

Where Pedagogy and Social Innovation Meet: Assessing the Impact of Experiential Education in the Third Sector

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, higher education institutions (HEIs) are seeking institutional transformation that responds to and enables greater responsiveness and responsibility to the social and environmental challenges that our contemporary world faces. The rise of “wicked problems” such as poverty, global climate change, and migratory pressures (among others) have created a scenario in which innovation will be necessary to resolve the myriad social problems created during the present crisis. The higher education system plays an important, and increasingly vital, role in stimulating and developing social change and social innovations. These types of new arrangements and partnerships are key in breaking the conformity of thought by renewing ideas and transforming paradigms and beliefs that are supporting our current systems (GUNi 2013). They are also central to the creation of a new citizenship, built on social transformation, equity and justice. We suggest this demands not only classroom learning *on* social justice but, vitally, front-line, experiential learning *in* social justice work, and mindful pedagogy to support it.

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In this chapter, we address the ways in which social innovation learning, acquired through transformative¹ pedagogy and experiential education, can lead to a range of positive outcomes for participating community organisations, students and HEIs. Some of these include helping to address and respond to local community needs, building the next generation of leadership in the growing social economy, and creating a more dynamic and relevant curriculum in higher education. We highlight this through a case study of the Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone (VISIZ) cohort pilot² (herein referred to as the “SI Cohort”) which operated through the Co-operative Education (Co-op) frameworks in and across both institutions. The Co-op framework, widely used in post-secondary institutions for over 100 years, provides work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities by connecting an HEI with organisations and businesses that employ students and give them mediated, hands on, experiential learning in workplaces related to their subject areas. Unlike conventional Co-op arrangements, in which employers are responsible for the cost of hiring, this pilot funded the organisations to cover hiring and make their social innovations more viable. Also unlike mainstream Co-op, in which employers willing to hire students can partake, the employers participating in the pilot were selected by a committee based on the organisation’s ability to promote social responsibility in not only the student but also both HEIs and the wider community. The pilot connected students from two HEIs (University of Victoria and Camosun College) on southern Vancouver Island with local social innovations/enterprise that are addressing social justice issues specific to food security, social finance and Indigenous³—non-Indigenous relationships. The cohort students received training, mentorship, workshops and opportunities to share experiences related to social innovation, social enterprise and social finance. Though we hold that HEI collaboration should be the standard practice for building capacity to best serve their surrounding community, there is currently very little collaboration and resource sharing between HEIs in Canada. This pilot, however, made institutional collaboration a priority: research and curriculum development and training sessions for students were generated together for mutual benefit. The approaches and success of this collaboration has been discussed at a symposium and conference with the intention to create some momentum behind inter-institutional partnerships.

Social innovation is described as both a *process and the outcome* of re-thinking the systems that have kept many of our social problems in place for so many years. Social enterprise and innovation play an increasingly important role in the political and economic landscape of British Columbia (and across Canada). Operating between the private and public sectors, the *third sector* or *social economy*, makes up a unique realm of Co-operatives, non-profit societies, civil society associations, credit unions and social enterprises that are working to combine social objectives with economic ones. Amyot et al. (2010) describe this sector as a “people-centred economy, one in which the importance of human life, well-being and social development are put above the interests of capital accumulation and greed” (p. 13). These organisations seek to effect change by generating products or services considered to have an inherently positive social impact. For most, this purpose remains a primary reason for their existence.

It is fitting, then, that pedagogy and curriculum aiming to facilitate student’s understanding of social innovation also take an experiential, collaborative, socially minded form. We will discuss the transformative learning pedagogy we have applied in order to guide students through their respective social innovation initiatives, and how this took shape in concrete activities with the students and organisations involved in the cohort. Experiential learning or WIL and social innovation are not new fields; however, facilitating social innovation learning through HEIs in an experiential context is fairly untrodden terrain. Further, we have found the pairing of transformative pedagogy with the social innovation sphere is very fruitful yet currently underexplored—this chapter will therefore put a spotlight on this juncture where social innovation and pedagogy meet, and its implications for student learning and social justice initiatives. This approach suggests that, when supported, students can achieve significant shifts in the self (for Jack Mezirow (2000): psychological, convictional and behavioural shifts; for bell hooks (1994): affective and ontological) as well as in the social realm (pp. 4, 15). Students certainly learn about social issues in lecture halls, however in truly sharing space and problem solving with the communities that are implicated in these issues, we suggest there is more than a grade at stake: the learning becomes transformative.

ASSEMBLING AND ASSESSING THE COHORT

Four students (ranging from undergraduate to graduate level) with Social Sciences backgrounds (including Anthropology, Political Science, and Alternative Dispute Resolution) were selected for this pilot from two

HEIs: University of Victoria and Camosun College. These students were selected by a panel of adjudicators who were also responsible for selecting the hiring SI organisations. The selection for the SI organisations was based on the following criteria: organisational capacity, quality of the opportunity for student learning, focus on social innovation and social enterprise, collaborative and cross-sectoral, budget, and the initiatives potential for implementing a long-term solution to the identified problem. The SI Cohort working group, comprised of an equal mix of community and university partners (6 in total), used the previously discussed criteria in a consensus decision-making process. Each organisation was rated in a transparent process and was invited to discuss the results with the working group if desired.

