PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MORAL REASONING IN HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This work examines the role of professional development in higher education graduate programs through the use of reflective teaching approaches. We discuss the relevance of a professional development framework in supporting the exploration of moral reasoning in addressing challenges in the higher education profession.
Background	Shifts in demographics within college university environments has resulted in increased diversity among students facilitating the need for professional development experiences that involve moral reasoning and self-reflection as resources to increase cultural awareness.
Methodology	Case study overviews of higher education courses focused on supporting the development of graduate students' professional interest illustrate ways moral reasoning can be examined to facilitate self-awareness as a professional skill and competency. Four teaching strategies reflect how professional learning can be used to shape students' experiences, knowledge of critical issues, and understanding of organizational development in higher education.

Contribution	This paper contributes to the knowledge of professional development in higher education graduate programs and the experiences faculty and graduate students.
Findings	Strategies discussed provide a basis for further research to examine the role of professional learning framework in developing effective pedagogical strategies that facilitate moral reasoning, social justice, democratic values, and diversity. Previous research on the experiences of graduate students has not explicitly discussed the proposed professional learning framework across graduate student experiences.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Administrators responsible for managing higher education graduate programs may find this work useful for understanding how moral reasoning can be used as tool for teaching professional development in graduate programs.
Recommendations for Researchers	Researchers of professional development within graduate programs may find the use of moral reasoning helpful in understanding strategies that support facilitating discussions of critical issues related to cultural awareness.
Impact on Society	Moral reasoning is an effective resource for building the professional insight and awareness needed for understanding multiple experiences in the workplace.
Future Research	Additional research is needed to understand how moral reasoning could be used to support the professional development of higher education graduate students.
Keywords	professional development, graduate programs, moral reasoning, racial and cultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

Graduate programs have played an important role in the development and growth of higher education (Gumport, 2005), but their performance has come under greater scrutiny due to rationalizations about the nation's global competitiveness. For example, The Commission for the Future of Graduate Education Reports (Council of Graduate Schools & Educational Testing Service, 2010, 2012) concluded that while the United States has long held a prominent position in graduate education internationally, this status is made vulnerable by gains made by other countries. For instance, Europe has experienced a massive restructuring of its graduate education system, resulting in greater numbers of advanced trained professionals in the fields of science and engineering compared to the United States (Wendler et al., 2010), while China and India have made significant investments in developing programs geared to prepare undergraduate students for graduate study (Wendler et al., 2010). In 2012, The Commission highlighted the value and role of US graduate programs informing and guiding students in the exploration of career paths as priorities in examining the competitive performance of graduate education (Wendler et al., 2010, p. 1). Higher education graduate programs serve as ideal models for examining these priorities and how they contribute to the expansion of knowledge and practices essential for understanding career pathways and opportunities in graduate education.

Key to advancing this idea is the knowledge of diversity in higher education through understanding: 1) a broad set of identity characteristics; 2) focal constituent groups; and, 3) institutional initiatives (Worthington, 2012). Four teaching models using St. John's (2009) framework of moral reasoning in higher education graduate education programs demonstrate an awareness of contemporary diversity priorities in professional learning and development. This work argues the use of moral reasoning in higher education graduate programs supports the potential to learn diversity related research and practices, thereby expanding opportunities for knowledge attainment highly relevant to the higher education profession. Findings suggest the implementation of moral reasoning in higher education professional development courses provides a useful platform for examining critical issues in research

and practice; serving to broaden conversations on how higher education professionals can be more competitive, both nationally and globally.

As such this work aims to build on previous work by St. John (2009), scholarship on professional learning and development, addressing moral reasoning as a critical function of attaining knowledge of diversity in higher education.   Questions guiding the development of this work are: In what ways can graduate higher education programs play a role in facilitating knowledge attainment on moral reasoning and diversity in higher education? In what ways does knowledge attainment on moral reasoning and diversity in higher education contribute to the professional development in higher education graduate programs?

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Four teaching models provide an overview of professional development goals for higher education graduate programs with emphasis on moral reasoning, self-reflection, social justice, and diversity. Each model includes use of St. John's (2009) text, *College Organization and Professional Development: Integrating Moral Reasoning and Reflective Practice.* St. John's work serves as primary resource for developing and supporting course objectives focused on moral reasoning. Objectives support the learning experiences of master's and doctoral students' interest in critical issues related to learning professional competencies associated with college and university environments. Observations about developing a professional experience in higher education are based on five points: 1) the potential for graduate students to transition from master's to doctoral programs to broaden their theoretical and practical interests; 2) the practical application of learning to emphasize the role of social justice and diversity in the field of higher education; 3) the potential for learning in the moment and the value of this process as a professional; 4) the broader systemic issues guiding the development of higher education as a field; and 5) self-reflective practices and strategies that engage moral reasoning. The models address professional development as a priority towards strengthening institutional capacity through facilitating the development and attainment of professional competencies relevant to the higher education profession.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND MORAL REASONING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Literature points to the benefits of reflective practice in terms of self-assessment (Bleakley, 2000), discipline (Ryan, 2011), learning journals (Morrison, 1996), portfolios (Klenowski, Askew, & Carnell, 2006), continuing professional education (Trevitt, 2008), professional identity development (Gilardi & Lozza, 2009), and understanding how power and powerlessness can be constructed and deconstructed in professional development scenarios, especially relative to issues of social justice (St. John, 2009). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recently proposed "a new agenda for higher education" focused on the development of John Dewey's (1938) notion of practical reason. Sullivan and Rosin (2008) call this approach to education "shaping a life of the mind for practice" (p. 91). Students in higher education administration graduate programs are typically emerging practitioners and scholars, and also, sometimes simultaneously, experienced practitioners of higher education administration. Their professional learning occurs in a specific knowledge community defined by particular cognitive practices as required by the nature and scope of the work that they do. Faculty in higher education programs engage in this experience with their students, "establishing a conscious relationship between the implicit, holistic grounds of meaning [practice], on the one hand, and the work of analytical thinking," (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008, p. 103-104), in activities associated with research. We are, as such, preparing our students to work at the nexus of research and practice.

