

## Advancing Human Services Education: Exploratory Study of International Service-learning and Digital Pedagogy

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Service-learning provides instructional space and hands-on experience outside of the classroom. These experiences engage students in various communities to cultivate learning. This study explores students' experiences of international service-learning within the human services field to fully grasp and apply the helping skills and promote professional growth. The experience of students studying abroad in Jamaica was captured through reflective activities presented in ePortfolio. ePortfolio was analyzed to determine the value such educational tools can produce through reflection and capturing student's skill development. Findings of this study add to the academia overall and the education of future human services students. Specifically, this article will attest to the overall importance of reflection, technology and international service learning in human services education.

A case study was conducted to isolate the lived experiences of students learning to find their professional identity by engaging critically while completing an international service-learning trip. Each student completed coursework which remarked on their experience while in Jamaica. The final determining factors on the success of the experiences emerged from the students.

### Literature Review

Human services education embraces the ideology of hands-on experience in developing competent professionals, activities such as field placements, practicum, and internships are commonly used in the formal education of new professionals (Hogan & Bailey, 2010; Craigen & Sparkman, 2014; Woodside, Carruth, Clapp & Robertson, 2006). Dewey (as cited in McAuliffe, 2011) stressed the significance of students having

## Abstract

This study focuses on advancing the understanding of human services education in international service-learning focused study abroad programs. There is a gap in the literature pertaining to service-learning education for human services students.

This study explores the integration of service-learning, reflection, and technology in human services education. Case study methodology and document review analysis are used to examine the use of ePortfolio as a reflective tool in addition to the skill development of upper-level undergraduate human services students through service learning. Seven themes arose from the findings, which suggest that international service-learning assists students in human services skill development and ePortfolio is effective as a reflective tool in human services education.

tangible experiences to promote learning. These experiences give students the opportunity to take theory to practice. Students need space to cultivate their helping identity (Desmond & Stahl, 2011; McAuliffe, 2011). Service-learning both locally and abroad provides students with the space to grow into their identity as professionals and gives them the experiences needed to apply what was learned in the classroom to practice in the field.

### *Service-learning*

The National Service-learning Clearinghouse (NSLC) defined service-learning “as a teaching and learning strategy integrating meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (NSLC, 2012). Service-learning concepts are integrated into countless colleges and universities’ curriculum throughout the United States (Whalen, 2008; Craigen & Sparkman, (2014). Service-learning provides students with opportunities to immerse themselves in community-engaged learning specific to their fields. The key purpose of this form of education is to merge learning and service together so that it may be a seamless process (Pariola & Pariola, 2006; Adams, 2015). There are several theoretical models that guide the development of service learning focused courses in academia. The most common theoretical model, developed by the University of Maryland, is P.A.R.E. which stands for, preparation, action, reflection and evaluation (Commuter Affairs and Community Service, University of Maryland, 1999).

The main aspect of the theoretical model P.A.R.E. is the focus on ensuring that the service-learning curriculum has a focus on these four components deemed important to an effective service-learning experience. It is assumed that these four components lend way to positive outcomes for both the student and the community. Researchers have supported the use of this theory as well as explored models specific to the field of study. The P.A.R.E. model is the most used structured approach to service learning (Loyola, n.d.; Johns Hopkins, n.d.; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2008). It involves the preparation of participants for a service-learning experience which, includes providing information on the agency or need to be met. The second tenet of this model focuses on meaningful action which is critical to successful service-learning. Successful service learning programming takes action that makes all parties involved feel that a measurable difference was made, even if the difference was small.

Reflection is an essential component of service-learning that distinguishes service-learning from traditional volunteerism or community service. Reflection can address skills developed, experiences and challenges. Evaluation is essential to the project’s impact on both student participants and the community can be measured (Commuter Affairs and Community Service, University of Maryland, 1999; Loyola, n.d.; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Makel, & Putallaz, 2015; Lee et al., 2008).

