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**Critical Pedagogy of Discomfort in Community-Based Learning:
Kenyan Students' Experiences**
**Pédagogie critique de l'inconfort en apprentissage communautaire :
les expériences des étudiants kenyans**

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Abstract

Community-based learning (CBL) is employed as a pedagogical approach in professional programs globally; however, transferability of Eurocentric CBL models and theory to university settings outside the Global North is under-examined. Adopting critical hermeneutics as the theoretical and methodological framework, this study explored the meaning of community-based learning (CBL) to Kenyan university students in a human services program and examined the complexity of students' difficult learning experiences in making connections between classroom learning and praxis in Kenyan communities. Data were collected from six university students following 12-week placements with community organizations in Kenya. Findings revealed disciplinary, historical, cultural, and extra-linguistic factors related to students' difficult and uncomfortable learning experiences as human service professionals in training. Recognizing critical civic engagement in Kenya is closely associated with social and cultural contexts, this article recommends the pedagogy of discomfort be integrated into CBL curriculum and praxis to mitigate negative reactions to challenging CBL experiences. The article concludes with implications for enhancing critical CBL literacy and praxis.

Résumé

On utilise l'apprentissage communautaire comme approche pédagogique dans des programmes professionnels dans le monde entier; cependant, la transférabilité des modèles eurocentriques d'apprentissage communautaire et de la théorie aux contextes universitaires qui ne sont pas situés dans la partie nord du monde est sous-étudiée. En adoptant l'herméneutique critique comme cadre de travail théorique et méthodologique, cette étude a exploré ce que signifie l'apprentissage communautaire pour des étudiants universitaires kenyans inscrits dans un programme de services sociaux et a examiné la complexité des expériences d'apprentissage difficiles qu'ont vécues des étudiants, en faisant le lien entre l'apprentissage théorique et la pratique dans les communautés kenyanes. Les données ont été recueillies auprès de six étudiants universitaires kenyans suite à un stage de 12 semaines dans des organismes communautaires au Kenya. Les résultats ont révélé des facteurs disciplinaires, historiques, culturels et extralinguistiques qui ont contribué à des expériences d'apprentissage difficiles et désagréables pour les stagiaires en services sociaux. En reconnaissant que l'engagement civique critique au Kenya est étroitement lié aux contextes socioculturels, cet article recommande que la pédagogie de l'inconfort soit intégrée au programme et à la pratique de l'apprentissage communautaire afin d'atténuer les réactions négatives face aux expériences d'apprentissage communautaire difficiles. La conclusion de l'article présente des implications pour offrir une meilleure connaissance critique et une meilleure pratique de l'apprentissage communautaire.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; critical hermeneutics; community-based learning; Kenya; international; pedagogy of discomfort; service-learning
Mots clés : pédagogie critique; herméneutique critique; apprentissage communautaire; Kenya; international; pédagogie de l'inconfort; apprentissage du service

High-impact educational practices that nurture and encourage authentic student engagement in real-world contexts have been attracting attention and research interest since the late 1990s and are widely regarded as an essential component of a comprehensive undergraduate university experience (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Kuh, 2008; Meyers, 2009; Sharpe & Dear, 2013). Community-based learning (CBL) experiences have been extensively offered to university students in professional programs, such as medicine, education, and law; however, there has been very little CBL literature in emerging professional programs in human services. Programs such as these frequently require students to complete an internship or practicum with a community-based organization as a graduation requirement in global higher education context. This article is developed based on a critical hermeneutic inquiry that aimed at understanding Kenyan students' CBL experiences in a university level human service program in Kenya. Focusing on Kenyan students' difficult learning experiences in their community placements, this article discusses how discomfort can be used as a critical pedagogy to engage transformative learning and how to translate the complexity of students' experiences in CBL into meaningful connections between classroom learning and praxis in communities.

Traditional Versus Critical CBL

Community-based learning, as defined by Bringle and Clayton (2012), is increasingly employed as a pedagogical approach in professional programs in higher education institutions globally. The transferability of current primarily Eurocentric CBL models and theories to higher education settings outside of the Global North needs to be examined as they are not always congruent with regional or local needs (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Stanton & Erasmus, 2013). In addition, the use of Eurocentric models and theories in countries with a colonial past, such as Kenya, can lead to experiences of recolonization.

The historical and contemporary contexts of a country have significant implications for CBL curriculum development and learning in higher education, and this is particularly true for Kenya, where this study was conducted (VanLeeuwen, Weeks, & Guo-Brennan, 2017b; Dei, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). Higher education institutions (HEIs) play an important role in reaching nations' sustainable development targets (United Nations, 2015). Community-based programs and curriculum can bridge the effective partnerships between HEIs and community organizations and respond to local communities' needs and bring economic growth to countries such as Kenya, whereby stable economic circumstances can ensure appropriate climate and adequate resources for universities to focus on achieving their social development mission (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2006; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012). In addition, CBL from a global perspective is viewed as both a learning methodology and a community-driven development philosophy (Hartman, Kiely, Boettcher, & Friedrichs, 2018). Deeper understanding of what CBL experiences mean to Kenyan students during their placements in the community is not only crucial for decolonizing Eurocentric CBL theory and research, but fundamental for understanding the impact of political, social, cultural, and environmental contexts on the relationships and systems that shape the formal CBL curriculum in higher education (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Giroux, 1992). Identifying transformative CBL curriculum and pedagogy research that contributes towards and presents the Kenyan perspectives on CBL programs can further establish theoretical foundations and successful practices in preparing contextual responsive human and community services.

