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# Practical wisdom and ethical awareness through student experiences of development

*Karim-Aly Kassam*

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*How is book-learning at university made relevant to societal needs? What pedagogical framework helps to transform students from those who know about major challenges of the twenty-first century to those who know how to respond to such challenges in a particular socio-cultural and ecological context? This narrative about the practical experience of Canadian students in two separate international-development classes shows that learning is ultimately about linking the education of students to its consequences for communities and society. The students' maturation from a community of enquirers to a community of social practice is not just an intellectual transformation from 'knowing that' to 'learning how', but also the development of a heightened ethical awareness of the consequential link between freedom and responsibility.*

## **Sagesse pratique et conscience éthique à travers les expériences d'étudiants dans le domaine du développement**

*Comment peut-on rendre pertinent pour les besoins sociétaux ce qu'apprennent les étudiants dans des livres à l'université? Quel est le cadre pédagogique qui contribue à transformer les étudiants de personnes qui ont des connaissances sur les principaux défis du vingt-et-unième siècle à des personnes qui savent comment réagir à ces défis dans un contexte socioculturel et écologique particulier? Ce récit, qui porte sur l'expérience pratique d'étudiants canadiens dans deux classes de développement internationales séparées, montre que l'apprentissage consiste tout d'abord à relier l'éducation des étudiants et ses conséquences pour les communautés et les sociétés. La maturation des étudiants d'une communauté de 'poseurs de questions' à une communauté de pratique sociale n'est pas seulement une transformation intellectuelle, de l'attitude 'savoir que' à une attitude 'apprendre que', mais aussi une prise de conscience éthique intensifiée du lien conséquentiel entre la liberté et la responsabilité.*

## **Conhecimento prático e conscientização ética através de experiências de desenvolvimento de estudantes**

*Como o aprendizado baseado em livros na universidade torna-se relevante para as necessidades sociais? Que sistema pedagógico ajuda a transformar os estudantes, em que eles deixam de ser aqueles que conhecem os principais desafios do século vinte e um para serem aqueles que sabem como atuar frente a tais desafios em um contexto sócio-cultural e ecológico em particular? Esta narrativa sobre a experiência prática de estudantes canadenses em duas classes de desenvolvimento internacional separadas mostra que o aprendizado, no final, diz respeito a conectar o*

*ensino dos estudantes com suas conseqüências para as comunidades e sociedade. O amadurecimento dos estudantes, que em vez de serem uma comunidade de indagadores passam a ser uma comunidade de prática social, não é apenas uma transformação intelectual de 'saber aquilo' para 'aprender como', mas também uma maior conscientização ética da conexão consequente entre liberdade e responsabilidade.*

***Sabiduría práctica y conciencia ética a través de las experiencias estudiantiles en el desarrollo***  
*¿Cómo se adapta el aprendizaje en la universidad a las necesidades de la sociedad? ¿Qué marco pedagógico puede utilizarse para promover entre los alumnos una conciencia, no sólo de los principales retos del siglo XXI, sino también de la necesidad de responder a estos retos en cada contexto sociocultural particular? Este ensayo, que narra el proceso de varios estudiantes canadienses en dos cursos de desarrollo internacional, demuestra que, en última instancia, el aprendizaje tiene que ver con los vínculos que se establezcan entre la educación y sus consecuencias para la comunidad y la sociedad. La transformación de un grupo de estudiosos en un grupo de acción social, no sólo tiene que ver con el camino trazado entre el 'saber qué' y el 'saber cómo', sino también con una mayor conciencia ética del vínculo crucial que existe entre libertad y responsabilidad.*

