Teaching Intercultural Communication through Service Learning*

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Abstract

Interest in service learning has increased in past years because of more accumulated knowledge about its beneficial outcomes to participants and to society. The purpose of this paper is to describe one case of a service learning project with positive outcomes.

Service learning was chosen as an assignment for an intercultural course at ___ University. A total of 97 responses were collected from students over two semesters. A content analysis of student reflections was conducted for themes concerning students' perceptions of learning outcomes of the project. Five major themes emerged. The self-reported themes were in the following order of frequency, from the highest to the lowest level; 1) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to apply communication concepts, 2) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to make a difference and to impact others' lives in a positive way, 3) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to build bridges with the local community, 4) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to apply intercultural communication concepts, and 5) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to understand themselves and the similarities and disparities of the human condition. Sample student comments best illustrating those themes are included. A discussion of the learning outcomes and suggestions for students who wish to take service learning courses follow.

Key words: Service learning, intercultural communication, communication education

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Introduction

The field of scholarship of teaching and learning is a field different from the traditional scholarship of research scholarship. While in the past research using this approach was devalued relative to traditional research, in recent times the scholarship of teaching and learning has become more accepted, to the extent that research of this kind now is acknowledged as bona fide research that can be used as support in one's promotion and tenure decisions (Hutchings, 2010). This paper applies the approach of scholarship of teaching and learning, and therefore uses an approach of research that does not fit the mold of traditional research. The focus of this study is to provide insight into the teaching and learning about intercultural communication.

The purpose of this paper is to describe one case of a service learning project with positive outcomes at ___ University and to encourage students to take a step out of the ordinary by signing up for a service learning course. While service learning has a bounty of positive learning outcomes, not all of which are strictly academic in nature, it is a huge commitment which students need to be ready to undertake. This paper will first present an overview of service learning and its historical foundations, followed by a specific description of the project and suggestions for students.

Interest in service learning has increased even more in the past two decades, with hundreds of colleges and universities across the nation implementing service learning courses, thanks to more accumulated knowledge about its beneficial outcomes to participants and society (Carlan & Rubin, 2005; Eyler, 2002; Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, & Geschwind, 2000; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005).

Service learning is a concept that incorporates active experiential learning with community service. The value of service to the community has long been part of the public discourse of the U.S. since as early as 1810 in the writings of Thomas Jefferson and philosopher William James. In the 1930s the Civilian

Conservation Corps, a community service project that involved millions of unemployed youth, was initiated (Waterman, 1977). As for the experiential learning component of service learning, philosopher and educator John Dewey advocated active discovery of ideas by students themselves as an approach to effective education (Madsen & Turnbull, 2005; Waterman, 1977).

In the 1960s a number of state-government internship programs evolved involving urban or rural studies semester and summer programs. The Kennedy administration saw service learning as a way to tear down barriers between academics and other sectors of society (Jacoby & Associates, 1996). In the 1980s and 1990s, service learning developed conceptually, leading to organized lists such as "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning" by the National Society for Experiential Education and "Critical Elements of Thoughtful Community Service" by the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). More recently, service learning has acquired more support and acknowledgment, as reflected in the Clinton administration's emphasis on

service learning, urging academicians to share their knowledge and resources with their community (Jacoby & Associates, 1996).

Today the number of service learning courses in institutions of higher learning have risen dramatically, partly due to accumulated empirical research about outcomes of service learning. Although some differences among scholars exist, most agree that the beneficial outcomes of service learning include (a) enhancement of learning of in-class material, (b) personal development, (c) fostering of civic responsibility, and (d) benefits to the community (Eyler, 2002; Madsen & Turnbull, 2005; Waterman, 1997). More recently, service learning has been found to have a positive effect on the retention and academic success of first-generation college students (McKay & Estrella, 2008). These outcomes were inductively derived from studies of student and participating organization feedback to service learning experiences.

