How the I Shapes the Eye: The Imperative of Reflexivity in Global Service-Learning Qualitative Research

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While literature on research methods abounds, little attention has been given to understanding how qualitative researchers and their approaches to research (i.e., the researcher's stance) shape what we know about global service-learning (GSL) and how we come to know what we know about GSL. Researchers often uncritically adopt a particular research method without understanding its theoretical underpinnings and assumptions (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). This is problematic when we consider how communities, learning, resources, and knowledge may be affected by the processes and outcomes of our inquiries, especially when working across cultures. This article explores how GSL qualitative researchers affect the knowledge creation process by examining approaches to ethical research, exploring a reflexive account of the enactive approach to a GSL qualitative research project in Pakistan, and discussing the elements, implications, and limitations of reflexivity.

I traveled to Islamabad from Washington, DC, as part of an initiative to develop a university global service-learning (GSL) exchange in June 2013. To inform and cultivate the GSL partnership, I researched the current understandings and practices of GSL in both the U.S. and Pakistan. One aspect of the research was to conduct focus groups with students in both countries to better understand their respective GSL experiences and how they made meaning of their experiences. However, when I arrived I learned that one of my Pakistani partners had not scheduled the focus group. After a discussion, it was added to the schedule and 25 students were invited. I hoped that at least eight would be interested in participating. In fact, 23 came.

As I was explaining the purpose of the focus group and the consent process, a student interrupted me, challenging the "real" purpose of the focus group, and doubting that I, or anyone, cared about his and his classmates' experiences. He was angry at the United States for its drone strikes, one of which had happened two weeks before. He and his family were from a Northern province and had witnessed the War on Terror first-hand, including drone strikes and U.S. troops operating in their community. He also faulted international aid organizations for making important decisions regarding aid without listening to the Pakistani people. He claimed that local community and university leaders did not listen to him or his peers. He was apprehensive and distrustful of me, the project, and the focus group, questioning me about the project's sponsor and where, how, and with whom results would be shared. His challenge had every-

one's attention.

I had a choice to make: Do I engage with the student's concerns directly or do I sidestep his challenge? I chose the former. I told the group that the U.S. government sometimes did things that I thought were wrong. Yet, as a citizen, it was my responsibility to participate in the process of democracy—to learn about the issues, vote, use my voice, and otherwise act in a manner consistent with my beliefs. I shared that one of the reasons I came to Pakistan was to hear another side of the story, which I thought was not being heard in the U.S. The effect of my disclosure was that he – and the rest of the students – moved from a position of apprehension to one of active engagement.

As qualitative researchers in global service-learning (GSL), unanticipated and even contentious moments like this one can emerge at any point during cross-cultural research projects as we often unintentionally bump against differences in cultures, positionalities, geopolitical issues, and power (Hartman & Kiely, 2014). I believe these moments warrant close attention from GSL educators, practitioners, and researchers because how they are resolved speaks to the very heart of what and how we come to know what we know, which has important implications for how we think, feel, and act as scholar-practitioners. For instance, had I ignored or dismissed the angry student's comments by moving forward with my agenda, I might have stifled the focus group, potentially sending a message that I controlled the agenda and that it was not a safe environment for self-disclosure. However, by engaging with the stu-

dent, I sent (or attempted to send) a different message—one that (hopefully) showed I welcomed honesty and was willing to share control with the focus group. In addition to my actions, who I am—a middle-class, white woman in my 30s with my doctorate from the U.S. who is not Muslim, but who chose to wear traditional Pakistani clothing throughout my time in Pakistan—not only shapes how and what I know, but also affected what the students shared with and how they responded to me. There is no way to know how the results may have varied had I stayed on script or had someone else conducted the study, but I am sure that the results were unique because of who I am and the decisions I made prior to and throughout the focus group experience.

This example highlights the need for researcher reflexivity – the process of critically reflecting on one's approach to research (i.e., the researcher's stance) (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Reflexivity provides us with a clearer understanding about how a researcher might have arrived at particular data collected and the interpretation thereof. This process can strengthen the quality of our qualitative research by increasing trustworthiness and credibility, which in turn provides evidence often used to refine, further, or change GSL theories, practice, and future research.

Qualitative research is a form of organized and systematic inquiry into aspects of the human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) such as student involvement in GSL. Such inquiry is informed and shaped by the researcher's tacitly or explicitly held theoretical perspectives and assumptions, which guide how the researcher engages with and makes sense of the world (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). These perspectives and assumptions can, and often do, influence research in ways for which the researcher may not even be aware. The practice of reflexivity is important because it helps researchers raise their awareness of these issues (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). Reflexivity "enhance[s] the quality and validity of data by expanding awareness and understanding of the social phenomenon under study, as well as knowing the limitations of knowledge production" (Couture, Zaidi, & Maticka-Tyndale, 2012, p. 89). Given the role researchers play in producing knowledge, it is imperative that we explore the process of qualitative research and reflexivity in GSL, especially considering how communities, learning, resources, and knowledge may be affected by our inquiries. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold: to explore ethical GSL qualitative research with a focus on reflexivity, and to illustrate the process of reflexivity from my experience in Pakistan. Each purpose will be addressed in turn. To begin, I will frame GSL and qualitative research. Within this framework, I will address approaches to ethical research, provide a reflexive account using the enactive approach, and discuss the elements, implications, and limitations of reflexivity in GSL qualitative research.

GSL and Qualitative Research

GSL is defined as "a community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective practice to better understand common human dignity; self; culture; positionality; socio-economic, political, and environmental issues; power relations; and social responsibility, all in global contexts" (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 60). GSL expands upon the goals, aims, and design of local service-learning to include global outcomes (Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011), which may include helping students increase intercultural competence, analyze structural assumptions, understand globalization, reflect on dissonant experiences, and engage their civic and moral imagination (Hartman & Kiely, 2014). Quality research can ascertain the extent to which our GSL practices are effective and ethical.

