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Panel Title: How Service Learning Relates to the Third Sector:

Multi-national Practice and Research

One of the presumptions of a well-functioning, viable third sector is that citizens are well-informed about community issues, they participate in various ways in contributing to work around those community issues, and the quality of life is improved as a result of their involvement (Wandersman & Florin, 1999). The third sector, then, benefits from developing in young adults the inclinations to become involved in civic matters and support the third sector. How can the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for civic involvement be developed to engender a sense to community and participation?

Developing good citizens is not a new role for higher education, and Levine (2003) notes that there are numerous pedagogical approaches for civic learning (e.g., classroom instruction on civics, moderated discussions of current events, student governance, community activities, simulations). However, the emergence of service learning as a pedagogical strategy has heightened attention to the civic domain as a set of intentional educational objectives to be addressed seriously in higher education (Astin & Sax, 1998; Battistoni, 2002; Zlotkowski, 1999). Bringle and Hatcher (1995, p. 222) define service learning as:

- a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

Unlike other forms of community-based education (e.g., internship, co-operative education, see Furco, 1996), the phrase “civic responsibility” denotes that service learning has the civic education of students as an explicit goal. Thus, service learning is not only about “serving to learn,” but also about “learning to serve” and being involved in communities in a variety of ways (e.g., through direct service, political involvement, grassroots organizations, careers in the nonprofit sector). One of the explicit goals of preparing civic-minded graduates is “knowledge of volunteer opportunities and the nonprofit sector” (Bringle & Steinberg, in press). Although “citizenship cannot be reduced to service” (Dionne & Drogosz, 2003, p. 25), service learning needs to be appreciated and understood as a means for teaching toward civic education objectives. The case for service learning can be strengthened, then, by understanding its capacity to prepare students to assume a civic-minded disposition in their career and acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be active citizens in their communities in ways that support the third sector. For as Cunningham (2006) notes:

One of [the] goals is the broad-based education of students to be effective engaged citizens in our democratic society, and to be good citizens in our increasingly international world. Civic learning outcomes from higher education are difficult to document, but they are one of the most important social and civic contributions our colleges and universities provide to our society. (p. 4)
Over the past two decades, the prevalence of service learning courses has increased dramatically in American higher education. This has occurred for all types of institutions of higher education and across the spectrum of disciplines with a reported rate of 12% of faculty involved in teaching service learning classes (Campus Compact, 2007). Corresponding growth of service learning has taking place in South Africa, aided by the Joint Education Trust-CHESP initiative (JET, 2006; Lazarus, 2004), in Australia (see Metropolitan Universities, 14(2), 2003), in Asia (see United Board for Christian Education, 2002), in Ireland (Boland & McIlrath, 2007) as well as Latin America, Mexico, Middle East, and Europe (see Annette, 2003; Perold, 2005; Perold, Stroud, & Sherraden, 2003; www.ipsl.org).

The purpose of the proposed panel is to build on prior cross-national comparisons (Thompson, Smith-Tolken, Naido, & Bringle, 2009; Hatcher & Erasmus, 2009) and critically examine the role of the third sector in service learning in Ireland, South Africa, Egypt, and North America. These individual examinations will include the role of staff in NGOs as co-educators in service learning, the meaning of “citizen” in each national context, the qualities of the relationships that exist in terms of being reciprocal and mutually beneficial, the exchanges of resources that support the initiation and maintenance of relationships, and the outcomes for students, faculty, NGOs, and society as a result of these relationships. The analyses will be grounded in a variety of research methodologies and will offer recommendations and Principles of Good Practice for each national context. The convener will then be in a position to analyze some of the common elements and differences across the four nations.
The concept and practice of ‘citizenship’ has recently become the subject of speculation and debate in Egyptian media and civil society. The Arabic translation “muwaatana,” coined from the base word “muwaatin” or citizen, is new vocabulary. With a growing youth population, constituting a ‘youth bulge’ (Assaad & Roudi-Fahimi, 2007), concerns for youth employment, services, human capital development, and civic awareness have come to the fore. Yet, while the media has engaged in purposeful awareness-raising, educational institutions have been less active agents in creating social awareness and engagement.

