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Oh, SNAP! Poverty Simulations in Social Justice Classrooms: Active and Experiential Learning

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Abstract

The Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Challenge encourages critical self-reflection and analysis of biases over seven consecutive days. Active learning methodologies are discussed compared to pre-formed lectures. Adaptive flexibility and empathy are salient skills for social workers that are emphasized in simulations. Students are challenged to only eat the average daily allowance for approved food options (\$4.50/day) and chronicle their observations. The Challenge improves students' awareness of power and privilege with their future clients. This novel approach not only addresses the Council of Social Work's Core Competencies but also trains new social workers to effectively deliver social services empathically.

Approximately 43 million individuals, approaching 14% of the entire U.S. population, were considered living in poverty by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2015 (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Furthermore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), the field of social work will grow roughly 12% over the next ten years, adding almost 75,000 new professionals to the field. To accommodate this growth in the field of social worker and the number of individuals living in poverty, faculty are expected to demonstrate excellence in teaching to not only meet students' expectations but to graduate highly-skilled social workers to compete in the job market (Auster & Wylie, 2006; Dominelli, 1996; McQuire, Gentle-Genitty & Gaylean, 2013). Faculty often respond to these forces by increasingly relying on fixed curricula and standardized educational methods which focus on student memorization of rote knowledge. Alternative approaches that prevent teachers simply bowing to market pressures and student demands in the classroom could prove beneficial in faculty responding to economic and classroom pressures more efficiently and effectively. One alternative, active learning, shows promise in helping to preserve social work pedagogy as a force for social justice and democracy (Nagda et al., 2003; Holmes et al, 2013).

The active learning model is a participatory process that involves "students doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2). Participants critically

reflect and analyze their learning through discussion, reading, and writing their own narratives of their experience (Auster & Wylie, 2006; McQuire, Gentle-Genitty & Gaylean, 2013). Active learning involves methods that make social work classrooms more transformative by including the perspectives and experience of minority and marginalized groups typically excluded from higher education classrooms (Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Holmes et al, 2013). Without exposure to these perspectives, students rely on their pre-established beliefs and assumptions about marginalized groups when encountering curricula or delivering services. Utilizing approaches such as simulations, active learning impacts students and educators in significant ways that enable more effective social service delivery by future practitioners through increased understanding of clients' needs and experiences (Dominelli, 1996; Holmes et al, 2013; Craig, et al, 2017).).

Simulations are utilized in health science education to enhance the interpersonal communication skills of graduate students to help reduce their own biased attitudes. This teaching method increases the practical application of theoretical concepts for mental health nursing students (Alexander, Sheen, Rinehart, Hay, & Boyd, 2018; Saaranen, Vaajoki, Kellomäki, & Hyvärinen, 2015) including virtual games to teach mental health assessment skills to nursing students (Lawless et al., 2018; Verkuyl, Romaniuk, & Mastrilli, 2018). Other fields such as computer science have utilized simulation exercises to enhance students' understanding of cultural differences and social justice issues (Lawless et al, 2018). One study involving active learning approaches combined with Freire's critical pedagogy and dialogic learning indicated that participants increased students' awareness of the structural and historical mechanisms related to racial/ethnic inequalities while increasing their focus away from individuals towards emphasizing institutional and social change (Nagda et al., 2003; Loyd & Gaither, (2018). Approaches such as these create a truly revolutionary learning process that can diminish power imbalances in traditional classroom hierarchies by engaging both students *and faculty* in mutual learning processes aimed at reshaping knowledge of the structural causation of inequality and oppression through direct experiences.