KEY WORDS: Civil society; Methods; Social sector

## Introduction

The approach of the third millennium galvanised debate about international development initiatives, particularly the contributions of development-studies programmes to meeting the basic needs of a large proportion of humanity. While at times polemical, this discussion points to decades of resource-use by universities to produce a cadre of development 'experts' whose resultant efforts, if not irrelevant to alleviating poverty, were at best ineffective. Key issues of the debate included the need for students to apply practical wisdom in dealing with continuous change, demonstrate relevance through effective action, and negotiate the ethical dimensions of complex socio-cultural settings (Edwards 1989; Hamdi 1996; Slim 1996; Sumner and Tribe 2008). The fundamental aim of development studies was concise and yet demanding: to generate a *community of enquirers* who combine rigour with relevance, passion with analysis, and research with practice (Edwards 2002).<sup>1</sup> This article narrates the dynamic formulation of learning that merges critical discourse with practice, examining the resultant experiences not only in terms of their benefit to students, but also in terms of students' awareness of responsibility. A conversation about learning without practice is just as vacant as a discussion of rights without responsibilities. Responsibility is embedded in knowledge, as well as in rights. To educate without causing students to reflect on consequences is tantamount to making machines out of humans, alienating students from themselves, their community, and their ecology (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986; Flyvberg 2001). Barber (1994: 88) argued, 'The language of citizenship suggests that self-interests are always embedded in communities of action and that in serving neighbours, one also serves oneself.' Self-interest does not exist outside community but arises from engagement with the community from within. Below, I describe the context for a senior-level course in development studies in which critical reflection was combined with practice. The article presents a pedagogical framework that facilitated reflection-in-action in the form of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), summarises student projects in their communities, and discusses findings from their deliberation about development in practice.

## Context: development-studies course

In the summer of 2005, I was given the responsibility for a capstone course to be offered in the autumn to senior undergraduates at a Canadian university. The twin objectives of the course were (1) critical discourse on current issues in the field of international development and (2) practical application of the learning from the programme within the context of civil-society institutions. Teaching was to merge seamlessly with practice. A major constraint was that both objectives had to be achieved within one semester (approximately 13 weeks). The choice of working with civil-society institutions at home was not guided simply by the desire to act locally, but driven practically by resource and time constraints.

Three overarching questions helped to set the stage for integrating the twin objectives of critical thinking and application of learning or practice: (1) Why should students learn by participation in development activities of civil-society organisations (CSOs)? (2) How can students develop a critical viewpoint on a variety of perspectives dealing with development issues? (3) How can students learn to design and carry out collaborative activities that establish their own perspective on particular issues, while also deliberating and reflecting on those perspectives in order to meet the needs of a CSO? The first question anchored the course to the ethical framework of civic responsibility in development studies. Asking *why* placed the interrogation of post-secondary education beyond the instrumental perspective of what benefits a student can derive from learning, instead situating the student within the complex connectivity of relationships to community and civil society. The second question shed light on the pedagogical framework needed to achieve application-oriented learning. The final question operationalised the pedagogical framework to merge reflection with practice by highlighting the skills needed to undertake 'development' activities.

Unlike a typical university course, in which the student is seen as a detached observer in the process of scientific experimentation, this course required students to be aware as participants that their activities had real consequences for communities or institutions. All students therefore participated in an ethical review of the projects that they undertook with community organisations. For instance, a group of students assisted a faith-based organisation (FBO) to examine the implications of a change in policy: a change from simply providing homeless people with meals and a place to sleep for the night, to helping those among them who were actually seeking employment or rehabilitation from substance abuse to achieve those goals. In a city with very cold winters and a growing homeless population, the organisation was reformulating the focus of its mission from being an emergency-relief agency for the homeless to being a development agency devoted primarily to those individuals and families determined to change their condition of poverty. Besides complex concerns related to organisational restructuring and the potential effects of this policy change on donor funding, this Christian FBO had a difficult set of ethical matters to resolve. By direct engagement, students transformed their own orientation and perspective, from being solely a *community of enquirers* based at a university to being a *community of social practice* that participated in meeting the changing needs of a growing population of vulnerable people.

At the beginning of the course, the identity of students had to be situated. There was need to articulate *a priori* their role in the course and to ensure discussion at the outset of the implications of merging a *community of enquirers* with a *community of social practice* (Argyris *et al.* 1985; Wenger 1999). On the first day of classes, there was a frank discussion of expectations. Students are not just 'consumers' of information, but also 'producers' of insight. By virtue of learning, the student develops agency, and this agency demands action realised through learning-by-doing.

As Kuhn noted in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962/1996), paradigm shifts generally emerge from young scholars and from those outside a discipline. This acknowledgement

of the role of the young scholar in contributing to knowledge also includes the second aspect of situating the student, namely, inter-disciplinarity. By building bridges across different ways of knowing, students draw from the diversity of their cultural backgrounds and a variety of experiences. Problems faced by societies and communities within the context of development rarely present themselves neatly or in reference to a single discipline. Issues of poverty, socio-cultural and environmental change, and food sovereignty depend on multifaceted responses. The field of development studies is inherently inter-disciplinary (Desai and Potter 2002). Here, inter-disciplinarity is not about self-confidence based on what one knows, but rather an intellectual maturity arising from appreciating the dimensions of what one does *not* know, and thereby learning to co-operate with others.

