

1 *Before engaging in service-learning, professors will want to know what the impulses are behind service-learning, what research says about the successes and pitfalls of service-learning, and how they can respond to major objections to it.*

Why Service-Learning?

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To ask the question, Why service-learning? in a volume designed to provide professors with the nuts and bolts of implementing service-learning in their classes might appear a bit odd. After all, does service-learning need any rationale? Isn't it a bit of common sense that the study of academic subjects is linked in tangible ways to life outside the classroom? Isn't it transparently obvious that learning cannot be adequately defined by the mere amassing of knowledge—of facts, figures, and theories so readily available in higher education classrooms?

The answer to those supposedly rhetorical questions is not a resounding yes. In fact, service-learning needs a great deal of explanation. First, there is no one impulse behind service-learning initiatives, and professors should understand the reasoning behind the various impulses. Although this chapter is not designed to provide a detailed explanation of theoretical assumptions that support service-learning, nevertheless, professors, who are acutely aware of the theoretical underpinnings for practical endeavors, will be curious about the assumptions that support service-learning. Second, professors, quite reasonably, will want to know to what extent service-learning initiatives have been successful. Indeed, studies can provide insight into service-learning approaches that have shown success in meeting particular service-learning goals and those that have shown potential pitfalls in meeting those goals. Third, professors certainly will want to know the answers to major objections regarding service-learning. It would be naive to assume that professors, chief proponents of critical thinking, would not be interested in reasoned responses to objections brought against service-learning or would make a decision to engage in service-learning without exploring answers to potential problems. My task,

therefore, is to provide information about all three of these issues so that professors have an informed framework for making decisions about engaging in service-learning.

Impulses for Service-Learning

To discuss the impulses that support service-learning, I begin with three definitions:

In their most limited sense, service learning courses unite in a single mission the traditionally separate duties of research, teaching, and service. [Cushman, 1999, p. 331]

More than volunteerism, service-learning combines community work with classroom instruction, emphasizing reflection as well as action. It empowers students by making them responsible in a real world context, while giving them the support, encouragement, information, and skills to be effective. [Rosenberg, 2000, p. 8]

Service learning is a pedagogy that fosters the development of skills and knowledge needed for participation in public life. [Forman and Wilkinson, 1997, p. 278]

These definitions have common threads: (1) separation and (2) integration and engagement.

Concerning separation, Cushman (1999) says that the mission of higher education comprises three duties that are not interrelated: research, teaching, and service. Rosenberg (2000) assumes that students are not being empowered in the traditional classroom; rather, they are actually separated from the means of empowerment. The problem of empowerment appears to be related to the separation of an “unreal” world of education from a real-world context. Forman and Wilkinson (1997) also suggest that traditional education separates students from participation in public life and in fact does not give them the skills and knowledge they need for such participation. In all three cases, service-learning is a way to overcome separation by integration and engagement. Concerning integration and engagement, service-learning unites research, teaching, and service; combines community work with classroom instruction; and prepares students to participate in public life, thus integrating theory and practice.

These definitions faithfully represent a main intention of service-learning: to ensure that academic study is integrated with the larger public life, generally conceived as life outside the classroom, although the classroom is a place where students also develop community relationships. The definitions also represent a negative critique of traditional education as ineffective in

fostering the skills and attitudes necessary for students to become active in solving social problems.

The definitions, however, do not reveal two motives for service-learning, which Battistoni (1997) defines as “philanthropic and civic” (p. 150), which provide two very different impulses for service-learning. The philanthropic position might also be considered an additive position. It holds that all that needs to be done to the traditional classroom is to add a public service component. Public service is integrated into the classroom by ensuring that students consider the impact of service, but the impulse behind the philanthropic or additive approach is helping others who are in need of help, with the added benefit of honing students’ marketable skills and encouraging students to feel good about themselves.

