

Best Practices in Service-Learning in Higher Education for
Achieving Positive Effects on Students

By

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To my amazingly epic daughter, Rosalie Coretta,
you are my inspiration,

and

to my parents, Sandra and Tom Rogers,
you have always been there for me

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Chapter I

Introduction

I plan to format my dissertation in the style of publishable piece that is focused on student outcomes of service-learning with a major emphasis on its effects on altering students' negative stereotypes. My method will be to draw from the research and theory literature of service-learning and the literature in surrounding fields and interdisciplinary areas including the literature on experiential learning, cognitive development, stereotyping, and prejudice. My dissertation seeks to fill a niche and advance the field by providing suggestions for best practices for service-learning where the goals are to advance cognitive development, personal development, and civic engagement and reduce stereotyping and prejudice in students.

The benefits of combining service and learning appear to be great. However, not enough research exists to clarify just what about service-learning is so powerful for achieving positive impacts on college students. Theories abound in education, sociology, psychology, and other fields and interdisciplinary areas that can be harnessed in order to better inform our decisions about how to implement service-learning in higher education and how to construct research projects to study it.

I propose to do a thorough, critical, and integrative review of the literature about service-learning regarding best practices for its use in higher education as well as the literature in other fields and interdisciplinary areas that can be applied. I will focus on the domain of the effects of service-learning on students where I will direct my efforts to

the following four areas of benefits to undergraduate students participating in course-based service-learning experiences: cognitive development, development of civic engagement, personal development, and the alteration of negative stereotypes. These represent the three major categories of impacts of service-learning on students as defined by Waterman (1997) with the addition of the separate category of stereotype alteration.

I plan for my dissertation to contribute to the field and resolve the destabilization that currently exists by filling the need for an examination of what the best practices in service-learning in higher education are for achieving positive effects on students in light of recent research and the application of theories and findings in other disciplines and interdisciplinary areas as well as in education. We need to better understand how service-learning affects student outcomes in order to better design service-learning courses that can maximize positive results, and my dissertation will endeavor to meet this need.

The overarching theories that will drive my inquiry are the two major competing theories regarding conceptualizing stereotypes- as an individual or a collective representation. Important in my dissertation will be a thorough examination of these two perspectives and their differing implications for how stereotypes can be impacted through the use of service-learning in undergraduate education. I will fully explore both theories, contrasting the two different theoretical approaches and their implications for lessening negative stereotypes to find which one is borne out best in the service-learning literature.

In addition, over time, the big questions that need to be addressed regarding service-learning change. Since it has been some time since an article has been published about a research agenda for service-learning research in higher education, I will look to determine if new questions need to be addressed, and this will be another contribution of my dissertation.

Chapter II

The Effects of Service-Learning

Many researchers have found that service-learning can produce positive outcomes for students in higher education (i.e. Eyler and Giles, 1999; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000; Batchelder and Root, 1994). Numerous practitioners have reported it to be very powerful for students in higher education, and students often report that they enjoy service-learning courses more than their traditional courses and feel that they learn more in them in comparison (Eyler and Giles, 1999). In addition, there are generally tangible benefits to the community from the service provided by students (Schmidt and Robby, 2002). And college and university presidents often find service-learning to be a good way for their institutions to provide service to their communities and others as well as to attempt to meet the obligations to society that higher education institutions have often been asked to fulfil (Campus Compact, 1996).

Effects on Higher Education Students

Positive student outcomes have been found for higher education students participating in service-learning courses in the areas of cognitive development (Markus, Howard, and King, 1993; Batchelder and Root, 1994), development of civic engagement (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Hollander, Saltmarsh, and Zlotkowski, 2002; Sax and Astin,

1997), personal development (Batchelder and Root, 1994), and the alteration of negative stereotypes (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Greene and Diehm, 1995).

Some researchers have attempted to examine what components of service-learning are important to producing positive impacts on students in higher education. For example, Eyler and Giles (1999) found the importance of placement quality, the quality and quantity of reflection, the level of application of service to the course's academic content, exposure to diversity, and the presence of community voice in determining the service performed on particular outcomes of service-learning. Others have found that the duration and intensity of the service impacts some student outcomes (Astin and Sax, 1998) as well as whether students receive quality feedback from professors and service clients (Greene and Diehm, 1995).

