© *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Volume 22, Number 2, p. 31, (2018)
 ISSN 1534-6104, eISSN 2164-8212

Approaching Critical Service-Learning: A Model for Reflection on Positionality and Possibility

Mark Latta, Tina M. Kruger, Lindsey Payne, Laura Weaver, and Jennifer L. VanSickle

Abstract

Mitchell *(2008)* asks faculty to adopt "a 'critical' approach to community service learning" *(p. 50)*, one that focuses on social change, redistribution of power, and the development of authentic relationships. However, the path of transformation from *traditional* to *critical* service-learning practices remains unexplored. In this autoethnographic reflective essay, five individuals share their journey from higher education institutions as they engaged in a community of practice examining their own questions, assumptions, experiences, and positionality to more fully understand critical service-learning (CSL). This essay documents self-discovery through an iterative reflection process, detailing the approach used to examine CSL and interrogate the relationship between positionality and critical theory. This process provides a roadmap for service-learning practitioners interested in developing their own critical consciousness. Key outcomes include a conceptual model positioning CSL on a spectrum, in which one may approach without necessarily achieving social change, and the development of a toolkit of CSL resources.

Keywords: critical service-learning, positionality, social change, faculty learning community, critical reflection, autoethnography

Introduction

These are our stories . . . how we got from there to here. *(Laura Weaver [LW], director of programs and member development at Indiana Campus Compact, Faculty Fellow field notes, February 28, 2017)*

I go back to the intake procedures for Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility. . . . I am here to teach, to listen, and to do something—anything—in hopes of reversing the stubborn trend of recidivism for each of my 125 students. I am here to deliver a bucket of water to a forest fire that has burned for years and shows no signs of slowing down. I am here because I joined AmeriCorps

> and wanted to help. I am here because one of my most vivid memories of my first day at Pendleton was the staff orientation in which I learned not one single person in the front office who spoke to us actually believed rehabilitation was a goal worth hoping for, and I refuse to embrace that cynicism, to let my bucket run dry. *(Mark Latta [ML], director of the Writing Center, instructor of English, and public literacy coordinator at Marian University)*

In this article, we weave together elements from a year-long reflection process, which utilized qualitative research tools, in an effort to share the outcomes of the journey of a faculty learning community examining critical service-learning. Our intention was to explore critical service-learning, seeking ways to expand not only our own pedagogical strategies, but the field as a whole. We hoped to trace the evolution of an intentional repositioning of a practitioner orientation from a *traditional* service-learning perspective toward a *critical* service-learning orientation, as defined by Mitchell *(2008, 2015)*. We sought to articulate emergent understandings and challenges that shape this evolution, and to examine how the movement from traditional service-learning to critical service-learning orientations attunes educator understandings of socially just pedagogy. In other words, it would not be enough just to understand the theory behind critical service-learning; our goal was to understand how to integrate critical service-learning into the classroom. All procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Indiana State University and Purdue University, or were exempted from review by Marian University and University of Indianapolis. Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis accepted the Institutional Review Board approval from Indiana State University and Purdue University.

Our iterative process was facilitated by the use of methodologies found within critical theory, critical race theory, and feminist theory *(DeMeulenaere & Cann, 2013)*. We captured and deconstructed our learning process and the evolution of our understanding of positionality, critical theories, and critical service-learning by recording our conversations and reflecting extensively both individually and collectively through writings and in conversation. This also allowed us to track our progress so that others could follow a similar path. In particular, we relied on critical, coconstructed autoethnographies *(Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012)* as a valid, reflexive data source *(Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2005)* that enabled us to "describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order

to understand cultural experience" *(Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011)*. As Ellis and Bochner *(2000)* note, this style can "show how important it is to make the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right" *(p. 733)* and is particularly well suited to examine, expose, and trouble the relationship between practitioner and practice. To highlight the role of this method and demonstrate the role of self-interrogation in approaching critical service-learning, we include excerpts of our own autoethnographies within this article.

This reflective essay is an attempt to contribute to the literature surrounding critical service-learning, literature that often positions traditional and critical forms of service-learning as binaries rather than a spectrum of practices and often neglects to address the role of self-interrogation. We share our journey here in the hope it may serve as a roadmap for others interested in expanding their service-learning efforts to bring about social change and developing their own critical consciousness *(Freire, 1970)*, an awareness "that through acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality" *(Freire, 2005, p. 39)* and may challenge systemic oppression.

In our attempt to gain insight into how one may achieve the aims of critical service-learning, we determined that the movement toward this understanding is itself an integral part of becoming critically aware and developing a critical consciousness. Additionally, the continued interrogation of one's own positionality and perspective is a fundamental part of developing a critical lens of personal and cultural understanding. Such understanding leads, we conclude, to the knowledge that one may approach critical service-learning, but may never arrive at that destination. Like a point on the horizon whose features begin to reveal their complexity in greater detail as one moves closer to them, the richer the complexities, possibilities, and nuances of social change appear as one moves toward the aims of critical service-learning. Also similar to the horizon destination, critical service-learning provides an orientation but no determinate finality. In other words, it may be more helpful to think of critical service-learning as an ongoing process that is never fully realized rather than an outcome with a defined end point.

The Fellows—A Community of Engaged Scholars

This article is one outcome of a community of five engaged scholars (Fellows), from different institutions across Indiana, who are dedicated to "learn[ing] *from* and *with* one another" *(Stevens & Jamison, 2012, p. 20)* as they examine issues from *within* and *across*

courses, disciplines, institutions, and the field of service-learning and community engagement. Fellows are invited to participate in the Indiana Campus Compact Faculty Fellows Program (the Program) and form a year-long learning community designed according to the tenets of Boyer's *(1996)* definition of the scholarship of engagement through the integration of community engagement with teaching, research, and service. More than 100 Fellows have participated in the Program since its inception in 1996. This year-long learning community experience for faculty aims to strengthen the field as well as the individual scholarship of the participants through a collaborative Fellowship Project *(Bringle, Games, Ludlum Foos, Osgood, & Osborne, 2000; Marthakis, Eisenhauer, & Jamison, 2013; Stevens & Jamison, 2012)*.