Enhanced learning of in-class material was noted by various authors who summarized student feedback to service learning assignments in terms of learning about specific content areas such as public relations (in a public relations service learning project); learning about such general communication concepts and skills as team work, leadership, critical thinking; and that the service learners gained a holistic understanding of how the content related to the social contexts in which they were placed (Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997; DeVitis, Johns, & Simpson, 1998; Lubbers, 1998; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005). Similarly, personal development was noted as an outcome by authors gathering information inductively from students who reported that they experienced personal growth in terms of becoming a role model, becoming more responsible, clarifying their value systems, clarifying career goals, and acquiring greater self confidence (Kauffman, Martin, & Weaver, 1992; Tannebaum & Berrett, 2005). Fostering civic responsibility was another induced outcome of service learning: Students reported commitment to social values, future plans to volunteer, efficacy to enable social change, commitment to promoting racial understanding, and preparation to take on the role of an engaged citizen (Bringle, Hatcher, & Games, 1997; Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997; Eyler, 2002; Madsen & Turnbull, 2005). Finally, an outcome that is reported by the participating organizations, rather than by the students, is that service learning brings about a value-added dimension to society, that the volunteers' efforts have indeed bettered society, albeit in varying degrees (Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005).

Service Learning Project in an Intercultural Communication Course Intercultural Communication

While many scholars laud the benefits of service learning as a conduit for learning, we should also realize the importance of intercultural communication as a content area that can potentially benefit all students. In a world of increasing diversity and globalization, learning about communication between cultures and co-cultures within a given society is of utmost importance to prepare students well for their future lives. Specifically, intercultural communication is important for two main reasons; it will help students in their future careers and it will help them understand themselves better in the fabric of diverse conditions of human existence.

The contention that intercultural communication prepares students for their future careers is supported by the fact that at ___University, the intercultural course is either required or recommended for such major

areas as communication, international business, marketing, and psychology, among others. In the intercultural communication course students learn the importance of living and working with diverse others, through theoretical discussions of such concepts as dimensions of culture, cultural identity, prejudice and stereotyping, culture shock, and adaptation. The knowledge and skills acquired in this class will undoubtedly help students majoring in the above-mentioned fields, with successful attainment of career goals becoming more and more dependent upon awareness of and skills pertaining to communing in a diverse society.

Perhaps more importantly, as part of the College of Arts and Letters curriculum, intercultural communication helps students to understand themselves, to free themselves from stereotypes, and to better understand the human condition that they constitute a part of. In the intercultural communication course, students are encouraged to see people and events from multiple perspectives and to form an understanding of different others through cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning. Armed with this knowledge, they can free themselves from limiting world views and restrictive thoughts, and they can learn to view life holistically and inclusively. These objectives are congruent with the objectives of service learning, where understanding and appreciation of themselves, as well as societal and civic issues are core goals (Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997).

Community Relations

Compatibility of learning objectives was one reason why service learning was chosen as an assignment for the intercultural course at ___ University. The other more practical motivation for selecting service learning as an assignment for the intercultural communication course was the insulated nature of the campus from its immediate surroundings: The campus was an "island" of privileged and educated persons who saw themselves as different from the surrounding town residents. The "townies", in turn, did not view the campus residents positively at all. ___ is a small rural community in which many residents work on farms or the local poultry farms and related industries. Historically, ___ is an agricultural town. With an emphasis on poultry farming, which led this area to become known as the "Turkey Kingdom" of the U.S., new poultry processing industries were formed, necessitating a reliable labor force to do the difficult chores of cleaning and processing poultry. Immigrant laborers were willing take on the task, and subsequently they are beneficiaries of immigrations regulations that allow them to apply for the U.S. Alien Resident card (green card) relatively quickly, apparently in an attempt to maintain the needed supply of labor. These circumstances have led to a conglomeration of diverse cultures gathering to this small town. According to an official of the local school board, there were upwards of 35 cultures represented in this town in 1997. So the permanent and semi-permanent residents of this town are made up of farm owners, shopkeepers, some professionals such as medical, political, and legal staff who are for the most part from the surrounding areas, and migrant workers from varying cultures.

