CRITICALLY ENGAGED CIVIC LEARNING

A Comprehensive Restructuring of Service-Learning Approaches

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Abstract

This article contributes to a long-standing conversation about the implementation of service-learning by proposing an updated revision for the 21st century: critically engaged civic learning (CECL). The term service-learning is problematic as it invokes inequitable power dynamics that inherently privilege one group over another, with more privileged groups providing "service" to marginalized groups (Bortolin, 2011). CECL shifts service-learning from a student-centered pedagogy to an equity-based framework that views all constituent stakeholders as invested partners in the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of CECL initiatives and is founded on redistributed power and authority to promote civic learning and social change. CECL is structured by six guiding principles: social justice, power dynamics, community, civic learning objectives, reflexivity, and sustainability. Consequently, we argue that CECL can be seen across four overarching outcomes—increased self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-empowerment; increased awareness of civic agency; better understanding of community; and workforce preparation—which can be assessed through the CECL Inventory for Social Change (CECL-ISC) (Awkward et al., 2021).

This article contributes to a long-standing conversation about the implementation of service-learning by proposing an updated revision for the 21st century: critically engaged civic learning (CECL). Service-learning has been embedded in universities and communities for close to a century, where it has been framed as a movement, educational phenomenon, pedagogy, theory, and field (Giles & Eyler, 1994). However, the term *service-learning* is problematic as it invokes inequitable power dynamics that inherently privilege one group over another, with more privileged groups providing "service" to marginalized groups (Bortolin, 2011; Mitchell, 2007). This criticism attacks the epicenter of service-learning, which often places emphasis on "servicing" others rather than collaborating to resolve issues that affect everyone in the community, including the educational institution. This framing reinforces structural and institutional inequalities in the community and reifies the inequitable power dynamics that persist throughout all our social institutions (Butin, 2006; Stoecker, 2016).

In response to these criticisms and building upon the foundational work of service-learning scholars (Brown, 2001; T. Mitchell, 2008; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), we propose a comprehensive restructuring of service-learning approaches toward the critically engaged civic learning framework. CECL shifts service-learning from a student-centered pedagogy to an equity-based framework that views all constituent stakeholders as invested partners and is founded on redistributed power and authority to promote civic learning and social change. Due to its focus on equity, CECL actualizes contemporary calls for leveraging the cultural wealth of students and communities and incorporating anti-racist practices that work to decolonize community-engaged practices. CECL is rooted in six guiding principles: social justice, power dynamics, community, civic learning objectives, reflexivity, and sustainability and can be seen across four overarching outcomes: increased self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-empowerment; increased awareness of civic agency; better understanding of community; and workforce preparation. Throughout this article we discuss each of these principles and their foundations rooted in service-learning scholarship and interdisciplinary fields of study. We also briefly introduce the CECL Inventory for Social Change (CECL-ISC) (Awkward et al., 2021), an assessment instrument designed to evaluate the outcomes of meaningful and equitable community-campus CECL partnerships.

In addition to proposing the CECL framework, we argue for a paradigmatic shift in service-learning pedagogy from a student-centered approach to an equity-based approach through what we call the stakeholder cloverleaf. Through the cloverleaf, representatives from each stakeholder group (community members, community organizations, college students, and faculty and community engagement professionals in higher education[1]) have redistributed power and equitable authority in the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of a CECL initiative. In this study, community (as a people and place, and the relationships inherent therein) is broad and intentionally inclusive of all people who live, learn, work, play, and have impact on the local community, to include all stakeholders as well as individuals not directly involved in the initiatives. It is important to note that while CECL initiatives have the ability to impact macro-level social changes, the CECL framework has a micro-level focus on social change, primarily focusing on individual change.

Literature Review

First coined in 1967, the term *service-learning* has endured "definitional anarchy" for most of its history (Sandmann, 2008); however, within this anarchy are common components that are found in most definitions: course-based credit-bearing educational experiences, student participation in organized service activities, and student reflection on experiences (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Inherent within these components is an emphasis on service and a student-centered approach. The CECL framework emerges from over 20 years of scholarship that has encouraged the growth and transformation of service-learning definitions and approaches over time. Specifically stemming from community engagement, critical service-learning, and civic learning scholarship, CECL further develops the best practices identified in these areas by focusing on how individuals undertaking

1. Community engagement professionals are defined as "professional or administrative staff whose primary responsibility is to support community engagement initiatives within American higher education" (Dostilio & Perry, 2017, p. 3).

community-engaged work can move away from service-oriented and student-centered experiences and redesign their approach toward more authentic and equitable engagement.

Community Engagement

To better understand the context in which we developed the CECL framework, it is imperative to take a larger step back and look at the origins of community engagement in higher education, which predates service-learning by centuries (Daniels et al., 2017). Some scholars have argued that community engagement has been a focus in higher education since its inception in the United States: "Colonial colleges, land-grant universities, historically black colleges, and community colleges all include community engagement in their missions" (Hollander et al., 2017, p. 21). Some of these institutions included educational programs in partnership with settlement house activities in the early 1900s, immigrant education programs in the 1920s, and New Deal work programs in the 1930s (Stanton & Giles, Jr., 2017). Since the civil rights movement in the 1960s, community engagement has been an embedded value and focus in ethnic studies programs, where "students participate in community and link experience with education in order to consider and grapple with the multiple facets of settler colonialism and capitalism" (Yep & Mitchell, 2017, p. 295). These histories and values have shaped our approach to CECL.

