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R. Cerrillo Martín, "Service Learning as a Community of Practice in Irish Higher Education: Understanding Cultural and Historical Nuances". Service Learning at a Glance. Ed. Rodríguez-Izquierdo, Rosa M. Novapublishers (2022): pp. 19-40

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Chapter 2

Service Learning as a Community of Practice in Irish Higher Education: Understanding Cultural and Historical Nuances

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Abstract

Service learning is a pedagogical approach that connects student learning to real world needs through civic engagement. This qualitative research paper¹ explores enactments of service learning and conceptions of civic engagement within an Irish university. The perspectives of those engaging in the pedagogy operating as a community of practice are presented, in order to understand the cultural and historical contextual influences. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the community of practice participants in service learning (university leaders, students, academics, community partners and staff at the centre for civic engagement); review of key institutional documents and reflective practitioner journals undertaken. The inquiry indicates that cultural and historical context matters when conceiving of and enacting service learning as a community of practice within Ireland. These

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¹ This work was supported by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades through the Programa Estatal de Promoción del Talento y su Empleabilidad en el marco del Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica y Técnica y de Innovación 2013-2016 en I+D+i, Subprograma de Movilidad (Grant number PRX18/00607).

In: Service Learning at a Glance

Editor: Rosa M. Rodríguez-Izquierdo

ISBN: 978-1-68507-739-6

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findings align with other studies and the paper draws points of discussion, reflection, and conclusion in terms of implications for the field.

Keywords: service learning, civic engagement, higher education, communities of practice, Ireland

Introduction

Service learning (SL) is a form of experiential education whereby students are guided to connect academic knowledge to real world needs and concerns to enhance their civic engagement (Bringle and Hatcher 1996; Eyler and Giles 1999; Seifer 1998; Sigmon 1994). However, engagement with the community is viewed as the ‘fulcrum’ (Howard 2003, 2). Through service learning, student learning is extended beyond the four walls of the classroom into the community (Aramburuzabala, Cerrillo, and Tello 2015; Birdwell, Scott, and Horley 2013; Eyler and Giles 1999; McIlrath and MacLabhrain 2006; O’Connor 2012; Sigmon 1996; Zlotkowski 1999).

This qualitative research inquiry focuses on SL within an Irish university. It aims to explore and identify if more nuanced understandings from the enactment of SL exist within a university within this context. The Irish and European Union (EU) higher education policy landscape is abundant with references to and articulations for active citizenship and community engagement to be embedded as part of the higher education experience (Commission of the European Communities 2001; Department of Education and Skills 2011; EHEA 1999). The European Commission’s Renewed Agenda for Higher Education (Commission to the European Parliament, 2017) has underlined the importance of community involvement and encouraged a civic vision of universities. Also, Irish higher education policy in the last two decades has placed a new emphasis on community partnership through research, teaching and learning.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Community of Practice and Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Wenger’s community of practice theory (1998) has been employed for this inquiry as its central characteristics align with the enactment and principles of SL. Communities of practice can be described as ‘groups of people who share

a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002, 4).

This theory has been adopted to explore how those involved in the enactment of SL in a university in Ireland, committed to institutionalising SL, engage to develop, and share knowledge, as well as embed and mainstream the approach through their social interactions. This inquiry aims to ascertain if and how social structures in the form of culture and history influence the enactment of SL from those operating as a community of practice.

Communities of practice theory firstly underlines that participation is central and does not only refer to participation in isolated events but also refers to being part of the community and contributing to the construction of identities (Wenger 1998). Secondly, communities of practice share a purpose. Thirdly, democratic principles are essential to understand the process (Hart and Wolff 2007). Fourthly, communities of practice are fluid and boundless, evolve over time and 'it is not so clear where they begin and end' (Wenger 1998, 96). Finally, the so-called practice of brokering opens new possibilities for learning. Some actors in the communities have been described as 'boundary spanners' (Hart and Wolff 2007, 200) as they can facilitate 'different ways of seeing and doing across different domains' (Hart et al. 2013, 282).