Information does not passively flow in a unidirectional fashion from instructor to student. However, approaches relying on rote knowledge and predesigned classroom content function as if this were the case. According to Freire (1993), these approaches characterize the banking model of education which stifles the potential impact of instructors on students due to a "lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge" (p. 72). While students can memorize information via the banking model, faculty seeking to create transformative classrooms must help students connect content with personal experiences and beliefs. Furthermore, this approach also creates a more democratic and participatory classroom by encouraging student and faculty participation and collaboration in the same activities (Glennon, 2004; Bernklau Halvor, 2016; Craig et al, 2017). Through these well-crafted activities, such as poverty simulations, participants acquire and synthesize information via a transformative experience (Kolb, Boyatzis, Mainemelis, & others, 2001; White et al., 2014). Through these encounters, learning becomes a process filled with personal meaning where participants make connections between content and their own goals and interests (Glennon, 2004; Bernklau Halvor, 2016; Craig et al, 2017).

These transformative experiences also encourage participants to investigate and potentially reshape foundational assumptions and beliefs which are especially pertinent within social justice-oriented classrooms (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Glennon, 2004; White et al., 2014). Social justice is the core value in social work education (Swenson, 1998; Nicotera, 2018). However, social justice must go beyond teaching culture as a static, finite concept (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Craig, et al, 2017). Furthermore, poverty and class-based oppression do not fit neatly into the typical discourse of cultural competency and mediating differences between groups but demand equal attention in social justice-focused classrooms. The effects of the economic and political structures of neoliberal capitalism and its corresponding austerity policies require students to engage with the historical-social context of their devastating effects on future clients. By encouraging students and teachers to move beyond a competency-based approach where power and knowledge resides solely with the provider, active learning activities promote a social justice orientation and critical thinking regarding inequality and oppression at the individual, mezzo and macro levels (Nagda et al. 2003; Nicotera, 2018). By increasing awareness of oppression and promoting greater ethical and moral agency, students can actively engage in fighting social injustice by understanding their own biases that might inhibit access to clients' resources often served through unconscious bias (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Nicotera, 2018). In active learning, there is a higher likelihood that a more comprehensive form of understanding is attained where social skills are honed, and cognitive infrastructures are revisited and revised. The participant may critically analyze his or her own placement within a world of privilege, disadvantage, and power differentials (White et al., 2014). Through this experiential process, social work educators and future practitioners can increase their critical consciousness and take direct action in decreasing systemic inequalities by identifying structural causes of imbalance and increasing an action orientation toward social change through democratic processes (Nagda et al., 2003). Furthermore, students can observe their own cultural structures and identities as dynamic and ever-changing processes (Freire, 1993; Glennon, 2004; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Bernklau Halvor, 2016). This approach can help faculty catalyze a critical consciousness in students that stresses social justice-oriented practice while also modeling learning as a life-long process.

Active Learning and Adaptive Flexibility

Social work pedagogy utilizing active learning methods has a unique potential to help students expand their knowledge and experiential limits in the personal and professional realm. Utilizing principles similar to those in adult education frameworks, active learning within social work education focuses on allowing students to be self-directed by trusting that their inquisitiveness will lead to substantive, applied learning experiences (Kolb & Yeganeh, 2011; White et al., 2014). In contrast to the banking model where students conform to learning goals pre-established by educators, active learning utilizes students' lived experiences as the primary content and outcome. Students can define their own interests and goals while faculty honors their individual differences in learning style and insight. By engaging students more directly in their own learning processes, well-designed activities can increase student engagement while enhancing educational outcomes (White et al., 2014).

Active learning in social work curricula also promotes the development of students' adaptive flexibility in learning which describes the ability to respond to a variety of learning situations (Kolb et al., 2001; Nicotera, 2018). Experiences that link classroom content with lived experience and awareness of larger social contexts can increase adaptive flexibility and enhance individual characteristics such as self-direction, ego development, interpersonal efficacy, self-confidence, and leadership potential (Kolb et al., 2001; Odom, Boyd, & Williams, 2012). These qualities are especially important for social work practice which demands moral responsibility, self-awareness and personal initiative as they are agents of change in systems of power and oppression (Brown, 2004; Warren, 1998; Nicotera, 2018). Furthermore, future practitioners will encounter a wide array of clients' presenting problems which requires the social worker to respond and creatively problem-solve with those they serve. The benefits of increasing adaptive flexibility through active learning can enhance students' ability to encounter the complexity of these situations. This will aid future social workers to respond by trusting their ability to reflect and critically analyze their experiences and effectively adapt their practice accordingly.

