

Chapter 4

Learning In The Context of Service: Concluding Thoughts

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As one reads the descriptions of the 15 courses offered at the three institutions of higher education, the distinction between service learning and volunteerism resonates. Volunteerism is altruism in action. Service-learning is more. It is course-related, reflective outreach that focuses equally on the growth of those giving service and the empowerment of those receiving service. These courses clearly bring service-learning to life. The impact of service-learning on multiple student populations at urban, suburban and rural campuses, has a ripple effect for many years to come. The most fundamental of those effects is to help shape the professional identities of the preservice and inservice teachers engaging in service-learning activities in these courses.

The Consortium comprised of the three institutions of teacher education was very productive. Formed in the year 2000, the Consortium consisted of 18 professors who met regularly at alternating campuses to learn about infusing service-learning into teacher education courses. These professors represented a broad range of disciplines, levels, culture/ethnicities and experiences. At Coppin State College, there were professors of Adult and General Education whose expertise ranged from early childhood to gerontology, an associate dean of arts and sciences, the director of the Education Resource Center, and the director of the Education Technology Center. Professors from Towson University represented the four large departments in the College of Education: Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary and Reading, Special Education, and Instructional Technology. Salisbury University's team included professors who taught many different General Education requirements such as the foundations course called *The School in a Diverse Society* and methods courses in social studies, science and language arts/reading. Courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels were infused with service-learning as a result of this consortium.

VARIED APPROACHES TO SERVICE-LEARNING

The courses taught by Consortium members demonstrated the variety of approaches that can be taken to integrating service-learning into curricula. For example, some of the courses required a specific whole-class project, while others allowed for each student to develop her or his own individual project. Some of the projects took place in schools and at other settings with a primary focus on education, while others took place in conjunction with community organizations for which education is just one part of their mission. Most courses required service-learning, although a few allowed students the option of service-learning, a research project, or an action/advocacy project. In these courses, the majority of the students chose to do service-learning. Each approach to service-learning had advantages and disadvantages.

Site selection was one of the biggest differences among the projects. Some courses required a specific site at which all students were to perform their service learning. For example, all of Dr. Robeck's students were required to spend time at the local zoo. Similarly, in Professor Gilliam's Honors World Literature course, students worked with children from two selected elementary schools. When a whole class of students went to one site or when the target population was transported to the college, the professor had more opportunity for direct supervision of the project. With this model of service-learning, there was an opportunity to build the course-specific service-learning expectations over several semesters and to develop a strong collabora-

tion with the personnel at one or two sites. An ongoing collaboration has the benefit to both the community site and the institution of higher education for personnel to really get to know each other and understand each others' priorities and needs for the joint projects. The expectations of students' roles are clearer because of this ongoing collaboration. Furthermore, feedback allows for improving, refining and possibly enlarging the service-learning project in subsequent semesters.

In several courses, students had the option of choosing any site for their service-learning projects. At Towson, self-selection was expected in several courses, such as Dr. Frieman's *Intervention and the Young Child*, Dr. Laster's *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse Society*, Dr. Wilkins' *Survey of Educational Programs*, Dr. Wiltz's *Primary Curriculum*, and Dr. Jin's *Teaching in a Multicultural/Multiethnic Society*. This was also true of Dr. Geleta's course at Salisbury University, *The School in a Diverse Society*. At Coppin State, both of Dr. Sutton's courses and Dr. Brooks' *Sociology and Community Development* course also gave students the opportunity to choose their sites. One significant benefit of having students forage for their own site was that they often became very engrossed in the lives of the citizens at the site. For example, the film major who did her service-learning project at a halfway house for drug addicts decided to make a film documentary of the facility. That project and others continued beyond the term of the course because the service the student chose to provide was more than what could be contained in a single semester. This shows how the individual student's vision can become larger than the class assignment; he/she becomes part of the community site. Connections with the curriculum, which is an important element separating volunteerism from service-learning, are sometimes more challenging to identify when students are working at multiple sites, making classroom discussions of the projects more wide ranging in scope. Another drawback of having student-selected sites is that it often takes longer for students to get their service learning project going. Establishing rapport with the community-based personnel takes time, for example. As most students are in these courses for only one semester, ongoing collaboration between the site and the university may be absent. A professor who allows for student selection of service-learning sites must be comfortable with a more open-ended assignment and with less supervision of the action part of service-learning. Yet,

having students at several sites can also provide the opportunity for students to see an even broader relevance to the course content as the diverse range of connections to real-world experience become clear in class discussions about each others' projects.