To understand a dynamic, complex, and nuanced human experience such as GSL, researchers often use qualitative research methods. Although such methods abound (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002), insufficient attention has been given to researching the actual process of research (Gelmon, Stanton, Rudd, & Pacheco-Pinzon, 2009). In addition, there is little understanding of the unique role that the researcher plays in the process of designing, collecting, analyzing, and representing the phenomena of interest (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2006, 2007), especially in the context of GSL experience.

The GSL literature recognizes the importance of researching community involvement (Crabtree, 2013; Reynolds, 2014; Steinman, 2011), power (McMillan & Stanton, 2014; Riggan, Gwak, Lesnick, Jackson, & Olitsky, 2011), privilege (Madsen Camacho, 2004), and researcher reflection (Darling, Kerr, Thorp, & Chung, 2014; Reynolds, 2014). However, in their overview of qualitative research methodologies and GSL, Kiely and Hartman (2011) note that while the existing literature is replete with "descriptions of programs, activities, nuts and bolts, and rationales for [international service-learning]," it is on the whole "not empirical, cumulative, or theory-based" (p. 303). They call for an expanded use of qualitative research frameworks and methods to explore who participates in knowledge construction in GSL programs and contexts, whose perspective matters, and who benefits from the knowledge generated by GSL research. In particular, there is a need for greater understanding of the

qualitative research process in GSL with specific attention on the researcher's stance.

To better understand the GSL qualitative researcher's stance, we must focus on the researcher's implicitly or explicitly held assumptions and methodological (mis)alignments. "We need to know more about the intricacies and judgments that make up the skills and dispositions used in conducting qualitative studies" (Polkinghorne, 2006, p. 76). As Mauthner and Doucet (2003) point out, qualitative researchers often uncritically adopt a method without examining its assumptions. However, methods are infused with the theoretical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions of the researchers who developed them, which affects how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted. Thus, researchers can unwittingly find themselves implicitly aligned with a research method and concomitant stance to which they may not fully agree but that nonetheless has serious implications for and ramifications on knowledge creation.

All qualitative researchers, including those examining GSL, have "an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible" (Patton, 2002, p. 434), which includes articulating how their theoretical approach and assumptions have shaped the research process. This has important implications as,

> the trustworthiness of the findings of a qualitative study is not judged by its conformity to a method or set of procedures. Instead, trustworthiness is a status given by a reader who is convinced that the researcher made responsible judgments and exercised care in the production of the study. (Polkinghorne, 2006, p. 76)

In GSL, we have the additional criterion of trustworthiness as discerned by community members, partners, and leaders (Erasmus, 2011). Thus, to make decisions clear throughout the research process, as researchers we need to identify how we situate ourselves within a particular paradigm or theoretical framework, become aware (Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch, 2003) of the assumptions inherent in a particular approach, and note the choices we make throughout the research process and their effects on the knowledge production process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). This process of recognizing our stance as researchers is especially important with GSL given our border crossing work (Kiely, 2004) and our responsibility to do no harm (Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Wells, Warchal, Ruiz, & Chapdelaine, 2011; Wendler, 2012).

Approaches to Ethical Research

Nobel physicist Max Planck asserts that knowledge is shaped by how and what we see. "Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change" (Planck, as cited in Dyer, 2004, p. 173). His assertion invites such questions as: *how* do we look at things? *What* shapes our lens? How does *what we see* shape how we think? How does *what we think* shape what we see? *Who* is the person that forms the lens? In other words, who is the I that shapes the eye? and *How* does the I shape the eye? These questions prompt us to critically reflect on the process of scientific inquiry. How we answer these questions has direct implications for how we conceptualize, design, implement, analyze, (re)present, and evaluate what we come to know about GSL through our research, which we use to refine and develop our theories and practice. To inform our reflection, I present a theoretical framework that provides an overview of research approaches, ethical research, reflexivity, and paradigms with their underlying assumptions.

Research Approaches

Over the past 40 years, the umbrella for research has broadened to include quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Quantitative studies emphasize reliable, valid measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Bohm, 1980) while maintaining distance between the researcher and the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Palmer, 1993). In contrast, a qualitative study – broadly defined – "is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3). Accordingly, qualitative researchers are intimately connected with the focus of their study, often exploring the socially constructed nature of reality to understand how experience and meaning emerge (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Both quantitative and qualitative research inform GSL (Tonkin, 2011; Bringle, Hatcher, & Williams, 2011; Kiely & Hartman, 2011). However, the approach taken depends on the researcher's stance and the nature of the research question or focus of inquiry. Regardless of approach, all research is interpretive and guided by the researcher's "set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22).

Ethical Research

Every qualitative researcher influences the process and outcomes of any given research project in important and unavoidable ways. With the researcher as the instrument, particular attention should focus on what is ethically appropriate in research. Biologists Maturana and Varela (1998) define ethics as to see the Other as legitimate. Other is capitalized to represent the authentic being of the other person (Morrison,

2011). Researchers who fail to see the legitimacy or the wholeness (Palmer, 2004) of the Other, commit what Isaacs (1999) calls violence, an imposition of a point of view with little or no understanding, which is counter to the aims of GSL. This is not new; Rumi put it more poetically 800 years ago, "if you are here unfaithfully with us / you're causing terrible damage" (Moyne & Barks, 1984, p. 69).

To promote ethical research, Wells et al. (2011) offer 47 statements that GSL researchers should aspire to follow, which address researchers' competency and responsibilities, rights of participants, sponsorship, and publication and dissemination of results. If we convert the statements to questions, they can serve as a tool for checking our research design and process, thereby mitigating potential snags before the research begins. Wendler (2012) also offers insight on ethical research. She bridges the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process with the principles of good practice for service-learning, proposing a model for engaging in ethical service-learning practice that can arguably include research. She highlights the need for respect, beneficence, justice, and reflexivity.

