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Harry C. Silcox

Torun E. Leek
Oklahoma State University

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Recommended Citation

Silcox, Harry C. and Leek, Torun E., "International service learning" (1997). *International Service Learning & Community Engagement*.
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INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

International service learning. By: Silcox, Harry C., Leek, Torun E., Phi Delta Kappan, 00317217, Apr97, Vol. 78, Issue 8

Its Time Has Come

It is clear that a network of international service learning is in its formative stage, the authors point out. We must not allow the politics of service programs in the U.S. to blind us to the opportunities in other parts of the world that will enable us to advance the theory and ideology of service learning.

SERVICE learning as a teaching methodology has recently emerged in the United States as a part of the school reform movement. Through the Learn and Serve America initiative of the Corporation for National Service, thousands of K-12 schools nationwide have been awarded grants to develop community/school service projects that are integrated with what is taught in the classroom. Combining many practices of the school reform movement - teachers as facilitators, active student learning, reflective teaching, and connection with real-life situations - this new emphasis on youth service has captured the imagination of educators. In addition, every service project has built into it the "ethic of service": students thinking of someone besides themselves, students as resources for the community, and an increase in students' understanding of the value of active citizenship.

Service learning is a grassroots movement that is springing up in community after community. However, because of America's isolationist tendencies, few practitioners have reflected on the impact that this methodology might be having throughout the world. We at the Institute for Service Learning had no idea how widespread the service-learning movement was internationally until we received invitations to attend annual conferences of the European Council of Independent Schools (ECIS) in Montreux, Switzerland, in November 1995 and in Nice, France, in November 1996. The ECIS represents some 2,000 schools in 50 countries, including the U.S. Our task at these conferences was to describe service learning as it is currently being advocated and practiced in the U.S.

The Montreux conference offered three workshops in service-learning methodology. A year later, in Nice, there were 15 workshops and a full-day preconference training session in service learning for 40 international educators. Since these conferences included 3,000 teachers from 40 countries, the workshops represent a milestone in the efforts to promote service learning internationally.

We originally thought that we were expected to be the experts on service learning who were bringing American ideas to Europe. In fact, we were just one part of a worldwide network of service advocates who are sharing ideas and experiences. The power of the conference experience grew out of the knowledge of the participants. In the area of youth leadership, no school or group of students in the world could rival the Gymnasia Bejigrad, Ljubljana, Slovenia. Led by teacher Barbara Gostica, students at the school not only helped free their country from Communism, but also in just three years brought the English language to their school as part of the curriculum. They remain a vibrant force in all local community affairs.

Kate Harrison of the International School of Geneva has led expeditions into Tanzania, where high school students have built outdoor toilets and set up schools for the use of local villagers. Harrison integrates these experiences into her classroom curriculum to help students develop critical thinking skills and an appreciation of other cultures.

Experts in developing students' creativity include Sally Robertson of the International School of Vienna, Dinos Aristidiou of the Danube Institute, and Annie McMannas of the Frankfurt International School. These three educators bring to the field of service learning new and invigorating ideas about how young people can express themselves more creatively. Their ideas are significant for the U.S. model of service learning because they mirror current trends in this country to increase the level of reflection and celebration/recognition.

In addition, such visionaries and theorists as David Mindorff and Jeremy Lewis of the American School in Budapest have done much to frame service as part of classroom learning. The work of these European educators has the same energy and pace found in the U.S. If their work is any indication of worldwide trends, then service learning is truly becoming international. The most comprehensive service-learning initiative presented at the Montreux and Nice conference featured schools that offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. IB coursework is primarily concentrated in the last two years of secondary schooling. Its rigorous approach, now followed by more than 700 schools around the world (some 250 of which are in the U.S.), gives the successful graduate access to any university in the world and advanced credits in most American colleges.

An integral part of the IB curriculum is the Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) course, which requires participating students to complete at least 150 hours of extracurricular work in these three areas. The caliber and quality of the course vary, depending on the interest of the instructor. The importance of CAS to service learning can be documented easily when it is understood that all students seeking the International Baccalaureate degree must pass this course. Another similarity between CAS and American service learning is that every service project done by a student is recorded in a "reflective journal." Clearly, there is recognition in this international program of the value of experience followed by reflection. Service that fulfills the CAS requirements can range from in-school activities to a wide range of assignments in the community.

