How Written and Oral Reflection in MBA Capstones Enhance the Ability to Complete a Service-Learning Project

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This study investigated whether reflection enhances the employability skills of graduate business students who participate in service-learning during a capstone course. Participants were recent MBA alumni from three U.S.-based universities who participated in team-based, client-focused service-learning. Qualitative data were analyzed through semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that written and oral reflection improves the ability to accomplish a team-based client project. This is good news for the workplace because business needs workers who can accomplish tasks, meet deadlines, and complete projects. Higher business education must actively prepare students for this workplace need by intentionally building reflective activities into service-learning projects.

It can be difficult for business education curricula to respond to the demands of the workplace by creating authentic learning experiences that bridge a perceived gap between theory and practice. While employers want employees with practical skills, these may be difficult to obtain while in a classroom. One way some business education programs have responded is by incorporating a business capstone into curricula. A capstone is an educational experience that intends to synthesize the content learned in a particular major (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998b). A goal of capstones is for students to reflect on their learning, and intentional reflection, defined as "intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives" (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997, p. 153) is one of the ways capstones help students make meaningful connections between theory and practice.

Literature confirms that critical and deep reflection is important to any learning methodology that involves experiences (Dewey, 1933; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004; Kolb, 1984).Both the amount and quality of reflection have been shown to be predictors of meeting course learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999), and meeting learning outcomes is another a major goal of capstones. At the same time, research has shown that reflection is a proven method for helping to increase depth of understanding in an experiential course such as a capstone (Lang & McNaught, 2013). Andreasen and Wu's (1999) experiential learning model for capstones includes reflection as one of its five components, and goes so far as to say that reflection distinguishes experiential learning from other types of learning.

In addition to other experiential pedagogies, service-learning has proven to be a useful experiential pedagogy that helps students deepen their understanding of course content, provided reflection is part of the service-learning (Eyler, 2002; Robinson, Sherwood and DePaolo, 2010; Wei, Siow & Burley, 2007; Wittmer, 2004). In fact, Kendall (1990) stated that service-learning must include reflection, and defines service-learning programs as educational pedagogies that "combine needed tasks in the community with internal learning goals and with conscious reflection and critical analysis" (p. 20). Service-learning is

increasingly recognized as a legitimate approach to business education, including sub-disciplines such as management information systems (Richmond, Banerjee & White, 2008), accounting (Gujarathi, McQuade and Sarmiento, 2002), business ethics (Wittmer, 2004), management (Aupperle and Sarhan, 1995; Robinson, Sherwood and DePaolo, 2010) and others. However, although proven outcomes of service-learning exist, service-learning experiences are used less in the business discipline than other instructional methods. In a study of over 864 capstone courses taught at 707 American colleges and universities that offer upper-division courses, when the course was a business management course, the most frequent instructional component of the capstone (84%) was a major project. These projects, for the most part, did not involve real-world experiences such as service-learning or internships (Henscheid, 2000). In addition, research related to how service-learning impacts the employability skills of business students is scarce.

Because experiential learning is a proven way for business students to learn, more needs to be understood about how service-learning, especially the reflective activities associated with it, may benefit the employability skills employers who hire business graduates want and need. Because of this, a study (Wickam, 2015) was conducted to examine the alignment between the employability skills employers need and the employability skills that graduate business students gain through service-learning in business capstones. In addition, the study sought to understand whether reflection, a stated requirement of service-learning, enhances the employability skills of graduate business students who participate in service-learning during a capstone. While the study included several research questions, the applicable question for this article is: In what ways did reflection offered through business capstones that included service-learning enhance, in participating students, their employability skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflection plays an important role in enhancing student learning from experiential learning. In service-learning, reflection is considered to be the bridge that connects the service with the learning, and without reflection, the experience cannot be defined as service-learning (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Jacoby, 1996). For capstones, reflection is considered to provide students with a way to synthesize both program and course objectives. Critical reflection is rooted in Dewey (1933) who defined it as, "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 118). Reflection is a metacognitive skill, requiring students to think about how they think (Krathwhol, 2002; Martinez, 2006), which helps build higher-order thinking skills that employers need. Reflection is what connects the service to the learning.