This research inquiry underpins the community of practice theoretical framework with reference to Vygotskian cultural historical theory (Vygotsky 1978). Cultural and historical theory has been referred as 'a cross-disciplinary framework for studying how humans purposefully transform natural and social reality, including themselves, as an ongoing culturally and historically situated, materially and socially mediated process' (Roth, Radford, and LaCroix 2012, 1). The intention of this combined theoretical framework is to provide a set of conceptual ideas in order to assess the enactment of SL as a community of practice through the perspectives of those engaging in the pedagogy within the cultural and historical contexts of a university in Ireland.

Service Learning in Ireland: A Brief Context

From a policy perspective, scholars agree that 'government policies can have a substantial impact on university civic engagement through mandates, and through incentives and exhortation' (Watson et al. 2011, 250) and this is true within the Irish context. The system of public higher education Ireland is in

flux due to a myriad of reasons, not least an on-going economic recession since 2008 and huge financial cutbacks over the last decade. The system is in the process of restructuring as many institutes of technology strive to become re-designate as new technological universities through the formation of new cluster arrangements. There are eight public universities governed by the Universities Act 1997. According to this Act the core functions of universities are to 'promote the cultural and social life of society,' 'foster a capacity for critical thinking amongst its students,' and 'contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development.' While the Act does not refer to SL, civic engagement or any other pedagogy for that matter, there is a conducive legislative environment for SL to flourish given that the values referred to in the act align with SL principles. However, SL as a pedagogy to promote civic engagement is given attention at national policy level within the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2011) or sometimes known as the Hunt Report. This policy states that 'engaging with the wider society' is 'one of the three interconnected core roles of higher education' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 75).

Also, the Presidents of higher education in Ireland crafted and then gathered in 2014 to sign Campus Engage² Charter for Civic and Community Engagement (Campus Engage 2014). This Charter was designed to capture the principles of community and civic engagement and encourages diversity in terms of how each institution engages with society.

Over the last two decades, there has been growing momentum among universities in Ireland to develop supportive infrastructure and new SL programmes. The term SL within an Irish context is problematic, and many institutions have created their own language for the pedagogy including community-engaged or based learning. Campus Engage has adopted community-based learning and teaching (CBLT) as a catch all phrase to encompass SL that connects student and community learning together. All universities are members of Campus Engage which is the national network to foster civic engagement. Campus Engage is hosted by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and overseen by the Presidents of the eight universities in Ireland. It was originally funded by the government through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) 'to promote civic engagement as a core function of higher education on the island of Ireland, by better enabling higher

² Campus Engage is the Irish national network that promoted civic engagement within higher education in Ireland and has been funded by the government through the Higher Education Authority.

education Institutions (HEIs), their staff and students across all disciplines, to engage with the needs of the communities they serve' (Campus Engage 2014).

Method

The main objective of the study was to explore the enactment of SL at the University of Ireland³ through the perspectives of those engaging in the pedagogy, in order to understand the cultural and historical contextual influences. This research inquiry is qualitative, and the goal is to 'see through the eyes' of the research participants and engage them in a series of 'close' encounters (Bryman 1984, 78). These include university leadership, students, community partners, academics and centre(s) for civic engagement personnel that comprise a community of practice that gather around the enactment of SL.

A qualitative case study research approach was adopted that involved the collection and analysis of relevant data through semi-structured interviews conducted with the community of practice participants (see participants below). The Irish context is of particular interest for the reason stated above and allows for a better understanding of SL at a deep and specific level within one university.

The research participants selected draws from community of practice theory that brings 'groups of people informally bounded together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise' (Wenger and Snyder 2000, 139). The enterprise within this research inquiry is SL and all the participants selected are involved, assuming different roles and to differing degrees. These five constituent groups include:

- University leaders bring an institutional commitment to civic engagement through university mission and vision, and the creation of policies that encourage practices.
- Academics have the responsibility to design curricula and underpin programmes of study with this approach.
- Students participate in SL courses overseen by academics and through theory to practice dimensions engage with community.

³ This research has been developed in one university of Ireland. In order to maintain the institution anonymized authors used the name 'University of Ireland' to refer to it. For the same reason they use 'Centre for Civic Engagement' when talking about the unit that foster civic engagement on campus.