The learning of reflective skills follows an underlying developmental sequence significant in building professional competence (Felder, St. John, Kline, Gentry, & Moore, 2013; St. John, 2009). The first

two forms relate to self-reflection about professional action: people learn to reflect on their own actions in relation to the role of the system (known as a basic, institutionalist frame), see Table 1. Second, as their skills develop, they learn to adapt their practice by setting and moving toward situational goals that seem to address emerging problems (known as closed strategic action), see Table 1. When people have a capacity to reflect on whether action has achieved its intent, it is easier to engage openly in setting goals, shifting from an attitude of controlling situations to collective engagement in problem solving (known as open strategic action). It is also possible in especially troubling situations to engage in discussion about reframing within the system, to move toward empowering others to solve critical challenges when they emerge (known as communicative action).

Graduate programs can facilitate the development of these reflective skills by creating a safe place in which people can openly discuss their assumptions about professional situations as they happen in real-time and can feel free to ask questions about problematic issues. This approach does not immediately change students' attitudes, but it does provide a skill set for engaging in dialogue about critical issues (Kline, 2003, 2007) that students will continue to use during their early professional work.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As colleges and universities become increasingly diverse, a valuable professional skill set is practical expertise where moral reasoning is emphasized as it relates to facilitating social justice and equality. St. John's (2009) framework (see Table 1) for integrating moral research into professional development provides guidance for identifying, understanding, and valuing the integration of critical thinking about diversity and cultural and social justice issues as critical challenges. The lack of integration of these concepts into the professional learning experiences of higher education professionals sustains potential for the reproduction of social inequality and minimizes the potential for effective, constructive institutional diversity efforts within college and university environments.

For instance, the lack of diversity and multicultural skill competences can serve to foster professional environments where racial and cultural experiences are marginalized. Examples of this might include ineffective communicative frames based on pre-conventional moral reasoning involving insincere politically correct comments that undermine learning objectives in diversity education. This ineffective communication can serve to create a moral dilemmas that prevent authentic personal sharing of the real, and often intense issues related to diversity. Second, because of a lack of meaningful sharing, "politically correct contributions impair or neutralize collective learning about diversity." (Avery & Steingard, 2007, p. 270). Thus, diversity initiatives involving the practice of meaningful communication and learning about race and culture are at risk of not achieving intended outcomes.

Furthermore, examples of critical multicultural competencies include the capacity to engage in authentic dialogue and difficult conversations; the ability to recognize one's own multiple, intersecting group memberships; and the capacity to understand and discuss the social status and advantages of privileged group membership as well as the organizational and attitudinal challenges and barriers experienced by members of marginalized groups (Obear, 2012, p. 1). An important professional learning skill set is the ability to reframe communication and behavior that is conducive and supportive to addressing challenges to racial and cultural diversity towards the development of post-conventional reasoning where moral reasoning is leads to reconstruction of rules and practice that value diversity, social equality and justice.

Social Justice and Moral Reasoning: The term "social justice" is used in higher education and student affairs, but is often not officially defined. We appreciate Lee Anne Bell's (2010) definition as she talks about social justice both as a process and a goal. She states,

> The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society
> that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society
> in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically
> and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are

both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live. These are conditions we wish not only for our own society but also for every society in our interdependent global community (p. 21).

Table 1: Framework for Reframing the Relationship between Moral Reasoning and Professional Learning

| Levels of Moral Reasoning/Professional Learning	Pre-conventional Moral Reasoning	Conventional Moral Reasoning	Post-conventional Moral Reasoning
Institutionalist/Basic Frames	Using rules without considering underlying problems.	Applying rules of practice consistent with ethical codes.	Using extant methods to address moral challenges.
Closed-Strategic Frames	Adapting methods to achieve ends without considering moral problems created by new practices.	Adapting methods to address challenges; attempts to reconcile ethics within rules of practice.	Adapting strategies to address moral issues, including those that challenge the rules of practice.
Open-Strategic Frames	Collaboration on strategies that use power and persuasion to achieve aims with little regard for consequences.	Collaboratively develop goals and adapt strategies to achieve mission; reconcile strategies with ethical standards.	Collectively consider strategies for adapting mission to address client concerns, diversity, and issues of justice.
Communicative Frames	Reaching false consensus within professional groups; using beliefs to construct rationales that reinforce problems in practice; failing to consider diverse voices and dissent.	Focus on actions consistent with ethical standards; consider ambiguities between ethical codes and organizational strategies; may emphasize resolving moral ambiguities.	Openly reconstruct rules (practices and methods) to address moral challenges, including diverse views and evidence of effects of action; willingness to reconstruct theories of action to address challenges.