The third aspect of the student's role is combining a historical sense with relevance. To place an issue in context, students must consider not only the 'pastness' of the past, but also its presence: the relevance of the issue's history to reflection on present and future possibilities. Finally, the idea of relevance links education to experience, and learning to community. By combining critical thinking and practice, the student experiences how theoretical perspectives both emerge from and inform the applied context. In the process of application, the particular hints at the universal.

## The practice of knowing: *phronesis*<sup>2</sup>

The philosopher Gilbert Ryle, in his book *The Concept of Mind* (1949/1984), discusses the relational nature of knowing through direct experience. Ryle differentiates between 'knowing *that*' and 'knowing *how*'. Knowing *that* enquires into whether something is the case. For instance, a textbook-oriented university course demonstrates the learning that leads to knowing *that*. Students draw on the experiences of their teacher, combined with information contained in books and articles. The learning in the classroom is abstracted from the context where the knowledge was generated. While this form of knowing is valuable and necessary, it is different from knowing *how*. Knowing *how* considers how to achieve something. It is embedded in experience. Learning-by-doing is an example of knowledge generation through knowing *how*. Knowing *how* is related to John Dewey's philosophy of experience. In situational learning, experience is the impetus for reflective thinking, which in turn impels enquiry (Lave and Wenger 1999). Dewey referred to this non-linear process as 'the scientific method' (Dewey 1927/1994; Giles and Eyler 1994).

Knowing *how* is manifested in the performance of an act. An individual who is bodily active is also mentally active. Thought is not separated from action, and a performance is not simply habitual practice: it is intelligent practice, because each action is modified by its predecessor. It is reflection-in-action (Schön 1983). Because learning is involved with each act, activity is tantamount to the movement of the person through the world. In order to achieve knowing *how*, a particular type of competence is required. Just as the intelligent performer acts critically, the intelligent spectator must follow critically. This is called learning *how*. Learning *how* is not imparted, like learning *that*; rather, it is achieved through participation and direct experience (see Table 1). The aim of the course was to facilitate the transformation of the student from knowing *that* to learning *how*. (Knowing *how* is an expertise achieved only after many years of practice; it is beyond the scope of the course objectives.)

Knowing *that* and knowing *how* are not in binary opposition. While distinct, they are not mutually exclusive, but rather co-dependent in the learning process. The two forms of knowing are being compared and contrasted here for the sake of understanding; however, this dichotomy is artificial.

It is important to keep in mind that this learning process is cumulative and iterative: it is not a linear progression like the path of an arrow, but more like a feedback loop or circuit, building on

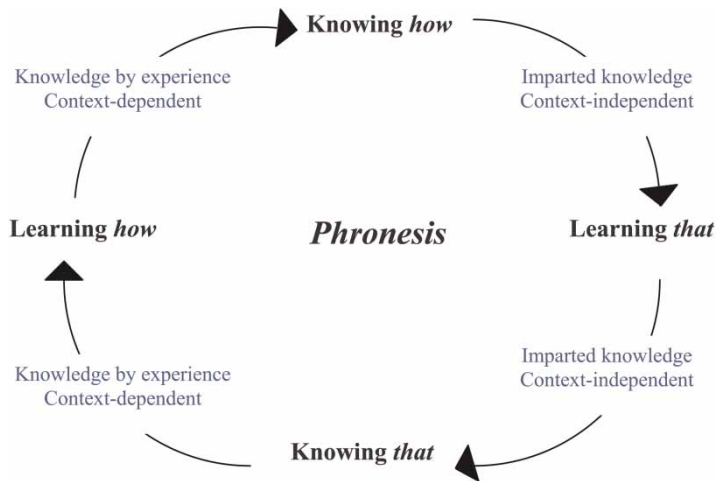
**Table 1:** A summary of the pedagogical model of learning

Ryle	The learning process
Learning <i>that</i>	Knowledge is imparted (context-independent)
Knowing <i>that</i>	
Learning <i>how</i>	Knowledge is achieved through participation and experience (context-dependent)
Knowing <i>how</i>	

the experiences of the performer. Knowing *how* is decontextualised when it is used to teach in the classroom. Taking context-dependent knowledge and putting it in a format understandable to students (knowing *that*) is also a necessary part of teaching.