The American School of International Studies in London offers an excellent example of the service portion of a CAS program, under the direction of teacher Kimberly Keller. Her students participate in the following activities:

- Badgers Wood, Ottershaw, Surrey. Students visit a residential home for adults with learning difficulties, work with staff members to provide companionship, and work with the residents on daily living skills. Students attend once every two weeks.
- Egham and Staines Conservation Group. Students clear public footpaths, plant trees and bulbs, and conduct environmental and general maintenance at various specified areas on five to seven weekends a year.
- Merlewood Nursing Home, Virginia Water. Students visit the elderly residents (go for walks, chat, play cards, and so on), make holiday decorations, grow plants and deliver them to residents, and make "care packages" for residents as necessary. They attend once every two weeks.
- Spelthorne Farm. Students assist with daily operations at a charitable organization for handicapped children: potting plants and feeding and grooming farm animals. Experienced riders exercise horses. Handicapped students accompany student volunteers during their service. Students attend once every two weeks.

While the nature of the English culture is different from our own, the projects in which Keller's students engage have a marked resemblance to those in the U.S.

The American School in the Hague has a CAS program that promotes similar youth learning/volunteering activities in the Netherlands. Service is defined in the school's CAS booklet as "social service (helping others) inside or outside the school, environmental projects, and international service projects." Specific service agencies listed for students include "Amnesty International, Habitat for Humanity, Refugee Center in The Hague, and assisting at the Jantje Beton Day." The energy coming from these CAS programs and the growing need for professional development for the staff members involved prompted the ECIS last year to create a community service committee. Led by President Ambrose Kelly of the Frankfort International School in Oberursel, Germany, and Secretary David Harrison of the Budapest International School, Hungary, ECIS teachers recognize the value of service activities in promoting active learning. They have started a campaign within the International Schools to develop service-learning projects as part of the academic curriculum.

The 1997 ECIS conference will be held November 20-24 at The Hague. A full-day preconference workshop on the subject of International Service Learning will take place on November 19; enrollment in the workshop is limited to 50 participants. During the conference itself, at least 20 workshop slots will be set aside for service learning and related topics. All U.S. teachers and allied service professionals are welcome. (For information and workshop dates, contact Jane Timpson, Conference Secretary, ECIS, 21 Lavant St., St. Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 3EL, UK. Ph. 44/1730-268-244; fax 44/1730-267-914.)

Another international component of service learning is the Duke of Edinburgh Award for Service for high school students. The program, established in England in 1956, uses hourly contributions of service as a basis for awarding bronze, silver, and gold recognition certificates or pins to winners: the more hours and the longer the project, the higher the award. A unique feature of this award is that those who strive to meet the requirement must undertake an "expedition" to another country to perform service. The Duke of Edinburgh Award seeks to inspire young people to create exciting programs, such as the establishment of a school in Tanzania or the creation of environmental courses and laboratories in Russia or Israel.

There is one drawback to this award, particularly for young people in the U.S. The service must be performed outside of school hours. This requirement is a tremendous handicap for the service-learning movement, since such programs are ideally developed as part of the school curriculum. In addition, each of the 59 countries offering the award does so through its own government. In America, the award has become known as the Congressional Award and is based on recommendations from congressional offices in Washington. It has served the country well by honoring worthy American young people for their service, but, despite having minimized the "international expedition" requirements of the program, the Congressional Award has not reached the scale in the U.S. that its counterparts have reached in other countries. A comparison of international figures for 1994 illustrates this disparity: in the United Kingdom, there were 46,761 recipients of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards; in Australia, 4,185; in Kenya, 3,534; in New Zealand, 3,427; in Senegal, 2,815; in the U.S., 306. The U.S. total ranks 15th internationally, behind India, South Africa, Ireland, and Israel.

Clearly, service-learning advocates in the U.S. have been remiss in providing our young people with recognition when they explore opportunities for service beyond our shores. In order to recognize these school-based service programs, the Robert F.

Kennedy Award for International Service has been created by the Institute for Service Learning in Philadelphia. The award will recognize those American students who, as part of their high school curriculum, have participated in a service-learning project either nationally or internationally. This program will be launched as part of the International Conference in London in 1997. Perhaps the most dynamic and energetic effort to promote community service in the public schools of any country is the work of John Potter, educational director of the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) in London. CSV has long been involved in tutoring/mentoring "schemes" (as the English refer to them) and in all other forms of volunteer activities. The organization has sponsored senior citizen projects, environmental projects, literacy/educational mentoring, and citizenship development. Most recently, faced with youth vandalism, child violence, racism, disquiet in the classroom, lack of respect, and a general malaise among children in Great Britain, Potter and CSV have begun to view service, when used as part of the curriculum, as an important component in improving British schools. In a recent article, Potter has called for a new vision of students as mentors and tutors. For the first time, school-age students are seen as resources that are part of the solution to the country's educational problems.