Source: Adapted from St. John, 2009

INCORPORATING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTO HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATE PROGRAMS

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching launched the Preparation for the Professions Program (directed by William Sullivan), which is focused on reforming professional education in the United States. For Sullivan (2005), the absence of moral reflection constitutes a "crisis" of professionalism (p. 1; Sullivan & Rosin, 2008), which threatens the integrity of professional education programs. Program initiatives emanating from Sullivan's work and the Carnegie foundation are targeted to specific fields, including doctoral education in the professions (Golde & Walker, 2006), clergy (Foster, Dahill, Goleman, & Tolentino, 2005), legal studies (Sullivan, Colby, Wegner, Bond, & Shulman, 2007); engineering (Sheppard, Macatangay, Colby, & Sullivan, 2008), nursing (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2009), and medicine (Cooke, Irby, & O'Brien, 2010). These authors consistently address issues present at the intersection of moral reasoning and professional knowledge.

This work aligns with the models in this text by presenting faculty with pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning in higher education graduate programs. The common thread in all of these approaches is the use of moral reasoning and reflective practice to create learning environments focused on exploring individual commitment to the profession. Professional learning teaching approaches are presented within the following dimensions: 1) an institutional emphasis on facilitating

service to the profession and an understanding of organizational development, 2) to encourage the discipline of reflection within master's programs; 3) coursework in doctoral programs that utilizes service-learning pedagogy, and 4) to examine challenges associated with moral practice within higher education. The next sections provide an overview these dimensions followed by reflective first-person accounts of teaching experiences aimed at facilitating professional learning within college and university environments.
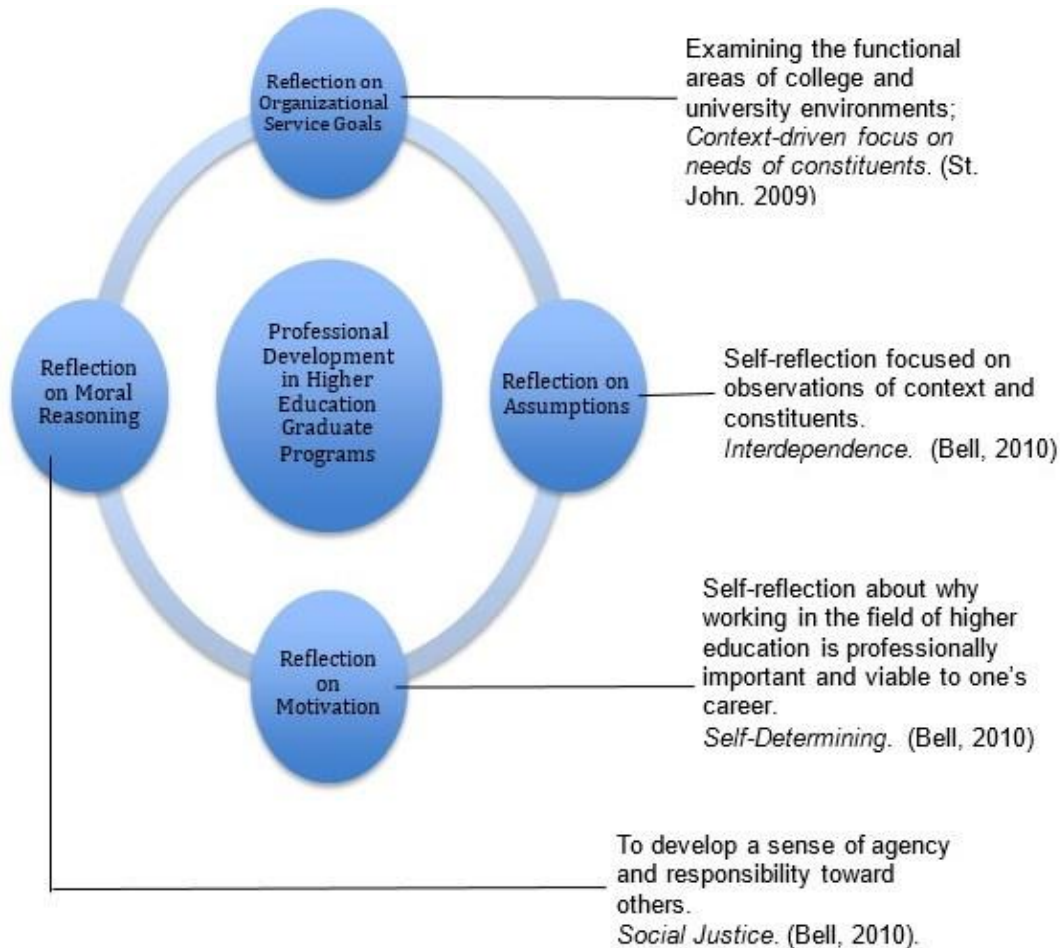
Figure 1. Professional Development in Action Sustained through Reflective Activities

Based on this review, we propose developing a common conceptual frame for students' engagement in professional development sustained through continual reflective activity (Figure 1). We present four first-person accounts of how the professional learning framework is used within higher education graduate programs. Each account emphasizes the use of reflective activities that focus on commitment to the profession.