On the other hand, the majority of students at ___ are mostly from well-to-do, middle class families from different states on the east coast. As the university has a selective application policy, students are generally well prepared academically, but are potentially limited in their world views by a sheltered lifestyle of affluence. Although overt actions of discrimination by either group is rare, this disparity in socio-economic as well as cultural backgrounds has brought about a sense of alienation between the campus and its surroundings. As one student put it, "I am aware that there is a good deal of resentment toward students from the ___ residents who the students have callously dubbed as 'Townies'". As indicated by this comment, the residents of ___, for their part, are somewhat wary of the university students and their seemingly condescending ways, and the local newspaper's coverage of the university's relations with the community have been somewhat mixed, if not blatantly negative. Consequently, the service learning project was conceived in part to bridge the gap between the campus and the community surrounding it, by reducing stereotypes, and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

The Cultural Folktale Project

The service learning project in the intercultural communication course required students to work in groups to prepare and present a cultural folktale to a local elementary class in order to promote cultural understanding among children. One goal of this assignment, in terms of benefit to the community schools, was to promote an openness to and an interest in different cultures among the elementary school children, by presenting cultural stories to them. Understandably, different folktales would contain specific

messages and morals that would promote understanding of specific cultures and their value systems, but the common thread of this assignment across all the presentations, regardless of which specific culture was chosen, was that the presentations would hopefully lead the young children to be more interested and open to other cultures in general. By listening to the folktales told by college students, potential role models to these young children, the children would be incited to develop an interest in other cultures and an ensuing desire to learn more about them.

The initial plan was to match the student group to the culture the elementary school teacher requested (the logic was that the elementary school teachers would choose a culture from which their student(s) originated, so as to enhance their elementary students' perceptions of salience of this activity as a learning project that affected them and their classmates directly). However, when students were given the choice to go beyond the list of cultures that were represented in the schools as presentational topics, it was soon clear that the list of cultures were confining, rather than useful to students. The choice of culture and folktale was subsequently delegated to student groups to decide for themselves, as I believed that it would motivate my students to work harder if they chose a topic that was chosen by themselves, rather than designated by me. Students were required to tell the folktale in an interesting manner with visuals, costumes, and props, then to encourage cultural learning with questions they had prepared with the goal of helping the elementary children process the information further. They could purchase what materials they needed for this presentation with money provided by the Committee for Community Grant awarded by ___ University.

Project goals.

The goals of the service learning project were, among others, to provide a forum for students to apply their intercultural skills by creating bridges with the local community, to enhance their audience adaptations skills by adapting to the age group of the class they were to present to, to encourage students to see themselves as part of the larger fabric of the community in which they live, and to foster a sense of enjoyment derived from contributing to the well-being of others in the community.

Initial preparation.

Preparation for the service learning project began with a survey of local school principals to investigate their interest and willingness to participate in the study. Individual visits were set up and an initial handout of the assignment was shared. They were informed that a new set of handout copies, including the same introductory information contained in the handout they had just received as well as a finalized list of the cultures my student groups chose to research and present, would be sent to the schools for distribution to each teacher in the following weeks.

Student group tasks.

The class groups were encouraged to decide on their culture during the first two weeks of their semester-long class. The class was told that this presentation assignment was composed of two parts; they would first research and present information on their chosen culture in an in-class presentation to our class. This first presentation would include a presentation to our intercultural communication class of cultural facts such as geography, language(s), and population, as well as a folktale along with an indepth analysis of the world view and value system of the culture the folktale reflected.

Then as a second part of this presentation assignment, they would present the same folktale to a community elementary class while appropriately adapting the folktale to the age-group of their elementary school class. Their course packets included their evaluation forms for the in-class presentations as well as an evaluation form to be filled out by the elementary school teacher immediately after the presentation. Thus, my students were aware that for the elementary school presentation, they were to be evaluated on such criteria as contacting the teacher early to set up details of the presentation, communicating effectively and courteously when contacting the teacher, organizing the presentation well, contributing to the class' knowledge of the different cultures, and adapting appropriately to the elementary class age group that they would be assigned to.

The elementary school presentations were to be presented during one of two class days allocated for this activity during my regular class time to minimize potential scheduling problems for students. On these

two days I scheduled the same class content so that on the day that the students groups were not presenting in the elementary schools, they would be attending class rather than missing out on any class material. As I would be scheduled to be in class on the elementary school presentation dates and could not be present to evaluate the groups, the groups were asked to videotape their performance, ensuring that no elementary school students were caught on tape for legal reasons of child protection. Immediately after the presentation, the teacher evaluations were to be filled out by the teachers and sealed in envelopes and returned to me during the next class. The elementary school teacher's evaluations of the presentation were worth 80% of their elementary school presentation grade, and my evaluation of the videotaped performance was worth 20%.