Schon (1987) sees the importance of placing a reflective practicum into a business school, or any professional school, as a "bridge between the worlds of university and practice" (p. 309). He believes reflection should not come last in a sequence of curriculum, but should be at the core of the curriculum. Reflection comes through knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and knowing-in-practice.
Knowing-in-action is the knowledge revealed by doing something, such as riding a bike, using a calculator, or catching a ball. Knowing-in-action is difficult to describe, because we do it without consciously thinking about how we do it; it is quite spontaneous. While this is one important kind of knowledge, it has its limitations. More complex processes need reflection-in-action, the ability to reflect while taking action. This allows us to monitor and adjust our actions in hopes of improving their outcomes and shaping future actions. Knowing-in-practice is when students are able to practice their knowledge in settings that are related to their profession. While practice learning can be done on its own, the best way for a student who hopes to enter a profession such as business to practice learning is to take part in a practicum, which is a "setting designed for the task of learning a practice" (Schon, 1987, p. 37). Service-learning, apprenticeships, and internships are examples of practicums.

Literature confirms that reflection is a key part of a successful service-learning experience, and more broadly, to any successful learning methodology that involves experiences (Dewey, 1933; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolb, 1994). For example, a case study was done of a capstone course consisting of 18 students earning an undergraduate certificate in leadership. The leadership certificate included an experiential

course that focused on either an internship, service-learning, a research project, or another type of experience. Both semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to understand how students perceived reflection during the capstone course. Findings showed that students were able to see value in reflection, but disliked forced reflection in the form of some of the class assignments, and found the time associated with reflective activities a challenge (White, 2012). As another example, an undergraduate business strategy capstone course where students work in teams to provide business consultancy to a real-world client includes a reflection report that is used as one of the course assessments to assess the impact the service-learning had on the students (Robinson, Sherwood, & dePaolo, 2010).

CHARACTERISTICS AND MODELS OF REFLECTION

An evaluative model called The DEAL Model was developed to quantitatively evaluate student reflections in courses that include service-learning experience. It is a process-oriented model that has students (a) Describe the service-learning experience, (b) Examine the service-learning experience from academic, personal growth and civic engagement lenses, and (c) articulate their learning through reflection (Ash, Clayton & Atkinson, 2005; Ash, Clayton & Moses, 2007). The model is grounded in Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Paul and Elder's (2002) work on critical thinking.

The DEAL Model begins with engaging in the experience. Then, through reflection, students articulate their learning through the lens of civic engagement, personal growth and academic enhancement. Reflection surrounding civic engagement asks students to, for example, describe the objectives they and the community organization are mutually working towards as well as how the community is working towards those goals. As another example, students might be asked to consider possible approaches that could be used to foster systemic change in the community organizations. Reflection surrounding personal growth asks students to consider their service-learning experience in light of their beliefs, sense of identity, personal characteristics, and assumptions. Reflection surrounding academic enhancement directly links the course material with the service experience. For example, students might compare academic theories with their experiences, and explain and analyze concepts learned in course readings (Ash, Clayton & Atkinson, 2005).

An evaluative case study of the DEAL Model was undertaken at a large U.S. university. Researchers (Molee et al., 2010) wanted to know what depth of learning and level of critical thinking, if any, students achieved during a service-learning experience. Respondents were 26 freshmen and 16 upper-level students from a freshman psychology course and an upper-level communication studies seminar. The service-learning experiences consisted of 10 weeks of work at a variety of community-based nonprofit organizations. Students participated in several structured reflections designed to measure their depth of learning in academic enhancement, personal growth, and civic engagement, and the assigned reflections were slightly different in the freshman-level course and the upper-level course. Results showed that students had the most difficulty reflecting on civic engagement, with over a third (36.8%) unable to achieve any depth of learning. However, about 24 percent achieved depth of learning at the analyze and synthesize level of learning, and over 34 percent achieved depth of learning at the application level of learning. In the area of personal growth, results were similar. While only about 7 percent were unable to achieve any depth of learning, about 28 percent achieved depth of learning at the analyze and synthesize level, and over 53 percent achieved depth of learning at the application level. In regards to academic enhancement, most students only achieved depth of learning at the application level of learning (55.6%), and about 19 percent did not achieve any depth of learning.