CASE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MORAL REASONING IN HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Case study method is guidance for providing examination of how moral reasoning is applied in professional development courses in higher education graduate programs. Case study allows for the development of descriptive analysis and in-depth understanding of the use of moral reasoning with the use of the same resource (Creswell, 2013).

St. John's (2009) text provides the basis of collaboration and continued study of moral reasoning developed from discussion at an annual conference presentation at a national association. Each participant on the panel, authors of this work and faculty of professional development courses in higher education programs, found the text useful in facilitating activities around challenging and sensitive topics related to diversity. After collaborative discussion on the experiences of graduate students managing their interests in diversity, we decided further collaboration in the form of a journal article would facilitate further discussion of these ideas in support of our work with larger diversity initiatives. As such, multiple cases of activities used directly from the text, or developed in conjunction with it, provide a purposeful sample to analyze various perspectives of the use of moral reasoning in professional development in higher education graduate programs. The goal of analysis is to present a holistic account of why moral reasoning is a valued skill for emerging higher education researchers and practitioners. An intended outcome of this work is to examine how moral reasoning contributes to the way diversity issues (i.e., understanding a broad set of identity characteristics; focal constituent groups; and, institutional initiatives) are incorporated into professional development programs. Creswell (2013) describes a holistic analysis in qualitative research as researchers being bound not by cause and effect relationships, but by sketching a larger picture that emerges from complex interactions of factors in any situation.

The use of reflective activities in graduate classrooms focused on professional development provides an opportunity for students to discuss issues and challenges critical to their professional interests. Reflection also facilitates discussion, interaction, and exchange are how these issues and challenges relate to graduate students' moral reasoning. The following four cases address these several issues and challenges presented in professional learning scenarios. Each case highlights how concepts from the professional learning framework facilitates an opportunity to engage students' moral reasoning. Instructors share first-person accounts using the professional learning framework.

The cases represented here provide first-person account of faculty perspectives of learning aims and intended learning outcomes. Faculty provide details of the implementation of activities focused on moral reasoning in professional development programs at four different institutions. Institutional representation includes three public higher education graduate programs, and one elite program. Faculty members include one Lecturer, three Associate Professors, and a Professor Emeritus. Foremost, this collaboration represents an interest and commitment of faculty whose belief systems include moral reasoning as a highly valuable professional development skill. This work is part of a larger focus professional development curriculum at the institutions represented, the programmatic focus of supporting graduate students, school and university missions and their commitment to institutional diversity, and the faculty members individual teaching philosophies.

CASE 1: PROMOTING ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT ENABLES PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENCOURAGES LEARNING

Organizational development that enables professional development and encourages learning is sustained by providing extensive feedback on reflective exercises to slow the pace of learning and facilitate dialogue about sensitive workplace situational dynamics (Moon, 2006). Course curriculum should incorporate research on graduate student socialization focused on making the transition from a graduate program to the professional role (Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

Intended Learning Outcomes: The goal of my teaching professional learning is to facilitate my students' exploration of commitment to their educational and professional communities and their capacity to be aware of their own competency regarding higher organizational development. Organizational development can be used to enhance professional learning within a higher education master's program. For example, students enrolled in a one academic year program at an elite graduate school of education in the Northeast corridor in the United States (NEU). Every full-time student in the program must take the professional development course unless they have more than five years professional

experience within higher education, and each is assigned a 15-20 hour per week graduate assistantship/internship (paid or unpaid).

Historically, one of the primary professional development goals of graduate programs in higher education has been to support and enhance the practical experience associated with the students' graduate assistantship assignment. During the fall and spring semesters, students typically explore various practical issues and the contemporary literature focused on facilitating an understanding of competence within various functional areas within college and university environment. However, given a recent institutional initiative at NEU to grow and strengthen master's education, the professional development course was modified to include the topic of institutional diversity to enhance teaching practice on organizational development. This modification also embraces graduate student development research to strengthen the student-faculty relationship as a significant factor of the classroom experience. The course syllabus emphasizes this research as a key component of student-faculty interaction both inside and outside of the classroom. Transparency about the perception of this relationship in the syllabus and within interactions with students serves to facilitate intellectual community (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). Research indicates that fostering this type of community is essential to the socialization experience necessary for success within doctoral programs (Lovitts, 2002; Walker et al., 2008). Many of the students in the program have aspirations to pursue doctoral study, including several of the program's alumni. To this end, class assignments and activities involve use of the text, *College Organization and Professional Development: Integrating Moral Reasoning and Reflective Practice* (St. John, 2009), which emphasizes the importance of understanding one's own moral reasoning and how this reasoning is reflected in practice. Reflection is associated with prioritizing institutional selection as part of considering one's specialization within higher education. For example, if students are interested in working within the community college environment, they are encouraged to reflect on their moral values regarding this interest and to explore aspects of community college organizations that appeal to them. I found this to be useful in examining institutional and structural diversity to highlight fundamental distinctions among institutions and the constituents they serve, reinforcing the exploration of organizational development.