Interest in a Growing Movement

> LW: It seemed like this group would be long-time colleagues and even friends, with talks of group hikes and rock climbing trips, and bonding over the shared love of pie—yes we managed to include dessert with every meal we ate over the course of the two-day retreat. . . . Talks of a group project seemed to be gravitating towards the broad topic of critical service-learning, as this had become one of the "hot topics" of the field in the past few years—we had even managed to have Tania Mitchell speak at our Service Engagement Summit the previous March. . . .

Primed from attending the annual Indiana Campus Compact Service Engagement Summit in March 2016, which had the themes "Explore Critical Service-Learning, Power and Privilege" and "Charity vs. Social Justice," we began discussing and exploring the tenets of critical service-learning (CSL). The Fellows each had varying levels of knowledge and experience in grappling with ideas related to critical service-learning, including the concepts of positionality and critical theory, and an understanding of how to shift one's pedagogy from *traditional* service-learning to *critical* service-learning.

> At the beginning of this fellowship, I was aware of service-learning as a pedagogical practice (having been involved with ICC and community engagement activities for about 5 years), was also aware of the concepts

> of critical theory (having a bachelor's degree in sociology), and was also aware of the ideas and concepts of social justice (having gone on many tirades in the face of various injustices I have witnessed). What I was not very aware of (although I had heard the term) was the intersections of these ideas in the form of critical service-learning. The term immediately made sense to me as using the pedagogy of service-learning to bring about social justice, yet there are many nuances that I have discovered throughout the fellowship and many more that I know I have yet to uncover. *(Tina Kruger, [TK] Senior Faculty Fellow, chair and associate professor of multidisciplinary studies at Indiana State University)*

These differences in knowledge and varying degrees of understanding formed the basis of the Fellowship Project: Address a need to approach CSL in a way that would allow practitioners to enter into this understanding regardless of prior knowledge, demonstrate the importance of self-reflexivity as part of a willingness to experience a philosophical shift in understanding, and provide a toolkit of resources that would be useful throughout the journey. We aimed to explore CSL through investigating critical theory, examining our own positionalities, and critically reflecting on our current efforts in the field of service-learning and how those efforts could be shifted further toward CSL. We embarked on our journey guided by the following concepts and questions:

- What are CSL, critical theory, and positionality, and how do the three intersect?
- How does one identify their own positionality, and how would one help students discover their positionality?
- What tools and resources are best suited in facilitating practitioner movement from a traditional service-learning perspective toward a CSL orientation?

> As LW recalled: After a short while our group begins to split a bit with Tina, Mark and I talking more about our knowledge with and experiences in CSL and further still its connection to Critical Theory. At times, I can hear Jennifer and Lindsey's discussion and their lack of familiarity (uncomfortableness/hesitation) on the subject. . . . Tina and Mark laid out their idea for a CSL toolkit and how it could also examine the connections to various critical theories. Jennifer proclaims how this

> is a great idea, but that she isn't sure how much she can contribute besides testing the toolkit in her course as she doesn't have much knowledge in the area of CSL let alone Critical Theory, to which Lindsey nods her head in agreement.

CSL calls for educators to go beyond merely participating in the community to being agents of social change *for* and *with* the community *(Marullo, 1999; Mitchell, 2008)*. This call for social change and for educators to labor alongside communities as agents of social change requires a radical reconceptualization of teaching practices and a willingness to imagine what this shift might require of us. After some discussion of this social change declaration, the confusion among the remaining Fellows permeated the room. How do we, as educators, begin to integrate CSL into our courses?

> ML: I became interested in systemic oppression and organized violence long before I knew these terms or recognized their potential meaning in part by my experiences at Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility and in how these understandings played out in my personal life. . . .
>
> My path from Pendleton Juvenile into academia involved a position as a writing instructor at our local community college. During my interview with the program chair, I recall expressing a concern about my relative lack of experience. After all, I had only been teaching for two years and my experience was limited to the young men at Pendleton. "Actually, we feel your experience there makes you uniquely qualified for the community college system," my interviewer replied.
>
> "Oh, okay," I answered. . . .
>
> I don't remember any of my students from my first semester teaching at the community college. . . . Rather, here's what I remember from my first day of my first college writing class: there were no guards in the classroom. While this difference threw me off during my first few weeks at our community college, I soon discovered a similarity that caused me to question my assumptions surrounding education and my role in perpetuating systemic inequalities. . . .
>
> I began to wonder about my own role in perpetuating what appeared to be an educational system rigged against the student. Increasingly, I questioned my own

> assumptions of education and began challenging myself to look deeper at systemic issues. This is what led me to critical theory and social change.

It quickly became clear that beyond the role of critical reflection *(Ash & Clayton, 2009)* in shaping effective service-learning pedagogy, a gap exists in understanding how educators can adopt a CSL stance or what an adoption of this stance should entail. Additionally, little is known about how this movement toward a social change orientation will translate into curriculum development and community-learning strategies, or how it will shape the transfer of knowledge. We wondered: How does one actually do CSL?

What Is Critical Service-Learning?

Although the term *service-learning* really took hold within higher education in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the general concept of learning through service within a local community goes back to the origins of the contemporary American educational system within Dewey's model of education *(Dewey, 1916)*. Many educators report that service-learning can help students not only to develop intellectual, personal, and professional skills, but to emerge as more conscientious, thoughtful, civic-minded individuals (e.g., *Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001*). However, others have cautioned that poorly designed service-learning experiences may actually "reinforce stereotypes, decrease participants' motivation to engage in future service activities, and exacerbate power differentials between social and cultural groups" *(Furco, 2011, p. ix)*.

