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Informal Advocacy as a Way to Deeper Learning of Adult Development and Aging Processes, Part 2

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Abstract

To enhance engagement and deepen learning in undergraduate courses that focus on adult development and aging, two informal advocacy classroom activities were created and surveyed. The surveys were brief empirical assessments of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) activities, and contained closed- and open-ended questions. Part 2 of this publication discussed the second study investigated the expression of enjoyment in learning using a PBL activity that required the development of a public service announcement poster that would teach about an important concern of older adults (e.g., age-discrimination, costs of health care, life-review, etc.). Results from Study 2 suggested students' enjoyment of the informal advocacy discussion and the creation of a public service announcement to be positively associated with survey ratings of increased insight, enhanced understanding, broader awareness, and the gaining of new knowledge about the concerns of older adults. Narrative responses from both studies suggest informal advocacy for older adults to promote deeper learning as reflected in increased empathic understanding, ethical concern, and greater personal involvement with central topics of discussion.

The results from Study 1 inspired a subsequent learning activity and design of a survey for an Introductory Lifespan Development course. As in Study 1, the research question examined the efficacy of a PBL activity incorporating informal advocacy as a method to facilitate deep learning. It has been noted that, due to lack of knowledge about as well as experience and involvement with older adults, many undergraduate students hold negative biases about older adults that impede learning (Allen & Johnson, 2009). Thus, effective methods for engaging students and deepening understanding of later-life development are crucially needed. In considering ways of effectively facilitating learning in the classroom, previous research has suggested that learning activities that trigger intrinsic motives such as curiosity, enjoyment, and interest may enhance the

value and depth of learning (cf. Ainley, 2006; Brophy, 2013; Hwang & Chen, 2016; McKeachie, 1999; Silvia, 2008). In a related manner, research by Bers (1975), Blai (1977) and others (e.g., Bykerk-Kauffman, 1995; Schweitzer & Brown, 1995; Silapachote & Srisuphab, 2014; Yazedjian & Kolkhorst, 2007) have reported small-group discussion and collaborative learning activities to be perceived as very enjoyable and effective modes of learning. Thus, this investigation examined the efficacy of a PBL activity incorporating informal advocacy in enhancing student learning, but also explored the emotional experience of participants. In accord with the postulate that satisfying intrinsic motives enhance the value and depth of learning (Brophy, 2013; McKeachie, 1999), it was hypothesized that students' ratings of enjoyment aroused by the PBL activity incorporating informal

advocacy would be positively associated with ratings of gaining insight, understanding, awareness, and knowledge from the learning activity. Again, as in Study 1, following the assumptions of Fink's (2013) backward-design, it was expected that asking students to play the role of informal advocate would help to expand awareness and understanding of significant issues and concerns of older adults, and thus deepen learning.

Method

This investigation was conducted in an Introduction to Human Development course at a small regional public University in the mid-western United States, and approved by its Institutional Review Board (IRB). Immediately following completion of the learning activity, the opportunity to participate in a brief survey was announced by a research assistant who administered the survey. An informed consent statement was contained within the survey introduction, and indicated that the purpose of the research was to understand the usefulness of the classroom learning activity in assisting student learning, and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. The consent statement also indicated that no grade or other remuneration would be given for participating, and that the individual would give consent to participate by completing the survey and returning it to the survey center.

Sample

The sample was comprised of 79 participants, who represented 66% of the students in the course. Participants' were predominantly female (92%) and Caucasian (90.8%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.4%; Hispanic, 2.6%; Native American, 2.6%; Other 2.6%), with a mean age of 18.4 years ($SD = 0.68$; Range 18 to 22). The Introduction to Life-Span Development

course is a general education course in the Social Sciences, and a requirement for majors in the Education, Human Development, and Social Work programs. Participants held the undergraduate class-standing of Freshman (55%), Sophomore (26%), Junior (12%), Senior (6%), and without designation (1%).

