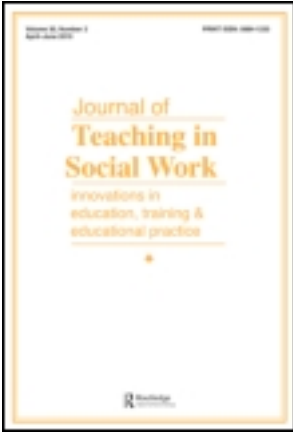


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## **Preface to a Special Issue on Service Learning**

PAUL A. KURZMAN

*Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Teaching in Social Work*

From time to time, the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* will publish a special issue centered on a contemporary issue of pedagogical importance. This special issue focuses on service learning and includes six articles written on ways of approaching and teaching service learning in both the graduate and undergraduate social work curricula. As an increasingly popular innovation in adult education, service learning has been relatively easily and rapidly adapted for professional education, in general, and for social work education, in particular.

In the *Social Work Dictionary* (2003), Barker defines service learning as “An educational method in which students provide school-approved and school-monitored social services to their communities for school credit . . . which gives students a greater sense of involvement in the community and its needs and enhances their academic instruction” (p. 392). Bringle and Hatcher (1996), pioneers in the adaptation of service learning to higher education, state that service learning is “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 222).

It is, therefore, easy to see how this classroom-initiated experience dovetails well with field education—cited by the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education as the “signature pedagogy” of the profession (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008). The Council further defines this signature pedagogy as “a central form of instruction and learning to socialize students to perform the role of practitioner . . . it contains pedagogical norms with which to connect and integrate theory and practice” (p. 8). Moreover, service learning generally includes peer learning, which Knowles (1980) notes is a highly valued component of adult education that usually is missing in fieldwork education. In addition, as some scholars observe, service learning can serve as a way of bridging the traditional divide between class and field, the school-based

curriculum and field practicum learning, agency-centered education, and classroom-based instruction (Lyter, 2012; Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). Integrative in spirit and collaborative in execution, the pedagogy also fulfills an important latent function of bridging “town and gown.”

We hope that this special issue, with its focus on service learning as an innovative approach to undergraduate and graduate social work education, will provide a timely focus on a creative new modality for educational integration. The editors are greatly indebted to the authors of the articles in this special issue for their thoughtful observations and their scholarly contributions.

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