According to Brown, educational institutions "do not simply have the responsibility to help shape the civic engagement of individuals such as students (and staff and faculty), but also have the responsibility of identifying the causes and solutions of social issues that have real and devastating impact[s] on communities" (2001, pp. 15–16). However, according to Yamamura and Koth (2018), "contemporary community engagement efforts in higher education focus more on student learning and faculty research over pursuing measurable change on larger societal issues" (p. 3). Evans et al.'s (2009) work on voice in communities of color in "town/gown" projects calls for partnerships that encourage institutions to work with communities of color to understand their clearly defined needs and that ask faculty and college students to recognize community expertise and assets. Focusing on community assets through asset-mapping and other information-gathering activities is critical to the development of authentic community/campus partnerships (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014).

Responsible community engagement requires a critical lens that recognizes how even well-intentioned efforts in vulnerable communities can have damaging effects. Similar to the epistemological foundations of community-based participatory research and community-engaged research, critical community engagement "reiterates the connection between critical analysis and action, or theory and practice . . . in a way that allows us to both relate to and challenge different positions within the civic engagement movement" (Costa & Leong, 2012, p. 174). This level of reflexivity is critical to authentic, meaningful community engagement and social change.

Critical Service-Learning

In 2008, Mitchell cohesively wove together the emergent literature of that time, which advocated for a critical approach to service-learning. In her literature review, she highlighted distinctions between "traditional" and "critical" service-learning, where traditional service-learning was defined as "community service action tied to learning goals and ongoing reflection about the experience" (p. 50) and the critical approach focused more on social justice and social change, power redistribution, and building authentic relationships. Coupled with a social change approach, critical service-learning requires a shift in how projects and assignments are created to ensure they "challenge students to investigate and understand the root causes of social problems and the courses of action necessary to challenge and change the structures that perpetuate those problems" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 53). Critical service-learning also emphasizes a focus on power redistribution, shifting away from a deficit-based perspective of the community toward one that incorporates and values community assets. Lastly, critical service-learning focuses on building authentic relationships based on connection.

Since 2008, many scholars have added to this conversation, bolstering the critical service-learning framework (Butin, 2015; Ganss & Baker, 2014; Kajner et al., 2013; Latta et al., 2018; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). Of these scholars, Mitchell has been a key figure in this conversation, looking at the perspectives of students of color in service-learning (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009), the embedded nature of Whiteness in the service-learning pedagogy (Mitchell et al., 2012), and the importance of decolonizing community-engaged work (Yep & Mitchell, 2017). In addition, scholars such as Butin (2015) have criticized critical service-learning scholars for too quickly declaring the pedagogy a success without assessing and fulfilling the social change goals individuals set out to achieve. Latta et al. (2018) also argue that critical service-learning (CSL) should be placed on a spectrum where practitioners may approach, but not necessarily achieve, social change in communities. Underlying this call is a move to "unsettle critical service-learning and produce work that is answerable to those outside of higher education's walls" (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019, p. 43).

Civic Learning

Critics have cited a collective departure from civic education in service-learning, which has limited the creation of an informed and engaged community (Evans et al., 2019; Kiely, 2005; Norris et al., 2017). According to Thomas and Brower (2017), colleges and universities have increasingly provided students with a wide range of community service and experiential learning opportunities, but those initiatives have not cut across all disciplines and do not focus on the knowledge and skills necessary for a healthy democratic culture. As a result, many practitioners have called for a resurgence of service-learning that reconnects democratic principles, civic engagement, and experiential learning (Saltmarsh, 2005). This requires the development of meaningful civic learning objectives that are both intentional and assessable, for which teaching that facilitates the development of civic knowledge, skills, and values can cultivate an informed and engaged community that is oriented toward social change (Bringle & Clayton, 2012). This also requires long-term, sustainable commitments to the community

in order to build authentic and equitable relationships that support the growth of civic knowledge and skills (Tryon et al., 2008).

Institutionalized and statewide movements are reinvigorating interest in implementing and supporting meaningful civic learning. For example, the Association of American Colleges and Universities' National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement released *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* in 2012, which called for emphasizing "the civic significance of preparing students with knowledge and for action" (p. 3). Heeding this call, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to establish civic learning as a goal for all undergraduates in public higher education (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2014). The Massachusetts Policy on Civic Learning charged campuses to develop action plans that embed civic learning in the curriculum, including ways to measure and report student learning outcomes.

The process of infusing civic knowledge, skills, and values into the curriculum facilitates a civic imagination or "the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions" (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 5). An active civic imagination allows an individual "to see oneself as a civic agent capable of making change" and engage with others around shared interests and goals (p. 5). College students and community members alike can consider ways of improving society and understand themselves as agents of change by imagining what change looks like in their community and how they can join a larger collective of individuals "whose perspectives and experiences are different than one's own" (p. 5). The integration of an active civic imagination into the curriculum creates an opportunity to reify civic knowledge, skills, and values into real-world spaces and, ultimately, the possibility for change.