The role of schools in fostering civic participation seems to be largely theoretical. Baraka (2008) outlines the development of civic education in Egyptian curricula from the British colonial times to the modern era. In the early 1900s, the values communicated within school textbooks emphasized imperial generosity in “bringing the benefits of civilization to end tyranny and chaos” (Hammad, 2006 in Baraka, 2008). With the rise of the Egyptian socialist revolution in 1952, the emphasis shifted to notions of “social justice, equity, and social democratic values.” Anwar Sadat’s successes in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and his consequent peace agreements at Camp David brought about concepts of “peace and dialogue.” Hosni Mubarak’s recent political reform agenda promotes the values of “citizenship and civic rights, human rights, globalization, children and women rights, political awareness, roles of non-government organizations, and meaning of democracy.” The National Curriculum, as Baraka observes, delivers the ideology of the political administration, but lacks the resources to engage in active-learning methodologies that promote civic skills and dispositions.

Within the higher education sphere, civic engagement, for the past two decades, has been largely student-initiated. Driven by religious motives for charity and good works (Shukrallah 1999), university students since the late nineties have created hundreds of student organizations for extra-curricular community service. Since 2000, with the growing global emphasis on human development and agency, students became aware of the value of community capacity-building and empowerment. Many student organizations sought ways to connect their volunteer work to existing non-government organizations (NGOs); many of these developed into youth-headed community agencies. The interface between higher education and the third sector, while vibrant, has been largely extra-curricular and non-strategic.

The American University in Cairo (AUC) is, perhaps, the first institution in the region that creates a program whose mission is to deliberately connect student curricular learning to community needs. The Community-Based Learning Program engages faculty across the disciplines in the design and implementation of coursework that employs a structured methodology for community engagement. Campus-partnering with community agencies creates an opportunity for reciprocal gain – while students engage in an outcomes-based curriculum that emphasizes experiential academic learning and active citizenship; the third sector benefits from the intellectual capital and creative expertise of a tremendously energetic young population. It is a fledgling partnership that provides much promise and potential.

Yet, the pedagogy of service-learning is a new and borrowed practice at AUC, posing visible challenges:
While the rhetoric of ‘participatory development’ is common, the practice within the third sector is still largely charity-oriented. This limits the pool of potential campus-community partners, since service-learning is based on principles of ‘empowerment’ and ‘sustainable service.’

Most community agencies lack the capacity to incorporate student populations and the culture and experience of supporting student learning. For there to be reciprocal gain, there needs to be an investment in orientation and training of community partners.

The cultural differences in conception and implementation of ‘service’ become tangible when the service-learning model imported from the US is imposed on the local context. Faculty ultimately partner with organizations whose members have similar multi-cultural exposure, or whose executive managers are themselves AUC graduates. The hard-core Egyptian organizations seem to ‘speak a different language.’

Given the value of creating a synergy between student civic/academic learning, and third sector development, this study selected six AUC community partners within Cairo, to explore the following research questions:

What is the discourse of civic engagement within the local urban communities? Based on the assumption that discourse reflects and shapes social identity and world view, the data are analyzed for metaphors and indicators of social power distribution, identities of and relationships with ‘outsiders’, collaboration, empowerment, reciprocity, citizenship, and partnership.

How can the community-campus partnership be strengthened and sustained? The participatory approach will help elicit the community perspective on supporting student citizenship and set goals for effective investment in student capital for the benefit of the third sector.

The data corpus was collected through focus group interviews, and structured reflection sessions. The discourse of engagement is analyzed within James Paul Gee’s (1999) Critical Discourse Analysis Framework.

The research leads to the conclusion that, in Egypt, a mapping of civic rhetoric and expectations within the third sector can strengthen community-campus relations, inform the educational curriculum, and advance the community agenda. The country focus will additionally contribute to cross-cultural literature on service-learning.

References


Over the past decade the steady growth of service learning in the South African higher education sector has brought in its wake new levels of collaboration between universities and third sector partners who share educational, service and developmental goals for the various sectors of society within which they function. At the University of the Free State (RSA) it has become apparent that the component of our community engagement that takes the form of curricular service learning heavily relies on the following third sector role players: non-profit organizations (NPOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and other community-based organizations (CBOs). Due to severe shortcomings in the service delivery of the various government sectors in the country, civil society has become increasingly dependent on assistance provided by these third sector organizations, who themselves more often than not are in a precarious position as a result of the general lack of sustainable funding and support that they experience in our rather typical “third world” situation.

The aim of this research paper is to establish how higher education engagement through service learning can and should strengthen and sustain both (1) third sector partners in their endeavors to serve the most vulnerable in society, and (2) higher education institutions to provide contextualized training for future civic-minded leaders for the South African society.