Chapter III

History of Best Practices for Service-Learning

In K-12, there has been a great deal of work on developing a set of best practices in the past few years. These best practices provide practitioners with guidance on how to best design their service-learning courses to increase the likelihood of positive impacts on their students. Billig and Weah (2008) recently crafted an updated set of best practices for service-learning in K-12 education by taking the well-accepted Essential Elements of Service-Learning (National Service-Learning Cooperative, 1999) which consisted of eleven essential elements for service-learning in K-12 education, applying what research has found in the field since they were created, refining and translating them, and then further adapting them based upon input from experts and reactor panels. Through this process they crafted the new K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice which are comprised of eight standards and thirty-five indicators (Billig and Weah, 2008).

The Essential Elements of Service-Learning (National Service-Learning Cooperative, 1999) utilized by Billig and Weah (2008) built upon the work of the Wingspread Conference members who developed ten Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning in 1989 by analyzing the results of extensive consultation between the National Society for Experiential Education and more than seventy organizations with interests in service and learning (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989). The Wingspread Principles were not designed specifically for K-12 but

were crafted for use in service-learning in any setting including higher education. The principles built upon the early work of Robert Sigmon (1979) who crafted three fundamental principles of service-learning in order to better guide practitioners and researchers working in service-learning.

Lenses for Examining Principles of Best Practices

Mintz and Hesser (1996) sought to better understand Sigmon's (1979) principles and the Wingspread Principles (1989) as well as principles of best practices developed by others not specific to service-learning but for community service. They incorporated what they learned themselves as service-learning practitioners, and they proposed three meta-principles to work as lenses through which we can examine service-learning and the ongoing interactions between its principles and practice. Their meta-principles are termed collaboration, reciprocity, and diversity, and they suggest viewing principles of good practice and through these three lenses. Mintz and Hesser (1996) also proposed looking at the relationships between the three partners they term the academy, the students, and the community and viewing service-learning principles through each of their perspectives utilizing the three lenses of their meta-principles.

Collaboration "engages the partners to work together by sharing authority and resources to enhance each other's capacities to reach goals" (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, p. 39). Reciprocity "underscores that the partners are both teachers and learners, servers and those served" (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, p. 39). Diversity "means that all three partners see differences as assets and that they employ those assets in service-learning endeavors" (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, p. 39). Mintz and Hesser (1996) believe

that reviewing sets of principles such as the Wingspread Principles through the lenses of their meta-principles of collaboration, reciprocity, and diversity and through the perspectives of the three partners they term the academy, the students, and the community in a manner similar to looking through a kaleidoscope provides helpful, critical questions for improving practice in what they term “practice-to-principle-to-practice dialogue” (p. 41).

Mintz and Hesser (1996) also urged faculty to assess their service-learning programs according to established sets of principles of good practice while examining them through their meta-principles of collaboration, reciprocity, and diversity through the perspectives of the academy, the students, and the community in order to move towards “principle-centered service-learning programs” (p. 50). They explained,

“principles offer vision and guidance as we struggle with the difficult issues and daily details in the complicated synergy of service and learning. The kaleidoscope and the meta-principles that we propose have grown out of the practice-to-principle-to-practice journey of the past four decades, and it is our hope that this organic process will continue to sharpen both the principles and practice of service-learning” (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, p. 50).

Chapter IV

Definitions

Service-Learning

Service-learning has been defined in many ways, and the wide range of activities that are sometimes termed “service-learning” contributes to problems in analyzing the effects of service-learning. For example, some consider community service that is not associated with a student’s coursework to be service-learning while others do not. Others neglect to incorporate reflection in programs that they term service-learning. Sometimes typical internships are called service-learning. As Robert Sigmon (1979) noted there is a need to move toward a more precise definition of service-learning.

Service-learning has been defined narrowly as

“a method under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; that is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 1999, p. 5).

Drawing on the work of Sigmon (1994), Furco (1996) distinguished service-learning from other types of experiential learning by its “intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring” (p.5).

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development includes developing a better understanding of the academic material of the course (or content learning) as well as outcomes such as developing critical thinking and problem solving skills (Waterman, 1997).

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement includes a number of diverse activities including developing a social commitment to take action on behalf of or in hopes of benefiting individuals and groups who are less fortunate within society, performing community service acts, helping develop policies to deal with social problems, advocating for social causes, and voting in a socially-responsible manner. Civic engagement has been defined as

“working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi).