While Wells et al. (2011) and Wendler (2012) offer useful tools, Palmer (2004) warns us against setting and following "an objective set of rules we are told to follow, a moral exoskeleton we put on hoping to prop ourselves up" (p. 8). An objective set of ethical knowledge is knowledge that is kept at arm's length and can be difficult to embody. Instead, he argues for the addition of the value of integrity, which involves honoring and abiding by the objective code, as well as recognizing the state of being whole, complete, and genuine. Ethics and integrity are essential in GSL research. Reynolds (2014) models both when she describes analyzing GSL findings with community members, which resulted in greater trustworthiness, credibility, and informed action. Recognizing the importance of conducting ethical research in GSL (Wells et al., 2011; Wendler, 2012), more attention is needed on how researchers can realize this aim.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity offers a way for us to check ourselves and our research process(es). Reflexivity "requires critical self-reflection on the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning, and behavior impact on the research process" (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix), thus offering researchers a way to situate and enhance the trustworthiness of their findings. The terms "reflexive" and "reflect" share the same etymological root that means "to bend back." While the two are closely related, Finlay and Gough (2003) distinguish them: reflection is a more cognitive act that happens after

the fact while reflexivity indicates a more dynamic, immediate, and continuing self-awareness.

Researchers are asked to clarify and articulate their stances, including the assumptions, theoretical orientations, worldviews, and experiences that shape a specific study (Merriam, 2002). Particular interest is put on how their stances affect the context of the study, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. By sharing their stance, researchers make more visible and public the "ethical, practical, political, and theoretical dimensions of the research endeavor [and how they] are filtered through [their] subjective lens into the research activities and decisions" (Kiely & Hartman, 2011, p. 294).

There are questions, however, about the extent to which published research reports, articles, and presentations should entail personal biography impact statements and reflexive accounts. Some consider such statements and accounts self-indulgent, while others view them as a way to check meaning and assumptions that guard against the effects of personal subjectivity (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). There may be other considerations that need to be made before sharing a reflexive account publically, such as the effect on family, community members, funders, and even one's own professional evaluation. Notwithstanding these concerns, including reflexive accounts in published research may be beneficial because they bring "honesty to the fore, asking us not to feign objectivity or reach post hoc conclusions, but to acknowledge that multiple factors, including our personal narratives, shape the data we produce and our interpretations of this data" (Bishop & Shepherd, p. 1285).

Despite our best efforts to be aware and reflexive, there may be limits to the extent that we can actually be fully aware of our stance and the influences we have on our research before conducting a study, while collecting data, and afterwards when analyzing the data. To mitigate against an 'all or nothing' approach, Mauthner and Doucet (2003) offer the concept of "degrees of reflexivity" (p. 425). Some influences are easier to identify and articulate. Others may take more effort and time. The key is to recognize the on-going dynamic nature of reflexivity and to articulate one's stance as clearly as possible in appropriate ways.

Paradigms and Their Underlying Assumptions

Researchers' stances are shaped by paradigms (Kuhn, 1970) or "basic set[s] of beliefs that guide action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). Paradigms shape what we know about the world and how we come to know what we know. There are five major paradigms in research: positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, critical theory (including feminist, Marxist, race, queer, and indigenous theories), and

participatory (including action and cooperative) (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Cognitive science offers a sixth paradigm called enaction (Stewart, Gapenne, & DiPaolo, 2010). The enaction paradigm asserts that "meaning and experience are created by, or enacted through, the continuous reciprocal interaction of the brain, the body, and the world" (Colombetti & Thompson, 2007, p. 18). Each of these paradigms holds a unique view on who defines the problem, selects the methods, collects and analyzes the data, and reports the findings (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Buaman, & Vallejo, 2004), all essential in GSL research (Wells et al., 2011). Problems can emerge if there is a lack of awareness about the particular paradigm(s) at work and its inherent assumptions.

Furthering Guba and Lincoln's work on paradigms, Creswell (2007) discusses five key categories of assumptions that influence qualitative research: (a) ontological (the nature and meaning of reality), (b) epistemological (knowledge and how we know what we know), (c) axiological (role of values in research), (d) rhetorical (how knowledge is translated from thought into language and communicated), and (e) methodological (process of research). These assumptions inform the overall approach that a researcher consciously or unconsciously holds toward research and affect what and how knowledge is gathered, analyzed, and represented. Taken together these paradigms and assumptions necessarily reflect a researcher's stance, which affects what we do and do not learn through our research efforts about GSL.

The intent of this article is not to explicate each of the paradigmatic perspectives and assumptions (for a full discussion see Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007), but rather to identify each as they affect the process of GSL research. Without understanding what and how our thinking is shaped by the paradigms and assumptions we make as we conduct research and analyze data, there is no way to truly evaluate the quality of our research. Worse yet, we may unknowingly perpetuate inequities or harm the communities we are researching (Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Erasmus, 2011). Thus, to prevent doing harm, increase the quality of our research, and deepen our understanding of GSL, we need to engage in a continuous practice of reflexivity, paying particular attention to our research paradigm(s) and assumptions.

Reflexive Account of an Enactive Approach to Challenges in GSL Qualitative Research

To illustrate *how* a particular paradigm and its assumptions affect research and apply to GSL, I offer examples of reflexivity from a focus group that I facilitated in Pakistan using the enactive approach. I use the paradigm of enaction because its ontological,

epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions most closely align with my beliefs and values as a researcher. This account couples my researcher's stance with real-world challenges that I faced when initiating and conducting cross-cultural research that explored students' GSL experiences. Rather than fully explicate each example, my intent is to indicate moments throughout the research process that show how a practice of reflexivity can inform the process and outcomes of GSL qualitative research (for more discussion on GSL research see Erasmus, 2011; Gelmon et al., 2009; Kiely & Hartman, 2011; Sutton, 2011; Tonkin, 2011). Drawing on this research project illuminates a way to approach reflexivity in GSL qualitative research and ethically address the complexities and challenges that often emerge in cross-cultural research (Wells et al., 2011; Wendler, 2012).