Although service-learning is commonly associated with community-engaged and democratic pedagogies, the modern origins of service-learning were focused primarily on the needs of students and institutions housing those students. This raised a number of criticisms that service-learning exploits members of the community by positioning them through a deficit orientation and using them for educational gain *(Butin, 2005; Cruz, 1990)*. Others raised questions about the ethics of tying credit to service, pointing out that charity not only maintains systemic issues *(Herzberg, 1994)* but also exacerbates these inequalities through requiring what amounts to "forced volunteerism" *(Boyle-Baise, 1998; Mitchell, 2008)*. Other critics (e.g., *Brown, 2001; Cipolle, 2004; Pompa, 2002; Robinson, 2000*) went further, stating that service-learning orientations that focus primarily on the needs of students and institutions are paternalistic and actively support the hegemony that many service-learning courses state they aim to disrupt.

Mitchell *(2008)* captured the range and evolution of criticisms related to service-learning within her work establishing the concept of *critical service-learning* (CSL). She distinguished between traditional forms of service-learning, which typically lack an explicit aim of questioning or disrupting social power imbalances, and CSL pedagogy, which centered on "working to redistribute power amongst all participants in the service-learning relationship, developing authentic relationships in the classroom and in the community, and working from a social change perspective" *(Mitchell, 2008, p. 52)*. These three tenets (referred to hereafter as Mitchell's tenets of CSL) form the foundation and aims of CSL.

Today's distinction between traditional and critical service-learning is one that boldly maintains a need to expose and disrupt systemic inequalities, working in "service to an ideal" *(Wade, 2000, p. 97)* that seeks to redistribute power. CSL positions an intentional social change orientation *(Mitchell, 2008)* as one necessary in identifying forms of oppressions in communities, understanding their systemic causes, problematizing hegemonies that benefit from power asymmetries, and utilizing asset-oriented strategies that work toward the support of socially just communities *(Brown, 2001)*. CSL also asks participants to consider and reflect on a wider, societal perspective of their service and to dialogue about the concepts of power, privilege, and oppression *(Brown, 2001)*.

This social change orientation relies on the power of the CSL practitioner to identify as a social change agent and to work through this identity. As general concepts of critical theory have worked through and have become embedded within the field of CSL, the importance of identity and positionality has recently begun to emerge. In order to create "authentic relationships" *(Mitchell, 2008, p. 52)* that seek to redistribute power, Donahue and Mitchell *(2010)* advise that, before attempting to engage in a CSL project, faculty examine their own identities and interrogate their positionality. This is sound advice, but service-learning practitioners, particularly those more accustomed to traditional service-learning, often lack a theoretical and practical understanding of what an interrogation of positionality entails.

Developing New Lenses: Interrogating Positions of Power, Privilege, and Identity

> Our group first decided that we needed to learn more about critical service-learning and critical reflection. That produced a large sigh of relief for me as I knew

> that is where I needed to start. I needed time to read, reflect, and digest what all of this meant. . . . I had doubts about whether my current or future service-learning projects could meet the goal of critical service-learning because of my lack of knowledge and because I felt like a beginner. I knew that I had work to do first. I thought that, to have my students participate in critical reflection and critical service-learning, I had to start by understanding the population to which my students would be exposed . . . , then examine/identify my own assumptions about the population, to figure out how to frame the experience so that students would be able to explore the strengths of the community while helping the facility provide a service to the community. For example, Mitchell *(2008)* suggests that faculty should select readings and tailor lectures to prepare students for their experiences and to see them through educative frames for example, asset-based assessments of communities or critical perspectives addressing systemic causes rather than only individual failings for community problems. I felt like I had no idea where to find those readings and/or how to include those concepts in my lectures/classes. *(Jennifer VanSickle [JV], professor of sport management and coordinator of the Undergraduate Sport Management Program at University of Indianapolis)*

The orientations of CSL draw generally from the postmodern epistemologies of critical theory and share lineage with the humanizing pedagogy of hooks *(1994)* and Freire *(1970, 1998)*, as well as the sociocultural theories of Foucault *(1966)* and Bourdieu *(1986)*. More specifically, CSL draws on Black feminist theory (e.g., *Collins, 2009; hooks, 1981, 2000*) and critical race theory (CRT; e.g., *Bonilla-Silva, 2014; DiAngelo, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995*) as the lenses through which power asymmetries and structural inequalities are interrogated. In order to develop "a critical approach that is unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice" *(Mitchell, 2008, p. 50)*, CSL requires faculty to develop a critical stance *(Fook, 2007)* and an awareness of the "enormous role of their own and others' racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing" *(Milner, 2007, p. 388)*.

To aid the development of a critical consciousness *(Freire, 1970)* and the interrogation of assumptive norms, feminist theory and CRT commonly employ an analysis of the interrelationships

between identity and power through the embodied knowledge frameworks of positionality *(Madge, 1993; Rose, 1997)* and intersectionality *(Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2006)*. Within positionality, "facets of the self . . . are articulated as 'positions' in a multidimensional geography of power relations" *(Rose, 1997, p. 308)*, and identity is composed of multiple selves, including "race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, sexuality" *(Madge, 1993, p. 295)*. Similar to positionality, intersectionality considers the intersections of these multiple selves as facets of social identities through which knowledge is filtered and toward which oppression is often directed *(Crenshaw, 1989)*. These frameworks provide entrance into a critical understanding of the ways in which knowledge may be embodied and power exerted or directed in relationship to particular social identities *(Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 2006)*.