The dynamic process of learning *that*, knowing *that*, learning *how*, and knowing *how* is best illustrated by Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* (‘practical wisdom’). *Phronesis* is central to the practice of development, because it provides a philosophical and pedagogical foundation. *Phronesis* is marked by reflexive analysis in which cultural values are contributing factors. It is knowledge of *how* to secure the ends of human life. It involves daily praxis, pragmatic action, and context-dependent knowing based on variable factors. *Phronesis* is not a state of knowledge, but a dynamic process within the framework of socio-cultural and ecological relations. Aristotle (2004) maintained that we may grasp the nature of *phronesis* if we consider those who are adept at it. This dynamic and participatory conception suggests that knowledge is in the relations of people to their environment. Therefore, knowledge lies not in the heads of professors, but in the world that they point out to students. It is found in the experience of *living through and within* – that is, knowledge is in the salient features of the experiential environment (see Figure 1).

Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* recognises the role of context-dependence in knowledge generation, acknowledging that the vocabulary of empirical observation is theory-laden, and that, as a result, empirical fact and concept are not separate events. There is no mind–body dualism in the process of reflective engagement. The validity of the knowledge held by diverse communities is determined by their ability to cope, or by the workability of responses



**Figure 1:** The dynamic process of experiential learning

that satisfy particular needs, because this knowledge is concerned with practical consequences and deals with socio-cultural change by encouraging action over theoretical paralysis. The philosophical stance of *phronesis* is that practical action is necessary to secure life while adhering to certain ethical standards.

To relate this idea back to development studies, the present articulation of *phronesis* emphasises praxis or action–orientation. It also illustrates the fundamental role of reflection or deliberation in determining appropriate action. In essence, *phronesis* also has ethical import: it is informed by the values that guide action. Eikeland (2006) articulates the notion of *phronesis* in the larger context of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues. It is from this more holistic view of *phronesis*, which includes its connection to culturally grounded ethical aims, that the foundation is set for wise action to emerge. The idea of *phronesis* presupposes deeds in societal best interest: it presupposes excellence and assumes that knowledge is used for particular purposes. As Eikeland (2006: 34) explained, ‘*Phronesis* is both ethical and intellectual. Why and how? It deliberates about how I or we should and could be just, fair, friendly, and caring, etc. in relation to other people here and now, people with very different needs and wishes, all things considered, but still respecting their autonomy.’ Writing about the necessary skills for effective relief work, Slim (1996) also used the notion of ‘practical wisdom’ to argue that formal education, while not irrelevant to humanitarian emergencies, requires coupling with experiential grounding. Mirroring the discussion here about students, he argued that experiential grounding provides the relief worker with the ability to deliberate towards the appropriate decision, endows a type of understanding that is akin to empathy, and enables equitable judgement. *Phronesis*, thus, speaks to the objective of development studies—the transformation of the student from a detached learner to a reflective, and therefore mature, contributor.

## Summary of student projects

The pedagogical approach grounded in the ethical framework of *phronesis* sets the groundwork for discussing the significance of practically oriented learning to fourth-year undergraduate students of development. Before discussing student reflections on their experiences, I will briefly summarise their activities. In 2005 and 2007, students working in groups of two to three undertook a total of 20 community-service learning projects with civil-society institutions. Their activities included aspects and combinations of conceptualisation, research, planning, implementation, and evaluation of development initiatives. In almost all cases, students undertook primary research in the form of interviews. However, the purpose of this research differed. One project traced the impact of home ownership on low-income families, and another the reconstruction efforts of the Canadian military in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Five projects involved primary research to respond to a specific need, such as establishing a community centre, or a health-care co-operative for immigrant women and their families, or a co-operative business programme for micro-enterprises, or determining a liveable minimum wage for employees of small businesses. Two projects aimed to trace the impact of change in the policy of a civil-society institution. Another four projects were devoted to developing planning models for structural change and implementing new programmes for civil-society institutions. Three projects researched and developed specific approaches, such as methods for measuring the social impact of inexpensive lighting; eligibility criteria for transitional housing for low-income families; and triple bottom-line reporting (involving financial, social, and environmental audit) for micro-enterprise lending. Finally, four projects researched and developed materials to use in raising awareness of diverse issues, ranging from homelessness to the plight of women.

