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# 5

## The Importance of Program Quality in Service-Learning

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One of the tensions between practitioners and researchers in service-learning is that they seem to ask different questions. As we immerse ourselves in the practice and the research literature, we are reminded of the task of digging a tunnel under a mountain with crews starting at each end and finally breaking through at what they hope will be the same point in the middle. In this chapter we try to link the practice and the research literature so that the questions of “why” and “how,” which appear most frequently in the practice literature, can be linked with the “what” or the question of outcomes raised most often by researchers.

Because there is no single literature on program characteristics that lead to quality experiences for students in service-learning, we review several related bodies of literature in this chapter. These are:

- the practice literature on principles of good practice in service-learning.
- the related experiential education literature that is derived from learning theory.
- the research literature on student growth and development outcomes.

### PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Because service-learning has largely been a practitioner enterprise, the earliest expressions of quality were statements of principles of good practice. These were developed by practitioners and were based on a combination of beliefs of what “ought” to be and years of reflection on what worked in practice. The earliest of these were the three principles articulated by Robert Sigmon (1979):

1. Those being served control the service(s) provided.
2. Those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions.
3. Those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned.

Whereas all three principles relate to program characteristics, only the third relates directly to the experience of the student participants.

The next evolution of principles of good practice in service-learning came as the result of a Wingspread conference where a group of practitioners codified 10 principles that had been developed, critiqued and endorsed by 77 organizations in the field (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Although these 10 principles represent an expansion and elaboration of Sigmon's original three principles, in the Preamble they state very clearly the fundamental proposition of service-learning as educational philosophy and pedagogical approach: "Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both." (Kendall & Associates, 1990, p. 39).

In the introduction to the principles, there is a series of claims about the results of this combination related impacts on participants. Key among these are that students:

- Develop a habit of critical reflection on their experiences, enabling them to learn more throughout life.
- Are more curious and motivated to learn.
- Understand problems in a more complex way and can imagine alternative solutions. (Kendall et al., 1990, p. 38)

The major emphasis in the *Principles of Good Practice* is on the process of combining service and learning and general program characteristics; as such all are standards of quality. However, for the purposes of this chapter there are three that seem to link program characteristics and outcomes in terms of quality. These are: providing critical reflection (Principle 2); matching servers and service needs (Principle 6); and including training, supervision, monitoring and assessment (Principle 8).

The standard work in this field is the two-volume set compiled and edited by Kendall et al., (1990) that reviews philosophy, practice, and some research. Review of these encyclopedic volumes yields a few ideas about program quality and student outcomes. The first is Stanton's (1990) argument that experiential learning and service are necessary to meet the goals of liberal arts such as critical thinking and citizenship development. Next is Levison's (1990) conclusions about his national study of community service programs in independent schools. Levison concluded that quality programs provide *engagement* rather than just *exposure*. This engagement is intellectual understanding of problems and issues and not just "feeling badly" about those needing service. The key program characteristic of programs providing engagement is clear and concrete specification of objectives and outcomes (Levison, 1990).

Also in this volume is the commentary by former university presidents Kennedy and Warren on Campus Compact's national survey of its member campuses on the faculty role in public service. They argued that one of the three main findings is that the most important role of faculty in service programs is an instructional one where they "assist students to learn from their service experience and connect this learning with academic study" (Campus Compact, 1990, p. 472).

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY AND PRACTICE

The question of how to make experience educative goes back to Dewey (1938) and is the focus of his work that is often cited in this field, *Experience and Education*. Implicit in most of Dewey's writings is a theory of how experiential programs ought to be organized to meet the outcome goals of growth and development.

Elsewhere we have argued that Dewey's theory is useful for undertaking service-learning research (Giles & Eyler, 1994b). He put forward four criteria that were necessary for projects to be truly educative:

1. Must generate interest.
2. Must be worthwhile intrinsically.
3. Must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for education.
4. Must cover a considerable time span and be capable of fostering development over time. (Dewey, 1933)

These criteria lend themselves well to being operationalized as both program characteristics and as student outcome indicators. Also useful in Dewey is the emphasis on growth and development as the goal of experiential education. He envisioned experiential education as being a continuum of experiences for the learner and an activity in which there was an interaction between the external experience and the developmental experiences of the individual. From this view he developed the two principles of continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938; Giles & Eyler, 1994b).