The civic approach is at odds with the philanthropic or additive approach and constitutes a radical pedagogy. It assumes that (1) the American social order is fragmented, lacking a sense of community, (2) lack of community has produced injustices of various kinds, (3) higher education is deeply implicated in the perpetuation of injustice, and (4) higher education must be radically transformed to meet its obligation to produce citizens who can promote justice in a democratic society.

The philanthropic-additive approach and the civic approach are very different approaches to service-learning, and professors should investigate each to make an informed decision about their philosophical commitment to service-learning. In investigating the two basic impulses, they will find in the service-learning literature degrees of commitment along a continuum, with the philanthropic-additive approach near one end of the continuum and the civic approach near the other end. In fact, the literature offers both models (Cleary, 1998; Cleary and Benson, 1998; Gordon, 1999; Schaeffer and Peterson, 1998) and examples of classroom service-learning (Althaus, 1997; Bush-Bacelis, 1998; Eddy and Carducci, 1997; Huckin, 1997; Mohan, 1995; Ogburn and Wallace, 1998) at different points along the continuum. My purpose is to provide a discussion of the civic approach because it appears to represent a highly powerful impulse in the developing pedagogy of service-learning, and I assume that professors will want to know more about a pedagogy that both threatens the status quo of higher education and promises remarkable benefits once the status quo is replaced by the structures necessary to sustain a long-term service-learning pedagogy.

Service-learning is not new in terms of its intellectual roots, which as Morton and Saltmarsh (1997) show, go back to the Progressive era in U.S. history, particularly the work of Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Dorothy Day. At the same time, as Barber and Battistoni (1993) note, it “is [in] some ways a rather new pedagogy” (p. ix). Its newness is quite obvious when its literature is investigated. I did a search of the word *service-learning* using the ERIC database and found six sources in 1990, five in 1991, two in 1992, and then sixty in 1996, fifty-two in 1997, fifty-three in 1998, and forty-six

in 1999. Clearly, *service-learning* as a searchable term is relatively new, and the literature about it has increased significantly in the past five or six years.

Another way that it is new is that it is a response to a perceived fragmentation of community and the ascendance of materialism, individualism, and competitiveness. As Astin (1993) has pointed out, "During the past forty or fifty years American universities have come to be dominated by three powerful and interrelated values: *materialism*, *individualism*, and *competitiveness*" (p. 4). One result of the ascendancy of these three values, continues Astin, is that "we have the scholars, to be sure, but we lack the community. One might more aptly characterize the modern university as a 'collection,' rather than a community of scholars" (p. 7). Astin's observations share kinship with Cushman's minimalist definition already cited of service-learning as the uniting of "the traditionally separate duties of research, teaching, and service."

Because the academy is intertwined with other institutions that comprise American culture, it is both a symptom and a cause of the problem of community fractured by materialism, individualism, and competitiveness. Hepburn (1997) traces the impact of this problem to the late 1980s, when "individuals found themselves increasingly disconnected from public life and civic discourse" (p. 140). Henson and Sutliff (1998) trace service-learning to "the attempts of some institutions of higher education to revitalize their moral and intellectual leadership in a democratic society" (p. 191). Thus, it seems fair to say that service-learning is a response to a perceived crisis in community.

This crisis in community presents a dilemma for higher education because higher education itself is one of the culprits that helped precipitate the crisis. Therefore, it must itself be revitalized morally and intellectually so that it can provide the education befitting citizens of a democracy. Although Mattson (1998) is skeptical about whether higher education ever really exerted the level of civic responsibility in the twentieth century that many proponents of service-learning say it did, those who advocate the civic approach to service-learning insist that the academy must be transformed to fit the impulse that drove John Dewey to promote "knowledge as a tool for creating a just society" (Hatcher, 1997, p. 24). Such knowledge will help create a society in which all citizens participate fully in political decision making. Only such full participation will eradicate the social evils—poverty and racism, to name just two—that are unmistakable blemishes on the national social landscape today.