In addition, depending on the program and the skills that will be taught, the length and location of service-learning can vary from one week to several months (Craigen & Sparkman, (2014). Within this timeframe, students engage with their teachers, classmates and the community to grow and learn (Craigen & Sparkman, (2014). Overall there are both short-term and long-term experiences that students can embark on to

promote their learning (Craigien & Sparkman, (2014). This study will explore service-learning in terms of international service learning focused programs.

### *International Service-learning*

In higher education, the use of international service-learning is increasing in use (McKee, 2015) but does not differ from traditional service-learning programs as the goal is to infuse learning with service to promote educational growth (Pariola & Pariola, 2006). Pariola & Pariola (2016) continue by indicating that by conducting international service-learning experiences the benefits only proliferate for the students as and the communities that are visited. However, in contrast to this statement in more recent years, international service-learning has come into question on if students are causing more harm than good and if knowledge could be best attained at the university.

The process of international service-learning has been criticized; as there is a belief that more harm comes to the community receiving the help than anticipated (Wood, Banks, Galliardi, Koehn, & Schroeder, 2012; Stewart, 2018). Despite good intentions communities are left with no resources, limited funding, and potentially more concerns than prior to the arrival of the assistance (Wood et al., 2012; Stewart, 2018). It was determined that outside of the specific individuals assisted or locations served there is greater harm that can come to the community once the group leaves (Wood et al., 2012). Wood et al., (2012) sought out with their study to be deliberate and mindful in planning and execution. It was determined that diligent and purposeful work led to a decrease in negative impact to the communities entered (Wood et al., 2012). Thusly, there is not only a need for these experiences but also the need to better support study abroad experiences for students and communities.

### *Service-learning and Human Services*

The National Organization for Human Services (NOHS) states that it is a profession established from identifying and addressing the needs of humans (NOHS, 2015). NOHS was founded on the concerns that were arising throughout the country during the 1960s by individuals who saw value in honoring and serving diverse populations (NOHS, 2015). According to the ethical standards for human services professionals it is the responsibility of human services professionals, to be effective at working in diverse populations (NOHS, 2015). There are obligations to clients, colleagues, the profession, the public, and students to advocate and engage in the communities with those who are in need (NOHS, 2015). Service-learning, and more specifically international service-learning provides an opportunity to remain aligned with the preamble of the profession to "...respect the dignity and welfare of all people; promoting self-determination; honoring cultural diversity; advocating for social justice; and acting with integrity, honesty, genuineness and objectivity" (NOHS, 2015, p.1).

Hogan and Bailey (2010) align with the NSLC (2012) sentiment in stating that service-learning provides instructional moments to prepare human services students for civic engagement. Despite the known benefits a service-learning experience can have on students and the community this practice is not adequately documented within human services research (Hogan & Bailey, 2010). Service-learning experiences are an asset to students overall awareness of the community and technical skills (Hogan & Bailey's,2010; Craigien & Sparkman, 2014).

Taking a step into the community, separate from employment, allows students to connect with people more directly (Nicholas, Baker-Sennett, McClanahan, & Harwood, 2011). Skills such as observation, research, planning, presentation, and interpersonal skills are learned during experiences when human services students are engaging in the community (Nicholas et al., 2011). Nicholas et al., (2011) discovered that students reported that they did not gain an understanding of the aforementioned skills in settings outside of the service-learning experience. Desmond and Stahl (2011) found that collaboration, professionalism, problem-solving, critical thinking, effective communication and leadership gained meaning when students practiced them during service-learning. The incorporation of ePortfolios with service-learning sets the framework to evaluate the experience and provide the opportunity to view all of the individual pieces as one entity (Banachowski et al., 2013).