- Community partners provide the space and community identified activities, and in turn benefit from the sharing of knowledge.
- Centre(s) for civic engagement staff create supportive infrastructure for SL to become embedded through the provision of training, contacts with community, seed funding and support.

Table 1. Research participants

Keys	Research Participants
L	Leader
S	Student
A	Academic
CP	Community Partner
CCE	Centre for Civic Engagement

Note: Author's own.

Each interviewee has been labelled as follows: 1) type of participant (L: Leader/ S: Student / A: Academic / CP: Community partner / CCE: Centre for Civic Engagement), 2) page of the interview transcription where the quotation is located. E.g., [CCE, p.4].

Data Collection and Data Analysis Process

The field work was carried out between April and July 2019. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews among essential participants involved in SL; a review of institutional documents and through reflective practitioner journals.

Interview questions were validated by experts in the SL field, generated by the literature, and piloted in advance. The research objectives were shared and explained to interviewees. They were also informed of confidentiality and each interview lasted 45 minutes on average and a good rapport between interviewer and interviewee was maintained within a comfortable and private setting on campus. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

For the purpose of this study, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was adopted to identify, develop and analyze patterns across the interviews. This method identified six phases of thematic analysis: familiarization with

the data; initial coding; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and, writing up of the data. In addition, the SL community of practice within this Irish site of inquiry was assessed using the EDGE tool (NCCPE 2018) through four main stages of SL development and institutionalization: embryonic; developing; gripping and embedding (McIlrath 2019). Atlasti 7 software was used to facilitate and organize data analysis.

Results and Main Findings

The analysis of the interviews has provided an understanding of SL and how it is perceived at the University of Ireland. Four broad thematic areas emerge from the findings that include: Community as Central; SL as a Community of Practice; Public Good; and Strategy, Recognition, Infrastructure and Citizenship. These themes will now be explored in greater depth.

Theme A – Community as Central

The data analysis relates that there exists a unique Irish sense of community and a natural inclination to engage with community that could be attributed to historical and cultural roots. In general, the Irish legacy of colonization and oppression, a Catholic tradition that has been bound up in State related areas from governance to education, and societal challenges such as the Famine, the Troubles, the recent financial crisis, and a long history of migration could be described as factors that have fostered a culture of community engagement and deep sense of social capital. Culturally, a strong charitable tradition and a culture of giving also underpins the Irish sense of community. This is evidenced in the academic's remarks:

We're naturally more generous or more inclined to charity I think these are some of the values that maybe you're raised with, that you want to become involved. I think it's more a cultural thing... [A, p.5]

...I mean if you take the idea that, you know, Ireland is this very, you know because of you know it's religious values of charity and volunteering or because of a certain history of oppression ... [A, p.10]

The leader highlights that this culture of engagement is part of the national ethos and says that ‘we try and work with people as opposed to impose ourselves on people.’ The student explains that ‘it’s very common across the whole country in secondary school to be engaged in social outreach programmes’ and emphasizes the scale of community events organized by the student’s union and societies within universities.

In addition, many interviewees referred to previous community engagement experiences that had an impact on their commitment to and shaping of SL. Many mentioned ‘sports’ as fundamental to their sense of community, the student also mentioned ‘fundraising for charities’ as pivotal experiences, the CCE Director refers to a variety of volunteering and educational experiences that led her towards this pedagogy. It is evident that all interviewees shared a sense of community involvement that relates to their previous formal education and informal experiences. The community partner’s reasons for becoming involved in SL were more pragmatic in nature. He recalled that he first showed an interest in SL because he needed university research to ‘back up’ or evidence what the community organizations were doing to make positive change in society.