Literature indicates that student activities during CBL placements are categorized into two approaches: traditional and critical (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006; Cress & Donahue, 2011). Traditional CBL approaches provide opportunities for students to “apply and master traditional disciplinary knowledge ... through active and engaged learning in the community” (Pollack, 2014,

p.11), whereas critical approaches engage students from a social change perspective as they examine complex issues related to service and social justice, equity and diversity, identity and belonging. Mitchell (2008) differentiates these two approaches according to whether they perpetuate or change the status quo and whether they advocate for authentic relationships between students and community members that do not simply recognize differences, but work with them. In recent years, scholars and practitioners have shared guidance and effective practices in creating and implementing critical CBL curricula to promote greater social justice locally and globally. The promising practices include developing courses with CBL requirements, employing a social justice education model, structuring reflection as an intentional and directed process that facilitates deep, contextualized meanings linked to students' outcomes, and supporting students to address social injustices thereby identifying self-imposed and societal barriers to the development of critical thinking (Bheekie & van Huyssteen, 2015; Bowen, 2014; Rice & Pollack, 2000). The pedagogy of discomfort is another practice that could be considered to promote transformative learning in CBL.

Pedagogy of Discomfort as Transformative Learning

Pedagogy of discomfort was first introduced in Boler's (1999) book "*Feeling Power: Education and Emotions*," which explored issues of inequality through students' disengagement experiences which surfaced from feeling powerless and numb following repeated exposures to injustice. Students' sense of powerlessness manifested as silence, led to feelings of guilt, distanced students from interpersonal connections, and ultimately reinforced a sense of isolation and denial. Isolation from inequality exacerbates and reinforces power relationships between those with and without power (Freire, 1970). Discomfort as a pedagogical approach takes students outside their comfort zones into situations where they are confronted with their own discomforting emotions. This approach challenges students' dominant beliefs, social habits, and normative practices that sustain social inequities (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012).

To achieve greater social justice, educators and students in CBL programs need to critically examine how historical events shape culture, reinforce the status quo, and perpetuate injustice in communities and societies (Boler, 1999). Repeated exposure to injustice without a sufficient understanding of the root causes can lead to the development of passive empathy or survival numbness and isolation, which is triggered by power relations, fear, and identity politics (Bheekie & van Huyssteen, 2015). Bheekie and Huyssteen (2015) emphasize that fear can impair students' ability to empathize, which can lead them to assume roles as spectators as opposed to learning to bear witness and take action. This isolation and lack of ability in taking action presents barriers in developing authentic CBL relationships and achieving transformative learning. Critical CBL encourages students to view themselves as agents of change, ensure they have the knowledge and skills to interrogate issues of power that they encounter, reflect on their CBL in meaningful fashion, and take actions that move beyond meeting individual needs to also address social justice issues.

Understanding the root causes of discomfort in CBL helps students navigate transformative learning, a process of effecting change through understanding experiences to become more open and inclusive with a heightened awareness of situations and willingness to consider different courses of action (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning changes how we know through reconstructing frames of reference in three dimensions: psychological (i.e., changes in understanding of the self), convictional (i.e., revision of belief systems), and behavioural (i.e., changes in lifestyle) (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2017). Through transformative learning, students'

thinking becomes more flexible, open, complex, and accommodating of contradictions (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2017).

Students' uncomfortable experiences in CBL often generate emotional reactions such as confusion, frustration, worry, regret, fear, or anger. The pedagogy of discomfort brings forward the uncomfortable experiences that can be encountered in CBL placements as teachable moments. In working through these experiences which do not "fit" into students' current frame of reference, their perspectives can be transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which their interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based (Bheekie & van Huyssteen, 2015). Critical reflection is a key component of CBL process as students learn about themselves and develop a greater understanding of their personal strengths and limitations (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Whitney & Clayton, 2011). CBL infused with critical reflection provides space for students to develop the capacity in recognizing and understanding the political, economic, and social conditions that impact their community and their experiences.

Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory implies that CBL experiences can serve as opportune occasions for university students to become aware of and critical about their own and others' assumptions, with chances for them to redefine problems from a different perspective and develop autonomous thinking skills while being supported in critical reflection and discourse. Experiences which promote discipline-based learning and individual identity formation, along with learning to deal with dilemmas and socio-centric engagement can lead to change of inequitable conditions for self and others (Chambers, 2009; Cress & Donahue, 2011) while fostering emancipatory transformative learning (Freire & Macedo, 1995; Taylor, 2017). Drawing together critical approaches to CBL informed by Transformative Learning Theory opens up a range of empowering possibilities for the development and redesign of CBL experiences for Kenyan students. Research looking at the transformative outcomes of CBL has found that a social justice approach results in more complex thinking and reasoning skills (Wang & Rodgers, 2006). Without the critical lens to help reconstruct students' frames of reference, there is potential for difficult CBL experiences to reinforce negative stereotypes and preserve societal inequities (Mitchell, 2008).

The ethical dimensions of engaging students in pedagogical activities that create discomfiting situations have been studied in classroom settings where there was control over the levels of discomfort encountered by the students (Zemblyas & McGlynn, 2012). However, in CBL placement settings, there is much less control over the situations students may encounter. In countries such as Kenya, where the social and economic infrastructure lacks many resources, CBL placements bring students into contact with many situations in the community which will be a source of tension to them. In addition, the roles of students, educators, and field supervisors from community organizations are blurred, which may hinder or deny affective learning in such settings and silence students' voices (Bheekie & van Huyssteen, 2015; Bheekie, van Huyssteen, Rae, & Swarbooi 2016). Students are likely to encounter a variety of disorienting dilemmas in CBL placements, and there should be meaningful preparation for dealing with these uncertainties and challenges (Cress & Donahue, 2011). As there is little literature focused on CBL in Kenya, it is critical to understand Kenyan students' experiences, particularly those difficult CBL experiences that highlight the challenges associated with the country's specific historical, sociocultural, and economic contexts. The pedagogy of discomfort and critical approaches to CBL can inform potential changes to CBL praxis and supervision that can enhance student learning in Kenya and other countries with similar contexts and signals interesting avenues for future research.