Other reflective models exist, such as the Reflective Judgement Model (RJM) (King and Kitchner, 2002). This model formalizes how reflective thinking is developed in adolescence and carried through into adulthood, and especially informs the work of educational psychologists and others in higher education about high school, college, graduate and non-student adults. The seven developmental stages of the Reflective Judgment Model are grouped into three levels. Stages 1-3 indicate pre-reflective reasoning, meaning a heavy reliance on ones' beliefs/opinions guides reflection, a single, right or wrong answer

exists for questions, evidence is not needed, and all problems are well-structured. Stages 4-5 indicate quasi-reflective reasoning, meaning participants recognize that knowledge is constructed and there may not be a single, right or wrong answer. Still, quasi-reflectors tend to reflect based on evidence that conforms to their beliefs, instead of Stages 6-7, where reflective thinkers allow their beliefs to be informed by the evidence and have the ability to recognize several points of view. These individuals care about knowing about several points of view, because there is recognition that in order to develop their own judgments, they must understand other perspectives. Reflective thinkers come to conclusions, but recognize that those conclusions must be continually reevaluated.

Reflection allows business students to understand course material at a deeper level (Huber & Hutchings, 2004). A study (Economos, 2014) of 3,232 U.S. graduate business and graduate education students contrasted differences in graduate student perceptions of several variables, including deep learning. Findings showed that for the variable deep learning, there was positive significance in differing students' perceptions between graduate business and graduate education students (p=.011).While business students somewhat agreed and agreed that they engaged in deep learning, education students reported that they agreed that they engaged in deep learning. As another example, an Australian business program incorporated a reflective learning journal in its required master's-level management accounting course. A longitudinal case study of the implementation of the learning journal was performed with 37 students in an online course. The course objectives specified that students should be able to "critically evaluate theories and research studies and relate thought, theory and the research literature to the practice of management accounting in the real world" (Bisman, 2011, p. 317). One of the course assignments was a reflective learning journal, where students kept notes and reflective comments about the management course content. Findings included student reactions of appreciation for the ability to include their voice through the learning journals, instead of discipline-specific assignments which were not reflective.

When it comes to reflection, more is not necessarily better. Mabry (1998) studied undergraduate college students in the areas of education, human resources and the arts and sciences and found that when students were assigned two types of written reflection, one an ongoing type such as journaling and one a summative type such as a paper, this was enough to cause significant positive changes in civic attitudes and personal social values. Discussion also proved to be valuable, as students who discussed their experiences with more people, such as students, instructors, and service beneficiaries, had higher personal social values and civic attitudes. Frequency of in-class reflection was also important, as students who reflected more often in class had higher post-course personal social values and perceived a greater academic benefit of the service-learning. There was not, however, a significant difference in students' personal social values based on the amount of in-class reflection.

Experiences should be linked to learning outcomes. Eyler and Giles (1999) studied students from 20 colleges and universities to measure whether there were service-learning program characteristics that were predictors of meeting course learning outcomes. Surveys of 1,500 students were conducted before and after a semester of service-learning, and qualitative interviews of 66 students at 6 colleges were also conducted. Several program characteristics, including reflection, were shown to be predictors of meeting course learning outcomes. Moreover, reflection was associated with the amount students learned and how motivated they were to work harder in their service-learning classes when contrasted with other classes.

There is research showing that timing matters in reflective activities. Reflection can be categorized as reflection before service, reflection during service, and reflection after service. A study focused on how reflection activities should be designed in order to increase the quality of the service-learning experiences for undergraduates. Results showed that having students reflect more than once during the semester increased the quality of the experience (Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004). Students benefit from reflection before service because it allows reflection on any preconceptions they may have about the community they will serve and voice any assumptions they have about the project, which can later be proven or dispelled through more reflection (Eyler, 2002). Reflection during service allows students to monitor their own learning, which is a key aspect of adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1994). Students should be able to discuss experiences with classmates, connect experiences to academic content, continually test assumptions, and possibly engage in reflective activities with community partners.

Reflection after service can include presentations to community partners, reflection papers, and journal entries (Eyler, 2002). Reflection has also been integrated into written end-of-course exams, such as a business communication course which used an essay exam as a reflective tool (Dubinsky, 2006).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design was a non-experimental, comparative, descriptive study. The study's methodology was mixed-methods, and incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to offer various forms of data to address the research questions (Creswell, 2009). For the quantitative part of the study, an existing instrument (Tanyel, 1999) was modified and used to test which, if any, of the essential employability skills that were identified by employers through a literature review, were enhanced by service-learning experiences. Once those results were obtained (Wickam, 2015), the qualitative data collection began. Qualitative research, in a mixed-methods study, is often included when quantitative results alone are not adequate to explain the outcomes. Qualitative data also provide an opportunity to enhance the inclusion of participants' voices, which can enrich and help explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Two groups were compared: Group A consisted of alumni or students who completed a capstone in an MBA program that included a service-learning experience, and Group B consisted of alumni or students who completed a capstone in an MBA program that did not include a service-learning experience (Wickam, 2017). For the qualitative portion of the study, only respondents from Group A were used as survey participants, because they were the ones who completed a capstone that included a service-learning experience.