When analyzing the interviews, the frequency of the use of the word ‘community’ is striking and evident in all responses. Also evident is that engagement with the community is reciprocal and of mutual benefit through SL. The student highlighted these values:

... what we have learned and sharing it with a community... so I have been learning Italian for the last four years and I am going to a school where none of students will know Italian whatsoever, and I am sharing a little bit of my knowledge with them and that might influence them in the future... [S, p.3]

The academic, after indicating a preference for the term ‘community-based learning’ (as did the community partner) over the term ‘service learning,’ expanded on this two-way relationship:

I always must teach them [students] humility and not to see themselves as these amazing experts who come in to spread their knowledge, that’s a very important thing they need to understand that they are learning as much as they are contributing to the community [A, p.2]

The academic added that SL can be an ‘eye-opening’ experience for students that can develop ‘confidence,’ ‘sense of achievement’ and

‘creativity.’ The leader shares the academic’s sentiments about the importance of understanding that the University does not only teach but ‘also learns’ from the community. The CCE Director said:

It’s been very much collaboration with the community and only doing things if they responded to a need within the community [CCP, p.2]

The student and the academic both indicated that a strong sense of community, an inclination to share and to engage or, as the academic explicitly said, to get involved as responsible citizens is essential:

...and the idea of citizen as well as I think that would probably be in the Irish context quite strong in terms of community involvement that it is a civic thing [A, p.4]

Mutuality and reciprocity are further explained by the academic, and she added:

So, for me civic engagement is just working with but also beside the community and not say reaching out or down or you know things like that so the mutuality of it is the engagement part for me [A, p.7]

Theme B - SL as a Community of Practice

Within this case study, SL operates as a community of practice but the strength of relationships that exists between the members varies. It could be suggested that working as a community of practice is a natural endeavor in Ireland due to the historic practice of ‘meitheal.’ Meitheal describes an old Irish tradition where people in rural communities gathered to farm, share equipment and labor, and to help each other to save the hay, cut the turf as a form of working together to achieve a common good or goal.

The CCE Director explains the importance of a community of practice approach and highlights that SL at this University is ‘connected to community of practice theory (...) there are no experts and there are no novices, everybody is learning from each other.’ When explaining the beginnings of SL in this University she said:

we had a service-learning pilot group, and this was very much action orientated, people learning from each other’s expertise and, and really

making, making the road by walking together (...) after three years became a hugely influential academic group (...) we changed the name and they became Meitheal, is a Gaelic word it's an Irish word for community or community gathering around a common concern [CCP, p.5].

Both, the leader, and the student highlight that they are part of the community and SL modules are beneficial for the students and for the community.

We don't see ourselves as distant or apart, we are very much part of the community... [L, p.1].

All the research participants talk about 'Community Based Learning' rather than 'Service Learning.' The student prefers this term as it denotes '...engagement with the community' and the academic says:

...is a more accurate description of what it is. I think the term 'service' also had some connotations that are different to 'community based' [A, p.1]

When analyzing the community of practice approach at this University, the nature and depth of relationships that exist between the research participants vary from fragile to strong. They engage with each other through a variety of guises, such as peripheral participants, as full participants, as expert performers and as boundary spanners (Lave and Wenger 1991). From analysis of the data, the nature of the community of practice at this University can be represented by the following visual map.

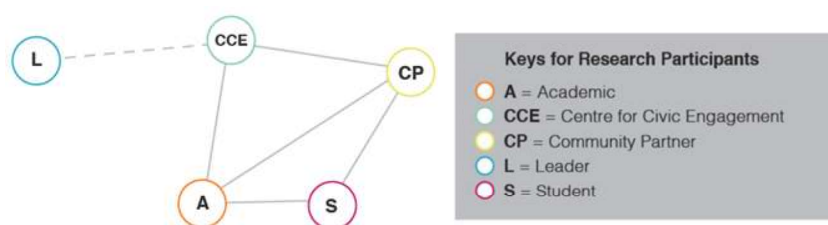


Figure 1. Visual map of the community of practice. Note: Developed by Authors.

This visual map represents the University of Ireland's SL community of practice and the strong connection that exists between the Director of CCE, the academic and the community partner. To explain further and when triangulating the interview data, this finding illustrates how the CCE Director

is both the boundary spanner and the expert performer as she brought her knowledge of the pedagogy from her work at another university. Both the academic and the community partner underlined the importance of the CCE as a ‘resource,’ a ‘dating agency’ and the community partner pointed out that it acts as an ‘interpreter’ that translates and ‘speaks both languages,’ namely academic and the community languages. Brokerage functions are core to community of practice theory.