Teaching Empathy and Cultural Appropriateness

While empathy is not mentioned within the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), it is a highly important component of client-practitioner relationships. Empathy can be defined as an innate, neurological process where one physiologically experiences the emotional state and ideas of another person (Eriksson et al, 2017; Gerdes & Segal, 2009; Wolf, Gales, Shane, & Shane, 2001). While affective, physiological responses are involuntary components of empathy, cognitive processing and conscious decision-making are voluntary components of empathy that can be shaped through learning (Gerdes & Segal, 2009; Eriksson et al, 2017). Active learning can directly impact these voluntary components by exposing students to situations that simulate oppression and help shape the cognitive processing of those experiences to enhance critical thinking and ability to empathize with clients.

While most discussions on empathy in classrooms has omitted its behavioral components and thereby stressed lecture-based learning of cultural and social information, active learning methods facilitates teaching empathy as a behavioral *and* cognitive process that encourages empathetic action oriented toward social justice (Gerdes & Segal, 2009; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). This process can help students move beyond a cultural competency model which prioritizes cognitive processes and memorization of cultural information for interacting with diverse clients. Students can develop their ability to go beyond passive, albeit subconscious, acceptance of cultural assumptions with clients to an approach which emphasizes authenticity, critical reflection and action in response to situations of social injustice (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Lu, Dane, & Gellman, 2005; Bernklau Halvor, 2016). Furthermore, students and faculty all benefit from active learning processes to obtain the necessary skills and qualities to serve increasingly culturally diverse populations while combating the effects of poverty, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression (Gerdes & Segal, 2009; Nicotera, 2018).

Core Competencies and Active Learning

Active learning methodologies have the potential to uniquely address The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Core Competencies such as utilizing social work ethical principles to guide practice, incorporating diversity and advocating for social justice and human rights (Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), 2017). Specifically, Core Competencies are associated with practice behaviors that are directly associated with active learning. This learning method encourages students to reflect, challenge and understand the links related to their own values and experiences in shaping their future social work practice (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, Eriksson et al, 2017). Adaptive flexibility, which emphasizes self-direction in learning and adaptability, allows practitioners to navigate ethical dilemmas and more effectively serve clients' unique needs via creative problem solving (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb & Yeganeh, 2011; Odom et al., 2012).

Combining active learning methods within social justice-oriented content also effectively addresses competencies related to including diversity within social work practice and advocating for human rights. Including methods like simulations, which expose students to the perspectives of marginalized groups typically absent from higher-education classrooms, enhances future practitioners' understanding of how intersectionality and diversity shapes clients' experiences and needs (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2017). Furthermore, faculty can increase students' understanding of their own bias and potential to be agents of change within systems of oppression (Brown, 2004; Warren, 1998). These activities can encourage the development of authenticity, culturally appropriate action responses, critical reflection and leadership skills (Kolb et al., 2001; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Lu et al., 2005; Odom et al., 2012). Through active learning within social justice classrooms, faculty can satisfy the requirements for educating effective social work practitioners to deliver services while changing systems of inequality and oppression.

The SNAP Challenge

Approximately 49 million people in the United States are food-insecure and often are often in the care of a social worker or a social service agency (Feeding America, 2014). The Supplemental Nutritional Allowance Program (SNAP) provides food vouchers, based on income status, to low-income individuals and families in the United States. The SNAP Challenge is an innovative simulation that is designed to increase empathy by allowing students to adopt a SNAP food budget for one week. This activity provides students the opportunity to actively engage in their professional and personal development by providing students the opportunity to experience, in part, what life is like for those who daily rely on food assistance.