St. John introduces five practical learning components defined as the process of "Reflective Framing." One is having students examine the instrumental (basic) foundations of higher education through institutional comparison to better understand organizational development through similarities and differences. Another introduces basic knowledge about the functional areas of higher education by identifying characteristics of the populations being served, and how college and universities are governed by norms of practice. Students are encouraged to consider how to adapt practice to meet diverse client needs and build new skills and to identify "critical social issues" in developing this expertise (St. John, 2009, p. 175).

This approach raises an important moral question about how these issues might be perceived. "When we have visibility into injustices that create conditions which deny access to education, health care, and other services, what are our obligations to act?" (St. John, 2009, p.175). This question suggests that visibility is not constant and a sense of obligation towards social justice is different for every student. This teaching approach attempts to address the following question: How might graduate programs explore this difference as it relates to the organizational development of colleges and universities?

CASE 2: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AIM: ENABLE REFLECTION ON ASSUMPTIONS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

One of my goals in teaching master's level courses in Higher Education is to help my students develop the art and skills of reflective practice. Reflective skills are a way for students to improve their learning and think about their professional practice, and professional development in higher education, outside of the classroom (Rogers, 2001). I use reflective practice in my classroom in three ways, triangulated, as a means to support and promote student learning and professional growth:

1. My own written journal details what I learn as my students are learning. This allows me to become a better instructor as I understand what my students are learning about course content and about themselves in their professional practice roles.
2. Each semester, students are required to submit a minimum of five reflective writings. I use these writings to understand *what and how* students are learning from texts and classroom dialogue.
3. A goal is for students to understand *how and in what ways* their professional practice is impacted by what they are learning and how they are reflecting upon their own practice.

Reflective practice, in the sense that I use it, refers to Schön's (1983) discussion of two models of reflective practice: reflection in action (RIA) and reflection on action (ROA). Reflection in action is just that, students are required to reflect in the moment, usually during classroom time, and then discuss the results of their active reflection with a peer or the larger discussion group. Reflection on action requires that they reflect upon, write about, and discuss actions they may have taken in their professional practice, which may or may not directly align with their developed skills, values, principles, or espoused theories. Both RIA and ROA are useful tools to help move students' learning and professional growth in a positive direction.

While reflection may be one way to construct the 'self,' the disciplined act of reflective writing (Ryan, 2011), if properly taught and utilized, can lead to improved learning and professional practice. In most cases, however, reflective writing is done at a superficial level. Deep reflective writing should help students actively question as well as construct and deconstruct their own professional practices. Students learn to see themselves as active participants in their own learning, growth, and identity development as professionals and change agents. Transformative reflective writing is difficult and requires moving beyond simply describing feelings or events. The goal "is to transform practice in some way, whether it is the practice of the learning or the practice of the discipline or the profession" (Ryan, 2011, p. 103).

Ryan (2011) provides a three-part model that enables students to learn and master the skill of reflective writing and reflect within a structured format that more easily enables students to see first-hand how reflection can be a tool for professional understanding and growth. The reflective writing format includes: *reporting and responding,* in which students introduce the issue or incident, discuss its significance, and provide a few important themes of the incident; *relating and reasoning,* where students relate the incident to their professional practice, possible explanations for why the incident occurred, and the introduction of multiple perspectives.

CASE 3: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AIM: IMPROVE SERVICES PROVIDED BY PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Oklahoma State University's Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program typically attracts students who hold full-time appointments as mid-level administrators in student affairs or academic administration at two- or four-year institutions in Oklahoma who pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies/Higher Education (ELPS/HIED) as part-time students. Most aspire to increasingly responsible positions at their current institution or advancement to a larger college or university. International students – primarily faculty members and academic administrators at their home institution – comprise roughly 5% of the total program enrollment at the doctoral level and are among the few full-time students in the HESA program. On the whole, ELPS/HIED students place high value on course-based experiences they perceive to be directly relevant to their professional position and/or career path. Program faculty understand our responsibility to be one of preparing scholar-practitioners to be competent in data-driven decision making and grounded in the theory-to-practice connection (Reason & Kimball, 2012) as a foundation for professional practice.

In this environment, I worked with area administrators who are alumni of the HESA program to develop a new course for Fall 2012, a reflective practice seminar structured around service-learning

placements, at three institutions in the Tulsa metropolitan area. Service-learning is a common pedagogical approach in undergraduate education; three decades of research demonstrates positive outcomes for students in the mastery of discipline-specific learning objectives as well as addressing issues of diversity, difference, and social justice/change. Educators in specific disciplines have written about the value of service-learning and other forms of civic engagement in the graduate curriculum. Graduate students in other professional education fields report that participating in a service-learning experience benefitted their professional development and positively influenced their career trajectory.