The service learning program evaluation research practices that are followed currently (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005) were extended to include elements of community-based participatory action research (Strand, Marullo, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003) in order to allow for reciprocal knowledge flows between the participants; this methodology mutually enriches the third-sector and higher-education partners with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the roles, challenges, and goals of the other. The philosophical, epistemological, and ontological approaches of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) informed the research in order to fully tap into the strengths (i.e., through discovery, dreams, designing, and destiny) of the various participants. Relevant community development theories (Battacharyya, 2004; Bridger & Alter, 2006, and others) that have proven to be useful in the South African context were investigated jointly by the research sets/teams in order to increase the understanding of what good practices entail for service learning collaboration between the third sector and higher education institution in the Free State Province of South Africa. Interpretations of the research results will be set against the backdrop of misgivings expressed by various South African authors and practitioners who believe that service learning partnerships are more often than not flawed by the vastly unequal power-relations that exist in the broader South African society (cf. Nduna, 2006; O'Brien, 2009; Subotzky, 2000).

The purpose of this paper within the proposed panel is to build on a prior cross-national comparison (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2009) and to examine critically the role of the third sector in service learning in South Africa. This examination will include a specific focus on training programs required by both third sector staff and faculty in order to allow for truly reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships to flourish among them. The research is grounded in a variety of participatory, collaborative research methodologies and will offer recommendations and Principles of Good Practice (partly based on those put forward in a publication of the Council on Higher Education, RSA, 2006) for the South African context.
Service learning is an active learning strategy that involves students in organized service experiences in the community and integrates structured reflection to link the service experience with academic goals of the course and civic outcomes of the discipline (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). The service experience is designed in collaboration with staff from community organizations so that the service experience contributes to both community issues and aligns with the academic goals of the course. Ideally, service learning is a pedagogy that is mutually beneficial. Therefore, well-designed service learning should have both civic outcomes for students and public benefit for nonprofit organizations and the third sector. Cultivating civic skills and civic action among college students is an opportunity to strengthen the third sector and increase social capital (Vernon & Foster, 2002).

This opportunity to strengthen the third sector through service learning is demonstrated by research conducted in the United States that confirms a number of outcomes from service learning that contribute to both academic and civic outcomes for students. Students who participate in service learning during college are more likely to volunteer, vote, and be active participants in their community after graduation (Sax & Astin, 1998). They are able to work with others across difference (Keen & Wilson, 2009) and this is a critical skill in an increasingly diverse society such as the United States. A “Symposium on Student Civic Outcomes” of twenty-eight educators and researchers convened by our campus and the Association of American State Colleges and Universities in May, 2009 resulted in a mapping of this field of research in the United States. Cross-sectional studies at the University of Notre Dame (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2009), and longitudinal research at Tufts University (Kaiwashemi, 2009) and Tulane University (Moely, 2009) point to academic, personal, and civic outcomes for students who participate in service learning classes. The research to date is highly focused on self-report measures, and there is a lack of clarity on what is being measured, as the terms (e.g., civic responsibility, civic engagement, civic action, community engagement, service) each have their own interpretive stance.

Our own research indicates the efficacy of participation in service learning courses. A random sample (n=606) of college students indicates that enrollment in one service learning course is associated with civic outcomes for students (knowledge of volunteer activities and nonprofit sector, skills to collaborate with others across difference, active participant in society, understanding of how social issues are addressed in society, civic identity, benefit of education to address social issues) and enrollment in more than one course has an additive value in terms of civic outcomes as measured by the Civic-Minded Graduate Scale (Hatcher & Steinberg, 2009).

This opportunity to strengthen the third sector is also reinforced by research conducted on understanding service learning from the perspective of nonprofit organizations (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett, 2009). A sample of nonprofits from Central Indiana (n=287) reported that “student volunteers increased their agency’s visibility in the community” (72%), students “continued to volunteer after their volunteer commitment” (67%), student involvement “improved client services” (66%), “increased their agency’s visibility on campus” (64%), and “helped build campus-community relationships” (61%). This research also found that the large majority of staff in these nonprofits were “eager to work with students” (88%) and reported that “student work is as good as the work that other volunteers provide” (82%). Our campus conducted a survey in May 2009 of 28 community partners across a range of education and nonprofit organizations and 50% had been partners with our Center for Service and Learning for more than 3 years. Results of the survey indicate various ways that students were of benefit, including “saved us money because of the additional help” (68%) and “students brought new energy to the organization” (60%). Contrary to the research by Gazley et. al (2009) only a minority reported an “increase in number of clients served” (22%).
or an “increase in number of services offered” (30%), and there was limited value in terms of an “increase in connections and social networks with other community groups” (30%) or an “increase in access to university resources” (22%). Nevertheless, service learning did contribute to the nonprofit sector.

