

Service-Learning: Theory, Student Development, and Strategy

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In higher education, there are generally two types of campus-based service opportunities. The first type operates through some kind of volunteer clearinghouse and does not have an explicit educational component. The second type integrates service into the curriculum so that classroom knowledge is explicitly applied to community service, and knowledge gained through service in the community enhances classroom learning. This type of initiative has been given the name of service-learning because of its explicit educational component. While community service generally does not have an explicit learning component, service-learning always does. This author uses the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) definition of service-learning. The SREB states that service-learning is a pedagogy that emphasizes the accomplishment of tasks which meet human needs in combination with conscious educational growth (in Kendall, 1990: 20). In practical terms, this means that students perform weekly community service while they are enrolled in a course which provides time to reflect on how the ideas generated in the field relate to the course concepts.

Over the past five years, I have utilized the pedagogy of service-learning in a number of courses: Social Stratification, Global Development, Global Human Ecology, and Non-Violence. This pedagogy has been particularly useful since it integrates theory and praxis, thus making it exciting for both teacher and student. This paper will explore three of the insights that have been gained by using the pedagogy of service-learning. First, service-learning can be grounded in sociological theory. Second, service-learning has a powerful effect on the students' social and intellectual development. And third, it is necessary to develop new strategies and resources in order to incorporate service-learning into the learning process.

I. Theory

Service-learning students are seen as more active agents in the learning process than most standard approaches. Because service-learning focuses on human agency and has a concern with developing critical and engaged learners, this way of knowing can be grounded in critical education theory, which stems from critical social theory in the subdiscipline of the sociology of education. Critical education theory is a perspective that is unified by the goal of transforming existing social inequalities and injustices and to heal and repair the world (McLaren, 1989). More specifically, critical education theory is interested in discovering the various types of curriculum and pedagogy which allow teachers to become "transformative intellectuals" and students to become active, critical, and engaged learners (Giroux 1988).

One method of cultivating active, critical, and engaged learners is through service-learning

since it provides students with the type of transformative experience that critical educators identify as crucial. Critical education theory asserts that this transformation occurs when students have the opportunity to interact with various groups of people (e.g., people from different socio-economic backgrounds and sub-cultures), and then reflect critically upon the meaning of those interactions. Using this theoretical model, service-learning students are clearly active agents in their own learning process.

II. Student Development

Service-learning can have a powerful effect on students' social and intellectual development. My doctoral dissertation examined the effect of an intensive two-year service-learning program on college students' attitudes toward civic responsibility, international understanding, and racial prejudice (Myers-Lipton, 1994). A non-equivalent control group experiment was conducted with students from a large Western state university. The results of the multivariate analysis generally supported the hypothesis that students who were involved in service-learning showed larger increases in civic responsibility and international understanding, and larger decreases in racial prejudice, when compared to students involved in voluntarism or no service. The changes between the experimental (i.e., the service-learning group) and the control groups were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and were strong to very strong for civic responsibility, moderate to strong for international concern, and moderate to strong for racial prejudice.

Besides filling out surveys for the above study, the service-learning students were interviewed. Using open-ended questions during the interviews, three themes have emerged. The first theme that emerged is that service-learning promotes a sociological imagination since the students have the opportunity to discover the larger structural issues that are behind the human or environmental need to which they are responding. Moreover, service-learning bridges the gap between the structural and the personal by having them reflect on their actions in light of the concepts in the course. For the student, the resulting dialectical tension creates a situation where the concepts and theories that are discussed in class are no longer just abstractions that have little relevance, but rather they are powerful ideas that affect the lives of the people they are serving and themselves. This personal engagement with the course material makes it possible for students to develop a much greater understanding of the concepts in the course.

Another theme that has become apparent is that service-learning students express that their education is not solely for their own development, but also is a part of the common good. This shift in perspective from the "I" to the "we" occurs because of the dynamic process of service-learning, which engages students in the process of action, analysis, and reflection. These processes, which are both intellectual and emotional, motivate students to become actively involved in the public good. This shift in perspective reveals itself in student comments about how education is no longer just about personal success, but about working for the betterment of society.