Sample

The population of interest was graduate business students who completed a capstone experience as part of their MBA program. The sample was purposeful, and the specific type of purposeful sample was criterion sampling (Patton, 1990). Because the existing data on the number of U.S.-based MBA programs that include capstone courses is limited, and no data about the number of MBA capstone courses that include a service-learning component could be found, it was estimated that about 20 percent of MBA capstone courses include a service-learning component.

Recruitment for semi-structured interviews came from survey participants in the quantitative portion of the study. Participants for the survey were sought through professional electronic mailing lists, Google Groups that focus on service-learning in higher education or MBA alumni, and LinkedIn groups that focus on service-learning in higher education or MBA alumni. Additionally, three universities gave explicit permission to research their students, and IRB approval was obtained from all three institutions. Survey respondents were invited to answer a question agreeing to be contacted after the survey for a possible face-to-face or telephone interview. In making decisions about which participants to select for interviews, one survey question was chosen: *Reflection means intentionally considering an experience in light of particular learning objectives. Keeping that definition in mind, what was the frequency of the reflection in your MBA capstone course?* There were 79 useable surveys, and all participants in Group A, if their frequency of reflection was at least some reflection, were contacted for an interview, which resulted in 10 interview participants out of a possible 17.

The 10 participants represented three U.S.-based MBA programs: two from a faith-based East coast college; two from an MBA program at a faith-based Midwestern university; and six from an MBA program in a public, research-based university on the West coast. Four participants were male and six were female. The racial mix was 60% White (non-Hispanic), 20% Hispanic or Latino, 10% Black or African American, and 10% Multiracial. Age of participants ranged from 18-49 (80%), and 90 percent of participants were employed full-time.

Data Collection and Analysis

Table 1 shows the Interview Protocol related to reflection. Semi-structured, recorded telephone interviews lasted between 35 and 55 minutes. The key to determining how many participants to interview

was to come to the point of saturation, when no new themes emerged from the interviews (Morse et al., 2002). Once data obtained started replicating itself, that was considered the point of saturation, and this came after the seventh interview. No new codes were added to the codebook for the eighth, ninth, or tenth interviews. All interviews were professionally transcribed, and the researcher reviewed each transcript against the recording to look for errors, but found none.

TABLE 1
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Q: How did discussing your service-learning experiences in class contribute, if it did contribute, to your understanding of the skills necessary to do service-learning? Can you give me some examples?
Q: What assignments in the course were valuable to your learning and why?
Q: Do you think that reflecting on your service-learning experiences enhanced any skills that you use in your workplace? Can you give me some examples?
Q: Thinking back to the course, in what ways do you remember being asked to reflect on the service-learning experience? Please describe those reflection activities.
Q: What else would you like to share with me about your service-learning experience in this course?

In keeping with measures of validity and reliability for qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for rigor was used: credibility and dependability, confirmability, transferability, authenticity, and auditability. Credibility was ensured by using thick descriptions of the text to give the experiences of participants, and to make sure the results of the research reflected those experiences. Transferability was met by writing thick descriptions of the data so readers could use and evaluate that data for their own contexts. Writing thick descriptions increased the validity of the study. Confirmability happened because the researcher's advisor reviewed the data analysis. Authenticity was met by making sure the findings were written in a way that gave readers enough details to see for themselves that the experiences and meanings of the participants were captured, without overwhelming the reader with too much detail (Sandelowski, 1986). Auditability was met by keeping confidential audio recordings of each interview, memoing throughout the data collection and analysis period, using a systematic coding process and keeping records of it, and describing and defending to a dissertation committee how and why decisions were made throughout the study (Wickam, 2015).

