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University students who experience real-world service tend to develop a more inclusive world view and enhanced understandings outside of their personal perspectives. This project combined course objectives, community collaboration, and service provision to identify the impact of students' understanding of social justice and disability access realities. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of a service-learning university course on social justice education. The study explored how constructs including empathy, attitudes towards diversity, self-efficacy, and personal communication (of undergraduate university students) were impacted by interactions with children with disabilities in a summer camp setting that included various activities (e.g., art, equestrian). The study utilized surveys completed by university students prior to a service-learning experience and again after the project. Pre- and during-camp reflection data were also analyzed.
    Key Words: Service Learning, Experiential Learning in Higher Education, Social Justice Education, Disability Awareness, Equestrian Camp

Higher education provides a ripe opportunity to engage young adults with new learning experiences designed to enhance personal perspectives through social justice and experiential education. Hackman (2005) indicates social justice education "requires an examination of systems of power and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change and student agency in and outside of the classroom" (p. 103). One avenue that may facilitate increased understanding of social justice issues regarding individuals with disabilities is the engagement of university students in service-learning courses through direct experiences. While social justice movements seek to address discrimination toward marginalized groups, strategies for addressing inequity related to people with disabilities are usually minimal or left out of conversations despite the importance of disability as a diversity issue (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 1996; Moore, 2004). It is critical to educate young adults on measures society can take to effectively abide with disability legislation (e.g., Americans with Disability Act), improve services, and help the larger society better understand issues of accessibility and how these affect human rights (Bucaro, 1999; Moore, 2004; Quinn, 1995; Shannon, Schoen, & Tansey, 2009). While critical, there are factions within higher education that believe social foundations coursework should be removed from the curriculum (deMarrais, 2013).

Broadly, service-learning can be defined as "a hands-on experience that simultaneously fulfills a local community need and the learning goals of an academic course" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Previous research found that service-learning coursework impacted students' attitudes about equality (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000), multicultural competencies (Eyler &

Giles, 1999), and civic engagement (Sax, Astin, & Avalos, 1999). Community involvement and service-learning opportunities embedded within higher education curricula have a variety of positive effects in the lives of university students that are connected to social justice. For example, personal efficacy, identity, and moral development have shown positive outcomes as a result of service-learning (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Wasserman, 2009). In addition, social skills (e.g., working well with others, problem-solving, and communication) were positively impacted by service-learning (Kilgo, 2016). Furthermore, several studies found that students who participated in service-learning exhibited enhanced academic achievement, showed positive effects on personal growth, and understood how to reduce barriers in communities (Alliance for Service-Learning Education Reform, 1995; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2003; Little & Harris, 2003).

Service-learning has a number of overall benefits and can provide a unique forum to teach college students about the complex concerns of equality associated with people with disabilities (Galvan & Parker 2011; Moore, 2004). Previous experiential learning research found direct contact between youth with and without disabilities increased sensitivity about inadequate accessibility (Florian & Kehat, 1987). Also, a shift to more positive attitudes about disability was observed in people without disabilities following engagement with people with disabilities (Perry et al., 2008; Rice, 2009; Scior, 2011). In addition, service-learning experiences involving direct interactions with people with disabilities enhanced undergraduates' attitudes toward K-12 students with disabilities (Roper & Santiago, 2014). Lastly,

previous research found college students had a greater understanding of the discrimination faced by people with disabilities following a course and camp experience that included direct interactions with people with disabilities (Wozencroft, Pate, & Griffiths, 2015).

While current research found positive benefits of direct interactions with people with disabilities, little research examined social justice education as it relates to civic engagement in teacher preparation programs. Preliminary research by Clemons, Coffey, and Ewell (2011) found that service-learning may foster openness to students who have traditionally been marginalized in the K-12 system. Furthermore, Campbell, Gilmore, and Cuskelly (2003) found that pre-service teachers' knowledge of disabilities increased and their attitudes toward the individuals warmed following service-learning experiences with people with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

Social justice education lacks a clear definition; however, a model was previously developed that identified five key components (Hackman, 2005). The first, Content Mastery, is considered a necessary first step to provide students with information from various perspectives that enables them to effectively think and discuss how issues of social justice impact the world at both micro and macro levels (Hackman, 2005). The next, Critical Thinking and Analysis of Oppression, requires students to take the content they have learned in the first step and analyze it at deeper levels to more thoroughly understand systems of power and alternative possibilities. The third, Action and Social Change, focuses on teaching students to feel empowered by helping

them to understand the social action steps they can take in their lives. The fourth step, Personal Reflection, teaches students to reflect upon issues of social justice and understand that there are always more questions or perspectives that should be considered beyond what they have already learned and critically analyzed. The final step, Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics, enables students to intelligibly engage in discussions about diversity and formulate appropriate responses based in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000).