Identifying Key Principles for Equitable Community Engagement

Using these strands of literature and a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1973, 2000; hooks, 1994) as a guiding framework for authentic and equitable engagement practice, one of the authors co-designed a community-engaged project in 2016 in which she analyzed the relationship of critical service-learning, media production, and civic engagement through ethnography, surveys, and interviews. After the completion of the first semester of the project, seven best practices of equitable community engagement stemming from the aforementioned literature began to be identified: social justice and civic focused, community based, academic and civic learning objectives, power dynamics, reflexive learning, sustainability, and reciprocity (later merged with power dynamics). The CECL framework was ultimately created based on these strands of literature, the findings of this case study, and informal discussions with other community-engaged scholars undertaking similar projects.

The author's project was titled the SPS Civic Media Project and was a collaboration between a mid-size university and three local public schools (grades 3–8) that took place over five semesters from 2016 to 2018. The collaboration was initiated to address a larger social history of residential segregation in the community that augmented a racial school segregation problem and biased public perception of "good" versus "bad" public schools

in the district. The stakeholders for this project were public school teachers/principals (community organization), public school students (community members), university students, and a university professor. During this project, university students enrolled in a media literacy course co-designed and co-created civic media projects with public school students that addressed local social justice issues, such as systemic racism in the community; the projects were subsequently disseminated to help raise awareness of those issues in the community.

Community, Social Justice, and Civic Learning Objectives

The project was initiated by the public school district looking to collaborate on topics of media literacy, media production, and social justice. The identified social justice issues (e.g., media literacy, systemic racism, immigration, etc.) preexisted the collaboration and were the central bond of the project across students, schools, and teachers. The professor, teachers, and occasionally principals at each school would meet prior to each semester to establish shared goals and expectations for the collaboration that would meet identified needs, such as how the project would meet Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education English Language Arts standards for public school students, academic and civic learning objectives for university students, and identified community needs (e.g., implicit bias in the community). Once the semester began, the university and public school students were brought into the co-design process by identifying their project scope, content, and design. While the teachers and professor initially took the lead on shaping the infrastructure for the project (schedule, timing, resources, etc.), the students were invited to redirect the project in real time to meet their personal and educational needs. Co-design meetings were also beneficial in taking an assets-based approach to the collaboration to identify each stakeholder's existing assets (e.g., knowledge, experience, funding, production equipment) and how such assets could be leveraged to buttress the success of the collaboration.

Power Dynamics

Through the co-design process, stakeholders attempted to create reciprocity and flatten hierarchical power dynamics; however, the professor and teachers realized that although they made every attempt to break down power hierarchies, the educational systems upheld certain dynamics they were unable to change, such as the reinforcement of traditional teacher-student authority relations. This in turn impacted the self-perception of being an authority by various stakeholders at moments throughout the project, particularly with the youngest stakeholders. However, the teachers and professor were effective at co-creating a space of shared authority among all of the stakeholders, which centered on the public school students' content knowledges, the university students' technological knowledges, and the teacher and professor's powers of institutional access. Also, the power dynamics between university and public school students were primarily flattened as students were dependent on one another's knowledges to complete their project: the university students were dependent on the public school students' content knowledge, and the public school students were dependent on the university students' technological knowledge. Together, all stakeholders worked to chip away at social issues that were bigger than any one entity alone.

Reflexivity

This project moved away from passive student reflection typical of service-learning in which students might engage in one post-initiative reflection toward active reflexivity that occurred iteratively throughout the collaboration. This reflexive practice asked individuals to account for their positionality within the world and this project context specifically and to critically reflect on how the project impacted them and how they in turn were impacting the project continuously and in real time. When the stakeholders engaged in the reflexive learning experience, they continuously reflected on their learning and engagement, which shaped their experience going forward as well as their understanding of themselves as civic agents.

Sustainability

Lastly, from the very beginning of the project's inception, sustainability was a key focus. When the SPS School District approached the professor with a collaborative opportunity, the invitation stemmed from a decades-long history and relationship between the district and university (long before the professor was hired to work there). Over time, a civic ecology was created between the district and university, involving professors across disciplines and teachers across content areas. The professor was one piece of that active relationship, and the SPS Civic Media Project was one of many projects that were produced. For this specific project, the school district and professor took a long-term approach and helped maintain the project over the course of two and a half years, involving nearly 300 students in total. Because the project tackled large social issues such as systemic racism, it was important to the stakeholders to create continuity within the project beyond one semester. The stakeholders knew they were not the first to address the issue and would not be the last, but they wanted to contribute new perspectives and voices to the conversation that were not frequently heard (i.e., youth voices).

CECL Principles

Based on the best practice scholarship outlined in our literature review, the findings of this case study, and informal discussions with other community-engaged scholars undertaking similar projects, we identified six guiding CECL principles that can serve as a foundation for meaningful community-engaged work that aims to effect social change within communities (see Figure 1). The co-creation of this framework among all the authors, to include the community partner author, was also guided by CECL principles from start to finish, for which each perspective and knowledge was equitably leveraged to formulate the final shape of this framework.

Each principle critically examines the roles of community members, community organizations, college students, and faculty and community engagement professionals as stakeholders who equitably co-design, implement, and evaluate CECL initiatives that work toward sustainable social change (see Figure 2). This framework relies on redistributed power and authority and shifts the privilege and responsibility of creating community engagement opportunities from the educational institution to each of the stakeholders to leverage the voices and perspectives of each group.

