Reading Packet for:

**Experiential and Service Learning: The Pedagogy of Community Engagement**

Rev. Dr. Joe Blosser  
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Contents:


[Optional]


Creating a service learning course raises substantive pedagogical challenges and dilemmas. This chapter discusses the counternormative nature of academic service learning and presents a pedagogical model to resolve these tensions.

Academic Service Learning: A Counternormative Pedagogy

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Faculty interest in academic service learning has exploded over the last few years. Some see service learning as a way to prepare students for active citizenship. Others perceive it as a means to involve universities in socially responsible action. Still others find in it a panacea for the perceived shortcomings of the information-dissemination model that prevails in higher education.

These are solid reasons for becoming involved in academic service learning. But once the motivation for becoming involved has emerged, questions about implementation necessarily arise. Though the notion of adding community service to an academic course may not be difficult to conceptualize, the practice of integrating service and learning is anything but simple.

Contrary to some interpretations, academic service learning is not merely the addition of a community service option or requirement to an academic course. A clause on a syllabus that directs students to complete community service hours as a course requirement or in lieu of another course assignment does not constitute academic service learning. Rather than serving as a parallel or sidebar activity, the students’ community service experiences in academic service learning function as a critical learning complement to the academic goals of the course.

In other words, academic service learning is not about the addition of service to learning, but rather the integration of service with learning. In this contrasting synergistic model, the students’ community service experiences are compatible and integrated with the academic learning objectives of the course, in a manner similar to traditional course requirements. Here students’ observations and experiences in the community setting are as pivotal to the students’ academic learning as class lectures and library research. In this integrated
model, the service and the learning are reciprocally related; the service expe-
riences inform and transform the academic learning, and the academic learn-
ing informs and transforms the service experience (Honnet and Poulsen,
1989).

Integrating service with academic learning, however, catalyzes a com-
plexity to the teaching-learning process that is analogous to adding a newborn
to a family. Just as the newborn is not merely the addition of one more mem-
ber to the family, community service is not merely the addition of one more
requirement to a course. As the newborn qualitatively changes the norms and
relationships in the family constellation, so, too, community service qualita-
tively changes the norms and relationships in the teaching-learning process.

A Working Definition of Academic Service Learning

For the purposes of this volume, we are utilizing the working definition, “Aca-
demic service learning is a pedagogical model that intentionally integrates aca-
demic learning and relevant community service.” There are four key
components to this definition. First, academic service learning is a pedagogical
model; first and foremost it is a teaching methodology, more than a values
model, leadership development model, or a social responsibility model. Sec-
ond, there is an intentional effort made to utilize the community-based learn-
ing on behalf of academic learning, and to utilize academic learning to inform
the community service. This presupposes that academic service learning will
not happen unless a concerted effort is made to harvest community-based
learning and strategically bridge it with academic learning. Third, there is an
integration of the two kinds of learning, experiential and academic; they work
to strengthen one another. Finally, the community service experiences must be
relevant to the academic course of study (Howard, 1993). Serving in a soup
kitchen is relevant for a course on social issues but probably not for a course
on civil engineering. All four components are necessary in the practice of aca-
demic service learning.

Challenges

From this definition, it is apparent that academic service learning creates a host
of stimulating pedagogical challenges that are obviated in traditional pedagogy.
For example, how can we strengthen student capacity to extract meaning from
community experiences? How can we strengthen student capacity to utilize
community-based learning on behalf of academic learning? How can we bet-
ter enable students to apply their academic learning to their community ser-
vice? These are challenges that those who consider academic service learning
will face.

Many of the pedagogical challenges associated with academic service
learning result from its counternormative nature. Academic service learning
stands, in some significant ways, in contradistinction to traditional pedagogi-
al principles. For example, broadening the learning environment beyond the instructor’s purview is clearly contrary to standard pedagogical operating procedures. Involving students in experiential learning breaches traditional practice. Positioning students with the responsibility for discerning important from unimportant “data” in the community is contrary to traditional courses in which relevant knowledge is deciphered for the students by the instructor. The mix of traditional classroom-based theoretical learning and nontraditional community-based experiential learning clearly “raises the pedagogical bar.”

The Traditional Pedagogical Model

At the risk of generalization and simplification, let us review some of the salient features of the prevailing information-dissemination model in higher education. The oft-cited advantage of this model, customarily manifested in the lecture, is that it is efficient in transmitting volumes of academic information and theory to large numbers of students. Through years of elementary and secondary school rehearsal and then higher education reinforcement, classroom roles, relationships, and norms in the traditional model have been powerfully internalized by all parties; before entering the very first meeting of a class, faculty and students alike know that faculty are the knowledge experts and direct the learning activities in the course, and that students begin with knowledge deficits and follow the prescribed learning activities. In this “banking model” (Freire, 1970), faculty are active, depositing and periodically withdrawing intellectual capital from students who are for the most part passive. The course follows a predetermined structure, learning stimuli are uniform for all students, and each class and each assignment follow a familiar routine. Even in courses in which there is a departure from the standard lecture, “discussion usually focuses on a pre-established set of inquiry questions or curricula” (Chesler, 1993, p. 31). In fact, control of the entire range of teaching and learning activity is within the faculty member’s knowledge and experience purview and ascribed and perceived jurisdiction.

Furthermore, in the traditional teaching-learning model, learning is individualistic and privatized; students generally learn by themselves and for themselves. When students do contribute in class discussions, often it is for grade-enhancing reasons rather than to advance their peers’ learning. Instructor-determined grades reflect individual achievement. The epistemology that undergirds traditional pedagogy is positivistic and in conflict with communal ways of learning (Palmer, 1990).

Incongruencies Between the Two Pedagogies

Academic service learning is incongruent with traditional pedagogy in a number of ways:

A conflict of goals. Service learning’s goal of advancing students’ sense of social responsibility or commitment to the broader good conflicts with the
individualistic, self-orientation of the traditional classroom (Howard, 1993). Perhaps the most important way that academic service learning is inconsistent with traditional pedagogy, and even other forms of experiential learning, is in its insistence on advancing students’ commitment to the greater good. “The competitive individualism of the classroom . . . reflects a pedagogy that stresses the individual as the prime agent of knowing” (Palmer, 1990, p. 111). In the traditional course, with its focus on the individual, an orientation toward others is necessarily discouraged. The dilemma here is that the nature of the traditional classroom encourages individual responsibility rather than social responsibility.

A conflict about valuable learning. In traditional courses, academic learning is valued, whereas in academic service learning, academic learning is valued along with community-based experiential learning. Academic learning is deductively oriented, whereas experiential learning is inductively oriented. The dilemma here is how these very different kinds and ways of learning not only can coexist but can even create a learning synergy for students.

A conflict about control. In traditional courses there is a high degree of structure and direction vis-à-vis learning; the faculty control what is important for students to learn. This contrasts with an invariably low degree of structure and direction vis-à-vis learning in the community (the exception may be professional practica, in which there is directed learning by a designated field placement supervisor). Therefore, in the community, students are more likely to be in charge of their learning. Even though they may be armed with a learning schema from the instructor, the dilemma is how to bring the level of learning structure and direction in the two learning contexts into greater congruence.

A conflict about active learning. A closely related issue is that student passivity contributes to the efficiency of the information-dissemination model, whereas in the community there is a premium on active learning. The high degree of structure and direction provided by the instructor in traditional pedagogy leads to a passive learning posture by students, but the low degree of structure and direction in communities in relation to learning requires that students assume an active learning posture. The dilemma here is how to bring the role of the learner in the classroom into greater congruence with the role of the learner in the community.

A conflict about contributions from students. The orientation toward efficient transmission of information in the traditional model precludes taking advantage of students’ learning in the community. Student contributions in traditional pedagogy are discouraged because they compromise the efficiency goal. The dilemma here is how to make student learning that is harvested in the community not only welcome but utilized in the classroom.

A conflict about objectivity. Whereas objectivity is valued in the traditional classroom, in academic service learning a subjective engagement, emanating from the philosophy of pragmatism, is also valued (Liu, 1995). The dilemma here is how to integrate subjective and objective ways of knowing.
A New Model: The Synergistic Classroom

To resolve these tensions, drastic measures are needed. Nothing less than a reconceptualization of the teaching-learning process will do. We need a pedagogical model that

- Encourages social responsibility
- Values and integrates both academic and experiential learning
- Accommodates both high and low levels of structure and direction
- Embraces the active, participatory student
- Welcomes both subjective and objective ways of knowing.

For many years I have struggled with these dilemmas in a sociology service learning course here at the University of Michigan. I have struggled in my attempts to prompt student participation, to find a balance between more structure and less structure, to integrate learning from the community with learning from academic readings, and to encourage social responsibility in the classroom.