Service-learning can unlock an under-documented territory of learning in human services. Hands-on experiences impact the learner in a way that bridges coursework to practical knowledge. Incorporating both service-learning and ePortfolio (Digital pedagogy) with undergraduate human services students is especially valuable as it provides a more inclusive perspective of the profession. Student's experiences of service-learning were captured for this study to depict the utility of this tool in the education of human services students.

### Purpose

The field of human services has a focus on addressing the needs of individuals (NOHS, 2015). The purpose of this study is to address the gap in the literature which does not address the use of digital pedagogy in human services education or the reflective experiences of service-learning focus study abroad in human services education. This study aims to launch human services education into the utilization of purposeful international service-learning experiences and the use of digital pedagogy. This study will identify the value of international service-learning to the education of human services students and whether ePortfolio is an effective tool in capturing reflective experiences.

### Method

Qualitative research relies on the emergence of themes through investigation of participant experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). A case study was chosen as the methodology for this study, as it focuses on the researcher examining in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014). The case, the ePortfolio, will be analyzed through a document review which is a "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The findings will provide a basis for future research and reflection on the topic of the value of international study abroad experiences in human services education. Research questions that guide this study are identified as (1) What are the competencies students develop during and international human services service-learning study abroad? (2) How useful is an ePortfolio as a reflection tool for human services service-learning focused study abroad programs? Based on the criteria for a case study, this study is focused on a single study abroad experience aligned with a course that all participants

enrolled in to take part in the study abroad experience. The current qualitative study examines the experiences of human services undergraduate students of a service-learning trip abroad through their reflection of experiences compiled in the development of an ePortfolio. ePortfolios are beneficial for students due to their ease of access and their web-based design, which allows students to save the information and relevant media in one location (Banachowski, Drabik, and Nowacki, 2013). The interface of the ePortfolio is useful in allowing students to use their creativity to present information in a way that expresses their individuality of experience (Banachowski et al., 2013). Additionally, the ePortfolio allows students to share their stories with many individuals simultaneously since they are Internet accessible. This also makes it readily available to faculty members for grading purposes.

All participants in this study were human services undergraduate students who participated in a service-learning trip to Jamaica where they worked with teenage mothers. During the trip, they also participated in several cultural immersion experiences aimed to enhance cultural competence. Opportunities to reflect on their experiences with classmates occurred throughout the trip. Learning objectives for the class were the following: 1) To develop an understanding of the culture and people of Jamaica that have had an impact on the development of the human services profession in that country, 2) To develop awareness of the state of development of the human services profession in Jamaica, 3) To interact with other human services professionals in Jamaica and to understand how services are provided to clients in Jamaica, 4) To learn about social and political issues in Jamaica that are having an impact on the development of the human services profession in that country, and 5) To learn about service-learning in Jamaica and the issues that impact populations being served.

The ePortfolio, from which the data for this study was obtained, was a course assignment used as an online technological tool through which students could document and reflect upon their experiences. The ePortfolio functioned as a learning tool, which encouraged reflexivity and creativity of expression on behalf of the student participants. Additionally, the ePortfolio served to not only address student experiences but to hold students accountable for providing accuracy of content learned, practicing organizational skills, convey knowledge attained through coursework, and to practice their writing skills, all useful and necessary skills for professional development as human services students. In accordance with Saldana (2009) guidelines for identifying the best coding method, descriptive coding was implemented first as the researchers began by reviewing and analyzing larger domains of data retrieved from student ePortfolios. Continuing with the guidelines of Saldana (2009) once the first cycle of coding was completed the second cycle utilized pattern coding and continued the analysis by reduction and clustering of the data into “meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.69). This study is unique in that it is the first article in human services literature to describe the utility of ePortfolios as an instructional tool aimed to encourage student skill development.

