldn't go to RAEL every week . . . change the SL community. -Only have group assessment on blog because we do it as a group. -Stop blogging because it's a waste of a lot of time. -Improve e-teaching technicalities. -Wish I could form a structure and programmes for youth and children. -Lectures every week. -Have presentations in class, not just blogging, so that we can understand if we on the right track or not.
Maintain status quo	-In my humble opinion the module guide should be re-constructed [to provide] lecture notes, prescribed textbook. -Wished University X presented GBV. -Presentation of project should be counted for this module and stop blogging. -Not to rely only on articles. -Go to community, request their problems and bring their feedback to school. -Firstly having better venues, letting community know that . . . students will be working in a specific area and when maybe have better client attendance.

The recommendations reflecting the respondents' learning preferences ranged from "nothing" to a suggestion that "the module guide should be re-constructed [to provide] lecture notes [and] prescribed textbook". Those statements reflected

the typical range of responses to an innovation, namely that the few early adopters would appreciate the innovativeness while the majority would resist the innovation during the initial phases.

The SL module successfully instilled ‘civic-mindedness’ in some respondents as reflected by this anecdote: “Wish I could form a structure and programmes for youth and children.” The concerns about timing and communication should be further explored.

Characteristics of the SL module

The findings in Table 8 provide a summary of the responses to the question: What makes SL different from other modules?

Table 8: Characteristics of the SL module

Themes	Codes
No difference	-It’s not different.
Interactive	-More interactive; encourages participation within class. -Get a chance to meet people in communities but they don’t always give you the expected results, some refuse to participate. -You get to interact with others and get to know what they experiencing and you can reach out. -Working with vulnerable groups made a difference. -More interactive, yet with lack of support it’s also way more frustrating. -SL concentrates more on group work then individual work.
Time-consuming	-Time-consuming but interesting because it combines two different things GBV and project.
Hands-on approach	-Is a hands-on approach compared to only focusing on theory? -Main body of the module is practical. -GBV is more practical; students need to have background knowledge of GBV perpetrated in community where he/she comes from. -Makes learning outside university possible by using skills to help community and community members. -Gives students an opportunity to enter community and practice theory in community.
Expensive	-More expensive in terms of money for projects because all finances come out of our own pockets. -Very expensive to students.
Non-complicated module	-It is a non-complicated module and interesting at the same time but blogging makes it complicated since some students are not willing to work in groups. -Straightforward and explanatory because it states it all.
Self-directed learning	-Needs more of our individual attention and also broadens our levels of understanding. -Minimal interaction from lecturers, clinical supervisors. -No proper notes. -Other modules provide more explanations and clear guidelines. -Confusing; I don’t even know what it means. -Blogging makes it difficult; wasting our time and we can’t focus on module.

The respondents identified most of the properties of an SL module; namely, it makes learning outside university possible by using skills to help community and community members, needs more of our individual attention, broadens our levels of understanding, gives respondents an opportunity to enter community and practise theory in community, combines two time-consuming but interesting things (GBV and project), provides an opportunity to meet people in communities although they do not always give one the expected results (some refuse to participate), is more expensive in terms of money for projects, and is more interactive. However, with a lack of support, it is much more frustrating.

General appreciation of the SL module

The students’ responses to the open-ended question about their general appreciation of the SL module are reflected in the major themes in Table 9. The respondents indicated that the community interaction projects had broadened their subject knowledge. The teaching strategies had culminated in transformational learning for them and had shaped them to become reflective practitioners who could make a difference.