Over time I have come to realize that to create a classroom that is consistent with the goals and values of service learning, it is absolutely necessary to deprogram or desocialize students and instructors away from traditional classroom roles, relationships, and norms, and then resocialize them around a new set of classroom behaviors. To accomplish the desocialization and resocialization processes requires that the instructor and the students travel together on a journey to remake the classroom. Figure 3.1 depicts this journey.

**Figure 3.1. Stages in Transforming the Classroom**
In this matrix, four prototypical stages are identified in moving from a traditional classroom to a synergistic classroom that meets the five criteria enumerated above. The first stage, identified as the conform stage, depicts the traditional classroom model in which the instructor (represented on the horizontal axis) is directive and the students (represented on the vertical axis) are passive. To initiate the transformation process, identified in the model as the second stage, renorm, the instructor must begin to carry out her or his role in an intentionally counternormative way. For example, the instructor may ask students what was important in their readings and in their service experiences since the last class, and use their contributions to frame the class discussion. Actions such as this will implicitly communicate to the students that it will not be business as usual.

In this second stage, however, the students, whose schooling has been effective in internalizing a passive, individualistic role in the classroom, resist these change efforts and continue to be primarily passive. This might be manifested in a low participation rate when the instructor seeks contributions from the students. But as the instructor continues to be consistent in her or his new interpretation of the teacher role, and as the students continue to receive the message that their active participation around both academic and community-based learning is encouraged, we arrive at stage 3 in which the students, in fact, become more active and begin to take greater responsibility for the learning in the classroom.

This storm stage, ironically, often becomes problematic for the instructor, who, also schooled for many years to perceive instructors as authorities and students as receptacles, questions the quality of learning under way. As a result, in this third stage the instructor regresses and retreats to a more directive posture. But over time, the instructor comes to realize that the students are genuinely learning, and returns to a more facilitative approach. As the students continue to assume an active role, the fourth and final stage, the perform stage—the synergistic classroom—is achieved, in which the consistency between the students’ and instructor’s respective new roles and ways of learning lead to enhanced teaching-learning performance.

Though this diagram illustrates a linear progression from a traditional classroom to a synergistic classroom, the actual movement from one stage to another is not so simple. In fact, faculty can expect a more nonlinear progression, characterized by fits and stops along the way.

**Recognizing the Synergistic Classroom**

Transforming a classroom from a traditional orientation to one that is consistent with the goals and opportunities associated with academic service learning is not easy. It takes an intentional campaign on the part of the instructor and lots of patience, because change will be far from immediate. If, however, the challenge is accepted and a commitment to experiment is made, how will one know when one has arrived at the synergistic stage?
For the most part, arrival will be self-evident to the faculty member. As Garry Hesser has written, “Every time faculty read students’ papers, journals, exams, or listen to the quality of discussion [emphasis added] in a seminar, they are responsible for discerning whether learning is taking place” (1995, p. 35). Faculty will know. The most obvious dynamic to change will be the role of the students. An observer in a synergistic classroom will note that the students are actively engaged in discussion, among themselves or with the instructor. Discussion comfortably embraces both the content of academic readings and observations and experiences from the students’ community placements. The instructor may be difficult to identify, though she or he might be seen facilitating the conversation to maximize the students’ efforts to integrate the community-based and academic learning, contributing her or his own knowledge and relevant experiences to the discussion, or managing the discussion so that there is equal attention paid to the objective and subjective ways that students come to know. We might even see that if the instructor left the room, the level of learning would not be diminished.

In this classroom, discussion about theory and discussion about experiences is embraced by all, and efforts to integrate the two are made by all parties. The lines of distinction between the student role and the instructor role become blurred, so that students are teachers and learners, and instructors are learners as well as teachers. The traditional classroom’s orientation toward individual student learning is replaced by a commitment to the learning of the collectivity. Questions and answers are perceived as equally important to the learning process, and ignorance, rather than to be avoided at all costs, is valued as a resource.

Once the synergistic classroom is achieved or at least approached, the new orientation to classroom teaching and learning can fan out to other components of the course. Faculty and students who have achieved the synergistic classroom will find that group academic projects, students reading each other’s term papers, and final exams that call for bridging academic and community learning are consistent with the classroom transformation.

The Cost of the Synergistic Classroom: Time Away from Task?

Inevitably, the question arises: Does this effort to transform the classroom take time away from academic tasks? After all, time is expended in moving through stages 2 and 3 of the model, and, as acknowledged above, time on community learning necessarily takes time away from attention to theoretical learning. How does an instructor committed to student learning about an academic body of knowledge reconcile this dilemma?

The issue at hand has to do with the answer to the question: What is the task at hand in an academic course? If it is to impart as much information as possible, then the information-dissemination model unequivocally receives top honors. But if the task, in addition to learning content, is to excite and motivate
students to learn during the course and after, to learn new ways of learning, and to develop a set of overall values in the field of study, then we know that the information-dissemination model is woefully lacking.

For example, one study found that while teachers are lecturing, students are not attending to what is being said 40 percent of the time (Pollio, 1984). Another study found that in the first ten minutes of lecture, students retain 70 percent of the information, but only 20 percent in the last ten minutes (McKeachie, 1986). Still another study found that four months after taking an introductory psychology course, students knew only 8 percent more than a control group who had never taken the course (Rickard, Rogers, Ellis, and Beidelman, 1988).

In contrast, we continually read faculty testimonials about the difference academic service learning has made in students’ drive to learn (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Hammond, 1994; Hesser, 1995; Hudson, 1996; Kendrick, 1996; Yelsma, 1994). In a study conducted at the University of Michigan, students in sections of a political science class who were involved in community service as part of the course received better grades and reported more enhanced learning than their counterparts who were involved in library research (Markus, Howard, and King, 1993). In addition, they reported a statistically significant difference relative to their library research counterparts when asked about “performing up to my potential in this course,” “developing a set of overall values in this field,” and “learning to apply principles from this course to new situations.”

A Formidable Challenge

As a relatively new and dilemma-filled pedagogy, academic service learning is not for the meek. Reformatting classroom norms, roles, and outcomes so that both academic and experiential learning can be joined requires a very deliberate effort around a rather formidable challenge. As a counternormative pedagogy, instructors who accept this challenge can expect initial resistance from students, periodic self-doubt about their own teaching accomplishments, and colleagues’ looking askance upon this methodology. But the dividends—renewed motivation for learning by students, enhanced academic learning for students, renewed excitement for teaching by instructors, and better preparation of students for their roles as lifelong citizens and learners—will more than compensate for the effort.

References


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Why Service Learning is Bad

Why Service-Learning Is Bad
John W. Eby
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Abstract

Service-learning has potential to transform teaching and learning in the academy and
to call a generation of students to develop social responsibility and an ethic of service.
Research on the learning side of the service-learning equation shows that students
develop social responsibility, reduce racism, develop leadership and gain personal and
social skills. There are however important questions which must be examined on the
service side of the equation. The demands a learning orientation places on service limits
its effectiveness and its ability to address community needs at a structural level. The
service students do is often ameliorative and the explanations of social issues gained
through service-learning are often individualistic. Through participation in service-
learning, students may develop truncated understandings of the nature of social problems
and of strategies for fundamental social change. This paper examines potential negative
aspects of service-learning and identifies an agenda for strengthening the service
provided through service-learning.

The service-learning movement is burgeoning. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of
colleges and universities in the United States have some kind of service-learning program with
more added every semester. The number of high schools, middle schools and even grade schools
with service-learning is increasing. Conferences on service-learning are well attended. Both the
quality and the quantity of research is increasing. Service-learning is widely praised by educators,
faculty, administrators, students, parents, politicians, and community service agencies as a great
hope for restoring relevance for the academy, as a strategy for creating a generation of students
with an ethic of service, and as the answer to community social problems. Different
representatives of the same groups also question service-learning because they claim that it does
not address real community problems, because it is not real learning and because it teaches
students inadequate understandings of service and social issues.

The service-learning movement is fueled by an uneasy sense that the academy is becoming
increasingly irrelevant to real issues of society and by the increasing popularity of volunteerism
in society. The President’s summit focused national attention on volunteerism. There are so
many follow up mini-summits that national figures must pick and choose which ones to attend
and video recordings are used to provide a token presence. Some businesses are freeing
employees to do volunteer work on company time. Community volunteer centers are adding
staff. It is not unrealistic to talk of an emerging service movement and not too optimistic to
expect a dramatic increase in the numbers of persons doing volunteer service and in the numbers
of agencies depending on volunteers to accomplish their work.
The excitement and euphoria of the service-learning movement, fueled by dramatic stories of the benefits of linking learning and service masks underlying troubling issues. The limitations of service done in the name of service-learning are often overlooked and possible harm done by to communities by short term volunteers is ignored. Conversations about negative aspects of service-learning do surface occasionally in the hallways of the academy and in the lounges of service-learning conferences. There is talk of McService, service bites, quick fix service, happy meal community service, or service in a box. Discussions of the limits service-learning have surfaced on the Internet. Community leaders and agency representatives concerned about fundamental community change raise significant questions when given opportunity.