Research Purpose and Questions

Historically, Kenyan universities have employed more traditional approaches to CBL in keeping with national education and employment policies with strong linkages between education and training on the one hand, and their labour market implications on the other (King, 2007). This vision of education-and-employment has been carried over as the focus of current day CBL in Kenyan universities. Critical CBL approach is scarce in community-based programs in Kenyan higher education. There is also a lack of understanding of Kenyan students' CBL experiences and contexts in literature. Research on CBL in Kenyan settings which also takes historical and contextual influences into account can offer a clearer perspective of what students are learning from these experiences, assess the impact and efficacy of CBL, and help identify "best practices" for all stakeholders. Most importantly, a deeper understanding of Kenyan university students' experiences will expand our knowledge and understanding of culturally and contextually responsive CBL and decolonize the current theoretical perspectives and praxis in the field of CBL.

The purpose of the research was to understand the meaning of CBL for Kenyan university students by addressing three research questions: (1) What do community-based learning experiences mean for Kenyan university students? (2) In what ways do Kenyan sociocultural and historical contexts affect students' CBL experiences? (3) What are the implications of students' experiences on CBL curriculum and pedagogy?

This article is based on a doctoral study conducted by the first author. The second and third authors guided and advised the first author as her co-supervisors. The study generated rich data and a large number of important interpretive themes. For the purpose and scope of this article, the themes of findings presented in this article specifically focus on students' difficult CBL experiences and the meaning of such experiences for students and educators. The implications of such experiences in transformative CBL curriculum and pedagogy are also provided.

Critical Hermeneutics as Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Hermeneutics is the art and theory of interpretation (VanLeeuwen, Guo-Brennan, & Weeks, 2017a; Gadamer, 1976; Porter & Robinson, 2011). The term "hermeneutic" is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which has a spectrum of meanings of "to express," "to explain," and "to translate" (Palmer, 1969, p. 33). With an emphasis on understanding and interpretation as opposed to explanation and verification, hermeneutic inquiry offers important insights of the deeply intersubjective nature of human knowing and life experiences (Gadamer, 1976). Although hermeneutics is developed from specific fields such as theology, philosophy, and law where interpretation of written texts was the central task, contemporary hermeneutics has been developed and adopted as the theory of interpretation for not only written and oral texts, but also social phenomenon or event. Contemporary hermeneutics has moved from epistemological concerns to ontological concerns, from *a mode of knowing* to *a way of being*. This framework reflects the essentially "existential-ontological characteristic of human beings" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 4) by offering an existential phenomenological analysis of human existence.

Gallagher (1992) classifies hermeneutics into four orientations: conservative, critical, radical, and philosophical hermeneutics. The study reported in this article was informed and guided by critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics attempts to critique the relations of power inherent in tradition, and to expose the institutionalized, reproductive exploitations of persons and classes (VanLeeuwen et al. 2017a; Freire, 1970). It advocates critical reflection as it can neutralize the language context of tradition as well as the extra-linguistic forces which distort interpretation (Ricoeur, 1981). Adopting a critical hermeneutical orientation for this research highlighted a strong awareness of how traditions, culture, ideology, institutional structures, and other extra-

linguistic forces impact the text or behaviours being studied (Tan, Wilson, & Olver, 2009). Hermeneutic researchers or interpreters do not approach interpretation from a neutral standpoint; interpretation is always influenced by tradition and history (Jacobs, 2014; Moules, McCaffrey, Field, & Laing, 2015). Incorporating historicity in understanding into interpretation is achieved by bringing the interpreter's historical context, cultural tradition, and prior knowledge into consideration in the hermeneutic circle (Jacobs, 2014; Moules, 2002). As a cultural outsider, interpretations made by the first author were likely to be different from interpretations of an insider; however these are no less valid if the study is designed appropriately, as the researcher's unique pre-understandings, prejudices, foreknowledge, and preparation for research in the field offer broader perspectives on interpreting students' CBL experiences (VanLeeuwen et al., 2017a; Jacobs, 2014). The movement or interchange of the researcher's prior knowledge with novel viewpoints or partial understanding as a hermeneutic spiral, represents the widening or deeper understanding of the topic as a whole as it is informed and shaped by these new associations (Moules et al., 2015).

Employing critical hermeneutics provided opportunity to focus on issues such as asymmetries of power relations, gender (in)equality, and the colonial and indigenous contexts of Kenya. In connecting the everyday troubles encountered by Kenyan students during their CBL placements to public issues of power and social justice, critical hermeneutics requires rigorous and reflexive reasoning (Jacobs, 2014). As philosophy, theory, and research methodology, critical hermeneutics is congruent with critical approaches to CBL and the pedagogy of discomfort.

Methods

Data were collected from six fourth-year university students returning to campus from their 12-week CBL experiences. Three individual conversations were conducted with each participant to understand and make meaning of their CBL experiences while incorporating the historical and cultural Kenyan context in meaningful ways. Pragmatic and logistical issues of conducting cross-cultural research in Kenya were carefully considered in research design and data collection.