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions are about the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007). I chose a constitutive – not static – ontology (Maturana, 1988) for my GSL work in Pakistan. This ontology comes from the cognitive and affective sciences and is central to the paradigm of enaction. From a constitutive ontology, reality comes into existence or is brought forth in knowing by an observer (Maturana). In other words, reality cannot be separated from the knower (Maturana & Varela, 1998; Palmer, 1990a, 1993). Instead, it emphasizes that there are multiple and dynamic realities and processes that are person- and context-dependent (Bamberger, 2008; Klenke, 2008). Stated differently, reality is a subjective experience that does not exist independently of the person who perceives it (Klenke, 2008). Research 'subjects' are not subjects in the positivist sense; rather research 'subjects' are participants, even co-researchers, who co-create reality (Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Wendler, 2012) through language (Maturana, 1978; Strasser, 1969) and dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999).

When I arrived in Islamabad, I quickly discovered that my ontological assumptions ran counter to those of one of the host leaders. He was trained as an engineer and seemed to be coming from a positivist paradigm. While the team of Pakistani host partners had expressed verbal support for holding a focus group several months before I arrived, he did not see the value of it. So when it came time to make the schedule, he scheduled my U.S. colleagues and I to meet with faculty where our time would be "better spent."

When I asked him about rearranging my schedule to hold the focus group, he suggested that I instead create a survey where students could tell me what I wanted to know. Wondering if we were coming from different ontological perspectives or if there was

something else going on, I asked him directly if there were particular concerns about having a focus group with students. He said "no;" rather, he had misgivings about the reliability, validity, and utility of focus groups and created the schedule accordingly. However, I believed that it was critical to understand the students' experiences with GSL in order to intentionally develop our partnership. Since his concern was about the method – not the content – of the focus group and my U.S. colleagues were very capable of meeting with the faculty without me, I proposed that I meet with the students instead of the faculty, to which he agreed.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) talk about commensurate paradigms, but in this instance his and mine were not compatible. He came from a university geared toward research and technology that highly valued positivist research and objective ways of knowing. I, on the other hand, am grounded in the social sciences and value how Others understand and make meaning of their lived experiences. Rather than change one another's stance, we instead discussed our perspectives. I took a risk (given my age and gender) and suggested a win-win compromise. While he may not have appreciated why the focus group could be insightful or that I raised the issue of the focus group, he trusted his colleagues who approved it and consented as well. His permission was key. Without it, the focus group would not have happened due to the cultural differences that include a more authoritarian and hierarchical culture (Davies, 2002; Nazir, 2010).

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemological assumptions are about how we know what we know (Creswell, 2007). Given a paradigm of enaction and a constitutive ontology, meaning is created moment by moment. In fact, knowledge is informed by the dynamic co-emergence (Thompson, 2007) between knower and known (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Palmer, 1993). Dynamic co-emergence refers to the process where the whole and the parts arise at the same time together. They each shape and are shaped by one another (Thompson, 2007). Knowledge, therefore, is not a distancing process in which there is objectification and separation of knower from known (Daloz Parks, Keen, Keen, & Parks Daloz, 1999; Palmer, 1990a, 1993). Rather, from this perspective knowledge emerges because of and through the dynamic process the participants and researcher enact (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Maturana & Varela, 1998).

As the researcher, I saw my role as trying to lessen the "distance" or "objective separate-ness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between the students and myself. Meaning emerged from the way that we interacted. By intentionally constructing the focus group, asking questions, following the students' leads, and clarifying interpretations, the process allowed me to better understand their epistemologies (Creswell, 2007). Reflexivity, checking language, and dialoguing not only during the focus group, but in individual and group interactions with students before and after the focus group, provided me with an opportunity to check my assumptions, clarify meaning, and create new understanding with the students (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

In the opening example, the student's interruption was preceded by him leaning forward and placing one arm on the table. He spoke quickly, with emotion and urgency. In confronting me, a university assistant professor from the U.S., the student was taking a risk. This violated several cultural norms and the other students around the table were very still, eyes open, listening to every word to see what would happen.

As stated earlier, I chose to engage with him. Later in the focus group, he directed a comment to me saying, "You're sitting here, and you're still listening to me. But we aren't capable of going and telling our people this, because they don't have the ability to listen." By engaging with him, I inadvertently stumbled into an important issue that I had not even known was there. His classmates also saw what was transpiring and they joined in. They expressed difficulty in having their voices heard by university leaders, local community leaders, and even a few mentioned their families. Together, the participants and I were able to explore the role of voice in their service work through dialogue. By creating, holding space for, and clarifying the students' experiences, new insights emerged that otherwise might not have emerged had I chosen a different approach for the study.

Axiological Assumptions

Axiological assumptions are about the values of research (Creswell, 2007). Research is value-laden and biased (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). While value and bias free knowledge is not possible in naturalistic, post-positivist research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is feasible to make bias and researcher attitude (Davidson, Scherer, & Goldsmith, 2003) as explicit as possible (Patton, 2002). Denzin (1989) offers that "every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied. The term hermeneutical circle or situation refers to this basic fact of research. All scholars are caught in the circle of interpretation" (p. 23). To address this hermeneutical situation, researchers need to become aware of and find ways to articulate and check their interpretations (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998), as well as those of the research participants (Creswell, 2007). The manner

in which a research topic is chosen, framed, and bound reflects the inquirer's values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Values in this paradigm refer to the expression of relationship between self and object (individual, thing, organization, or idea) (Makiguchi, 1982). Through reflexivity and dialogue, researchers' values may be revealed.

I started the focus group by acknowledging and thanking the students for taking an interest in the research topic of GSL, for taking a risk to participate, and for walking more than 30 minutes on a hot Saturday morning to get to the building since the campus shuttle was not running. I mentioned risk because the day before the focus group, one of the student leaders mentioned to me that she believed one of the administrators seemed anxious about what might be said during the focus group. Although no one else said anything to me, her comment prompted me to reflect more deeply and revise my opening comments and questions. My primary concern was how to structure the process in a way that elicited ground rules that felt safe to the students, recognizing my limitations in a different country and cultural context.