It is not enough merely to add service to the curriculum, proponents of the civic approach affirm; they believe the philanthropic-additive approach does not go far enough to solve social problems and promote justice. Rather, the whole approach to education must be radically reformed. As Howard (1998) says, "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 tra-

ditional classroom roles, relationships, and norms, and then resocialize them around a new set of classroom behaviors” (p. 25). This program of resocialization, however, is inimical to the ethos of the academy as it now functions, for, as Harkavy and Benson (1998) note, the goal of service-learning should be to “overthrow the aristocratic Platonic theory of ‘liberal education’ and institute a democratic Deweyan theory of ‘instrumental education’” (p. 19). Morrill (1982) makes a similar point: “The task of civic education is, then, especially difficult and ambitious for it involves the empowerment of persons as well as the cultivation of minds. This is not an undertaking for which contemporary colleges and universities are especially well equipped because many of the well-known features of modern collegiate education create serious barriers to a powerful civic education” (p. 365).

Marullo (n.d.) agrees with Morrill: “I will argue that service learning programs, if implemented properly, should be critical of the status quo and should ultimately challenge unjust structures and oppressive institutional operations” (p. 2). One implication of this criticism of the status quo is the “discrediting of the political economy that results from students discovering that it is the overt operations of market forces, aided by the political-economic system designed to generate inequality, that is responsible for the misery they see” (p. 13). Indeed, Rice and Brown (1998) affirm “the need to link service learning pedagogy with curriculum that introduces students to issues of personal and institutional power and oppression, in order to foster the development of self-reflective, culturally aware, and responsive community participants” (p. 146).

The focus on empowerment is not limited to students, who, proponents of the civic approach note, surely must be enabled to be change agents in a democratic society and oppose oppression of every sort. Professors also must change. They must come to see that a collaborative teaching style, which puts them in the place of learners so that they can identify with students, is critical if the pedagogy of service-learning is to transform the academy and, concomitantly, American culture at large. Neither the vocationalism that the academy has embraced nor the purist model of learning for learning’s sake will meet this goal (Barber, 1993). There cannot be “large and impersonal classes, lack of context relevance, and lack of direct contact between students and faculty” (Cleary and Benson, 1998, p. 125). Instead, the classroom should become a place where equals meet and form communities based on mutual respect to support each other as they identify with communities outside the classroom—communities broken and bleeding because they have been oppressed and treated unjustly. In meeting in the classroom to provide a staging area for the offense against injustice, students and professors create a community that practices the values they will promote in the new society.

I have tried to represent the civic approach accurately, knowing that the continuum I spoke of earlier allows for various points of agreement closer to and further from the authors I have quoted. Nevertheless, in

aggregate, the civic approach represents a significant voice in the service-learning movement, and professors will want to know not only what that approach offers to and requires of them, but also will want to know whether the service-learning movement as a whole has been successful in implementing its vision of a just academy that produces citizens ready to be change agents for justice. I now turn to evidence from those who have been implementing service-learning courses to provide information that professors can use to begin gauging the success of the service-learning movement to date and to gain insight into the issues that face those who implement a service-learning course.

The Success of Service-Learning Initiatives

Because service-learning is a relatively new pedagogy, we should not expect definitive answers about its effectiveness. In fact, Astin and Sax (1998) note, "To date, empirical studies on the impact of service are quite scarce" (p. 251). In addition, Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1997) say, "There is very little empirical research to go along with the social and theoretical justification for service-learning, and what research there is has been mixed" (p. 5). Giles and Eyler (1998) affirm, "Faculty and administrators are intensely interested in this issue [of the relationship between service-learning and subject matter learning], but convincing evidence of the importance of service learning to subject matter learning is still lacking" (p. 67). These assertions about lack of definitive research to confirm the impulses that motivate service-learning and attest to the claims of those who support it do not mean that no research exists to give indications of service-learning's effectiveness or lack thereof.