A third theme to emerge is that service-learning students become "connected knowers" instead of "separate knowers." Belenky and her co-authors (1986) discuss how students in the university are encouraged to be separate knowers. If a person is a separate knower, then she or he plays the doubting game. In the doubting game, each possible "truth" is put in the form of a logical proposition and then is put on trial. Unfortunately, this model of knowing encourages verbal jousting, which makes students, particularly female students, unwilling to express themselves for fear of being verbally attacked. This leads them to feel disempowered and unconnected to the learning process (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

In slight contrast, connected knowers play the believing game. In this "game," connected knowers listen to other people's perspectives and try to take on the different positions they are hearing before they begin to doubt their validity. Belenky asserts that this process builds new knowledge and facilitates the students' understanding of themselves, the people they are in dialogue with, and the readings from the class. Thus, the assumptions of connected knowing are that knowledge comes from first-hand experience, the process of reflection, the shared experience of going through a process together, and the integration of emotions and the intellect. All of these assumptions underlie the epistemology of service-learning. Because of these shared assumptions, service-learning encourages connected knowing.

III. Strategy

Third, it is necessary to develop some new strategies and resources in order to incorporate service-learning into the education process. Recall, that when using this pedagogy, students are required to be involved in a community service project. Thus, just as students are required to read articles and books for a course, they are also required to be involved in the community. Since many students are unfamiliar with this type of educational experience, the professor needs to educate them about it.

As part of educating the students about service-learning, the professor needs to explain in the beginning of the course the background of this pedagogy and how it relates to the concepts in the course. More practically, the professor needs to outline clearly the service expectations that she or he has of the students (see Appendix 1). Thus, she or he needs to discuss the amount of service required (2-3 hours a week is appropriate), the service sectors that are appropriate to work in, and what they should be looking for when performing service.

Furthermore, it is helpful to provide students with a clarification paper that they fill out with their "service supervisor," a person at the service agency who also nurtures the growth of the student (see Appendix 2). This clarification paper helps to ensure that the students understand their roles, responsibilities, and expectations while they are a part of the organization. The clarification paper also makes clear that the "service supervisor" and student are expected to meet once every two weeks to discuss how the service project is progressing. This bi-monthly meeting is to encourage clear and open communication between the two. It is also a good idea for the "service supervisor" to

fill out an evaluation form at the end of the experience. This evaluation form ensures that the student completes his or her service and provides the opportunity to give feedback to the professor and the student about the growth and performance of the latter.

The professor should also take an active role in helping students find meaningful service, as it is difficult to reflect upon such service as filing files or typing letters. Hence, students should be provided with a list of organizations where they can have meaningful service-learning experiences. The list, which might be composed of service projects that deal with education, health care, hunger and homelessness, gender, or the elderly should include the telephone numbers of the various organizations and the names of the volunteer supervisors, as well as the telephone numbers of the service-learning students who have worked there previously. It is a good idea to send this list, along with a letter explaining the course objectives and a description of service-learning, to the students a month before the course begins. In the letter, the students ought to be asked to find a project before the semester begins, thus ensuring that the integration of academics with service starts in the first week of the course.

Lastly, it is important to provide ample opportunity for the integration process of theory and praxis. This integration process occurs during their weekly service-learning journals, in the formal papers, and during the reflection sessions. When first using the pedagogy of service-learning, the class would discuss the service projects during the last 10 minutes of every third or fourth class. However, this did not provide students with enough time to discuss what they were learning in their projects and how it related to the concepts of the course. Thus, it became necessary to devote an entire class period every three weeks to reflection and integration. This reflection period was so successful that the next step has been to add a one-unit "praxis" course in addition to the above reflection period. The praxis course meets for 1.5 hours every three weeks.

In conclusion, I hope that the above insights will help other sociology professors to develop and implement service-learning courses. As with any new course, it will take time to develop. However, the effort it takes to develop a service-learning course will be rewarded by a genuine engagement of the students with the course material.