Considerations for Decolonizing the Study

In the initial planning stages, and throughout the study, indigenous research literature and practices were extensively reviewed to avoid recolonization effects (VanLeeuwen et al., 2017b; Fleet & Kitson, 2013; Hodge & Lester, 2006; Smithers Graeme, 2013; Smithers Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Stelmach, 2009). Actions to decolonize this research included carefully considering the purpose and motivations guiding the research, reading broadly and deeply on issues associated with the experience of colonialism and colonial residue, articulating researchers awareness of the colonial experience, and establishing authentic relationships (Beeman-Cadwallader, Quigley, & Yazzie-Mintz, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Ndimande, 2012). In addition, a critical friend who was a Kenyan university faculty member was involved to strengthen awareness and sensitivity to various contextual and historical factors (Appleton, 2011; Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009). As a cultural insider, she engaged in conversations that helped clarify the first author's perspectives during data collection and analysis.

The Research Team

This article is part of a larger doctoral study conducted by the first author. The second and third authors guided and advised the first author as her co-supervisors. They did not participate in the data collection but supported the first author during data analysis and writing. The critical friend

described earlier was a trusted Kenyan colleague that the first and second authors had worked with on previous research projects.

The first author's pivotal CBL experiences as a Caucasian undergraduate student, pre-service teacher, university instructor, and field placement coordinator in Canada led to her intense interest in CBL. This background coalesced with previous research projects with Kenyan colleagues, her long-standing interest in international development and acceptance into a doctoral program, all of which informed the current study. Her position as a cultural outsider affected the research process in several ways. First, as a hermeneutic researcher, she needed to articulate her prejudices and prior understandings. She did this through reflection, exploring her prejudices and new understanding in relation to the reading that she tackled to learn about the unfamiliar cultural context and her values associated with local knowledge and hermeneutic methodology. However, reading about the Kenyan context to prepare for the multitude of cultural differences and articulating these pre-understandings was only the beginning. Second, in addition to self-location as a researcher, using a hermeneutic approach as a cultural outsider made it easier to be attentive to the dynamics around issues such as power and language. This position provided the researcher with rich opportunities to observe cultural factors and draw together critical approaches to CBL to critically examine their influences on the data collection and analysis processes. These are some of the key challenges and opportunities afforded by employing a hermeneutic approach to research in cross-cultural or international settings (VanLeeuwen et al., 2017a). All of these influences reflected the desire and need to decolonize current theoretical frameworks and practices in the field of CBL while expanding knowledge and understanding of culturally and contextually responsive CBL in Kenya (VanLeeuwen et al., 2017a).

Research Setting

This study was conducted at a large public university in Kenya where students from over 20 departments are required to complete CBL placements or "attachments" as part of their undergraduate degree requirements. The academic program involved in this research prepares graduates to pursue careers with social and human service organizations (e.g., within the civil service, international aid agencies, faith-based charities, or non-governmental organizations) that support vulnerable children, youth, families, and their communities. All students are required to complete a 12-week CBL placement working full-time with a community organization between third and fourth year. Placement organizations are located throughout Kenya.

Participants and Data Collection

Following screening of students who had completed the professional practice course and required placements at the end of their third year at the university, six participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method considering their gender, age, ethnicity, and locations of CBL (Moules, 2002; Patton, 2015; Sandelowski, 1995). Three female and three male students ranging in age from 21 to 30 years old were invited to participate in this study. They came from four different ethnic groups with educational and living experiences in either rural or urban settings. All participants were fluent in Kiswahili and English, Kenya's two national languages, as well as the language of their ethnic group: Gikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, or Iteso. At the time of this study, they had just started the fourth year of their undergraduate program.

The first author had three conversations with each participant over a period of three and a half weeks. The conversations were conducted on campus at times convenient to the participants and each lasted between 45 to 70 minutes. All conversations were guided with open-ended

questions to explore students' learning experiences in the community, knowledge and skills gained, transformative changes gained during their CBL placement, and memorable learning moments (Binding & Tapp, 2008; Carson, 1986). Questions addressed topics related to (1) the organization they were partnered with; (2) important or meaningful learning moments; (3) knowledge, skills, or attitudes that they developed as a result of their CBL experiences; (4) practices which supported or impeded their learning; (5) challenges and successes; (6) exploring their use of Kenyan local knowledge; and (7) their thoughts on how CBL could be changed to enhance student learning. Additional questions were generated following each conversation to clarify the unfolding stories for each participant. Where appropriate, techniques such as rewording, clarification, funnelling, probing, encouraging story-telling, and summarizing were used to achieve greater depth in the data. All conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed, using Microsoft Word and speech recognition software Dragon NaturallySpeaking, and transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11. To protect students' confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each of the participants.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interpretative analysis encompassed more than the spoken words of participants, and included the speaking, listening, sharing, questioning, and reflecting of the participants and researcher in conversation about the CBL experiences. Conversations were listened to multiple times, while transcripts, in conjunction with field notes and the researcher's journal were read and re-read. Analysis also included reading transcripts aloud, reading other literature, writing memos and notes, talking to colleagues, paying attention to what was not said, and thinking as well as journaling. A critical friend, a trusted person who asked provocative questions, clarified ideas, and offered a critique of a person's work, was used to help with contextual understanding or language (Appleton, 2011; Costa & Kallick, 1993). This systematic process of moving in the hermeneutic circle through the CBL experiences of the participants helped identify emergent themes from the data and establish naïve understanding of the topic as a whole and in parts (Moules et al., 2015). This was followed by writing about the context for each participant's CBL placement which is essential in presenting the meaning and understanding of their CBL placement learning by situating his/her horizon (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Utilizing best hermeneutic practice, this involved close reading of transcripts, looking for similarities and dissonances in single interviews and between multiple interviews, and paying attention to the particular or what was catching the researcher's attention.