Student learning was evaluated through a combination of workplace visits, in which Co-op Coordinators asked the employer and student to assess their competencies, and regular discussion groups with all students and a program organiser which explored the connection between theory (acquired in the classroom) and practice (at their workplace). Finally, students completed a detailed self-assessment of their own competency development by comparing their growth to their midterm self-assessments (the competency framework will be explored later). Their employers provided holistic feedback on their final assessments without assigning a grade. Through their participation, students gained specialised training and immersion into the third sector and a Co-op designation on their diplomas. The impact assessments completed by the organisations and Co-op Coordinators were certainly useful yardsticks against which to judge the students self-assessments, however in following with UVic's Co-op model (and indeed the model employed by many WIL programs), we place a primacy on students' self-assessments as evidence for learning—believing that each student has the most intimate knowledge of their own development and that the practice of reflecting on one's development is of pedagogical value⁴ in itself.

FUELLING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: VISIZ

In 2014, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation launched RECODE, an initiative providing social innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities for College and University students across Canada to become drivers of social change. Their aim is to support the development of

social innovation and entrepreneurship within and in proximity to colleges and universities, along with business, community, and public sector partners. In response to this opportunity, the Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone (VISIZ)⁵ was founded in 2015 as a partnership between seven institutions and community organisations with the aim to advance social innovation and entrepreneurship on Vancouver Island. The founding partners include three post-secondary institutions Royal Roads University, Camosun College and the University of Victoria, a financial cooperative *Vancity*, and community organisations including the Community Social Planning Council, the Victoria Native Friendship, and Social Enterprise Catalyst. One of the three strategic priorities of VISIZ is to more purposefully connect post-secondary teaching, research, and networking opportunities to communities and organisations island-wide to advance agendas such as affordable housing, food security, sustainable energy and others. The SI Cohort is the main activity to advance this goal, pairing Co-op students with placements in social innovation projects, and providing funds for the social innovation alongside other post-secondary supports—the Cohort will be the focus of this chapter. The three participating social innovations involved address issues linked to social justice in different ways including access to social finance, affordable and dignified access to food and enhancing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships with cultural awareness building.

Selected Organisations and Job Descriptions for the SI Cohort

VISIZ received 22 proposals from social innovation enterprises/initiatives in the region, of which 3 were selected to be part of the cohort. The participating organisations include:

- (a) Social Planning Cowichan (SPC) is a registered charitable society that provides leadership in research and community engagement to create a sustainable quality of life for everyone in the Cowichan Region. One of the main programs is “Cultural Connections,” a social innovation aimed at building understanding and relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Cowichan Valley and Xwaaqw’um (Burgoyne Bay) on Salt Spring Island. The motivation behind these innovations is to lessen troublesome

divides through education, empathy-building and Indigenous cultural revitalisation.

In my position, I was fortunate to get to work with two social enterprise projects: Cultural Connections, through Social Planning Cowichan (SPC), and the Xwaaqw'um Project. Through both, the primary social issues that my work addressed were the sociocultural and socioeconomic divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people locally and across the country, and the history of why these exist. These issues are important for many reasons, but essentially one need only look to the centuries of colonial oppression forced upon Indigenous peoples in Canada to understand why. The impact of these relations continues to negatively impact Indigenous peoples, who are subjected to much higher rates of poverty, suicide, unemployment, etc. across the country. It will require an effort on the part of all Canadians, not just Indigenous peoples, to reconcile this past and move forwards together to create a better country for all of us. (Cowichan Council student intern)

- (b) The *Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CRAIR)* is a not-for-profit organisation that acts as a coordinating backbone to a network of food, farm and health organisations implementing a collective impact strategy to promote healthy and sustainable food systems in the Capital Region. CRAIR's mission is to mobilise and connect efforts to develop a healthy and sustainable food system in the region. The *Good Food Innovation Exploratory* is a collaborative initiative that brings together community organisations to coordinate resources and build capacity to deliver food literacy and food access programs. The ultimate aim is to provide a dignified access to healthy and nutritious food to low-income families.

As part of the pilot project, the cohort student worked with local community agencies to determine the feasibility of integrating rescued fresh foods into food literacy and access programs at the neighbourhood level. The position involved working with various community organisations (foundations, grocery stores etc.), receiving input and guidance from a community based working group, undertaking community based research and preparing a findings report of the feasibility study. “From this co-op work term, I learned many new things about food. I learnt about food literacy, food access and local food economy. At times, I had an opportunity to present my research findings to a larger group of audiences ranging from executive directors to the coordinators from different community neighbourhood houses.” (CRFAIR student intern)

- (c) The *Community Social Planning Council* is a non-profit society and registered charity that takes action on a range of social, economic, and environmental planning issues. The organisation’s mandate is to improve the quality of life of those who are disadvantaged or facing hardships due to social constraints by rethinking and shifting structural barriers such as access to employment for street-involved populations. In addition to working on priority areas of poverty, youth employment, community economic development, and housing affordability, the Council has a particular focus on social enterprise, social finance, and social economy as vehicles to respond to socio-economic challenges of communities. One of their priorities, and a feature of the social innovation in this case study, is to strengthen the social finance sector in the region.