Personal Development

Personal development Waterman (1997) noted is made up of a range of outcomes including positive changes in attitudes and values with respect to the issues addressed by the service including becoming more reflective where “the goal is to promote a reflective development of attitudes and values, not the forming of particular attitude or value contents” (p. 4). Waterman (1997) also includes in personal development the contributions to students’ thoughts about their career preparation and career directions as well as the outcomes of increasing students’ feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Stereotypes and Negative Stereotypes

The term stereotype as used in social science was first coined by Walter Lippman (1922) to explain how humans deal with the complex world around them by creating simplifications or preconceptions in the form of stereotypes; he borrowed the word from the printing industry. A stereotype is defined as “a cognitive structure that contains the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human group” (Hamilton and Troiler, 1986, p. 133). Building on this definition, negative stereotypes are defined as cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies that are negative in regards to some human social group.

Best Practices

The best practices that I plan to propose will be those practices that are most likely to create the most positive growth in higher education students in the areas of cognitive development, personal development, development of civic engagement, and the reduction of negative stereotypes. They are “best” in the perspective of positive impact on students in these areas. For example, a best practice for cognitive development would be one that is most likely to provide positive gains for students in cognitive development. It could, for example, be a practice that is likely to lead to gains in the students’ levels of critical thinking and problem solving skills.

I am centering my dissertation on the impacts on students in higher education in order to limit the scope. Therefore, I am approaching the question of best solely from the perspective of students engaged in service---what’s best for them. What is best for the students may not be best for those being served (clients, community agencies, etc.),

but due to time limitations, I had to limit the scope of my dissertation in this manner. In addition, there is a lack of a decent amount of studies in community and client impacts of service-learning that would make including the best interests of these members difficult.

The best practices may vary based upon the topic or subject of service, and I will seek to provide a full description of any differences that I can discern. I will look for ways that the nature of service activity impacts best practices.

Chapter V

Variance in Outcomes in Service-Learning

Service-learning is a form of experiential education. Dewey (1938) extolled the virtues of experiential education but warned that some experiences can be “miseducative” by arresting or distorting the growth of further experiences. Likewise, some have warned that service-learning poorly done could be of harm to students (O’Grady, 2000; Reardon, 1994). Most often critics suggest that service-learning poorly done, especially with regards to adequate student reflection, may strengthen existing negative stereotypes or even create new negative stereotypes about those being served rather than diminishing negative stereotypes (O’Grady, 2000; Reardon, 1994). However, there is little evidence that this has happened (see Curran (1998) on some variables but written responses in that study seemed to disprove this and point to instrument bias according to Curran). Regardless of possible negative impacts, it is well agreed upon that service-learning courses do have varying amounts of positive influences on students. We need to understand why.

Chapter VI

How This Dissertation Endeavors to Fill the Gap

Although as noted above, some have given consideration to applying theory as well as research findings to determining what is important in service-learning for positively impacting students in higher education, this area is ripe for further development and the application of additional theories and research findings from inside and outside the field of education. In higher education, best practices need to be established so that practitioners will have a guide for assisting them in designing and redesigning service-learning courses in hopes of achieving the most positive impacts on their students. In addition, one challenge to advancing service-learning research has been identified as the need to base research on strong theoretical foundations (Billig, 2003). This development of a list of best practices for service-learning in higher education would provide researchers with variables that they could test.

We need to know the answers to the following questions. What matters in designing and teaching a service-learning course in higher education? What components (or best practices) are important if you wish to positively impact college students? Specifically what are the best practices for generating positive impacts on students in cognitive development, development of civic engagement, personal development, and the alteration of negative stereotypes? There is a need for a strong review and critique of the literature on theories that can be applied to service-learning along all dimensions, crossing fields and interdisciplinary areas, as well as focusing on

what researchers have found about the effects of service-learning on students within the field of higher education research.

A major area of contribution of my dissertation will be in the application of theories regarding stereotypes to service-learning in order to generate best practices. This is potentially the most interesting area because of the wealth of available theories regarding stereotypes that can be applied and the dearth of previous application to service-learning. It is in this area that I have chosen my overarching theories to drive my inquiry. The overarching theories that will drive my inquiry will be the two major theories regarding how stereotypes can be conceptualized.