Informal Advocacy Activity

This discussion activity accompanied the curricular topic of biological, psychological, and social development in later adulthood. The classroom activity embraced a PBL model of cooperative learning (cf. Hung et al., 2008; Smith, 2000) and constructivist orientation (e.g., Bruner, 1996; Fer, 2016; Windschitl, 2002), intended to promote deep levels of analysis, perspective taking and involvement. Students were conveniently arranged into small-groups (i.e., 3 to 4 students), and instructed to work collaboratively to create a public service announcement poster that would voice a position of advocacy and teach about an important concern or issue for older adults. Students were further directed to consider any particular policy issue or health concern, and to use any logical tact and creative approach in creating their poster. Further, in accord with constructivism theory, students were instructed that the issues and concerns addressed in the poster, as well as characterization of older adults groups was expected to be free-ranging and varied, reflecting each individual's personal and unique background of experience, knowledge structures, interpretations, and understandings. To aid participants in developing a storyline for their public service announcement poster, stock-photography drawings created by and licensed from Nova Development Corporation (2000-2001) were provided to students on an 8.5 by 11 inch sheet of paper. The stock-photography drawings depicted adults in various life poses

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and were used as eliciting stimuli so as to bring forth participants' concerns and interests, and to aid and facilitate creation of the public service announcement poster.

The small-group collaborative activity lasted approximately 40 minutes, and was followed by a broader debriefing discussion lasting approximately 20 minutes where each group displayed their public service announcement and shared ideas perspectives.

Survey

The survey was administered at the end of the class by a research assistant. As in Study 1, to facilitate responding, the survey was brief, and contained both closed- and open-ended questions (e.g., Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2007). The closed-ended items were empirical questions similar to those used in Study 1. These questions asked, "How much did the activity help you to find insight into the concerns of older adults?" "How much did the activity help you to become more aware of the concerns of older adults?" "How much did the activity enhance your understanding of the concerns of older adults?" and, "How much did the activity help you gain new knowledge about the concerns of older adults?" Response scales for these items ranged from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (10).

The survey also included questions that inquired into enjoyment during the activity, asking, "How much did you enjoy the group-discussion?" and "How much did you enjoy creating the public service announcement poster?" Response scales for these items ranged from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (10).

The survey concluded with an open-ended question that required brief narrative

response, asking participants to describe, "ways in which you learned by creating the public service announcement poster?" As in Study 1, participants' narrative responses were treated as a collective whole so as to provide a description of learning processes, and to permit a directed content analysis (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) assessing depth-of-learning.

Results

Preliminary statistical investigation indicated no effects due to gender, age, ethnicity, class standing, or adopted advocacy perspective on any dependent variable measure, thus these variables were excluded from further analyses. Statistical analyses included correlation procedures to investigate relationship between study variables, content analysis of the narrative responses, and nonparametric analysis of the content analysis data. Due to missing data (i.e., where no information or response is provided by the participant to a particular survey item), degrees of freedom vary.

Descriptively, the advocacy issues identified and addressed by students in their public service announcements posters included the following topics: Ageism and stereotyping of the elderly ($n = 13$), Alzheimer's disease and other neurological illness ($n = 5$), coping behaviors ($n = 4$), costs of prescription drugs and health care ($n = 11$), driver licensing issues ($n = 4$), fear of crime and safe neighborhoods ($n = 5$), health and nutrition ($n = 7$), life-review ($n = 6$), mental health awareness ($n = 5$), nursing home and retirement home care ($n = 7$), opportunity for religious expression ($n = 4$), retirement pensions ($n = 2$), and social isolation and loneliness ($n = 6$). These advocacy concerns reflect participants' interest in the areas of older adults' physical health and well-being, age-based social biases, and public policy

Table 1

Study 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation of Survey Item Ratings