To provide safety and structure, I spent a considerable amount of time on the informed consent process. As illustrated in the opening vignette, the student who was angry offered an opportunity to unpack the study's purpose and intentions. I also welcomed the students' ideas on how to explore their service-learning experiences to a greater depth in the safest way possible. This encouraged students to share the power of the research process. I made eye contact with each student and asked that the students either nod or give me a thumbs up (both actions that the student leader assured me would be culturally appropriate) that they understood their rights to skip a question or leave at any time and their responsibility to respect one another by not sharing any names or identifying comments with others. Everyone agreed with this decision.

Another axiological consideration I made was to consciously decide to be curious. When speaking of values, there is an automatic tendency to evaluate, make snap judgments and assign labels such as good-bad or like-dislike, depending on whether or not a particular expression, idea, or action aligns with one's values. Instead of making automatic judgments, I tried to employ mindfulness-based awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) during the focus group. This involved paying attention in a particular way to become aware and suspend judgment when it happened so that I could hear students' voices more clearly. Since I did not fully understand the intricacies of the political and economic ramifications, for example, that could affect the students' well-being if any critical comments regarding the community or

university were divulged beyond the focus group, it was imperative to pay attention as closely as possible.

I followed the students' leads with regards to what and how much they shared. For instance, several students spoke about how their home communities were driven by authorities and fear. The students felt voiceless and oppressed, especially a few of the women. One woman's story about not being able to speak with some members of her religiously conservative family elicited a visceral reaction in me and brought to the fore my own values regarding respect, voice, inclusion, equity, and family. Catching my snap judgment, I stayed quiet and refocused my attention on what she was saying as best as I could. When she finished speaking, I reflected what I had gleaned: she was frustrated and felt dismissed by some members of her family who were more religious. "No," she corrected me directly, "it's the system." Through dialogue, I became aware that I assumed incorrectly that her primary concern was religiosity. However, she was using her family as an analogy of the larger "system" dynamics of age and gender (i.e., the "acceptable" role of women her age in the community). By valuing curiosity and subsequently checking my understanding, I caught my otherwise serious mistake of allowing my values and assumptions to affect and misinform my interpretations; that said, I may have missed other assumptions. This moment reminded me how research is imbued with values and underscored the importance of on-going care, awareness, and reflexivity with which I and other researchers need to collect and interpret data, especially in research that crosses cultural boundaries.

Rhetorical Assumptions

Rhetorical assumptions deal with how knowledge is put into language and communicated in ways that persuade others (Creswell, 2007; see Ryder, 2011, for a discussion of rhetoric in service-learning). In research, specific rhetorical assumptions vary according to the particular method employed. In general, the overall rhetorical assumption for qualitative researchers is to (re)present what reality is according to the research participants. Qualitative researchers recognize that "everything said is said by someone" (Maturana & Varela, 1998, p. 26). Each person offers a perspective that is shaped by the unique intersection of multiple identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.), education, family, life experiences, and environment. For this reason, when examining GSL, it is important to pay close attention to when and how participants express their experience verbally and nonverbally, as well as what role we play as researchers in encouraging and discouraging such expressions. Moreover, it is imperative that we check our understanding of what terms and

expressions mean to participants during the data collection, analysis, and representation phases.

During the focus group, I paid close attention to the language that the students used, asking questions about what terms meant, and then using the terms they introduced in subsequent questions. This stance recognized what Maturana and Varela (1998) refer to as *languaging*, a process through which "the act of knowing, the behavioral coordination which is language, brings forth a world" (p. 234). Accepting that reality is person- and context-specific, it was imperative for me to not only include participants' voices but also use actual language from the participants (Creswell, 2007). Member checks ensured that my interpretations and representations were trustworthy and credible (Merriam, 2002).

One of the first major issues that surfaced through the focus group was how the term "service-learning" was being used in different ways. Pakistani university leaders said that they were doing service-learning and so I designed the focus group accordingly. However, within the first ten minutes of the focus group the students said that there was no reflection in their service-learning course, which consisted of lectures *on* community engagement rather than experiences *in* and *with* community engagement. I had wrongly assumed that the university leaders meant service-learning in the same way that I did because we had discussed terminology, worked together remotely for a year on GSL, and met for a week-long, in-person meeting in the U.S. Even with those efforts, it turns out that the language we were using did not have the same meaning.

Beyond addressing the term service-learning, the languaging process revealed different organizational structures (e.g., how non-governmental organizations [NGOs] are conceptualized) and operational systems (e.g., the relationship between the government, religious groups, and NGOs). Given the different meaning and use of the term service-learning by my Pakistani partners, as well as the differences in context, I revised the guiding research question from exploring students' GSL experiences to their broader service experiences. The broader question offered a better account of the actual, lived experiences of the participants rather than forcing them to fit a preconceived or particular research question. The revised question was more relevant and appropriate. While noting this change as part of the data analysis process, two reflections struck me. First, I could have missed this significant finding had I chosen a different research stance. If I had developed a fixed-scale survey based on my faulty assumption about shared language and meaning, then the results on "service-learning" would have most likely been misleading at best. Second, I had the freedom to adjust my research

question given the approach I chose. I could have encountered a real dilemma if there were funding or particular publication requirements tied to my original research question.

Methodological Assumptions

Methodological assumptions shape the process of research. Studies should be intentionally designed to align with the purpose of the study and the nature of the problem or inquiry. Researchers must consider the theory that underpins research decisions like what to study; which knowledge to draw on; what to include and exclude; where to study; what data to gather and why; etc. The particular method necessitates different techniques for collecting data. One's method (i.e., the tool of scientific inquiry) comes from how one perceives and frames the problem, which is informed by the previously mentioned paradigms and assumptions. Specific methods often employed to gather qualitative data include interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2007; Kiely & Hartman, 2011).