In fact, Astin and Sax (1998), in reporting on a study they conducted, say, "The findings reported show clearly that participating in service activities during the undergraduate years substantially enhances the student's academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility" (p. 262). Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1997) report in their study of service-learning, "Service-learning programs do appear to have an impact on students' attitudes, values, skills and the way they think about social issues even over the relatively brief period of a semester. These findings are even more consistent in arts and sciences classes. While the effect is significant, it is small; few interventions of a semester's length have a dramatic impact on outcomes" (p. 13). They note as well the need "to identify more clearly the types of service-learning experience that make the greatest difference to students" (p. 13), so a crucial aspect of service-learning needs further investigation.

Henson and Sutliff (1998), in reporting on their experience of integrating service-learning into a business and technical writing classroom, say, "Integrating service learning into a regular class stimulates both teaching and learning" (p. 201). Others agree that service-learning is beneficial (Rhoads, 1998; Rice and Brown, 1998).

Yet as Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1997) noted, the results are mixed. For instance, Miller (1997) reports that one of the hypotheses of his study of college freshmen—"Students, over-all, will report an increased sense of the power of people to make a difference in the world"—was not confirmed. In fact, he found that "students perceived people to have less power than before the experience [of service-learning]" (p. 18). He nevertheless interprets this result positively because it represents a change in a particular group of students' unrealistic expectations about the level of their influence in helping to change the world. Koliba (1998), in reflecting on his case study of service-learning, identifies one of the problems he encountered as underuse of students in a redevelopment project: "Most . . . did not feel as if they were an integral part of the planning process, let alone members of the community. In most instances, there was never any dialogue between the students and the residents" (p. 83). Indeed, Neururer and Rhoads (1998), in considering the results from their study of graduate and undergraduate students engaged in service-learning, remark, "Community service, as a panacea to bridge class differences, as well as racial differences, falls apart upon close examination of our data" (p. 325).

These successes and failures suggest that more research needs to be done to determine the best ways to integrate service-learning into the curriculum and identify the types of activities best suited for meeting the goals of service-learning initiatives. For instance, Astin and Sax (1998) view tutoring and teaching as "by far the most common forms of education-related service" (p. 257). Yet Schutz and Gere (1998) question the use of tutoring as an effective means of achieving the goal of developing community among equals:

The strength of tutoring as a mode of service is its ability to promote close individual relations between tutors and tutees. Yet, without a deep connection to a tutee's communities, the effort to create such a relation may be seriously constrained. Thus, it is not surprising that tutoring often fails to change college students' visions of their tutees as lacking a free-floating "expert" knowledge that they can provide. [p. 135]

In other words, tutoring maintains the status distinction between those who help and those who need help, one of the distinctions that the civic approach believes perpetuates injustice. Clearly, the research provides only a rough guide to professors who want to know how successful service-learning initiatives have been.

Objections to Service-Learning

Studies on the effectiveness of service-learning in courses suggest that professors will find challenges as they seek to implement this pedagogy. In particular, I address three major challenges or objections to service-learning: service-learning takes too much time and too many resources; it should not be required; and it should be resisted because it is a form of indoctrination.

- *Service-learning takes too much time and too many resources.* One of the immediate responses to the call for professors to participate in service-learning is that there is not enough time for professors to do everything they want to in a course. Thus, service-learning can be perceived as taking time away from the study of course content and requiring additional resources that could be used for other existing needs, such as increasing photocopying budgets. And that is true. Professors will not only spend more time than usual setting up service-learning in their classes but will also have to readjust their thinking about what constitutes effective education. They will need to reconsider the belief that stuffing students with content knowledge is the sole or the most important function of academic education.