This developmental view suggests that duration is an important element in program quality; a program or a sequence of experiences needs to be of a long enough duration to have a developmental impact. This view is often echoed in the practice literature. Observers have noted that the nature of the tasks that students do in field placements changes and becomes more complex over time (Moore, 1981; Moore, 1986; Suelzle & Borzak, 1981). One model of development focused explicitly on service learning has five phases and requires experiences over a relatively long duration in order for students to move through the phases (Delve, Mintz & Stewart, 1990).

Perhaps the most often appropriated element of Dewey's thinking about experiential learning is the concept of reflection or "reflective activity" (Dewey, 1938). Through reflection, action and thinking are linked to produce learning that leads to

more action. This is central in the literature that is practice oriented (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Silcox 1993), and as illustrated later in this chapter, one of the key areas of inquiry in the research literature.

In his recent volume on reflection, Silcox (1993) argued that reflection is necessary when students are to make sense of information so that they can know what it means. It is the processing of experience through reflective teaching that Silcox argued is the characteristic of service-learning programs that teach students *how* to learn. One expression of this view is the set of "Standards of Quality for School-Based Service-Learning" developed by the Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform. One of the key principles of these standards is that quality programs include preparation and reflection as essential elements (see Appendix 1 in Silcox, 1993).

In the mid-1980s, the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE, now NSEE) undertook a national program to strengthen experiential education in American postsecondary education. In the volume that resulted from this project, one of the chapters was devoted to quality (Kendall, Duley, Little, Permaul & Rubin, 1986). The core of this chapter is based on the work of John Duley (1979) in defining quality learning outcomes in college level experiential learning. Among the higher order outcomes listed are dealing with data through synthesis, coordinating, analyzing, and comparing. People skills include mentoring, negotiating, instructing, supervising, and persuading (Kendall et al., 1986).

The program characteristics necessary to achieve these outcomes are presented by Duley and the other members of this project as a series of tasks related to linking experience and learning: these characteristics of quality programs are:

1. Well established course or program goals.
2. Identification of service sites with students having the primary responsibility for securing positions in the field.
3. Help students establish educational objectives.
4. Recruiting students for sites.
5. Prepare students for learning and the field experience.
6. Monitor and support the learning.
7. Evaluate and assess the learning.
8. Report the learning on transcripts (Kendall et al., 1986, pp. 71-74).

Reflection, as developed in the service-learning practice literature seems most closely related to tasks 3, 5, and 6 in the NSIEE list.

Several emphases emerge from these two bodies of literature that are practice and or theory-based. Some of these emphases are also echoed in the service-learning research literature reviewed in the next section. As we noted at the beginning, the literature based on beliefs or the practice-derived "oughts" focused on the processes and inputs in service-learning programs. By contrast, the service-learning research literature focused on outcomes and with only a few exceptions, paid little attention to differentiating the processes and practices that might be associated with these outcomes (see Giles, Honnet, & Migliore, 1991). Themes that are not reflected in

the empirical literature but are predominant in the theory and practice literature are the importance of student choice, community voice, and client control of service. Another theme is that successful service-learning or other experiential learning leads to the desire for new learning. One theme that emerges in the empirical literature that is not emphasized in the practice literature is the nature of the task and how the individual student experiences the task and the service or field setting.

Although there are differences in focus between the practice and empirical literature, several shared themes emerged. These are: the importance of program duration for developmental impact, and the central role of reflection in promoting learning.

### EMPIRICAL LITERATURE LINKING PROGRAM QUALITY AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

As we have seen, there are many reasons for thinking that the quality of service-learning programs might make a difference in what students get out of them. And although the empirical research is spotty, there is growing evidence that program characteristics do make a difference, particularly on students' social and intellectual development. Empirical studies that explore program characteristics and link them to student outcomes focus on: qualitative differences between service-learning and more conventional classroom learning experiences; variations in the structure of service-learning programs themselves; and differences in individual student experiences within programs.