Unfortunately these voices are often informal and sporadic. Much of the discussion about service-learning is carried on by advocates. Most of the published research about service-learning is done by academicians particularly interested in the learning side of the equation. Community leaders and residents do not have a voice in the dialogue. The voice of community leaders committed to community development and structural change would be particularly helpful. Service is awarded something of a “sacred” status so it is neither popular nor politic to raise questions about the assumptions or unintended effects of volunteerism which often characterizes service-learning. However, if the service-learning movement is to reach maturity and live up to its potential, it must realistically face its limitations and broaden its emphasis beyond volunteerism. It must carefully examine what students learn about social problems and social structure through the kind of service service-learning does. It must examine the subtle effects of service on communities. This suggests both an agenda for planning and organizing service and a research agenda.

This paper is intended to be provocative and to generate such discussions and encourage such research.

*Service-learning grows from mixed motives*

Because of the strong emphasis on learning within service-learning, service can be subverted and become a “means to an end” rather than an end in itself. At its best, service should be defined by persons served and should be accountable to them in significant ways. Programs should be managed by local people and agencies controlled by them. Often service-learning is organized to respond to the needs of an academic institution which sponsors it, the needs of students, the needs of an instructor, or the needs of a course. The needs of the agency and the community often come last.

There are other forces which dilute both the motivation and the performance of service. The need for service-learning to gain legitimacy with doubting colleagues in the academy is a powerful force to redirect energies from service toward learning. Colleges and universities sometimes use service-learning as a public relations device to enhance their reputations in their communities in order to raise funds and recruit students or to mask negative impacts of other actions they take. Students sometimes use service-learning to make themselves feel good or to strengthen their resumes. They may use service-learning to avoid writing requirements or other course requirements when options are given. Agencies use service-learning to get free labor and to gain prestige. The fact that agencies will take almost any warm body is a sad commentary on
how much they need help. Participation in service-learning programs gives agencies access to a college or university and the prestige and help that brings. Religious students sometimes use service as a means to gain converts. Businesses support service to enhance their reputations and sometimes to legitimate or divert attention from other practices which may not be in the best interests of the community.

There is also danger of “using” individuals and communities in inappropriate ways as laboratories or as subjects for experiment and practice. Community members become objects rather than participants or passive recipients rather than actors. The fact that service-learning mixes objectives has potential for prostituting service by making it serve objectives which contribute to the students or the college or university rather than to the community.

*Service-learning is based on a simplistic understanding of service*

The service-learning movement is fond of the quotation from Martin Luther King. “Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s Theory of Relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

While it is true that anyone can serve, it is also true as Allan Keith-Lucas (1972 p.119) comments that, “To help another human being may sound like a very simple process. Actually it is one of the hardest things that anyone can be called to do.” When service-learning is done without proper selection of students and without appropriate training, orientation and reflection, it can support ineffective and sometimes harmful kinds of service. Such service trivializes service and demeans service professions.

*Service-learning teaches a false understanding of need*

John McKnight (1996) in an insightful discussion of “Professionalizing Service and Disabling Help” discusses the concept of need often carried by students into service-learning assignments. Need, he says, is often defined as deficiency or as the lack of something a client needs or wants. The deficiency is placed in the client. Deficiencies are translated into a set of disconnected parts and treated with specialized service. Needs are understood to reside in the individual rather than in the system. Each need can be isolated as a discrete deficiency. Service is provided in discrete units directly targeted to a particular deficiency.

Freire (1971, p. 53) uses images borrowed from a “banking” system to describe this understanding of education. The system acts as if students are empty receptacles to be filled by the teacher. Education becomes an act of transferring knowledge from the teacher to the student. Students are passive depositories and teachers depositors.

This understanding of need as deficiency reinforces simplistic understandings of social problems and ignores resources and strengths already in communities. It is rewarding for a student to share love, hugs, and mathematics with a student in a tutoring program, but this individualization of social issues ignores structural components and causes. Often students who do service-learning enter communities from outside. This reinforces the idea that communities
themselves are deficient and need outside resources to work at their problems. By defining needs as deficiencies, students are able to separate themselves from the problems they encounter. They fail to see that often the same social structures which work well for them create the needs in the communities in which they do service-learning. By focusing on individualized need and individualized service students miss the systemic nature of social life.

Defining need as deficiency also reinforces the fundamental misunderstanding among many Americans found by Bellah (1985) and colleagues. They discovered that while most people they surveyed thought the world was going to “hell in a handbasket,” most also were optimistic about their own personal futures. They failed to grasp the fundamental fact that their individual futures were intrinsically linked to the future of the society. A Somali proverb states that the presence of a man in a village who is too poor to own a camel is an embarrassment to the entire village. In America the village blames the man for his poverty! Unfortunately, service-learning when it is characterized by individualistic understandings of need perpetuates this kind of individualism.

Service-learning teaches a false understanding of response to need

Help according to McKnight (1996) is often offered as a mirror image of the individualized definition of need. The answer to need as deficiency is an outside person whose service fills the deficiency. This exaggerates the importance of the person who serves, demeans the person served and ignores resources in the community such as peers, families and community leaders. It fails to recognize the political, social and economic factors which create the need.

This definition of response allows service to be shaped to reflect the skills, schedules, interests, and learning agenda of the students in service-learning rather than to meet real community needs. Needs are defined in terms of what students have to offer. “To a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” Resources in the community are often ignored. Too often service-learning reinforces assumptions of persons who need help that they do not have the resources to solve their own problems. It communicates to communities that they too are deficient and that the answers to the issues they face must come from outside. Service-learning tends to skew programs toward the needs of students rather toward the needs of communities. It often ameliorative rather than oriented toward change of social structures. It puts band-aids on deeply rooted problems and gives students an inadequate understanding of service.

Service-learning diverts attention from social policy to volunteerism

Most service-learning programs include volunteer service. The President’s summit on volunteerism, the many state and local follow-up summits and the visibility given to volunteerism by national figures such as General Powell have elevated volunteerism to almost sacred status. While the importance and significance of volunteerism cannot be overstated, volunteerism and private programs cannot substitute for appropriate governmental action and social policy. At a recent regional meeting touting volunteer service and service-learning, both the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Mayor of the City of Harrisburg stated that government can reduce its role now that volunteerism is increasing. It is tempting to see volunteerism as a viable response to deeply rooted social issues.
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The fallacy of that claim is evident when noting that $16 billion annual reduction in programs for the poor in the recent welfare reform bill approved by congress compares with the $11 billion total of all secular and private giving for the poor (Wallis, 1997). If service-learning diverts effort from social policy initiatives to volunteerism it will do a major disservice to those it is designed to help.

Service-learning encourages diversion of agency agendas

The existence of a ready source of well motivated and generally competent service-learning volunteers encourages agencies to divert energies to meet the needs and interests of the volunteers sometimes at the expense of their own mission. Time spent catering to needs of volunteers and participating in their learning robs time from agency work. Time required to develop and run programs designed for short-term, untrained volunteers from outside the community detracts from time needed to involve community residents in working at community issues and to design programs which have long term structural impacts.

Service-learning can do harm

Service-learning exists within a number of constraints imposed by its very nature. Students must serve on schedules dictated by the college calendar, sports events, classes, availability of transportation, and their many personal commitments. Safety and liability considerations impact what they can do. When service-learning is done within a course, activities must fit with course objectives. Many students have little experience working with people different from themselves or little exposure to the issues involved in their service activity. Many professors are experts in their disciplines but not in community service or cross cultural relationships.

Service-learning has potential to do actual harm to individuals, particularly to children with whom students work. Because students come and go, relationships are short term. What may be a casual relationship for a student may be a very significant relationship for a child or young adult in the program. Breaking the relationship at the end of the service-learning assignment can be traumatic and can add to the fragmentation already typical of poor communities. Students may reflect ethnocentrism and racism in ways that are harmful. Idealistic students may inappropriately criticize agency practices and policies.

Implications for design of service-learning

Admittedly, the discussion above is provocative and based on stereotypes and broad generalizations of volunteer service and service-learning. There are many service-learning programs which do not fit the stereotypes. But unfortunately many do.

As it matures, service-learning must go beyond “good intentions” (Illich, 1990) and “do goodism” to incorporate “state of the art” theoretical understanding and principles of good practice for service and social change. A beginning agenda to help move in this direction might include the following points.