The leader is a peripheral participant and the broken line between him and the CCE illustrates a top-level commitment to the CCE but remains disconnected to the rest of the members. The strong line depicted between the academic, the community partner, the CCE and the student indicates a set of strong relationships, shared vision and practice. They can be described as full participants within the community of practice (Hart et al. 2013). There is no direct relationship between the CCE and the student as the contact is secondary through the academic.

Combining this set of relationships with documentary analysis for the Irish site, the enactment of SL at the University of Ireland could be described as at an ‘embedded stage’ of development. It is embedded as it has been ‘prioritized in the institution’s official mission and other key strategies, with success indicators identified’ (NCCPE 2018). Community engagement is conceived as a central University vision; the CCE of the university is a national and international resource; SL courses have been developed across the university; resources have been allocated to sustain this; and there are several recognized networks.

We can relate that SL is influenced by wider contextual historical and cultural dimensions and a history of giving within Ireland. All those involved in the COP are concerned about community challenges, and share a vision of working as equal partners, underpinned by the value of reciprocity. SL within this site of inquiry operates as a community of practice but the strength of relationships varies across the participants.

Theme C - Public Good

All interviewees highlighted that universities could contribute to society if teaching and learning, research and service intersect with ‘life’ and a real-world context. Interviewees all imagine a university that is not apart from ‘life’ but one that contributes fully and positively. Both the community partner and

the academic see SL as beneficial to students as it can ‘bring their learning to life.’

The community partner implicitly stated that the obligation of universities is to participate in improving real lives of people. They also see this form of applied learning as core to academic and personal development.

So, from our point of view if there’s a benefit to someone who is in the homeless services, or a woman who is in the domestic violence refuge, or an older person who needs support... If they’re getting benefit from service learning that’s all we care about, that’s our job is to make sure their lives are improving. [CP, p.10].

The interviewees also indicate that an engaged university is a place for ‘sharing’ and a source of ‘inspiration’ for the wider world. The community partner explained that a good university is a good neighbor and must strive to eradicate ‘mystique’ and ‘snobbery’ often associated with universities often conceptualized as historic ivory towers. The CCE Director spoke of SL as a ‘distinctive pillar’ of her university. This idea of distinctiveness can also be found in the leader’s answers as he explained that he expects that the forthcoming strategic plan will have community engagement as a distinctive ethos of the institution. The leader emphasized:

I think we first and foremost serve our society. And if we are serving our society well then, we must engage. . . it’s working *with* community. [L, p.1].

Theme D – Strategy, Recognition, Infrastructure and Citizenship

When reflecting on the future and structures required to foster ‘engagement,’ the interviewees pointed out the importance of the University’s strategic plan, (under consultation at the time of the data gathering process). They indicated that this plan should prove clarity on the importance of SL. They also pointed the necessity of central resources such as a Vice President and/or Vice Deans for engagement or community engagement.

In addition to strategy, the interviewees perceived recognition as a critical factor to foster the pedagogy. The leader underlined the need for ‘supporting colleagues who wish to develop SL.’ All interviewees referenced the importance of recognizing academics who are committed to SL for their efforts and the labor required to work in partnership with the community

through formal career promotional structures. The CCE relates that recognition through promotions would evidence a real 'cultural change' and according to the Community Partner this would represent a 'mind shift.'

Also, recognition was referred to by way of celebrating achievements through SL and the need for more formal ways to acknowledge the pedagogy:

...sometimes I'm concerned that service learning is fragile because it's not celebrated at a high institutional level... [CCP, p.3].

The interviewees acknowledge that a central structure is required to successfully promote and support civic engagement and SL within higher education. The CCE in the University of Ireland is a university-wide centre that embeds an ethos and practice of civic engagement across the university. It acts as a catalyst to create innovations for the University, to democratize and share knowledge, and to give students an opportunity to engage. The centre creates new partnerships between the community and university that involve community members, staff and students in activities with mutual benefits (through teaching and learning, research and service). All the interviewees emphasize the key role of a central structure to promote and support civic engagement and SL. The academic explains:

...you need a willingness there and then a structure that will allow it and then obviously we had the support of the CCE to bring it into reality and I know, that has moved to other universities... [A, p.10].