In this placement, the cohort student undertook original research and engagement activities including the organisation of the first social finance forum in the region. The work entailed interviewing various actors in different sectors including finance, non-profit and government. The outcomes of this work has led to a social finance report, strengthened networking and partnership development between these stakeholders.

For my co-op work term I have been a research assistant within the organization primarily focused on managing the social finance project. I was in charge of independently organizing and implementing a qualitative research study involving an identified list of 40 possible key informants. This included creating the research questions to be used to understand the topic, actively speaking to and arranging for interviewees to participate in the study, narrowing the possible participants to interviewing 15 different respondents, transcribing the results and followed by analysis, and creating a summary report on the analysis findings. Through my work in researching the social finance sector I have come to see how social change occurs for these organizations in terms of how policy and regulation change affects how they are able to operate and the current landscape that supports such initiatives (Social Planning student intern)

TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION LEARNING

As noted previously, the SI cohort was run through a Co-op framework, with a number of modifications to the mainstream processes such as the adjudication of participating employers and students based on their ability to advance social responsibility and social innovation, additional training for the students and collaboration across HEIs. While we would not claim the pedagogy we utilised was itself “innovative” insofar as it is new, or trailblazing (educators have been using experiential learning, WIL, and dialogical methods for countless years), we hold that the pedagogy is well designed to *support* learning on the theory and practice of social innovation. As noted previously, we also believe that providing students with front line work and training in social innovation at the HEI level remains rare but shows great promise. In pedagogical terms, the key aim of the experiential education offered to the SI Cohort is for the students (and organisations) to undergo transformational or transformative learning. While Paulo Freire (2000) asserted the need for transformative social

justice education, which explored methods for empowerment to incite change, the separate but compatible concept of Mezirow's "Transformational Learning Theory" (1995) describes the process in which learning through experience can stimulate three changes: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle) (p. 15). Both have informed our approach to the SI Cohort pilot.

Transformation, in contrast with what Freire terms "banking education" employed in most lecture-style classrooms, emphasises the importance of challenging, practicing and integrating knowledge that gives rise to change rather than passive retention of information. This pedagogical approach, which focuses on the potential of experiential education to transform the student's ability to act as "socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers," is methodologically fitting with social innovation frameworks (Mezirow 2000, p. 4). Social innovation, as noted previously, stresses the importance of working towards solutions to social problems by utilising sustainable or responsible approaches. As educational theorists and practitioners Freire and bell hooks stress, there is a critical consciousness that arises when learning is deeply engaged in this way. That is, students are not seen as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but agents who help construct meaning, who develop an increased awareness of the dynamics in current systems and where they fit within those systems. In light of this meaningful involvement in the learning process regarding topics that are of consequence to their immediate environments, the students "self-actualise" or feel a fulfilment of the self through learning (hooks 1994, p. 15). Though Mezirow conceives of transformative learning through different frameworks than those of Freire's and hooks', all suggest that education holds profound potential to shift social realities towards more just ones. According to hooks, when the self is tied up in and fulfilled by the learning, in what she calls "engaged pedagogy," there is a deeper investment in the whole process—in the case of the Social Innovation Cohort: there is a deeper investment in seeing the projects succeed than one might see in a "banking model" of education.

Individual transformation, or the development of ones' critical consciousness, is acknowledged to be the foundation for an individual to then participate in larger social change (Shor and Freire 1987, p. 110; hooks 1994, p. 13). "[...] While critical pedagogy recognises the importance of the individual and her interests, it also recognises that the individual and her fulfilment depend on her social relationships with others, inside and

outside the classroom” (Monchinski 2008, p. 1). Furthermore, radical pedagogues like Freire and hooks insist that the teachers or leaders (or in our case: the SI organisations) must also undergo a transformation. This mutual learning was supported through the SI Cohort in a tangible way by having students develop personal relationships with their cohort members (peers) and SI organisations (employers) at events like the “day of learning,” which students regarded as an effective springboard into their successful workplace experiences. One student participant commented:

The initial day of learning right off the bat, which was a chance to really meet who you will be working with, was certainly useful. That was different from the normal Co-op where on your first day you just show up [at the workplace].

Throughout this initial day of learning, students and organisations formed personal relationships while participating together in group sessions on creative/blue sky thinking, inclusive facilitation methods. They assumed fluid roles of teacher and learner as a range of Social Innovation projects and approaches were discussed. What seemed more crucial than the material covered was the opportunity to begin to know their employers as people participating alongside them, not dictating from on high, to set the tone of the experiential learning. This is consistent with Freire’s participatory models (2000) and with hooks’ call for teachers to embrace the vulnerability of learning (not security of authority):

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. (hooks 1994, p. 21)

hooks maintains that generating engaged pedagogy in which both student and teacher are invested and can transform, there is a need for mutual vulnerability. In this spirit, SI Cohort students, employers, and organisers were matched at random during the day of learning and asked to complete blind drawings of each other’s faces without breaking eye contact. Even if only for symbolic purposes, this small gesture invited a mutual vulnerability and levelling of ability (as well as laughter over the lopsided portraits that resulted). The medium for conducting this workshop (participatory

sessions) was indeed the message: that social innovation often requires collaborative and lateral praxis in a way that disturbs existing strictures. Cohort members carried this participative and flexible approach to their work with colleagues, other organisations, and other communities when they entered their workplace. Norah McRae (2014) emphasises that transformative pedagogy “acknowledges that the learner is not learning in isolation but as a part of a greater whole [and . . .] the interplay between learner, educator, and place potentially revealing the critical pedagogical factors for effective learning that meet the goals of WIE” (p. 6).