Findings and Discussion

Themes of findings reported here were revealed and synthesized through the deconstructive and reconstructive dialogue between participants' sharing of their CBL experiences and the researcher's attention to the disciplinary, historical, cultural, and extra-linguistic factors related to the topic of study (Jacobs, 2014; Moules et al., 2015). For the purpose of this article, themes related to challenges that cause students discomfort in their various community settings, particularly those associated with HIV/AIDS, poverty, gender inequality, and exclusion were identified. These themes portray unique aspects of CBL in Kenya and reflect a deepened understanding of the impact of these contextual factors on CBL curriculum and praxis. The culminating sections of the paper examine student concerns which transcend geographic and cultural boundaries and discuss pedagogical options, including the pedagogy of discomfort, to enhance student learning from CBL experiences. It is important to present this pedagogy to students as an approach that helps them process their learning and sets them up for action as agents of change.

Dealing with Uncertainty and Compelling Responsibility

Joy and Symo completed their CBL placements with an organic agriculture training centre. The mission of this organization was to empower local communities' self-reliance regarding food security and smallholder farming. Both participants were involved with a pilot program to support impoverished grandmothers who were raising their orphaned grandchildren due to parental deaths caused by AIDS.

Joy spoke of a specific experience interacting with one grandmother participating in the program when she stopped by shambas (smallholder farms) to help older community members with heavier tasks in their kitchen gardens. Hearing Joy's greeting in her tribal language, a widowed grandmother, whose son had recently died, invited Joy to sit with her sorting beans. It was during this encounter that this grandmother confided her circumstances and requested help with her immediate concern of wanting her grandchildren to be tested to confirm their HIV status. This grandmother also emphasized that maintaining privacy was very important as she suspected that her son had died of HIV/AIDS and wanted to avoid discrimination from the community as much as possible.

Joy felt honoured that this woman trusted her in disclosing such sensitive information but also questioned "Why me and not the management?" (Joy – Conversation 3). Initially she felt she was completely ill-equipped to respond to this request and it was beyond her responsibility. However, she knew that she needed to act ethically and not to ignore this woman's request for assistance. Feeling uncertain about the proper actions she should take, she eventually chose to speak to the director of the community organization to seek advice on appropriate referral to a health care worker. In our conversation she wondered aloud about her subsequent actions of listening, being confused, questioning what actions she should take, and eventually determining the appropriate referral person within the partner organization she would speak to in order to respect the privacy of this family. In doing so, she crossed the boundary or liminal space from student to emerging professional. Wrestling with the obligations of taking action at a professional level and the genuine care she put into making sure that this bereaved grandmother and her dependent grandchildren were connected with appropriate follow-up care contributed to this impactful learning experience.

While acknowledging the intensity of the situation, Joy also indicated that she gained confidence and capabilities in addressing professional responsibilities appropriately. Protecting client privacy and confidentiality is a critical ethical consideration for a human service professional; however, this professional standard was constantly challenged in a communitarian culture where everyone shares everyone's business. How to respect the collective community and cultural norms while following her professional obligations was a challenging task for Joy to navigate. For her, this experience connected with prior classroom learning around confidentiality and ethical professional practice but presented complexities and multiple layers of implications in community placement. Reflecting on this experience, Joy also learned that mundane things, like a greeting in a mother tongue or first language can be a first step in establishing the trusting rapport necessary for gathering sensitive information from community members. Through guided reflection in our conversation, Joy came to realize how these uncomfortable learning moments facilitated her growth as an emerging professional and enabled her to translate the knowledge and skills acquired during her university studies into authentic actions and solutions in communities.

Symo shared a dilemma he experienced when he conducted needs assessment visits with program participants during his CBL placement. Describing his encounter with a group of hungry primary school children during a hot summer day, he said,

...the sun is so hot, and they have not even taken [eaten] their lunch. I remember what I went through when I was in primary school. I sympathized so much with them and the only money I had in my pocket was 100 bob [Kenyan shillings], about one dollar. I used this money to buy them bananas. But in class we are told “you’re not supposed to sympathize, you’re supposed to empathize.” ... I remember I asked my supervisor [in the community organization] “Did I do the right thing or wrong thing? Was I just supposed to sympathize with them and tell them ‘Don't worry, it'll be okay. You'll go home, and you'll get food.’” He [supervisor] told me, “I think you did a good thing, because they were hungry and you had money in your pocket and you were willing to help the kids. Looking at your own life and the situation that you went through, probably it was right for you to do that. But not all situations call for the same [responses] and forgetting yourself.” I remember that day I did not eat supper, because that was the money that I had for supper (Symo – Conversation 2).

Symo's action of buying bananas for the hungry children indicates the significant role one's personal history has on individualized behaviours in CBL learning. Through reflecting on his learning about empathy and sympathy in classes and the dilemma he experienced in his placement, Symo began to understand the ethical complexities in worldviews, actions, and the process of decision-making influenced by his own personal and professional histories.

The personal development, professional skills, and judgment that these participants developed were consistent with what is described in the broader CBL literature (e.g., Roos et al., 2005); however, the intense circumstances revealed through this study highlight the uniqueness of the Kenyan context and cannot be overlooked in helping students understand the complex transitioning from student to professional. In CBL in Kenya, students need to be prepared for the complexity of human service “life as it is lived” in everyday practices (Moules et al, 2015, p. 77). As Jardine (1998) noted, “matters such as genuineness, care, love, patience, integrity, trust, listening, [and] attunement ... lie at the heart of living our lives ... *even though* such matters are difficult, ambiguous, risk-laden” (Jardine, 1998, p. 6) [emphasis in original]. In Kenya, community educators and human service professionals can experience deep and irremediable difficulties that cannot be fixed. Preparing students to deal with difficult CBL moments is particularly important for Kenyan university students' success in CBL.