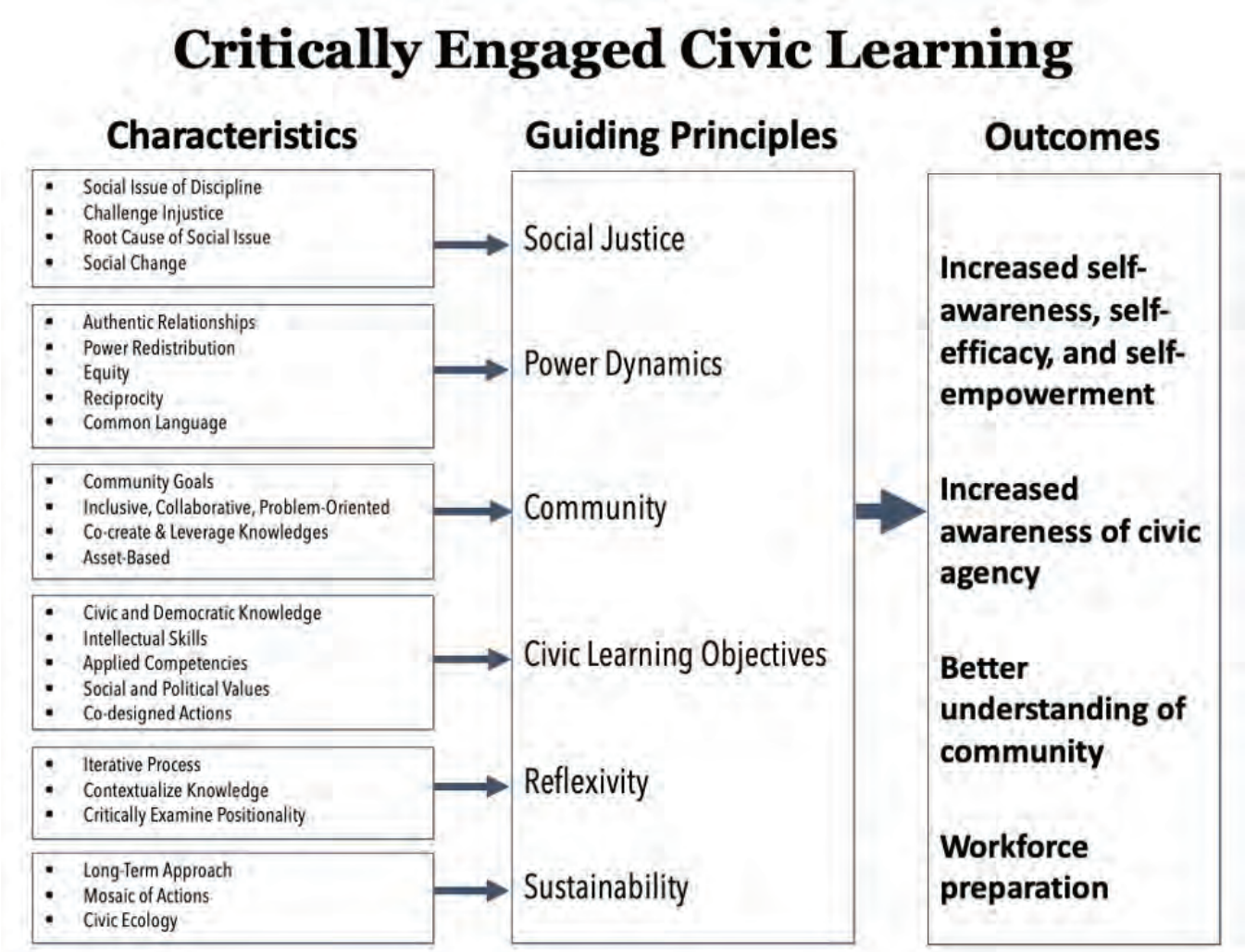

Figure 1

The CECL principles described herein guide the work of stakeholders who are committed to building authentic and equitable relationships with community organizations and community residents beyond campus. The CECL framework provides a lofty charge, and the people who do this work are often bound by institutional constraints, time, and limited resources. As such, the framework is not designed to be a checklist of "musts" but a set of principles that guides the work of stakeholders toward meaningful social change. Moreover, CECL practitioners need not be community organizers to engage in this work. While community organizers have a particular set of facilitation and advocacy skills, anyone with a commitment to building authentic and equitable relationships in service of social change can implement CECL.

Social Justice

As previously noted in the project description, the SPS Civic Media Project was intentionally designed to identify, research, and address social justice issues within the community. Operationally, this principle moves collabo-

Figure 2

rative projects involving community and campus stakeholders toward a social justice goal by enhancing access to opportunities for underserved constituents of the surrounding neighborhoods. Thus, the social justice principle encourages stakeholders to critically engage with the world around them to address the social justice issues of our time (Butin, 2007). We rely on Bell's definition of social justice education as both a process and goal, where "it begins with people's lived experience and works to foster a critical perspective and action directed toward social change" (1997, p. 14). As a process, we recognize that awareness needs to be drawn toward inequitable systems and efforts to reduce them (Richards-Schuster et al., 2019). As an outcome, we frame social justice to mean that all social identities should receive equitable access and opportunities in society.