> JV: My multiple cultural identities are: White, female, American, homosexual, Christian, middle-class. I know that I have bias and bring that into the classroom, although I try to be objective. I have experienced very little discrimination and have always had the opportunity to succeed. Therefore, I am not sure that I can fully empathize with those who have been marginalized. I am sure that I allow or even espouse language in my classroom that is not always fair to others or that may paint an inaccurate picture of cultural identities that are unlike my own, even though I don't want that to happen.

Although a critical awareness of identity and privilege is necessary in order to disrupt the replication of oppression through educational practices *(Milner, 2007)*, connections and explorations of the influence of practitioner identity within CSL are not widely discussed within the current literature. Likewise, examples documenting the process of exploring practitioner positionality as part of taking on a critical stance seem to be missing from the body of work surrounding both traditional and critical service-learning. Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law *(2012)* draw specific parallels between CSL and CRT from a pedagogical stance, but this examination is not framed explicitly on the critical consciousness of those practicing service-learning. Donahue and Mitchell *(2010)* speak to the relationship between CSL and intersectionality and positionality of identity, albeit primarily from a student perspective.

Additionally, implications between practitioner positionality and the development of a critical stance through critical theory are an area of focus that is still largely unexplored within the literature. Butin *(2005, 2015)* and Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law *(2012)* have maneuvered the debate in this direction, calling on practitioners to examine their own criticality and commitment to upending systemic inequalities. Taylor *(2002)* also focused attention through the subjectivity and positionality of practitioners to some degree, but the focus remains on socially constructed and contested metaphors of service, falling short of articulating an explicit examination between practitioner identities and the tensions created by a shift toward CSL.

The literature that exists surrounding the intersection of critical theory and service-learning is emergent *(Butin, 2015; Donahue & Mitchell, 2010; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012)*, and gaps remain surrounding the relationship between practitioner positionality and taking a critical stance in service-learning efforts. Mitchell *(2015)* takes up this consideration, but as we discovered through this Fellowship Project, a knowledge gap exists among service-learning faculty surrounding critical theory and the iterative reflection process in which to interrogate one's positionality.

Grappling With Meaning and Implementation: A Process of Reflection and Discovery

Throughout our process we employed multiple modes of gathering reflections, information, and insights. To spark thoughts and discussion we used an iterative process through which we discussed a topic, identified gaps in knowledge, read and explored literature to address those gaps, discussed again, and identified new gaps in our knowledge. We found this process, as well as completing the assessment tools detailed in Table 1, helpful in identifying our own positionality and revealing gaps in our understanding of CSL. The instruments we used assess beliefs about justice, commitment to civic action, the presence of prejudice, and other relevant factors (see Table 1 for complete listing and scope of tools used). While completing these scales, we utilized the cognitive interviewing techniques of "think-aloud" and retrospective verbal probing based on those described by Willis *(1999)*.

Table 1. Assessment Scales

Title of scale	Reference	Key elements assessed	Description of scale
Global Belief in a Just World	Lipkus, I. *(1991)*	General belief that "people get what they deserve and deserve what they get"	Seven-item scale in booklet form, and responses range from strong agreement to strong disagreement
Universal Orientation Scale	Phillips & Ziller *(1997)*	Nonprejudicial attitudes—a universal orientation in interpersonal relationships in which people pay selective attention to the similarities between themselves and diverse others	20-item scale; asks respondents to rate perceptions of self/other similarities; responses on a five-point scale range from "does not describe me well" to "describes me very well"
Social Dominance Orientation Scale	Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle *(1994)*	Extent to which people prefer in-group dominance and superiority over out-groups	16-item scale with seven-point responses ranging from "(1)—very negative" to "(7)—very positive"
Civic Attitudes Scale	Mabry *(1998)*	Civic attitudes as they relate to community service	Five-item scale; responses ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement
Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire	Moely, Mercer, Ilustre, Miron, & McFarland *(2002)*	Attitudes, skills, and intentions of college students related to participation in service-learning	44-item scale; responses ranging from "(5)—strongly agree" to "(1)—strongly disagree"

> But where I really struggle is, okay, so how do I get into this bigger stuff, this deeper . . . The Universal Orientation. The Global Belief In A Just World. The Social Dominance scale. Where does that fit into my class and how do I . . . As a person that is also not confident in addressing those issues themselves, how do I enter that into my curriculum and engage with my students? And then, I don't have a good answer for that. I think that's where I've come to all this. *(Lindsey Payne [LP], director of service-learning, and assistant professor of environmental and ecological engineering at Purdue University, group transcript, November 4, 2016)*

Additionally, as part of the iterative process, guided by the questions listed in Table 2, we engaged in prolonged written critical reflection *(Ash & Clayton, 2009; Clayton & Ash, 2005; Fook, 2007)*. Although we made noticeable advances in collective and individual understanding of key issues in CSL, it became apparent throughout discussions that we each learned different things from the experience, at different times, and for different reasons. Expanded individual reflections on our particular experiences helped to identify key elements of transition in knowledge and understanding, which, we hope, might be of use to others interested in taking a similar journey related to CSL. Furthermore, by incorporating autoethnographies into our repertoire of critical reflection activities, we intended to "write both selves and others into our larger story" *(Denshire, 2013, p. 1)* and invited the reader to join us in the conversation and, perhaps, join the journey. This process led to the identification of key insights, "ah-ha" moments, and recurring themes in our development and understanding of key concepts of CSL and positionality.

We reviewed one another's independent reflections and autoethnographies, revisited recordings and transcripts from discussions, and posed questions to one another. This continual return to our narratives and responses formed the basis of our method in developing the critical coconstructed autoethnographies *(Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012)*. While we each authored our own stories, this process allowed us to also author the stories of one another and to explore more deeply the common themes and "ah-ha" moments described in the following sections. Although not explicitly stated as a goal for interpreting and drawing conclusions from the data, this process aligned the cohort toward organically adopting a consensus approach. At each stage of analysis, we grappled with interpretation together until each Fellow agreed with the understandings and implications. As we proceeded, we drafted ideas and models that we then further reflected upon, and which serve as the foundation of those shared here.