Given the nature of my question and the focus on relationships in GSL, I intentionally chose focus groups to research students' experiences with GSL and service more broadly in Pakistan. Focus groups often produce data that offer especially powerful interpretive insights because of the synergistic potential and ability to go beyond a particular individual's interpretation (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Focus groups allow researchers to see the dynamic and complex ways that participants relate to one another while addressing focused questions, issues, and topics. They create space for a proliferation of meanings and perspectives, as well as encourage the participants to interact and interpret the relationship between and among their perspectives. This process puts participants at the center of the inquiry process. It also allows researchers to collect large quantities of material from more participants in a relatively short amount of time. A final strength to this approach is that complexities and non-linearities in experience can emerge and these tensions can be held at the same time without diminishing any of the qualities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

For focus groups to be effective, researchers need to give careful consideration to the design and implementation of them. I faced two situations in Pakistan that challenged the effectiveness of the focus group: participation and trust. First, I had 23 students show up to participate in one focus group, which far exceeds the ideal number of six to eight participants (Krueger, 2002). I was surprised by the turnout (especially given the short notice of the invitation) and by the interest in the research topic. I was at a loss for how to choose who should participate and

who I should turn away. Instead, I wanted to be as inclusive as possible and decided to hold a very large focus group with the help of a colleague who was also familiar with focus group research. Second, to create trust, I needed to set and uphold ground rules. Yet, both the size of the group and the ground rules presented methodological challenges.

When the focus group got underway, I noticed that all of the students seemed engaged, but that the size of the group was too large for all to have a chance to speak. To create more opportunities for student sharing, I divided the group – with equal numbers of men and women in each – between my colleague and me. As the students were slowly moving to their small group, one woman pulled me aside and said that she and the other women would feel more comfortable speaking with other women. She helped me realize that I had assumed that having men and women together would lead to a more diverse, robust discussion and interpretation of perspectives. To check in with the rest of the group, I asked everyone to stop moving and I took a closed-eyes, hand-raised poll to see if they would prefer to be divided by gender. It was unanimous; they preferred to group by gender. Although, I was able to redirect the participants, I had unconsciously and inappropriately imposed my cultural background and norms on the participants. Thankfully, they seemed to adapt quickly and went on to meet in their respective groups. Everyone spoke up in what turned out to be a lively exchange of perspectives that I assume was far richer than what would have ever been gleaned from mixed groups. The groups came back together and shared key insights so that we could reach a level of collective understanding. This process actually encouraged students to reflect on their reflections, which led to stronger, clearer interpretations.

The second methodological challenge involved trust. As mentioned earlier, I started the focus group with an informed consent and group norm setting process. One of the norms we agreed to was that no pictures or video would be taken. This was set at the participants' request. Twenty minutes into the focus group a photographer and a videographer came into the room to capture the focus group without our permission. To protect the students and uphold an initial ground rule of trust and confidentiality, I interrupted a male student speaker and asked the crew to leave and delete any images or video they may have taken of the session. Once the two left, I apologized to the student and explained to him and the rest of the group why I abruptly cut him off. The tenor in the room shifted. The group norms had been tested, my explanation and apology accepted by the participants, and trust was deepened. Even though I violated one norm (i.e., as a white woman interrupting a man in a pre-

dominantly Muslim country), my transgression was overlooked as it protected a more significant norm (i.e., safety and well-being).

Knowing when and which norms can and should be broken in another cultural context requires finesse. However, there was no question in my mind that my first priority was ensuring the students' safety (e.g., the photos and videos could have put them at risk) and I used the power of professional authority to do so. While I intended to uphold the principles of ethical service-learning (Wells et al., 2011; Wendler, 2012), I may have simultaneously and unintentionally evoked a view of the participants as "inactive and vulnerable, [who] need the benevolent protection of the researcher" (Wendler, p. 36). There is no way to know for sure how my decisions, actions, and mere presence in the focus group affected the process and outcomes of the research. Rather, as part of my reflexive process, I noted decisions and challenging moments, followed up with student participants to clarify and check my interpretations, and discussed the process with my colleague who helped with the focus group. These steps helped me to become aware of and address my assumptions throughout the research process, but there may be assumptions that I made of which I am still unaware. This last point reiterates the need for an on-going practice of reflexivity, that is best enacted through collaboration with GSL partners and stakeholders, with the intent of enhancing the quality of GSL research processes and findings.

Discussion

People say: "Let the facts speak for themselves"; they forget that the speech of facts is real only if it is heard and understood. It is thought to be an easy matter to distinguish between fact and theory, between perception and interpretation. In truth, it is extremely difficult…When the level of the knower is not adequate to the level (or grade of significance) of the object of knowledge, the result is not factual error but something much more serious: an inadequate and impoverished view of reality (Schumacher, 1977, p. 42).

The implications of Schumacher's assertion are troubling, especially for those of us who want to understand the complexity and nuances of GSL. If we, as researchers and consumers of research, fail to observe our own and Others' ways of seeing, each with its implicit assumptions based on (un)consciously enacted theoretical perspectives, at best we may miss the very insights we seek and at worst miss serious limitations or flaws in our research. Extrapolating further, our limited research may misinform the decisions we make regarding appropriate next steps for action, the allocation of resources, and the well-being of local and global communities.

Recognizing that GSL is a dynamic, many-layered experience profoundly shaped by the community, we need to ensure that our awareness and level of knowing match the challenge that GSL often presents. Cultivating a practice of reflexivity (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Finlay & Gough, 2003) offers us a way to enhance the quality of what and how we know, as well as to guard against potentially adverse effects on the lives and communities we aim to strengthen. This practice of reflexivity in GSL research consists of mindfulness, Self-awareness (intentionally using a capital S as explained in the Self-awareness section below), learning, interpretations, relationships, and ethical action, which are discussed in turn and followed by limitations and implications.

