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## Transferring Social Justice Initiatives into Lasallian Schools

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*This article describes a research project that examined the impact of a Lasallian mission formation program on program participants and their institutions. The study found that the program had a powerful impact on the participants personally, and 71% became newly involved or recommitted to social justice initiatives upon returning from the program. Two factors, however, significantly predicted the participants' level of transfer of learning into action: the availability of social support at their home institution and the applicability of their learning to their work. The article concludes with recommendations to help institutional leaders even more intentionally support participants to bring the lessons learned from mission formation programs back to their institutions.*

As with many religious orders, the De La Salle Christian Brothers are facing dwindling numbers of Brothers while the need for their work—educating the impoverished—is increasing. To address this challenge, the order is actively partnering with lay associates to carry forward the Lasallian (Christian Brother) tradition, which is a call “by God to the educational service of the poor.” The Brothers state:

We are aware that our educational service of the poor cannot presume to solve all the problems of poverty in the world, but only specifically those which are related to education. As a group we follow the path which leads to the poor, acknowledging that God calls us to bring creative and generous responses to the world of the poor today, through fidelity to our founding charism. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2008, *The Educational Service of the Poor*, ¶ 2)

In 2000, the Superior-General identified an approach to help lay associates fully understand and embrace the call to educate the poor. “We need to welcome enthusiastically those who wish to become Lasallian associates and help them create new and original ways of living the Lasallian charism”

(Botana, 2008, p. 1). He further suggested that Brothers and lay associates alike need to “listen to, meditate upon, tell, and celebrate our founding story, the story of how we came to be and how we began to experience and perceive ourselves as original, different, and distinct” (p. 1).

In the U.S./Toronto Regional Conference of Christian Brothers, numerous mission formation programs are offered to help Brothers and lay associates identify with the Lasallian charism. One such program, the Lasallian Social Justice Institute (LSJI), was created to “ground Lasallians experimentally, practically, and spiritually in the Gospel call to attend to the needs of those on the margins of society, in the Church’s option for the poor and in Lasallian association for the educational service of the poor” (De La Salle Institute of Education, n.d., p. 6). Regan and Sirois (2004) contend that the focus on social justice in Lasallian schools is an extension of the Christian Brother mission. They suggest that “education for justice—both works of mercy in service of the poor and social action leading to long term change—are two expressions of [the Lasallian] ministry” (p. 14).

Though there are different opinions about how to teach for social justice, certain themes have emerged, standing the test of time. For example, teaching for social justice places an emphasis on: fostering critical thinking so students can see the social, political, and economic contradictions of their time (Friere, 1970; Shor, 1992; Swanger, 2002); teaching both for intellectual understanding and for personal transformation (Elias, 2005; Reed & Black, 2006); encouraging students to become agents for social and political change (Brown, 2006; Friere, 1970; Horton, 1998; Horton & Freire, 1990; Shor, 1992); facilitating a reexamination of assumptions and beliefs (Swanger, 2002; Rodgers, 2006); and empowering the powerless and disenfranchised (Freire, 1970; Horton, 1998).

In keeping with these emphases, the LSJI offers participants an opportunity to develop relationships with persons living in poverty, a place to examine the Church teachings on poverty, justice, and peace, and a community of participants with whom to integrate their experiences and explore their individual paths (Christian Brothers Conference, 2007). Begun in 2004, there are now three sites where staff and instructors working in Christian Brother (or Lasallian) schools and universities can attend the LSJI:

- El Paso/Juarez, dealing with global economic justice;
- Chicago, focusing on violence and social peacemaking; and
- San Francisco, emphasizing homelessness and human dignity.

Though each site has a different focus and slightly different goals, the program has identified its main goals in the following way:

- To examine theological, sociological, and Lasallian insights into poverty, justice, and peace in order to recognize more fully the scope of the struggle for human dignity.
- To provide a face-to-face encounter with persons in poverty.
- To create opportunities that will allow for a change of head and heart by examining societal and global trends in light of our experience and the Gospel.
- To examine and understand the rights of children and how these rights have direct bearing on our Lasallian vocation.
- To provide participants with tools to create and sustain programs of social justice in Lasallian ministries.