By employing service-learning pedagogy to meet the professional learning objectives of the ELPS/HIED doctoral program, I addressed two important program goals: integrating individual courses across the professional curriculum and presenting students with an opportunity to realize the relevance of the coursework in their professional life. As a pre-requisite for this reflective practice seminar, students completed a course on administration of higher education, including units on organizational theory and culture. The ELPS/HIED curriculum also includes a required stand-alone organizational theory course, as well as an elective campus culture course taken before the seminar.

In the reflective practice seminar, students worked in pairs to complete a service-learning project under the on-site supervision of a senior administrator/OSU program alum. Projects included a proposal for restructuring the academic administrative structure on one campus of a two-year institution; developing and presenting training on faculty-driven learning assessment at a tribal college; conducting a market analysis and presenting a marketing plan for a new 4-year degree program; and advising a university president on implementing a community-based participatory research model through a new interdisciplinary research center. Each of these projects required students to draw on their prior professional experience and develop new skills unique to the particular service-learning project. For example, one of the students completing the academic administration restructuring assignment worked as a business affairs administrator; she drew on her experience with restructuring departments and expanded her learning through interviews with faculty leaders to gather input on the desired new design for an academic unit.

Structured reflection was a key component to the design of the OSU course and the individual class sessions. Students kept process journals, using written reflections to explore connections between the work they were doing to design or implement new programs and what they had previously learned about higher education administration, organizational environments, and campus culture. Opportunities to talk with student peers about their service experiences (similar to Schön's, 1983, reflection-in-action) contribute very positively to student learning outcomes among undergraduate students. In an effort to replicate these outcomes with graduate students, I also facilitated in-class reflection activities by asking students to share with each other their struggles with the process of the work, and their insights into the curriculum made possible through the experiential learning opportunity. Although these discussions could foster learning in the moment, this was not often the case in the seminar. Students frequently struggled with the misalignment of their professional identity as competent, established administrators and their new identity as students engaged in learning: While a student's professional self might be confident, his/her student self was not. The cognitive dissonance inherent in these experiences proved uncomfortable for many in the group and seemed to diminish the moments of insight, or learning in the moment. Diminished insight at the time of the class session, or even during enrollment in this seminar, reflects the challenge inherent in learning rather than any weakness in the professional learning model.

Professional learning serves the mutually reinforcing goals of practitioner and researcher development. An accidental yet serendipitous outcome, beyond the ELPS/HIED-specific learning objectives, emerged from this approach to the course: Students reported strong satisfaction with the preparation for the independent work of dissertation research they perceived to be embedded in the course. I did not intentionally link the self-directed work of the service-learning consultation projects with the dissertation experience; however, this example of professional learning "in the moment" further demonstrates the value of this approach.

Learning, or in this case professional learning, is itself a process of transitions. Students entering graduate programs transition from their previous learning experiences to this new one; and, they are preparing for other personal and professional transitions that come as a result of the new learning. The professional learning framework assists higher education faculty in preparing future scholar-practitioners for these transitions through its focus on the content of the curriculum as well as the ethical and moral complexities of research and leadership in a dynamic system of higher education.

CASE 4: ENABLE REFLECTION ON ASSUMPTIONS, ACTIONS, AND OUTCOMES

From the syllabus for *Moral Reasoning in Higher Education: Description and Intended Outcome:* "The goal of this course is to ensure that graduate students are prepared to address social-critical challenges faced in professional practice. Moral reasoning and the incorporation of social justice education into our graduate programs is one means of utilizing theory to enable students to recognize "isms" that perpetuate our professional and personal lives. Students will gain experience in facilitating discourse by practicing the art of communicating with colleagues on difficult issues."

The expected course outcomes were:

1. *An Examined Life/Promoting Commitment to Lifelong Learning.* The Higher Education Administration graduate will possess a strong desire to learn, to ask questions, and a willingness to consider new ideas. Graduates will be exposed to experiential opportunities that give them the capacity to make and act upon ethical judgments, and will develop a motivation to engage in self-reflection in their academic, professional and personal lives. These learning traits advocate a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.
2. *Foster Research Skills:* The Higher Education Administration graduate will possess essential research skills to locate, evaluate and document print and online sources to achieve technological fluency. Through this research mastery, the HEA student will be transformed into an informed citizen who uses research skills to make thoughtful choices in her/his profession, education and personal life. (AAC&U Greater Expectations).

Professional Development enacted via a Group "Mini-Action" Project: During the Moral Reasoning course, students form groups to work on projects. These group projects are mini 'action experiments' that enable members of class to practice aspects of action science. The projects involve collaboration on the development of the design, working together on the experiment, and collaborating on the presentation of results and insights using an action research methodology.

One of the most poignant experiences I had with students in the Moral Reasoning course took place during the spring semester of 2012. There was lively discussion linked to the senseless shooting of Trayvon Martin, a 17 year old who was shot in the chest at short range in Sanford, Florida, that continued on for approximately four weeks. During these discussions, we covered the notion of race and social stratification, oftentimes discussing the notion of one's place in the world and how as humans we should know where we belong and where we do not belong. The ethnic makeup of this course included six African Americans, two Multiracial, one Latina and six White students, all of whom self-identified their ethnicity publicly at some point in the semester. There were students who lived in the most affluent parts of a town, and students who lived in the poorest part of Buffalo, for example, where the high school dropout rate is reported at 55%.