Elements of Reflexivity

Mindfulness. Conducting research in another culture can magnify qualitative research challenges due to differences in culture, language, norms, politics, religion, and so forth. The tendency is for researchers to "perceive their values, cultural understanding, and ethical standards as universal and reflecting the larger global community" (Wells et al., 2011, p. 326). Therefore, researcher awareness and sensitivity (Tonkin, 2011) are of utmost concern to produce research in partnership with the community (Reynolds, 2014; McMillan & Stanton, 2014) that is ethical and culturally appropriate (Crabtree, 2013; Wells et al., 2011; Wendler, 2012) as well as in accordance with the host country's standards (Erasmus, 2011). How we show up as researchers in each moment of the research process affects the subsequent moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) in direct and indirect ways of which we may or may not be aware and also affects our ultimate findings. Thus, we are called to conduct mindful research, where we experience what our minds are doing as they do it (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). If we engage in GSL research without mindfulness, we may be at risk of unintentionally or unwittingly perpetuating patterns of inequity and oppression, as well as potentially causing harm (Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Tonkin, 2011). However, by mindfully engaging in an ongoing practice of reflexivity, we can mitigate these adverse affects and enhance the overall quality of our research processes and findings, which in turn enable us to inform and strengthen our GSL theories and practice.

Self-Awareness. The qualitative research process typically consists of designing and implementing the study, analyzing the data, and representing the findings. However, this articulation of the research process fails to acknowledge a crucial factor—the researcher. Recognizing that researchers' tacitly or explicitly held theoretical perspectives and assumptions influence how they engage in the research

process and interpret findings (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998), the first step in the research process should be, at a minimum, 'researcher know thyself.' To truly understand how we influence our GSL qualitative research, the stronger first step should be 'researcher know thy Self.' The differences between thyself and thy Self are subtle, yet profound. Thyself refers to one's ego and personal history, whereas thy Self refers to one's authentic being and soul (Morrison, 2011; Scharmer, 2007). For example, a researcher's reflections on thyself might consider what he or she knows about research processes, GSL, a particular issue facing a community, a specific context, or one of the other factors raised by Wells et al. (2011). A researcher who seeks to know thy Self would expand on that reflection to also critically examine one's stance, considering the values, beliefs, knowledge, and language that shape who one is and how that understanding shapes the inquiry process.

Learning. When we critically reflect on who we are – our backgrounds, assumptions, positionings, biases, and behaviors – and how we affect the research process (i.e., engage in reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000)), we not only increase our awareness of and ability to conduct ethical research (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998) with integrity, but also learn about ourselves, the process of research, and our specific research topic. Indeed, learning is at the heart of research; although we know this fact, we often pay it little attention. However, from an enactive approach, learning is an intentional, interpretive, reflective, and an imaginative act (Herda, 1999; Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008; Maturana & Varela, 1998; Mezirow, 2000) that is in the foreground. We are continuously learning, with each interaction constituting new meaning and modifying what we previously had experienced and "known" (Maturana & Varela, 1998; Strasser, 1969). Learning does not happen automatically, however, as we know in GSL. Instead, it is through reflection (Crabtree, 2013; Eyler, 2002; Kiely, 2005) that we adapt the frame or lens through which we view the world; reassign meaning; make connections among thoughts, people, behaviors, feelings, and things; and interpret the world. Thus, reflection is essential in global service-learning practice and research. As GSL researchers, engaging in reflexive practices throughout our research projects enhances our learning and strengthens the quality of our interpretations.

Interpretations. Interpretations are our way of assigning meaning to data (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). We first assess the data to determine whether or not there is any "difference which makes a difference" (Bateson, 1991, p. 309) or stated differently, whether or not the data is meaningful (i.e., meaningfull). If so, then, we in-form the data and convert it

into information (Wheatley, 2005). As used here, information holds true to the original etymological sense of "in-formare, to form within" (Varela, 1979, p. 266). Information reflects meaning that has been ascribed to data. However, what is a meaningful difference to me may only be data to someone else. For instance, 23 students came to the focus group. For me, this data is meaningful because I know that the focus group was a late addition to the schedule, which meant there was less time for students to be invited and for arrangements to be made regarding transportation. The turnout was surprising, however, suggesting a strong interest in participating in the research study since the only incentive to participate was the opportunity for participants to share their experiences with GSL and service. Given our unique researchers' stances, our interpretations of the data may vary. Yet, by interacting with other people, ideas, thoughts, feelings, or things, our respective interpretations may change. Thus, in GSL, relationships are fundamental.

Relationships. Relationships – among and between students, community members, community leaders, faculty, administrators, other stakeholders, and researchers – provide additional interpretations and examples of how to act in the world. Through interacting and dialoguing with one another (Crabtree, 2013; McMillan & Stanton, 2014; Reynolds, 2014), we create new meaning and understanding (Bamber, 2015; Jantsch, 1980; Maturana & Varela, 1998). In fact, dialoguing (Bohm, 1996) with a community partner (Bamber; Reynolds) about what, why, and how we have come to assign the meanings that we have assigned invites us to (re)consider our position and experiences (Horn & Wilburn, 2005; Isaacs, 1999; Maturana & Varela, 1998). Indeed, "it is in relationships that we can have a backdrop with which to see who we are, to learn, and to change our history" (Herda, 1999, p. 129). In our relationships, we can identify, clarify, and work through real and perceived differences that we often encounter in GSL work, such as differences in ideas, beliefs, practices, values, systems, and ways of being. In the focus group, the students helped me see assumptions I was making. Relationships provide us an opportunity to deepen our practice of reflexivity, encouraging us to critically reflect on and evaluate our own and others' stances in the research process in order to strengthen our new, emerging knowledge.