Inherent in this principle is a focus on examining the root causes of social injustice, which may or may not be tied to a specific social issue within a given field or discipline; challenging injustice with the goal of promoting equity; and creating meaningful social change that is both incremental and holistic. The CECL framework encourages practitioners to use an approach to knowledge that transcends individuals, organizations, fields, and

disciplines to collaboratively and collectively examine, challenge, and address the causes of social injustice. Social justice also requires that our efforts actively work toward the goal of meaningful social change. As Mitchell (2008) argues, a social justice lens asks that we reframe "service" activities by shifting the focus from providing a service to alleviate a problem (i.e., service-learning) to collaborative engagement driven by the community that works incrementally toward holistic social change.

Power Dynamics

In the SPS Civic Media Project, the focus on equitable co-design and co-creation of the project provided a necessary lens through which to identify and confront existing power dynamics to create space for reciprocity and shared authority. The principle of power dynamics acknowledges that community-campus partnerships unfold within a larger social context that historically has been hierarchical in nature (i.e., the perception of "knowledgeable" academics providing expertise to "less knowledgeable" community organizations and members); however, we recognize a need to shift decision-making power dynamics away from faculty and institutions of higher education and toward community stakeholders and their experiential knowledge (Mitchell, 2008). Therefore, inherent in this principle is a focus on several interdependent factors: equitable access to decision-making and shared authority, a mutual respect among stakeholders, a shared language that can be used to examine social issues in ways that are more significant than any one entity can do alone, and mutually beneficial reciprocity for all stakeholders.

The power dynamics principle embraces a redistributive model that shares authority and recognizes expertise across all stakeholders on a project, confronting assumptions and stereotypes around competency and knowledge flowing in a single direction (Young, 2011). Doing so involves the inclusion of multiple perspectives that are given equitable weight with the understanding that knowledge takes multiple forms, and while some stakeholders are experts in one area, other stakeholders are experts in other areas, with those closest to an issue being the most knowledgeable and experienced to address it (Hayes & Cuban, 1997). This requires partners to engage in realistic, transparent, and accessible communication that is relatively free of jargon and involves all stakeholders at every step, from data collection to action planning.

Community

As we saw in the SPS Civic Media Project, the SPS district initiated the collaboration based on identified community needs, and community stakeholder assets were leveraged and built upon throughout the project in ways that validated their knowledges and perspectives. The community principle suggests that community engagement should stem largely from organizational community partners and community members rather than the interests of educational institutions. As previously stated, our definition of community (as a people and place) is broad and intentionally inclusive of all people who live, learn, work, play, and have impact on and shape the local community. This principle advocates for an asset-based approach to community work that facilitates the self-empowerment of each stakeholder by validating their knowledge and strengths (Longo et al., 2016), as opposed

to viewing them as deficient and in need. According to Hamerlinck and Plaut (2014), "Sustained positive change comes from strategies that play to residents' strengths and develop local leadership and ownership of the solutions to bring about change" (p. 2). They argue that asset-based community development must focus on the community members' assets and rely on them before turning to outside sources to fill the gaps.

This principle focuses on co-creating and leveraging multiple forms of knowledge, using an assets-based approach to examine social justice issues, and ensuring a multidirectional flow of knowledge and action planning. Work created with community by design must also be mindful of the community from start to finish, which includes knowledge access, dissemination, and repository wherein all stakeholders continue to reap the benefits. Historically, academic interests have taken advantage of communities by utilizing community time, resources, and knowledge for academic research and publication but failing to ensure that co-created knowledge, assets, and outcomes were disseminated to the communities they were intended to benefit (Bortolin, 2011). With approximately half of faculty in public institutions collaborating with community organizations through teaching or research (Eatman et al., 2018), collectively establishing community goals that leverage multiple forms of knowledge and that are inclusive and problem orientated leads to the authentic relationships necessary for meaningful community building across stakeholder groups.

Civic Learning Objectives

As part of the preparatory work for the initiation of the SPS Civic Media Project, the professor thoughtfully situated the project within the media literacy course by incorporating course civic learning objectives for the university students. In this way, the project did not become additional work for university students but instead a thoughtfully co-developed initiative that reinforced course concepts and allowed students to apply academic knowledge in a real-world setting. With this in mind, we define civic learning objectives as course learning objectives with a civic focus that intentionally intertwine the CECL initiative with the academic learning occurring throughout the course.

As a principle, civic learning objectives should be identified prior to the implementation of a project and incorporated into a course design to help assess student learning at the end of the project. These objectives can be in addition to disciplinary learning objectives or may be inherent within a discipline's learning objective foci. According to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (2014), civic learning is an "acquisition of the knowledge, the intellectual skills and the applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life; it also means acquiring an understanding of the social values that underlie democratic structures and practices" (pp. 2–3). When faculty incorporate civic learning objectives into their course design, they ensure that students' experiential learning is intentionally connected to the intended learning of the course. While the stakeholder cloverleaf calls for all four stakeholder groups to equitably co-design, implement, and evaluate CECL initiatives, essentially decentering the student, a unique notion in higher education, the civic learning principle gives assurance that student learning is an important, recognized, and valued part of the CECL framework and should be thoughtfully prepared for in advance and ultimately assessed at the end of student participation.

