Foundations of Service-Learning

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This chapter offers foundational knowledge of service-learning by providing an overview of the discipline's key concepts and definitions. It also features a discussion of relevant theoretical and pedagogical approaches to service-learning and a brief history of service-learning in the United States. Service-learning's relevance in higher education, in general, and education in the health sciences and occupational therapy, in particular, is also explored. Finally, the chapter includes critiques of service-learning as well as a brief summary of trends for service-learning in higher education.

DEFINITIONS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

What is service-learning? Although there are a variety of definitions, the essence of service-learning rests on a philosophy of service and learning that occurs in experiences, reflection, and civic engagement within a collaborative relationship involving community partners. A unique aspect of service-learning is that it incorporates structured

opportunities for students, faculty, and community partners to reflect on their interactions and activities in light of both educational and community objectives. The hyphen between *service* and *learning* is purposeful; it denotes a balance between the service and learning outcomes resulting from the partnership experience.

As stated by Jacoby (1996), "Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (p. 5). This definition differentiates service-learning from other forms of active learning, such as collaborative, cooperative, and problem-based education. Service-learning engages faculty and students with community partners in structured opportunities to meet academic learning objectives while addressing acknowledged community needs. Service-learning is different from volunteer experiences because of the explicit link of course objectives with structured community interactions to meet community-driven needs. Additionally, civic engagement and reflection about service are essential elements of service-learning, which often distinguishes it from internships (Howard, 2001).

According to Eyler & Giles (1999), quality service-learning experiences include the following components: curricula and projects that are sustainable and developed in partnership with the community; activities that are meaningful to student learning and community needs; a clear and relevant connection of community activities to course learning objectives; and purposeful challenges for participants to grapple with diversity and social issues. Service-learning is characterized as the interplay of service and learning, not only within individual course settings, but also within the broader academic institutional goals of community engagement. Brown (2001) describes service-learning as ". . . expanding educational institutions' (and the individual representatives of those institutions) participation *in* community, especially in terms of fostering coalitions and creating responsive resources for and with that community . . ." (p. 5).

The conceptual foundation of occupation and occupational therapy is an ongoing discussion and conversation featuring multiple

interdisciplinary theories and applied reference models (Kielhofner, 2004; Kramer, Hinojosa, & Royeen, 2003). Similar to the concept of occupation, service-learning is complex and based on diverse theoretical constructs, which will be described in the next section. As service-learning continues to expand into more courses, curricular models, and institutional infrastructures, theoretical concepts and definitions of service-learning will likely be further delineated and refined to meet the civic and social missions of institutions (Maurrasse, 2004; Shumer & Shumer, 2005).

THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

As noted by Howard (1998), ". . . academic service learning is a pedagogical model that intentionally integrates academic service learning and relevant community service" (p. 22). Service-learning is not simply the addition of a service assignment to a course, rather it challenges the teacher, learner, and community partners to connect course materials explicitly to service in community with others, thereby necessitating communal and reciprocal theoretical and pedagogical approaches.

Early writings and research on service-learning frequently cite the work of philosopher John Dewey as the philosophical and pedagogical inspiration for experiential, democratic, and civic education and for service-learning (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Dewey, a naturalistic philosopher, believed that we reflect and use prior knowledge from experiences to further our growth. The influences of Dewey's works on philosophy and epistemology lead to new ways of thinking about education as actively connecting knowledge to experience through engagement in and reflection on the world outside the classroom (Noddings, 1998). Dewey also linked the purpose of education to promoting democratic instructional practices and a more fully democratic society (Dewey, 1916). Dewey wrote:

> A society which makes provisions for participation in its good of all members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals

> a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the
> habits of mind which secure social changes without intro-
> ducing disorder. (p. 99)

In addition to Dewey, the theoretical insights of David Kolb and
Donald Schon on the role of reflective thinking in experiential edu-
cation have influenced how pedagogy incorporates reflection on serv-
ice as integral to service-learning (Cone & Harris, 1996; Eyler, Giles,
& Schmiede, 1996). Kolb's cycle process (Kolb, 1984)—reflection on
concrete experiences, thoughtful observation, abstract conceptual-
ization, and active experimentation—lead to inclusion of reflective
activities prior to, during, and after service as part of service-learning
assignments. Schon's practice of reflection in action and his recipro-
cal reflection teaching and coaching model (Schon, 1987) have been
used to foster reciprocal reflective activities among students, faculty,
and community partners (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989).