References

- Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. 1986. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. New York: Basic Books.
- Giroux, H. 1988. Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- Kendall, J., & Associates (Eds.). 1990. Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service, Vol. 1. Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education.
- McLaren, P. 1989. Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education. New York: Longman Inc.
- Myers-Lipton, S. 1994. The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students' Attitudes Toward Civic Responsibility, International Understanding, and Racial Prejudice. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder.

Appendix 1: An Abridged Syllabus

Poverty in the United States: A Service Learning Approach

Fall 1992

Instructor: Scott Myers-Lipton
Sociology Dept., Box 159
Office phone: 492-8626

Office: Ketchum 8
Office Hours: Tues.: 2-2:55
Thur.: 11-12

Overview of Course:

This course will analyze the issue of poverty in the United States. This will be accomplished by reading texts, class discussion, and through community service. It is my hope that you will be able to combine the intellectual dimensions of the course with the experiential, with the goal of developing a better understanding of this issue.

In addition to examining poverty in the United States, you will also be generating some solutions. You will be working on these solutions by:

- a) participating in a joint service project with high school students from Denver,
- b) participating 2-3 hours in an on-going service-learning project,
- c) developing a set of proposals and sending them to the newly elected President, Congressperson (from this district), and Senator (from this state).

In addition, you will be expected to attend and participate in all group experiences. That includes the trip to Denver on September 16-18 and the trip by Denver students to CU-Boulder (tentatively scheduled for mid-October).

What is the method of obtaining knowledge in this course?

Two principles guide my pedagogical approach. First, I believe that knowledge is obtained in the interactive process of action and reflection. Thus, we dedicate an entire class period and a lab every third week to the integration of action and reflection. Since the goal of this pedagogy is for you to become active participants in the discovery of knowledge, you will be integrating ideas that are generated from the readings and class discussions with ideas that are generated from your community service. In this way, you will be involved in the acquisition of knowledge, and thus will not be alienated from it.

Second, I believe that the best educational strategy is student-centered. Thus, while there will be times that I provide short lectures, I do not see myself as the source of knowledge. Rather, I see

myself as a facilitator who guides your learning process through discussion and small group work. Practically, this means that discussions will play a major role in the course, with you being responsible for bringing in one or two interpretive questions for each class.

How will I be evaluated? What are the purposes of the assignments?

You will be evaluated on your service work (10%), journal reflections (10%), participation in class (10%), and three 5-page papers (23.3% each). Since the various parts of the course add up to 100%, each percent equals a point. For example, the self-assessment is 10% of your grade; thus, this assignment is worth 10 points. The scale that I will use to measure your work is the following:

98-100=A+	88-89=B+	78-79=C+	68-69=D+	59 & below =F
93-97=A	83-87=B	73-77=C	63-67=D	
90-92=A-	80-82=B-	70-72=C-	60-62=D-	

There are four components to your service evaluation. First, you will be evaluated on the service hours you complete. Anything above 2 hours per week will provide you with an excellent evaluation. Anything below 2 hours per week will provide you with a poor evaluation. You are required to keep track of all your service hours by maintaining a "service log." This log should list: your name, the name of your service organization, the date you performed the service, and how many hours you served.

Second, you will fill out a "clarification paper" with your service supervisor. This paper will clarify the expectations that each of you might have of one another. Third, you will conduct an interview with a person on staff at your organization (some questions will be provided during the second week of class). The purpose of the interview process is to help you get better established in the organization. Therefore, don't just hand her the paper and tell her to fill it out. Fourth and finally, your service supervisor will fill out an evaluation form of your service performance.

The purpose of evaluating your participation is to encourage and reward students who prepare for, and engage in, the rigorous habits of the mind and heart. Thus, you will be evaluated on the extent and quality of your participation in class. Your classroom participation grade will be based on the following criteria.