Our discussions culminated in the development of a research topic deemed most important by them. The research question was simple: *What does college mean to you?* Students formed two action research groups and asked two different groups of teenagers from the East Side of Buffalo that question. One group videotaped individual and group responses to this question, and the other asked teenagers to write one word that answered the question for them on a piece of poster board. Then, the teenagers were photographed while holding their one-word descriptor.

This assignment was incredibly reflective for all of those involved. By using a real life case, the shooting of Trayvon Martin, a neutral ground for discussion of a topic was created around race and social stratification, a safe space for graduate student to openly and critically reflect moved them to "...collaborate and act with justice and care" (St. John, (2009) p. 191). The assignment was evaluated using a simple rubric utilized by the students to evaluate individuals within their group and the group overall. Did we take on a critical challenge? Did we openly and critically reflect, both individually and as a group? Did we act with justice and care? If the answer was yes to any of the questions, a follow-up questions was: How did we address with issue?

DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES

An underlying goal of this work is to make connections between broad aspects of the higher education profession and the learning of this profession within graduate programs. The four cases offer guidance to understanding these connections to build upon them for the purpose of understanding organizational functions of the higher education profession, as well as the ways students develop perceptions of these functions. How these perceptions translate into understanding of potential challenges within the field speak volumes about students' notions of social justice, democratic values, and diversity. Furthermore, discussing challenges within the context of the professional learning framework allows for acknowledging issues historically and currently present in the field.

The case studies illustrate four teaching approaches specific to supporting professional learning within higher education graduate programs (See Table 2). They are discussed with an intention to provide an overview of the reflective process; to encourage reflection and adaptation for use of the professional learning framework. Reflective activities are the hallmark of this framework and use of them is strongly encouraged to facilitate engagement with graduate student knowledge across multiple experiences with graduate programs. Attainment of this knowledge can be examined to understand the development of competencies in ways that draw on student commitment to functional areas with the higher education profession, social justice, student creativity, and the role of professional learning within a specialization.

Table 2. Professional Development in Action within Higher Education Graduate Programs

Professional Development *Learning Aims that Promote Moral Reasoning and Self-Reflection*	Identity Characteristics	Focal Constituents	Institutional Initiatives
Promote organizational development that enables professional development and encourages learning.	Self-reflection on personal identity characteristics for deeper understanding of identity characteristics.	Self-reflection on personal identity characteristics for deeper understanding of identity of focal constituents.	Incorporate institutional priorities into the professional learning curricula across programs. Examine current professional development strategies across programs and implement a framework to support an institutional focus on service as a professional learning goal.

Enable reflection on assumptions, actions, and outcomes in ways that promote learning about improving practice and developing and refining skills, along with reflection on the moral aspects of practice.	Reflective writing to construct the self to include observations of identity characteristics.	Assign impromptu reflective writing. Reflecting in action allows students to think about their own reaction and consider how it could be reframed, if needed, to allow for a broader or different perspective. Reframing may also enable self-analysis to understand how our own worldviews and perspectives may limit our understandings and reactions.	Reflective writing involves *reporting* observations of context and constituents and *responding* to what's been reported. t
Improve services provided by professional organizations that promote justice.	Service-Learning Activities/Reflective Writing	Service-Learning Activities/Reflective Writing	Service-Learning Activities/Reflective Writing
Encourage reflection that enables practitioners to achieve their aims as professionals, as well as realize the dreams that motivated their choice of profession.	Self-reflection that examines one's life and life-long learning.	Incorporate real-life examples and experiences to identify with constituents.	Using self-reflection to develop the communication skill of discussing difficult topics with colleagues within college and university environments

The professional learning framework provides guidance for critical reflection on student encouraging these skills and an orientation toward *Professional Learning* in graduate programs will promote organizational development that enables learning. The ways in which the organizational functions and goals of colleges and universities are addressed in the professional learning of its graduate students can facilitate discussions of institutional capacity that strengthen an understanding of graduate student knowledge and competence among specializations. For example, within graduate schools of education, expanding knowledge about students' professional learning experiences as they relate to research, teaching, and administration can inform and guide institutional leaders in understanding how they contribute knowledge to various specializations with education. There are many opportunities where knowledge of diversity is treated as a specialization in the field of higher education.

A holistic account of the cases found several ways knowledge attainment on moral reasoning and diversity contribute to professional development in higher education programs. The connection of professional development moral reasoning aims to key diversity points, facilitates the availability of diversity-related information, as well, as critical knowledge attainment for working in diverse environments. Across all of the cases there was a common aim to engage in self-reflective writing assignments. Self-reflective writing included multiple approaches (i.e., self-construction, reporting and responding, impromptu and in the moment observations, communication strategies for difficult discussions).

One challenge discussed among the cases was the challenge of students identifying with their student identities versus their professional identity through their current jobs or perceived opportunities. Furthermore, to emphasize the role of organizational development in higher education discussion of institutional priorities serves to promote knowledge of institutional initiatives and a deeper understanding of institutional context and constituents. This includes real-life examples of challenges found within college and university contexts and society.