David Kolb (1981), whose articulations of experiential learning (namely his experiential learning circle) have greatly influenced the formation of experiential learning pedagogies, suggests that this type of learning in an event which can be mapped, which follows a uni-directional cycle (beginning with a concrete experience). Mezirow (2000) instead suggests that experiential education following a transformational pedagogy views learning as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a singular event. The SI Cohort has operated under this later understanding that experiential education takes place not within distinct events but over long periods of simultaneous immersion and rumination, which, according to student and employer interviews, seemed to reflect the reality of the SI work placements. Again, this temporal understanding is fitting for the social justice aims underlying each SI project, which necessitate deep understanding of social barriers and long term processual approaches to addressing them.

CURRICULUM AND SUPPORTS FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

The skills and tools students use in a conventional lecture or seminar to comprehend, engage with and retain knowledge are developed early on in formalised educational settings: the disciplined subject sits and listens, selects key concepts and phrases to record in notes, responds to or asks occasional questions. The skills and tools students use in WIL contexts, like the SI work placements, differ greatly. Due to the less packaged and planned nature of WIL or experiential learning, more mindful methods of unpacking and reflecting are required to make sense of what has been covered and to grow from the experience. Moreover, in institutional classroom learning, according to Ivan Illich (1995), the student has the goal of achieving a particular grade, or individual betterment—this is

regarded to be the “commodification and credentialization of knowledge” which is mechanistic and alienating rather than participative and growing from convivial tools (p. 21). Within the SI pilot, as outlined previously, the goals are both individual and collective—we suggest this model is convivial in nature: it funds SI organisations to support their social innovation or social justice goals, it provides students unique training and experience in this SI work, it serves the community in a variety of ways, and it strengthens ties between HEIs (ibid). While students *did* earn a Co-op designation for their records in the SI pilot, the credential was not the only end, and was not gained by passively absorbing information—but rather through practical and immersive use of convivial tools as Illich champions. As institutional classroom learning is still the dominant mode, learning for convivial rather than individualistic ends requires new tools or approaches.

The VISIZ and Co-op teams generated curriculum for the SI Cohort (see inputs in Fig. 11.1) presented online in a flipped classroom format to provide experiential education tools giving rise to SI competencies (explored later). We believe the flipped classroom format enabled students

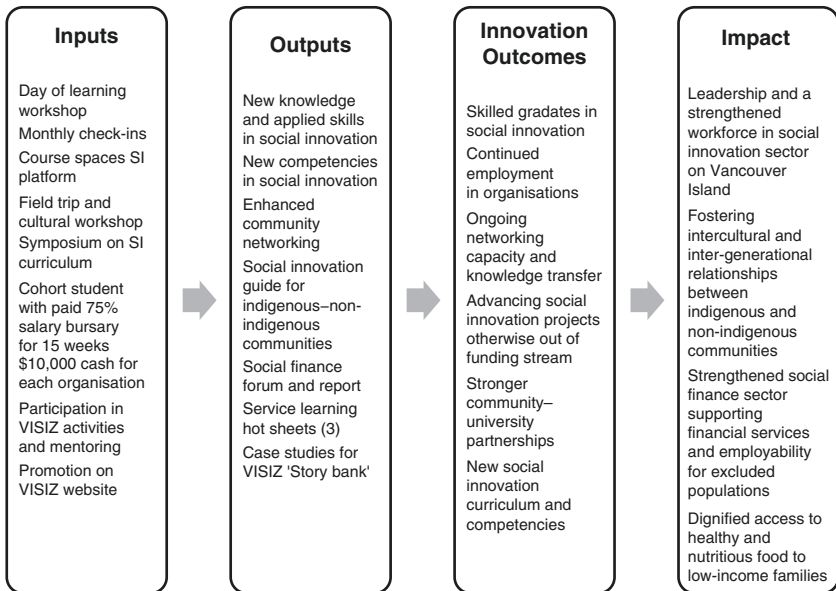


Fig. 11.1 SI Cohort logic chain model

to take responsibility for their learning—visiting the Course Spaces when and how they needed. This curriculum explored topics such as new techniques for documenting, retaining, and reflecting on information in a non-classroom setting. Next, we briefly outline a few key areas of curriculum.

Reflection

Drawing on Donald Schön's (1983) work on reflective practice, we indicated ways in which students can parse out their experiences and impressions “before action,” “in action,” “on action,” and “for action.” The curriculum then provides guidelines for using different modes to record these reflections through a range of apps, note-taking techniques, video and audio recording, mind mapping, illustrating and so on.