Research indicates that there are a number of challenges in terms of working with nonprofit organizations. Findings from a qualitative study of 99 experienced community partners by California Campus Compact reinforced the challenge of creating mutually beneficial partnerships with nonprofit organizations through service learning. Participants in focus groups reported a high level of enthusiasm for being co-educators of students; yet they repeatedly identified weak ties to faculty as a fundamental problem and the greatest challenges in service learning (Sandy & Holland, 2006). There was a mixed review as to the value of a centralized service learning office; while it can be helpful in terms of providing a point person and face for the campus in the community, it can also be perceived as a gatekeeper that keeps faculty from working directly with community partners. This coincides with the finding from Gazley, Littlepage, and Bennett (2009) who noted that the item ranked number one for improving service learning among nonprofit leaders was “more faculty involvement, such as joint curriculum planning, face-to-face pre-semester meetings and orientations for professors and all community partners.” Implications of this research will be discussed in terms of designing service learning programs and principles of good practice in terms of negotiating and sustaining partnerships with nonprofit organizations in the U.S. to yield the benefits of the involvement of college students through service learning courses.
In recent years within Ireland there has been a growing recognition of the potential role that Pedagogies for Civic Engagement (PfCE) can play within higher education and the third sector from top down and bottom up perspectives (Boland & McIlrath, 2007). This is due to a variety of factors including Ireland’s drift to an economy rather than a society attributed to the economic boom called the ‘Celtic Tiger’, concern over perceived declining levels of social capital related to the boom, and new national and European policy implications mixed with the availability of philanthropic and public funds (Taskforce on Active Citizenship Consultation Report, 2007; Boland & McIlrath, 2007).

Parallel to these concerns, at the local level in 2001, the National University of Ireland, Galway became the first higher education institution on the island of Ireland to embed civic and community engagement. To this end, the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) was established, which was funded by a generous donation from Atlantic Philanthropies, to work with faculty to embed PfCE, namely service learning, in the curriculum. The CKI’s activities were viewed as ‘integral to the University’s strategic mission and involved a fundamental examination of the role of the University in the social fabric’ (NUI Galway Academic Plan, 2003-2008). Service Learning, while a new concept and practice within the context of Ireland, has gained momentum at NUI Galway and now boasts of over twenty-five degree programmes incorporating a service learning experience.

Service learning has been viewed as having the potential to enhance academic skills while instilling in students their sense of place as citizens beyond graduation and enabling the capacity of the third sector through a knowledge sharing dimension (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Furco and Holland, 2004; Zlotkowski, 2007). For such learning to emerge, a solid partnership is necessary between the university and the third sector. This paper will present research that analysed the emergence of service learning through faculty development and the impact of service learning on the third sector from an action research based case study. Within Ireland, little is known or documented on service learning as a pedagogical tool and in 2009, the author undertook over thirty individual semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of service learning, namely members of faculty and the third sector, to develop a baseline understanding at the local level.

The faculty identified were crucial to the development of service learning at NUI Galway, representative of the disciplines, each responsible for a service learning module and categorised as ‘early adopters’. The third sector participants in the research were partners to the service learning curricula and worked in a variety of guises through service learning. The author was implicated in the research in that she is responsible for the development of service learning at NUI Galway and she moved along the double-edged sword of the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ continuum within the process (Mercer, 2007). This was both advantageous in terms of the knowledge she processed and disadvantageous in terms of her ‘knowing’ the participants.

Key issues under investigation included service learning developments and characteristics; development of service learning at the grassroots disciplinary levels; place and purpose within and out with the university; the mechanisms used to develop partnerships with the third sector; and impact of service learning.

Results indicate that service learning within the context of Ireland has emancipatory characteristics viewed very often as giving both students and faculty the freedom to be creative within the curriculum and the freedom to share knowledge with those untraditionally associated with the academy. However, it was highlighted that there are inherent risks involved in moving teaching and the learning experience from within to out with the university,
with these risks including safety, control over the learning experience, and quality of the
service undertaken. Furthermore, the motivations identified for adopting and embedding this
teaching tool has personal or values laden roots very often speaking to political standpoints or
a sense of social justice of the individual faculty member. While faculty indicated that much
needs to be undertaken to inform the third sector of the potential characteristics and benefits
of service learning, the third sector indicated that there is emergent understanding as to the
differences between volunteering and service learning, with service learning having the
hallmark of specific disciplinary knowledge sharing as opposed to ‘service’ on an ad hoc
basis.

As a backdrop to this exploration, a national strategic overview of civic engagement and service learning
will be offered from a contemporary perspective. Characteristics of partnership quality will be related to the
third sector reports of outcomes, which will lead to recommendations for how higher education in Ireland
can improve on strengthening the capacity of the third sector.