## Findings from reflection questions

In both years when the course was offered, students were asked to make regular entries in a personal journal throughout the course. In addition, they were asked to respond to reflection questions at the end of the term and submit their responses to the instructor after grading was finalised. The rate of response to these questions was high in both years: 87 per cent of students (21 of 24) responded in 2005, and 93 per cent (13 of 14 students) in 2007. Students were keen to participate, because they felt that their answers might affect change in the overall delivery of the development-studies programme and benefit subsequent students. These results are published, in part, to fulfil this objective. The questions sought to elicit qualitative information on the following issues:

- the viability of the course as scheduled (in one term of 12–13 weeks);
- outside employment of full-time students and their reasons for working;
- incidence and nature of extra-curricular activities during the course;
- students' perception of the benefits of experiential learning; and
- students' sensitivity to responsibilities associated with post-secondary education.

### *Viability of the course and balance of learning objectives*

Almost 97 per cent of the respondents said that the course should be taught over two terms, rather than being compressed into one semester. Students would have preferred to have more time to integrate the twin objectives of critical discourse on development issues (knowing *that*) and practical application of learning (learning *how*). Some students felt that they needed the time to get more involved with CSOs in order to strengthen their skills and establish a stronger relationship. They also wanted more time in class for discussion to deepen their experience of learning *how*. Finally, some felt that they had been poorly challenged up to this point in the development-studies programme. As the learning expectations were much greater in this course, they needed 'more time to do everything' in order to catch up. There was an underlying frustration with the delivery of some previous courses, and the students felt that they had not gained a full grasp of the theoretical foundations of their field in order to make the transition from knowing *that* to learning *how*.

The balance between discourse on critical issues and the practice of development is the framework for the dynamic of practical learning. The lessons learned in the community come into the classroom, and the classroom lessons go out into the community. Inclusion of ethical values in teaching is not only part of university mission statements, but also a fundamental premise of education (Barber 2000; Callan 1997; Chapdelaine *et al.* 2005; Ehrlich 2000; Galston 1991; Young 1997). *Phronesis* is critical reflection of values through deliberation of action. The dual objectives of the course facilitated this process through the link between learning *that* and learning *how*. With respect to a balance between critical reflection on development issues and the practice of development, all students felt that a balance had been achieved in the present configuration of the course. However, their response was qualified with the desire for more discussion, both in the classroom and through online platforms such as Blackboard. Some students organised discussion groups during the course and continued to meet even after graduation. Reiterating their concern about the compressed timeframe of the course, they expressed a desire simply to have more time for engaging in critical thinking and practice. Again the students expressed concern at not having received a rigorous preparation for praxis in development studies. Nonetheless, students were pleased and grateful to have been challenged by both the workload and the critical reflection that drove their learning in the course.



### Phronesis and employment

Most students in the course (95 per cent in 2005 and 77 per cent in 2007) held outside jobs in addition to pursuing full-time studies. Thus in 2005, 20 of 21 students who responded worked an average of 16.5 hours per week; in 2007, 10 of 13 respondents worked an average of 15.5 hours per week. This outside employment placed demands on students' time and may have affected their ability to engage fully in learning derived from practical development projects.

The primary reason for working may be characterised as 'making ends meet': paying for food, rent, tuition costs, etc. Working for experience or for income to fulfil the pleasures of a social life featured much lower as reasons for employment (see Figure 2). The fact that students are motivated to work primarily by the need to make ends meet has implications for the demands of a practice-oriented course, compared with those of a regular classroom-based course.<sup>3</sup> The challenge of juggling paid employment to meet basic needs with the learning objectives of a post-secondary education in development studies speaks to the concept of *phronesis*. Practical wisdom arises from pragmatic engagement with concerns such as securing the basics of life and paying for post-secondary education. Effectively managing one's own affairs is a pre-requisite to engaging in development initiatives at a community or societal level.

### Extracurricular activities

Civic engagement is a key component of a community's capacity to develop. While many factors influence this type of social engagement, the level of education has been shown to be the most important (Putnam 2000). A distinctive characteristic of people who give their time to community service is that they tend to be well educated. Furthermore, level of education is strongly correlated with political participation, organisational involvement, and social trust (Rothwell and Turcotte 2006; Schellenberg 2004). According to a recent study by Statistics Canada, young adults (ages 22–29 years) are more likely than older age groups to participate in political behaviour other than voting (Milan 2005). Their sense of political involvement arises from behaviours such as informing themselves on a political issue, contacting a newspaper to express their views, signing a petition, boycotting or purchasing products for ethical reasons, and participating in demonstrations and marches. Moreover, this political