#### Qualitative Differences Between Service-Learning and Traditional Classroom Learning

When students participate in service-learning programs they are plunged into environments that differ substantially from most of their traditional classroom experiences. Some of the early empirical studies in service-learning focused on describing these differences. These differences include: the nature of the tasks they are asked to perform; the social relationships with other service providers and clients; the student's role as service provider; the way in which knowledge is sought and applied; and the nature of the feedback students receive for their efforts.

Both Conrad and Hedin (1980) and Hamilton (1981) noted community placements move high school students out of an "adolescent ghetto" and into positive peer relationships with adults. Moore (1981) and Heck and Weible (1978) also observed that students developed greater confidence in working with adults in their internships and service placements. Rubin (1983) noted that service-learning plunges students into a different set of cultural norms for knowledge acquisition; whereas students in the classroom obtain information from authorities, students in the field acquire it through observation, questioning, and chance. Moore agreed,

noting that the tasks performed in the field required greater creativity and flexibility than those typically faced in the classroom and that they required understanding of the task in the context of an organization. He also found that the students' conception of tasks became increasingly complex and contextualized with continued service in the field. Pataniczek and Johansen (1983) also observed that students in field placements took on new roles as learners including learning by doing, collegial relationships with agency personnel, setting their own goals, and giving as well as receiving feedback. Faculty also found their roles changing to facilitators of learning and liaisons between campus and community. Eyler (1993b) analyzed student journals from a policy class and followed up with a later analysis of journals from the same students during their full-time internship. As interns, these students expressed a greater sense of ownership of the work they were doing. Where the students had focused on feedback from the professor in the classroom, they were much more likely to weigh their success in terms of accomplishing a task when they worked with organizations in the community. Hursh and Borzak (1979), in studies of college students in service placements, accounted for the changes in how students in the field defined themselves as learners by noting the role discontinuities involved in moving from the classroom to doing real and meaningful work in the community.

The changes in learning processes and roles noted by these qualitative researchers are consistent with the processes of effective experiential education identified by practitioners and theorists. Students polled about the characteristics of field experiences that helped or hindered their learning selected program elements consistent with these observations as well (Owens & Owen, 1979). Eyler (1993b) found that these qualities were more likely to be present in full-time rather than part-time field placements.

Thus qualitative studies have demonstrated that service-learning placements do provide many of the learning opportunities advocated by practitioners and experiential learning theorists and that more intensive experiences may provide more of them. What is needed is empirical evidence that helps identify which characteristics are most important for achieving the goals of service-learning.

#### The Association of Program Characteristics and Student Outcomes

Student community service programs are organized in vastly different ways. Some are purely volunteer experiences and others are tied to the curriculum. In some, students participate in frequent and carefully structured reflection; in others little or no reflection is built in. Some are carefully designed to match sites and activities to learning goals for students, others are rather haphazardly assigned. Some offer a one-time experience, others offer an articulated sequence of service activities over several semesters. Some immerse students in intense all-consuming experiences, others involve 1 or 2 hours a week. In some, students work with people in the community to plan and deliver services, others seem to operate with little community input. We are beginning to have some evidence about which program elements make a difference.

*Program Type.* Few attempts have been made to compare different program types and where that has been done, not much evidence has been found to suggest that it makes a difference in student personal, social, or intellectual growth. Conrad and Hedin (1980) compared four types of field-based high school programs: community service, community study, career internships, and outdoor adventure. Their sample included 27 programs that involved 1,000 students; there were six control programs including at least one for each program type. They examined the impact of programs on personal development including moral development and self-esteem; social development including attitudes toward service as well as career development; and intellectual development including self-reports of learning and measures of problem solving.

They found that although field-based programs did lead to student growth, general program types did not make a difference. Initial differences favoring community service programs for their impact on social and intellectual growth disappeared when analyses controlling for other program and student characteristics were performed. They attribute this lack of differential impact to the fact that the kinds of characteristics that do make a difference were found in some programs of each type. For example, research on social issues, originally thought to be the defining characteristic of community study programs was also found in some career and community service programs. The things that make a difference in social and intellectual outcomes are the particular activities that students participate in regardless of general program type and one of the more promising characteristics seems to be the extent to which the service activity is integrated into the curriculum or provides opportunities for student reflection.