Survey Item	Item Correlation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. Help increase insight	1.00						
2. Help enhance understanding	.69***	1.00					
3. Help broaden awareness	.68***	.72***	1.00				
4. Help gain new knowledge	.67***	.62***	.72***	1.00			
5. Enjoyed group-discussion	.33**	.23*	.34**	.25*	1.00		
6. Enjoyed creative task ^a	.46***	.33**	.50***	.48***	.64***	1.00	
	<i>M</i>	6.68	6.92	7.34	6.84	7.46	6.60
	<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.48	1.44	1.64	1.98	1.96

Note: The numbered columns across the top of the Table refer to the descending Survey Items listed in the first column of the Table; ^a References public service announcement poster; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test, $n = 79$).

effecting the areas of health care, prescription medicines, retirement, and housing.

The means, standard deviations, and correlation of survey measures with students' ratings of enjoying the small-group discussion and creative assignment are shown in Table 1. Of particular note, there are the positive relationships between enjoyment of the informal advocacy discussion, and increased insight into and enhanced understanding of concerns of older adults, as well as broadened awareness and gaining of new knowledge about the concerns of older adults ($r_s > .27$, $p_s < .05$). Similarly, there was strong association between enjoyment of the creative task, and increased insight into and enhanced understanding of concerns of older adults, as well as broadened awareness and gaining new knowledge about the concerns of older adults ($r_s > .42$, $p_s < .05$). These correlational findings provide support for hypothesis and concur with research indicating enjoyment to be associated with

heightened learning experiences (e.g., Bers, 1977; Blai, 1979; Bykerk-Kauffman, 1995; Schweitzer & Brown, 1995; Silapachote & Srisuphab, 2014; Yazedjian & Kolkhorst, 2007).

A directed content analysis was conducted to examine depth of learning expressed in participants' narrative response of how learning occurs through the collaborative work of creating the public service announcement poster. As in Study 1, the classification taxonomy was based on Kant's (1952), Entwistle's (2000), and Fink's (2013) descriptions of deep understanding and significant learning, and oriented along an ordinal continuum from shallow-learning (i.e., a rather narrow, passive, or self-focused response), to intermediate depth-of-learning (i.e., a response that links knowledge and problem-solving to personal understandings, and the human experience of caring and learning how to learn), to moderately deep-learning

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Table 2

Study 2 Sampling of Student Narrative Responses to the Question “Ways in which You Learned by Creating the Public Service Announcement Poster?” within Shallow-Learning, Intermediate Depth-of-Learning, Moderately Deep-Learning, and Very Deep-Learning Categories

Shallow-Learning

- “That old people have a hard time accepting the fact that they are getting older.”
- “I learned about the concerns of the elderly, but really didn’t think I learned anything.”
- “I really didn’t learn anything. It just made me familiar with advocates which I already knew about from the reading.”

Intermediate Depth-of-Learning

- “To use my creative side and to put all the pieces together about concerns, and to think about it in my own mind rather than hearing about it from someone else.”
- “I had to think of how I could relay the information I learned in a clear manner. In order to do that I had to fully understand the topic.”
- “It made me not only verbalize, but picture my concept, further engraining it to my memory.”
- “I learned in a hands on environment. It lets me become more knowledgeable by doing an activity based on what we are learning about.”

Moderately Deep-Learning

- “I learned to think in the perspective of older people, and that they have thoughts and feelings too.”
- “Learn how older adults might think about the problem. Looking at both sides of the issue.”
- “I learned more about the disease and how older people feel about it.”
- “Take on a different perspective in looking at the special concerns of older adults.”