Service-learning must incorporate the perspectives of all of its stakeholders
Service-learning brings together six sets of primary stakeholders; students, faculty, educational institutions, service recipients, community agencies, and communities. Each of these stakeholders has its own agenda and interests. Unfortunately very few discussions of service-learning give voice to all of these stakeholders.

One of the major challenges of service-learning at this stage of its development is to bring together with integrity the interests and cultures of all stakeholders. This is no easy task. Sven Groennings after interviewing more than 20 service agencies on behalf of the Association of Episcopal Colleges wrote, “While both service agencies and educational institutions are stakeholders in service-learning, the partners represent two cultures, which differ in purposes and considerably in vocabulary. Each of the partnering sectors lacks a solid widely-shared understanding of the dynamics of the other. There are weaknesses in the structure of inter-institutional relationships (“disconnects”) which hamper communication, conflict resolution and the development of leaders who are accustomed to working together” (Groennings, 1997). The “disconnects” are even greater between other pairs of stakeholders in the matrix. Too often conversation and planning is done by each group alone or in pairs, rather than with representatives from all groups.

**Authentic partnerships between colleges and communities are essential**

For learning to occur in service-learning there must be careful planning and clear objectives, the experience must be linked integrally with academic courses, and the experience must include structured reflection. The most critical factor in the service component is the local agency which provides the setting for students to work. It is important for the agency to have authentic roots in the community and to provide continuity for programs in which students serve and for the relationships which short-term service-learning students build.

Effective programs include training, supervision, monitoring, support and evaluation. Much of this must be done by the agency. To do this well requires a heavy investment of agency resources. Most agencies are already stretched beyond their capacities. They have limited resources to respond to unending need.

Priority must be placed on developing clear expectations and mutual understandings between partners. It is also important for the college or university to contribute their “fair share” to the partnership. There are many ways this could happen but often does not. Colleges might provide financial reimbursement for agency time invested in service-learning students. Or they might provide other in-kind resources such as research, consultation, use of university facilities, or program evaluation. However this is often difficult because service-learning is not fully incorporated into the infra-structure of the college or university. Individual faculty often carry the additional work load and cost to incorporate service-learning into courses. For authentic partnerships between colleges and universities and communities to develop, ways must be found to incorporate service-learning into budgets and into faculty and staff loads.

**Principles of good practice must be followed**

The Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning developed by more than 70 organizations at a Wingspread conference in 1989 (Hornet & Poulsen) provide a
framework for programs of high quality. These principles call for service-learning to include responsible and challenging actions for the common good, critical reflection on activities, clear goals, involvement of those with needs in defining needs, identification of clear responsibilities of all partners, careful matching of providers and needs, sustained organizational commitment, providing training, supervision monitoring, support recognition and evaluation of programs, flexible and appropriate time commitments, and participation with diverse populations. This set of principles provides an excellent checklist for planning service-learning.

The planning and evaluation of service provides an opportunity for service-learning to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach so central to the concept of service-learning itself. Disciplines such as social work, political science, sociology, organizational behavior and community development should be generously used by the administrators of service learning activities. Frequently practitioners of service-learning are long on motivation and good will but short on expertise that relates to social and community change. There is a particular challenge to design programs which can use short term service-learning students in ways which fit into long term community programs or to find ways for students to spend longer periods of time in agencies.

The learning agenda must include social structural issues

Learning in service-learning is both intentional and serendipitous. It is important to thoughtfully manage both areas. Curricular content should help students to develop what is often called a ‘sociological imagination,” that is the ability to see patterns, structures and social context. C. Wright Mills (1959) talks about “personal troubles of milieu“ which are rooted in the character of the individual and “public issues of social structure” which transcend the individual. Most students do not make the distinction intuitively. They must be helped to see structural conditions. Training, supervision and reflection must give careful attention to sensitize students to see factors beyond those residing in individuals.

Students tend to reflect on service-learning primarily in egocentric terms. They are quick to comment on the meaning service added to their college experience or the relationships they developed. They frequently reflect on changes in personal attitudes such as decreases in racism and increases in empathy for persons in need. This is important. But reflection must also include critical analysis and understanding of theoretical issues, service strategies, social change, agency policies, social policies, and community structure.

Advocacy and community development must be included

The short term nature of service-learning almost forces it to rely on settings which provide opportunity for direct service. However, as service-learning matures it is especially important to broaden service opportunities to include advocacy and community development.

Research Agenda

The issues raised above suggest a research agenda. There is a great need for case studies showing creative and innovative ways to do effective service in service-learning. Descriptions of exemplary programs can be used as models for planning and evaluation. Studies of ineffective
programs can help identify critical factors for success. Research should specifically examine the impact of service-learning on local communities and on persons served. Doing this requires using outcome measures rather than more commonly used input measures such as hours served or tasks done. Case studies can be used effectively for assessment (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996).

There is also need for research on short term service and volunteerism particularly as it affects agencies and communities. It is important to understand at greater depth the issues raised in the first section of this paper. Work needs to be done to identify the critical factors which determine the outcomes of service-learning. Additional research on the impact of service-learning could contribute greatly to improving quality and impact. A check list for planning the service component of service-learning would be helpful.

**Summary**

Service-learning has great potential to transform teaching and learning. It also has great potential to provide quality programs and people to local agencies to work with them to transform communities. However, if done poorly service-learning can teach inadequate conceptions of need and service, it can divert resources of service agencies and can do real harm in communities.

As service-learning matures, it must realistically face its limitations and realistically recognize both strengths and weaknesses. The answer to criticisms is not to abandon service-learning but to structure both learning and service to build on strengths and compensate for limitations.

One of the challenges facing service-learning is to bring to the service end of the service-learning equation the same level of rigor, expertise, and critical analysis that has been applied to learning. This will include responding to the legitimate interests of all the stakeholders, following principles of good practice, developing strong college/community partnerships which reflect quality and reciprocity, teaching a sociological imagination, incorporating advocacy and community development opportunities, and developing evaluation and assessment strategies which will assure continued program improvement.
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References


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Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?

Janet Eyler
Dwight E. Giles, Jr.

Foreword by Alexander W. Astin
Identifying the Learning Outcomes of Service

I can honestly say that I’ve learned more in this last year in [service-learning] than I probably have learned in all four years of college. I have learned so much, maybe because I found something that I’m really passionate about, and it makes you care more to learn about it—and to get involved and do more. You’re not just studying to take a test and forget about it. You’re learning, and the experiences we have are staying with us. It’s not cram for a test the night before. I know when I take a test that I just want to get it over with. That doesn’t happen with service; it stays with you.

We learn these theories in school and ideas, but until we really apply them or see them in action, they’re not real. And we come out of school, if we haven’t done something like this, not understanding.

Students like service-learning. When we sit down with a group of students to discuss service-learning experiences, their enthusiasm is unmistakable. Although skeptics sometimes dismiss the programs that evoke this student excitement as “fluffy, feel-good stuff” without “one iota of scientific research that says that this has made
comes are consistent with the goals of higher education. This book responds to the concerns for evidence of the academic value of service-learning.

This chapter explores the growing popularity of service-learning, the fit between service-learning and the mission of higher education, and the nature of the learning in service-learning. Our view of this learning is broader than the notion of academic learning as a relatively passive acquisition of information. The remaining chapters of the book focus on exploring these learning outcomes in greater detail and examining the impact of different characteristics of service-learning on student outcomes.

What Is Service-Learning?

A lot of energy has been devoted to defining service-learning. In 1990 Jane Kendall wrote that there were 147 definitions in the literature, and there has been no falling away of interest in this endeavor since. We have observed dozens of programs and have been impressed by the diversity of what is labeled service-learning. Schools that have a fall orientation activity with an afternoon of community service may call it service-learning; at the other extreme, there are well-integrated programs within colleges and universities where students spend a year or two in a connected series of courses linked to service projects in the community. In between these one-shot efforts and intensive programs are individual courses that include a service component. These also vary dramatically. Commonly students may elect a service option as extra credit or in lieu of another assignment, and these options are often not incorporated into class discussion in any sustained way. Less often single courses may be built around community service, and reflection on this experience is central to the progress of the course.

Sigmon (1996) described this diversity in service-learning by playing with the graphic presentation of the two concepts that make up the term (see Table 1.1). A course like the community
service lab we observed where students hear a bit about community agencies but that is primarily focused on getting them into the field to provide service fits his description of “SERVICE-learning,” as do volunteer service programs with occasional opportunities for reflection. The course where students studying juvenile justice primarily observed community groups looks more like “service-LEARNING”; there are many courses with limited service, which adds a dimension to an academic experience without being a significant part of the course. Volunteer programs within colleges and universities that may have no link to particular academic pursuits but exist alongside the curriculum fit the “service learning” model; service projects may capture student enthusiasm and interest, but the students are left to make academic connections themselves. The class in which students learn to develop program evaluation skills by assisting a local agency with their evaluation fits Sigmon’s “SERVICE-LEARNING” category; this term applies to programs where the two foci are in balance, and study and action are explicitly integrated.