Experiential education and transformative learning literature places reflection as the heart and soul of the learning process. For Freire (2000), it is also the heart and soul of social justice. His articulation of praxis frames action and reflection as indivisible forces: people must not only come together in dialogue to develop knowledge of their social reality—but also act together on their environment to critically to “reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection” (p. 87). A socially just pedagogy, then, necessarily supports this critical reflection. When working with students engaged in experiential education, it becomes clear that it is insufficient to demand deep reflective practice without in some way teaching reflection. Reflection, we hold, is too often an assumed skill, which does students a disservice. The SI Cohort curriculum therefore generated these explicit pedagogical materials on reflection to help students develop these skills—and to indicate the value and complexity of reflection.

While much work in the experiential education field places an onus on individual reflection, in a social innovation and social justice context, we felt it important to also emphasise the value of reflection as a *shared process*, as does Freire who often presents reflection as a community practice. This alleviates the pressure on the individual to process her experience in isolation—which seems unrealistic given the connected, community nature of the work. For instance, the Social Planning Cowichan Student underwent a great deal of reflection with Indigenous elders, settlers, and other members of the organisation on topics of colonialism, relationship-building, and community assets. Reflection for her was not only introspective but participatory or dialogical.

We reinforced the value of reflection with regular check-ins. An open-ended prompt was offered to students for rumination, and responses were shared with the whole cohort, which they later reported was a very useful exercise. The questions were formulated based on student's interests and concerns, in the spirit of inter-teaching methods. Critical reflection, Mezirow (1998) emphasises, can "allow for transformation at the personal, system and organizational level."

Facilitating

One of the curricular areas that was developed for the SI Cohort focused on facilitation. This was developed to cater to the student's immediate needs—as all of their work placements required them to lead roundtables, forums and other events—and because it is a skill central to social innovation and social justice work more broadly. Freire (2000) focuses on the role of dialogue to transform consciousness and therefore daily practice: "dialogue is crucial in every aspect of participatory learning, and in the whole process of transformation." Moreover, he stresses the important role of the facilitator to support this dialogue through generative themes, problem posing and cultivating an environment that "liberat[es participants] to be critical, creative free [and] active" (p. 39). Resources in our curriculum supporting facilitation skills included: "choice and voice" methods (allowing participants to steer discussion and providing various avenues for expression); "blue sky thinking" methods (to encourage free exchange of ideas); training on culturally appropriate methods, and, a number of digital facilitation tools such as live feed Q & A apps (like Socrative) and mind mapping tools (like Inspiration Maps software). We emphasised that facilitation is a complex skill that requires one to 'hold space rather than take space.' Participating students, communities and organisations found that using these facilitation tools helped to invite meaningful dialogue and problem solving, for instance: the Cowichan Social Planning student applied culturally appropriate methods in Understanding the Village workshops with Indigenous elders and settlers to build understanding of the cultural genocide endured by Indigenous communities. She first learned about cultural protocols (such as opening with an acknowledgement of the Indigenous territory where the event is being held) then applied them in the gathering. According to reports from the student and settler participants, this facilitation resulted in increased awareness on Indigenous perspectives and fostered relationship building between settler and Indigenous participants.

TRACKING CHANGE: AN IMPACT FRAMEWORK FOR SI

In-depth interviews were conducted at the end of the pilot to assess *student impact* including new knowledge, and applied skills and social change *impact in the community*. In addition, the students were asked to complete an assessment of learning competencies specific to SI and to provide an illustrative example of this learning. The community partners and Co-op coordinators were then asked to corroborate the students' self-assessed new competencies relating to social innovation.

We recognise, and appreciate the challenges of measuring impact. Like the terms community and engagement, the term impact carries many meanings and is often difficult and time consuming to measure. Impact can be described as the effect of a project at a higher or broader level, in the longer term, after a range of outcomes has been achieved. This may include changed thinking (meaning, values and interpretations) or behaviour. Usually there is no one-to-one relationship (cause-and-effect links), but reflected in a variety of connections involving influence, contributions, and benefits—new policies deemed relevant, economic performance, competitiveness, public service effectiveness, new products and services, employment, enhanced learning skills, quality of life, community cohesion and social inclusion. Ultimately, defining impact in this context is about identifying what changes have resulted from new partnerships and collaborations. Being aware that impact is often measured over a long-term period, the findings from this pilot assessment point to some substantial outcomes and illustrate how this model can lead to greater impact in the third sector. An obvious limitation in this assessment is the short time frame (3 months), and the small sample size, therefore only capturing some of the outcomes, which can then point to short-term impacts. Another key limitation to our impact assessment is the lack of direct community feedback on our impact framework. This initial framework focused on the pedagogical benefits to the students and outcomes for the organisations, however the perceptions of impact from community will be vitally important to consider in the future.

The conceptual framework used in this evaluation is informed by a logic chain model (Fig. 11.1), mapping the input of resources through to the outputs and the broader outcomes—impact. This chain describes the ways through which an engaged learning social innovation model might be expected to create impacts. The framework illustrates the inputs made into

the cohort (*e.g. curriculum and training*), and the outputs (*e.g. manual, event*), outcomes (*e.g. skilled graduates*) and broader impact within the context of social justice (*e.g. leadership in SI*).