*Reflection and Integration.* The old joke about the teacher who claimed 20 years experience teaching the first grade, but actually only had 1 year's experience 20 times, taps a basic truth about experiential education. An experience only becomes educative when students do something with it. Experience becomes experiential education when students are engaged in intrinsically worthwhile activities that awaken curiosity and stimulate reflection (Giles & Eyler, 1994b). Although reflection may occur naturally in field placements (Moore, 1986), often it does not. Reflection can be spontaneously initiated by the individual student or be the result of careful program planning, but there is a growing body of literature to attest to its centrality to the process of learning through experience.

For Conrad and Hedin (1980) the single most important, observable program factor in predicting student outcomes was "the presence of a formal, and at least weekly, seminar" (p. 36). Rutter and Newman (1989) found that high school service program participants who had a weekly reflective seminar were more likely to report positive interactions with community members during their service, than those who did not.

Linking service to particular classes would seem to assure some level of reflection and the growing number of controlled studies showing student learning in service-learning classes supports this assumption. Markus, Howard, and King (1993) found that students assigned to a political science section that included

service achieved higher exam grades than those who did not; Batchelder and Root (1994) found that students in service-learning sections showed a significant increase in use of complex multidimensional perspectives in essays they wrote analyzing a social problem compared to those in regular class sections; Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1996) examined the impact of service on students in liberal arts classes at 20 colleges and found that those who participated in service-learning showed significant increases over the course of a semester in political action skills, ability to identify social issues, tolerance, personal efficacy, belief that the community can solve social problems, sense of connection to community, support for requiring service and support for volunteering, valuing a career helping people, valuing service in their own lives, valuing the importance of influencing the political structure, perspective taking ability, openness to other points of view, commitment to social justice, belief in the importance of changing public policy and perception that problems are systemic rather than the fault of individuals who need service. Boss (1994) compared two sections of an ethics class and found the class that included service showed significant increases in moral reasoning over the course of the semester whereas the students in the nonservice section did not. Waterman (1993) compared seniors who participated in the Philadelphia High School Literacy Corps with a class of senior English students who did not participate in service. The students who participated in the service that included a reflective seminar increased in self-esteem and attitudes of social responsibility, whereas the others did not.

In one of the few studies that contrasts volunteer service without a systematic reflection component with service as part of the curriculum, Myers-Lipton (1994) tracked students in a college program that integrates service and learning over a 2 year period. He found that students in the integrated service-learning program increased in international understanding and civic responsibility and decreased in racial prejudice over the 2 years. Comparable changes did not occur in the students who participated in service without the reflection component or in no service. These changes also did not occur in the experimental group over the course of a single year; extensive and continuous integration of service and learning was necessary in this group to bring the change about.

Eyler (1993a) also found that extensive reflection is necessary in a field-based program if students are to transfer learning from the curriculum to use in new settings or tasks. She compared three groups of college interns completing full-time semester-long internships as the capstone to their interdisciplinary major in human and organizational development; some students were in service placements, others in business organizations. Two of the internship semesters immersed students in weekly intensive reflective seminars and required them to complete written assignment and projects and make oral presentations in which they analyzed their experience and organization using concepts that they had learned in the classroom. These groups were designated the "high reflection" treatment. One group completed a pattern of reflection more typical of internships and service-learning placements; they met occasionally to share feelings and discuss issues and concerns and they kept journals in which they received occasional written feedback. This

group was designated "moderate reflection." When these interns completed "letters of advice to a friend entering a complex organization," only the interns in the high treatment groups drew on the information and theories they had studied for 4 years as well as on their own internship experience; the students in the moderate reflection group relied on general cliched advice like "be yourself" similar to the advice offered by freshmen who had yet to complete the curriculum or the internship. The fact that this transfer of learning did not occur among students with a strongly applied curriculum based on experiential learning theory without the additional element of extensive reflection on field experience, suggests how critical it is to have a clear conception of program goals and very explicit strategies for reaching them.