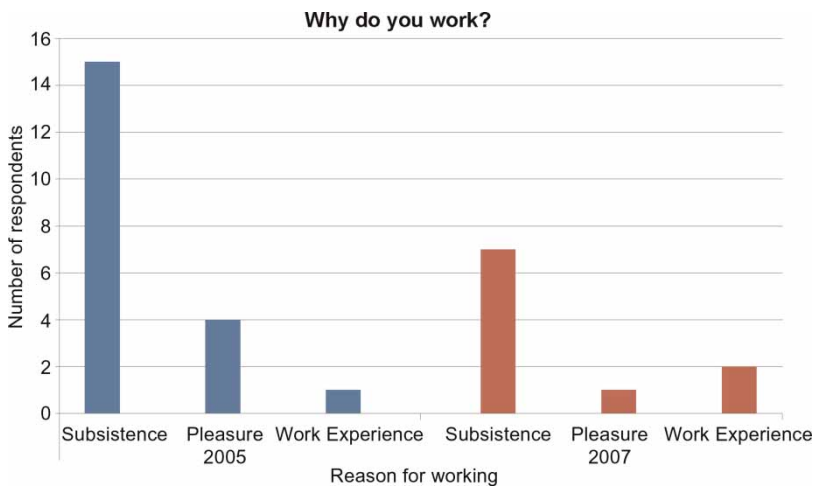
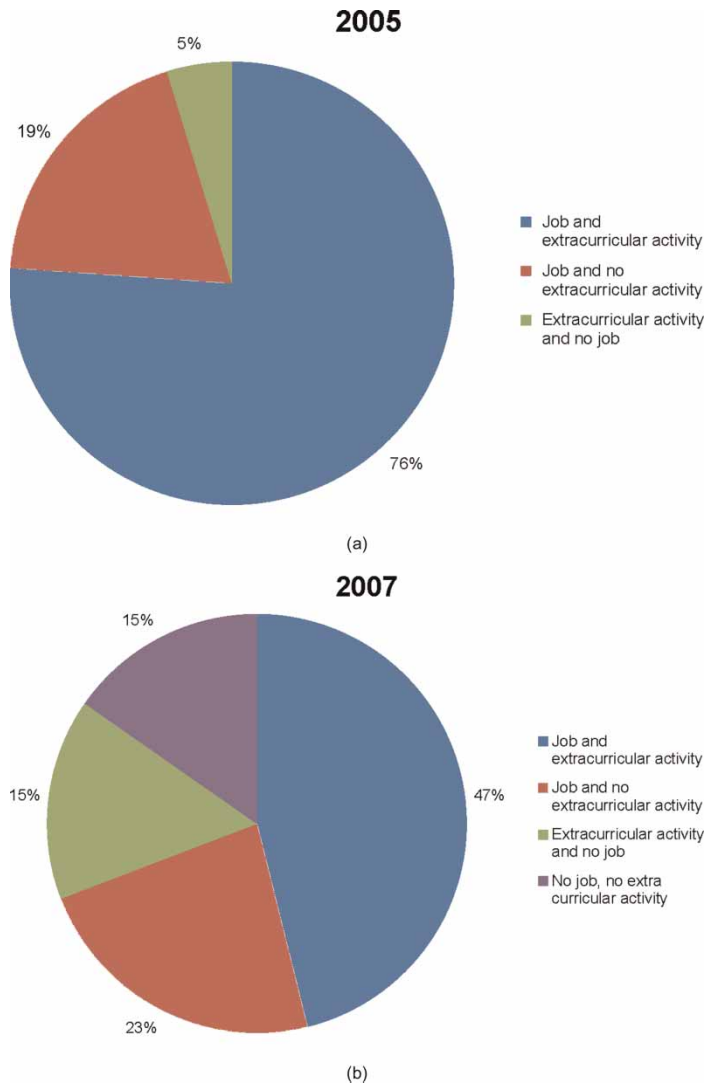


Figure 2: Students' reasons for working

behaviour and voting are directly linked to civic engagement such as volunteering. Greater civic-mindedness and participation in community-based groups lead to greater political engagement in young adults.

A majority of the students, 81 per cent in 2005 and 54 per cent in 2007, participated in extracurricular activities such as volunteer work and sports during their development-studies course. The time spent in these activities averaged six–seven hours a week per student. Demands on students’ time thus included engaging in employment and extracurricular activities for 22 hours per week in 2005 and almost 14 hours a week in 2007 (see Figure 3).