Excellence (A) requires that you play a leadership role in discussion, demonstrate that you carefully read and thoughtfully consider the text; discuss points articulately; listen sensitively and respond intelligently to other's views; do not interrupt, obstruct or dominate discussion; ask insightful, carefully-constructed questions; and take responsibility for the overall quality of the discussion.

Above average (B) requires that you participate actively in discussion, demonstrate good knowledge of the text, work to achieve understanding, listen to other viewpoints, and ask sound questions.

Average (C) requires that you follow the discussion, make occasional comments, have a basic knowledge of the text, and sometimes ask questions.

Below average (D) requires that you occupy a seat and occasionally show signs of life.

Failure (F) requires that you occupy a seat but show no signs of life. In addition, your participation grade is based on: (a) your attendance of the out of classroom events, and (b) your reflection on these events in the journal. At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate your level of participation. This evaluation will be taken seriously when participation grades are determined.

The purpose of the journal, which is handed-in every two to three weeks, is to reflect on your service project and how it relates to social stratification. The journal grades are +, C, or -. Some students falsely use the service journal as a personal diary. Remember, the journal is not a personal diary; rather, it is mostly a service journal that deals with the integration of service with the concepts of the course. Therefore, you should address such things in your journal as:

- (a) How does your service connect to the concepts that are discussed in class?
- (b) How do the ideas from the readings connect with your service?
- (c) How do the ideas of this course connect with other ideas that you are exploring at college?

The purpose of the three 5-page papers is to give you the opportunity to do some deep thinking on the various issues of social stratification and to develop your writing and analytical skills. I will handout the details for each of these papers at least two weeks in advance of each due date. The late policy is a 1/3 drop in grade for each day that it is late. If the paper is over one week late, do not bother to turn it in.

What is expected of each student?

% Obtain a service project where you can do meaningful service by the end of the first week of class.

% Obtain a loose-leaf binder which will hold your service log and journal.

% Perform 2-3 hours of service each week. Keep these hours recorded in a service log and turn

them in with your journal two to three weeks.

% Write in your journal after every service experience.

% Fill out the "Clarification Paper" with your service supervisor. This paper will help clarify the expectations that you and your supervisor might have of one another and hopefully avoid any miscommunication. This paper is due on Thursday, September 21.

% By September 28, meet with a staff person in your organization to discuss service. I will give you some questions (on September 19), and you will compose some of your own. The interview questions are due on Tuesday, October 3.

% Design one or two questions from the readings for each class and be prepared to share them with your colleagues. Also on the days we discuss service, be prepared to share some of your insights from your journal with the group.

Books:

Auletta, Ken. 1982. The Under Class.

Katz, Michael. 1989. The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare.

Newman, Katherine. 1989. Falling from Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class.

Wilson, William J. 1987. The Truly Disadvantaged.

Articles:

In addition to the four books, I have also assigned a reader. You can buy the reader for \$20 at the bookstore.

Overview of the Course

Section 1: Introduction to Poverty, Privilege, and Service-Learning

Section 2: From the Undeserving Poor to the Culture of Poverty

- a) Culture of Poverty
- b) Moynihan Report
- c) The Ghetto as a Colony
- d) Women and Poverty

Section 3: The War on Poverty

- a) The Ideological Underpinnings
- b) The Result of the War

Section 4: The 1970's and the Post-Industrial City

Section 5: Conservatives and Poverty

Section 6: The 1980's and the Underclass

- a) Who are the Underclass
- b) The Homeless
- c) A Progressive Response to the Conservatives
- d) Poverty as a Moral Issue

Section 7: The Role of the Wealthy and Corporate Class in U.S. Society

Section 8: What's Happening to the Middle Class?

Section 9: Proposals to the New President, Congressperson, and Senator

Appendix 2: Clarification Paper for Student and Service Supervisor

Name of Student:

Name of Supervisor:

Name of Organization:

1. What expectations does the student have about the service-learning project, the agency, and/or the supervisor? (please use the back of this paper if necessary)

2. What expectations does the supervisor have about the student?

3. What are the responsibilities and main tasks of the student at the organization?

4. How often will the supervisor and student meet to talk about their working relationship?