In our own practice, we have embraced the position that service-learning should include a balance between service to the community and academic learning and that the hyphen in the phrase symbolizes the central role of reflection in the process of learning through community experience. And indeed there is a considerable best-practices literature of practitioner wisdom that stresses the importance of reflection as the vital link between service and learning (Honnert and Poulsen, 1989). Many programs do not fit this balanced model; instead the service may dwarf the learning, or the academic focus dominates. Complicating matters is the evidence that the quality and quantity of reflection in program descriptions may not reflect the actual experiences of students; it is not uncommon to find students reporting far less systematic reflection and integration of their service and learning than program directors or brochures detail.

Given the diversity and complexity of practice, we were not inclined to use a tight definition to exclude programs that view themselves as service-learning efforts from our research studies. It is quite reasonable to suppose that programs with different structures might be effective in their own way at meeting particular academic goals. Although we are interested in an optimal mix of the service and learning, we were not interested in using definitions to drive our understanding. Part of the focus of our research was to explore the various academic outcomes of service-learning and try to identify the types of experience most likely to lead to particular outcomes. Thus we accept that any program that attempts to link academic study with service can be characterized as service-learning; non-course-based programs that include a reflective component and learning goals may also be included under this broad umbrella. Not all service-learning efforts may help students attain all the goals practitioners hope for, but discovering which practices are important to particular outcomes is central to our efforts here.

The Popularity of Service-Learning

All evidence points to a rapid increase in service-learning courses and programs on college and university campuses over the past decade. This pedagogy is now advocated by “students, faculty,
presidents of colleges and universities, and even by Congress and the President of the United States” (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999).

Two major national organizations encourage and support service-learning. Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents, and the Corporation for National Service, a federal government agency, report data that give some indicators of the popularity of service-learning. There are now 575 member campuses participating in Campus Compact, with estimates that about 10,800 faculty members were involved in teaching 11,800 service-learning courses in the most recent survey of members (Campus Compact, 1998). Ninety-six percent of responding institutions reported some faculty involvement, with an average of 8 percent per campus. About 14 percent of schools have what Campus Compact considers advanced levels of faculty involvement—30 percent or more. The average number of courses per campus for member schools is sixteen. In 1994 only 50 percent of campuses reported some form of support for faculty using service-learning; by 1998 fully 85 percent reported one or more forms of support for faculty involvement.

The Rand evaluation of the Corporation for National Service’s Learn and Serve Higher Education (LASHE) programs studied the 458 colleges and universities that received LASHE grants. During the three-year period of the evaluation, fiscal years 1995–1997, these schools developed about three thousand new service-learning courses (Gray and others, 1998). In fiscal 1997 these courses served a median number of sixty students per program.

In addition to these suggestive campus statistics, there are many national indicators of the popularity of these programs. Recently a colleague called us with some information that surprised her. She discovered that a recent conference on accounting education had a whole section of sessions in service-learning. The number of publications in the field, both articles and books, has risen from almost none a decade ago to hundreds. The field now has a journal with the inception in 1994 of the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, and a number of professional associations have begun to incorporate service-learning into annual conferences and publications. For example, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) has made service-learning a major focus of conferences and, most important, has issued a series of eighteen monographs that presents models, research, theory, and actual syllabi for service-learning in particular disciplines.

With all this growth there is still the concern that service-learning is marginal to the academic core of the academy (Zlotkowski, 1996). Historically service-oriented instructional programs have had a rough time maintaining institutional support. In order for the emphasis on service-learning to be sustained on college campuses, presidents, deans, and faculty need to be convinced that it is an effective process for achieving the most valued academic goals of higher education.

The Importance of Service-Learning

The recent popularity of service-learning stems partly from its fit with current views of the way people learn best and the changes needed to make higher education more effective. We believe that the clearest and easiest way to understand the nature of service-learning is to highlight what we like to call the central claim of the field: “Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both” (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989, p. 1). The question for research such as ours is this: exactly what is enhanced and transformed, and how does that occur? Even a cursory review of the service-learning literature reveals some key themes that suggest the breadth of the learning that occurs and the importance of this learning to improved community participation.

Learning from Experience

Service-learning is a form of experiential education whose pedagogy rests on principles established by Dewey and other experiential learning theorists early in this century (Furco, 1996). Learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection, not simply through
being able to recount what has been learned through reading and lecture. Dewey would have agreed with the students whose words begin the chapter that memorizing material from the classroom for reproduction on tests is static and unlikely to be of much use. Knowing and doing cannot be severed. And like these students, Dewey was convinced that learning is a wholehearted affair, linking emotions and intellect; an educative experience is one that fosters student development by capturing student interest—indeed their passion—because it is intrinsically worthwhile and deals with problems that awaken student curiosity and a need to know that extends over a considerable period of time (Giles and Eyster, 1994b). Experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action. Both learning and service gain value and are transformed when combined in the specific types of activities we call service-learning.

Recently cognitive scientists have come to a series of conclusions about students’ learning that are remarkably similar to those long endorsed by scholars and practitioners in the experiential learning tradition. Their focus has been on what Whitehead (1929) first characterized as the inert knowledge problem: the tendency of students to acquire stores of knowledge that are quite useless to them when they are in new situations. Cognitive scientists found that students rarely transferred knowledge and principles learned in classroom instruction to new problems; even students who had been presented with information about solving a problem directly analogous to a new problem often failed to apply it (Bransford, 1993). Only repeated attempts to solve similar problems and support and encouragement to apply what was learned seemed to lead to application. Cognitive scientists, like experiential educators, recognize the barriers presented to developing “knowledge in use” (Schön, 1995) by the decontextualized nature of much classroom instruction and stress the importance of learning in complex contexts and the “active construction of knowledge” (Bransford and Vye, 1989, p. 169).

Lauren Resnick (1987b) described the defects of much classroom learning clearly in her 1987 presidential address before the American Educational Research Association. She contrasted the nature of learning in school and in the community where this learning will be applied, noting that unlike typical classroom learning, real-world learning tends to be more cooperative or communal than individualistic, involves using tools rather than pure thought, is accomplished by addressing genuine problems in complex settings rather than problems in isolation, and involves specific contextualized rather than abstract or generalized knowledge. College learning that more closely approximates the situation in which students will use their knowledge and continue to learn is less likely to be useless or inert.

A colleague of ours worked with a team of students in her class to help find housing and a job for a homeless man in the community. For those students, potentially abstract concepts about economics, sociology, and psychology became vividly concrete as they struggled with the realities of working with social agencies, learned firsthand the difficulties of locating affordable housing near transportation and job opportunities, and dealt with the complex problems faced by and presented by a homeless person. A real person facing real difficulties in an authentic context forces students to a level of understanding that is sometimes not obtained when they read and glibly summarize what they have read about a complex social issue. Service-learning offers students the opportunity to experience the type of learning Resnick described where they can work with others through a process of acting and reflecting to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves.

A Connected View of Learning

Another central element of service-learning is to link personal and interpersonal development with academic and cognitive development. This linking of head and heart is a holistic approach
involving values as well as ideas. One of the goals of service-learning is to connect the multiple dimensions of human development that are often separated on college and university campuses. As Perry (1970) has demonstrated, personal and intellectual development are integral to each other; the development of personal identity and the ability to make committed decisions are connected to advanced levels of thinking. These connections occur within both the learner and the institution. Few efforts in higher education involve the chaplain’s office, student affairs, and members of the faculty as service-learning often does. Cognitive as well as personal development occurs through a process of challenge that touches feelings as well as thought (Fischer and Bidell, 1997). Service-learning is also about leadership development as well as traditional information and skill acquisition or “learning to be effective while learning what to be effective about” (Stanton, 1990, p. 336).

When we interviewed students about the reflection practices most useful to them in service-learning, the importance of this connection between the affective and cognitive was apparent. Many of the reflection techniques that students reported clearly combined the personal and the intellectual. These reflection exercises often asked students to reflect on their values and suggest what implications the learning had for action as well as for illuminating the subject matter being studied. For example, a student working with incarcerated juveniles talked about the reflection process used to structure class discussion: “There’s three stages to it. The first one was the person’s observations...not your feelings about it.... It was difficult, but I think it was necessary to just split that apart because so commonly people put those two together—what they observed and their feelings and come up with something in the middle. And to separate them is difficult, but it aids in introspection and understanding...the last step was an analysis of the experience and how it applied to something” (Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede, 1996).