Students who volunteer and opt to take development studies have already recognised the significance of service, and these choices show greater civic-mindedness than merely extracurricular activities. It is noteworthy that when students in both years were asked if they had



**Figure 3:** Percentage of students involved in various patterns of activity outside university that made demands on their time, 2005 and 2007

previously engaged in employment that fitted the category of development activities, two-thirds said that they had. While what constitutes a development issue may be debated, students identified the following as development activities: assisting homeless individuals who suffer from substance abuse, engaging in Native (First Nation) youth outreach, educating immigrant children, supporting disabled individuals, co-ordinating volunteer activities, and broadly facilitating community initiatives.

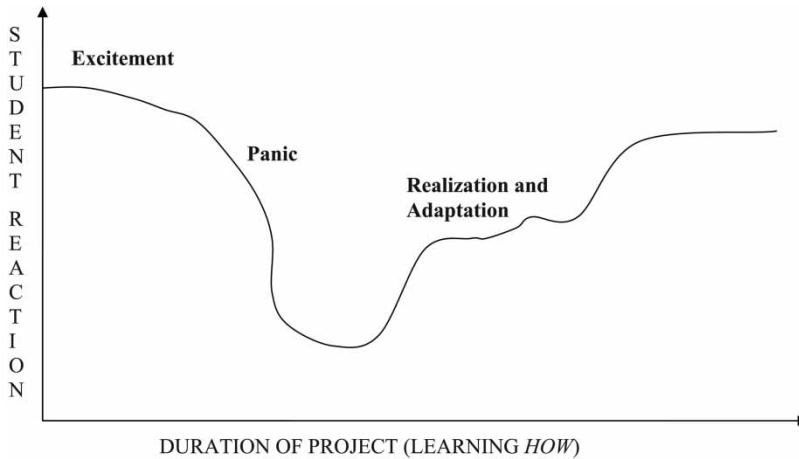
### *Benefits of 'learning how'*

Students were unanimous in stating that engaging in development practice had been valuable to their learning. One wrote, 'It has been the most transformative part of my studies and has given me a sense of orientation that would have otherwise been missed'. There is significant evidence of the meaningful impact of learning-by-doing. It benefits students by (1) deepening their theoretical understanding of the field through applied work, (2) challenging them to deliberate upon the relationship between their values and their education, (3) making them aware of the responsibilities associated with their education and its relationship to civic-mindedness, and (4) fostering a healthy respect for socio-cultural diversity. However, it is not so clear how this process takes place (Chapdelaine *et al.* 2005; Eyler 2000; Giles and Eyler 1994; Lave and Wenger 1999).

The pedagogical model of *phronesis* provides a compelling explanation for the role of development practice in facilitating pragmatically oriented education through a post-secondary curriculum linking critical thinking (knowing *that*) with practice (learning *how*). Students did not view this type of learning as yet another academic burden to be overcome along the way to receiving their degree. They perceived it as not only an opportunity for themselves, but also a means to contribute to the communities in which they live.

Student responses indicated that the process of transformation from knowing *that* to learning *how* was demanding.<sup>4</sup> Students were aware of a process of change in their learning. As one student put it, 'The internship gave students a practical sense of understanding that could not occur in a classroom, no matter how talented the lecturer'. A strong commitment and a sense of responsibility associated with consequentiality of actions develop as students move from being a *community of enquirers* to a *community of social practice*. A student expressed it best: 'My approach to the internship was different [from that] to other university-related projects I have done, in that I work hard because it is people's lives that are at stake, more so than my grades'. Throughout the term, students had opportunities to discuss and reflect upon their projects as a group. Students presented their interim and final project reports in class before formally submitting them to the CSOs. The events facilitated mutual support and exchange of ideas related to their respective projects. Students developed a diagram to illustrate the three phases of intense feelings of satisfaction and frustration related to transformation in learning (see Figure 4).

First, after having decided on their projects, students felt intense excitement and an optimistic feeling that they could accomplish almost anything. Miller (1997:19) described this as a 'sense of the power of people to make a difference in the world'. The students were confident of knowing *that*. Second, panic ensued with the realisation that civil-society institutions, despite their nobler objectives, suffer from human shortcomings: employees are overworked and chronically plagued by resource constraints. At this point, students realised their own limitations; they adjusted their expectations and revised their projects to a more modest scale that was within their capacity and achievable in the timeframe of one semester. This maturation in the student through the process of learning-by-doing is also borne out in another study (Rockquemore and Schaffer 2000).