Very Deep-Learning

- “It helped me think about the issue more thoroughly, and think of ways I could help the older people in my life.”
 - “I learned that older people in nursing homes need just as much freedom and sincere care as younger people.”
 - “It forces you to be empathetic to the lives of a different generation and their struggles.”
 - “Nobody should be discriminated against because of their age, and older people have just as many rights as us.”
-

(i.e., a response that describes a grasping and weighing of different viewpoints, and an inspection of one’s position from the viewpoints of others), to very deep-learning (i.e., a response that conveys concern for another person or group to whom one may provide assistance, or an expression of empathic understanding that espouses a sense of responsibility). Participants’ narrative responses were extracted, and classified by two independent and case-blind raters. Rater

disagreements were resolved through discussion. Examination of concordance between raters classifications using Viera and Garrett’s (2005) interpretive rubric, indicated very high agreement, Cohen’s kappa = .83, $p < .001$, with rater’s classification demonstrating high ordinal scale consistency, Cronbach’s alpha = .95. A sampling of participants’ responses is shown in Table 2.

Examination of the distribution of narrative responses across the depth-of-learning taxonomy indicated the intermediate-depth-of-learning to be the modal classification: shallow-learning (6%), intermediate depth-of-learning (49%), moderately deep-learning (24%), significant and very deep-learning (21%). A goodness-of-fit analysis indicated a significant difference between the observed and expected depth-of-learning classifications, $\chi^2(3, N = 70) = 26.343, p < .0001$. Similar to Study 1, examination of effect-size using Cramer's formula for non-parametric data indicated a large effect, $V = .35$, and following the conversion to Cohen's d (.75) was again within the zone of desired educational effects noted ($d > .40$) by Hattie (2008, 2015). Further, recognizing the ordinal nature of the classification taxonomy it is noted that 45% of the narrative responses were classified beyond the cumulative modal frequency of intermediate depth-of-learning, providing support for the educational efficacy of a PBL activity incorporating informal advocacy.

Test of the association between ways in which learning occurs described in participants' narrative responses and the ratings of enjoyment in creating the public service announcement poster and enjoyment in working with classmates in small-group discussion suggested significant positive association of depth-of-learning with rating of enjoyment in creating the public service announcement poster, Kendall's tau beta $r = .17, p < .04$; but no association between depth-of-learning and rating of enjoyment of working with classmates in small-group discussion, Kendall's tau beta $r = .03, p > .05$. Taken together, these findings suggest that this PBL activity incorporating informal advocacy helped to heighten learning engagement and promote deeper learning.

Discussion

As these brief survey findings suggest, PBL activities addressing adult development and aging processes that incorporate informal advocacy for older adults may broaden understanding, and promote deeper learning. However, in support of the hypothesis of Study 1, and in accord with other research (Beacham & Shambaugh, 2007; Berke et al., 2010; Massengale et al., 2014), the depth of learning experienced and acquired in the informal advocacy activity may vary as a function of the student's ability to go beyond their self-concerns and take into consideration the needs and experiences of older adults.

Importantly, it should be recognized that beyond traditional classroom-lecture formats, PBL activities offer a rich teaching resource that promotes deeper analysis and learning by students (e.g., Ferreri & O'Connor, 2103; Lake, 2001; Parrott & Cherry, 2011; Tiwari, Lai, So, & Yeun, 2006). For example, post-hoc comparative analyses of the rating-scale responses made by participants in the older adult advocacy group of Study 1, with allied research exploring the contrast between lecture-based and small-group discussion activities (Webb & Grib, 1967), showed the 99% confidence intervals (CI) of mean ratings for increased insight ($CI = 7.01 - 8.22$), gaining new knowledge ($CI = 7.08 - 8.22$), and gaining understanding ($CI = 6.82 - 8.18$), to contain the overall mean rating ($M = 8.11$) reported by Webb and Grib (1967, Table 9) of students' rated gain in knowledge, enhanced comprehension, and critical thinking that occurred in the student-led small-group discussion. Suggesting the informal advocacy activity to produce effects similar to those of other PBL activities that have shown enhancement in student learning

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beyond that of regular classroom-lecture routines (Webb & Grib, 1967).