Social Problem Solving

One of the major forms of service-learning practice from its beginnings has focused not only on learning about social problems, but on addressing them in the community through social action (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999). One way in which community and classroom are connected is through community action research. In these action research projects students, faculty, and community members take a community problem or issue and attempt to generate data that the community can use (Giles and Freed, 1985; Reardon, 1994, 1997). Students we interviewed gave such examples as conducting a needs assessment for a community attempting to create an after-school care program, providing research for an advocacy group helping legislators draft a bill on homelessness, and helping a community partner research and write a funding proposal. Because the learning was organized around genuine community problems, this action research process has also fostered an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Students developed their inquiry skills and knowledge about the issues under study while also providing needed research support for community groups; learning thus enhanced service to community.

One of the arguments for action research projects as a form of social inquiry is that they link education to citizenship; students function as contributing citizens during the process of study while acquiring skills and knowledge that equip them for later civic participation (Giles and Eyler, 1994b). This approach, which had its inception earlier in the century as part of progressive education, is being advocated today as a way to link the university to democratic citizenship by those who see inquiry not as an arcane occupation for an elite few but as integral to both intellectual development and community action. Service-learning offers the chance of both “researching for democracy and democratizing research” (Ansley and Gaventa, 1997, p. 46). Problem-based learning linked with
service-learning and cooperative learning forms an effective set of methods to educate for civic responsibility (Ehrlich, 1997).

**Education for Citizenship**

Citizenship is often cited as the purpose of education in general and service-learning in particular, and the focus on citizenship as an outcome is closely tied to the process of social problem solving (Ehrlich, 1997). It is in discussions of the role of higher education in preparing students for citizenship that the fit between the concerns of service-learning leaders and those concerned with higher education reform is most obvious. Service-learning advocates like Stanton have noted that “service-based learning is the means for linking the initiative to develop students’ social responsibility with the efforts to improve undergraduate education” (1990, p. 186). Higher education reform advocates have come to a similar conclusion, often singling out service or service-learning as examples of how to cultivate civic and social responsibility as part of education for citizenship (Gabelnick, 1997). One of the key proponents of this linkage has been Benjamin Barber, director of the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers University, who has called for civic education that is mandatory and is linked to a community service component (Barber, 1990, 1992; Barber and Battistoni, 1994).

**Service-Learning and the Critique of Higher Education**

The nature of experiential education in general and service-learning in particular makes it a good fit in addressing some of the concerns raised about higher education in a series of critiques that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s (Boyer, 1987; Association of American Colleges, 1991). These critiques noted a gap between traditional curricular content and society’s needs for new competencies for workers and citizens. A common observation was the lack of connectedness in higher education and the related lack of application of what is learned. Lack of connectedness resulted in the compartmentalization of knowledge by discipline, preventing students from experiencing the relationships among various modes of knowledge; subject matter was walled off behind disciplinary borders and not applied in any integrated way in academic study or to social issues. Students also experienced a lack of connection between classroom learning and their personal lives and between classroom learning and public issues and involvement in the wider world. Critics faulted the lack of intellectual links between institutions, noting barriers to connection between secondary and postsecondary education, between college study and the workplace, and between campus and community (Boyer, 1987; Association of American Colleges, 1991).

Service-learning is an obvious response to the reform critics of higher education. The emphasis in service-learning on applying knowledge to community problems and the reciprocal application of community experience to the development of knowledge meets many of the concerns about the lack of connectedness in higher education. Partly in response to these concerns, service-learning programs sprang up without the benefit of a research base or systematic attempts at evaluation. Founded and developed by bright and passionate students, enthusiastic faculty, and community-oriented student services staffs, these programs have flourished but have not become well connected to the academic core of most institutions that house them.

It is no surprise that such programs often come under fire from skeptics who question their educational value. Perhaps because there have been no systematic efforts to establish conditions under which service-learning is most effective and because most of the assessment of academic outcomes has been limited to course grades or student self-report, the research that has focused on academic benefits of service-learning has had mixed results; although students
do not learn less by these measures in service-learning classrooms, it is not clear that they learn more (Markus, Howard, and King, 1993; Miller, 1994; Kendrick, 1996; Gray and others, 1998).

Clearly the theories of experiential education on which service-learning rests and the problems identified in recent criticisms of higher education suggest learning outcomes that are far more complex and important than simple acquisition of information to be displayed on end-of-semester tests. Thus the answer to the question, “Where is the learning in service-learning?” may depend to some extent on what it means to learn more. Is the “learning” celebrated by service-learning students important to adequate mastery of the academic goals of a liberal education? In our research studies, we have been concerned with this need to work within a broader conception of academic learning, to identify the range of outcomes important to academic achievement and the conditions under which service-learning may contribute to these diverse outcomes.

What is the Learning in Service-Learning?

As we have explored the impact of service-learning, we have tried to identify the academic benefits that could be reasonably expected from an emphasis on active, connected learning. Service-learning aims to connect the personal and intellectual, to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in understanding the world, build critical thinking capacities, and perhaps lead to fundamental questions about learning and about society and to a commitment to improve both. Service-learning aims to prepare students who are lifelong learners and participants in the world. It is this broader conception of learning outcomes that has driven our studies of the impact of service-learning.

Learning Begins with Personal Connections

The emphasis on helping students become self-directed lifelong learners has become more pronounced in higher education as theories of development have taken on more importance since the pioneering work of William Perry (1970). Although personal development and interpersonal skills are often viewed as secondary to the academic goals of the academy and segregated institutionally into student services and activities, they are where learning begins for service-learning advocates. Passion is personal, and learning begins with passionate interest (Fischer and Bidell, 1997). For many students their first strong interest in service-learning projects develops when they get to know someone whose life differs dramatically from their own. This early constructive engagement with others is commonly found in those who go on to incorporate community service into their lives (Daloz Parks, Keen, Keen, and Parks Daloz, 1996). And the interpersonal skills developed during service learning outcomes that will be integral to the learning they are likely to do in their future work and community settings. As Lee Shulman (1998), president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, noted in his keynote speech at the American Association for Higher Education, “Learning is the least useful when it is private; it is most useful when it is public and communal.”

One of our concerns with the learning in service-learning is in measuring personal attitudes and values, feelings of connectedness and commitment to the community and interpersonal skills. These contribute to personal growth, but they are also tied to further academic learning.

Learning Is Useful

Academic learning is often assessed through test performance or course grades, but understanding is more than the ability to recall information when prompted by a test; understanding is the ability to call it up when it is relevant to a new situation and use it in that situation. Material that is understood has meaning for learners; it helps them make sense of the world. Learning in context and appreciating what the learner brings to the situation are fundamental to
experiential education; attention to these two elements helps students master content and skills and makes it possible to use the information effectively. Building a more adequate view of the world does not happen automatically with exposure to new information; it is the product of continuous challenge to old conceptions and reflection on new ways to organize information and use the new material (Bransford and Vye, 1989; Bransford, 1993). Service-learning can provide the rich context in which to resolve challenges to old conceptions and apply new information and skills. Understanding cannot be severed from active use of information; reflective instruction that encourages students to question preconceptions and adjust the way they think about the subject should facilitate more complex understanding.

The purpose of learning is to use what is learned. In order to test adequately for understanding, we need to see how students identify and describe complex problems and how they marshal skills and knowledge in offering tentative solutions to those problems. We are also interested in their practical strategies for addressing those problems within the community—understanding that will be deepened by their interpersonal skills as well as their knowledge of the issues and the community.

Learning Is Developmental

The very nature of the ill-structured problems we face routinely in a complex information-based postindustrial society requires critical thinking capacities above those normally attained by American college students (King, 1992). Ill-structured problems are complex and open ended; their solution creates new conditions and new problems. Such problems require, first and foremost, the ability to recognize that the problems are complicated and are embedded in a complex social context, the ability to evaluate conflicting information and expert views, and the understanding that there is no simple or definitive solution. Critical thinking and problem solving are not simply skills to be acquired through practice; rather they rest on attaining advanced levels of cognitive development (King, 1992). Traditional academic programs, however, have not resulted in moving most college students to the levels necessary to cope with complex issues and information (King and Kitchener, 1994).

Service-learning programs that place students in contexts where their prejudices, previous experiences, and assumptions about the world are challenged may create the circumstances necessary for growth. Service-learning programs that create this cognitive dissonance and also provide the structure in which to confront the challenge and seek further information and experience to help students sort it out provide conditions consistent with what is known about improved cognitive development and problem solving (King and Kitchener, 1994; Lynch, 1996; Perry, 1970). Critical thinking ability is another important academic outcome of higher education that may be affected by service-learning.