Each of the partner organisations had *immediate outputs* from the pilot that contributed directly to their social innovation. For Social Planning Cowichan, the development of a *social enterprise guide* provides illustrative examples of social innovation for community-level change, particularly related to indigenous and non-indigenous relationships building. For the Community Social Planning Council, *the social finance forum and research report* were the major outputs, providing a unique and timely opportunity to bring a diverse group of stakeholders together to help strengthen relationships and build capacity in the social finance sector. The most significant output for CREAIR was a *feasibility study, and an inventory* for their local neighbourhood food-sharing program.

INNOVATION OUTCOMES

There are a number of outcomes that resulted from the pilot for both students and community including new knowledge and understanding of SI, community and facilitation skills, relationship building, increased employment opportunities, enhanced social capital, and community-university collaborations. In the following, we focus specifically on the pedagogical outcomes and then point to some of the broader impacts in relation to social justice.

DEVELOPING NEW COMPETENCIES IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

At the University of Victoria, a new set of learning outcomes have been created in line with the institution's strategic plan which identifies "Dynamic learning" as one of its three pillars. Of these learning outcomes, the SI Cohort particularly works towards building those associated with "Personal and Social Responsibility Capacities":

- Informed civic engagement and understanding—from local to global
- Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity
- Ethical and professional reasoning and action
- Life-long learning

Following from this, the online curriculum provided to SI Cohort students outlined the following “social innovation” and “experiential education” learning outcomes:

Social Innovation learning outcomes:

1. Students will confidently discuss the relationship between social innovation, social enterprise, and social finance (as it applies to their placement) during their check-ins and final work term reports.
2. Students will provide a fulsome account of how their placement/initiative is creating social/environmental change during their check-ins, final work term reports, and creation of SI hot sheets.

Experiential Education learning outcomes:

1. Students will confidently engage with and incorporate different forms of knowledge in their work with the aim of valuing and reflecting all stakeholders and ensuring decisions/actions are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders in the worksite.
2. Students will successfully apply discipline-related theory to practice in their workplaces, and communicate this connection to a range of audiences in their worksite.
3. Students' plans will accurately reflect the process by which policy is created and changed and how this might compromise theoretical principle or impact on practice in the worksite.
4. Students will employ empathetic approaches and affective learning to facilitate meaningful understanding and teamwork in their projects.
5. Students will demonstrate strong self-reflection in action, on action and for action.

Miller and Steller (1985) suggest that within a transformative learning context, the curriculum focuses on the growth of personal and social skills, and social change. This reflects the spirit and intent of the curriculum for the SI Cohort. Growing from the previous, we designed a series of competencies that the learning outcomes aim to generate.

The SI Cohort, and all Co-op programs run through the University of Victoria follow a competency-based model.⁶ The UVic Co-op website indicates: “As more and more employers focus on competencies in the hiring process, successful grads will be those who can recognise their competencies and describe them effectively.” Not only does the competency framework help prepare students for gaining positions, and for understanding the logic of the assessment used by the majority of today’s employers throughout these positions, it also provides a needed structure for reflection. Students are able to tease out specific areas of achievement and areas for further growth in their past experiences. In their final reports, most UVic Co-op students are asked to reflect on a few core competencies (such as communication or time management), program-specific competencies, and inter-cultural competencies. The SI Cohort students were additionally asked to assess competencies relating directly to social innovation. We have included sections of the SI Cohort students’ competency assessments to illustrate the way in which their immersive work with organisations and community, while receiving a range of curricular supports, gave way to individual and social growth. The SI competencies were crafted according the key aims of social innovation, while weaving in the mission of VISIZ and UVic’s “personal and social responsibility capacities” outlined previously.

Asking students to assess their competencies in this way invites them to engage in deep learning, or, in other words: to consider not just what they learned but how they came to learn it through a process of complex experiences. McRae (2014) suggests that this type of deep learning is transformational, “it results in the revision or modification of meaning structures (Taylor 1997) that are the bases of judgments. Transformative learning results not only in a functional understanding of the constructed nature of knowledge but also a metacognitive stance, with regard to that knowledge and/or an understanding of why that knowledge is important (Moon 2004)” (p. 18).

The skills and training the student received from the curriculum and the experiential learning have demonstrated positive outcomes on their understanding and knowledge of real community needs and challenges. The

following are SI competencies we identified and some student assessments of their competency development:

The ability to *communicate to a broad range of audiences* is of particular importance in cross sector collaboration and within the social innovation space. Each of the cohort students learned skills in dealing with diverse modes of communication. For one of the students, this was a big challenge: “since I am used to writing in an academic style but was tasked with writing a program model that’s accessible and relatable to the public.” For another student, it presented an opportunity to “share and present my findings and my research with the others, which helped my presenting skills, my communication and interpersonal skills and helped me grow professionally.”

Systems-thinking, or the ability to see how social change occurs in terms of the interacting systems at play, make connections between systems and see overarching patterns is necessary for each SI Cohort students to embody holistic praxis. To this effect, one student remarks: “the organization I work for is trying to create cultural change within social systems (from local to national communities) which is also dependent on economic and political systems (e.g. government adopting TRC recommendations leads to more funding to Indigenous organizations). I learned a lot about collaborating on a community level, including the benefits of bringing various organizations together as well as the challenges for something like social policy.”

SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPACTS

The cohort pilot demonstrates how and in which ways a model of experiential and transformative education in the third sector can have real impact on local social justice issues—related to food, the economy and intercultural relationships as demonstrated here. HEIs have an opportunity to intentionally support local social ventures that have explicit social change missions, while curating the necessary skills and knowledge needed by students and future leaders of this sector. Each of the social innovation initiatives highlighted in this chapter are advancing their social missions and leading to positive impact.

1. Seeding leadership in SI on Vancouver Island

Young people—“*the Next Generation*”—play an increasingly greater role in seeding, advocating for and leading social, economic, and environmental change. They are tasked with addressing incredibly profound challenges,

such as local and global food security, climate change, access to finance and a persistent gender gap. There is a movement across the country (and globally) in developing youth innovation programs that seek to grow the potential and opportunity of youth as *changemakers*. At the same time, students are seeking out opportunities to make transformative, enduring, and widespread positive change in communities and public institutions, from the local level to the international. “The leadership and innovation needs of the twenty-first century require strong systems leaders and innovators who can grasp, embrace and navigate complexity with courage, empathy and creativity” (Stauch and Cornelisse 2016, p. 2).

Investing into models such as the cohort pilot can help support this effort, to more effectively align student learning with local social innovations addressing challenging complex issues. The cohort pilot curated important leadership skills necessary for a thriving regional social innovation movement, as outlined in the innovation competencies described previously. The students all felt the experience provided important interpersonal skills such as empathy and a strong sense of satisfaction in contributing to positive social change. As one student comments: “I worked in an IT company for several years, and it was all focused on profit, and this had more meaning for the people. Here, I am serving the community. I know what I am doing, where I am going, and where my energy is being utilized. So it’s like you’re gaining, the organization you are working with is gaining, and at the same time, the people of the particular city or organization even they are affected. I found it very rewarding to make this difference to the people.”

2. Fostering intercultural and intergenerational relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities

One of the major outcomes of the Cowichan Social Planning Council SI initiative was the development of a social enterprise guide “Bridging our worlds: for building better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.” The cultural bridging work that is described in this guide takes the form of experiential workshops, aimed to help participants deepen their understanding of Canada’s history of colonialism and the continuing impact it has on Indigenous peoples. This important work coincides with the recent release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report in 2015, which documents Canada’s residential school system that were in existence for over 100 years for the purpose

of separating Indigenous children from their families. The establishment of these schools was a central element in the goal of Canada's aboriginal policy to eliminate aboriginal governments and rights, which can best be described as "cultural genocide" (TRC 2015).

Social innovations, such as the "Cultural Connections" workshop are opening the doors to new spaces and tools that are needed to heal and build relationships in communities across Canada. "We want to move our money away from being destructive to being restorative and so it helped me realize that all the lovely things that community action does really fits in the social innovation framework. And having the intergenerational people there, the elders. These elders are holding deep knowledge and they don't often get deeply listened to, the process of just having them steer things is a process of social innovation." (SI Cohort community partner)

This work is an example of how social innovation can be used as a driver for positive social change. For the cohort student, working on Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationship building and the ability to work between and bridge two cultures was of utmost importance. "I experienced all of the complexities involved in this (e.g. being open and sensitive to other worldviews)." McRae (2013) emphasises the importance of developing cultural intelligence in experiential education programs, described as peoples' ability to cope with diversity and to function in cross-cultural settings. Although taken from an internationalisation context, McRae (2013) demonstrates the significant value for students to be engaged in cross-cultural settings, "for the growing needs of organizations and, ultimately, for Canadian society at large as the cultural landscape becomes more diverse" (p. 121).

3. Supporting the social finance sector on Vancouver Island

Social finance is an approach that mobilises multiple sources of capital aimed to deliver a social dividend and an economic return in the achievement of social and environmental goals. Social finance also creates opportunities for investors to finance projects that benefit society and for community organisations to access new sources of funds. Some of the instruments being used are social impact bonds, or community investment funds that acts to pool capital from investors to provide much needed loans, mortgages and venture capital to not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises and social purpose businesses (HRSDC 2013). One of the major outcomes of the Social Finance Forum (*an output of the cohort*)

was enhanced multi-sector collaboration and new investment for the community cooperative investment fund, an initiative of the Social Planning Council (a founding member of VISIZ). Fifty-five participants from across Vancouver Island attended the Forum representing actors involved in investment Co-operatives, development agencies, private consultants, not-for-profits, social ventures, and financial institutions. “It was connection to additional investors and new investment opportunities so that was helpful at a pivotal time.” (SI Cohort community partner). Another output from the cohort was a social finance report, drawing from in-depth interviews the SI cohort student conducted with key stakeholders in the sector. This research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the social finance eco-system on Vancouver Island and informs recommendations for strategies to build the capacity of the sector moving forwards.