Results from Study 2 suggests advocacy assignments that tap into students' creativity, may arouse intrinsic motivational processes that further advance understanding and promote deep learning. Again, in post-hoc comparison with other research exploring student enjoyment and learning (Bers, 1975), it is noted that the 99% confidence interval of ratings of how the informal advocacy activity helped to increase insight ($CI = 6.28 - 7.07$), enhanced understanding ($CI = 6.49 - 7.35$), broaden awareness ($CI = 6.92 - 7.76$), and gain new knowledge ($CI = 6.36 - 7.32$) in Study 2, were all respectively beyond or contained the means reported by Bers (1975, Table 8) for student ratings of learning that occur in student discussions ($M = 4.63$) and in classroom rap sessions ($M = 6.47$). In a similar fashion, the 99% confidence interval of enjoyment ratings of the group-discussion ($CI = 6.88 - 8.03$) and creative task ($CI = 6.03 - 7.16$) of Study 2, are also beyond or contain the means reported by Bers (1975, Table 8) for student ratings of enjoyment of student discussions ($M = 5.08$) and in classroom rap sessions ($M = 6.49$).

Examination of narrative responses from Study 1 and Study 2, similar to findings reported by Berke et al. (2010), indicate that participants' involvement as informal advocates involves thinking about and considering issues beyond personal and familiar contexts. Indeed, the informal advocacy activity encourages an interactive inquiry, critical analysis, and empathic understanding that provides for a learning experience that connects course topics to real-people, in real-world contexts. Further, It should also be noted that the effect sizes associated with the categorization of narrative responses for both investigations

are within the zone of desired educational effects noted ($d > .40$) by Hattie (2008, 2015). Moreover, in Study 1 and Study 2, it was respectively observed that 50% and 45% of participants' narrative responses of how learning occurs, were categorized beyond the cumulative modal frequency of intermediate depth-of-learning, offering a general degree of support for the educational efficacy of the informal advocacy activity. Taken as a whole, participants' narrative responses describe the many ways learning occurs when adopting a position of informal advocacy (e.g., "Thinking of how I want to be treated at 90+"; "It helped me think about the issue more thoroughly, and think of ways I could help the older people in my life"; "I think it helped to take a stance. It requires me to stand up for what I believe in."), and suggests informal advocacy as another tool to use in engaging students in the classroom and assisting them in acquiring deep learning.

Deep Learning as an Educational Objective

From the constructivist perspective, student understanding is the central focus of the teaching and learning enterprise (Windschitl, 2002). Thus, the PBL activities incorporating informal advocacy described here are suggested to be useful teaching strategies to help student gain deeper understanding. Further, the shallow to very deep learning taxonomy developed and used in this research, offers a useful measurement framework for assessing active learning activities and curricula. It should be noted, however, as Tochon (2010) describes, that deep learning is more about a process of thinking, than about a teaching method, and more of a philosophical approach that aspires for transformation, where new insight and personal meaning is discovered, than a specific concrete outcome that can be easily assessed or achieved. Thus the method of

deep education and the assessment of the learner take many forms, and both should be recognized as always in the making and “never fully achieved” (Tochon, 2010, p. 2). While recognizing the phenomenology of deep learning, Tochon (2010, pp. 7-8) offers some guiding principles of “deep education”. The first is that learning is a voluntary activity that is oriented from a personal perspective that addresses the concern of the learning project. This principle suggests that the teaching strategies of deep education should optimally make clear to the student that what they *know*, can be used and applied to solve pressing needs of the everyday world. A second principle is that deep education is contextually oriented, and involves the individual in addressing key real-world problems. Thus, it should be understood that what we *know* and how we may go about problem solving, is shaped by earlier experiences and knowledge, and that by exploring other contextual orientations, we can advance our knowledge and deepen our understanding. A third principle is that deep education is a constructivist approach that involves reflection of top-down understandings, in relationship to the person’s development of bottom-up understandings. Thus, we should recognize that there is no end or limit to the revising of what has already been constructed, and what understandings or knowing may occur in the future. A fourth and very important principle offered by Tochon (2010), similar to Finks (2013) supposition that in deep learning there is an understanding of knowledge in broader social terms, is that to apply a “deep education” framework is to emphasize an understanding of relationships between people. Thus highlighting the potential for new insights and solutions that may be discovered in embracing an attitude of equality and mutual interest held with others, absent of any superior-inferior quality of the person, or of their developmental context, or