### *Participants*

Researchers implemented a convenience sampling method, a non-probability method that allows the research to utilize participants easily accessible to them (Creswell, 2017). As all participants in the study were obtained from a course,

researchers were able to obtain information-rich cases for in-depth analysis due to the convenient sampling. Eight students were a part of this course and all eight students opted into the study for 100% participation rate. Additionally, researchers intended to explore the utility of an ePortfolio in capturing these experiences and the impact on the development of student cultural competence. Students were informed that the intention of the course was to provide them with an understanding of the role culture plays in human services with a focus on service-learning within the country of Jamaica. Readings, lectures, discussion, and experiential learning were all components of the course. Students enrolled within this course spent nine days in Jamaica and four of those days immersed in the service-learning activity at one local community agency. Besides the classroom activities in Jamaica, students engaged in cultural tours, lectures and student immersion activities. Through the examination of the rich data contained in the ePortfolios, researchers hoped to gain a vital understanding to the essence of what undergraduate students experienced on this international service-learning study abroad trip rather than solely making generalized observations (Patton, 2014).

In total, there were eight participants in this study. Participants included in this study were undergraduate students 18 years of age or older. All participants were upper-level human services majors from a large southern university. All students had completed a service-learning study abroad program, an elective requirement toward a BS in Human Services, during which they compiled an ePortfolio documenting their experiences. All participants identified as female (100%,  $n=8$ ). Of the eight participants 62.5% ( $n=5$ ) identified as African American/Black, 12.5% ( $n=1$ ) identified as Asian, and 25% ( $n=2$ ) identified as Caucasian. To ensure the anonymity of the students; other demographic information was not obtained from the participants, and any identifying information provided in the ePortfolio was removed. Researchers obtained human subjects committee approval through affiliated university and informed students that participation was voluntary. Students were also provided with information detailing the confidential nature of the research.

### *Data Collection*

As a requirement of the service-learning course and experience, students were instructed to create an ePortfolio as their final project based on their personal experiences abroad. Students were given a sample ePortfolio that had a specific layout. The home page was titled "About Me" and gave the students a prompt to discuss themselves and add a photo. The next tab was a prompt that encouraged students to include a travel brochure they created prior to traveling abroad. The third tab was labeled skills and experiences. Students were to reflect on their experiences in Jamaica and were prompted to describe their skill development or specific experiences encountered during the trip. Students were encouraged to discuss the impact of these experiences on their personal and professional growth. There were six pages embedded within this tab. Each page was numbered 1-6 and students were prompted to discuss a different skill or experience on each page. Finally, students were encouraged to include their resume listing their study abroad experience and a reflective letter to the instructor which describes course materials that prepared them for their service learning abroad. This ePortfolio was to be created using WordPress ePortfolio template. In addition to writing prompts stated above students were

encouraged to include pictures or artifacts representative of their personal experience and skill development. ePortfolios from human services service-learning study abroad course with trips to Jamaica were included in this study. ePortfolios were only included in this study if the students gave consent and if the ePortfolio was complete.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis utilized a document review of the ePortfolios by following these steps as described by Bowman (2009): 1) skimming, 2) reading, 3) interpretation. In preparation for data analysis, ePortfolios were downloaded as secure files and reviewed one at a time by each researcher to attain a global sense of the data. The collected data was divided into segments corresponding to specific experiences or events that took place during the trip and then scrutinized for commonalities. Each researcher coded the data using textural descriptions. Researchers met after coding individually to ensure uniformity of coding processes. After uniformity was established, researchers individually constructed charts including categories and subcategories, which were identified within the ePortfolios. After thorough collective examination of the preliminary themes and corresponding subcategories, researchers engaged in a consensus coding process to enhance trustworthiness and inter-rater reliability of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). This involved careful examination of one another's category identification after which inconsistencies in coding as well as the bracketing of biases were discussed. These discussions often led to further analysis of core themes and further analysis of established categories. Researchers then came to a consensus on final categories, which represented the essence of the students' experiences during their study abroad service-learning course.