Service-learning also draws on critical theory and feminist pedagogy
(Brown, 2001; Deans, 1999). As noted by Friere (1973) and Shor (1987),
critical theory emphasizes that education is political and should in-
volve a dialectical approach of problem-posing and a critique of social
systems and the civic responsibilities of education. Feminist pedagogy
also espouses the need for critical reflection and dialogue related to
educational aspects of privilege and power (Weiler, 1991). These mod-
els point to the importance of situating service-learning in context with
social issues and challenges. The development of participatory-action
and community-based research in service-learning are examples of how
these pedagogies support community advocacy and give greater voice
to community partners with their strengths and needs (Strand, Marullo,
Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Reardon, 1998).

Finally, in addition to the use of social learning and cognitive learn-
ing models, recent development in service-learning theoretical frame-
works include the use of a pedagogy of engagement (Lowery et al.,
2006), the transformational model (Kiely, 2005), and service-learning
as postmodern pedagogy (Butin, 2005). Each of these models has
promise in helping to elucidate service-learning as a concept of teach-
ing and learning with important philosophical considerations based
on current research. As the theory of service-learning is more fully

developed, researchers can apply theory to gain a clearer understanding of the impact and value of service-learning as a philosophy and pedagogy.

In summary, the diversity of theoretical and pedagogical approaches described in this section can be viewed as both a concern and as strength. Numerous sources point to an urgent need for a logical and relevant theoretical basis for service-learning and note the concerns of multiple, diverse theories to support needed evidence-based research studies (Langana & Rubin, 2001; Billig & Welch, 2004). However, some authors have posited that service-learning is a complex philosophical and pedagogical concept, one best served by multiple models of origin and through research, pedagogical discussion, and the critique of a variety of theoretical models (Butin, 2005). Clearly, it is important that educators, students, community partners, and institutions understand the history of service-learning before incorporating service-learning into courses or curricula.

THE HISTORY OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Many universities and colleges were founded to serve their communities as well as educate their citizens. Service-learning's philosophical roots lie in social-reform movements, as exemplified by Jane Addams and Hull House in the late 1800s, and the educational reform movements of Dewey and others at the University of Chicago in the early 1900s (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). Schools of higher learning, especially the land-grant colleges in the 1900s, developed extension programs that initially focused on the needs of the local farming communities and the Work Projects Administration during the Great Depression (Kenny & Gallagher, 2002).

After World War II, the federal government, through the G.I. Bill, partnered with higher education to provide funding and opportunities for former servicemen to obtain college degrees. Higher education became more readily available to the middle class, which resulted in members of many different communities sharing their educational skills with others. Furthermore, in the 1940s and 1950s

many universities and colleges continued to meet communities' needs regionally and locally through cooperative-education programs and student volunteer experiences. The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Corps, and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) programs in the 1960s, sparked a resurgence in the growth of national civic responsibility and community service on college campuses well into the 1980s and 1990s (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008).

Following the establishment the Campus Outreach Opportunity League in 1984 and The National Campus Compact (a coalition of university and college presidents) in 1985, additional organizations began to link the mission of universities and colleges and students across the United States with the promotion of civic responsibility and engagement through service (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008).

The 1990s featured continuing growth of campus service organizations with an expanding educational movement to link academic institutions to communities through teaching, research, and service. Ernest Boyer (1996), a leader in higher education, asserted that the role of institutions and faculty of higher education should be to support communities through engagement in the application of knowledge, as well as the discovery and integration of knowledge, through working with communities in needed community-based research, teaching, and service.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the establishment of the Learn and Serve America Corps, along with Campus Compact, created a national structure to support academic–community initiatives (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). The growth of these national organizations supported Boyer's notion of educational institutions in partnership with communities and the scholarship of engagement as relevant to current initiatives in community service (Boyer, 1996). Service-learning initiatives that began in the early 1980s became the early precursors to the phenomenal growth of service-learning programs across the United States in 1990s. Based on a 2007 member survey, Campus Compact reported more than 950 institutions and affiliated state offices in more than 30 states (Campus Compact, 2008).

Today, many academic–community partnerships are visible through service-learning and civic-engagement activities on many U.S. campuses. Campus Compact (2008) reports the following on its member institutions: ". . . On average, campuses have 77 community partnerships each, involving a range of nonprofit/community-based organizations, K-12 schools, faith-based organizations, and government agencies . . ." (p. 2).