The efforts of Chris Thorpe, London assistant; Elaine Slater-Simmons, acting national coordinator of the CSV Learning Together Program; and Mike Gadsby of Birmingham - all of whom work to bring school and community-service projects together in public school settings - have been central to this movement. They are finding that service projects influence the curriculum so that young people become resources, and, over time, service to the community and learning in schools become one. Despite the enormous difficulty of placing such service projects in the traditionally minded British schools, these individuals and others like them are most excited by the success of the four-year-old tutorial/mentoring programs found throughout Great Britain today. In 1995 CSV published its first book using "service learning" in its title (*Take Part: Service Learning in Schools*). This booklet outlines the service-learning efforts in nine schools located throughout Great Britain and represents a dramatic shift away from volunteering and toward advocating service as part of the school curriculum. Most of these service-learning sites are in communities outside of London. For those working in service learning in Britain, it was simply easier to establish school/community learning in small villages and towns where everyone knows one another rather than in large metropolitan areas.

In addition to these well-established international programs, many other scattered initiatives in international service learning are surfacing worldwide. An October 1996 Youth Conference held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, attracted hundreds of service advocates from "down under" who signed a constitution that emphasized youth empowerment. In Canada, Paula Speevak Sladowski from the Volunteer Centre of Ottawa-Carleton organized the Service-Learning Symposium of Eastern Ontario as part of an effort to initiate a service-learning training institute in that section of Canada. A follow-up meeting attracted 14 teachers and service agencies. Under the leadership of Carolyn Bauer, Oklahoma State University has instituted service-learning courses in Japan. As exciting as these projects are, few of them are networked together in any organized way. In the U.S. efforts are under way at the Institute for Service Learning to form a worldwide service-learning network. The Institute has initiated numerous international service-learning projects for students in the U.S. and currently distributes information about international service learning through its publication, *The Global Link*.

Emphasis at the Institute has been placed on environmental monitoring projects with international dimensions. High school students have taken environmental equipment to Russia and Israel. In each country, they have set up a course and a lab in a high school. They taught students how to use the equipment, conducted a 14-parameter environmental study in both countries, and used the experience to energize international studies in their home high school. (A video is available from the Institute that describes the expedition to Israel and the work done by the U.S. and Israeli students.)

In September 1996 the Institute added an International Division that will develop and support international programming in service learning. International service-learning specialist Cate Nelson spends half of the year in England, training teachers in service learning as part of a cooperative agreement with CSV, and the other half at the Institute, fostering the service-learning exchange program and administering the Robert F. Kennedy International Service Award. Both of these initiatives will culminate in presentations at the 1997 International Service Learning Conference in London on December 3-5, 1997. (For more information, contact Cate Nelson: ph. 215/951-0343.)

Yet another organization, the International Partnership for Service-Learning, designs and administers off-campus programs for college and university students. As part of this initiative, Roe Hampton University in London is preparing to offer the first master's degree in International Service Learning. The Partnership places students in the Czech Republic, Ecuador, England, France, India, Israel, Jamaica, Mexico, the Philippines, Scotland, and South Dakota (with Native Americans). The 1997 conference was held in Kingston, Jamaica, in February.

These activities present a clear picture of the focus, energy, and grassroots nature of the service-learning movement that is emerging from the needs of schools and young people throughout the world. Scattered and disconnected as these efforts might currently be, it is clear that a network of international service learning is in its formative stage. By 2000, service-learning advocates from many countries will be clamoring for ideas, program models, and collaborative partners. It is crucial that American concern for what is happening politically to service programs in this country not blind us to the opportunities in other

parts of the world that will enable us to advance the theory and ideology of service learning. We all have a chance to learn together if we seize the moment!

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By Harry C. Silcox and Torun E. Leek

HARRY C. SILCOX is executive director of the Institute for Service Learning, Philadelphia. TORUN E. LEEK is co-director of the Service-Learning Literacy Project, College of Education, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. The authors have represented the United States at numerous international conferences and have conducted workshops on service learning in Jamaica, England, Canada, and Japan. Much of the information in this article has been gleaned from participants in these events.

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