4. Dignified access to healthy and nutritious food for low-income families

CRFAIR is an important network organisation in the region with the main goal to create a sustainable and secure local food and agriculture system that provides safe and nutritious food accessible through dignified means. The organisation works with neighborhoods, communities and across diverse sectors to address food insecurity and increase individual and community health. One of their main programs is the Neighborhood Food Hub program, a centralised food hub location aimed to provide capacity to store and deliver food in different neighbourhoods that can be easily accessed by low-income families. The cohort pilot provided key resources to support a roundtable and collective visioning process between several actors that was needed to advance this program. The cohort student also worked on developing a baseline inventory of community assets, and helped raise awareness around food literacy and access. “Most of the low-income families in Capital Region do not have a proper access to healthy and nutritious food. Food is the major need for survival, and thus CRFAIR took an initiative in addressing this issue in order to help the vulnerable population of the Capital Region.” (SI Cohort student). The inventory developed helped to identify where and what resources (*e.g. food, storage, transport*) are available to strategically and geographically implement the program where low-income families can access the service.

Though several tangible outcomes have sprung out of this pilot, moving forwards we will need to create structures to ensure community

themselves establish the desired outcome of the SI and have an ongoing steering role. Freire's (2000) Participatory Action Research method emphasises that for any praxis to have a transformative, emancipatory outcome, the work must be done with and by those who are marginalised, not merely *for* those who are marginalised. This approach is embodied by each of the previous organisations, however we believe there is still room for growth in this area. In particular, there is room for growth on the HEIs' side in training and supporting our students to take this ethic forward in their work. We will continue to bring techniques for this type of solidaristic WIL into our curriculum.

CONCLUSION

We begin this chapter by articulating the increasingly important role higher education plays in stimulating social change and innovation in our contemporary world. We then frame the pedagogical principles of transformative learning, building from hooks, Freire and others, with a model of experiential education explicitly designed to support social innovation in the third sector. We use this model, as illustrated in the cohort pilot, to demonstrate how and in which ways experiential and transformative education in the third sector can lead to positive outcomes on local issues—in this case related to food security, social finance and Indigenous wellbeing. What makes this pilot unique, compared to other forms of experiential education, is the intentional pairing of this pedagogy and subject area. McRae (2014) suggests: “the integration of [. . .] transformative outcomes into the WIE or workplace [is] dependent upon the time and value given to transformative processes, institutional requirements and a positive emotional environment that supported the resultant changes to the students’ world view and ability to act”. With this in mind, the SI Cohort has aimed to intentionally devote time and resources to give way to personal, and social transformation through meaningful experiential learning opportunities in the third sector, curriculum, and a range of other supports. Through this pedagogical approach to learning, we echo Freire's (2000) assertion that raising critical consciousness through participatory work will colour future engagements, making strides towards more socially just relations.

There is immense opportunity for HEIs to embrace their social missions and actively pursue the development of transformative, socially relevant, and solidarity-based approaches to education and civic engagement. Some argue that education has been incorporated into an agenda of

wealth production through discourses relating to the knowledge economy (Patrick 2013), and more recently a phase of knowledge capitalism (Peters 2003), reconsidering educational aims to be most valuable for individuals and for the economy. This has been a strong trend in education policy and practice towards the acceptance of a neoliberal doctrine, in Canada and around the world. This raises several concerns for the future direction of education, and the social and *ethical* responsibility of HEIs—for the development of their students and the local communities where they reside. One concern, as highlighted by Patrick (2013) is that “emphasis tends to be placed on the production of knowledge that can be commercially exploited rather than on considering the ways in which engagement with knowledge can enhance individual development within sets of broadly conceived educational aims” (p. 3). The result is that universities and education tend not to be considered as a public good in any meaningful or impactful way, but rather a commodity void of any values that students might develop (Clegg 2011).

The SI cohort model that we present in this study highlights the positive role that HEIs can, *and should*, play in broader innovation processes aiming for the configuration of new social alternatives. Through intentional and thoughtful partnerships between HEIs and social innovations and other similar social ventures, students experience life-long transformation that cultivates critical reflection and action to make change in positive ways. Being humble in this declaration, we propose that models like this can help reclaim the education system from neoliberalism, to one more in alignment with individual and collective well-being at its core.

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NOTES

1. In the interest of concision, we will use the term “transformative” (used by Freire and hooks) to describe our pedagogical approach, though we also draw on Mezirow who uses the term “transformational.” When we use “transformative” within this paper, we intend for the term to reflect a synthesis of these concepts: that education can and ought to insight change, not simply knowledge accumulation.

2. <http://visocialinnovation.ca/social-innovation-cohort/>.
3. Indigenous peoples of Canada, made up of many distinct bands and nations, have been subjected to oppressive colonial forces, such as mass dispossession of land and cultural genocide through such practices as residential schools, since contact with settlers. There is also a history of resilience and now resurgence/revitalisation of Indigenous people (and their languages/cultures/knowledge systems) in the face of these colonial practices.
4. UVic Co-op stresses the need for reflective practice and puts students' self-assessments at the heart of the assessment process. This model is grounded in theoretical works of Graham Gibbs, and in particular his text "Learning by Doing" (1988).
5. VISIZ website: <http://visocialinnovation.ca>.
6. Competency based models are "systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education" (<http://edglossary.org/competency-based-learning/>).

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