Both constant comparative and content analysis methods of data analysis were performed. After three interviews had been conducted and transcribed, content analysis began by starting a master codebook and doing line-by-line open coding. Tentative categories began to emerge, so codes were clustered into categories. Once a preliminary set of codes and categories was created and organized, analysis of documents continued, using the results of the analysis to determine whether any new categories should be established or if any existing categories could be reduced to themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Peden-McAlpine, n.d.).Categories were expanded and collapsed between the fourth and seventh interview, and the eighth, ninth and tenth interviews fit into the existing categories. Categories were organized into themes, which were isolated, and named, and quotations were used to explain the voice of the participants. The themes were all related both to each other, to the data, and to the research questions (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

FINDINGS

Results of 10 interviews revealed one theme for the research question, and that was that *Reflection Enhanced the Ability to Complete a Project.* Two categories offered evidence to support how reflection enhanced the ability to complete a project: reflecting through a summative paper and reflecting through class discussions.

Reflecting Through a Summative Paper

One of the two major deliverables in participants' capstones, which were team-based, was a written report. Most, but not all, of the time, this report was a business plan for each team's client. The reflection did not occur in this report. Reflection occurred for the participants whose professors assigned some kind of summative written paper that was intended to help the students reflect. Participant 8 described how the paper was reflective by saying, "the paper that we had to write as well, summarizing how we went about everything - how we started, what the goal was, what processes we took, working with the group, were there any issues..." Participant 1 said the final paper was a way to allow reflection about the whole project by saying,

> ...it did force you to kind of go back through the project and think about . . . was this a good idea, this didn't work out the way that we had planned . . . would I change anything in the future? And even though some things maybe hadn't gone how we had expected them to go - that doesn't necessarily mean that we would have changed everything.

Participant 9 did not see it as reflective as much as evaluative, and described the summative paper this way:

> But, the final project that [the professor] had us do for the end paper was the whole evaluating your group, evaluating the project, and evaluating how you felt throughout the whole process. So, you actually had to, as our final, within two hours, you had to write, as neatly as possible, your whole entire experience that you had. And [the professor] had like key questions that [the professor] wanted you to touch upon, and that's what you had to make sure that you put in this essay format report to hand in to [the professor].

Reflecting Through Class Discussions

Reflection also occurred for most participants during class sessions where they gave oral presentations to their classmates and professor about their capstone project. Following the presentations, there was time for class discussions and feedback. Participant 1 called this *real-time learning*, by saying,

> Part of reflection was actually learning taking place real-time, because we got to say, this is what we wanted to do with our project, these are mistakes - or maybe things we've learned on the way, this is how we dealt with it, and then that allowed us to bring it back to our classroom and get feedback from the students, but also teach them, um, kind of another way of looking at things.

While reflection can take place before, during, and after service-learning experiences, Participant 1 described reflection during service. Participant 8 described how they were able to make changes to training sessions given to their client because of the reflection during class discussions by saying,

> It [class discussion] helped us out a lot, because what we did after each presentation, is, we didn't just say, OK, good job team- we immediately discussed what went right, what went wrong, how we can improve, and so, you know, when we - when we went back and discussed it and gave these pros and cons to our instructor, he had some feedback for us and asked for different things, if we had thought about doing differently as well - so - um - and it was interesting.

Reflection has been shown to be a metacognitive skill which requires students to think about how to think (Krathwohl, 2002; Martinez, 2006). Participant 2 described this metacognitive ability when talking about how class discussions helped their team through the process of completing a client project:

> We also reflected with our classmates about the challenges we were facing with our client. And as a team, there was one point where, in a class, with other, you know, others, we realized that we were not alone in our struggles - that other people were having the same, you know, issues - similar issues with clients. So, it was a real - it's a reflection of, you know - how are we going to pull through this as a team together? And we talked about challenges, and then we talked about, OK, how did you go through it, what did you

do? How did you talk to your client? So we talked to each other - not just with the professors.

While class discussion was reflective for most participants, two participants did not feel their capstone courses included class discussion. Participant 5 said there was not time to talk to classmates about each others' service-learning projects, and when asked to provide examples of how she reflected on the capstone project, could not think of any. Participant 6 had a similar experience, and described the lack of formal reflection with classmates by saying,

> I don't remember having any long conversations or any method for it or any sort of discussion, um, with the other teams. We informally connected. We knew the other team members - we knew the other teams. So we heard a little bit about them. We had a little bit of a chance of discussion. I don't feel like it was - I don't remember it being formal. I don't remember it being part of the, um, this week we're gonna give an update on how your project is going, or post, you know, one page on what's going on with your project. I don't remember that particularly happening.

These results are interesting because these two participants, on the survey, answered that they had at least some reflection in their capstone course, but when prompted through interviews, had difficulties coming up with specific examples of reflective activities. One possibility is that the course instructors focused on a written reflective component for these respective courses and de-emphasized oral discussion as a vehicle for reflection.