### *Findings*

Analysis of the data led to the emergence of seven core themes, which were salient among the experiences of participants. These seven themes were identified as 1) respect for self and others, 2) genuineness, 3) listening skills, 4) nonverbal communication, 5) cultural awareness, 6) relationship building, and 7) leadership. These themes, as observed in Table 1, emerged through the descriptive narratives of participants included in their ePortfolios as they described their experiences during various cultural immersion activities as well as their service-learning component of the study abroad course. These core themes also reflect the core values of human services work and key skills important to the development of human services students (Neukrug, 2016).

The first theme, respect for self and others, describes student acknowledgment of the importance of respect in the Jamaican culture specifically as well as the importance of respect in professional work. Adler and Proctor define respect as "esteem" (2016, p.301). Adler and Proctor (2016) continue by differentiating respect from qualities such as admiring or appreciation as respect is a key component of a positive relationship. One of the participants stated, "Respect is by far the most important skill in the helping professions", while another student stated, "Respect is an essential part of the Jamaican identity. To be effective with the teens, I had to establish respect quickly. I did this by making sure to ask appropriate questions and maintain good eye contact". Participant statements may suggest that the students understand the

value of respect and also emphasize student thought processes regarding methods of establishing and conveying mutual respect.

The second theme, genuineness, has been identified as a characteristic of an effective human service professional (Neukrug, 2016). Neukrug (2016) compares this to Rogers (1965) concept of congruence. This is the process of becoming in sync with the whole person ensuring all mental and physical reactions are aligned (Neukrug, 2016). One of the participants stated, "One of the skills that was the most easy to use in my time in Jamaica was being authentic. I was in awe of the culture and the way Jamaicans live. I made sure to express my genuine emotions and take an interest in our speakers". This statement speaks to an appreciation of culture and novel experiences while also expressing the student's belief that genuine emotions were elicited from the exposure during cultural immersion experiences. Other participants spoke of being authentic and genuine while working with teenage mothers during the service-learning component of the course. One student stated, "When the girls realized that we are real and authentic, it made it easy for the girls to open up to us when we got into small group sessions". Similarly, another student stated, "Because I was being genuine about their feelings, thoughts, and taking time to listen, my questions were being answered effectively. I became very successful while helping them during our group chats". These reflective statements from the students also indicate an active practice of learned skills in human services curriculum and an acknowledgment of the effectiveness of using the skills interpersonally in human services work.

The third theme that was identified was listening skills. Listening skills are often taught as basic, yet vital skills for human services professionals and other helping professionals alike (Neukrug, 2016). Listening skills provide a sense of understanding and construct a trusting relationship to establish a professional relationship (Neukrug, 2016). Student statements supported the utility of listening skills in human services work and also show the importance of the service-learning component in encouraging the use of important skills for human services work, giving students real-life opportunities, rather than solely classroom-based activities. Participant statements indicated that there was a value for listening both relating to the material presented by in-country speakers and also relating to the service-learning component which involved hands-on human services work. Statements that illustrate this thematic concept are the following: "I gave the girls in my group my complete attention by listening to their stories", "Listening was important because we were able to engage in meaningful conversations with the presenters", "While I was listening, I was noticing how she was communicating, whether she spoke slow or fast, soft-spoken or loud, and hesitating between words. I gave her time to think about what and how she wanted to respond. I allowed silence and resisted the temptation to talk to keep the conversation going".

Another theme which emerged from participant ePortfolios was nonverbal communication, defined as any messages expressed that do not involve language which could also include laughing, throat clearing, and other noises that are vocally expressed. Additionally, nonverbal communication encompasses volume, rate, and pitch as well as physical appearance, the environment in which communication occurs, the distance between individuals while communicating, body language, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact (Adler & Proctor, 2016). In human services curriculum, students are taught that all behavior has communicative value. They are taught the