The two major competing theories on stereotyping center on conceptualizing stereotyping as an individual or a collective representation (Stangor and Schaller, 1996). In the past, theorists argued about whether stereotypes existed in the minds of individuals or in the social fabric of the society. Now it is generally agreed that stereotypes exist inside the minds of individuals, and the major division between the two camps rests on “the assumed importance of shared social beliefs, above and beyond that of individual beliefs, as determinants of social behavior” (Stangor and Schaller, 1996, p. 5).

Stereotyping theories fall nearly completely into these two camps, and very few theorists have attempted to address both the individual and collective representations (see Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Forgas, 1981). Stangor and Schaller (1996) point to the importance of understanding stereotypes and stereotype change through each of the two perspectives in order to have a full understanding of stereotypes. Each of the two representations has differing implications for how negative stereotypes can be altered

and prevented, and theories of stereotype alteration and prevention differ largely due to whether they are situated within the individual or collective representation camps.

I will fully explore both major theories on stereotyping, and I will utilize these theories to contrast the two different theoretical approaches and their implications for lessening stereotypes to find which one is borne out best in the service-learning literature. In this way, I plan to support both (or possibly refute one) of the overarching theories and add to them by applying them to service-learning. My work should provide a larger amount of support for the theoretical approach that is best applied to service-learning.

In summary, my dissertation attempts to fill a niche and advance the field by providing suggestions for a set of principles of best practices for service-learning for generating positive effects on students in the areas of cognitive development, personal development, civic engagement, and the alteration of negative stereotypes through a thorough, critical and integrative review of the literature. In addition, it seeks to contribute to theory by exploring which of the major competing theories on stereotyping is borne out best in the service-learning literature.

What Readers Can Expect

People who read my dissertation can expect to come away with a better understanding of service-learning and its effects on students with particularly fresh insights on how research findings and the literature in other fields can be harnessed to increase the likelihood of positive effects of service-learning on higher education students. They will hopefully find new testable theories and become better able to

create studies that evaluate them. In addition, they will be better able to harness the current findings on service-learning as well as other applicable findings and theories in other disciplines to craft or revise service-learning courses so that they can include the program components that are most likely to contribute to positive outcomes for students. I expect that readers will be able to think in new ways about service-learning and how it can be used to affect students.

Methodology

Boyer (1990) defined the scholarship of integration as “making connections across the disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating nonspecialists too” (p. 18). Boyer (1990) went on to explain that the scholarship of integration refers to “serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research” (p. 19). Braxton (2005) elaborated that Boyer’s (1990) scholarship of integration “also entails fitting the findings of research into meaningful patterns. Thus, synthesis of knowledge in a field of study is what the scholarship of integration is about” (p. 287).

I plan to utilize Boyer’s (1990) concept of the scholarship of integration to examine, critique, interpret, and analyze the literature and research findings in the area of service-learning within a larger context of other field and interdisciplinary theories and research findings in attempts to formulate new knowledge. I plan to examine themes and categories that drop out of my analysis. I hope to find that best practices fall out from areas where there is a convergence of thought and research. In addition, hopefully one or more theories will drop out.

I seek to delve deeply into the literature and listen closely for new ideas it can reveal while engaging the literature from diverse fields and interdisciplinary areas on a deeply personal level. I will examine processes as well as outcomes. By listening carefully and examining not only the research in our field but in all areas around it as well, I hope to discover some insights that may have previously been missed into how we can best utilize service-learning to produce positive outcomes for higher education students. In these ways I plan to utilize the scholarship of integration in order to offer new insights and advance our understanding of how service-learning can best be utilized to reach positive outcomes for higher education students.

As noted above, I will utilize two overarching theories that are the two major competing theories on how stereotypes should be conceptualized. I will fully explore both theories and contrast the two different theoretical approaches and their implications for lessening stereotypes to find which one is borne out best in the service-learning literature. In this way, I will support both (or possibly refute one) of the overarching theories while adding to them by applying them to service-learning.

Timeline and Plan for Completion

I plan to defend my proposal early in the spring 2011 semester. Since the dissertation does not require IRB approval, I plan to move quickly to complete the research and analysis. I anticipate completion of my dissertation for graduation in August or December of 2011.