With a similar growth of service-learning in K-12 learning communities (Root, Callahan, & Billig, 2005), many students entering colleges and universities will already have experience with service-learning. Therefore, students are increasingly viewed as partners and leaders in service-learning programs on college campuses (Zlotkowski, Longo, & Williams, 2007). As student, faculty, institutional, and community partnerships continue to flourish and become integrated with campus infrastructures, there is growing call for rigorous research and analysis of the impact of service-learning as practiced in higher education.

SERVICE-LEARNING RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although the research on service-learning has been questioned in terms of its methodology and rigor, studies indicate that service-learning has a positive impact on students' attitudes toward community engagement and citizenship, as well as their growth in interpersonal activities, civic responsibility, and problem-solving skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, Stentson, & Gray, 2001; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002). Much of the initial research on service-learning centered on positive student learning outcomes and the impact of service participation on students' attitudes, values, and beliefs (Astin & Sax, 1998; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). Additional studies and literature have investigated how best to improve service-learning programming, assessment, and institutional culture for positive academic and community outcomes (Furco, 2002; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Schneider, 1998). Recent studies have addressed the impact of

service-learning on how community partners view student–faculty–institutional interactions and contributions to the community. Community partners appreciate their role as student educators and the resources academic members bring to their settings (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Worrall, 2007).

Literature on education and the community has addressed the value of community partnership relationships and enhancing community benefits in service-learning, best practices for service-learning programming, and emerging international service-learning, as noted in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* the *Journal of Higher Education, Educational Leadership,* and *Teaching and Teacher Education.* Just as studies have demonstrated the value of service-learning, limitations of these studies and criticisms of service-learning pedagogy have emerged.

Limitations and critiques of service-learning involve consideration of some student experiences that actually reinforce stereotypes or that reflect the volunteer or charity model of "doing for" instead of a collaborative partnership of "doing with" the community (Brown, 2001; Egger, 2007). Theoretical foundations of service-learning have also been criticized as lacking substance and clear conceptualization (Butin, 2006; Sheffield, 2005). Recent literature in service-learning in K-12 and higher education has reinforced the call for a theoretical framework of service-learning as well as key concepts/components of service-learning based on theory (Root, Callahan, & Billig, 2005). Although studies indicate positive benefits of service-learning, the robustness of research has been questioned with a renewed call for more rigorous and sophisticated research designs and examination of longitudinal impacts of service-learning on students, faculty members, community partners, academic institutions, and the community (Eyler, 2002).

A current initiative within higher education is to investigate the role of the scholarship of engagement and research within institutions. In a recent conference report, "New Times Demand New Scholarship II: Research Universities and Civic Engagement—Opportunities and Challenges," the authors recommended that ". . . our zeal for engaging students in service-learning and community-based research

should be matched by scholarly efforts to understand and articulate systematically the outcomes, challenges, and best practices in this work. Such inquiry should be undertaken at the course level, as well as across disciplines, schools, and institutions" (Stanton, 2007, p. 13). A systematic, institution-wide appraisal of the use of service-learning and community engagement may lead to more intentional research on theory and the application of service-learning.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE HEALTH SCIENCES

Integrating professional healthcare education with engagement in the community is becoming increasingly common across disciplines in the health sciences. Literature from the fields of medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, public health, social work, and others indicates both benefits and challenges of incorporating service-learning as part of their curricula and as interdisciplinary experiences (Hodges & Videto, 2008; Gitlow & Flecky, 2005; Gutheil, Cheraesky, & Sherratt, 2006; Kearney, 2008; Peabody, Block, & Jain, 2008). Students benefit from opportunities to develop knowledge and skills working with faculty and community partners in real-life situations and settings, and communities benefit from joint partnerships that provide health-related services and resources (Brush, Markert, & Lazarus, 2006; Dorfman, Murty, Ingram, & Li, 2007; Lashley, 2007).

As healthcare trends indicate the movement of service-delivery into more outpatient and community settings, with an emphasis on preventative care and health promotion, health professional students will benefit from opportunities to interact and engage with individuals and agencies in the community setting (Gregorio, DeChello, & Segal, 2008; Institute of Medicine, 2007). Additionally, service-learning provides an opportunity for schools of health to fulfill their mission of addressing health disparities and community health needs while meeting education standards set by national accreditation bodies.