In preparation for the elementary school presentation, my student groups submitted to me a preliminary list of five questions to ask the elementary school class during their presentation. These questions were to be based on my class lectures on intercultural training and types of culture-general or culture-specific questions that could be asked to foster culture-learning. I gave feedback and suggested the three best questions among the five questions submitted by each student group in my class, considering the age group my class group would be presenting to.

Coordinating the project.

I meanwhile made the necessary copies of the handouts with the finalized list of cultures that students had chosen for the folktale presentation and sent them to the elementary school teachers, through the school principals. The interested elementary school teachers called and were matched with the appropriate groups in my class. The groups in my class were then notified of their assigned elementary teachers' contact information.

Outcomes

The students were asked to reflect on their community service experience and to write a brief one-page reflection paper about what they learned. They were told that it would help them with the processing of their service learning assignment, that everyone who wrote a reflection paper would get the full points for it unless there were major stylistic problems inherent in the paper, and that the points could just be that point they needed to pull up their grade if they were on the borderline between two grades.

Although it is possible that there was a potential for social bias leading to artificially induced positive comments, it can be argued that because my students were aware that they would be getting the full points for the assignment regardless of the positive or negative nature of their comments, as long as it was stylistically sound, they had less motivation to "please" the professor, i.e. there would be very little or nothing to gain by emphasizing the positive while eclipsing the negative effects of the service learning assignment on themselves.

A content analysis of the themes in the reflection papers written by the students was conducted (Babbie, 1999). A total of 97 responses were collected from students; 46 responses were collected during Fall semester 1998, and 51 responses collected during Spring semester 1999. Each paper was considered the unit of analysis for the content analysis. Latent content was chosen over manifest content to reveal deeper levels of meanings in the student reflections. Additionally, the degree of each student's overall perception of the project's usefulness was evaluated and coded by the author from 1 to 5, 5 indicating the most positive evaluation possible. Although the total number of students who participated in this study (N = 97) was not overly small, the outcomes reported here are tentative due to the fact that this is not a true "scientific" study. The qualitative approach was carefully applied, but as the comments were only collected over the course of two semesters on 97 students, the conclusions should be taken as more tentative than an experimental study, for example.

The mean of coded subjective evaluations of student perceptions of the utility of the activity was relatively high at 4.31. To check the reliability of the coding, an independent coder who was trained on the coding scheme coded a randomly selected sample of ten papers. As there were a total of five themes that emerged from the data that the coders could choose from (i.e. enhancement of volunteering students' ability to apply communication concepts, enhancement of volunteering students' ability to make a difference and to impact lives etc., as mentioned below), the rate of agreement was expected to be lower

than, for example, a coding system with only two or three choices. The percent of agreement between coders was considered acceptable at 70% for the coding of the themes, and 80% for the overall rating coding. A Cohen's kappa was calculated to control for the possibility of choices made by chance (Howell, 1996). The Cohen's kappa for the theme coding was .61 and the Cohen's kappa for the rating coding was .67.

Content analysis revealed that students perceived the five main benefits of this activity to be, in the following order of frequency from the highest to the lowest level; 1) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to apply communication concepts (24.0%), 2) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to make a difference and to impact others' lives in a positive way (20.1%), 3) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to build bridges with the local community (19.7), 4) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to apply intercultural communication concepts (19.3), and 5) enhancement of volunteering students' ability to understand themselves and the similarities and disparities of the human condition (16.9).

Ehnanced Ability to Apply Communication Concepts

The following are selected excerpts of student comments reflecting each of the five above-mentioned students' perceived outcomes. In terms of the first on the list of student-perceived outcomes, "enhancement of students' ability to apply communication concepts," the theme reflected most often in the papers, students stated that they learned about the importance of audience analysis and adaptation to the audience's level. They also stated that they learned the importance of word choice (one elementary school teacher remarked in her feedback that it was inappropriate to address both sexes in the elementary school class as "you guys") and nonverbal communication, as shown in the following statements by Kristin, Christopher, and Patra:

"Aside from their age, we also had to consider the variance of cultures within the class as well as the differences between the cultures of my group and those of the 3rd graders."

"Probably the most difficult aspect of doing this group project was presenting to the elementary school students. There was so much that had to be cut due to the complexity of the material."

"For example, we changed a "cacique" into a troll. . . While speaking to the third graders, we tried to make sure that we weren't presenting information in a "grown-up" fashion.