Learning Is Transforming

Understanding and application might be likened to coloring within the lines; critical thinking helps students question assumptions—to color outside the lines; transformative learning is about thinking about things in a new way and moving in new directions—creating a new picture without relying on the old lines. Community experiences that challenge student assumptions coupled with thoughtful reflection may lead to fundamental changes in the way the student views service or society. David Lempert (1995) in his book *Escape from the Ivory Tower* gives a powerful example of such a transformative moment in his own experience with community service. While working on a project in the Philippines, he came to see that even doing a good job in the community project was helping to prop up a regime that he deemed responsible for the conditions his work was designed to ameliorate. More fundamental changes in the system were needed to achieve social justice.
Others have suggested that this movement from immediate service to a desire to create broader systemic change is also a characteristic of individual student development. As students mature in their service experience, they tend to move from a focus on charitable activities to a concern for social justice (Delve, Mintz, and Stewart, 1990). With their first exposure to poverty, students may tend to see the issues in terms of individual failings or misfortunes—to blame the victim. With more experience, information, and thought, some begin to see the complexity of factors surrounding these problems. We would not expect all, or even most, students to have experiences powerful enough to transform, but where programs engage students in important work in the community and provide continuous opportunities for reflection, service-learning may be a catalyst for a dramatic redirection of their lives.

Citizenship Rests on Learning

While citizenship, like personal development, is often considered to be an affective or behavioral rather than cognitive goal of higher education, we are persuaded that effective citizenship rests on the learning we have touched on. Thus we have focused our empirical inquiry on understanding the cognitive dimensions of citizenship. Students are unlikely to be effective community participants without the ability to understand complex social issues, apply what they learn, and have the critical thinking ability to make adequate judgments about the information they receive. The linkage between academic outcomes necessary for good citizenship and experiential pedagogies like service-learning was noted recently by Zelda Gamson (1997), editor of a special issue of Change titled “Higher Education and Rebuilding Civic Life.” She identifies some of the ways to “devis[e] ways of teaching and learning for civic life” as learning communities, collaborative learning, respect for different learning styles, reflective projects, and cooperation among students and between students and faculty. She argues that education for citizenship is basically good undergraduate education that follows the principles for good practice in that education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987).

Finding the Learning in Service-Learning

Our journey of inquiry has spanned six years and is best described by Donald Schön’s characterization of the process of discovery where reflection occurs both in and on action and “proceeds from doubt to the resolution of doubt to the generation of new doubt” (1995, p. 31). At each stage we made discoveries about the learning in service-learning, and with each of these discoveries came doubts and new problems to solve. Indeed only publication deadlines have temporarily interrupted this journey. We take comfort that this is the process we and other practitioners of service-learning go through with our students when we confront the messy and ill-structured problems that exist in our communities. We hope that we have followed a model of inquiry for service-learning that respects the values of the field and generates the kind of useful knowledge that our service-learning students reported in their own journeys of inquiry.

In our work with students in the community, we have been continuously struck by the way in which the emotional power of service-learning helps students connect intellectually with what we were doing in the classroom. Indeed our own understanding, like that of our students, has been transformed by community involvement. For many years before we began the two major studies that provide much of the data for this book, we conducted small research studies with internship and service-learning classes in an effort to understand and improve our instruction. The results of these small studies with our own students were encouraging, but we felt that the questions being asked of this field—by both skeptics and believers—demanded a national study reflecting diverse institutions and communities. In 1993 we sought funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) for the
Comparing Models of Service-Learning project, which would eventually fund a survey of fifteen hundred college students from over twenty institutions across the United States, as well as a later round of intensive problem-solving interviews with sixty-six students from seven institutions. In both the survey and the interviews, students responded at the start and again at the end of a semester of service-learning. In a second project for the Corporation for National Service (CNS), we conducted single interviews with sixty-seven students from six colleges and universities who were active in service-learning and community service. These students shared their perceptions of the benefits of service and discussed the types of reflective activity that worked best for them. In many of these efforts we were inspired by the pioneering work of Conrad and Hedin (1980), who attempted to measure the impact of varied experiential programs on high school students across the country. No similar national study had been attempted with college students prior to the studies reported here.

Before beginning our larger efforts, we conducted a series of focus groups with a benchmark group of very active service-oriented students at several institutions to help us identify learning outcomes that should be pursued. The views of these students were consistent with our own earlier experience that in addition to personal and social development, service-learning enhanced student learning. These students also made clear the different quality of the learning that resulted from service-learning compared to more traditional methods. With this set of outcomes in mind, we conducted a series of pilot surveys in 1994 to select and develop measurement instruments, attempting to build on efforts underway in the field. During the spring of 1995, we surveyed fifteen hundred students at the beginning and end of a semester where eleven hundred of them were involved in service-learning.

We recognized the limits of a survey for assessing cognitive development and academic learning and attempted to measure problem solving through an essay as well. Expecting students to draft thoughtful essays twice in a semester in the context of completing a somewhat extensive survey questionnaire proved unrealistic, however. This was particularly a problem at the end of the semester, when faculty were rushed for time too; thus we had a high number of incomplete or unscorable essays. As a response to this problem, we developed an intensive problem-solving interview where students spoke with us for about an hour about how they would address a social problem related to their service. Each of the sixty-six students completed two of these interviews, once at the beginning and then at the end of the semester. These interviews were designed to explore their service experience, how they analyze a problem, and, in the context of that problem, how they justify a position and use information. Because we talked with them twice, before and after their service, we could trace the impact of service-learning on changes in their reasoning process. Material from these interviews provided us with insights into issue understanding, application of information, perspective transformation, and critical thinking ability. It also provided insights into whether the outcomes identified earlier in this chapter were influenced by service-learning or the reflective quality of particular service-learning experiences. During the same period as the original survey, we also conducted the reflection interviews for the CNS project. As we heard students describe their views of effective service-learning, we were able to shape some of the questions for the subsequent problem-solving interviews. Thus the inquiry process explored these questions about learning using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

In this book we have combined the quantitative pre- and postsemester survey data, the analysis of problem solving and critical thinking from the pre- and postsemester interviews, and the views expressed in our reflection interviews, which were based on a single session with different students. When we talk about these different sets of student responses, we will refer to them as the survey, the problem-solving interviews, and the reflection interviews. A number of our statistical findings are also illustrated with quotations
from the students in our two sets of interviews. We believe that this combination of statistical data and student voice provides some useful insights into this complex and wonderful business of service-learning. In the following chapters we share the questions we raised at different stages of this journey of inquiry and the answers we found. All findings presented are statistically significant at at least the .05 level; the statistical material is located in regression tables in the resource sections at the back of the book. A list of the schools that participated in the studies can be found in Resource A, and a more complete discussion of the methodology of the studies is available in Resource B.

We are convinced that learning begins with the impact of service-learning on the personal and interpersonal development of the students who participated in the study, the subject of Chapter Two. Subsequent chapters detail the nature of the different learning outcomes briefly introduced in this chapter and present data about the impact of service-learning on those outcomes. Finally we examine the program characteristics that seemed to make a difference on these important outcomes and discuss implications for practice.

I suppose I've learned about real life. That's the only way I can put it. I've encountered people that I never would have met if I hadn't been a volunteer. I've had to deal with situations that I would never have been confronted with if I hadn't been a volunteer. I've been able to forge friendships with people that I never would have met.

One of the facets of service-learning classes that excites students is the quality of the interpersonal experiences that occur in the community compared with their usual classroom work. These diverse interpersonal experiences may help to prepare students to meet some of the goals of higher education where we currently often fall short. Thomas Ehrlich noted that when he was president of Indiana University, "the most frequent criticism...from both community leaders and employers, was that our graduates were unprepared to collaborate as members of a team. While most of the tasks they would be called on to perform in their communities and workplaces would be as team members, most of their undergraduate work had been done alone" (Ehrlich, 1997). Service-learning, which involves different roles for students from those typically encountered in the classroom, seems like a natural fit for achieving such goals of higher education as interpersonal competence, personal
"Why ‘Servanthood’ Is Bad"
By John McKnight
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In a small, relatively isolated community on Martha’s Vineyard, about every tenth person used to be born without the ability to hear. Everybody in the community, hearing and non-hearing alike, spoke a unique sign language brought from England when they immigrated to Massachusetts in 1690. In the mid-twentieth century with increased mobility, the people ceased to intermarry, and the genetic anomaly disappeared.

But before the memory of it died — and the sign language with it — historian Nora Groce studied the community’s history. She compared the experience of the non-hearing people to that of the hearing people.