of people. A fifth principle noted by Tochon (2010), similar to Kant’s model of deep understanding and the shallow to deep taxonomy used in the present investigations, is that deep education involves the person on many levels: cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Other suggested principles of deep education, and concomitant teaching strategies, include the use scaffolding techniques (e.g., assigned articles, brief reflection papers, small-group dialogue, problem-solving projects), and the immersion of students in a holistic style of learning, e.g., a style of learning that involves all dimensions of the person (Hammons, 2010), and makes clear their inter-cultural connection (Xiao, 2015).

Concerns for Application

As suggested by Majeski and Stover (2007), PBL activities where students address a problem or issue by exploring different perspectives, challenging viewpoints and understandings, and reflecting on ways of resolving the problem, may be especially effective in developing mastery of learning goals, and in guiding students to deep learning. Yet, as reported in a meta-analysis conducted by Dochy, Segers, Van den Bossche, and Gijbels (2003) and by Fatimi et al. (2013), it should be recognized that PBL activities may not always result in students’ understanding of conceptual definitions, theories, and research findings. Further, as Hammons (2010) and Smith, Gordon, Colby, and Wang (2005; see also Smith & Colby, 2007) allude, since the deep learning approach involves self-reflection upon one’s knowledge and inspection of personal points-of-view, not all students, or all teachers, may be willing or able to delve into the introspection of their understanding, and the concomitant alignment of one’s knowledge with one’s emotions, and thus embrace a deep approach to learning.

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Nevertheless, as Brank and Wylie (2013) indicate, the desired learning effects from collaborative student-led discussion are more likely to occur if there is prior instruction on how to ask questions in discussion, and the importance of discussion in enhancing critical thinking. Thus, preparing students for PBL activities has been noted to compel greater engagement and deeper learning by students (Brank & Wylie, 2013).

With further consideration of PBL activities incorporating informal advocacy as a teaching strategy, it should be noted that adopting an advocacy perspective is also a component of course assignments that occur outside the classroom, such as service learning (e.g., Berke et al., 2010). Thus, in preparing students who will interact with special groups of individuals outside the classroom (e.g., individuals in an adult day-care program, home-bound elders, residences of an assisted living communities), an informal advocacy activity may be useful in developing students' awareness and sensitivity about the concerns of particular groups, and in improving students competency in working with special populations. Further, informal advocacy may also be a mechanism by which to provide special emphasis in focal areas of a course, such as how public policy may impact upon the healthfulness of older adults and their families, or other related policy issues and concerns. It should be recognized, however, that while informal advocacy may be a useful teaching tool, maintaining a balance between the concerns voiced, supporting rhetoric used, and advocacy positions discussed and explored by students and teacher is imperative (cf. Spacks, 1996). Importantly, as West (1998) has posited, this involves the practice and application of the following ethical guidelines when designing and implementing an informal advocacy activity for the classroom: The first guideline is that

advocacy positions, even those positions that are indirectly referenced in lectures and classroom assignments, should be explicitly stated. This guideline brings the various advocacy perspectives out into the open, and allows for constructive discussion about their intended purpose and potential outcomes. A second guideline is that advocacy positions should be informed and reasoned, and defended by all available evidence. This guideline promotes critical analysis and logical consideration of the advocacy perspectives, and a weighing of possible options to pursue. A third guideline is that discussion of differing advocacy positions should be free and open, and seek to recognize the diverse concerns that may converge around particular issues, free of pressuring or coercion. This guideline instills the doctrines of fairness and the accommodation of diverse opinions, as well as the upholding of the democratic principles. It also delineates the educational purpose and boundaries of the informal advocacy activity. Making clear its use as a classroom-based activity, where diverse perspectives may be legitimately discussed and debated, versus an inappropriate promotion of special interests or activities beyond the classroom. A fourth guideline is that advocacy positions and their related arguments should be civil and respectful of all persons and groups. This guideline promotes the ideal of a pluralistic society, where diverse perspectives and opinions may be recognized and tolerated.