functions of nonverbal communication as well as types, meanings, and cultural context. Participant statements indicate a careful consideration of nonverbal communication and how knowledge has been put into practice. One participant stated, "Body language was important during the first few days because many of the girls may have wanted to say something, but were too shy". Similarly, another participant wrote, "Observing the culture of Jamaica helped me to establish a greater sense of the country and the people. I especially observed the girls' behaviors". Both statements emphasize student acknowledgment of the importance of nonverbal cues and the role that they would play as they navigated their service-learning experience and simultaneously a new culture. Another participant shared, "During the small conversation it was important for me to be a good observer because I wanted to have a better understanding of what my clients were discussing, and by exercising that skill it allowed me to give the appropriate feedback". One participant spoke to observing the actions and behaviors to help provide information as to how the teen mother she was working with might be feeling. The participant stated, "During my conversation with the girls, I was observing their reactions and behaviors, such as: Did she seem nervous? Did she seem shy? Was she looking away?".

Cultural awareness was the fifth theme that was revealed through data analysis. This skill is vital in maintaining respect. Cultural awareness is the sensitivity and knowledge that a human services profession displays with clients (Neukrug, 2016). Human services students are taught in their courses of the importance of forming a working alliance with clients regardless of cultural differences (Neukrug, 2016). The ability to navigate the world and utilizing cultural norms is essential (Antes, English, Baldwin, Dubois, 2018). Students' ePortfolios conveyed an appreciation of new cultural experiences and growth through these experiences. Students also displayed how they could relate their cultural experiences to the human services profession. Participant statements included: "Traveling abroad to Jamaica was a perfect way to experience a full cultural immersion", "My time during study abroad helped to develop my professional skills in counseling and helped me enlarge my world through increased cultural competency", "Today I went to the University of West Indies campus and listened to a powerful, thought provoking lecture on Jamaican culture...Jamaica has so much to offer and they are very proud people. I was amazed at how much they embrace their culture and are eager to share their knowledge with others", "Our trips to local areas, exploring the food, spirits, and dance enlightened us of another world", "...understand how we participate in the lives of others and in the world around us, communal behaviors that result in how people of similar beliefs come together to practice those beliefs".

Relationship building was the sixth theme which was identified in this study. Egan (2013) discusses the guiding principles necessary for building stronger relationships. Among these principles are collaboration, tracking client needs and wants, focusing on resources, openness to differing views, and dealing with client negativity and resistance. Comparably, Rogers (1965) claimed that qualities such as warmth, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness were necessary and often sufficient for progress in the working alliance between helper and client. Quotes from participants reveal their knowledge of relationship building skills, their knowledge of how to use them, their practice of these skills during the service-learning component, as well as the learning that took place which helped them to develop these skills further in the process.

The following are illustrative examples of relationship building from the participants: “When in groups my basic interpersonal skills were tested because I did not only have one client to pay attention to, but instead four to five girls at times”, “Building a relating background or connection allowed the girls to feel comfortable with me and it helped get my questions answered because they felt they were more of a friend versus me being a stranger who was trying to apply helping skills”, “I did not have any background in psychology or social work and I wouldn’t have gained these valuable skills if I did not participate in this study abroad”, “When working with the girls, we tried to get them to open up and talk to us about their self-concept. During these times I tried to reflect back as much as possible in order to let the girls know I was listening as well as cared”, “During these times I tried to reflect back as much as possible in order to let the girls know I was listening as well as cared”, “When we did the mind reframing activity we were able to see the girls start to understand how to change their thoughts from negative into more positive beliefs about themselves”, “The more time we spent with the girls and the more we taught them about self-compassion, mindfulness, self-concept, etc. the more they understood and wanted to be involved”, “We were able to work through the resistance by initially talking with the girls about what we were there for and receiving their feedback about self-concept and self-compassion, thus letting them feel as though aspects of what we were talking about or working on were their idea”, “During my time in Jamaica, I found that the best way to connect with the teens was to be friendly and express warmth. This was one of the first steps in to establishing a relationship at the Women's Center”. The service-learning component allowed students to practice their relationship building skills in an applicable human services professional setting in addition to being challenged to grow and continue to develop personally and professionally.