The supremacy behind this study was the direct opportunity students had to view the realities of human diversity. Specifically, the purpose was to explore how an experiential service-learning course that involved direct experiences with youth with disabilities impacted students' perceptions of social justice education and constructs based on Hackman's model. This article focuses on the 1st and 2nd year of the project and the impact of the course and camp experience on social justice in university students. Specifically, this study sought to address the research questions:

1. Are perceptions of social justice in university students (as measured by constructs of interest) impacted by the camp?
2. 2. Was there incremental change in students' perceptions of social justice over the time of the camp?

Method

Developing the Community Partnership

Sandstone County is a small rural farming community, located 45 minutes from a mid-sized university in the mid-West USA. In 2010, Sandstone County had a population of 12,766 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The unemployment rate was 11.3% in 2011, the fourth highest in the state (Indiana Department of Workforce

Development, year). In 2010, the county poverty rates were 16% overall and 24.3% for children under 18, both above state averages (Stats Indiana, 2010). The community partnership was initiated by Sandstone County Community Foundation, a local agency that seeks to provide and foster community enhancement funding. In 2010, Foundation members along with others from various agencies identified a pressing need for summer recreational experiences that addressed opportunities for local young children with disabilities since the majority of services available were typically geographically and financially out of reach for the majority of the community. Given this need, the leaders approached the local university to help provide expertise and the university agreed to assist, given the opportunities to pursue social justice education and provide authentic experiences to students.

The Service-Learning Course

This collaboration lead to a continued partnership between Sandstone County and the university through the development of a service-learning course for all undergraduate majors. The course instructor/camp director is an individual with expertise in special education and managing multiple large projects. Specifically, *High Riding Art and Equestrian Day Camp* was created and first implemented in 2011. The camp was designed to address the need for summer recreational opportunities of Sandstone County youth with disabilities. As part of the service-learning course requirements, university college students create, develop, and implement the camp each year. While students who participate in this course are often education majors, students from other majors are welcome and bring a unique perspective.

Team members apply and are accepted to the project two semesters before camp, which is held over the summer. During the semester prior to camp, students first build foundational knowledge of individuals with disabilities, poverty, special education, and other strategies needed to successfully participate in the project. Student-led teams then collaboratively plan, gather materials, learn to work as a team, and organize the camp experience. Each student chooses an area of interest and works with a small group of peers to create plans and activities that support a weekly or daily theme identified by the entire group. Plans are submitted to community partners and/or experts for input and approval. Field trips to the camp sites give students a glimpse into the environments in which they will be working.

The High Riding Art and Equestrian Camp

Campers are recommended by teachers, parents, and other community members. Approximately 40 community volunteers assist with supervision, nursing care, lunch/snacks, and helping campers move between stations. The university students develop lessons plans for each activity every day that align to daily themes. By the end of each day, every camper has visited every station and every university student has worked with all campers. Parent and camper feedback indicate high satisfaction and a desire for the camp to continue each year.

Participants and Project

For the study, twenty university students who were enrolled as students in the university course consented to serve as participants by signing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved consent forms. The undergraduates who participated were from various majors (e.g, special education,

public relations, dance, pre-dental) and backgrounds (e.g., rural, urban). Students indicated their interest in the course by completing the application and interview process.

The overall course objectives included: providing university students with information related to social justice for people with disabilities; developing strategies designed to build communication and collaborative skills; extending students' knowledge to the application and extension levels of mastery; and engaging students in experiences that would be meaningful to their overall development and college experience. Prior to the camp, students received course instruction focused on issues of social justice and people with disabilities. Students also learned strategies to effectively work with children with disabilities in order to prepare for the camp. During the pre-camp instruction, students received instruction about different disability categories and classifications (e.g, intellectual disabilities, autism), the de-institutionalization movement of people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., 1972 Geraldo Rivera Willowbrook expose), legislation associated with disabilities (e.g.,

Americans with Disabilities Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), assessment and instructional strategies for teaching children with disabilities (e.g., Response to Intervention), and discussed strategies for promoting inclusive opportunities for children with disabilities in educational settings. Students prepared for the campers by studying accredited camping practices and learning about the characteristics and behaviors that might be displayed by children with disabilities. University students further assisted by helping to recruit campers, choose daily themes for the camp, engage in Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training, plan each camp day's activities, and gather materials.

During camp, university students met, bonded with, and worked with the campers and volunteers while teaching them at their instructional stations (i.e., science, equine, dance, art). Camp culminated in an award program on the last day, complete with a carnival and picnic lunch for the campers, their families, camp staff and community supporters. Table 1 provides an example of one week of activities during one year of the camp.