The following is the lead author's experience using the Feeding America (2014) guidelines for the SNAP Challenge in 10 semester-long social justice courses (BSW & MSSW) over 5 years (2012–2017). While the class is mandatory for all BSW students, it is only mandatory for MSW students without a BSW. In total, 257 students participated in the SNAP challenge over 5 years. The exercise was completely voluntary. Students lived on the average benefit of \$4.50 per person each day for seven consecutive days. The lead author, also the professor of

these classes, participated in the activities to share her own empathetic processes inherent in active learning exercises and model that culturally appropriate practice is a lifelong process (Lu, Dane, & Gellman, 2005; Eriksson et al, 2017). The co-author participated in the SNAP Challenge when he was a student in one of these 10 social justice classes. Per the author's university's Institutional Review Board, for this work, an IRB review was not required as this was not considered research, but an activity designed for a class.

Guidelines of the Challenge

Students were provided a handout roughly a week before the Challenge began. This document describes the guidelines of the Challenge.

1. The Challenge starts Sunday-Saturday for a total of 7 days
2. You are allowed \$4.50 per day for food and drink — \$31.50 per week
3. All food eaten during this time period must be counted in total spending.
4. You can only eat food that would be allowed on SNAP (i.e. no fast food, restaurants, no prepared foods, alcohol).
5. Avoid accepting free food because these opportunities are not always available to those living in poverty.
6. Eat as healthy as possible.
7. If you have already purchased food, just document how much your meals cost. For example, if you eat a sandwich, take the cost of a loaf of bread and calculate how much 2 slices cost. The same for the meat, vegetables, etc. Condiments and spices do not count in your total meal allowance.
8. You will also provide an appendix on your daily food intake (the meal and what you ate) and how much each meal cost. You should also calculate how much you spent in total on food each day.
9. If you believe you already eat \$4.50/day (common with those who follow a vegetarian food plan) please give yourself a “disease” as discussed in class. Or you can live off the world poverty food allowance which is \$2.50/day

The Process

Throughout the week, the professor and students discussed their progress online via their course webpage. Students not only discussed their experiences but also shared other notable lessons such as recipes, sales of different SNAP-eligible meals, and other helpful comments. The discussion board served as an organic mechanism to reflect on their observations, share their thoughts, and engage with others who were also participating in the Challenge. All students were also required to write a 2-page critical analysis and observation paper documenting key observations of their week. Students could opt-out of the exercise including, but not limited to, health concerns including eating disorders. These students were still required to write a paper reflecting on how they would work with clients and communities experiencing food insecurity.

Obtaining Students' Feedback

Over the 5 years, student responses have provided several observed trends specific to days either on the class discussion webpage or in their individual papers submitted after the Challenge commenced. The authors would like to note that the observations provided in the “observations” section below occurred at least once per semester, therefore these were consistent over time. The lead author made a list of common statements from students' required reflection papers and/or their posts on the class's online discussion board. While there were no “prompts” per se, the professor did ask students to write about their experiences (for example, if they had noticed any unintended consequences resulting from the Challenge, did the question any previously notions about those living in poverty compared to before they started their Challenge, and asking them how they were doing throughout the Challenge). As stated previously, all members of the classroom (students and the professor) were invited to participate in the Challenge.

Students' Self-Reported Observations

Students were required to write a reflection on their week-long experience. Students were also encouraged to post on the discussion section of the class's webpage any thoughts or questions they wanted to share with their fellow students and their professor. Over the 5 year period, the authors noted trends from students' reflections and posts related to each day of the Challenge. Therefore, students observations are noted by the day of the Challenge and a common theme to that day.

Day 1: Excitement and skepticism about the difficulty of the exercise.—

Students often shared that they would have little difficulty living off the \$4.50 budget for the week because they were already surviving on a “student budget”. Other students reported, who came from higher socioeconomic statuses, that they had no idea how much they spent on food since their parents paid for all of their bills. Participants also gleefully would post on the first day their grocery carts with comments including “look at all the food I bought!”. Finally, students who were former SNAP recipients during their childhood were often the most apprehensive about the Challenge. These students reported a range of thoughts from concern that this exercise would remind them of difficult times to excitement that other students would begin to understand a modified viewpoint of living in poverty.