The last of the seven themes is leadership. Leadership is a highly regarded professional quality and often sought out regardless of the expense in an employee and staff (Ardichvili, Natt och Dag, & Manderscheid, 2016). When advocating for others, human services professionals will have to stand firm and lead others until they are able to do for themselves. Through innovation and being resourceful students were able to address difficult topics such as stress, self-esteem, and confidence. The following are examples of how students displayed their leadership: “My presentation topic was self-esteem and confidence, I gave a brief presentation on the importance of both and some tips for developing self-esteem and confidence. I also did a vision board activity in which the teens were able to create a board using magazine cut outs and scrapbook materials to showcase what their expectations of their future.”, and “We helped a group of teenage mothers and teenage pregnant mothers to-be with information on nutrition, stress management, education, and informational resources. We engaged in learning activities and provided them with various learning materials.”. As mentioned being a leader is a desired trait for any professional. These students were able to step up and show their leadership skills. Additionally, leadership was sought after and achieved by a diverse population of students, which is still to this day a challenge for minority populations (Roya & Korabik, 2010).

These experiences align with the experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2011) whereby learners have a concrete learning experience, followed by opportunities to reflect on these experiences, and subsequently conceptualize and actively experiment

with new knowledge. The service-learning experience in tandem with intentional didactic and cultural immersion components gave students a multidimensional opportunity for learning and growth especially in regards to their human services education.

Table 1 <i>Service-learning Experience Core themes</i>	
Theme	Illustrative Examples
Respect for Self and Others	<p>“Respect is by far the most important skill in the helping professions”.</p> <p>“Respect is an essential part of the Jamaican identity. To be effective with the teens, I had to establish respect quickly. I did this by making sure to ask appropriate questions and maintain good eye contact”.</p>
Genuineness	<p>“One of the skills that was the most easy to use in my time in Jamaica was being authentic. I was in awe of the culture and the way Jamaicans live. I made sure to express my genuine emotions and take an interest in our speakers”.</p> <p>“When the girls realized that we are real and authentic, it made it easy for the girls to open up to us when we got into small group sessions”.</p>
Listening Skills	<p>“I gave the girls in my group my complete attention by listening to their stories”.</p> <p>“Listening was important because we were able to engage in meaningful conversations with the presenters”</p>
Nonverbal Communication	<p>“Body language was important during the first few days because many of the girls may have wanted to say something, but were too shy”.</p> <p>“Observing the culture of Jamaica helped me to establish a greater sense of the country and the people. I especially observed the girls’ behaviors”.</p>
Cultural Awareness	<p>“My time during study abroad helped to develop my professional skills in counseling and helped me enlarge my world through increased cultural competency”.</p> <p>“Our trips to local areas, exploring the food, spirits, and dance enlightened us of another world”.</p>

Relationship Building	<p>“Building a relating background or connection allowed the girls to feel comfortable with me and it helped get my questions answered because they felt they were more of a friend versus me being a stranger who was trying to apply helping skills”.</p> <p>“I did not have any background in psychology or social work and I wouldn’t have gained these valuable skills if I did not participate in this study abroad”.</p> <p>“During these times I tried to reflect back as much as possible in order to let the girls know I was listening as well as cared”.</p>
Leadership	<p>“My presentation topic was self-esteem and confidence, I gave a brief presentation on the importance of both and some tips for developing self-esteem and confidence. I also did a vision board activity in which the teens were able to create a board using magazine cut outs and scrapbook materials to showcase what their expectations of their future”.</p> <p>“We helped a group of teenage mothers and teenage pregnant mothers to-be with information on nutrition, stress management, education, and informational resources. We engaged in learning activities and provided them with various learning materials”.</p>

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to showcase the significance of ePortfolio in capturing students experiences and service-learning as a form of pedagogy to ensure human services students gained practical knowledge. A key aspect of this study is the development of helping skills and how they are actualized throughout the human services service-learning experience. Seven themes emerged through this study: 1) respect for self and others, 2) genuineness, 3) listening skills, 4) nonverbal communication, 5) cultural awareness, 6) relationship building, and 7) leadership. The participants highly regarded their experiences and attributed this opportunity to their increased understanding of working in the profession.