Finding a Sense of Purpose in the Midst of Abandonment

Syl's host organization was a sub-county government office located on the outskirts of a large slum in Nairobi. This office was charged with tasks of ensuring children's rights, dealing with issues around custody, access and financial support for children, as well as investigating child trafficking, child labour and child abuse. During the 12 weeks of his placement with this government office, Syl was involved in a number of crisis situations where newborn infants were discovered on the street and the office needed to place or rescue these abandoned infants.

He shared his concerns about the tensions that mounted when dealing with these crisis situations even though he was not involved in organizing the direct care of the babies. As a student assigned to the office, there was very little for him to do. He also felt abandoned and needed to take initiative in making sense of each of these cases. He was intrinsically motivated to dig into these situations, gathering and documenting as many details about the infants as he could, with the thought that these abandoned children may attempt to trace their origins when they grew up. Rather than sitting on the sidelines until the urgency of the situation had passed, Syl collected information from individuals involved, ensuring records for each abandoned child.

Syl was able to find a task that was worthy in this situation. Gadamer (1960/1975) discussed how we are more likely to be influenced by our world than to exact influence on it. In

searching for a meaningful way to use his knowledge and skills, Syl found a way to make positive contributions to the organization while processing his own discomfort in feeling abandoned in these circumstances. Similar to Gadamer's (1960/1975) reminder that a piece of work that requires our consideration becomes part of our understanding of the world, understanding of Kenyan students' difficult learning moments in CBL is part of our understanding of CBL. Making students' work behind the scenes recognized and visible, the complexity and uniqueness of each CBL learning experience can be identified, understood, and appreciated as space and opportunities for transformative learning.

Learning to Deal with Tensions and Difficult Situations

Tensions and difficulties are common phenomena in students' CBL experiences and can disengage students from meaningful learning. Helping students understand the root causes of the tensions and difficulty can empower students to become more flexible, open, complex, and accommodating of contradictions. Ooih and Lolo's CBL experiences reflected such transformative learning outcomes.

Qoih was partnered with the local office of a non-governmental organization that engaged in empowerment activities with women in rural communities. During her CBL placement, Qoih was heavily involved in facilitating educational outreach sessions, such as table banking (group-based micro financing) and poultry husbandry with women's groups. Towards the end of our conversations, Qoih shared a disconcerting yet pivotal learning experience. She was late arriving the first several days of her CBL placement. Nothing was said directly to her about this behaviour; however, her field supervisor requested her office key and gave it to another student.

The incident of losing her key-holder privilege not only made Ooih realize that her fluid and flexible understanding of timekeeping did not mesh well with workplace expectations, but also served as a clear reminder that she needed to take ownership and responsibility of her CBL experience. The quiet action taken by Ooih's field supervisor initiated a cascade of effects on her CBL placement. It indicated that someone cared enough to take action and this in turn helped her engage in empowering activities with the women's groups in these small rural communities. Reflecting on how this difficult moment served as a catalyst for her learning from CBL, Ooih said,

One of the greatest challenges I faced was the road. Since I was working in a rural area, the roads were muddy. Vehicles could not access some of the places, so we had to walk. Sometimes we walked to far places. That gave me motivation because I had these women in mind. The walking was not such a challenge because I had the objective in mind, meeting these women (Ooih – conversation 2).

The consciousness of being empowered enabled Qoih to gain confidence and self-assurance to invite a senior staff member to partner in a mentoring relationship that extended beyond her CBL placement. Ooih also indicated that this cascade of transformative CBL experiences enabled her to voice her CBL experiences through participating in this research.

When encountering the "original difficulties" in life and professional learning (Jardine, 1998, p. 271), university students need to learn how to live well with them rather than solving them. Lolo's CBL experiences in a faith-based charity organization taught her the importance of living well with the original difficulties in CBL placements.

Serving around 200 families from slum communities in Nairobi, security was always a concern for the organization and staff. Lolo noted that she and other staff frequently needed to be accompanied by security volunteers when they conducted home visits to assess families' needs

and eligibility for ongoing services. Describing the chaotic and troubling environments of her CBL placement, Lolo said,

There could be tear gas and today you're told, don't come to work, you'll find this route closed. You'll find this area there are riots, you can't pass.... You have to wait and come back when it's cool. At times it would start when you were at the organization, so you have to stay indoors. (Lolo – Conversation 2/3)

Viewing these difficult situations as barriers she had to overcome, Lolo was intrinsically motivated to achieve the learning goals she had planned and presented in her CBL learning contract. Accepting these original difficulties working in slum communities, she stayed open and determined to learn all that she could through challenges, remaining invested in her learning from and with this community.

Understanding the Complexities in Human Services in Kenya

Students' CBL experiences and outcomes can be very diverse and complex because they are shaped by students' skills, values, philosophical insights, attitudes, expectations, and perspectives (Chong, 2014). The challenges experienced by Kiongozi during his CBL placement reflected the complexity not only in the learning process, but the human service system in general. The children's charitable organization where Kiongozi was placed was started in response to children in need of care during post-election violence in 2008. Many of the children had been cared for by the staff at this centre for an extended period and many parents or guardians resided in a nearby camp for internally displaced persons. The plan for Kiongozi's CBL placement was to participate in caring for these children.