Limitations

Small-group PBL activities have been noted to compel greater engagement and deeper learning by students (Brank & Wylie, 2013). As Brank and Wylie (2013) have noted, prior classroom instruction on best-practices in asking questions in small-group discussion aids student engagement and deepens learning, but also may impose

experimental demand-effects. Thus, conceivably, demand-effects of the teacher and/or researcher in facilitating the activity and gathering the survey may have imposed an experimenter effect that limits the generalizability of these findings. It should also be recognized that the brief survey method used in these investigations does not completely partition the properties of the small-group activity from the larger class discussion, nor do the quasi-experimental method of Study 1 and correlational method of Study 2 permit an interpretation of causal effects produced by the informal advocacy activities. Further, the survey procedure limits understanding of the dynamic processes of individual learning (cf. Carr 2002; Pietersen 2002), and various dimensions of deep learning (cf. Huberman et al. 2014), as well as analysis of the collaborative learning products (i.e., advocacy arguments, public service announcement posters) that would further provide understanding of teaching and learning processes. Thus, future research should endeavor to be more experimental in nature, stringently partitioning learning-activity conditions to reveal unique causal influences, inquiring more deeply into the meta-cognitive processes and personal experiences of students' individual learning experiences, and exploring in a longitudinal manner students' understandings of their learning, as well as the products of their collaborative exchange. Further, as described by Huberman et al. (2014), future research should endeavor to assess the cognitive (e.g., deep content knowledge, critical thinking, and complex problem solving), interpersonal (e.g., collaboration, communication), and intrapersonal (e.g., learning-to-learn, academic mindsets) competencies associated with deep learning. In addition, other course topics where informal advocacy may serve to help broaden and deepen understanding, and other

classroom activities (e.g., editorial writing, community planning projects) that engage students collaboratively and in a creative manner need also to be considered and assessed.

Conclusion

The findings from the survey investigations presented here, as well as other research (e.g., Berke et al., 2010), suggest informal advocacy activities provide opportunities for students to see critical issues within a larger context, and to understand the everyday impact of these issues on the lives of real people. Indeed, participants' narrative responses suggest the informal advocacy activity to enhance empathic understanding, ethical concern, and greater personal involvement with central topics of the activity. Further, it should be recognized that informal advocacy activities may well stir students' intrinsic interests (e.g., finding enjoyment in the creative and collaborative task, recognizing a point of connection between one's personal interests and broader social concerns, discovering a personal meaningfulness and opportunity for self-actualization; Brophy, 2013), thereby further promoting significant and deep learning. In using informal advocacy as a teaching tool for general discussion, an instructional first step is to ask students to consider how they would like to be treated, if they were of a particular age and from a particular background, situated within a certain context, and addressing a special concern. While this opening question is intended to spur the type of perspective taking noted to occur in transformational and deep learning, other follow-along questions (e.g., How might we individually or collectively respond to the unique needs of various groups of people? How might our community be concerned about the distinctive viewpoints and cultural

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environments of older adults?), will help to uncover the rich ethical landscape that exists and the opportunity for empathic understanding afforded in an informal advocacy activity. As a teaching tool incorporated and used in the classroom or in online-learning environments, the hope is that the informal advocacy activity will facilitate a deeper understanding that aids the individual and their families, and assists the student in moving one step closer to becoming “the change they wish to see in the world” (Berke et al., 2010, p. 24).

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