

Review of: "Public Health Student Internship: An Opportunity to Explore System, Self, and Society"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This essay explores the very important topic of the extent to which public health, as a field, is organized around core practices and principles that reinforce social determinants of poor health. A strength of the article is that it focuses specifically on how education of public health professionals feeds into the dominant values and assumptions of public health practice.

However, the article looks at this mainly from a theoretical perspective, and does not apply the theoretical environment to the experiences of specific interns. As such, the essay offers a strong start to a literature review / introduction, but does not provide any structured investigation or analysis. It never mentions the interns or the organization or community that is discussed in the abstract.

I would like to see this article reconstructed as a case study of specific theoretical concepts in practice. Put simply: If public health education tends to overemphasize biomedical and systems thinking, how would an immersive community internship potentially address that problem? Did that happen in this case? What are some examples? How can we broaden those examples back out to tie them to theory and suggestions for best practice in public health education?

As it stands, the article assumes that simply immersing students in "a community" will help to dismantle harmful assumptions and hierarchies by way of empathy development. But in reality, such assumptions and hierarchies are at least as likely to color the immersion as they are to be meaningfully challenged, and to strengthen the power dynamics at play. That is the nature of socialization and of culturally dominant norms. Every voluntourism program in the world can demonstrate this.

What KIND of immersion will shift the massive inertia of history, classism, colonialism, racism, professionalism, etc. in the education of a public health professional? How will this happen? What are the mechanisms that will bring that shift? Did these students experience those changes? Such questions are incredibly valuable to the field. I encourage the authors to further pursue them.