Days 2–3: Silence—Students often were less likely to respond to prompts from the professor on the course discussion board's webpage the first few days, after the initial excitement of the Challenge. When I asked students why they would not respond to the check-ins (i.e. asking them how they were doing on the Challenge, any observations they noticed), students said that they were “too busy” to respond or that they “didn't feel the need” to check-in on the webpage.

Days 4–6: Fatigue, irritability, isolation, stress, and making connections—

Wednesday, the 4th day of the Challenge, is perennially the day that evokes the most emotional discord with students. Students report that they have no energy to exercise, they are taking the bus instead of walking to class, they have found themselves sleeping or taking naps while in class or just not attending class overall. This is a galvanizing time for students

as they often begin to make the connection that food is energy. Students also share observations that they are more prone to emotional instability. For example, issues that normally would not bother them now trigger anger or depressive symptomology, and that they are either observing more fights with those in their social network or they are not spending time with others at all. Since SNAP dollars cannot be used in restaurants, they often notice that they are not eating dinner with their friends and socializing and instead are staying home alone to eat their meals. Students also make the connection that food is really a means of a community connection. Another common observation is that students make the association that living in poverty requires planning. It is not uncommon that due to students' emotional and physical challenges, they often forget their lunch during SNAP week. Some students will tell me that "they need" to use their credit card in order to get food as they must remain on campus the entire day while others disclose "if I was living in poverty, I wouldn't have the option of using a credit card". Regardless of their decision, students often link these choices to their privilege. In these events, students either run home and risk missing a class or they go without food for the day. The professor does not judge any of these decisions, but encourages the students to think what if this was not an exercise but a reality. And most importantly, how will they use this as a lesson towards their future social work practice.

Day 7: Processing—The class discusses their experience together, shares revelations, and discern how this exercise changed their values, biases and behaviors. Many students reflected on the prejudice they unknowingly held regarding people living in poverty as "lazy individuals"; yet after the exercise, they empathized with these feelings of exhaustion due to their own fatigue and mood changes during the Challenge. Students also disclosed that they never realized the amount of strength and resiliency that individuals living in poverty had in order to survive each day and that how one innocuous or unplanned event could potentially ruin their food budget (i.e. an inedible recipe, splurging on one item to increase one's mood). The students also commonly mention their surprised related to the amount of time spent on food preparation, cooking, and cleaning while on the Challenge. They also relate the cumulative nature of living in poverty. For example, if an individual worked a long or an additional work shift, or was employed in a manual labor job where one would likely need to eat more to sustain their energy throughout the workday.

One way to have students understand the stigmatization of and blaming of poverty on the individual is during our group processing after the Challenge in class. Students are asked if they experienced a variety of symptoms found in the DSM for a diagnosis of depression (i.e. isolation, sadness/hopeless, diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities). Students often report they observed changes in their mood during the Challenge, or social pattern disruptions. Students are then shown the DSM criteria for depression and they are shocked. Many times, this is their "lightbulb moment" during the processing of the Challenge. I then tell students, "if you went to a clinician right now, what do you think the odds are that you would be diagnosed, based on the DSM criteria, with depression even if three weeks from now you would not have these symptoms". This then leads into a discussion of how diagnosis is a limiting construct, leading to and reinforcing assumptions of "normal" behaviors based on privilege. Students are often shocked and even angered by

this realization as most intake sheets do not ask clients about food insecurity. And many clinicians do not equate depressive symptoms with one's availability of food due to their own privilege. Through this processing, students begin to understand how this exercise can make real change in their future social work practice with clients. Former students often share that this exercise informed their practice by influencing them to change their agency's questionnaires and create innovative community-based projects to address hunger.

Special Considerations

As social work students often reflect the diverse populations as the communities we serve, special considerations are made for students for this exercise. For example, due to the high cost of higher education in the United States and fewer resources for financial aid, an increasing number of social work students receive SNAP benefits. Therefore, they are already essentially living the Challenge daily. Surprisingly, some students chose to live off even less and used the world poverty average of \$2.50 per day to further understand food insecurity. Others opted to write how living on SNAP as a college student is often a very isolating and stigmatizing experience. They also shared how living on SNAP allotments will aid in increasing their levels of empathy while working with their future clients in similar situations.