### **Purpose of the Research**

While an evaluation is collected after each program to assess the participants' reaction to the LSJI experience, to date, there has been no comprehensive assessment. The initial purpose of this research was to understand the impact the LSJI has had on the program participants and on their institutions. More specifically, the researchers explored (a) how well the participants achieved the learning outcomes for the training; (b) in what ways they improved their work performance, given their new knowledge; and (c) what the recognizable results in the organization were, given the changes in individual performance (Holton, 1996). Though institutional training programs are different in purpose and format from mission formation programs, this three-pronged approach provided a useful framework by which to examine the effectiveness of the LSJI.

A broader research focus was to identify the factors that enabled the participants to transfer their learning into their work environments. Extensive research exists examining the factors that contribute to supervised workers, primarily within corporate settings, transferring their knowledge and skills into their work. These factors generally fall into three categories: the trainee's motivation to transfer the learning; the training design itself, which promotes this transfer; and the organizational climate that supports (or not) the transfer of learning (Holton, 1996). There has been less research conducted with professional staff members who have great leeway in deciding when and if they will apply new learning into their work environment (Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, & Ford, 2004), and no research was found dealing with the transfer of learning from mission formation programs. The researchers hoped to build on

the nascent work that exists regarding the transfer of learning for professional workers, especially as it relates to mission-related initiatives.

The research was guided by four questions:

- To what extent does the LSJI accomplish its stated goals?
- How were the participants personally affected by their participation in the LSJI?
- What actions did the participants take as a result of their participation in the LSJI?
- What factors contributed to their transfer of learning back to their workplace?

### **Transfer of Learning**

Human resource development professionals are increasingly being held accountable for demonstrating the worth of their organization's investment in training. It has been estimated that only 10-15% of learned skills from staff training programs are transferred back to the work environment, thus raising serious concerns about the effectiveness of training and other educational programs (Baldwin & Ford, 1988 as cited in Holton, Bates, & Ruano, 2000; Sevilla & Wells, 1998). Additionally, there is a growing consensus that training is meaningless if it does not result in improved performance that is sustained over time (Yamhill & McLean, 2001). The area of research that examines the conditions that most likely contribute to improved performance is known as transfer of learning, which is the "application, generalizability, and maintenance of new knowledge and skills" (Holton et al., 2000, p. 334).

Within the literature on transfer of learning, there is some agreement about the contributing factors enabling trainees to transfer new learning back to their work. For instance, there is widespread recognition that without support and follow-up, it is unlikely that trainees will transfer their learning back to work. "Left to chance, the likelihood that significant transfer will occur from most learning initiatives is truly very small" (Holton & Baldwin, 2003, p. 6). On the positive side, however, transfer of learning is more likely to happen when there is a culture of expectation regarding transfer and a culture that supports change and innovation (Baldwin, Magjuka, & Loher, 1991 as cited in Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). As common sense would dictate, trainees are more likely to transfer new learning if they can apply it, if it helps them solve a problem or develop a skill, or if it is related to their professional or personal goals (Yelon et al., 2004). Many authors recommend that participants identify an action plan for follow-up once they

return to work and be held accountable for their action plans (Longnecker, 2004; Naquin & Baldwin, 2003; Sevilla & Wells, 1998).

Numerous authors conclude that peer support such as peer coaching, a buddy system, or action research is an effective way to foster transfer of learning (Proehl, 2004; Seyler, Holton, Bates, Burnett, & Carvalho, 1998; Wlodkowski, 2003). Several authors, though using different language, maintain that the training design itself can foster transfer and that the design should be different when training for simple skill development versus principle-based training (Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Laker, 1990). And finally, several authors indicated that emphasis should be placed on the pre-training environment so the right participants are enrolled in the programs, and the groundwork is laid for subsequent transfer of learning (Baldwin & Holton, 2003; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997).