Two weeks after Kiongozi started his CBL, government staff visited and served notice that this charitable children's centre did not meet minimal requirements and would be closed. This meant a change in Kiongozi's tasks where he focused on locating parents and caregivers through sensitization sessions, liaising with local boarding schools and planning a shift in the organization's mandate. Instead of contacting the university to request approval to switch to a new site, Kiongozi chose to step up and worked with his colleagues to forge a way forward for the children, staff, and volunteers associated with the centre. This choice presented intense challenges as well as opportunities for Kiongozi to understand the complexities of community service work, which resulted from tensions between the government regulations and limited resources available to ensure quality care for 70 vulnerable children. The difficulty and complexity of community service work, in Kiongozi's case, came from several factors: first, the timing of the closure caused a great deal of mistrust towards the two university interns, who were perceived to have instigated the closure of the centre; second, Kiongozi and other staff at the centre were worried about the possibility of being accused or charged with child trafficking; third, the aftermath of the post-election violence of 2008 continued to haunt these economically disadvantaged families who had not been able to pull together the resources needed to move from the IDP camp.

As a response to these complexities, Kiongozi and the staff needed to handle the situation with tact and care. They took several steps to establish trusting relationships with the children and their parents to understand their concerns. Firstly, a trusted local pastor was enlisted to organize and facilitate discussions with the children and the impending changes in their living circumstances. Secondly, the parents, guardians, and caregivers of the children were located and informed about their legal obligations. Thirdly, parents and guardians were provided information on resources available within the community or from government to assist them in resuming care for their children. The work and learning involved in this complex and challenging organizational

restructuring process enabled Kiongozi to develop professional skills in ethical decision-making and problem-solving, which he indicated that he would never gain from other contexts or university courses.

The difficulties and challenges Kenyan university students experienced in CBL may resonate with those who are familiar with CBL in African contexts as examples of *erlebnis*. Within hermeneutic practice, *erlebnis* was used by Dilthey to refer to intense experiences that stand out as remarkable ones which linger as objects of reflection and contemplation (Moules et al., 2015). However, emotional entropy, especially during intense CBL experiences such as these, has the potential to arrest transformational learning if students become overwhelmed and unable to engage in effective reflective praxis. Emotional entropy has been offered as a heuristic phrase for expressing intense emotional upheavals that students can encounter as an aspect of cognitive dissonance (Cress, 2018). This research widens our understanding of the complex realities and difficulties of CBL in Kenya, and has important implications for CBL planning and implementation in higher education institutions, particularly in contexts where history, culture, language, and socioeconomic factors have been strongly impacted due to colonial history and traditions. The next section shares some examples of *erfahrung* or the “binding quality of experience” (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 84) in discussing findings that are consistent with the broader, international CBL literature.

Cross-cutting Concerns and Implications

This interpretative inquiry began by being struck by the sparse knowledge of CBL in Kenya and also sought to use hermeneutics to bring forward familiar strands of significance and meaning in a distinctive and relatively unexamined setting (Jardine, 1998). In addition to the intensely meaningful CBL experiences described above, participants also shared experiences that brought forward concerns which are common to many students’ experiences of CBL, ones which transcend the Kenyan context. These universal concerns are also important to note given there has been so little CBL research conducted in Kenya.

Participants’ sharing and reflection on their CBL experiences in this study indicated their burgeoning understanding of the complexities of CBL in Kenya which disrupted some of their assumptions and stereotypes about communities and the people they served; however, none of the participants named their experiences as initiation during our conversations. This is a common experience in CBL where students are invited into unfamiliar organizations and settings to work as they learn about and from the community; they develop their emerging identity as a professional and examine their ways of knowing (Brandenberger, 2012; Jardine, 2006). The substance of many of the experiences they talked about eventually led to looking at their stories as a rite of passage. Initiation, defined as the action of beginning something (Oxford Dictionary, 2019), comes with feelings of uncertainty and shouldering of responsibility as students learned to deal with difficult situations while gaining deeper understanding of the struggles and complexities of community-building in Kenya. This became a new layer in understanding the meaning of CBL experiences for Kenyan university students.

Travelling literally and figuratively into new communities for CBL placements meant that participants were in uncharted territory where they were not familiar with many of the formal and informal rules of the workplace. Participants discovered that some workplace norms were unfixed and ambiguous, which increased the challenges during their CBL because these student interns were situated in a grey zone of not being employees, yet had more responsibility than typical volunteers. Navigating this grey zone by clarifying expectations and taking ownership of their

learning in the community is a predictor for successful CBL experiences (Kabaria-Muriithi, VanLeeuwen, Kathuri-Ogola, & Weeks, 2018; Olson & Montgomery, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 2018). Not all participants in this study specifically talked about their experiences with the ambiguity of their role as a student engaged in CBL. However, helping students foresee and navigate the ambiguity of their role as professionals-in-training is also important to galvanize positive transformative outcomes for students from very challenging CBL experiences.

Integrate the Pedagogy of Discomfort into Program Learning

The use of the pedagogy of discomfort is very limited in CBL and this approach is critical in settings such as Kenya, where there are deep social inequities. CBL experiences such as those discussed in this paper, should challenge students' dominant beliefs and social habits. However, reducing the intensity of CBL experiences to make them less painful is not necessarily the answer to dealing with difficult learning situations. In fact, reducing the intensity may offer students the *mere possibility* of recognition of crucial learning and understanding (Phelan, 2005), keeping in mind that "(r)ecognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely" (Dewey, 1934, para 42). By normalizing that CBL can be uncomfortable, students such as these participants, can come to realize that the challenges, limits, and tensions they experience are not only the original difficulties of becoming human service professionals, but also opportunities for transformative professional growth because "We experience the limits of our experience by experiencing something that calls us to go beyond the limits of our experience" (Jardine, 2006, p. 271).