There are moral challenges embedded in all types of professional practice when promoting social justice. St. John (2009) incorporated three of the dimensions of moral reasoning proposed by Kohlberg (1981, 1984), whose theory is widely studied in graduate programs in education. However, since the basic stages of Kohlberg's theory are rooted in the biological development of children (1984) and the more advanced stages are situated in moral philosophy (1981), this theory does not provide a practical basis for discourse on building professional competencies that are morally problematic. It was crucial to consider how graduate students actually reason in situations that caused them moral conflict.

St. John (2009) reframed the application of Kohlberg's theory to deal with the situatedness of professional practice, adapting Habermas's (1990) reconstruction. Professionals are routinely confronted by morally problematic situations, They must make choices about applying the rules of the system and profession (known as conventional reasoning); working around the rules to address students' problems when they emerge, usually in ways that are satisfying to the professional (known as preconventional reasoning); or adapting the rules or reframing them to solve problems in equitable ways, respecting diverse groups (known as post-conventional reasoning).

Effective use of the professional learning framework is predicated upon an instructors' commitment to view moral reasoning as a valuable professional asset and competency within the higher education profession. An intended outcome of using the framework is facilitating opportunities for graduate students to identify with their sense of moral reasoning within the context of the framework to establish opportunities for self-awareness to understand how professional learning promotes: an understanding of organizational development within higher education; serves to contribute to the providing of service to one's organization and/or functional area within higher education; and, enables reflection on one's assumptions, actions, and outcomes.

The moral aspect of action is not necessarily dependent on the extent of openness to reflection, and reflection does not necessarily facilitate problem-solving, system adaptation, and/or change. In practical situations it is often difficult to abstract the moral aspect of action from practical problem-solving because action and morality are inexorably intertwined. The professional learning framework encourages reflection that enables developing practitioners to untangle their moral reasoning and practical considerations within specialized professional situations in an effort to facilitate achievement of professional aims and goals. Reflective activities include recognition of belief systems, values, and dreams that motivated emerging practitioners to choose their profession.

The professional learning framework is based on the teaching experiences of scholars in the field of education with a specialization in higher education research. Higher education programs focused on supporting the professional development of practitioners interested in working with college students or within college and university environments often attract students with a commitment to *social justice* that involves solving critical social problems in fair and just ways.

Our preliminary observations suggest professional learning within higher education graduate programs can enable reflection on assumptions, actions, and outcomes in ways that promote learning about improving practice and developing and refining skills, along with reflection on moral aspects of practice. Practitioners learn about moral challenges as a consequence of practice (St. John, 2009). An underlying intention of this work is to emphasize the integration of moral reasoning and reflective teaching approaches specific to professional learning within higher education graduate programs.

LIMITATIONS

Implementation of the professional learning framework and reflective activities across programs without careful consideration of institutional mission, review and assessment of established professional learning goals and activities, is not recommended. Additional research is required for analysis and understanding of use of the framework when used with other pedagogical methods. Also, the experiences shaping the attainment of graduate student knowledge changes, and the use of reflection

is a flexible approach that supports the evolving nature of student needs and demands. Reflective activities discussed here should not be considered applicable in all learning environments. However, use of these activities may be helpful when engaging the professional learning framework as part of the intended learning outcomes and exploration of course development focused on the professional experiences of higher education graduate students.

CONCLUSION

Professional development addresses two priorities associated with the university recommendations set forth by Wendler et al. (2012). The first priority is to broaden the focus of graduate education and professional development in alignment with larger institutional and/or organizational goals. The professional learning activities provide an integrative approach to expanding support of graduate student learning through the attainment of knowledge focused on a specialization. The second priority is to provide substantive learning opportunities for students to gain self-knowledge by exploring notions about their specialization interests in discursive spaces. For example, impromptu reflective writing assignments, service learning activities, and teaching that is responsive to student reflection are approaches to creating meaningful exchanges about building professional competence that allows for the consideration moral reasoning.

There is a paucity of information regarding the professional developmental experiences of Masters Students in higher education programs. In her work, *Professionalization Graduate Education: The Master's Degree and the Marketplace*, Glazer-Raymo (2005) conceptualizes the master's degree, both its evolution and current status as a credential in the academic marketplace. The Master's degree is evolving as an entrepreneurial credential with the potential to alter the direction of graduate education (Glazer-Raymo, 2005). Therefore, reflective work can be significant for institutional leaders and practitioners of higher education graduate programs interested in evaluating their contribution to higher education by exploring their professional development curriculum strategies. In fact, Wendler et al. (2012) underscore this interest:

> While it is critical to examine the challenges within the current U.S. graduate system, one of the biggest vulnerabilities is its connection to industry. The ultimate product of graduate education is a knowledgeable, productive, and innovative worker. In order to realize this connection it is important to understand what employers expect from graduate degree recipients as well as what the workforce will likely require in the future. (p. 35).

Developing a stronger understanding of how practical training and professional learning function within higher education programs can be extremely useful to graduate program administrators and leaders interested in strengthening the delivery of Masters Education programs. A collaborative classroom research-based design can highlight trends in student interests as they relate to the professional learning necessary to compete in a demanding marketplace. This is especially essential to understanding priorities associated with decision-making process for graduate students considering the transition between master's programs and doctoral education.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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