A third approach is having students, as a class, choose the service-learning project for that particular semester, but all students engage in the same project. Hence the site and the project may change from semester to semester. An example of this approach is the school-supply drive for Afghan children undertaken by Dr. Jenne's social studies methods classes. This approach has some of the advantages associated with the specific site approach, in terms of control and supervision, but lacks the ongoing collaboration with one site or agency. This approach also has the advantage of giving students some voice in the selection of the project but does not allow for the level of individual choice and engagement often associated with self-selected projects.

What this variety demonstrates most of all is that service-learning is a flexible approach that is adaptable to specific instructional contexts and community settings. As well, the success of the varied projects described in this text demonstrates that none of these approaches is necessarily better than any other, but that each holds promise as an option for engaging students with their community.

REACHING THROUGH DIFFERENCE WITH A COMMITMENT TO SERVE

Service-learning provides opportunities for students to encounter and interact not only with individuals who are different from themselves, but also with the contexts in which those people live. In doing so, the students do not address the people in a strictly abstract manner, as they might if they stayed in a classroom where trends and tendencies of a population might be the focus. Instead, students get involved in and become part of the experience of the people whose needs they are addressing. That involvement has many effects. First, it helps students put faces and names to dimensions of human difference along lines of language, race, age, economic status, nationality and so on. These are dimensions of difference with which college students often have limited experience outside their own group. This limited experience can lead students to both oversimplify the

situations of others and to view difference as a barrier to relationships. A common theme in these projects was that, at first, the issues of difference seemed remarkable. Some students felt awkward, and some even resented being asked to work in a setting that made them so uncomfortable. However, as the project evolved, what became truly remarkable were the commonalities that transcended difference. Dr. Laster recognized this as she saw her students comment about their discomfort with difference, and acknowledge their surprise at the extent of difference, but then move to a sense of affiliation as they recognized elements of experience that they shared with the people involved with them in their projects. This affiliation often led students to a sense of advocacy and a desire to go beyond requirements as they became genuinely committed to the individuals they met.

Through their commitment to serve, many students came to recognize a second effect of working within real-world contexts, which is that addressing community needs means becoming involved in the complex dynamics of human experience. So, for example, Dr. Sutton's students learned that addressing the socialization needs of elderly people also meant engaging with their ethnic identity, acknowledging their desire to be respected and loved, and recognizing elders as having a level of wisdom that comes from the passage of years. Similarly, when his students worked to publicize information about flu vaccinations, they encountered a range of cultural and language issues that made the effort more involved than just making information accessible. In their ambitious project to send school supplies to Afghan children, Dr. Jenne's students found that hard work and a drive to serve sometimes has to be coupled with logistical resourcefulness. In this case, for the service to benefit the target group, the materials actually needed to be delivered to the intended beneficiaries. Were students to only research these issues, these aspects of the holistic quality of the project might be missed.

The various problems with schedules, logistics and shaping a process to match the personal features of the people involved demonstrated the optimism that is inherent in service-learning as an endeavor. That is to say that while the students involved in these projects learned that addressing community needs is always more complex than it may at first seem to be, they also came to that realization while they were, in fact, negotiating those complexities successfully. Service-learning is premised on the expectation that problems can be

addressed, if not actually "solved," through concerted thoughtful attention and action. This optimism became apparent through the enthusiasm that was generated among students when they found they were able to contribute positively to their community even as pre-professionals. Dr. Geleta's students, for example, applied their existing skills to support literacy in their community and were excited by the sense of personal agency and empowerment that emerged for them as a result.