### **Program Overview**

In each LSJI program, 25 to 35 faculty, administrators, and staff members from Lasallian schools and universities throughout the United States spend a week together to examine a particular social issue. Prior to their arrival, they receive a reader with extensive articles related to their issue and to the founding of the De La Salle Christian Brothers. During the first half of the week, participants have a direct experience with the individuals who are living in poverty, for example, at the U.S./Mexico border or in an impoverished urban area. The LSJI participants live in the communities they are studying, participate in community activities, talk with residents, and hear speakers who live and work in the area. By design, participants are engaged in new experiences that often evoke feelings of anger, outrage, disappointment, and heartbreak. As Kotter and Cohen noted (2002 as cited in Brown, 2006), “People rarely change through a rational process of analyze-think-change” (p. 732); they are more likely to change when they undergo a *see-feel-change* sequence. For most, the experience is quite powerful emotionally as described by one of the LSJI participants: “I was transformed by the immersion experience in that I became more aware of my own contributions to issues of poverty and my responsibility to reflect on those contributions and act to change myself and the society in which I live.”

During the second part of the week, participants live in a retreat setting, reflecting on their personal experience while learning from experts who discuss the systemic roots underlying poverty, violence, or homelessness. Additionally, the founding story is shared to help participants gain insights into Lasallian spirituality and its connection to serving the poor. At the completion of the week, participants identify ways in which they will both personally and professionally integrate their learning into their everyday lives.

## **Method**

The primary research methodology employed in this study was the distribution and analysis of an anonymous questionnaire. To develop the questionnaire, a sample of LSJI graduates and organizational leaders were interviewed, LSJI documents were reviewed, and an extensive literature review on the transfer of learning was conducted. The Lasallian leader interviews were critical for developing the survey questions regarding participant actions taken since the LSJI; the leaders described the activities they *hoped* the graduates would undertake upon their return to work.

Using the information from the various sources, a draft survey was developed and critiqued by organizational leaders. It was then revised and pilot tested with a sample of LSJI graduates. Based on the graduates' feedback, it was again revised and finalized with 42 Likert-scaled questions, four open-ended questions, and seven demographic questions. The survey itself was designed to answer each of the four research questions. As the graduates were dispersed throughout the United States, a web-based survey was used to poll the El Paso and Chicago graduates,<sup>1</sup> and all communication with the respondents was handled through e-mail.

### ***Demographic Information***

Eighty-three out of 119 graduates (70%) responded to the survey. This is an impressive response rate given that some participants were enrolled in the program 3 years ago. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were from the El Paso LSJI while 33% were from Chicago. Eighty-seven percent identified themselves as White/Caucasian; 7% as Black/African American; 5% as Hispanic/Latina/Latino; and 1% as Asian/Asian American. The average participant was 45 years of age, ranging from 24 to 77 years, and the average years of employment at a Lasallian school was 11.5. Fifty-four percent of the participants had attended one or more mission formation programs. The majority worked in Lasallian high schools, accounting for 82% of the total.

### ***Data Analysis***

Several steps were involved in analyzing the survey data. Once we analyzed each of the 42 items descriptively, we conducted a factor analysis on the transfer of learning items for data reduction purposes. The maximum likelihood extraction method and Varimax rotation were employed for the factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues greater than one were retained, which

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<sup>1</sup> The San Francisco LSJI had only been held for one year and deemed too new for a comprehensive evaluation.

yielded a four-factor solution explaining 66% of the total variance. Finally, in an attempt to investigate the predictors of participants' level of action taken upon returning to their workplace, a correlation analysis was conducted among selected demographic variables, transfer of learning factors, and the level of action taken variable. Variables that correlated significantly with the action taken variable were then submitted to a multiple regression analysis. An alpha level of 0.05 was employed for all statistical tests.

## Results

### *Achievement of Stated Outcomes*

The respondents indicated that the LSJI outcomes were being achieved (see Table 1). Additionally, 87% of the participants indicated that they had a personal transformation at the LSJI and when asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their experience, the response was extremely positive. On a scale from 1 as *not satisfied* to 5 as *extremely satisfied*, the average score was 4.63.