Table 1
Organization chart for camp activities

"Travel Around the United States" Week #2 – Family Farm				
Monday **National Parks**	**Tuesday** **California**	**Wednesday** **Indy 500**	**Thursday** **Rodeo** **(Southwest)**	**Friday** **USA Day** **Flag Day**
Equestrian Orientation activities; safety; horse information	*Equestrian* Hollywood or Disney Character; red carpet photos;	*Equestrian* Relay races Movie CARS	*Equestrian* Lasso barrels Barrel races Cowboy hats	*Equestrian* Paint horses Parade
Arts and Crafts Campfires out of CD roms	*Arts and Crafts* Tie Dye Shirts	*Arts and Crafts* Cars out of cardboard	*Arts and Crafts* Paint wooden saw horses to look like	*Arts and Crafts* Picture Frames

SMORES		boxes	different animals	
Science/ Computer	*Science/ Computer*	*Science/ Computer*	*Science/ Computer*	*Science/ Computer*
Fossil Hunt in the Forest	Kites – maybe use Gator?	Car Race with Magnets	Scavenger hunt using compasses	Bubbles
Music and Movement	*Music and Movement*	*Music and Movement*	*Music and Movement*	*Music and Movement*
Scavenger Hunt or Animals	Beach Boys Wipe Out	CARS from Arts and Crafts Pit Stop Challenges	Square Dancing/Line Dancing	Sparklers Parade with instruments

Design, Instrumentation, & Data Collection

A mixed method design was utilized to explore the effect of the service-learning course instruction and camp experience on factors related to social justice. First, a quantitative analysis explored student responses on a course assessment survey which was completed at the beginning and end of the course experience. The survey instrument was developed from the IUPUI End-of-Course Survey (2011) designed for instructional evaluation. Twenty questions related to four constructs associated with social justice (i.e., Empathy, Personal Communication, Attitudes Toward Diversity, and Self Efficacy) were analyzed; ten other questions were primarily related to coursework and social skills and used for improvement of the course in general. All 30 items used a Likert rating scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree). These four factors were identified based on their relevance to the five essential elements previously identified as critical to social justice education (Hackman, 2005). Table 2 demonstrates how the survey constructs aligned with Hackman's model.

Table 2
Survey constructs aligned to elements of social justice education

Survey Construct	Elements of Social Justice Education	Rationale
Empathy	Personal Reflection	Empathy provides a forum to reflect on socia justice and determine if there's a need for
	Action and Social Change	social change.
Personal Communication	Action and Social Change	Effective personal communication promotes opportunities to pursue effective social change and obtain support and resources.
Attitudes Toward Diversity	Content Mastery	The focus of the course was learning about people with disabilities. Learning how
	Critical Thinking and Analysis of Oppression	people with disabilities experience discriminations requires critical analysis

	Awareness of multicultural group dynamics	and an understanding of how group dynamics can impact societal injustices.
Self-Efficacy	Personal Reflection	High self-efficacy requires a state of reflection about your ability and your
	Action and Social Change	beliefs about how you can make a difference to promote social change.

In addition to the quantitative data, student reflection data was collected through informal reflections completed by the students before and during camp. These reflections were provided as a way to explore the overall impact of the camp experience and further identify the students' perceptions about what they learned related to social justice. Students were provided with opportunities to reflect on issues of social justice for people with disabilities (e.g., reflect upon the Crisis Prevention intervention training, reflect on what the camp meant to the children and their families). Twelve prompts were completed - the first seven were spread out over a two-month period immediately preceding the camp. The last five were completed during camp - one prompt was provided at the end of each day. These prompts were delivered over time to address the research question of how students viewed social justice issues based on their experiences during the camp and how perceptions were impacted over the course of their experience planning for the camp and implementing the camp.

Data Analyses

Survey Data Analysis. A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the four social justice constructs of 20 participant survey responses at the beginning of the course (pre) and at the completion of the camp experience (post).

Reflection Data Analysis. A previously identified service learning framework (i.e., Simons and Cleary, 2006) was used to code social justice constructs noted in journal responses from 14 students. Initially, codes included fourteen broad and 29 narrow constructs. Coding was repeated in three rounds for the purposes of reaching inter-rater reliability among the coders as determined through a chi-square test for independence. All reflections (even those which contained multiple statements or utterances related to a given construct) were coded as a single code (i.e., codes were scored as an occurrence=1 or non-occurrence = 0). There were four coders in the research team. Two members were deemed "subject matter experts" (based on holding doctorate degree) in the domain and were "master" coders. During the first round, coders #1 and #2 independently coded students 1-5 and coders #3 and #4 independently coded students 6-14. The codes identified were then discussed by all members and the coding scheme was refined to nine constructs most relevant to social justice (Table 3). The reflections were then independently coded a second time. Reliability between teams was confirmed through a 3rd round of coding where Coder #3 coded two reflections previously coded by Coders #1 and #2. Once reliability of codes was confirmed between coders, the

coded data was organized into relevant   themes.