Reflexivity

A hallmark of the SPS Civic Media Project was the active, iterative reflection process it employed. Stakeholders examined and discussed their own privileges, oppressions, and worldviews throughout the project, which organically deepened their understanding of social justice and their role in effecting change. Moving beyond static conceptions of reflection as a required component of service-learning, CECL advocates for the use of active reflexivity. This study relies on Berger's (2015) definition of reflexivity as a starting point, where reflexivity is "viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of [stakeholder's] positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the . . . process and outcome" (p. 219). Broadly, when individuals engage in a reflexive process, they analyze the motivation, content, and impact of their actions and determine a new course of action in response (Archer, 2010). Haraway (1988) has similarly advocated for the practice of "positioning," which asks individuals to critically analyze the partiality or limits of their own knowledge and the "situatedness" or context of that knowledge's construction.

Reflexivity focuses on critically examining one's own positionality within the world around them, contextualizing knowledge, and ensuring an iterative process (Haraway, 1988). Reflexivity in the context of a community engagement experience requires all stakeholders to continuously and critically examine their social position within the experience, their role in shaping the experience, and how their role shifts in a reflexive exchange of actions with the stakeholders and world around them. To be effective, this process should be continuous, iterative, and organic throughout the community engagement experience. The reflexive process also creates space within a partnership for real-time dialogue that organically shifts and molds relationships as well as the direction of the project based on critical reflections and feedback from all stakeholders.

Sustainability

The SPS Civic Media Project emerged from a long-standing relationship the university had with the public school system that was built over decades, which allowed different stakeholders to collaboratively work together to address aspects of identified social justice issues slowly over time. This principle advocates for those involved in community-engaged work to start seeing this work as connected to a mosaic of necessary actions aimed toward a larger social justice goal. With this in mind, we define sustainability as the long-term maintenance of CECL initiatives to ensure that all principles and stakeholder groups are attended to over time. In order to create sustainable collaborations, Fourie (2003) argues that collaboration should focus on community needs; build an understanding of the complexities of an issue; create "integrated and iterative processes of learning" by, from, and with the community; and involve the community throughout the life cycle of the project (p. 35). Long-term partnerships should grow from authentic relationships with community organizational partners and members, which may take time to build trust, rapport, and interdependence.

While all stakeholders work together to identify, plan, administer, and assess CECL initiatives, we recognize that faculty members play a central role in initiating many projects. Moreover, we also realize that institutional

structures are necessary to sustain these relationships and help lay the foundation for a larger institutional civic ecology that brings together areas such as courses, faculty members, community engagement professionals, and co-curricular offices to address the holistic complexities of social justice issues, which simply cannot be completed in one semester. These civic ecologies will look different from institution to institution, depending on institutional size and resources but we believe can be created in a variety of institutions (as can be seen in the diversity of institutions who have received Carnegie community engagement classification).

CECL Outcomes and Assessment

This section examines some of the CECL outcomes we identified in the SPS Civic Media Project, our own civic engagement experiences, and in conversations with faculty and practitioners who do this work in their own institutions and communities. The overarching goal of any CECL project is social change, which involves elevating marginalized voices and challenging existing power structures that reproduce inequality in society (Bowen, 2014; Lewis, 2004). While many outcomes can be realized in CECL projects, we argue that the four outcomes described below could apply to most if not all CECL projects, even if not all six principles are incorporated. These outcomes are interconnected and when operating simultaneously, result in the ability of stakeholders to engender incremental or holistic social change in their communities. The outcomes we identified include increased self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-empowerment; increased awareness of civic agency; better understanding of community; and workforce preparation. These are by no means exhaustive and should serve as a place to start thinking about what the intersection of personal growth and indicators of social change processes through higher education civic engagement might look like. For faculty members, these outcomes may also be seen in addition to any disciplinary learning outcomes that may be inherent in their field.

In addition to identifying CECL outcomes, this section also provides guidance on how to assess whether they are met. Researchers have developed a myriad of instruments to assess students' civic skills, interpersonal perspective-taking, and critical systematic thought (Colby et al., 2003; Hatcher, 2011); civic values and attitudes (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012); and civic behaviors and collective action (Keen & Hall, 2009). However, we have identified no assessment tools that simultaneously measure personal growth and social change through higher education civic engagement. Therefore, we developed the Critically Engaged Civic Learning Inventory for Social Change (CECL-ISC), a survey instrument that does just that (Awkward et al., 2021). Given the prevalent use of surveys compared to general knowledge and skills measures, rubrics, external performance assessments, and portfolios, we determined a survey was the most appropriate method for data collection (Jankowski et al., 2018). We should note that CECL-ISC is designed as a research instrument, not a learning rubric, that can potentially be used by any stakeholder group. However, given the diversity of CECL projects across disciplines and issues, this instrument can be adapted based on identified community needs and augmented by qualitative interviews, focus groups, learning rubrics, and other methods of data collection as needed.