Table 9: General appreciation of the SL module

Themes	Codes
Broadened knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Liked the way it broadened my knowledge re: domestic violence. -Insightful; learned a great deal about the community. -A broader understanding of our communities and the integration of theory with daily living. -Appreciate it a lot because I have learned a lot that I did not know. -It improved our knowledge and gave me more insight and to have interview and communication skills.
Making a difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To make a difference in the community. -Learned how to work well with community project and how to start a community project. -Appreciate the fact that we do get a chance to go and make a difference in people’s lives.
Community interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Community project was a great part of the module and interaction with community was highly appreciated. -It showed me the importance of being involved in project because as someone who can make a difference in people’s hearts by giving hope. -Practical experience on community project and engaging with clients. -Getting to work and knowing community and their leaders.
Transformational learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Group discussions helped me understand how others see GBV. -Provide me with better understanding and approach to GBV. -Appreciate having had a chance to be indoctrinated, given others perception and what gender is and violence prone to prosper because of it. -Enjoyed it very much, learnt a lot. The knowledge they experienced and shared with us in community helped me grow and appreciate that it made us to touch lives.
Reflective practice Teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This helped me to deal with my own work and feelings. -Posting and blogging interested me. -The fact that we had to link GBV with other modules was excellent. -Service learning was very helpful for this module and it helped. -Gives chance to students to use info. -Good source of information. -Should continue, it is good teaching experience.
Not appreciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There is nothing to appreciate, causes so much stress and confusion. -Was really pathetic; didn’t enjoy classes. -Negative due to lack of support, guidance and expectations leading to students.
Unsure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not really sure. -Not highly appreciated, expected more. -Don’t see significance of it.

Discussion

The contextual factors that might have had an influence on the outcome of the intervention (Melnik & Fineout-Overholt, 2011) were taken into account. Therefore, the findings of the student survey were interpreted against the backdrop of the dominant customs and values of the undergraduate nursing curriculum at the time of the study (Julie & Adejumo, 2014). The findings of Petersen (2011) about “meaning-making” of students’ SL experiences indicate that students adopt a technician approach to service delivery, are inclined to pathologise the community as the ‘other’, and personal and professional development is only transitory. Some of the resistance experienced during this study could also be attributed to the refusal to change the dominant customs and values of the fourth-year curriculum in particular.

One of the quality criteria for SL modules specifies that students should be adequately prepared prior to and during the SL curricular activities. Regardless of the steps that had been taken to facilitate the SL process in the module design and the weekly feedback sessions by the teaching team, some respondents were still grappling with making the transition. Excerpts from a grievance letter from a specific respondent group with 36 signatures illustrated the challenges that some respondents were experiencing during the initial three weeks of the SL module.

The grievance letter summarised the module outcomes, blogging, and the outreach project as major concerns. The letter requested the module designer to “clearly define outcomes related to each topic within the theoretical and practical (outreach project) component to enable academic excellence” (Julie, 2014b). The request to provide structure and continuity in the form of “lecture notes”, as well as a suitably “prescribed text book” (Julie, 2014b) was indicative of the difficulty that respondents were experiencing to distance themselves from their understanding of learning and their experience of teaching at that time. This request also reflected the difficulties respondents had in making the transition to becoming independent, critical thinkers during the final year of the programme, despite statements in the module guide about the transition to becoming independent.

The findings in Tables 5 and 7 confirm students’ dependency on guidance from nursing educators. The respondents identified the contact details of the facilitation team, assessment tools, and weekly learning activities as the most useful in terms of linking the SL module outcomes to the service activity. Respondents also rated the following resources or strategies most helpful for facilitating deep learning: the module guide, lecturer, clinical supervisor, SL partners, and previous exposure to community work (Table 5). Blogging, however, was not listed. The academics’ response to the grievance letter clarified the rationale as:

“In terms of advancements in teaching and learning and fostering professional growth and development, it is preferable that there is no prescribed textbook; rather, the latest literature becomes the reading material for the module. As the module guide consistently states (pages 7 to 9), learners are expected to be self-directed [sic], and part of this is accessing your own information. Even then just to further accommodate you, web links and articles, as well as lectures, were provided on the e-teaching website.”(Julie, 2014).

Respondents perceived blogging as having the least effect on deeper learning. Blogging has the potential to be a transformational tool for both educator and learner. However, pedagogically successful and valuable blogs involve careful planning and consideration, including making blogging mandatory and cultivating educationally sound perceptions of blogs among students (Boltman-Binkowski & Julie, 2014). Further support for using interactive group reflection involves the development of skills that are needed for discourse which characterises an educated person (Waghid, 2009).