Preliminary results from a current study of the impact of service-learning programs on college student outcomes provides additional support for the importance of structured reflection. The Comparing Models of Service-Learning project surveyed 1,500 students at 20 colleges at the beginning and end of the spring semester 1995 and also gathered data from faculty and program directors; about 1,100 of these students were involved in service and about 400 were not. The students were in a variety of service-learning programs including internships, professional courses, volunteer programs, and alternative spring breaks as well as in traditional liberal arts courses. In one analysis, program characteristics identified by faculty teaching service-learning classes in the liberal arts and by researchers are used to predict perceptions by the 626 students in liberal arts classes that these classes were superior to their nonservice classes and the specific benefits they obtained from service-learning. The students in classes where the service was central to classroom activities were significantly more likely to report that the class was higher in quality than their nonservice classes and that they were motivated to work harder, they learned more and they were more intellectually stimulated than students in classes where the service was less well integrated into the curriculum. Oral complexity, which included students making oral presentations linking theory to their practice, was also linked to higher quality, learning and intellectual stimulation. The centrality of service to the class was also a significant predictor of students' perceptions that they had learned subject matter, attained personal growth, increased their commitment to the community, increased interpersonal skill and developed specific skills. Oral complexity was a predictor of subject matter learning and personal growth and written complexity was a predictor of social commitment. Classes in which reflection about service was consistently integrated into the class were consistently viewed as more powerful intellectually than those where service was performed but not well integrated (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1995).

Greene and Diehm (1995) found that college students who received frequent written feedback on their service journals rather than a simple check mark were more likely to credit the elderly people whom they were serving with contributing to their education. They indicate that the feedback appeared to motivate students to reflect on their experience and to show an increased level of personal investment.

Evidence suggests that reflection is important and that the quality of that reflection makes a difference. Certainly one element of quality is a close match between course goals and content and the service activities for students.

*Matching Placement With Learning Goals.* Although there is evidence that service placements may facilitate learning because they motivate students (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994), there is also evidence to support the view that placing students in settings in which they will deal with situations and issues related to the content of the course will help assure that the experience enhances learning.

We know that college students placed in political internships increased their understanding of the political process compared to students who studied the legislative process in an advanced political science class (Eyler & Halteman, 1981); that journalism students report greater understanding of communication concepts through their service (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994); and that students show somewhat greater problem analysis complexity on problems related to their service (Batchelder & Root, 1994).

The importance of matching service to the focus of the class has also been observed among high school students. The students observed by Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) learned more when the issues discussed in the legislative sessions they were observing matched those being discussed in the class seminar and they also found that preparation on the issues before their observations led to greater satisfaction with the legislative experience. Wilson found that students involved in political or social action became more open-minded as compared with students in other types of service (Alt & Medrich, 1994). The students in Conrad and Hedin's study (1980) showed the greatest increase in problem-solving skill when they experienced problems in their field placements similar to those in the problems they were asked to solve on the skill test and when they actually participated in problem analysis activities in the field. Moderate amounts of experience and instruction were linked to moderate growth in skill and students whose placements lacked experiences with such problems and also had no instruction in problem solving actually showed a decline in measured problem-solving skill. There have been a number of studies showing that tutors increase their learning in the subjects that they teach (Alt & Medrich, 1994). Matching service to course content appears to facilitate learning.

The kinds of tasks that students undertake during their service and the environmental context in which they work should also make a difference. Cohen and Kinsey (1994) involved 217 of 220 journalism students in a mass communication class in service activities. Some students were involved in direct contact with clients in the community, for example, teaching elementary school students about such media issues as stereotyping or violence in cartoons, whereas others prepared material for clients such as public relations brochures but did not work directly in the community. Whereas all students were positive about the experience and indicated enhanced learning in the key content areas of the course, the students who interacted with people in the community were more positive about the usefulness of the assignment in placing their course content in a meaningful context and were also more positive about the experience in their understanding of mass media audiences and messages.