Increased Self-Awareness, Self-Efficacy, and Self-Empowerment

According to Sutton (2016), self-awareness is "the extent to which people are consciously aware of their internal states and their interactions or relationships with others" (p. 646). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to achieve desired outcomes and "reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment" (Carey & Forsyth, 2009). Empowerment is defined as a process of attaining power and control in one's life; however, and in contrast to widely held ideas about "empowering others," our definition of self-empowerment centrally focuses on the role an individual plays as the key agent of change for themselves within this process. When combined in the context of a CECL initiative, these civic self-realizations were seen in the SPS Civic Media Project in several ways as participants engaged in self-reflection via surveys and interviews. For example, one college student acknowledged their increase in self-empowerment when stating, "I have the means to kind of do something that can change the world, or like one person's view. Get one person's voice heard that isn't normally heard . . . I have some power to help." Additionally, all stakeholders discussed their growth in these areas through the iterative process of reflexivity throughout the CECL project as these realizations were necessary for shaping and guiding the real-time execution of the project. This CECL outcome could also be assessed with CECL-ISC through indicators such as "The relationships developed with organizations in my community through the civic learning project have generated positive value" and "I am better equipped to advocate for my community as a result of my participation in the civic learning project."

Well-designed and equitable civic engagement experiences increase community members' sense of self-empowerment and civic agency (Vincent, 2014). When college students participate in community engagement experiences that make a difference in the life of an individual or community, their feelings of self-confidence, sense of civic agency, and self-efficacy increases (Gonsalves et al., 2019), as does their potential for participating in civic engagement opportunities beyond the classroom (Vincent & Jeffrey, 2018), which can be seen in class assignments such as reflection papers and discussions. While self-realizations are usually applied to individuals, these recognitions may also be applied to organizations as they better understand their relationship with other stakeholders, their organizational capacity for engendering change, and the dynamic ebb and flow of influence their organization may hold in the community at any given time. Growth in these realizations may be seen in faculty and community engagement professionals through a reinvigorated interest in their discipline, an increased exploration of funding opportunities, and a chance to try implementing other high-impact practices. This in turn may galvanize their institutions to reflect on community partnerships and the process by which faculty are acknowledged and rewarded through tenure and promotion.

Increased Awareness of Civic Agency

As a CECL outcome, increased awareness of civic agency inherently requires civic learning, which includes the civic knowledge, skills, competencies, and values stakeholders gain. Civic agency addresses the "practices, habits,

norms, symbols, and ways of life that enhance or diminish capacities for collective action" (Boyte, 2007, p. 1). In the SPS Civic Media Project, an increased interest in and awareness of civic agency was seen in community members and college students after they engaged in self-reflection of their level of civic engagement prior to and after the experience. Additionally, through the interview process, the community organizations and faculty member acknowledged their increased capacity for building civic agency through their participation in the project. For example, one community partner stated:

> I am still working with kids to help them see that reaching out to people who are different to start friendships that might have been unexpected . . . falls under that umbrella of what social justice is about. It's looking at people as a potential ally, a potential friend, a potential asset to your life, and seeing differences as being interesting and positive.

This CECL outcome could also be assessed with CECL-ISC through indicators such as "The civic learning project encouraged me to apply academic concepts and theories to real-world, real-time problems" and "Because of our participation in the civic learning project, my organization is better able to address the community's issues."

CECL promotes civic agency among community members by flattening power dynamics among stakeholders, amplifying marginalized voices, and facilitating the ability for community decisions to be made within a context of shared authority. For college students, civic agency entails understanding the impact they can make in a community through listening, learning, and meaningful action. If civic learning objectives are embedded in a college course, this outcome could also entail civic learning outcomes tied to those objectives for college students. Civic learning outcomes could then be assessed through traditional learning rubrics, such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (2009) VALUE rubric for civic engagement, and applied to course assignments, such as projects, papers, or exams. For community organizations, CECL leverages their ability to promote positive social change in their community and create new opportunities for community engagement. For faculty, each CECL initiative provides new or different opportunities to increase their awareness of ways to equitably engage with communities. Community engagement professionals in higher education have an obligation and commitment "to embrace civic learning and democratic engagement as an undisputed educational priority . . . where education for democracy and civic responsibility is pervasive, not partial; central, not peripheral" (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 2). As CECL initiatives become more common, institutions will likely see an increased awareness of civic agency at an institutional level as they heed the civic call of higher education.

Better Understanding of Community

Through a CECL initiative, a better understanding of community can be seen in increased knowledge of the community (e.g., histories, assets, needs, etc.) and community-building skill sets. This outcome integrates several CECL principles that focus on authentic relationships and the equitable distribution of power. In the SPS

Civic Media Project, this outcome was observed among community members and college students as both groups learned to identify, research, and address social justice issues in their community, which in turn taught them more about specific community populations and histories. The collaboration also provided a platform for community members' voices to be acknowledged and integrated into the project. For example, one community member said, "I think [this project] could [help people to listen to fourth graders] because we should have our voices be heard in our community, and people could listen to us. Maybe that could have an impact on our lives." Working alongside the community members and college students, the community organizations and faculty member also learned more about specific community populations and histories, expanding upon their growing repository of community knowledge. This CECL outcome could be assessed with CECL-ISC through indicators such as "The civic learning project better enabled me to address the root causes of [insert issue] in my community" and "Because of the relationships I built during the civic learning project, I feel more connected with the community."