Literature/ Theories to be Analyzed

Cognitive Development

Some of the literature and theories I plan to analyze in order to bring new insights to bear upon the use of service-learning in higher education in the area of cognitive development include the work of the following: Dewey; Piaget; Bransford, et al; Freire; ill-structured problem literature; Kolb; Vygotsky; constructivism; experiential learning literature; and Perry's theory of cognitive development. I have done some reading recently in this area particularly reading the work of Dewey and Kolb. However, during my masters program (Master of Education in Elementary Education), I did a great deal of work in learning theory completing my master's thesis on the use of constructivist teaching strategies combined with the use of technology, and I took Educational Psychology. I expanded my knowledge of learning theory by completing the graduate course Learning and Instruction at Peabody. Much of the literature here will be drawn from education and psychology.

Personal Development

The literature and theories that I plan to analyze in order to bring new insights to bear upon the use of service-learning in higher education in the area of personal development include college student development theories including Chickering's Theory of Identity Development, Josselson's Theory of Identity Development in Women, and Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Models (i.e. Cross, Helms, and Phinney) and Astin's theory of how involvement facilitates student development (1984). I have done some recent reading on each of these theories to refresh my memory and to

determine which theories I wish to begin analyzing in the area of personal development. I did the most work with these theories when I took the graduate course College Student Development Theory at Peabody. Much of this literature will be drawn from education (mainly higher education) and from psychology.

Development of Civic Engagement

A list of some of the literature and theories that I plan to analyze in order to bring new insights to bear upon the use of service-learning in higher education in the area of development of civic engagement includes the work of the following: Dewey; Astin; Barber; Barber and Battistoni; Battistoni; Ehrlich; Eyler and Giles; Eyler, Root, and Giles; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens; Morse; ill-structured problem literature; and Lisman. I plan to draw from literature in political science and education mostly. I wrote three final papers on the effects of service-learning on increasing students' levels of civic engagement as requirements for coursework at Peabody, and I have done a great deal of research in this area.

Alteration of Negative Stereotypes

Some of the literature and theories that I plan to analyze in order to bring new insights to bear upon the use of service-learning in higher education in the area of the alteration of negative stereotypes include: human relations literature; the two major theories regarding how stereotypes should be conceptualized (individual representations of stereotypes (including group schemas, group prototypes, and exemplars) and collective representations of stereotypes) and the work done toward

synthesizing the two (i.e. Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Forgas, 1981); Allport's contact theory (1954) and theories that extend it; other theories on stereotype and prejudice alteration associated with contact (i.e. slightly versus strongly disconfirming exemplars, concentrated versus dispersed conditions, and the importance of typicality); and theories of how the media, language, social norms and rules, and education can alter stereotypes.

This is the area where I have spent the most time recently. I have read numerous pieces regarding how stereotypes are conceptualized, how they are formed, how they can be altered, and how they affect individuals, both those who stereotype and those who are targets of stereotypes. I have collected countless other books and journal articles I wish to include. I have begun to write some here. This area is very ripe with implications for service-learning, and I am anxious to read more and analyze the literature. Most of this literature will draw from psychology, sociology, and social psychology. My graduate coursework in classical and contemporary sociology as well as educational psychology will assist me in this work.

All of the above listings are not final lists, and as I get deeper into the material, I am sure that I will find much more that I wish to include. I also plan to critique, interpret, and analyze studies on the effects of service-learning on students (i.e. Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000; Myers- Lipton, 1994; Curran, 1998).

Chapter VII

Summary

In summary, my dissertation seeks to discover why and under what conditions service-learning should lead to increased cognitive development, personal development, development of civic engagement, and the alteration of negative stereotypes in higher education students. It attempts to glean new insights and break new ground from a thorough examination, critique, and analysis of theories and research studies in education, other disciplines, and interdisciplinary areas in a manner consistent with the concept Boyer (1990) termed the scholarship of integration. It seeks to fill a niche and advance the field by providing a list of best practices for service-learning in higher education for achieving positive effects on students and hopes to provide new testable theories and new research questions to be addressed in the field as well. In addition, my dissertation seeks to contribute to theory by fully exploring the two major competing theories regarding conceptualizing stereotypes- as an individual or a collective representation- and contrasting the two theoretical approaches and their implications for lessening negative stereotypes to determine which one is borne out best in the service-learning literature.

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