*Relationship With Community Members.* Although Cohen and Kinsey (1994) found interaction with community members important to student motivation and learning, other studies have noted that in even rather brief service projects, close involvement with people who need service can have an impact on how students view the clients of social services. In a community service laboratory where students spent 3 hours a week for seven weeks in a volunteer agency, 75% of a group of 57 students changed from negative to positive description of the people to whom they provided service as a result of their service. Only 4% changed from positive to negative and the remainder were positive both before and after the service; several in this category commented that their views had not changed as they had worked with people with similar problems before (Giles & Eyler, 1994a). Ostrow analyzed journals kept by students who spent a day of service in a soup kitchen for the homeless and came to similar conclusions. His focus was on the process by which students come to change their perceptions of homeless people and the role of self-consciousness in this process (Ostrow, 1995). For many students, a brief service project may be the first time they are confronted with people whose life experiences are very different from their own, and such an experience may be very emotionally powerful.

It would be helpful to practitioners to have more empirical research that explores the link between the kinds of tasks students perform during their service, and what is learned. Among the more easily studied dimensions of service are its duration and intensity; there is growing evidence to suggest that service over a lengthy period is desirable.

*Duration and Intensity.* Many service programs are brief in duration; some as brief as a single afternoon event tied to club activities or campus orientation. The majority are probably of relative short duration and involve 2 or 3 hours a week in the field. There is evidence that a more intense program is more likely to provide the higher levels of the qualities associated with effective service-learning than a less intense one, that is, challenging and varied tasks, opportunities to make important decisions, sense of ownership, collegial relations with professionals in the field, opportunities to apply content from the classroom to the placement and vice versa, and to make a real contribution to the community. When 42 college students evaluated characteristics of their 3 to 6 hours-per-week service practicum and then later performed a similar assessment of their full-time internship, the levels of all these quality related variables were significantly higher for the higher intensity experience (Eyler, 1993b). Rutter and Newman (1989) compared opportunities for challenge such as making difficult decisions and being confronted with new ideas and found that students who participated in community services reported more of these challenges than those who did not.

The Comparing Models of Service-Learning study found that intensity was a predictor of students belief that their service-learning course was of higher quality



than other courses and that they worked harder, learned more and were more intellectually stimulated than in nonservice courses. This was true for the 1,131 students in a variety of service programs, as well as for the 636 who were in liberal arts service-learning classes (Eyler et al., 1995).

There is more evidence for the effect of duration; in fact some suggest that the lack of findings in the service-learning literature may be due to the relatively short and low intensity experiences that have been studied (Clayton-Pedersen, Stephens, & Kean, 1994; Kraft & Krug, 1994; Kraft & Swadener, 1994). Given the theoretical literature on stages of service (Delve, Mintz, & Stewart, 1990) and the qualitative studies showing students undertaking increasingly more complex tasks as their time in the field increases (Moore, 1981), we would expect programs that involve students over a long period of time to be more powerful. Kraft and Krug studied all of the K-12 Serve America programs, the Youth and Conservation Corps, and the Higher Education programs funded by grants from the Commission on National and Community Service to the Colorado State Commission. They used multiple methodologies to try to assess the impact of service on attitudes, behavior, and institutional impact. Over 2000 students and staff from middle school through higher education responded to their survey. They found no impact of service experience on attitudes toward civic participation and community service or on other outcomes they examined. They noted that most of these programs were of 6 to 8 weeks in duration and involved field work about once a week for a few hours and suggested that this limited experience was not powerful enough to affect the measured outcomes. In an evaluation of the Break Away alternative spring break programs, there was also no impact on social attitudes as a result of the week-long experience; evaluators felt that both the initial strongly positive attitudes toward social service and social justice issues coupled with the brief duration of the experience left little room for growth on this measure (Clayton-Pedersen, Stephens, & Kean, 1994). The findings in these two studies of college students are consistent with Conrad and Hedin's (1980) landmark study of high school students, in which they found that duration of the program was significant especially in programs of a semester or longer.