The academics’ response to the grievance letter (2012) about respondents’ request to discard the use of blogging in the SL module also alluded to the issues mentioned earlier (Julie, 2014b):

With regards [sic] to individual blogging: Due to previous experience with group work, we have discovered that individual members may or may not contribute to the group. Individual blogging was then decided on as the tool to trace each member’s contribution in a transparent manner, every week. The content of the individual post should be the individual group members’ contribution to the overall [sic] group postings for the week. This is so that, once all the individual members [sic] contributions (in the form of individual posts) are put together, then groups postings for the weeks can be done from there (Julie, 2014b).

The above approach reflects the practical inquiry model of knowledge construction which postulates that “higher-order critical thinking outcomes are [sic] best embedded in a community of inquiry” (Mthembu & Mtshali, 2013). The academics also emphasised the link to the critical thinking outcomes to the respondents by stating that the “reason behind the specific word limits for the group posting was to make you analyse and synthesise information into an academic format [because] it requires a high level of intellectual capacity to summarise critical information” (Julie, 2014: 200). The phrase “put together” in the previous quotation implies that respondents would only have been able to formulate a group posting after they had gone through a negotiation process that culminated in the synthesis of the data received from the other group members.

In other words, blogging provides an opportunity in cyber space for collaborative learning that would potentially lead students to deeper learning. The premise was that respondents would be willing to engage in the process of knowledge construction implicit to the group posting, i.e. to “exchange their personal views, engage in dialogue and test their knowledge against the ideas of others, create and co-create knowledge based on empirical evidence shared in the group process” (Mthembu & Mtshali, 2013).

The following response by the academics indicated that transitional challenges experienced covertly by students could be anticipated and were often covertly expressed as complaints. “We would like to re-assure you that it is natural when confronted with deeper learning, to encounter feelings of uneasiness and inadequacy. However, now [sic] in order to truly develop, you need to utilise those feelings to motivate you to move to the next phase of learning” (Julie, 2014b). These transitional challenges were also captured in some of the responses to the open-ended question in the questionnaire in relation to the design of the SL module (Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9). In this context, it was important to acknowledge the feelings respondents were expressing; yet, they needed coaching in order to move them beyond the emotional impasse. The academics mirrored the respondents’ feelings and said that the “anxiety of the final year may lead [students] to project trauma on events”. Even though that insight was provided to put the respondents’ emotional responses into perspective, they were advised “that if [they were] experiencing undue trauma [due to the SL project] it may be helpful to make use of the free counselling services available on campus” (Julie, 2014b).

Recommendations

Time should be spent on orientating students to what they may expect, since the approach is noticeably different to what they have experienced before. Large groups of students may require a financial disbursement in terms of clinical supervision, since additional small group work and reflection are essential to the outcomes of SL. By giving SL modules a higher educational credit rating, students may be reassured and motivated in terms of the time and effort required. The academic weighting of these modules may also allow room in budgets for financial contributions to SL projects. Students should be introduced to community partners and their expectations before the initiation of the project. The school should, therefore, consider allocating a higher weighting for SL-related clinical programme requirements in terms of its contribution to the programme’s clinical requirements.

Conclusion

The respondents' experiences in this study were classic examples of SL challenging the "dominant hegemonic practices of their disciplinary field" (Osman & Peterson, 2013). The developers of the SL GBV module succinctly summarise that health professional education has been traditionally rooted in the technical-rational approach, which presents a model to students of solving well-defined problems with procedures (Boltman-Binkowski & Julie, 2014). These authors also indicate that reflection has been presented as the solution to this educational issue and, therefore, reflective curricula, e-teaching technologies, and other solutions have evolved to supplement this technical-rational approach in nursing. However, there is still a dearth of literature that assesses whether students actually do engage in reflection, and if so, how deeply. Therefore, in the design of the SL module, reflection was evaluated by using the constructs of habitual action, understanding, and critical reflection, as developed by Boltman-Binkowski and Julie (2014).

Although respondents experienced SL as being quite challenging – especially to remove them from their dependence on face-to-face learning and being embedded in the technical-rational approach – they also felt that they had gained from the experience. The respondents agreed that their community work was mutually beneficial in terms of the learning the respondents experienced and the service the community received, as well as being transformative in assisting them to translate theory into practice.

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Piloting of a service-learning pedagogical model 335

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