Students who were in recovery for an eating disorder also voiced concern over participating in the Challenge, mostly due to fear of relapsing. Documenting every food intake and focusing on a "number" was the main concern for students in recovery. Students often adapted the exercise by documenting their food intake after the week was over instead of methodically each day. Then students would compare what they ate to the SNAP \$4.50 guidelines and compare accordingly. Students also reflect on how their future social work clients, or they themselves, would function on the SNAP challenge while having a history of disordered eating.

Finally, students who utilize a vegetarian diet often reported that they eat less than \$4.50 per day. Students have devised creative options for curtailing their lifestyle or their diet in order to live off of less. For example, some students will "give themselves a disease" to make the dollar requirement more difficult. This comes from the research showing that most clients that are served by social workers have at least one chronic health condition and most will incur additional diagnoses (i.e. diabetes, heart disease) within a year of living on SNAP benefits (Findley, 2014; Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010). And since many chronic health conditions also have a nutritional component, students have found this application to the Challenge very helpful in their learning.

The SNAP Challenge is a creative technique that uncovers students' personal biases, professional growth areas, and awareness of the collective experience. Students continually write on their final course evaluations that the Challenge was "life changing". One student wrote on his/her paper "this Challenge touched my heart and brought me back to the reality that so many people live this way" and that "this was the most insightful exercise that I have ever participated in!". And finally, a student shared that "the SNAP Challenge opened my eyes". Because of the activity, students learn how macro-level policies impact individuals and communities plagued by poverty.

Conclusion

By enhancing lecture-based learning with participatory activities, students can reframe their learning as a social process between students and their professors in which ideas are exchanged bilaterally. Participants from various backgrounds may then critically analyze their own unique placement within a world of privilege and power differentials. Unlike more passive teaching approaches, active learning allows students to “learn how to learn” through the interrelated processes of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting (Kolb & Yeganeh, 2011, p. 2). As a result, a deeper form of learning is attained as empathetic skills are honed and cognitive infrastructures are revisited and revised (White et al., 2014).

As social work students are often confronted with their own bias throughout their years of training, they will disclose an increased level of empathy regarding how individuals live on limited resources while on SNAP. The goal of such classroom projects is to elicit emotional reactions among students that could potentially influence their viewpoints, but also enrich their social work practice with their clients long term. The hope, and often described in their papers, is that students connect with this messaging of “us” vs. “them” and to revisit their approaches that are often related to their own prejudice related to poverty. Overall, students rate this exercise as one of their most influential learning experiences in their social work training. Students share that the SNAP Challenge is successful in challenging common beliefs regarding individuals living in poverty and how they have internalized many of these non-affirming messages from media outlets but also from their families.

While the SNAP Challenge can be an effective teaching method for exposing students to the experience of poverty, it is not without limitations. A simulation activity cannot fully translate the lived experiences of people living in poverty, as this is a complex mechanism related to micro, mezzo and macro systems simultaneously. While students can learn valuable lessons about the impact of poverty, it is important to communicate the inability to fully translate the experience of poverty through the SNAP Challenge alone. With that said, actively engaging in empathy through active learning is an important first step to gaining a broader understanding of those living in poverty.

One modification to the Challenge is incorporating a service learning, by combining class learning objectives/goals with service to one’s community in order to offer pragmatic, reformist learning experiences outside of the classroom while meeting societal needs including addressing one’s own bias, component into all classrooms regardless of pedagogical focus. While social work classrooms outside of the United States might not have a similar SNAP program, there are a number of social welfare programs that students could simulate including France’s Revenu de Solidarité Active (RFA), (Republique Francaise, 2017) or the United Kingdom’s Income Support programme (Government of the United Kingdom, n.d.). There are a variety of ways our Challenge could be applied to other governmental programs, but the emphasis should always be furthering their understanding of social justice issues. And most importantly for students to understand that oppression and inequity are not only individual experiences, but to apply these to structural mechanisms unique to their own country and historically under-represented groups.

A key component to service learning is applying these lessons via advocacy. For example, the independent school district that serves our community has a dire need for monetary contributions to their free and reduced lunch program. Recently, local school administrators communicated that any donation would be helpful for the continuation of their free and reduced food programs for students and their families. Our social work students report that they often save money by participating in the Challenge. Students share they often spend double if not triple the amount of money than the allocated SNAP compared to their weekly budget. One common service learning outcome from this Challenge is that many of my students take the money they saved that week while participating in the Challenge and donate that to the local school district for their school-based food program. Students often comment on how they now see how critical these programs are to families that are on SNAP. Service learning is linked as a viable bridge in students' understanding of the complex nature of the social worker and client relationship. Connecting a service learning component to active learning exercises could further shape emotional and cognitive processes that can affect approaches to care.

Ascertaining if all students completed the Challenge is difficult for a professor to assess. While it appears that many students did complete at least a bulk of the Challenge due to the length, in-depth description and analysis of their experience, it is realistic to believe that some might have written papers that were socially acceptable to their professor. Of important note, students are not graded solely due to meeting all the requirements of the Challenge. Students are assessed more broadly on what they learned about themselves and critically analyzing why they might have not pushed themselves enough in the exercise. Students process not only their experience in the Challenge but also how it informed their future social work practice, if they have an increased sense of self-efficacy and how they will increase their empathy while working with clients.

At first glance, the SNAP Challenge is an easy exercise to create, introduce and implement for any social work classroom. The Challenge does not require any training, there is no cost to using the materials as there are various sites that explain the Challenge (Feeding America, 2014), (or one's own country's welfare program) to participants. What might not be anticipated is the emotional toll that this seemingly simple exercise can take on not only the professor but the students as well. As with other social justice exercises, especially those that involve "self", there can also be much resistance and defensiveness to learning about and ultimately addressing one's own bias. What is so impressive about the Challenge are the life lessons and the impact on students' future social work practice. In fact, on many end of semester evaluations, the SNAP Challenge is often mentioned as "the most amazing learning experience" of their training. And these lessons are likely not limited to just U.S. students as this simulation could be easily augmented to other programs in various countries.

More inquiry is necessary to elucidate the influence of the Challenge regarding the longer-term effects on students' attitudes involving poverty, prejudice and stigma in future social work classes. Furthermore, ascertaining if the exercise promoted change after graduation in their social work practice is important to observe. Research is also needed focusing on more systemic effects of the Challenge, for example providing students a more extensive experience of poverty by not only participating in the challenge but to extend this to other

parts of their clients' lives. For example, extending the Challenge to include other factors related to poverty such as using public transportation instead of using their own cars to complete errands, get to work or attend class. Adding these other experiences attributed to poverty may enhance their learning goals and provide a more comprehensive learning experience as opposed to just nutrition.

Social justice is a difficult and challenging topic for students and professors alike. And yet learning about our own biases, particularly related to poverty, is crucial in social work education. While reading about poor laws and the challenges of poverty in a book are important, active learning and simulations make these learning goals come to life. A journal article or a book chapter might increase one's understanding of poverty, but the active learning component grounds learning in a bodily experience that can reshape students' core awareness of issues and change deeply held assumptions about others. Asking students to do what our clients go through daily, even for one week, promotes a more nuanced understanding of social justice issues and leads to more compassionate, empathetic social workers. Exercises like the Challenge enrich one's awareness of clients' struggles, the impact of poverty, and the capacity to employ this new-found knowledge into their practice. Students overwhelmingly have shared that participating in the SNAP Challenge lowered their stigma towards individuals living in poverty and they had a greater appreciation and compassion for those living with food insecurity. These lessons not only directly impact participants but also can influence effective and empathic service delivery.

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