STRUCTURE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

While combining opportunities to use varied approaches with sensitivity to the complex needs of people in a community imbues service-learning with great potential, it also calls for an organizing structure that keeps service-learning manageable. The three-phase service-learning process of Preparation-Action-Reflection (PAR) provided the students and instructors in the Consortium with a heuristic for organizing their work. Each faculty member was able to use the PAR structure to present the outline of service-learning to students and to sketch the activities that would be undertaken. Yet, as the projects developed, the PAR structure could be interpreted in different ways, allowing instructors and students to use it to meet the specific needs of the course. Even within a single course, the PAR structure allowed shifts in the flow of a project—what was done as Action in a phase of a project might also be Preparation for a later phase of the project, and Reflecting on a project done one semester might become Preparation for the next semester. As well, the changes that Dr. Bond and Dr. Robeck made in their courses over time provide demonstrations of the iterative character that must be part of the processes that address community problems. What seems like it will work at the outset may not be workable in practice, and what is workable in practice on one occasion may have to be revised to work in another situation. One lesson learned from this is that while a process framework is important for problem solving, the actual focus must continue to be the people in the community who are being served, and their responses to the actions being taken.

BENEFITS FROM SERVICE-LEARNING

The Preparation-Action-Reflection structure also helps to bring the process back to the person providing the service, which highlights the reciprocal character of service-learning. In virtually all of the projects in this volume, the students felt they not only provided service, but gained from the experience. These benefits sometimes came about incidentally, as noted in students' affective realizations; Dr. Frieman's students mention benefiting from the role of teachers in children's lives. Other times the benefits are derived within a deliberate set of opportunities built into the project, such as when Dr. Jin provided her students with a project that helped them to examine their own prejudices and stereotypes about others. Still other benefits come about from students having to, not only recognize the real-world effects of prejudice, but also to negotiate the demands of the social dynamics of the setting. This was the case with Dr. Laster's student who struggled to gain legitimacy as a female working to coach young males in baseball. In all of these ways and more, the potential of service-learning to benefit those providing the service was readily apparent. Interestingly, what some students gained was not only a sense of their new knowledge and abilities, but also the recognition of what they still had to learn. Comments by Dr. Jenne's students showed that they realized how little they really knew about the conditions of Afghan life, for example. The potential of service-learning, therefore, is not only to help students learn, but also to help create a desire for learning. As students come to care about those they are striving to serve, they want to know more about how to form relationships with them.

Service-learning offers the potential for personal growth; yet, it must also be said that there are factors that can keep that potential from being entirely realized. Dr. Geleta and her class found that in trying to understand the situations of some of the children they worked with, some of her students continued to operate through a perspective shaped by their prior assumptions about low-income families. The college students maintained their more simplistic version of the "others'" lives, despite their interactions with them. Issues of power and equity, intersecting with students' preconceptions about society and various social groups, can work against their learning. Still, service-learning provides a

vehicle by which those preconceptions can be recognized, at least by the instructor, and dealt with over time. For example, Dr. Robeck's ability to respond to his students' ideas about the roles of teachers and students in schools was enhanced by the service-learning experiences of his students, but it took time over several semesters to develop an approach that helped students to critically examine those ideas.

The reciprocity of service-learning taking place within schools can reconfigure the relationships that are typical of teacher education programs. Traditionally, students in teacher education programs enter schools expecting to gain from the experience in various ways, such as becoming familiar with the culture of schools, certain instructional practices, or the characteristics of children of a certain age group. At times, the students feel they have little to give back to the setting. As Dr. Bowden's project demonstrated, when students entered the setting with the focus on giving as much as they were getting from the relationship, they were less likely to be passive. Instead, they actively looked for ways to contribute to what is happening in the setting in positive ways. Many times these contributions drew from the unique characteristics of the individuals providing the service, as was the case with Professor Gilliam's students who used their own multinational experiences to enhance the learning of the young children with whom they worked. Preservice teachers' read-alouds to K-5 ESOL students in Dr. Bond's classes not only enhanced understanding of the potential of using literature to strengthen language skills, but also positively affected the English skills of the K-5 students.