Table 1

#### *Stated Outcomes*

Question	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree
<b>The LSJI that I attended:</b>		
1. Examined the theological insights into poverty, justice, and/or peace.	2%	98%
2. Examined the Lasallian insights into poverty, justice, and/or peace.		100%
3. Examined the sociological insights into poverty, justice, and/or peace.	3%	97%
4. Provided a face-to-face encounter with persons in poverty.	1%	99%
5. Created opportunities that allowed you to change your "head and heart."	6%	94%
6. Examined the rights of children and their direct bearing on your Lasallian vocation.	19%	81%
7. Provided you with tools to create and sustain programs of social justice.	15%	85%

The participants wrote numerous comments to reinforce their quantitative responses. For example, one individual discussed his reactions when he noticed a beautiful, modern University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) building while driving along the Mexican border:



I felt like someone had just punched me in the stomach. I suddenly realized what it must be like to live in such squalor, quite literally in the shadow of such luxury. I could have picked up a rock and hit the UTEP building. But, for the people in Mexico, it might as well have been half a world away. This other world was so close, and so much nicer, yet completely cut off from them. I suddenly realized what that must do to a person's mind and spirit. This sort of thing changed the way that I look at the immigration issue...this is what makes a program like LSJI so powerful.

Another participant, echoing the sentiments of others who lamented their own lack of follow-up, wrote:

Knowing what to do about the problems we studied in El Paso/Juarez is something else entirely. I feel that I was stunned by what I saw but still unsure how to affect reform. By the time I returned from LSJI we had about two weeks to the start of school. Once school started, the summer's lessons were put on a shelf in favor of attending to the pressing needs of any given school day.

### ***Personal Impact on Participants***

Participants resoundingly indicated that they were personally and professionally changed by their experience in the LSJI, reporting that they were more knowledgeable about the Lasallian tradition and more committed to social justice work (see Table 2).

The LSJI works well with new staff and with those who have attended many mission formation programs previously. For example, one individual wrote: "The LSJI, being my first formation experience, gave me a broader perspective on the Lasallian world. I left there feeling a part of something larger than simply my school." Another more seasoned Lasallian wrote:

I have always lived and worked in the Bronx; I have dedicated my life to the issues and concerns of the Bronx—the poorest urban county in the U.S. LSJI helped me become ready and able to take Manhattan [University] students on two immersion trips to Duran, Ecuador to see/experience poverty in the 3rd world.

Table 2

*Personal Responses to LSJI*

Questions	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree
<b>After attending the LSJI:</b>		
1. I am <i>more</i> knowledgeable about the Lasallian mission.	5%	95%
2. I feel <i>more</i> committed to the Lasallian mission.	6%	94%
3. I feel <i>more</i> dedicated to promoting social change at work and my life.	5%	95%
4. I am <i>more</i> sensitive to issues of poverty and social injustices.	5%	95%
5. I am <i>more</i> reflective about my life style practices, including how I contribute to social injustice.	7%	93%
6. I am <i>more</i> open to examining my beliefs and assumptions about poverty, justice, and/or peace.	6%	94%
7. I was reenergized in my work at my institution.	12%	88%

*Note.* In the survey, “more” was italicized as written in Tables 2 and 3.

***Actions Taken by Participants***

Often participants in social justice initiatives, though personally moved by such experiences as the LSJI, have not always acted on their commitment and dedication to social justice. Table 3 displays the range of activities that participants have taken since returning from the LSJI, indicating that these graduates have indeed acted on their commitment. Based on mean scores, the questions have been listed from the greatest to the least application of a given activity.

Additionally, 71% of the participants indicated that they became newly involved or recommitted to social justice initiatives since returning from the LSJI. The activities range from being an advisor to a JustPeace club, involving students in community-based research projects, organizing a Homeless Night Out for students, buying free trade products, sponsoring a child in Mexico, integrating social justice topics in their teaching, serving as a speaker on peace and justice issues, and taking students on immersion programs into such diverse places as Tijuana, Dominican Republic, Central America, and Kenya.

Table 3

*Actions Taken*

Question	None to Little	Some	Large to Great
<b>Since returning from the LSJI, to what extent have you:</b>			
1. Advocated <i>more</i> for students of color or other students who have not traditionally been served well in school?	22%	28%	50%
2. Taken steps to learn <i>more</i> about the population you studied?	16%	45%	39%
3. Become a <i>more</i> active change agent for social change?	22%	40%	38%
4. Been involved in fund-raising/donated money for social justice?	29%	28%	43%
5. Shared my experience with staff or faculty?	33%	21%	45%
6. Expanded or adapted my teaching to include material from LSJI?	28%	43%	28%
7. Altered my teaching to make it more experiential?	34%	33%	33%
8. Become newly involved in a social justice school activity or service group?	40%	25%	36%
9. Stayed in contact with LSJI participants, <i>outside</i> of my school?	51%	32%	16%
10. Initiated a research project examining some aspect of poverty or social justice?	61%	18%	20%

***Factors Contributing to Transfer of Learning***

Table 4 indicates that the systems within the home institutions for supporting the returning participants are not consistently strong. For example, 70% of the participants indicated that their bosses did not follow up with them upon returning from the LSJI. Fifty-four percent received no personal recognition for transferring their learning to work; 50% noted that there is not a shared culture at their institution that participants can apply their LSJI experience. On the positive side, a majority indicated that they were able to use the learning from the LSJI at their work (92%), understand how they can embrace the Lasallian mission in their job (90%), and perform their job better given the learning from the LSJI (85%). Thus, the external systems for supporting transfer of learning were quite weak at the Lasallian schools while the graduate’s ability to use their knowledge from their LSJI in their work was high.

Table 4

*Transfer of Learning*

Question	Disagree	Agree
1. My boss followed up with me upon my return.	70%	30%
2. I've received recognition for applying learning from the LSJI.	54%	46%
3. There are shared expectations at work that I should apply my learning.	50%	50%
4. There are people at my school to help me integrate my learning.	45%	55%
5. Administrators made it clear that I should apply my learning at work.	44%	56%
6. My workload allows me time to use what I learned.	43%	57%
7. I have connected with LSJI grads at my school.	43%	57%
8. I was accepted after a careful review of my qualifications.	27%	73%
9. Before attending, I knew how program fit my job.	32%	68%
10. Before attending, I was oriented about what to expect at LSJI.	12%	88%
11. LSJI learning helps me perform my job better.	15%	85%
12. I understand how I can embrace the mission in my job.	10%	90%
13. I am able to use my learning in my job.	8%	92%

Unlike the other open-ended responses, many comments in this section were critical, especially regarding the level of support they received at their home institutions, as noted by the three statements below:

We didn't even have the opportunity to share our experience with our institution. No one has asked me about how I applied, or if I ever applied any knowledge gained. It is implied by virtue of attending, but not stated or spoken that we will apply our experience.

There is a wide range of opinions in my workplace about the meaning of the Lasallian project, and especially, whether social justice activism in areas such as immigration reform is central, peripheral, or irrelevant. . .when one broaches the subject of correcting the inequities in society that keep some people in a permanent underclass, people . . .get uncomfortable.

At my school or college, there are persons available to help me integrate my learning into my work, however, those people are often undermined by the administration and so the integration is undervalued, and unnoticed.

To examine the data further, a factor analysis was conducted with the transfer of learning variables to identify categories underlying the construct (see Table 5). Four factors emerged and were identified by the authors as the following: (a) institutional expectations and support; (b) social support; (c) application of learning to the participant's job; and (d) availability of resources. Then, a correlation and *t* test analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which these transfer of learning factors, gender, extent of personal transformation, LSJI site, and level of satisfaction with LSJI were associated with participants' transfer of learning into action. All factors and variables were significantly related to transfer of learning with the exception of gender and LSJI site, suggesting that participants who reported greater extent of personal transformation, greater satisfaction with the program, higher levels of institutional expectations and support, more social support, greater application of learning to the job, and more available resources were likely to transfer learning into action. Men and women were similarly involved in taking action at their workplace.

When regression analyses were run to examine the data more, it was found that two factors, however, significantly predicted the participants' level of transfer of their learning into action over and above the effects of all other predictors (see Table 6). They were the availability of social support and the applicability of learning to their work. In other words, the following items<sup>2</sup> made the most important contribution to participants transferring their learning into action at their home institutions:

The learning from the LSJI helped the participants perform their work more effectively.

They had someone to help them integrate their learning.

The learning helped them perform their jobs better.

They received recognition for transferring their learning.

They connected with other LSJI graduates at their school.

They understood how to embrace the Lasallian mission into their job.

They understood how the LSJI fit their job-related development.

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2 The items listed comprise the two significant factors.

Table 5

*Factor Analysis of Transfer of Learning Items*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
<b>Factor 1: Institutional Expectations and Support</b>				
I was accepted after a careful review of my qualifications.	.64			
Administrators made it clear that I should apply my learning.	.90			
There are shared expectations that participants should apply their learning.	.75			
My boss followed up to see if I integrated my learning.	.62			
<b>Factor 2: Social Support</b>				
I have a clear understanding of how I can embrace the Lasallian mission in my job.		.56		
I've received recognition for applying my learning to my job.		.46		
I have connected with grads within my institution to discuss our common experience.		.67		
There are persons available to help me integrate my learning.		.73		
<b>Factor 3: Application of Learning to Job</b>				
Before attending, I had a good idea of how the program fit my job-related development.			.35	
I am able to use the learning from the LSJI in my job.			.80	
The learning from the LSJI has helped me perform my job better.			.77	
<b>Factor 4: Availability of Resources</b>				
I was oriented about what to expect before I attended the LSJI.				.53
My workload allows me the time to apply the new things I've learned.				.54
The activities and exercises the trainers used helped me know how to apply my learning to my job.				.73
Eigenvalue	4.95	2.17	1.67	1.17
Cronbach's alpha	.84	.77	.65	.70
Percent (%) of variance explained	33.0	14.5	11.1	7.8

*Note.* Extraction method: Maximum likelihood with Varimax rotation; Eigenvalues greater than 1 retained.

The level of satisfaction with the program and extent of personal transformation experienced was so high for all participants that these variables did not significantly predict who would or would not become actively involved in social justice initiatives at their school sites.

Table 6

*Regression Analysis Results*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Institutional expectations and support	.148	.138	.124
Social support	.397	.161	.308*
Application of learning to job	.588	.175	.379**
Availability of resources	-.152	.187	-.108
Extent of personal transformation	.176	.129	.165
Satisfaction with LSJI	-.142	.149	-.124

Note:  $F(6,70) = 6.350$   $R^2 = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Discussion

The level of satisfaction and the degree to which the LSJI outcomes have been achieved are quite remarkable. It is extremely challenging to have 94–100% of participants indicate that the course learning objectives were achieved; and that was the case with five of the seven learning outcomes that were assessed in this study. Additionally, 87% of the participants indicated that they had a personal transformation at the LSJI, and the overall satisfaction level was 4.63 out of a maximum of 5.

Similarly, the respondents specified that their personal and professional lives were dramatically influenced by the LSJI. Some 93–95% of the participants reported that they are now *more* knowledgeable about the Lasallian mission, *more* committed to the mission, *more* dedicated to promoting social change, *more* sensitive to issues of poverty and social injustice, *more* reflective about their own life style practices, and *more* open to examining their own assumptions about poverty, justice, and/or peace than before the LSJI. Additionally, 88% indicated that they were reenergized in their work at their institutions after attending the LSJI.

The designers and current facilitators for the LSJI programs can rest assured that they have implemented a powerful program that meets the intended learning outcomes. They have successfully used the principles advocated by social justice educators of teaching both for intellectual understanding and for personal transformation; of facilitating a reexamination of assumptions and beliefs; and of encouraging participants to become agents for social and political change (Brown, 2006; Freire, 1970; Elias, 2005; Horton, 1998; Horton & Freire, 1990; Shor, 1992; Swanger, 2002).

Regarding the actions taken since attending the LSJI, 71% of the participants reported that they had begun a new or recommitted to an existing social justice project. When asked about specific actions taken (i.e., those actions that the organizational leaders hoped they would undertake), the percentages were considerably smaller. When the factors that are often identified as facilitating the transfer of learning are examined, there are clues suggesting why many participants “haven’t done as much as [they] would have liked...especially given how inspired [they] felt at the time.”

These data suggest that the LSJI participants were most likely to transfer their learning when they could easily apply their experience to their jobs, and it helped them solve a problem or develop a skill. Additionally, they were positively influenced by peer and social support and by understanding how the LSJI related to their work and professional development. Finally, they were more likely to transfer their learning when they knew how to embrace the Lasallian mission in their work. The data support the contention that the dynamics of transfer for professionals such as educators, doctors, and nurses are different from those of supervised or hourly workers (Yelon et al., 2004). Specifically, professional workers are primarily influenced by how relevant and applicable the new learning is to their work and their own personal goals while supervised employees are greatly swayed by supervisor support and follow-up (Holton & Baldwin, 2003).

Ironically, while institutional expectation/support and availability of resources did not motivate employees to transfer their learning in this study, they appear to lead to employee dissatisfaction with organizational leaders. For example, in the written responses in the survey and during the initial interviews, participants were quite disappointed when their bosses, for example, did not ask them about their LSJI experiences or when administrators did not provide leadership for transferring learning back to the work site. Thus, it seems prudent to tap into those factors that motivate participants to transfer their learning and to minimize situations that lead to employee dissatisfaction with institutional leaders.

### **Recommendations**

It is conceivable that graduates from the LSJI could have even more consistently embraced social justice initiatives if their organizations had provided greater opportunities and support upon their return from the powerful experience. The following recommendations are offered for consideration by any organizational leaders who have employees attending off-site, mission-related programs:



1. Participants in educational programs will likely transfer new learning if it is relevant, meaningful, and applicable to their work. During the selection and orientation process, program recruiters can help participants anticipate how they will integrate the experience. For example, participants could identify in writing what their goals are for attending the mission formation program and how they can embrace the mission-related learning in their job.
2. The literature informs us that graduates generally will not transfer their learning unless there is a system to support the transfer. Thus, it is important for institutional leaders to identify programs, processes, and persons to provide this support. For example, many graduates do not have the leadership skills or motivation to initiate new projects or initiatives. Thus it would be helpful if organizational leaders identified school-wide mission-related projects so graduates could take a role in the projects without having to create an entire project themselves.
3. Upon returning from an off-site experience, participants should be welcomed back by an immediate supervisor (or other individual such as a campus minister) to help them reflect on and integrate their learning at their home institution. Additionally, it is helpful for participants to prepare an action plan specifically to identify what actions they will take to apply their learning. To make this a meaningful activity, steps should be taken by a designated institutional representative to follow up on their action plans.
4. Organizations can successfully use some forms of collegial support with the graduates—buddy systems, action research groups, and/or group meetings—where they share their experiences, goals, and actions taken with one another. Regular, though infrequent, meetings could be held throughout the year to help create a community of graduates within the institution.
5. As noted in the literature, the training design for *far transfer* where the focus is on principles and values needs to be different from *near transfer*, where the focus is on specific skills (Laker, 1990). To facilitate far transfer, such as in mission formation programs, the training designers themselves need to help participants reflect on their learning and identify ways to transfer their learning *while* they are in the training sessions.
6. Organizational leaders can create a culture of expectation that mission formation participants will make a contribution back to the institution. Though individuals will often transfer their experience on their own, it is likely that if organizational leaders make it more explicit about their expectations, they can capture the collective energy and commitment of returning participants. However, the role that institutional leaders play in facilitating transfer of learning requires more exploration in order to verify this supposition.

## Conclusion

The LSJI is an example of a well-developed and implemented mission formation program that makes a significant difference in the lives of the participants. Even so, the challenges of transferring such a powerful experience back into the participants' personal and professional lives are great. To help participants more easily channel the commitment and zeal they felt at their program's closure, institutions need more intentionally to select, orient, welcome back, recognize, utilize their energy, and follow up with graduates so they will bring the lessons learned from such powerful experiences back to their institutions.

Future research is needed to determine which factors help professional participants transfer mission-related learning back to the work site. For example, does the culture of the educational institution influence the participation level and subsequent transfer of learning back to the institution? Does the institutional leaders' commitment to the mission make a difference in how readily participants transfer their learning to the worksite? In this study, the two factors that were most associated with positive transfer were the applicability of the learning to work and the level of social support available for transfer of learning. By building on the findings of this study while examining additional research questions as described above, it is possible to develop new transfer of learning models for nontraditional educational programs.

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