The Leader declares his intention to expand the CCE making it central to the new strategic plan: '...something in the next strategy we are thinking of doing more is expanding the CCE... making it more central to the strategy.' The academic understood that the evolution of SL and community engagement for higher education in Ireland started in this University: 'A lot of what is happening nationally happened here, started here.'

The community partner refers to the CCE as a dating agency and as the broker between the University and the community. He highlighted that people in the CCE can speak 'both languages' and understand both sides as the mediators or 'interpreters.'

...one of the biggest challenges for community organizations is understanding who in the university, like who do you go to... they were like a dating agency, so they wanted to see what we wanted, and they identified who in the university could do that. [CP, p.3].

He also refers to the CCE Director as:

...that link person between the community partners and the university.
And someone who can speak both languages. And understands both sides...
[CP, p.13]

The CCE Director describes her role as a type of cartography:

I talk about us being cartographers we're in the business of creating
maps between the university and the community and bringing people
together along those maps. [CCP, p.15]

All interviewees acknowledged that SL contributes to education for citizenship and that it be recognized as a tool to further enhance democracy. Recognition for SL in this example was cited by the student as something that is officially endorsed by a higher education institution as a message to society. The academic further elaborates on the civic underpinnings of SL:

...an idea, I suppose, a sort of questioning about civic values and
engagement within students and a lot of looking at the students that the
university produces... Create graduates who have a sense of their civic
responsibilities [A, p.6].

For the university the aim of it [SL] is to have students out in the
community almost as ambassadors [A, p.2].

This rationale to 'produce' responsible citizens has some historical roots. The academic and the leader mentioned that Ireland is a country with a 'history of oppression' that could explain an Irish inclination to foster collective efforts.

...we were governed by Britain or by England for so long that I think we
had to navigate from positions of the dispossessed or people who didn't have
power. And because of that we had to find other ways to engage rather than
through power relationships... I think historically we are open to working
together... [L, p.3]

The leader referenced the concept of a 'legitimate university' when explaining that when an institution that is engaged within and for society, then it gains legitimacy within that society.

Summary of Findings

1. Irish sense of community and engagement have both historical and cultural roots.

The historical context of oppression and deprivation within Ireland (colonization, famine, migration, conflict, financial crisis) is perceived by the interviewees as factors that has fostered a unique sense of community and engagement. Culturally, a strong charitable tradition underpins the Irish sense of community that could be described as rooted in a Catholic history and legacy, but expressed in contemporary Ireland as civic action. Another aspect influencing community engagement is the cultural legacy of ‘meitheal’ that underpins the community of practice approach to SL.

2. Within this Irish site of inquiry SL operates as a community of practice but relationships vary between the members.

The set of relationships assessed within the Irish case study embody a community of practice approach to the enactment of SL with various sets of strong to weaker relationships existing. SL could be described as at an ‘embedded stage’ of development.

3. From this Irish case study, higher education institutions should be relevant to the real world and public good.

The interviewees all indicate that higher education institutions must be relevant to real world needs. Within this case study, theory without practical application is viewed as elitist and viewed negatively in this site of inquiry.

4. Irish higher education institutions can gain deeper legitimacy through societal engagement and from an Irish point of view democracy is strengthened through SL.

The academic sees SL as:

... an alignment of the vision of what you see the universities function as being and what you are you know training students to be so that’s civic notion (...) and the idea of a citizen as well I think that would probably be in

the Irish context quite strong in terms of community involvement that it is a civic thing [A, p.4].

The CCE Director explains the civic engagement strategy at the University of Ireland:

...the university strategy, this is our teaching, learning and assessment strategy that talks about service learning and this also sets up the, the Representatives for Civic Engagement...Each college will nominate an academic staff with the responsibility for civic engagement [CCP, p.3].