Table 3
List of construct codes for reflection data

Construct	Description
Empathy	Recognizing feelings in others
Self-Efficacy	Perceived self-efficacy including positive or negative self-efficacy
Diversity	Acknowledging factors related to diversity or disability without substantial reflection
Academic Learning	Recognizing learning in camper or university student
Career Development	Recognizing something will be beneficial for one's career
Motivation	Signs of resiliency, initiation, or emotional/affect impact
Belief and Attitude Changes	Reward of helping others with disabilities; increase in learning/awareness, appreciating other cultures
Developing Connections with Others	Working well with others; inter-personal communications; teamwork; collaboration; providing ideas to the group; reward in helping others; community connections
Problem Solving	Adapting to a situation or making accommodations or modifications

Results

Reliability of Coding

Three chi square tests for independence were calculated comparing the frequencies of codes per construct between the rating teams and between the two experts, resulting in 33 contingency tables. The results of each test confirm good to high agreement (high association) between the coders for all constructs with $_c$ (Cramer's V) values ranging from .572 (#3 x #4; developing connections), which is acceptable to 1.000 (#1 x #3; self-efficacy), meaning complete agreement between

coders. Specifically, lowest agreement was x^2 (2) = 26.543 (N = 81, p < .05) while, highest agreement was x^2 (2) = 23.000 (N = 23, p < .05).

Survey Results

Quantitative data from 20 students across 2011 & 2012 was utilized in the survey analyses. All assumptions were evaluated and met. Table 4 displays the mean percent of social justice constructs identified by university students on the pre- and post-survey. Results indicate change before and after direct interaction with individuals with disabilities.

Table 4
Results of t-test for pre- and post-course surveys

	Time Point								
	Pre-Test			Post-Test					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	t	df	Sig

Personal Communication	14.35	1.90	20	17.50	2.09	20	-4.79	19	0.000*
Attitudes Toward Diversity	11.00	1.59	20	13.45	1.61	20	-4.53	19	0.000*
Self-Efficacy	33.40	5.16	20	40.73	4.49	20	-4.71	19	0.000*
Empathy	16.30	2.56	20	19.05	1.23	20	-4.30	19	0.000*

*Significant at alpha=0.05

Formation of Themes from Student Reflections

The analyses of the students' journals found that reflection texts ranged from one short paragraph to four paragraphs in length. All available reflections from students were analyzed through the *ex post facto* analysis of an instructional intervention. From the nine constructs that were coded, four themes emerged related to social justice education. The four themes included: Empathy for Campers, Self-efficacy of Teaching Skills, Understanding of Diversity through Belief and Attitude Change, and Developing Connections with Peers and Community Partners.

Empathy for Campers. Empathy for the campers emerged as a theme primarily through reflections written by counselors during the camp experience. Once counselors began to directly engage with the campers and teach lessons, they saw firsthand how the experiences impacted the campers. For example, several counselors displayed empathy for a camper who initially displayed fear of the horses but was able to overcome this:

> One of the biggest challenges I think for us will be to get one kid who refused to ride today up on a horse and riding. He was very hesitant today, and was afraid to even go near the horses. However, once he saw the other students riding I

believe that he realized that the horses were not as scary as he once thought.

A later reflection from a different counselor stated, "I was so excited to see the one kid who was terrified of the horse get up in the saddle today, he is precious."

During the early part of the camp, counselors displayed empathy for campers as they noted the campers' initial hesitations about being at camp:

> The boy that was in this group was really shy today, and I really want to get him to open up. One of the girls in the group had huge smile on her face the whole time we were together and that made me so happy to see. The other girl in this group was very closed off and I also wanted to get her to open up.

A later reflection notes the change in the campers that occurred over the course of the camp:

> They are learning to be more creative and open when it comes to making things on their own. They also are much more open than they were at the beginning. They also have learned a lot of new behaviors when it comes to interacting with others. I think they have learned better friendship skills in a chance

especially since we are good examples for them to look up to. They really enjoyed their picture frames and the older kids wrote poems which really was surprising. It might have been since one of the campers started doing one, but it was still really creative and cute. They were very deep and tried using their words and it was great :) The whole activity went really well.

On the final day of camp (i.e., at the "carnival"), one counselor demonstrated empathy for a camper who was showing his grandparents the activities he had participated in saying, "When his grandparents got there, I could just see the excitement in his eyes. I seriously almost started crying when his Grandma and Grandpa walked up to the arena to watch him, but I did not." More broadly, another Counselor acknowledged the impact the camp had on the campers saying: "I am glad that I was able to be a part of a camp that impacts their lives as much as it did. To me, that is priceless."

Self-Efficacy of Teaching Skills. The counselors recognized the impact of their teaching on the campers; this was primarily demonstrated through reflections during camp. After a day of prepping, one counselor noted the impact of careful planning: "When I left to head back [to campus], I felt very accomplished." During camp, a counselor assigned to the equestrian group shared how the camper who was fearful of the horse impacted her feelings of self-efficacy stating, "We reached our main goal for the week, which was to get the student who refused to ride yesterday up on the horse and riding. I could not have been any prouder for him and myself. It was a huge challenge, and I

am very happy that we could accomplish it on only our second day of camp." Another counselor also commented on this accomplishment:

> Day two, well, my biggest success today was getting the camper that was afraid of the horses on the horses today. We got him up there and he just loved it. We even got him to get on at the end of the day so his grandparents could see him. Watching their faces as they got out of the car was the most rewarding feeling that I felt all week. It was so great to know that I had a part in doing that for a little boy who was so afraid at first.