Ethical actions. Knowledge of knowledge compels us to act (Maturana & Varela, 1998), especially when we understand and trust the quality of the knowledge creation process. Once we know something new about GSL, we "cannot deny (to ourselves or to others) that we know" (Maturana & Varela, 1998, p. 245). Instead, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to make in*form*ed decisions about the costs and benefits of (not) acting on what we know. To decide which action(s) to take, Palmer (1990b) recommends we immerse ourselves in the realities of the research and recognize the relationships among and between the focus of the research, Others, and our Selves. Reflexivity can allow us to see these relationships without "othering" [i.e., objectifying the other as bounded subjects (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 904)], distancing ourselves (Palmer, 1993), or denying our connection (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). Equipped with this understanding, we are in a position to embody a sense of response-ability, where we are able "to act with the wisdom [we have] gained" (Kane, 2003, p. 90). For example, in Pakistan, after hearing several concerns and major themes, I felt compelled to share themes from the students' experiences with university leaders; however, I did not want to exacerbate the situation. So, I asked the students what, if anything, I could share. They unanimously wanted me to share all of the themes with one condition: I must protect their identities. With their permission, I was able to share the major themes with the university president and other leaders in the spirit of strengthening the quality of meaningful service to the community, deepening student learning, and establishing a foundation for GSL. While the risks of action were relatively low in this case (e.g., missed learning and meaningful service opportunities), the risks for (in)action might be much greater in other GSL situations. Regardless, we, as GSL qualitative researchers, are ethically bound to act on our research and to work with participants and communities to enact changes that redress social injustice (Bamber, 2015) and enhance individual and collective well-being.

Implications and Limitations

> No methodological approach to experience is neutral; they all inevitably interpret their phenomenal data. The hermeneutical dimension of the process is inescapable: every examination is an interpretation, and all interpretation reveals and conceals at the same time (Depraz et al., 2003, p. 9).

Two questions emerge: What interpretations are we making about GSL based on our qualitative research findings? How do these interpretations reveal and conceal the essence of GSL? In this article, I have proposed using reflexivity as a means to understand how we shape our research process and findings, exploring the ways in which we (un)intentionally reveal and conceal the GSL experience. With this understanding, we can now discuss the implications and limitations of this work with regards to GSL theory, research, and practice.

Theory. The GSL literature draws on a number of disciplines and fields (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Hartman & Kiely, 2014). This article pulls from the fields of biological and cognitive sciences, education, service-learning, and sociology to explore how reflexivity can inform qualitative GSL research. However, this article is limited in its reach and only explicates one theoretical approach—the enactive approach (Stewart et al., 2010)—and its underlying assumptions. Expounding on other theoretical approaches and their respective assumptions toward research may inform and expand our theoretical understandings and approaches to GSL research. Since research reveals and conceals at the same time, having additional perspectives from which to research GSL may lead to new insights and understandings about the field. There are also other fields, such as cross-cultural communications, international development (Crabtree, 2008), philosophy (Thompson, 2007), and the neurosciences (Depraz et al., 2003), that may be able to challenge, extend, and strengthen our understanding of how reflexivity operates in GSL research. For instance, how similar is the process of reflexivity in GSL to that in other fields? How do other fields explore the role of the researcher on the knowledge creation process?

Research. This article focused on the researcher's role in data collection and interpretation in GSL qualitative research using focus group data. Future research on reflexivity in GSL research should consider the unique stages of data analysis and (re)presentation (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), as well as consider other research methodologies and methods. Specific training in qualitative methods and reflexivity may be needed by new researchers as well as seasoned researchers who may have been trained in a different paradigm. Yet, "knowing the techniques and the procedures in the literature about qualitative methods is helpful, and perhaps necessary, but is not sufficient" (Polkinghorne, 2006, p. 72). Qualitative research and reflexivity—much like GSL—require practice, and the quality of our work will correlate with the quality of our teaching, learning, and scholarly dialogue. By practicing reflexivity and making researcher stances clear to others, we can begin to embrace "epistemological accountability" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 424) in GSL research. Moreover, by having greater transparency in the qualitative research process, we address concerns of quality and rigor in service-learning research (Gelmon et al., 2009; Kiely & Hartman, 2011). To this end, we may want to reflect on our own stance, look at seminal studies with a fresh eye to ascertain the researchers' stances if not already explicit, and consider conducting new studies that include reflexive accounts.

Practice. Irrespective of whether GSL is conceptu-alized as teaching, development work, or a movement for social justice (Crabtree, 2008; Hartman & Kiely, 2014), there is an urgent need for trustworthy research to inform our collective understanding of the dynamic, evolving GSL experience. To trust and act on GSL research findings, we need to understand how the emergent findings were informed by our and others' researcher stances. Reflexivity is hard; we cannot do it alone. Relationships – especially those with community partners (Erasmus, 2011; McMillan & Stanton, 2014; Reynolds, 2014) – play an important role. However, it may be difficult to have honest conversations where assumptions, misinterpretations, or harms can be named without fear of damaging the relationship or losing resources (e.g., students, supplies, expertise, etc.). Yet, to conduct ethical research, we must actively practice reflexivity and hold time and space to engage with Others. By doing so, we may be better able to respond and serve as a catalyst for the very changes our communities – local and global – seek.

Conclusion

In this article, I have proposed ways to see ourselves and think about our thinking with regard to GSL qualitative research by actively engaging in reflexivity during research design and data collection as we strive to enact ethical research. To begin, as researchers, we need to know our Selves and carefully choose a research stance, identifying the requisite theoretical underpinnings and assumptions that align with the nature of the research question, as well as our values, beliefs, capabilities, and research intentions. As the research process unfolds, an on-going practice of reflexivity can increase our awareness of and ability to act on how we are affecting each moment of the research process and the subsequent outcomes. Reflexivity offers GSL qualitative researchers an important process with which to inform and enhance the quality of the research process. Recognizing that our research findings may affect real communities, learning, resource allocation, and knowledge creation, it is imperative that we understand and pay close attention to what we know and how we have come to know what we know. By practicing reflexivity, we guard against, or at least limit, our potential to harm the very people and communities for whom our research addresses. In addition, when we are aware of our own and others' research stances, we are better equipped to evaluate the research and to understand its implications. By practicing reflexivity and situating our qualitative research, we have the potential to raise the level of collective understanding about GSL while also contributing in meaningful ways to lives near and far.

As we contemplate our next inquiry, which values and beliefs are we consciously or unconsciously bringing to our GSL research? How might these values (axiology) and beliefs (ontology, epistemology) shape the process (method) and the language (rhetoric) that we will use in our research? Will we see how the I shapes the eye?

Note

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