Making a Difference in the Lives of Others

In terms of the second theme, making a difference and impacting others' lives in a positive fashion, Erin and Anna's comments demonstrate this theme:

"I felt that I had made a difference, no matter how slight, in their learning process."

"I grew to realize just how important it really is to educate children about the different cultures and ways prevalent within society and it is vital to start when they are young. . . I never realized the impact of education upon children until now."

Building Bridges with the Community

The third theme was that of building bridges of understanding with the local community. Anna and Jakia's following comments reflect this theme:

"I felt as though I was a part of ___ for the first time and not just a part of ___ University. Giving the community presentation allowed us the opportunity to go out there and show ___ that we not only respect the people within this community but that we are also thankful to them for giving us the opportunity to become a part of the whole."

"I think that working [in] the small groups also helped us to learn that we are part of a greater community. . . It was a great opportunity to get out into the community and see that the "townies" are not as bad as they seem."

Enhanced Ability to Apply Intercultural Communication Concepts

The fourth theme was application of intercultural communication concepts. There were two sub themes that could be identified in the student reflections; culture-specific learning about a given culture, and seeing intercultural communication from a wider perspective. Meredith, Danna, and Jakia speak about learning culture-specific information.:

"I was fortunate to learn more about the culture of Kenya, which is a culture completely diverse from my own."

"In order to teach a subject one must have full understanding of the topic. . . we as a group had to learn enough about our culture to choose what we felt was important to tell the classroom."

"I learned a great deal about Ghana in the preparation and research for the project."

Seth and Rebekah discuss their widened perspectives about applying the theories of intercultural communication to concrete contexts:

". . . both the students and our own group were racially and ethnically diverse, therein enhancing the experience."

"I believe that communication between the 4th graders and us college students was definitely intercultural communication."

Enhanced Understanding of Self and Relation with Others

Also, the theme of enhanced understanding of the self and the interrelatedness of the human condition was reflected in such excerpts as the following by David and Tanya. These excerpts show that one outcome of this activity was the realization of life as a cycle and commonalities between humans as entities going through similar stages in the cycle of life, leading to increased empathy for, and a sense of interrelatedness with others:

"When I was younger, up to the age of 12 in fact, I always looked up to older kids, especially my brothers. . . So when I was put in front of these children, all these emotions emerged again but in reverse."

"I'll never forget my elementary school days when high school language students would come and teach us Spanish, Latin, French, or German. I remember how we all looked up to those high school students and longed to have a chance to be like them. . . After presenting at the elementary school last week, I can only hope that the same inspiration was planted in these children."

Other student comments reflected self reflection in other ways, such as their realization and/or reinforcement of their personal strengths and gifts, as stated by Dave and Jordan:

"It has been several years since I was a camp counselor and worked with children. I really did not remember how much I loved children."

"I think that the most important thing that I got out of the presentation was that I realized that I really need to be a teacher."

Student reflection papers were also evaluated, as mentioned above, for degree of each student's overall perception of the project's usefulness, which was coded by the author and another coder from 1 to 5, 5 indicating the most positive. The mean of coded subjective evaluations of student perceptions of the utility of the activity was relatively high at 4.31. It should also be noted that eleven of the 97 students, or 11.3% stated that this was among the best assignments recently experienced in college. This finding accords with a study by DeVitis et al. (1998), which also states that their service learning project was typically ranked the best of their college experiences. This view is exemplified in statements such as the following by Meredith, Desiree, and Virginia.

"The best experience overall was that of the community presentation. . . The experience I gained will definitely benefit me in my future endeavors. I also was able to feel an accomplishment when serving my community."

"I think the community service project was one of the best group projects that I have ever participated in."

"Our community presentation was one of the most positive events of my sophomore year at ___."

Discussion

In this section I will first compare the beneficial outcomes of service learning that have previously been suggested in the literature to the outcomes of this project as inductively derived through my students' reflections, then I will continue to assess whether the project objectives were met through this service learning activity, and whether the service learning activity outcomes helped students achieve some of the objectives of the intercultural communication course specifically. Finally, I will present some general reflections on lessons that I had learned as instructor of a service learning course. I will also offer some practical recommendations for students who are considering or who are embarking on a service learning experience.

Project Outcomes

The themes that emerged from student reflections regarding the outcomes of the project produced a very good fit between what the literature previously suggested as student-reported positive outcomes of service learning projects. Although the outcomes were categorized in different ways, all in all there was a great deal of overlap between my students' reported outcomes and the literature's reported outcomes. To reiterate briefly, my students found that this project helped them to 1) enhance their ability to apply communication concepts, 2) make a difference and impact others' lives, 3) build bridges of understanding with the local community, 4) apply intercultural concepts to various contexts, and 5) enhance their understanding of the self and the interrelatedness of the human condition. This closely parallels the statements made in the literature on service learning that state that the beneficial outcomes of service learning include 1) enhancement of learning of in-class material, 2) personal development, 3) fostering of civic responsibility, and 4) benefits to the community (Waterman, 1997).

The first, enhancement of learning of in-class material closely matches my students' first and fourth themes of enhanced ability to apply communication and intercultural communication concepts. Students were able to learn about the importance of word choice, nonverbal acuity in sending and receiving messages, audience analysis in public speaking, and respect for different cultures and values through this service learning activity. They also learned to work with and present to different others while they prepared and presented their work, and they realized that communicating with different age groups can be considered intercultural communication as well. Additionally, they were able to become more aware of, and to break, some of the stereotypes they held about the community in which they lived, and about the "Townies" with whom they share the community.

The second benefit mentioned in the service learning literature, personal development, is reflected in my students' second theme of feeling good about their efficacy in making a difference and ability to impact others' lives positively as well as the last theme of enhancing understanding of themselves, and seeing themselves in a larger context that enables them to see themselves as a part of the fabric of humanity, with similar stages to be passed through in the human cycle of lives. They were also able to refine and clarify their value systems as well as their ensuing career goals.

The third benefit to students that was presented in the literature on service learning was civic responsibility. Students were also encouraged to foster their civic responsibility by being encouraged to give back to the community in which they live, through their volunteered time and effort. Finally, as for the last benefit mentioned in the service learning literature, benefits to the community, they did indeed benefit the community both directly and indirectly through their efforts. Teachers sent notes of thanks, either individually, or with individual notes of thanks from the entire class for helping their class to learn about other cultures. On a more latent level, teachers were exposed to seeing students of this university as

giving members of society, rather than as temporary residents who shun the residents of that town because of the "Townies'" non-affluent backgrounds. That exposure is an intangible beneficial outcome of this project.

In terms of fulfilling the project's objectives, I believe that this service learning project achieved its goals. The goals of the service learning project were, among others, to provide a forum for students to apply their intercultural skills by creating bridges with the local community, to enhance their audience adaptations skills by adapting to the age group of the class they were to present to, and to encourage students to see themselves as part of the larger fabric of the community in which they live and to foster a sense of enjoyment derived from contributing to the well-being of others in the community. The student excerpts provided earlier attest to the students' perceptions of the course objectives having been met in all these areas.

Finally, in terms of the fit of this service learning project with the objectives of this intercultural communication course, I believe that it fared well on this dimension also. The two main goals of the intercultural course are to help students in their future careers and to help them understand themselves better in the interwoven fabric of human existence. As the student comments indicate, this service learning project helped them to understand the cultural values underlying different cultures more fully through their analyses of cultural folktales. They also learned to see the interdependence and interrelatedness of human beings while interacting with members of the community. In short, they learned that they can help others see diversity in a positive light and that in many ways, there are commonalities among humans, points of empathy and confluence that are often needlessly overshadowed by the outward differences among them and the ensuing negative attitudes.

Lessons Learned

In terms of outcomes, students generally stated that they perceived that the class project was reaching the service learning outcomes originally anticipated. Despite students' favorable perceptions, however, there are some lessons learned from this project that may be useful for others attempting service learning projects in the future. The first is that students should be guided to conduct adequate logistical planning and to anticipate details and possible contingencies. For example, one student group forgot to bring a videotape and consequently had to borrow one from the elementary school teacher, creating a negative impression from the onset. The utility of reminding students that they need to think about these and other details was one thing that the author did not anticipate: the author overestimated the students' levels of ability to plan ahead

Another is that the Spring semester project occurred the week after the elementary schools' Spring break. Assuming that the students would contact the teachers weeks before the project (they were allowed approximately ten weeks of preparation time and urged to contact the teachers early) the schedule was not foreseen to be a problem. However, one group received a negative evaluation for their tardiness in contacting the teacher; they had contacted her the Monday of the week of the presentations. According to the students, they attempted to contact her and leave messages approximately two weeks before the presentation dates but had difficulties partially due to the schools closing during Spring break. These problems have served and will serve as a learning experience to relay as a caution to subsequent classes when implementing this project.

Another barrier to success was the time that it took the author to set up the necessary connections with the schools to coordinate the groups with the teachers. This endeavor involved much time in terms of setting up and attending meetings, receiving phone calls, copying and mailing handouts to teachers, and preparing handouts for the relevant student groups. This problem could have been alleviated if some of the project grant money would have been appropriated to securing a student assistant as coordinator. In fact, in an article entitled "School Community Partnerships That Work," the author suggests both applying for a mini-grant for the service learning project and securing administrative support (Cloud, 1998). Perhaps these oversights will serve as guides to other instructors endeavoring to teach a service learning project, and inform students planning to take a service learning course. In addition to insights about teaching the course, this project gave rise to suggestions that students should take seriously into account before embarking upon a service learning adventure.

What students should consider before taking a service learning course.

A list of recommendations is first presented, followed by a brief explanation of each:

1. Realize the importance of advance planning and time management – are you willing to brush up on or learn these skills? If not, service learning, which requires self-discipline and self-pacing, may not be right for you. Service learning is a commitment; missed appointments with a young tutee due to mismanagement of time and poor planning, for example, can be detrimental to relational trust.

2. Consider the time and effort that the service learning component will take – are you ready to put in that time and effort? Oftentimes, service learning will require you to use your out-of-class time to fulfill your service learning duties on a regular basis. There may be emotional side-effects as well, resulting from encountering realities starkly different from yours. These emotional roller-coasters may take time and effort to process as well.

3. Write out a physical contract that you, your professor, and the service learning organization agree upon. It will serve as a guide and avoid possible conflicts in the long run. You may have a personal preference or pet peeve in terms of duties and expectations. You should state these clearly. On a daily basis, the written contracts will serve as a reminder of what the expectations of your service learning assignments are, and sometimes more importantly, what the organization can or cannot expect you to realistically do. Clearing the air about these with your service learning administrator can help maximize your service learning experience for both sides. A sample service learning contract and questions about the rationale for the service learning assignment is included in Appendix A and B for your reference (University of Mary Washington, 2002).

4. Avoid cliques – although group solidarity can be conducive to working well together, cliques can be intimidating to others who work with you, or to the people you serve in the organization. Having a friend work at the same organization may give you the support you need for the first few weeks, while you are getting acclimated to your new environment. However having a large group that you are very close with work with you on the same assignment at the same time may be detrimental to focusing upon the needs of those you serve, and distracting to those in the organization as well. You are there to learn about the people you engage with in that organization, not necessarily to extend your campus relationships. Another reason why it may not be good to work with a group that you are very close with, is that your reflections may be more group reflections, rather than your personal ones: Your reflection notes may be heavily influenced by your group, rather than be a reflection of your personal thoughts. Take this chance to break off from your usual social environment and find out about yourself as an individual and the community you are part of.

5. Keep a journal and make it a habit of writing a short reflection, even if it is in bullets, into your journal as soon as you can after each service learning day. In doing so, apply the concepts you learned about in your classes to your service learning experiences. Bring your journals with you to your service learning site and immediately write down some quick observations while the feeling or observations are fresh in your mind at the conclusion of each service learning day. Then take a few minutes to write out your daily entries in essay form when you get back to your desk, applying concepts and theories that you learned in the service-learning course, or even other courses, to your specific experiences. Reflective journals are an important component of service learning, but can be heavy burdens if you try to reconstruct events and feelings days, or even weeks after the fact. You will thank yourself when it is time to write a paper based on your reflections, or when your instructor collects them for grading. See Appendix C for a list of questions you can ask to sharpen your observations on a daily basis (University of Mary Washington, 2002).

