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# CAR IN SERVICE-LEARNING

An Innovative Learning Experience  
beyond Knowing and Doing

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# Overview

- Background
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- The term *service learning* was coined in 1967 by Sigmon and Ramsey (Giles & Eyler, 1994).
- There have been many definitions of service learning since then.
- Some define service learning as reflective learning combined with service participation (Schwartman, 2001).
- On the other hand, some define service learning as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity and then reflect on the activity to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999).
- These definitions focus on service learning as a kind of education.

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- In recent decades, researchers and educators have considered service learning from another angle, that is, service learning as a philosophy (Giles & Eyler, 1994).
- Given that service learning has suffered from a lack of a well articulated conceptual framework, the concept of service learning as a philosophy provides a new window into theorising about service learning .

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- John Dewey's social and political philosophy of experimentalism (which is not to be confused with the more common usage of the term, i.e., a heavy reliance on the experimental method) has been regarded as a theoretical root of service learning (Giles & Eyler, 1994).
- For Dewey, experimentalism emphasizes the principles of experience, inquiry and reflection (Dewey, 1938). These principles are core elements of service learning.

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- From the perspective of service learning as a philosophy, experiential learning, which is distinguished from cognitive learning by Rogers (1969), can be regarded as a broader form of service learning. CAR is a case of experiential learning.
- According to Rogers, learning is facilitated greatly when the student participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction, and when the learning is primarily based upon direct confrontation with practical, social, personal or research problems.
- Rogers also emphasizes self-evaluation (or reflection) as the principal method of assessing progress or success. The importance of learning to learn, and openness to change and personal growth is emphasized in Rogers experiential learning.

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- CAR in my social psychology teaching is a case of experiential learning.
- CAR stands for concepts (core knowledge and understanding to engage in action), action (applied active learning of concepts in a community context) and reflection (analytical, evaluative and critical reflective frameworks).
- CAR promotes an experiential pedagogy that is discursive, flexible and reflective (Hauser, 2010).
- CAR is an Innovative learning experience beyond knowing and doing.

# Background: CAR, service learning and experiential learning

- Research questions:
  - 1) How to structure reflection and critical thinking in social psychology;
  - 2) How reflection and critical thinking impact on students' personal and professional development and growth; and
  - 3) How reflection makes a difference in achieving the learning outcomes of Service-Learning.



# Methods

- Participants:
  - 33 third-year students who enrolled social psychology in 2013 at James Cook University.
- Materials:
  - Participants' weekly CAR entries posted on the LearnJCU discussion board.
  - A 4-item evaluation on CAR.
  - Peer-review of teaching
- Procedure:
  - Ethical approval
  - Informed consent
- Analysis:
  - Thematic analysis

# How to structure reflection and critical thinking in social psychology

- **Objectives:** To put subject materials into action in daily contexts, and apply social psychology research findings on attribution biases, bystander intervention, conflict resolution, empathy, and so on.
- **Concepts:** Attribution biases, bystander intervention, conflict resolution, empathy, and so on.
- **Action:** You are required to participate in the "Day of Compassion." To participate in this event, your challenge will be to live each minute of that day in as compassionate a way as possible. In other words, for a full 24-hour period you should do your best to help other people in need, to be considerate and respectful, and to avoid causing harm to any living being. When carrying out this assignment, leave no behaviour unexamined – from watching TV to eating lunch to decisions about giving time or money to others. That is, don't limit yourself to simply holding the door open for a stranger or petting a lonely dog; think about all the unnecessary suffering in the world, and strive for the greatest impact and deepest level of compassion without being phony or insincere. It is up to you to define what compassion is and to decide how best to realize it. If you are already quite compassionate, try being compassionate toward groups you don't often focus on, and even if your actions don't differ much from how you normally behave, be sure to carefully observe and analyse what transpires during the experience.
- **Reflection:** Reflect on your action by linking your action to the concept you choose to apply.

- Acknowledgement: Professor Scott Plous, Wesleyan University

# How reflection and critical thinking impact on students' personal and professional development and growth

- Students constructed their personal and professional identities throughout the learning process
  - Active learner
  - Collaborator
  - Inspirer to one another
  - Cultural exchanger
  - Global citizen

# How reflection makes a difference in achieving the learning outcomes of Service-Learning

- Students actively engaged in classroom discussions
- Students were creative and critical
- Inconclusive observation: Students achieved very well in other assessments.

# Discussion

- Not only did CAR teach concepts but it improved students' ability to reflect, and their broader critical thinking skills.
- As the semester progressed and students became more familiar with reflecting and writing a CAR entry their entries became more creative and their reflections became better developed, utilising more theoretical integration.
- Critical thinking is of course an essential skill among psychology graduates. The Australian Psychology Accreditation Council even names 'critical thinking in psychology' as one of its six core graduate attributes (APAC, 2010). It is essential because the work of psychologists—whether in research or professional practice—requires critically evaluating opinions and biases, identifying and testing hypotheses to answer theoretical and applied questions, and applying knowledge to mental health problems experienced at a population or individual level (Karantzas et al., 2013).
- For these reasons, service learning models such as CAR—which teach concepts AND critical thinking, a skill needed to apply concepts in the real world—have a place within psychological teaching.