Table 2. Written Reflection Prompts

Questions used to prompt written reflection
What are my multiple cultural identities and how do they inform and/or effect my practice?*
How do I create a physically, intellectually, socio-emotionally, and culturally safe and inclusive learning community?*
How will I acquire accurate information about the cultural histories and community practice of my students?*
How are you feeling about/what are your thoughts on the process we have taken thus far—researching critical theories, critical service-learning, critical reflection?
How are you feeling about/what are your thoughts on the intersection of/between critical theory and critical service-learning? How does critical reflection fit in? Does it fit? If so, where? If not, why not?
What is your current knowledge level of critical theory, critical service-learning, critical reflection? Has it changed? If so, how has it changed? How do you feel about your current level of knowledge?
If you were not part of this learning community and were trying to work through this on your own, how would this experience potentially be different? Better? Worse? Would you keep going? Why/why not?
Where do I want to go (progress) from here with regards to my understanding and use of critical service-learning (and critical theory)?**

* *Question prompts from Great Lakes Equity Center, 2016.*

** *Question prompts utilized for autoethnographies.*

Finding a Path Forward: Reorienting Our Understandings of Critical Service-Learning

In sharing our iterative process to determine pathways for moving beyond traditional service-learning toward a greater understanding and implementation of CSL, we hope that others may also join in the journey. Through participation in critical analysis and self-reflection, we realized that Mitchell's *(2008)* tenets of CSL are, perhaps, far more difficult to achieve than we originally thought and that the language of achievement might itself be limiting our understanding of CSL as a continual process as opposed to a determinant destination. Working from a social change perspective to challenge the existing structures that reproduce social inequities while building authentic relationships and redistributing power is not something that can be accomplished in a semester *(Mitchell, 2008)* or a year; perhaps this is not even something that can be fully realized.

> TK: Having developed a somewhat deeper understanding of critical service-learning (CSL) this year, I

> realize that truly bringing about social change (the key goal of CSL) may not be possible in a semester, a year, or ever. . . .

Just as traditional service-learning has pitfalls *(Butin, 2005; Boyle-Baise, 1998; Cruz, 1990; Mitchell, 2008)*, CSL also has limitations *(Butin, 2015; Cahaus & Levkoe, 2017)*. Both the instructor and the student may enter into a project with the ideal of achieving Mitchell's tenets of CSL, but Mitchell *(2008)* acknowledges that "the types of service experiences that allow students to consider social change and transformation may not bring immediate results" *(p. 54)*. In fact, such experiences may initially discourage both the student and the instructor, as results and impacts may be delayed or unseen *(Doerr, 2011)*.

Maintaining a focus on immediate and concrete outcomes also runs the risk of ignoring the slow yet necessary process of working for social change, a process that demands a more full understanding of the complexities of situations and the richness of community members' embodied experiences. Therefore, a redefinition of what it means to *do* CSL is needed. Orientations centered on the practice of CSL rather than the dominant conceptualization of CSL as an outcome may be more helpful. Furthermore, we argue CSL is a means of both developing and enacting a critical consciousness. CSL is itself iterative and reflexive, simultaneously based on the knowledge, experiences, relationships, and critical awareness of those who are engaged in it while also capable of producing movements toward social change, authentic relationships, and the redistribution of power. In this sense, we believe it is more accurate to position CSL as a range of movements and strategies oriented toward *approaching* Mitchell's tenets rather than the arrival at them.

Approaching Critical Service-Learning: A Conceptual Model

> LP: I teach a service-learning course centered around stormwater management and the health of a local river. . . . This year I found myself on a journey past typical good will and good deeds that arise from traditional service-learning courses and toward a more critical perspective. . . . How do you motivate students to be actively engaged citizens . . . to be critical of society's injustices, striving for a better, healthier, more equitable, and sustainable world? How do you motivate them when all

> you can think about is your own White privilege and how it has sheltered you from many of the very issues you are asking them to rail against?

Butin *(2015)* argued that the desire to do justice is an action in itself and therefore is a positive step even if the goal of justice is not accomplished. We came to this same conclusion with the recognition that we were not yet at the point where we could successfully implement CSL. By acknowledging that we may never actually accomplish the end goal of systemic social change, we freed ourselves from the demand to *do* CSL. We concluded that *approaching* CSL is essential to *doing* CSL. Approaching CSL, by which we mean acquiring knowledge to advance closer to Mitchell's tenets of CSL, started for us with developing a thorough understanding of the concepts of CSL and critical theory, followed by the identification of our own individual positionality. What we discovered is that one cannot attempt to help students develop a social change perspective without first understanding one's own positionality in an attempt to develop a critical consciousness. The path toward social change, redistribution of power, and authentic relationships must start with the practitioner: In what ways are we orienting ourselves toward working toward these practices, allowing ourselves to imagine they are possible, or investigating how our own identities may be undermining these efforts?

Approaching CSL is a voyage of discovery. The model (see Figure 1) depicts a metaphor for our journey in the areas of knowledge acquisition and understanding of CSL. At first, CSL appears as a destination, as a discrete point in the distance. However, as one approaches that point it becomes apparent that it is not a discrete point but is actually a line, viewed end-on. Continuing to approach and explore that line, in turn, reveals that there might be an additional dimension, and that the line is actually a circle, viewed from the side, and that the approach is actually on a spectrum allowing a greater range of movement. But even further exploration reveals that the circle is actually a three-dimensional object with a measure of depth and breadth and multiple pathways providing multiple approaches. This latter view makes the initial understanding of what we thought was a determinate point now unrecognizable. However, as we draw closer to our more sophisticated concept of CSL, we also begin to recognize there is no end, only a new way of seeing it that begins to emerge as we progress. This, we believe, explains our journey of approaching CSL, and as long as we are willing to investigate our own location along this path and are

willing to embark on a philosophical shift in our understanding, it doesn't matter at what point along the spectrum one enters the process.