In addition, professors who integrate service-learning into their classrooms will find that the relationship between the classroom and the organizational environments in which students engage in service is not necessarily tidy. Gordon (1999) notes that “working with a community partner can be a dance of accommodation” (p. 22). Sax and Aston (1997) not only endorse the idea that each campus should have a centralized service-learning center; they believe that without such a center, the necessary “level of coordination between faculty and community agencies will be nearly impossible to attain” (p. 32). Indeed, the costs for such a center can increase the resentment of professors who are struggling to live with inadequate budgets. In short, service-learning requires precious resources, including classroom time and a variety of support mechanisms.

Ultimately, the question to resolve is this: Are those resources well spent, or could they be better spent in other ways? Proponents of service-learning affirm that the resources are well spent, but questions about the effectiveness of resource allocations are notoriously difficult to answer unless good evaluative data are available. As I have noted, research results on the effectiveness of service-learning are mixed, and even the evaluation of individual students’ efforts in a service-learning project can be inconclusive. For example, Eddy and Carducci (1997), in discussing the evaluation of students’ writing in their service-learning class, admit that student writing “aims to, and often does, affect the local community in ways both subtle and profound, but difficult to estimate and evaluate” (p. 83).

- *Service-learning should not be required.* Another objection takes advantage of the seemingly ironic position that service-learning, which is intended to breed a long-lasting desire for voluntary service, can be required. This objection may be based on a misunderstanding of volunteerism as spontaneous. Indeed, volunteerism is no doubt a learned behavior that can be nurtured best in an environment where service is naturally accepted as part of a person’s civic responsibility. Such environments, however, are not the norm, and although students might initially resist the notion of being required to serve as part of an academic class, they may learn that service is worth their energies and make it part of their post-graduation lifestyle (Carpenter and Jacobs, 1994). Again, however, whether service-learning should be required depends in part on what education is.

If Dickson (1979) is correct when he says, “Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know, it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave” (p. 149), then service-learning might very well be required.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of requiring service-learning comes from Schnaubelt and Watson (1999): “One could argue that forcing a student to do algebra homework also violates one’s personal freedom. This imposition, however, may lead to greater freedom (i.e., admission to a good college, a better job, etc.). In a sense, some impositions lead to greater freedoms” (pp. 12–13). Indeed, their comments raise a more fundamental issue: Why is any course required? Certainly, professors believe they have the right to impose graduation requirements on students, in both the general education program and students’ majors, so any argument against imposing requirements would need to explain why certain requirements are defensible and others are not.

- *Service-learning should be resisted because it is a form of indoctrination.*

Perhaps the most potent argument against service-learning is that it appears, at least in the civic approach, to be indoctrination. Students *will* learn to be democratic citizens, and they *will* subscribe to particular political views about the evils of capitalism. The authors I have quoted who openly criticize the status quo certainly could be interpreted as pushing a particular agenda, one that is based on notions of human perfection, as was typical of Dewey’s thought.

This qualm about a particular ideological impulse for service-learning, however, need not keep professors from engaging in it. After all, the continuum of service-learning impulses offers a variety of perspectives from which to integrate service-learning in higher education classrooms. And as Huckin (1997) notes, students can be given some flexibility in choosing service-learning projects: “It is important to let students choose the agency they want to work with, and to do so in full awareness of the kind of work the agency does and its governing philosophy or ideology. Many nonprofit agencies have strong political stances, and it might not be a good idea to have a right-to-life activist, for example, doing a project for Planned Parenthood” (p. 52).

In short, the purpose of service-learning in general is to integrate in the classroom the learning of concepts with the implementation of those concepts both inside and outside the classroom. The hope of service-learning is that when students participate in such an integrated course, they will choose as a lifelong goal to engage voluntarily in service.

Conclusion

Service-learning, like any other pedagogical initiative, presents risks and rewards attended by numerous barriers and pitfalls. Professors need to investigate both risks and rewards and be aware of pitfalls and barriers

before committing themselves to service-learning. While the purpose of this book is to provide professors with nuts-and-bolts answers to practical issues related to service-learning, it is also imperative for professors to be aware of the impulses behind service-learning because theory drives practice.

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