Similarly, a counselor from a different group described her role in helping a student become more engaged with the camp saying, "One of the boys only wanted to catch the ball then hold it for a long time and not pass it on, however, we eventually got him to get the concept and he started participating properly. That was nice for us to see…" Another commented on how one of the campers complimented her ability: "A moment I will never forget is when I was told that I was someone's favorite camp counselor. What a feeling that will never go away nor diminish in importance regardless of how much time elapses. Today was an awesome day." Counselors also acknowledged their ability to teach the campers:

> I am so proud of all of us for making this possible for these children. Most of them do not get the opportunity to do things like this and especially not free of cost. I am so happy we could create this for them. Being a part of creating this camp has made me feel important,

and more sure that I can have good ideas for things.

Another stated, "If I have changed those children's life as much as they have changed mine, then I know that this was a great success." Other counselors noted how their self-efficacy improved throughout the camp experience, reinforcing beliefs regarding future careers goals and their ability to make a difference:

> I have struggled everyday this past year over what I what I want to do with my life because I have not been 100% sure about being a teacher. I have many aspirations including joining the Air Force and opening a bakery as well as teaching. However, this week has reminded me why I chose to go to [college] to dual major in Elementary Education and Special Education.

Another counselor acknowledged her growth:

> I would like to thank you so much for providing the opportunity for students like myself to participate in the week of camp. It has been a truly satisfying and rewarding experience that I think I gained much from. I have had some experience working with people with disabilities, as I volunteered … all last semester, but after this week I definitely feel even more equipped to knowing how they operate. This is a skill that will help me undoubtedly with whatever I choose to do in life. In my personal life I will be able to seek out and be friend these individuals. I have friends who do not feel comfortable around people with disabilities, and I feel like

because I feel so comfortable around them I need to do something with that skill. Professionally, I would love to work for either a non-profit or a government agency that helps individuals who have some sort of handicap, whether that be a mental disability, a physical one, or an unfortunate monetary situation. This camp has also really helped those career goals become clear for me.

Understanding of diversity through belief and attitude change. The counselors also displayed increased understanding of diversity through belief and attitude changes mentioned in their reflections. For example, during pre-camp activities one counselor noted the importance of being able to accommodate the campers' individual needs:

> I can't wait to have this camp, I have had so much fun planning it and working everything out. I can't wait to find out who our campers are so we can go more in depth without lessons and plan to accommodate their disabilities. I can't wait to work with all of them, I really hope they get a lot out of what we are teaching them.

Counselors also shared the unique challenges that children with disabilities bring to the camp experience:

> Working with children is a hard task on its own, but working with children with disabilities, even just mild ones, can be a lot harder. You have to be persistent and very, very flexible and open to change. I already knew I wanted to work with

children when I finish school, but this camp has reinforced that.

Another counselor commented on how the students faced discrimination:

> Each day I have heard stories about how they are told they are "not normal" and I don't like how this is a daily, trending topic. These kids are hands down some of the best and kindest individuals I have ever met.

Other counselors spoke about how working specifically with children with disabilities impacted them:

> I was under the impression it would be much more difficult to work with children who have mild disabilities, but I learned to adapt my teaching styles and the way I interacted with each of them very quickly. Overall, I regret absolutely nothing from this experience, and I know I will remember this camp and the knowledge I've gained from it for the rest of my days.

Another counselor noted, "The kids have made a huge impact on my attitude and I hope that this camp has impacted them as well." Counselors also commented on how the camp provided a reciprocal relationship between the campers and the counselors:

> I have never met such wonderful kids who truly just want to be treated as kids. I feel that since the start of our preparation we have grown tremendously personally and academically. … I feel that I have grown in so many ways and my leadership abilities were able to shine throughout camp in addition to my sense of humor. … I feel an attachment with each of these kids

and I hope that we have not only positively influenced these children but we have inspired them and encouraged them to be whatever they want to be. I feel that we have also inspired the parents and have shed some light on how truly amazing and special their children are.

The impact on the campers and the larger impact on the community was also noted:

> Many [campers] demonstrated ability they did not know they had and I hope that shows them how much more capable they are than they previously realized. Because "Sandstone" County lacks the resources to present opportunities like this to many children who could benefit from them, I can only imagine how blessed the families of these children feel. Each parent I spoke with long enough to thank me did so, which was a heartwarming experience.

Further, the impact on the campers' perception of their disability was observed:

> It has been wonderful to see the children make new friends, and be able to "be themselves" at camp. I think this camp was really great for the children, because it let them be like "other kids", and have a camp experience. Kids want to fit in, and not be different from their peers. I have enjoyed seeing children come out of their shell, and have more confidence. It was great to give the children a fun place that had no homework, testing, psychologists, or grades. I haven't gotten so many hugs in one week in a long time! I

think the parents were happy that their children got to do something that" all the other kids" get to do. I am sure they appreciated the opportunity for their children to socialize with other children and adults in a fun setting.

One counselor mentioned how the campers wanted to share their experiences with their families:

I am so happy to have been a part of such a great experience. I know that the feelings and memories that I will hold close to my heart is much like those that the campers will share. I love how the campers have many keepsakes to remind them of the camp. I hope that this experience is something that many more children can take part in later in the future. … All of the campers were great children in their own right and I will remember and miss them all. They were always a pleasure and made me look forward to going to camp. They were always positive and very eager to get started with the day's activities. Their optimism and excitement along with their smiles were very contagious…As I think back to the impact of the camp I will think of how many times the campers would talk at length to parents or just be ear-to-ear smiles from the time they arrived to when they left shows the camp made a positive difference in their lives. I hope all those involved how much they changed the lives of these children when they consider if this camp should continue and I also hope that this camp is something that stays around for many years. It

was an amazing experience that I am so happy I had the opportunity to be a part of and I would like to thank all of those who made it a possibility.

Another counselor spoke about the impact the campers' excitement had on her:

Being around them all week gave me a variety of emotions. Those kids could have you laughing one minute and almost crying the next because of the sweet comments they made about how much they liked us being there. All of the parents seemed extremely grateful the last day during our parent show time. I did not hear one negative comment the entire time is was all positive and encouraging. I think the campers favorite part was being able to show their parents the horses and what they have learned to do with them. All of the campers were so proud of everything they did the whole week and could not wait to show their parents! This was an eye-opening experience!

Developing connections with peers and community partners. The impact of working collaboratively with fellow university students and community partners was also an important theme that emerged across reflections and was relatively stable both before and during camp. Prior to camp starting, one counselor commented on her group's collaborative skills saying, "I hope we will be able to put all of our thoughts into action. I think we are collaborating very well together." Another student commented on how the connections developed between groups assisted with their planning:

Discussing our themes and actually seeing them written on the board helped us as a group to make sure that all of our ideas were cohesive and that they were all linked to the equestrian part of the camp. It was nice to finally work out some of the details for the rodeo day on Friday, I am on the science committee and we were having difficulties deciding on what activities to do with the kids.

At the beginning of camp, one counselor noted the importance of her team's dynamics:

I was a little nervous at the beginning of the morning because this is my first experience working with children with disabilities … It was really great having such an awesome team to work with, they showed me not only how to interact and work with children with disabilities but they had a tremendous amount of patience. I have really enjoyed this experience of not only meeting new friends but doing positive and fun experiences for the kids. I am looking forward to the rest of week and I am excited to get closer with the kids and to experience as much as I can.

Another counselor mentioned the importance of being able to work together as a team, even when the lesson did not go exactly as planned:

One child did not like the music, and he kind of threw a fit. We had him sit down since he did not want to participate. Another child decided that she did not want to do bubbles, so we had her sit inside also. [A

fellow Counselor] got kind of frustrated, but I told her to just let the kids sit if they did not want to do anything…. I am starting to see everyone's individual personalities, and learning about what they like and do not like.

The connections made among counselors, and how these connections impacted the campers' experiences, were noted in several reflections. One counselor said, "I miss the kids so much already and I would love to see them all again and continue to watch them grow. It is crazy how one week can bring you so close to somebody." A second acknowledged the growth saying, "I think the group of people we have now meshes well and that we are all eager to make this a fun experience for the kids as well as ourselves." A third counselor emotionally stated:

I am so truly blessed to be a part of this camp and seeing these kids with their parents was an awesome experience. I am sad to say that this camp is over because my classmates were not just my classmates many of them became part of my family. Thank you so much for doing this camp and I hope that you see your efforts going to good use and inspiring others to be more than they are.

One counselor shared how she planned to use what she had learned during camp:

I also really liked how the parents came up to us and told us how much they appreciated what we did, I hated saying goodbye to the campers though. This camp really meant a lot to me, I feel like I have really made a difference in some of

their lives. I am so so grateful that I was chosen for this immersive learning project. I made so many friends along the way, I even made new friends with some of the campers.

Another commented on how these experiences would impact her future actions:

> I am really sad that today and this whole week are over, but this will be something I never forget. This week has and will have a tremendous impact on my life and what will come of it. All of us have worked so hard to put this camp together, and I am so glad to see that it paid off this week. Towards the beginning of the week I did not think that I liked [Community Partner) that much. However, by the end of the week I did not want her to leave. …I hope that I can take what I have learned from this experience and make an impact in my community someday.

Similarly, a second counselor noted more specific action steps:

> I will never ever forget this experience; it has inspired me in

many ways. One of which is to have a camp just like it at my own house next summer. I am going to try to get a grant … so I can continue this.

Quantitative Analyses of Themes

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze reflection data, focusing on an analysis of the four themes: empathy, self-efficacy, belief and attitude change, and developing connections. Table 4 presents the summary of frequencies of the codes identified in the journal reflections of 14 students (some reflections were missing) used in the data analysis.

Figures 1 and 2 provide descriptive summaries of the percent of occurrence over time. Pre-camp reflections displayed empathy an average of 8% of the time compared to 44% of the time during camp. Self-efficacy was displayed an average of 22% of the time pre-camp and 36% of the time during camp. Belief and attitude change was displayed an average of 16% pre- and 62% during. Lastly, developing connections was displayed an average of 53% of the time during pre-camp reflections and 49% of the time during camp. Visual analysis indicates an overall upward trend in empathy and belief and attitude change during camp.
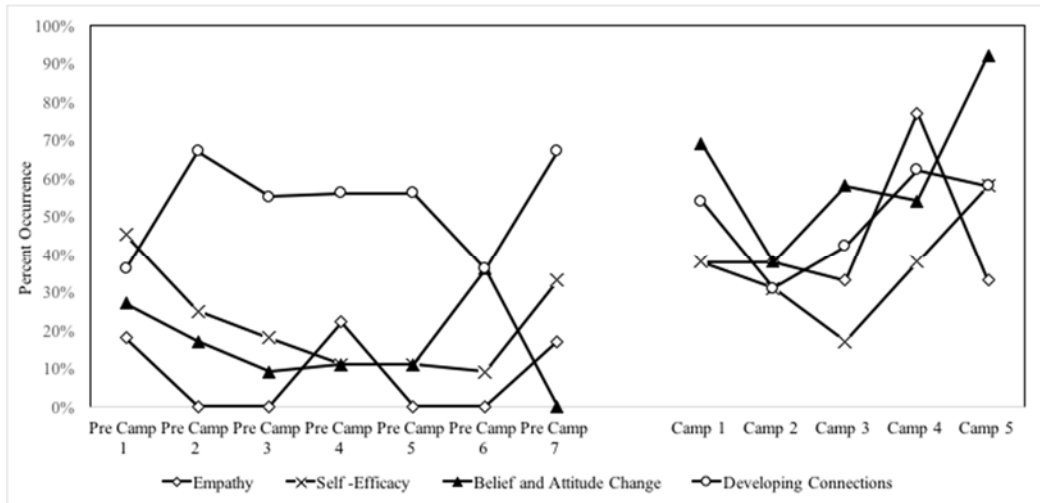
Figure 1. Percentage of occurrences of social justice themes identified from reflections
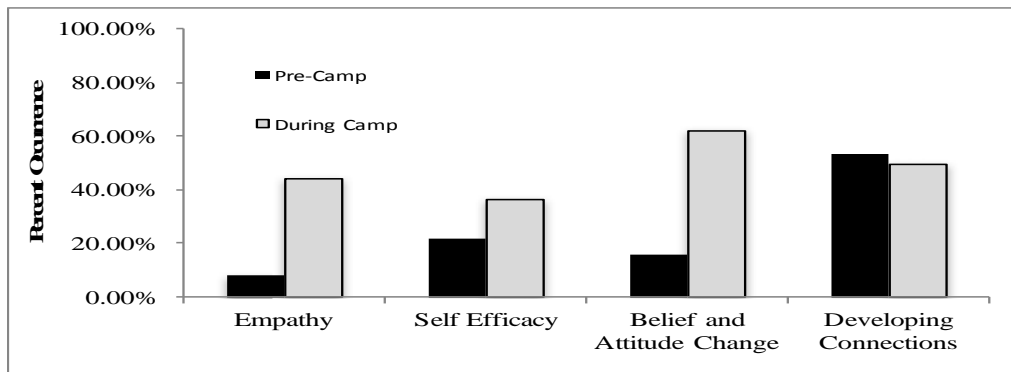

Figure 2. Average occurrence of themes before and during camp

Discussion

Discrimination related to social justice for people with disabilities is a critical issue that may be addressed through experiential education and exposing people without disabilities to those with. The purpose of this project was to teach university students about issues related to social justice for children with disabilities through a service-learning course which included direct interactions with children with disabilities and their families. The study examined how social justice constructs were impacted in university students as a result of the service-learning camp experience. Data suggest that students' perceptions were significantly higher post-camp as indicated by survey results. Furthermore, reflection data indicate that students' perceptions of empathy, self-efficacy, and belief and attitude change were higher when the students were engaged directly with the campers (during the camp) than when preparing for the camp.

While social justice education is important and highly regarded in institutes of higher education, this paradigm typically lacks a clear vision (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). This study sought to clearly define relevant factors related to social justice education through identifying four constructs that support the five essential elements of social justice education. This course was designed

to promote meaningful social justice education as discussed by Hackman (2005) (i.e., Personal Reflection, Action and Social Change, Content Mastery, Critical Thinking and Analysis of Oppression, Awareness of multicultural group dynamics, Personal Reflection). Specifically, the course sought to teach students about the inequity associated with people with disabilities in society and the associated systems of power. A long-term goal was to clarify the roles students can play in their communities and the effects students can have on the lives of people with disabilities. Both outcomes were promoted through the service-learning component of the course.

The results of both the survey and reflection data indicate that the constructs and themes related to social justice were higher following the camp than before (or when planning the camp). The survey data was significantly higher across all themes during the post assessment, indicating that students were greatly impacted by the coursework and camp experience. The reflection data allow for a deeper examination of relevant social justice themes over time. The growth of empathy and belief and attitude change are of particular interest when comparing the pre- and during-camp data. Empathy ranged from about 0%-25% pre-camp. There was an immediate increase in empathy during-camp, with reflections for empathy ranging from 32-77% with no data points overlapping with the pre-camp data. Similarly, belief and attitude change ranged from 10-35% pre-camp; however, once the camp began, scores ranged from 39-91% with no overlapping data.

These results suggest that students were greatly impacted in these areas by their direct experiences with the campers. This is critical when thinking about how the students may use what they experienced to take future action. Fawcett et al. (1995) suggest disability advocacy is impacted by personal factors including being cognizant of the causes of the problems and open to diversity. The alignment of the four constructs measured to Hackman's five elements of social justice education further supports changes in the thought processes of the university students. The increases in the social justice constructs identified may reflect the beginning steps needed to promote empowerment for people with disabilities in the future as a result of the university students' having new information, beliefs, empathy, and understanding.

The increases in constructs measured are of particular relevance to the 25% of participants who majored in education (i.e., special education or adult education). Previous research suggests a strong need for teacher preparation programs to support pre-service teachers in acknowledging potential biases prior to entering the education field and this is of particular relevance for those who hold biases against people with disabilities (Kirkland, 2014; Nowicki & Sandieson, 2002). This study contributes a preliminary statement for programs focused on teacher education. It seems prudent to include opportunities for future teachers to increase empathy and communication skills with the ultimate goal of improving understanding of students with disabilities and their families and communities.

Implications

This project, while targeted toward campers with disabilities, involved several academic disciplines from many majors who worked together to create a positive camp environment. The interdisciplinary characteristic of this project lent itself to

encouraging students from fields outside of special education to experience working with individuals with disabilities in particular, and diverse populations in general. Findings suggest that the students' views on social justice and their personal ability to affect change were impacted by a preliminary opportunity to work with children with disabilities.

A deepening social awareness and increased empathy and openness in relating to individuals with disabilities emerged as a strong theme in students' reflections. The experience with diversity (for many of the students, an initial one) was viewed positively. Students observed campers' increased confidence and competency with a variety of activities (e.g., equestrian experiences, social skills). They also witnessed the positive impacts on parents/guardians, given the camp was provided at no cost. Most campers experienced summer programming for the first time and the students recognized the importance of this as a social justice issue.

Students were also able to observe that the community-at-large was impacted, as various community groups and agencies understood the need to address opportunity and access for children with disabilities. The camp demonstrated that students from diverse majors could successfully collaborate to impact the quality of life for children with disabilities. In turn, students also improved their personal communication skills as indicated by the data. In addition, students, faculty, and community partners who would have never had the opportunity to meet and work together came together for the campers.

Many individuals were affected by this experience; however, the results indicated the most change was felt by the participants who planned, implemented, and reflected upon the service-learning opportunity. Kirkland (2014) noted that individuals who feel passionately about particular issues, possibly after participating in a service-learning experience, become advocates by raising awareness of other individuals, families, and community members. It is important to recognize that while raising awareness is a necessary and important pre-curser for action, it by and of itself does not translate into change (Picower, 2012). The participants in the summer day camp practiced the skills of creating change firsthand, and thus may be able to provide social action later in their careers. Another benefit that the participants of this study experienced was that ordinary people can unite to create change of a social nature in a community.

Limitations and Future Research

These results have significant implications for social justice education in university settings, specifically with regards to individuals with disabilities. The results from this study suggest that university students' experiences during the camp impacted their perceptions of social justice constructs. For those seeking to address social justice issues for people with disabilities, this research provides a starting point. Specifically, the connection of quantifiable constructs (e.g., empathy) to essential elements of social justice education are an important consideration when seeking best practices related to teaching strategies for social change. While the survey results support change across all four factors, the theme of developing connections was slightly lower during camp than pre-camp. This may be due to the planning required before the camp, the peer relationships formed pre-camp, or the reflection prompts provided. It would be of

interest to explore the other constructs identified from the reflections which were not analyzed in this study to determine how those might vary over time in a similar course. Additional limitations include the small sample size and missing data.

Suggestions for future research would be to replicate the study and to collect longitudinal data to measure lasting effects of the immersive learning experience. This study helps to answer the research question regarding university students' perceptions, but this study does not address the reasons for these changes or how much of the changes are related to course instruction vs. the experiences students had with the campers. Further exploration could address when the change(s) occurred and if a single incident could be identified as the cause. Another question to investigate may be whether or not university students make future efforts to build relationships or address issues of social justice with people who have mild disabilities outside of a "class" or formal experience. One might expect these significant results (and trend) to continue; the hope is that it fosters a commitment to equity and social justice. Increased exposure to diversity in general, and to children with disabilities in particular, may encourage the formation of relationships and connections with life-long implications. Social justice cannot be merely taught – it must be experienced.

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