5. Structural changes are required within an Irish context for the full recognition of SL and of those who enact it.

Structural changes within higher education institutions are critical for higher levels of recognition for SL and those who enact it. All those involved as community of practice in SL must receive recognition at all levels, including national, regional, and local level and this can be expressed monetary and non-monetary (flexibility, support, dissemination of their work, celebration and communication).

Conclusion and Discussion

This inquiry indicates that Irish citizens share a strong sense of community and a shared aspiration is to bring university closer to real life. The inquiry also suggests that cultural and historical context matters when conceiving of and enacting SL as a community of practice. This is in parallel with McIlrath (2019) that looked at nuanced enactments of the pedagogy within three diverse European contexts, namely Belgium, Croatia and England and draw points of discussion, reflection, and conclusion in terms of implications for advancing the field (Sabzalieva 2016).

From a historical point of view the famine, history of oppression, institutional abuses, conflict in Northern Ireland, fiscal recessions, migration, charitable tradition, the Catholic tradition, and Celtic Tiger have all impacted upon SL. SL is seen as a mechanism to address social injustices and prepare student for their role as democratic citizens. This is in parallel with the literature - that the 'history of a culture powerfully shapes all levels of contexts' (Miller 2003, 375).

One rationale for the Irish government's initial drive to support to community engagement was that 'there was a belief of a lack of civic values developing among a young generation,' as the academic affirms. SL modules were considered as a mechanism to 'counteract a certain apathy and drop in engagement.' At the University of Ireland, SL has been described as a pedagogical approach that encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society, inside and outside the classroom. It was viewed as a mechanism to enable students to learn from engagement with communities through participation, and that academic staff would guide students through this process by structured reflection and the integration of theory and practice. Community partners are viewed as crucial to the process and could encompass charities, non-governmental organizations, statutory bodies, associations, or any organization with a focus on social responsibility (McIlrath and McMenamin 2019). It is evident that SL as a pedagogy has gone through a process of 'localisation' (Boland and McIlrath 2007) or re-territorialization (Le Grange 2007).

Ireland is a small country with eight public universities that have all contributed to the creation of Campus Engage. Campus Engage is dedicated to supporting Irish higher education institutions to embed, promote and increase civic and community engagement activities. These universities work as a community of practice and have drawn upon their own wisdom to find ways to engage that align historically and culturally.

The theoretical frameworks of community of practice theory (Wenger 1998) through a cultural historical lens (Vygotsky 1978) has also been adopted within the literature. This theoretical opportunity may allow for the telling of a bigger story than one theory by itself might relate and provide an opportunity to unearth contextual nuances related to cultural and historical inflections on the enactment of SL through the eyes of the participants enacting the pedagogy as a community of practice.

There is a deficit of empirical research that encompasses the perspectives of all those involved in the enactment of the pedagogy within universities. While the literature on the embedding of SL emphasizes the necessity of all these actors, most studies have focused on single or double population clusters of students, academics, leadership, and centre staff, and, to a lesser degree, community partners (Evans 2015; Hampden-Thompson et al. 2015; Mann and Casebeer 2016; Mtawa and Fongwa 2020; Opazo, Aramburuzabala, and Cerrillo 2016). This inquiry affords the opportunity of providing a representation of diverse actors but is a small-scale sample within one university in Ireland institutionalising the pedagogy as a community of

practice. This aligns with other studies that articulate the necessity of the contribution of all these stakeholders (Bringle and Hatcher 1996; Furco 2007; Holland 2001; Morton and Troppe 1996).

Future research can focus on expanding the sample within the Irish context, this would allow the study to gain a better understanding about cultural and historical nuances when referring to the enactment of SL.

Although while adopting a case study qualitative approach, we cannot claim any generalizations. Nevertheless, although the findings are limited and not generalizable, the insights are illuminative for future enactments of the pedagogy in diverse contexts, particularly in Europe. This inquiry has given us the drive to investigate other European countries where SL is beginning to take root. Moreover, this research inquiry may present revised understandings of SL that may be applicable elsewhere.

Acknowledgments

This research inquiry has been developed thanks to the generosity of the research participants and the support of the National University of Ireland, Galway.

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