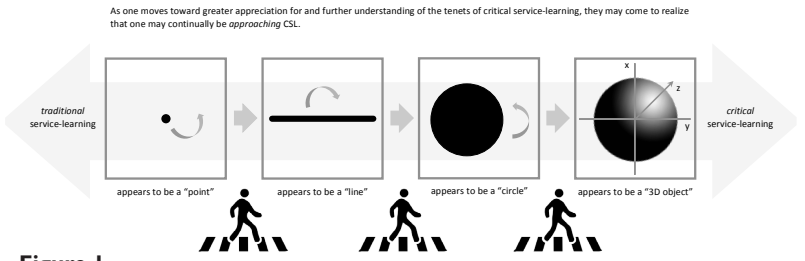

Figure 1.

At first we viewed enacting CSL as a destination—a point that we could somehow reach at the end of a semester or year. But through the iterative process of review, discussion, interpretation, and further review, we began to see the continuum of lenses through which CSL can occur, and, ultimately, the multidimensional, layered complexities of implementing CSL. It is only because we were able to interrogate our own positionality that we were able to achieve a more sophisticated understanding of our own critical consciousness and how that informs our individual CSL stance.

This iterative reflection process, which we found vital to ensuring that we were indeed approaching CSL, became a way for each of us to identify our own positionalities. For example, as conversation developed during the Fellowship Retreat in November 2016, where we discussed the tools highlighted in Table 1, we discovered the influence of past experience on present perspective. Additionally, we were able to pinpoint the various lenses through which we view our own and others' circumstances.

> JV noted, "I know exactly what I used to come from. . . . Where I'm at now in my life is very different from where I was 20 years ago in terms of my beliefs, my experiences. . . ."
>
> LW said, "Some of these questions I looked at very much through a professional lens. And then others I looked at from a very broad, holistic, community, world perspective."
>
> Likewise, TK said, "I'm with you. I didn't distinguish how I thought about [it] personally versus professionally, but the notes that I write sometimes reflect my personal perspective, or my perspective is more formed

> more by being an academic."
>
> LP added, "But it is kind of, 'What is your identity?' And then, 'How does your identity then manifest itself into your actions, your classes . . . ?' So on and so forth. And does it matter if you're a staff person or a faculty person, and does that force your identity to go different ways?"

Ultimately, these discussions amplified the realization that we enter a classroom with our own biases and our own perspectives. Our own personal positionality may determine the extent to which we can successfully implement CSL. Having a conversation around the questions on the assessment scales listed in Table 1 helped us to understand the critical nature of self-reflection and the importance of recognizing our own positionality. It also provided us with a roadmap for what we might do as a CSL practitioner to guide students' understanding of their own positionality. Our students, too, can approach Mitchell's tenets of CSL, but may not realize those outcomes within the confines of a single course or even their entire undergraduate experience. As Ashworth and Bourelle *(2014)* noted, "attempting to increase students' awareness of their own attitudes may be more of a realistic outcome" *(p. 75)*.

> TK noted: If, through my efforts, students adopt a more critical perspective of the social structures in our society and a better understanding of how those structures advantage/disadvantage people differently, then those students might go on to make changes that address those inequities throughout their lives.
>
> Similarly, JV concluded: While I have learned a lot during this time [as a Fellow] and am grateful for the patience, guidance and support of my colleagues, I still feel like I have a long way to go! It has been a great relief to me to discover that I may never even get there—and that is OK.

A Toolkit for Approaching CSL

One of the key factors we discovered through this Fellowship Project and its iterative process is that approaching CSL is a difficult and time-consuming task. We realized that, although we were fortunate to be part of a learning community as a means to facilitate this journey, not everyone will have such an opportunity to engage

with a cohort and explore these ideas in depth. This journey has shown us that there may be many other practitioners who also want to approach CSL, and we cannot overstate the value of a learning community and the discussions and reflection afforded within such a group. However, when such a community is not readily available, it may be useful to have a toolkit of resources that can facilitate the process of knowledge gain, self-reflection, and, ultimately, philosophical shift toward CSL. Therefore we assembled a toolkit *(http://libguides.marian.edu/CSL)* of preexisting resources, which include literature and assessment scales, reflection prompts, and personal reflections that can serve as a guide for others on a similar journey. The toolkit is intended to serve as a repository of resources that might help others approach CSL as we did throughout this journey.

The selected readings in the toolkit are designed to support a novice in gaining a deeper understanding of CSL and how it relates to critical theory and positionality. The toolkit also includes information on select assessment scales that one can use to begin to identify their own positionality as a practitioner and, potentially, to help students identify their positionality as well. These scales became especially salient during the middle of the iterative process and Fellowship Project as we realized that the deeper the understanding we gained of our own positionality, the more progress we each could make in approaching CSL—moving from the discrete point on the model to the three-dimensional circular object with a measure of depth and breadth that makes the initial point unrecognizable. The toolkit contains the Fellows' autoethnographies in an attempt not only to share our journeys, but also to bring other practitioners into a shared virtual learning community. These autoethnographies detail the Fellows' learning process, as well as their plans for future personal and professional growth.