In this study, all participants spoke of difficult CBL learning moments outside of their comfort zone and their challenges in confronting and working through them. Each of the participants spoke of situations where they encountered practices which sustained social inequities in Kenyan communities. Participants indicated that they were unsure how to challenge these practices or received information or advice from peers or supervisors that would perpetuate the status quo. They did not believe they had the capacity to interrogate issues of power in the moment. In their work with South African students, Bheekie and van Huyssteen (2015) noted that repeated exposure to inequity can lead students to develop a sense of passive empathy, isolation and silencing, which in turn, can hinder affective learning in CBL. While this silencing may be generated by issues associated with power relations, fear, and identity politics, proactive measures in the form of (1) preparatory work which may be for-credit courses or formal preparation sessions which engage students in understanding the root causes of societal and community inequities; (2) access to appropriate faculty support during the CBL experience; and (3) opportunities for reflection and in-depth de-briefing following the CBL placement, with faculty and peers, can avert such negative outcomes. Normalizing uncomfortable moments as transformative and memorable CBL experiences by exposing students to the pedagogy of discomfort prior to their CBL placements can be an integral part of this. Actions such as these can serve to support students as they reframe their thinking based on their CBL experiences, break down barriers to the development of authentic and caring relationships during their CBL placement, and empower them to become effective agents of change in Kenyan communities.

Acknowledging that discomfort is part of the learning process has implications for the CBL experiences of students as they develop confidence in their own knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and capacity to practice in the community. A range of strategies and opportunities for students to express their concerns, successes, limits, or observations, as they navigate CBL in Kenyan settings needs to be coupled with appropriate support from field supervisors and faculty

in order for students to take meaningful action; actions which can enhance students affective learning and civic literacy during their CBL placement.

Structured Guidance for Critical Reflection

CBL learning outcomes can be maximized by critical reflection, a means of examining thinking (Dewey, 1910). Guided reflection activities can take many different forms as they contribute to student learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). This is not to say that reflection cannot and should not be encouraged at serendipitous moments, such as collegial conversation about CBL experiences on the road while returning to the organization's offices or through individual or collaborative artistic expression. However, planned and structured critical reflection on CBL experiences and related academic content followed by feedback and assessment is a powerful mechanism helping students generate meaning, unearth questions, confront biased assumptions, integrate or contrast their theoretical knowledge with practice and deepen learning and thinking (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Whitney & Clayton, 2011). Critical reflection is a powerful tool that can complement the pedagogy of discomfort. In addition, reflection activities during the CBL placement can help students process and document their learning. Field supervisors employed by the partner organizations are busy doing their day-to-day work and providing direct supervision to students; they may not have the capacity to assist students beyond this. It is the role of the university through course instructors to guide and support students in critical reflection on their CBL experiences. Dual pronged, hand-in-hand supervision involving field supervisors and faculty is very effective in supporting students' CBL because the "high-quality on-site supervision seems to increase general complexity of thought and awareness of variability, while the quality of on-campus instruction influences the awareness of obstacles and of ways to address these obstacles" (Batchelder & Root, 1994, p. 353).

Facilitating students' critical reflection and dialogue on their CBL experiences is important not only for the Kenyan context, but also more broadly because CBL without adequate reflection can lead to simplistic solutions to complex situations, reinforced stereotypes, and perpetuation of systems of power and privilege (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Pompa, 2002). These are not desired outcomes for CBL. Reflecting and addressing the challenges and complexities that arise from working in Kenyan community settings, where resources are scarce and access to university instructors and peers for dialogue and feedback is sporadic, will require innovative practices that are concurrently rigorous yet flexible and can also build readiness for deeper learning in the future. Faculty are encouraged to design assignments that allow students to consider academic content alongside personal reflection (Savicki & Price, 2018) and to build opportunities for post-placement reflection (Pasquarelli, Cole, & Tyson, 2018). Developing and supporting communities of practice (e.g., Cress & Donahue, 2011) for students during their CBL placements is one option that enables student access to faculty and peer support concurrently. The high adoption rates of cell-phone technology in Kenya, especially among university students, opens up learning opportunities using mobile phones, often called m-learning in the literature, that were not available even a few years ago. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend offering professional development opportunities for faculty to develop greater capacity to design and assess critical reflection activities and assignments that are sensitive to the realities of Kenyan communities. Assigning faculty with an appropriate background in emancipatory transformative learning (Freire & Macedo, 1995) to facilitate and support the critical reflection and dialogue is necessary to foster student learning from their experiences and community settings. Ensuring students' timely access to both field supervisors and university faculty to gain support and guidance is equally imperative.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the pedagogy of discomfort which is not widely used in CBL is an important approach that should be considered for CBL, especially in settings with deep social disparities such as Kenya. Positive and productive CBL experiences do not always end up being easy and comfortable, and Kenyan students should be prepared for these growing pains and well-supported in their progress towards becoming human service professionals. Universities have a responsibility to facilitate students' CBL using the most effective practices known, otherwise there is danger that such experiences will perpetuate stereotypes and lead to more deeply engrained negative attitudes perpetuating current power systems and severe social injustices. Most civic engagement programs in higher education fail to address injustices that exist in our neighbourhoods, communities, nations, and across the globe because of the lack of critical civic literacy (Pollack, 2014). Through understanding and interpreting the meaning of difficult CBL experiences for Kenyan university students, we believe it is important to integrate the pedagogy of discomfort in CBL in Kenya because it can empower students to challenge dominant beliefs and normative practices and to identify innovative practices that contribute to greater social justice and equity. CBL integrated with a social change paradigm can enrich curriculum and open new opportunities for fostering civic responsibility (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006). This is particularly important for Kenya and those countries where widespread social inequality exists due to the colonial history and the disconnection between the social services and the local communities' unique needs. By paying close attention to the multiple tensions in the Kenyan context, the newest generation of human service professionals can be empowered to promote positive social changes through enhanced critical civic literacy and transformative CBL experiences.

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