DISCUSSION

Using a written assignment such as a paper or journal is found in literature on reflection in business education. For example, a five-year, longitudinal case study of a management accounting course asked students to keep a reflective learning journal (Bisman, 2011). Researchers analyzed the journals and classified them as either having surface or deep reflection. Researchers discovered that scores for the journals were higher when they were classified as having deep reflection and during subsequent years of use of the reflective journals, the researchers made them an even more integral part of the course, removing other writing assignments and putting more focus on the journals. Research confirms that real-time reflection, as Participant 1 described, is important. Eyler (2002) stated that reflection during service helps students reflect on possible preconceptions they may be having about their service, voice assumptions, and connect their experiences to academic content. Eyler also suggested having students engage in reflective activities with their community partners, but it does not appear that the participants in this study did that.

Some participants had difficulty describing specific examples of reflective activities. Literature is not conclusive as to how much and what types of reflection are required in order to make an impact on student learning. Mabry (1998) found that students assigned two types of written reflection caused significant positive changes in civic attitudes and personal social values. Using oral discussion as a vehicle for discussion is also found in literature. Mabry found that when students discussed their experiences with instructors, service beneficiaries and other students, personal social values and civic attitudes increased. Frequency of in-class reflection was also important, as students who reflected more often in class had higher post-course personal social values and perceived a greater academic benefit of the service-learning. Eyler & Giles (1999) found that one of the predictors of meeting course learning outcomes was the amount and quality of reflection, and that reflection was associated with how much students learned. Ash & Clayton (2009) recommended designing an overall reflection strategy containing the types of reflection that would occur, such as online chat sessions, oral exams, or in-class discussion sessions. A strategic marketing capstone course used an e-portfolio to allow students to reflect on their learning (Mummalaneni, 2014). Davis and Comeau (2004) used reflection logs to evaluate students' learning in a capstone business management course.

Reflection's ability to help students complete a service-learning project is good news for the workplace because industries associated with business need workers who can accomplish tasks, meet

deadlines, finish jobs, and complete projects. Therefore, business education must actively prepare students for this workplace need by intentionally building reflective activities into team projects. This study shows that reflection through written papers and oral class discussion are effective ways to promote reflection. The importance of oral discussion as a vehicle for reflection should not be minimized, as Stanton (1990) found that when reflection on experiences was weak, learning might be "superficial" (p. 185).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this research exist which provide opportunities for future research. The ten interview participants came from only three MBA programs, and since there are hundreds of U.S.-based MBA programs, results may not be generalizable. In addition, it is possible that students who enroll in an MBA program that includes a service-learning experience may have some pre-conceived ideas that they will benefit from service-learning, and this could limit generalizability to all capstone courses. Moreover, two of the three MBA programs represented by the participants are religious institutions, which may or may not mean those students could hold different views about service-learning than students from non-religious institutions. Future studies comparing these two groups might be interesting. Finally, this study did not seek to distinguish between part-time and full-time MBA students, and the two groups may have some different characteristics. In general, part-time MBA students are employed during their graduate studies, and are balancing both work and school (Rafferty, 2012). In this study, 90 percent of participants worked full-time while earning their MBA. It may be interesting to study full-time MBA students in capstone courses that include a service-learning experience to see if results would be different.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to understand whether reflection, a stated requirement of service-learning, enhances the employability skills of graduate business students who participate in service-learning during a capstone. Findings showed that graduate business students used written and oral reflection to improve their ability to accomplish their team-based client projects. Written reflection was mostly found in the form of a summative report, report written for the professor. Oral discussion was mainly found in class discussion.

This finding should be welcome news to employers of MBAs, as service-learning allows students opportunities to practice these written and oral skills in preparation for employment. Colleges and universities have been blamed for failing to educate the future workforce with the skills most needed by employers. The Secretary of Education Commission on the Future of Higher Education wrote, "employers reported repeatedly that many new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills needed in today's workplaces" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 3). Engaging students in reflective practice is an important component to high-impact educational practices such as capstones and service-learning (Kuh, 2008). Employers want graduates who can accomplish tasks, finish jobs, and complete projects, and service-learning helps build these skills. Faculty and administrators in charge of MBA programs should integrate written and oral reflection into service-learning team projects, because reflection enhances the ability to complete a project.

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