**Figure 4:** States in the dynamic process of transformation from *knowing that* to *learning how*

This type of learning contributes to maturation in understanding the complexity of the world. The feeling of panic arose out of expectation and desire to accomplish and the recognition of limitations in terms of the dimensions of what one does not know. This dissonance is the basis of transformation, because the academic speech, knowing *that*, meets the reality of the mundane world, knowing *how*. Panic was a necessary part of the process of genuine engagement in learning *how*, which is context-dependent, and as a result students came to terms with their own strengths and weaknesses. Given a realisation of their limitations and adaptation to the context that accompanies the process of learning *how*, students became more self-confident about their knowledge. This led to a strong sense of accomplishment and self-worth, accompanied by a feeling of humility. As a student explained, ‘What I have learned from this portion is absolutely vital to the field we will be going into, and uncomfortable or not, I would not have traded this experience for anything’. Students felt a sense of purpose supported by the knowledge that their work will be read not just by their professor, but by others, and will be useful to a civil-society institution.

#### *Phronesis engendering responsibility*

The last reflection question gauged the ethical premise of *phronesis*. A student explained: ‘I feel more about this concept now than I did at the beginning. Now I feel that I have a lot more responsibility to myself and to others when I step out into the “real world”. On the bright side, although I feel a lot more pressure to perform, I also feel a lot more prepared to go out into the world.’ It is insufficient to approach learning solely from the instrumental perspective of benefits to students, just as it is limiting to justify development activities solely in terms of debt owed to society. Benefits of knowledge exist in tandem with responsibilities. As one student put it, ‘It is an ethical position that most development studies students probably held in the first place, but it is important to be told as much. It made us squirm. We felt the pressure like we had never felt it before.’ Another student described how awareness of responsibility had the effect of focusing both concentration and effort: ‘It has become a mantra that has stuck with me throughout this hectic semester —something that I think we all have believed in, but had not articulated so directly before. It is a common bond that connects us. The expectations of this course challenged me in many positive ways, and there was always a sense of perspective to keep me grounded.’

## Conclusion

By giving voice to student reflection, we are able to glimpse the experience of learning *how*. Student responses indicated that *phronesis* is ultimately about linking the education of students and the consequences of that learning for communities and society. It is fundamentally about the consequences of action. However, experiential learning, in itself, is not sufficient. First, there has to be a base of knowledge (knowing *that*). Second, student identity needs to be re-oriented. In order for development practice to be a transformative experience, students must engage effectively in learning *how*: they must see themselves as citizen–scholars. Finally, this process, in which knowledge generation is grounded not only in context, but also in the ethical fabric of *phronesis*, results in maturation in the student.

Furthermore, the students' reflections directly inform the preparation and development of future curricula for development studies and the nature of partnerships with civil-society institutions. A key message from the findings is that a course with the objectives of critical discourse and practice of development may require two semesters to achieve its full potential in developing engaged scholars.

The concept of *phronesis* provides a compelling pedagogical framework to illustrate the process, as well as the objectives, of development studies, in which civic engagement is both a means and an end. Learning is not only driven by an expectation of excellence in teaching; it is also compelled by a commitment to excellence in the applied research that informs that teaching. Ultimately, excellence is achieved through application of learning. The transformation of students from a *community of enquirers* to a *community of social practice* is not just an intellectual transformation from knowing *that* to learning *how*, but a heightened ethical awareness of consequentiality, of the link between freedom and responsibility. This type of learning may not achieve knowing *how* in the sense of the 'development expert', but it articulates a process for students who aspire to excellence in professional engagement and civil life.

This article does not explicitly discuss the role of 'practical wisdom' from the perspective of people in the civil-society institutions where the students worked, or how this approach can help busy practitioners to continue their learning. However, these aspects are all important to understanding development in practice and are worthy subjects for future applied research.

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## Notes

1. While this aim is discussed in the context of development studies, I would argue that it applies equally to university disciplines such as biological or social sciences, whose students engage in applied research and outreach activities.
2. I deal with the notion of *phronesis* in greater depth in a work entitled *Biocultural Diversity and Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Human Ecology in the Arctic*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press (2009).
3. While students have a choice in the programme of study that they undertake, course demands upon students must be weighed against their subsistence needs.

4. It is noteworthy that the cognitive stages of learning such as *shock*, *normalisation*, and *engagement* described by Rockquemore and Schaffer (2000) are not applicable to these Canadian students. Their understanding of service was already more sophisticated because of their interest in development studies, their experiences of voluntary work, and their diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

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