She found that 80 percent of the non-hearing people graduated from high school, as did 80 percent of the hearing. She found that about 90 percent of the non-hearing got married, compared to about 92 percent of the hearing. They had about equal numbers of children. Their income levels were similar, as were the variety and distribution of their occupations.

Then Groce did a parallel study on the Massachusetts mainland. At the time, it was considered to have the best services in the nation for non-hearing people. There she found that 50 percent of non-hearing people graduated from high school, compared to 75 percent of the hearing. Non-hearing people married half the time, while hearing people married 90 percent of the time. Forty percent of the non-hearing people had children, while 80 percent of hearing people did. And non-hearing people had fewer children. They also received about one-third the income of hearing people. And their range of occupations was much more limited.

How was it, Groce wondered, that on an island with no services, non-hearing people were as much like hearing people as you could possibly measure? Yet thirty miles away, with the most advanced services available, non-hearing people lived much poorer lives than the hearing.

The one place in the United States where deafness was not a disability was a place with no services for deaf people. In that community all the people adapted by signing instead of handing the non-hearing people over to professionals and their services. That community wasn’t just doing what was necessary to help or to serve one group. It was doing what was necessary to incorporate everyone.

I’ve been around neighborhoods, neighborhood organizations, and communities in big cities for thirty-six years. I have never seen service systems that brought people to well-being, delivered them to citizenship, or made them free.

When I’m around church people, I always check whether they are misled by the modern secular vision. Have they substituted the vision of service for the only thing that will make people whole — community? Are they service peddlers or community builders? Peddling services is unchristian — even if you’re hell-bent on
helping people. Peddling services instead of building communities is the one way you can be sure not to help.

We all know that at the Last Supper Jesus said, "This is my commandment; love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends." But for mysterious reasons, I never hear the next two sentences. "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know the business of the one they serve. But I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything I learned from God." It is not right to be hung back by service and servantry. The goal is to be a friend.

I’m consistently impressed by how dangerous people are who want to serve others. The service ideology and its systems don’t work for three reasons.

First, they constantly steal money from people who are poor. At the center where I work, we’ve added up how much money the four levels of government — federal, state, county, and city — specifically target for low-income people in Cook County. It adds up to about $6,000 for every person with an income below the poverty line. (That figure is low; not everyone below the line participates in low-income programs.) For a mother with three children, that is the equivalent of $24,000. Three years ago, the median income in Cook County was $23,000. In one sense, we spend for every poor person more money than half the people in Cook County make. But Chicago still has poverty!

So I asked our researchers, "Of the money appropriated for low-income people, how much did they get in cash and how much in services?" They replied, "They got 63 percent in services and 37 percent in income." Now, if you are a family of four, that means your servants walked away with over $15,000 of the money appropriated for you while you got less than $9,000.

Bureaucracy is not the problem. (Bureaucracy eats only about 6 percent.) The money goes to health- and human-service professionals: nurses, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrist, social workers, public-housing administrators, land-clearance officials, welfare workers. It doesn’t go to the poor.

The second problem with service systems is that they base programs on "deficiencies." I fight whenever I can — in legislatures and before policy-making bodies — against "needs surveys" in low-income neighborhoods. Here is why.

I was organizing block clubs in West Side neighborhoods. I wasn’t very good. But people responded. They understood what I was saying. Then the anti-poverty program came, and within three years organizing became incredibly difficult.

The anti-poverty program sent people out to interview people this way:

"Mrs. Jones, we’re from such-and-such. We’re doing a survey. Can you tell me how far you went in school?"

She looks down a little and says, "Well, I just got through tenth grade." So they
write on the clipboard, "Dropout. Two years." Not "educated ten years," but "dropout two years."

Then they say, "I wonder if you could read this to me."

She looks at it, embarrassed. "No. I can’t read."

"Illiterate," they write. Then they say, "Just now you squinted your eyes. Do you have trouble seeing?"

"Yes. I think I need glasses."

"Visual deficit," they write. "Do you have any children?"

"Three daughters, ages fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen."

"Do any of them have children?"

"The fourteen-year-old has a child, and the eighteen-year-old has a child."

"Teenage pregnancy," goes on the clipboard.

Then they say, "We’re going to get you some help. Just wait. We’re going to make a service center here." And they cash in their needs inventory for a GED dropout training center and three people who work there, for an illiteracy program with four staff people, for a neighborhood optometrist who is responsive to the community, and for a new teenage-pregnancy counseling program that gets the schools more money. This poor woman is a gold mine. That’s how she ended up getting one-third what the service system got.

When I go back to this woman, organizing, I say, "Mrs. Jones, I’m organizing for the local neighborhood organization, and your neighbor told me to talk to you. She told me that when her daughter was hit by an automobile down at the corner, you took charge while she took her daughter to the emergency room. And when the tree fell down across the street, you’re the one who came out and told people who to call, what to do about the tree. She told me you’re the leader on this block. People trust you. People believe in you. People follow you. That’s one of the most wonderful things in the world, because you have the opportunity to join with other people like yourself in the neighborhood to being to do more things than just deal with the tree and the crisis with the little girl. So would you come with me to a meeting tonight?"

"No," she says, "I’m waiting for the people in the white coats."

Service systems teach people that their value lies in their deficiencies. They are built on "inadequacies" called illiteracy, visual deficit, and teenage pregnancy. But communities are built on the capacities of drop-out, illiterate, bad-scene, teenage-pregnant, battered women like Mrs. Jones. If the church is about community, not service, it is about capacity, not deficiency.
Third, the service system displaces the capacity of people’s organizations to solve problems. It says, "Don’t form a community organization. Sit and wait for the white coat to come save you." The proliferation of an ideology of therapy and service as "what you need" has weakened associations and organizations of citizens across the United States.

Many churches and pastors have become the agents of systems. They themselves may not understand whom they represent, but they refer people to systems. Instead of building community, they help take responsibility away from the community and give it to professionals. People who do this in the name of the church and of Jesus are community busters. They are not agents of Christ.

Here are five rules to protect yourself from being the agent of the devil in the middle of a church. (I could give you ten if I had more space.)

Saul Alinsky referred to the first rule as the "iron rule": Never do for others what they can do for themselves.

Second, find another’s gifts, contributions, and capacities. Use them. Give them a place in the community.

Third, whenever a service is proposed, fight to get it converted into income. Don’t support services. Insist that what poor people need is income.

There is a point where things called services can be useful. Most low-income communities are well beyond that point. If you improve the professional credentialing of big-city school teachers and systems, knowing and wisdom will decrease in direct relationship to the increase in that system’s poor. The increase in medical resources in Chicago is now decreasing the health status of poor people.

The fourth rule is a sort of subhead of the third. If those in power are hell-bent on giving poor people services rather than income, then fight for those services to come in the form of vouchers. That way the persons who must be served at least have a choice as to who will serve them. And there may be some competition.

Fifth, develop hospitality. Abraham, the head of a tribe, decided to follow a God who claimed to be the only God. That made Abraham and his people strangers in their own land. They journeyed as strangers through the world. And they developed some unique ideas about responsibilities to strangers because they were strangers themselves.

Jesus’ disciples were also people who decided to become strangers — in their own land and in others. They built communities based on their decision. That renewed their understanding of obligations to strangers, and hospitality was renewed.

In every household, in every tent, the door was open — to the stranger, the outsider, the enemy, or potential enemy. And the stranger was one with whom one acted, not in service, but equality.
Then a terrible thing happened in third-century Italy. At the side of a monastery, they built a little room for strangers. And they called it a hospice. The church took over responsibility for the stranger. And Christians forgot what had been unique about their community — how to welcome the person who was outside and hungry.

The hospice hooked hospitality out of the community. "Hospice" became "hospital." The hospital became Humana, a for-profit corporation buying up church hospitals. Communities and churches have forgotten about hospitality. Now systems and corporations claim they can produce it and sell it and that you can consume it.

You must struggle with all your might to reclaim the central Christian act of hospitality. You will have to fight your local hospitals. You will have to fight Humana. You will have to fight the social services. They have commodified hospitality and called it a service. They have made a market of the temple. And you know what you’re supposed to do the money changers: get ‘em out! Or bring into the church the hospitality that is at the center of understanding a relationship as a friend not a servant. A church’s response to people without should be hospitality, not services.

* * * *

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing Community Assets was written by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. McKnight is the author of this article "Why Servanthood is Bad." Though not addressing theological issues, nor presuming Christian activism, it presents a radically new departure for urban community re-formation, stressing assets rather than deficiencies. Published by ACTA Publications and 376 pages long, it is a bargain at $12.00 through Amazon.com.

One review says that this is a guide that "...summarizes lessons learned by studying successful community-building initiatives in hundreds of neighborhoods across the U.S. It outlines what local communities can do to start their own journeys down the path of asset-based development."