While some of the most important learning that occurs through service-learning is often incidental and unanticipated, the approach also allows for the inclusion of specific goals and standards. Dr. Wilkins' and Dr. Wiltz' contributions to this volume, among others, demonstrate the explicit support that service-learning provides to an instructor's attempts to emphasize established content standards, outcomes, and instructional goals. This is important for several reasons, of course, but generally speaking it is important in that it suggests that service-learning is not just one more thing to add to the curriculum. Service-learning itself is an effective instructional approach, and one that carries with it important social and personal benefits that are sometimes difficult to obtain through more traditional means.

In conclusion, the multiple objectives of the Teacher Education Consortium in Service-Learning provide a set of powerful teaching strategies for students in teacher education programs. As teacher educators, collaborating across institutions of higher education, we assist our students in the development of their professional identities as teachers. Part of that identity includes an

understanding of the potential connections between academic learning and community service. Introducing our students to best practices for implementing service-learning projects in their own classes has been a step in the right direction as our students cross the threshold to professional practice.

Resources

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ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

(Available as of May 25, 2003)

American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Monograph Series

www.aahe.org/service/series.htm

Contains theoretical essays helpful to educators interested in service-learning pedagogy (design, implementation and outcomes of specific service-learning programs).

American Association of Community Colleges Service-Learning Clearinghouse

www.aacc.nche.edu/initiatives/horizons/syllabi.htm

Free copies of course syllabi which contain service-learning projects/resources from a number of community colleges.

Close Up Foundation

www.closeup.org/

Publishes online Service-Learning Quarterly newsletter containing resources.

Colorado State University Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs

www.colostate.edu/Depts/SILVP/sipman.htm

Source for Service-Learning Faculty Manual which includes principles and standards of service-learning, programs and activities at Colorado State University, and effective practices in service-learning.

Corporation for National Service

www.cns.gov/

Provides links to Learn and Serve America and AmeriCorp with research information, conferences and grant sources.

Denison University, Center for Service-Learning

www.denison.edu/service-learning

Provides lots of ideas for service-learning projects suitable for use with young children.

Georgetown University, Volunteer and Public Service Center

www.georgetown.edu/outreach/vps/

Provides detailed descriptions of national and international service-learning programs.

National Council of Teachers of English Service-Learning in Composition

www.ncte.org/service

Resources and information for teachers seeking ways to connect writing instruction with community action. Includes syllabi, assignments, sample student projects, bibliographies and active research projects.

North Carolina Central University Academic Community Service-Learning Program

www.nccu.edu/commserv/Service1.htm

Provides detailed Faculty Guide for use in connecting service-learning to instruction in higher education.

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

<http://umn.edu/~serve>

Broad site providing information for novices and well as experienced service-learning leaders. Information includes: funding, conferences, legislature and current issues related to service-learning.

University of Rhode Island, Feinstein Center for Service Learning

www.uri.edu/volunteer

Site offers extensive information on Feinstein Center Faculty Fellows Program, Scholarships, Conferences, America Enrichment Project, etc.

Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning

<http://umich.edu/~ocsl/MJCSL>

LISTSERVS

(Available as of May 28, 2003)

Community-Based Service-Learning

A national listserv for individuals at community-based organizations who are engaged in service-learning activities. This listserv is hosted by the Points of Light Foundation.

To subscribe send an e-mail to listserv@listserv.pointsoflight.org

HE-SL Listserv

Provides a forum for the discussion of issues concerning the higher education service-learning community. HE-SL Listserv discussions have evolved around curriculum requests, class assignments and the institutionalization of service-learning.

To subscribe send an e-mail to join-he-sl@lists.etr.org

K12-SL Listserv

Provides a forum for the discussion of issues concerning the K-12 service-learning community. Some of the past discussions have involved project ideas, information requests and current service-learning news.

To subscribe visit <http://lyris.etr.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=k12-sl>

Service-Learning Listserv Hosted by Communications for Sustainable Future at the University of Colorado, Boulder

An active and informative listserv for the entire service-learning community. Although hosted by an institution for higher education, the discussions cover a wide range of service-learning topics.

To subscribe send an e-mail to majordomo@csf.colorado.edu

SERVICE-LEARNING JOURNAL

Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning

<http://umich.edu/~ocsl/MJCSL>

National peer-reviewed journal publishing articles on research, pedagogy, theory and other matters pertaining to curriculum-based service-learning in higher education. Published at the Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan.