Sabbatical Report

Exploring Service-Learning Models: A Need for Creating a Comprehensive Process Diagram Specific to Service-Learning in Psychology

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Service-learning (SL) has been incorporated into my psychology courses for over 8 years, being offered both as an option and also as an integral, required component; as in my Service-Learning Philanthropy Course (2004). “Service-learning challenges students on multiple levels in a manner that conventional classroom instruction does not. By providing students a forum to explore their environment via a reasonably safe, institutionally-constructed service experience, faculty can facilitate a student’s ability to make meaningful connections between what sometimes may seem like arcane theories and definitions to events that occur in their local community that may conversely seem of more immediate import. Through the concrete experience of service, students engage in active experimentation, application of abstract concepts and reflective thought to better understand the relevance of not only course material, but of being a part of an educated citizenry,” (O’Loughlin-Brooks & Smith, 2011).

When first engaging service-learning pedagogy, I scoured the literature for direction and information regarding how to structure my course and also in order to learn best practices from other SL faculty. For educators eager to take on a service-learning course, there is a plethora of research for review, along with in-depth examples. However, the SL literature specific to psychology appears to be relatively underdeveloped.
Many general examples of SL Models can be found in the research, such as these:

The aforementioned models, Venn diagrams and others may be adequate visual examples to depict the holistic viewpoint of the service-learning experience, yet discipline specific process diagrams could provide an enormous benefit to faculty first embarking on service-learning. A comprehensive visual of SL in psychology could provide “a quick understanding of the entire process” (Buzan & Buzan, 1996). Visual models illustrate hierarchy of ideas, allow for quick interpretation and aid in visualizing
outcomes. Ideas can often be grasped much more rapidly with a visual model than by “reading them in an article or book” (Martin, 2012)

For example, psychology SL enthusiasts could view the hierarchy of the experience; depicting service learning from the development of relationships with specific community partners to applying critical thinking skills and academic knowledge to reflection. To an instructor new to service-learning, “where to start” can be quite intimidating. Flipping through pages and pages of documents in order to even conceptualize the process is not satisfactory. Hence, with this sabbatical, I sought to create a comprehensive visual model specific to SL in psychology that could potentially be adapted for utilization across disciplines.

**Procedure**

Review of the literature and peer input were salient in the development of this process diagram for faculty use. SL faculty in psychology from around the country were solicited for best practices, design, implementation and assessment information. At the onset, I tried a “cold call” method via email and telephone petition. This technique did not prove useful, given the fact recommended lists were outdated and response rates were low. I therefore relied heavily upon known experts in SL, frequently cited psychology faculty active in SL, and SL colleagues for the major components of my diagram. The
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literature, specifically Howard's 10 Principles of Good Practice for Service Learning Pedagogy, and the SL Faculty Handbook (University of Florida), were weightily referenced when constructing the process diagram. I was also inspired by the “Schematic Overview of the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection,” supplied by Ash, Clayton, and Moses in 2007. Nonetheless, throughout my sabbatical I remained cognizant of other opportunities which might enhance the developmental process, such as regional conferences and psychology specific teaching symposia.

Conferences Attended

On January 3-6, I was privileged to attend and present at the 2012 NITOP (National Institute of Psychology) conference. This conference is well known as a venue for “teachers of psychology at two- and four-year colleges, universities, and high schools, who wish to explore new ideas that will enhance and broaden their teaching skills” (NITOP, 2012).

During the conference, I was able to hear Victor Benassi, PhD from the University of New Hampshire speak on “Infusing the Science of Learning into Psychology Curricula: Design, Implementation, and Assessment.” Dr. Benassi supplied multifaceted insight into the course construction process, while providing clear examples that would directly facilitate the creation of my diagram.

Also, at NITOP, my colleague and I presented at the PIE (participant idea exchange) “Learning Communities in Psychology: An Exploration of Successful
Discipline Pairings. ” This presentation afforded the opportunity to network with faculty from around the country and initiate conversation regarding service-learning and learning communities. Several faculty in attendance were embarking on SL courses, which allowed for brainstorming and discussion of the relevance and viability of a structured visual.

On April 12-14th, I attended the Southwestern Psychological (SWPA) Association annual convention held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. At SWPA, I attended two sessions specifically related to service-learning. The first poster presentation was titled, “Service-learning: The Hurricane Action Team (H.A. T) Project,” (Cervantes, Licona, Davis, Huerta & Cox, 2012). The other presentation discussed, “What distinguishes volunteers from non-volunteers?” (Kroska, Kraft, & Pressman, 2012). Both of these presentations provided an opportunity to view active service-learning in psychology while also learning more about characteristics specific to individuals who engage in volunteerism.

Model Construction

I chose to construct a process diagram in order to depict a visual representation of the SL process and support the “understanding of the process as it moves from point to point” (Niedzwiecki, 2012). Throughout the building process, I solicited feedback from faculty colleagues, and in this report I have supplied critique excerpts from Terry Hockenbrough, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement at Collin College and from Regina Hughes, Collin Psychology Professor and former Collin Director of the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement:
“I like the layout and the progression of the model. I have a few observations and
have made the following notes as you requested.
Under Pre-Course Planning
As this is a faculty model for Service Learning in Psychology, it would be
awesome to add a few details specific to psychology, pulling from your own
experience and projects. (i.e. what specific discipline specific course objectives
are singled out through the SL project... example...identification of the grief
cycle...or stages of emotional development...) and then follow that example all
the way through your diagram as an application or example of the model.

Under Desired Outcomes
Under student you might want to add career exploration and development
Under faculty you might want to add their contribution (through service, research,
etc) and course retention.

Under Academic Institution, you might want to change "graduate" to
"complete".

Terry Hockenbrough, M.P.A.
Director of the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement
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“Most of the diagrams I've seen are either of a pyramid (as in Zlotkowski's
Service-Learning pyramid) which speaks to the process of institutionalization of
the pedagogy and the Venn diagram often seen associated with the stakeholders.

Having said this, I look to the last column and think you should add a brief list of
Community Partner outcomes since they are typically listed as a major
stakeholder along with students, faculty, and academic institution. (The pdf I
enclosed offers some outcomes for your review). Also, the very last bulleted list
of outcomes relevant to the Institution: for the sake of language consistency, I
suggest you change "students more likely to graduate" to "increased student
graduation rates". You might also consider adding citations for some of the
outcomes?

This appears to be quite original in its presentation as I've not seen a diagram in
the current literature that represents the process as you've laid out---good work,
my friend!”

Regina M. Hughes
Professor of Psychology
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Feedback from faculty colleagues was considered and appreciated when fine-tuning the final diagram. Infusing examples from faculty, information gained from the literature, and also conference participation yielded the Faculty Model for Service Learning in Psychology below:
Faculty Model for Service Learning in Psychology

Pre-Course Planning
- Understand Service Learning (SL)
- Review SL resources
- Clearly define course objectives
- Develop Course Syllabus
- Research recognized real community needs

Design & Implementation
- Provide students with orientation to SL
- Modify objectives to suit students' personal learning goals
- Decide how SL will be offered
- Match Community Sites to student interest and motives
- Identify Community Partner(s)
- Prepare service learning experience

Assessment
- Continuous Reflection
  - For example: Weekly Journals, Structured Group Discussion, Email discussion groups
- Connected Reflection
  - For example: Reflective Essays, Portfolios, PowerPoint Presentation

Desired Outcomes
- Faculty
  - Enhanced teaching quality
  - Outlet for professional development opportunities
  - Stronger faculty/student relationships
- Student
  - Improved academic outcomes
  - Improved ability to apply course concepts to real world
  - Improved Faculty/Student relationship
  - Enhanced personal, spiritual, and moral development
  - Increased interpersonal development
  - Teamwork, leadership, communication skills
  - Facilitates cultural and racial understanding
  - Increased commitment to service
- Academic Institution
  - Improved student satisfaction with college
  - Increased student retention
  - Increased graduation rates
  - Improved community relations
- Community
  - Increased student resources
  - Faculty expertise
  - Improved college relations
  - Community

Connecting the “dots” between curriculum and SL
- Continuous Dialogue
- Student Outcomes & Life Lessons

For example:
- Serving the elderly is a concrete, hands on experience which affords direct observation to the aging process illustrating a deeper understanding of psychological concepts such as memory processing, Erikson’s Integrity vs. despair stage of development, and stereotyping of the elderly.

For example:
- Community Partner(s)
- Students

Placement & liability forms completed
- Conduct physical site reviews
- Consider safety needs of the students
- Identify / Mitigate risks

*Examples of risk mitigation:
- Accompany student(s) to SL site
- Continuous communication with community partner

For example:
- YMCA Nursing Home/Children’s Hospital
- Juvenile Detention Center
- Clay Care Center
- Habitat for Humanity
- Crisis Prevention Unit
- High Risk Youth Center

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Benefits

Listed below are the projected benefits from this sabbatical experience:

• Faculty will benefit from a strong visual in order to conceptualize the dynamics of service-learning in psychology.

• Connecting with instructors from around the country should open doors for future collaborative partnerships.

• Creation of the SL Process Diagram might facilitate direction and ideas for the integration of service-learning in psychology.

• Working with the Collin CSCE (Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement), there is anticipated utilization and adaptation of the SL Process Diagram across disciplines.

• For me, personal enrichment and dissemination of knowledge in the classroom and beyond (conferences, publications).
References


Service Learning Faculty Handbook, Lead, Serve, Grow. Retrieved from www.leadershipandservice.ufl.edu/.../service-learning-faculty-handb...