By participating in a CECL initiative, community members gain a better understanding of different aspects of their community that may have been unknown to them before. Additionally, their position in a CECL project offers other stakeholders with invaluable knowledge and perspectives and provides a platform for their voices to be heard. College students learn to recognize themselves as part of a larger group focused on social change, forge connections to their community and to one another, and co-generate positive community change, which can be seen through course assignments such as reflection papers or class discussions. For community organizations and faculty, a better understanding of community can result through the process of co-constructing knowledge, as seen in co-generated data and research in a CECL initiative. This outcome can also help to erase the invisible boundary that often exists between institutions and communities, generally improving "town-gown" relations.

Workforce Preparation

Within a neoliberal higher education context, an artificial rivalry has been created between labor market preparation and civic engagement as focus for higher education institutions (Battistoni & Longo, 2006; Evans et al., 2019). CECL refutes this false dichotomy and shows the possibility for the development of civic professionalism (Koritz & Schadewald, 2015) through professional skill-building and networking. This outcome was seen in the SPS Civic Media Project as community members learned media and technology skills they need to succeed in secondary education and eventually their future careers. It was also seen for college students as they learned to apply their media and technology production concepts in a real-world context that they were able to include on their resumes. Both the community organizations and faculty member increased their collaboration skills and professional networks through the implementation of the project. This CECL outcome could be assessed with CECL-ISC through indicators such as "Through my participation in the civic learning project, my organization built capacity that will enable us to improve the services we provide to community members" and "My participation in the civic learning project has led to sustainable partnerships with community organizations and members."

In general, community members who participate in CECL efforts can develop professional skills and networks, which can improve their employability and lead to economic self-empowerment and community vitality. For college students, CECL projects offer an opportunity to apply course concepts in real-world settings, contextualize their knowledge through reflexivity, and foster authentic and equitable relationships with community organizations, which can be seen through course assignments such as projects or papers. For community organizations, collaboration can build capacity by expanding networks of engaged community members and college students who are familiar with the stakeholders and structures involved in lasting community change. Through CECL collaborations, faculty can increase their community networks and expand their professional skill sets by fostering a more equitable approach to community engagement. Furthermore, CECL can help institutions meet the simultaneous goals of providing college students with a strong liberal arts education and preparing them for future professions.

The outcomes described above should be seen as intertwined and interdependent but, again, are by no means exhaustive. At a minimum, each stakeholder should see results in each of these four outcomes and more through their use of the CECL framework. We encourage potential CECL practitioners to ground their initiatives in the principles described above to improve the likelihood of achieving these outcomes. Additionally, the development and evaluation of CECL-ISC is fully detailed in a separate article, including how to mitigate the limitations we identified when piloting the instrument (Awkward et al., 2021).

CECL Limitations and Areas for Further Inquiry

While the design and intent of CECL are meant to be fluid guidelines for practitioners, we are fully aware of the complexities and challenges of implementing every principle, every time. As readers are probably aware, there are a multitude of challenges/obstacles one could encounter when undertaking community-engaged work, such as dynamics of power and interests, clashing worldviews, and differences in agreement of ends and purposes, among others. Our intent is not to simplify or minimize these very complex issues, and we know that future research and studies will need to further flesh out each of the principles identified here. This article serves as an introduction to the CECL framework, and we look forward to engaging in further conversations and reflections on how best to refine and implement it.

We also realize that frameworks are inanimate objects and it is the complexities of human beings and human nature that bring them to life, especially when those humans are embedded in contexts of problematic systems, oppressions, and values. Therefore, we recognize that the CECL framework alone may be insufficient and individuals who use it will need to recognize the varying possibilities of human complexities when implementing it. Lastly, we understand that a CECL initiative will look very different between fields, disciplines, and practitioners, especially from new to veteran practitioners. The effectiveness of implementing these principles will become greater with time, practice, and experience navigating the complexities of community-engaged work.

Conclusion

The critically engaged civic learning framework calls for an equitable approach to civic engagement work. Such equity enables community organizations and institutions to build sustainable efforts by requiring well-informed action and reflexive analysis on the part of each stakeholder. Without a balance among stakeholders from the start of a planning process to the implementation and evaluation of an initiative, civic engagement experiences risk becoming one-off moments of "service" with lackluster results. If an institution does not truly value the expertise of community organizations, the co-design and implementation of an initiative is inherently incomprehensive and does not fully account for programmatic and cultural knowledge located in the community. However, when the relationship between community member, community organization, college student, and faculty and community engagement professional is based on equitable power dynamics, the mutually beneficial reciprocity of a well-executed sustainable civic engagement project manifests in the key outcomes described above. Positive progress in any (but especially all) of the aforementioned outcomes builds the necessary trust for maintaining partnerships and engaging new ones. Although the results sought by all partners within a civic engagement collaboration may differ slightly, the common ground is a collective focus on creating and maintaining social change within the community.

Unlike traditional pedagogical approaches that are centered solely on the student, CECL argues that the needs of our students should be placed along an equitable power axis alongside the needs of all other invested stakeholders. When we place the needs of our students first, we continue to privilege a hierarchical power structure that sustains inequitable power dynamics between communities and universities. Through a CECL lens, however, we can begin to deconstruct those systems and reinforce the idea that knowledge can and should be co-constructed and that we are all but one piece of a larger civic ecology, working together toward social change for the betterment of all.

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