6. Reflect, reflect, and reflect. Your service learning experience will end up as simply "busy work" if you do not take the time to reflect about your experience. Compare the lives of those you served with your own. What values are similar / different? How have you changed as a result of this experience? What are the barriers to your accomplishing your service learning goals, and how can you overcome them? During each service learning day and at the culmination of your service learning experience, ask yourself such important questions as these. They may not be specifically about applying concepts and theories, but these reflections will be about you and how you stretched and grew during this experience. Looking at your daily journals and summarizing whether you reached your goals, and in

what ways you changed and what things were newly revealed to you about yourself is an invaluable experience in self-discovery. See Appendix D for a list of questions you can ask that help direct your personal and social analysis (University of Mary Washington, 2002).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that there are things an instructor and the students signing up for a service learning course need to consider before committing to one, service learning can definitely benefit students and the entire community as well. Mainly, students can begin to see service learning as a lesson in rhetoric and persuasion. First, by getting students to engage in a novel and pro-social action, students are urged to improve their attitudes towards the community. By creating cognitive dissonance, they may be persuaded to consider themselves as an integral part of the community who can and should contribute to its betterment.

From a different viewpoint, we can see from students' statements that there are different levels of changes resulting from this, and potentially from other service learning projects as well: While some students have experienced quite dramatic effects such as deciding to change career paths or reinforcing their belief in their career choice, others simply felt better for the experience of giving to the community (DeVitis et al., 1998). When we realize that persuasion is often very subtle and incremental in nature, we can see service learning as part of this long-term incremental persuasion process to incite students to create a more inclusive and giving society. In this way the students, and ultimately everyone, can benefit from a well thought-out and implemented service learning project.

This service learning project was the first of its kind for me. Despite that fact, it was a rewarding experience for both me and students alike. The project's benefits and lessons learned were shared in this paper in the hopes that it will become the impetus for students to seriously consider taking a break from the norm by enrolling in a service learning course.

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Appendix A

Student Service Learning Contract

With my signature below, I certify that I, (name)_____, will complete a minimum of _____ hours of service learning at (agency)_____. I have discussed my course expectations and personal expectations with (agency representative) _____ , who agrees to supervise me. We have agreed on the following duties:

We have further agreed to the following schedule (hours and days):

I have articulated the following learning goals to my supervisor (learning goals should be related to the course, career, or personal development):

I agree to make quality service a priority and to strive to connect my learning in the agency to my learning in the course. I understand that I am also required to fulfill a course assignment related to my service-learning.

Student Signature_____
Date_____

Agency Supervisor Signature_____
Date_____

To be completed at the end of the service-learning experience:

I certify that the above named student has completed _____ hours of service at my agency.

(agency representative)_____ Date_____

agency_____

Appendix B

Rationale for Service Learning

Questions to ask before beginning a service learning course:

1. Why do I want to serve?
2. What do I expect to gain?
3. What will others gain from my service?
4. How will this experience help me understand the course material?
5. How will I benefit from understanding what service is like in this field?
6. Do I manage time well? Am I ready to commit to the time and effort required of a service learning project?

Appendix C

Questions to Ask During Service Learning

1. What did I see?
2. Might others see different things? In what way? Why?
3. What surprised me?
4. What stories can I tell to give others an idea of the agency?
5. How did I feel during the experience?
6. How do I feel now about it? Why do/did I feel that way?
7. What was my initial judgment of what I saw?
8. How do my values and experiences shape how I feel about what I see?
9. How does this help me to understand course materials?
10. What stumbling-blocks am I facing? How can I overcome them?
11. What concepts learned in my classes can I apply to this experience?
12. Are there issues that I should discuss with my agency supervisor and / or course instructor?

Appendix D

Reflections after Service Learning

1. What community problem makes my service necessary?
2. What are the causes of the problem?
3. How am I part of the problem or solution?
4. What can I learn? What can I offer?
5. What would I do differently next time?
6. What would I suggest to the agency to do differently? How might I communicate that effectively without inciting defensiveness? Is it better to approach my course instructor about these suggestions?
7. Would I recommend this service learning to peers? Why or why not?
8. How did my values affect the kind of service I provided? Did they prevent me from doing more or help me to do my best for the organization? How so?

9. What are the cultural expectations of the organization I worked for? Are they different from mine? In what ways?
10. How can I continue to do more for this group?
11. How can I share my experiences with others? Who will be the target audience? Why is it important that I share these experiences?
12. How can I begin to effect social change? What is reasonable? What is not? Who are the experts who can help guide me in pursuing social change?
13. How have I changed as a result of this experience?
14. How may the client / organization I served have changed as a result of this experience?
15. Are there any unanticipated benefits that I reaped from this experience?

About the Author

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