> JV: So, my aim will be to take this in small steps. I intend to find ways to insert pieces of what I have learned about positionality, social justice, and critical service-learning into my project. I wish I could say I had a solid plan for where to start. But I cannot. I can begin by formulating a plan.
>
> LP: I knew I needed a clear plan for developing my own understanding and ability to implement the foundations of critical service-learning in my course. As fellows we talked about the journey and how we might approach critical service-learning, but I needed to put in the work. I also needed to accept that per-

haps, truly fostering critical, reflective perspectives in one semester just might not be possible. I had tried to integrate probing questions into my students' reflection assignments that would begin to spark some awareness in regards to their own positionality and bias as they approach their projects and project partners. We also had a few moments of in-class discussion that touched upon these issues, but I never felt like I was moving the dial. I just didn't know how.

Concluding Thoughts

Our intent with this essay is to convey the process we employed in our Fellowship year in the hope that our experiences might serve as a model for others as they seek to approach CSL. We do not claim to be experts. Instead, we attempted, to the extent we were able, to investigate our own embodied experiences *(Collins, 2009)* and blur the line *(Denshire, 2013)*, using this as a basis for situated knowledge and biases related to approaching CSL. We have invited the reader to listen in on our thoughts and conversations, and watch as we try to understand, unpack, wrestle, and learn, and while we were guided by Milner *(2007)* and his call for researchers "to consider dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen" *(p. 388)*, we understand this process of self-reflection as one that is ongoing and never complete. This process is guided by the intersections of our identities and positions of privilege we occupy as White practitioners, and we recognize we cannot "speak for that which we have not felt" *(hooks, 2000, p. 50)*. Although we did reflect on and discuss our own experiences of privilege and our positionality, we recognize that the primary focus of this essay has been Mitchell's tenet of orientation toward social change. In seeking to share with others interested in creating meaningful change through CSL pedagogy, we have limited our discussion of how we grappled with the privilege we each experience in our lives. Furthermore, given the insular nature of such a fellowship, actually building authentic relationships in the community was beyond the scope of what we could accomplish, although, again, we discussed frequently how we might each work toward such authenticity in our own CSL efforts.

During our journey, it became clear that achieving CSL as presented by Mitchell *(2008, 2015)* is a daunting goal—one involving a long, and at times seemingly impossible, process, especially within the structures of 16-week courses. We also discovered that the concept of achievement focused our attention away from the devel-

opment of a critical consciousness and interrogation of our own assumptions and toward the realization of our goal. This language of *achievement* allowed us to frame our efforts in terms of a CSL finish line and to maintain a focus on this terminus rather than understanding the importance of the journey. In this essay we have articulated our model of approaching CSL, described the importance of positionality and interrogating one's own positionality in approaching CSL, and provided practical methods that faculty can use to begin their journey.

> TK concluded: While the world may not be changed by any one project I do or even any well-planned series of projects, the world may indeed be changed by unleashing a steady stream of college graduates into the world who have the desire to make a difference and the beginnings of the skills necessary to do so. If I work to foster a love of continued learning and the desire to think critically about what is going on, "my" graduates will, ideally, continue to grow and develop along the trajectory of CSL principles.
>
> ML also revealed: The future of critical service-learning for me is one defined by paradox: I will remain frustrated by its seeming inability to produce the change desired in the frame of my short attention, and I will remain committed to it and the slow drip of change I hope it provides because I believe it is the best chance we've got.

References

Ash, S. L., & Clayton, P. H. (2009). Generating, deepening, and documenting learning: The power of critical reflection in applied learning. *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education, 1*(1), 25–48.

Ashworth, E., & Bourelle, T. (2014). Utilizing critical service-learning pedagogy in the online classroom: Promoting social justice and effecting change? *Currents in Teaching and Learning, 7*(1), 64–79.

Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*(3), 251–263.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and persistence of racial inequality in America* (4th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach, 1*(1), 11–20.

Boyle-Baise, M. (1998). Community service learning for multicultural education: An exploratory study with preservice teachers. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 31*(2), 52–60.

Bringle, R. G., Games, R., Ludlum Foos, C., Osgood, R., & Osborne, R. (2000). Faculty fellows program: Enhancing integrated professional development through community service. *American Behavioral Scientist, 43*(5), 882–894.

Brown, D. M. (2001). *Pulling it together: A method for developing service-learning community partnerships based in critical pedagogy.* Washington, DC: Corporation for National Service.

Butin, D. W. (2005). Preface: Disturbing normalizations of service-learning. In D. W. Butin (Ed.), *Service-learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions* (pp. vii–xx). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Butin, D. (2015). Dreaming of justice: Critical service-learning and the need to wake up. *Theory Into Practice, 54*(1), 5–10.

Cahaus, M. C., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2017). Towards a critical service learning in geography education: Exploring challenges and possibilities through testimonio. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 41*(2), 246–263.

Cann, C. N., & DeMeulenaere, E. J. (2012). Critical co-constructed autoethnography. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies, 12*(2), 146–158. doi:10.1177/1532708611435214

Cipolle, S. (2004). Service-learning as counter-hegemonic practice: Evidence pro and con. *Multicultural Education, 11*(3), 12–23.

Clayton, P., & Ash, S. (2005). Reflection as a key component in faculty development. *On the Horizon, 13*(3), 161–169. doi:10.1108/10748120510618187

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), Article 8. Retrieved from https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Cruz, N. (1990). A challenge to the notion of service. In J. C. Kendall (Ed.), *Combining service and learning: A resource book for community and public service* (pp. 321–323). Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education.

DeMeulenaere, E. J., & Cann, C. N. (2013). Activist educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 19*(8), 552–565. doi:10.1177/1077800413494343

Denshire, S. (2013). Autoethnography. In *Sociopedia.isa* doi:10.1177/205684601351

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education.* London, England: Macmillan.

DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3*(3), 54–70.