Challenges of service-learning for the health sciences are similar to those experienced by faculty, students, and community partners in higher education. These may include lack of knowledge or resources

to incorporate service-learning in existing courses or to create new coursework; resistance to service-learning; or logistical difficulties in terms of community scheduling; lack of time needed for communication, collaboration, and planning; and limited funding for programming (Holland, 1999). Although research shows that faculty are frequently the leaders in promoting service-learning on campus, some faculty may be hesitant to incorporate or sustain service-learning in their courses because of barriers such as those previously noted or because of pressures to meet institutional promotion and tenure guidelines (Sandmann, Foster-Fishman, Lloyd, Rauhe, & Rosaen, 2000; Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002).

Some institutions of higher education are incorporating the scholarship of engagement as characterized by Boyer (1996) as important aspects of faculty work in the areas of research, teaching, and scholarship. Recently, The Carnegie Foundation has established a community-engagement institutional classification, which provides national recognition for the unique strategies that institutions promote and demonstrate to enhance community engagement (Driscoll, 2008). This classification may provide faculty and institutional members with renewed energy and recognition for making service-learning and community engagement visible and sustainable.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

How is service-learning exemplified in occupational therapy education? As will be discussed throughout this text in contributor chapters, service-learning provides a contextually relevant and rich educational environment for students to actively apply occupation-based theories and skills to real-world occupational performance needs that are identified as important by a particular community. Nationally and internationally, a review of the literature in occupational–therapy-related journals shows an increase of publications on service-learning in occupational therapy and interdisciplinary health programs (Alsop, 2007; Beck & Barnes, 2007; Gitlow & Flecky, 2005; Hoppes, Bender, & DeGrace, 2005; Lohman & Aitken, 2002; Lorenzo,

Duncan, Bachanan, & Alsop, 2006; O'Brien & D'Amico, 2004; Waskiewicz, 2002; Witchger-Hansen et al. 2007).

In recent years, community engagement and service-learning topics have been featured in numerous presentations at the American Occupational Therapy Association (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2008; 2007; 2006; 2005; 2004; 2003). Service-learning coalition consortia have also emerged across the United States and abroad that include occupational therapy faculty and students (Campus Compact, 2008; Center for Healthy Communities, 2007: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, n.d.; Midwest Consortium of Service-Learning in Higher Education, n.d.).

Service-learning, as a form of community engagement, has been used as a relevant teaching and learning tool in a variety of courses and student experiences, as evidenced in the chapters in this text. We encourage you to explore the various types of community partnerships, student and faculty experiences, reflective strategies, assessment and outcome tools, and lessons learned in the chapters that follow.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Butin (2005) states that service-learning can be dangerous when used as an educational pedagogy and theoretical framework. It is dangerous in that it calls into question the traditional notion that education is separated from the larger community. It asks educators to view learning as an act of challenging students to become better citizens and demonstrate the ideals of democracy and social justice. It calls on us to blur the roles of student-educator and community and share power, expertise, and resources for a common mission and vision of community. The community is viewed as a partner and a collaborator rather than as a vague entity that students come from and graduate into. It is dangerous because it is a powerful way to mentor students to share their knowledge and skills for others rather than to settle for students who demonstrate knowledge and skills but lack the resources to move into future areas of practice.

One of the core values and beliefs of the occupational therapy profession is that "dignity emphasizes the importance of valuing the inherent worth and uniqueness of each person. This value is demonstrated by an attitude of empathy and respect for self and other" (American Occupational Therapy Association, 1993, p. 1085). In the occupational therapy service-learning courses I have engaged in with students and community partners over the years, we have experienced three moments of learning about human dignity: (1) the realization noted by students that they "serve" in many ways—most importantly as a catalyst and a witness to empowering others to serve themselves; (2) the process of service, an interdependence and shared vulnerability, emerges as students view themselves as change agents for others; and (3) the inherent humanness of us all—we all have limitations, and, in fact, our limitations present an opportunity for strength in collaboration. Limitations and strengths come in many forms—financial, political, physical, social, cultural—and student insight from analysis of these strengths and limitations of themselves and others fuels a developmental process of becoming a change agent.

Service-learning provides a potent tool for service and learning. How do we choose to dignify our profession of occupational therapy? Perhaps by educating future occupational therapy professionals in ways that reframe how we view the community—not as a setting in which we do occupation-based intervention, but as a place where we partner with others to create a healthier, more rich way of life. We dignify clients when we care about where they come from and where they are going. Community is more than an intervention setting—it is where we live and relate with others *in community*. It is dangerous thinking.

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