In addition, this study embraced digital pedagogy by utilizing ePortfolio as a reflective tool to capture students study experience and skill development. Since technology serves a key role in the lives of traditional college students embracing it provided an opportunity for creative yet rich expressions. It is not only suggested but also necessary to incorporate technology to increase learning within the classroom (Littlefield, Rubinstein, & Pittman, 2015). The ability to retain and learn information is only a portion of creating a well-rounded student. The application of the material and if possible first-hand experiences bring the information to life in a practical manner, which solidifies learning. Nicholas et al. (2011) determined that service-learning trips provided a unique experience, which promoted the understanding of helping skills unlike any other means of learning. Similar to Nicholas et al. (2001) findings, this study found that students gain an increased understanding of key skills through the incorporation of service-learning and ePortfolio reflection. Using the ePortfolio as a tool to encourage reflection on the service learning trip supports student integration of personal

experience and professional identity while increasing self-awareness and facilitating further development of skills essential to the human services profession, such as empathy (Tracey & Hutchinson, 2018).

This study produced seven themes which participants linked to their own growth and understanding of serving as a human services professional. Each of the themes is an integral component of the human services curriculum. As a result of the study abroad and ePortfolio experience, students were able to not only learn but also apply these skills to become well-rounded human services professionals. It has been determined that incorporating “meaningful and active learning experiences” (Katz, DuBois, & Wigderson, 2014, p.251) leads to higher quality undergraduate education. The results of this study were conclusive with these prior results as students found meaning, value and a deeper understanding through the service-learning experience.

The outcomes of this study create a unique opportunity for human services education. It suggests that human services educators would benefit greatly from utilizing, service-learning to foster advanced skill development. In this instance, service-learning focused study abroad was utilized to develop human services skills while challenging students to utilize critical thinking in order to evolve into culturally competent human services professionals. This study further suggests that the use of ePortfolio was effective in capturing students’ critical reflections of experiences. Without the use of digital pedagogy to explore, capture, and assess this development it would be unknown if students truly gained the knowledge that was intended.

Although the information gathered as a part of this study is valuable to the field of human services, there are certain limitations, which must be considered. First, while smaller sample sizes are characteristic of qualitative research, the sample size utilized for the current study was small and is a limitation. Caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other populations as the sample size was small yet also not diverse in nature, lacking male participants. A second limitation is the lack of information on student experiences using an ePortfolio. It may be helpful to gain specific information regarding student perceptions of the utility of this digital tool in order for educators to improve the manner in which the tool is used for instruction and evaluative purposes. Future research efforts should focus on addressing the gaps identified.

Service-learning and specifically international service-learning is an asset to human services education. This study provides information, which speaks to the necessity of study abroad experiences as a tool to cultivate informed future professionals. Human Services is a profession that requires a variety of professional skills and human services educators have the responsibility to ensure that students are both knowledgeable of their interpersonal communication skills as well as capable of appropriately and effectively applying the skills prior to graduation. This study identified seven themes which are needed for students to effectively work within the field. Respect for self and others, genuineness, listening skills, nonverbal communication, cultural awareness, relationship building, and leadership are the themes identified by this study. Students expressed their ability to comprehend and execute these tasks through this study. Service-learning within human service education is a strong form of pedagogy which is needed to continue to engage our students in meaningful and purposeful ways. Service-learning experiences allow instructors to ensure that the

information has been learned and executed appropriately which enhances the longevity of the profession.

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