Doerr, E. (2011). Cognitive dissonance in international service-learning: Possibilities and challenges for service-learning pedagogy. In B. J. Porfilio

& H. Hickman (Eds.), *Critical service-learning as revolutionary pedagogy: A project of student agency in action* (pp. 71–94). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Donahue, D. M., & Mitchell, T. D. (2010). Critical service learning as a tool for identity exploration. *Diversity & Democracy, 13*(2), 16–17.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography.* Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira.

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research 36*(4), 273–290.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254703924

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2005). Autoethnography, personal narratives, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1–32). London, England: Sage.

Eyler, J., Giles, D. E., Jr., Stenson, C. M., & Gray, C. J. (2001). *At a glance: What we know about the effects of service-learning on college students, faculty, institutions and communities, 1993–2000: Third Edition* (Higher Education Paper 139). Retrieved from Service Learning DigitalCommons@UNO website: http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered/139

Fook, J. (2007). Reflective practice and critical reflection. In J. Lishman (Ed.), *Handbook for practice learning in social work and social care* (2nd ed., pp. 440–454). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Foucault, M. (1966). *The order of things.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Freire, P. (2005). *Education for critical consciousness.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Furco, A. (2011). Foreword. In T. Stewart & N. Webster (Eds.), *Problematizing service-learning: Critical reflections for development and action* (pp. ix–xi). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Great Lakes Equity Center. (2016, March). *Equity dispatch: Becoming an equity-oriented educator through critical self-reflection.* Retrieved January 27, 2017, from http://glec.education.iupui.edu/Images/Newsletters/March%202016%20Equity%20Dispatch%20PDF.pdf

Herzberg, B. (1994). Community service and critical teaching. *College Composition and Communication, 45*(3), 307–319.

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman?* New York, NY: South End Press.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* New York, NY: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47–68.

Lipkus, I. (1991). The construction and preliminary validation of a global belief in a just world scale and the exploratory analysis of the multidimensional belief in a just world scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 12*(11), 1171–1178.

Mabry, J. B. (1998). Pedagogical variations in service-learning and student outcomes: How time, contact, and reflection matter. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 5*(1), 32–47.

Madge, C. (1993). Boundary disputes: Comments on Sidaway (1992). *Area, 25(*3), 294–299.

Marthakis, N. B., Eisenhauer, M. J., & Jamison, J. R. (2013). The faculty fellows program: A model for faculty development and interdisciplinary partnerships through service-learning. In M. R. Wiegand & C. Lan (Eds.), *Service-learning in higher education: Connecting the global to the local* (pp. 45–52). Indianapolis, IN: University of Indianapolis Press.

Marullo, S. (1999). Sociology's essential role: Promoting critical analysis in service-learning. In J. Ostrow, G. Hesser, & S. Enos (Eds.), *Cultivating the sociological imagination: Concepts and models for service-learning in sociology.* Washington, DC: American Association of Higher Education.

Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher, 36*(7), 388–400.

Mitchell, T. (2008). Traditional vs. critical service-learning: Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 14*(2), 50–65.

Mitchell, T. D. (2015). Using a critical service-learning approach to facilitate civic identity development. *Theory Into Practice, 54*(1), 20–28.

Mitchell, T. D., Donahue, D. M., & Young-Law, C. (2012). Service learning as a pedagogy of Whiteness. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(4), 612–629.

Moely, B. E., Mercer, S. H., Ilustre, V., Miron, D., & McFarland, M. (2002). Psychometric properties and correlates of the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ): A measure of students' attitudes related to service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 8*(2), 15–26.

Phillips, S. T., & Ziller, R. C. (1997). Toward a theory and measure of the nature of nonprejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*(2), 420–434.

Pompa, L. (2002). Service-learning as crucible: Reflections on immersion, context, power, and transformation. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 9*(1), 67–76.

Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*(4), 741–763.

Robinson, T. (2000). Dare the school build a new social order? Michigan *Journal of Community Service Learning, 7*(1), 142–157.

Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21*(3), 305–320.

Stevens, M. C., & Jamison, J. R. (2012). Finding the balance: Reflections on service engagement in faculty and campus development. *Journal of Public Scholarship in Higher Education, 2*, 15–30.

Taylor, J. (2002). Metaphors we serve by: Investigating the conceptual metaphors framing national and community service and service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 9*(1), 45–57.

Wade, R. C. (2000). From a distance: Service-learning and social justice. In C. R. O'Grady (Ed.), *Integrating service learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities* (pp. 93–111). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Willis, G. B. (1999). *Cognitive interviewing: A "how to" guide.* Retrieved from http://www.chime.ucla.edu/publications/docs/cognitive%20interviewing%20guide.pdf

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 193–209.

About the Authors

Mark Latta is the director of the Writing Center, instructor of English, and public literacy coordinator at Marian University (Indianapolis). His research and teaching bring together composition, collaborative inquiry, participatory-based research, and critical literacy. He earned his English M.A. at Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis, where he is also completing his Ph.D. in urban education studies.

Tina M. Kruger is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Multidisciplinary Studies at Indiana State University. Her research focuses on promoting well-being throughout the lifespan through a multidisciplinary, human rights–based approach. She earned her Ph.D. in Gerontology from the University of Kentucky.

Lindsey Payne is the director of service-learning at Purdue University and teaches a service-learning course in environmental and ecological engineering. Her research sits at the intersection of sustainability, teaching and learning, and engagement, focusing on transdisciplinary decision-making in community-based design. She earned her Ph.D. in ecological sciences and engineering from Purdue University.

Laura Weaver is the director of programs and member development at Indiana Campus Compact. Her research interests include how to institutionalize community engagement practices, and the development of community engagement professionals. She earned her M.S. Ed. from Northern Illinois University.

Jennifer L. VanSickle is currently professor of sport management and program director for the Sport Management program at the University of Indianapolis. Her research interests include community engagement, volunteer and event management, and