Myers-Lipton (1994), in his study also completed in Colorado, found that students in a program that integrated service and learning over a 2 year period showed few changes in international understanding, civic responsibility, and racial prejudice after a single semester, or even at the completion of the first year, but differed significantly from control groups of service volunteers and nonservice involved students at the end of a 2 year period.

One of the phenomena noted by Astin (1991) in his studies of college students is that there is a dramatic fall off in participation between high school and college. One effect of even brief service programs of limited intensity, may be to reconnect students with their desire to perform community service and with an infrastructure to connect with a new community in their college town. Giles and Eyler (1994a) found that students in a community services laboratory in which they studied community agencies and then volunteered for 8 weeks for 2 or 3 hours a week indicated a commitment to continue with volunteer service in subsequent semesters.

About 81% of the 57 students had been active in service during high school, but only 39% had been active the previous semester in college. At the end of their service, all but one student indicated an intention to continue service; 71% of the group indicated they would continue with the current placement and 78% indicated a specific commitment of hours. Duration should not be thought of only in terms of particular programs, but also in terms of the chance to create a series of opportunities for students to serve in both volunteer and class-based service activities. If programs of limited intensity or brief duration succeed in connecting students with further service activity, then they have had an important impact.

There is a need for more research linking objective assessments of the structure of programs and experiences within programs to desired outcomes. But even in carefully planned programs, the actual experience of each student will differ. And we know that these idiosyncratic experiences and perceptions of students make a difference.

#### Linking Students' Perceptions of Program Quality to Student Outcomes

Much of what we know about effective programs is based on students' perceptions of their experiences. Students in the same program will not necessarily have the same quality experience. Part of this difference will stem from actual differences in the sites or types of assignments, but students also bring their unique backgrounds and personalities to the field. Some students arrive at a site with a long history of service and are ready to contribute at a sophisticated level; for some students, the most important thing that happens will be coming face-to-face with distressing social conditions for the first time. Some students will take initiative and seek out challenge; others will passively do as they are told to meet a requirement. And even where students participate in the same program and experience, they may perceive those experiences differently as a result of their own backgrounds, motivations and personalities. Waterman summarizes the role of these student characteristics in his chapter "The Role of Student Characteristics in Service-Learning" (chap. 7, this volume.)

There is also considerable evidence that students who choose to do service or service-learning differ before their service on the attitudes and values that are desired outcomes of service-learning. In both the pilot sample of 150 students and the large survey sample of 1,500 students in the Comparing Models of Service-Learning study, college students who participated in service-learning were significantly higher than nonservice students in nearly every dependent variable pretest measure (Eyler et al. 1995; Eyler et al., 1996).

There are two large survey studies that attempt to link students' assessment of program characteristics to outcomes. These are Conrad and Hedin's (1980) landmark study of high school service and other experiential programs and the Comparing Models of Service-Learning study of service-learning programs in colleges and universities. The Comparing Models project is still in process but some results have been reported from the first year pilot with 150 students, and the second year



survey of 1,500 students. (Eyler & Giles, 1995; Eyler et al., 1995) Results of both studies suggest that practitioners are right to be concerned about the design of their programs.

*Quality of Service Experience.* Conrad and Hedin (1980) found that by far the most powerful predictor of student personal and social development was the students' perceptions of the quality of their experience. Whereas such objectively measured program characteristics as the presence of a reflective seminar accounted for about 5 to 8% of the variance on outcome measures, students' idiosyncratic experiences of quality accounted for about 15 to 20%. The quality variables that make a difference are similar to those that the students studied by Owens and Owen (1979) identified as important for a quality program.

Among the elements that made a difference were: having important adult responsibilities; being involved in varied tasks; making a real contribution; and having freedom to explore their own interests. These echo the findings of qualitative studies of the special characteristics of service placements discussed earlier; the student who can take on a more adult role and do real and important work is most likely to develop stronger attitudes of social responsibility. Autonomy, that is, doing things instead of observing, challenging tasks, and freedom to use one's own ideas tended to be most associated with development of self-esteem and efficacy. Conrad and Hedin were, however, unable to link these characteristics with growth in problem-solving ability.

Data gathered during the first year of the Comparing Models study, linked students' perceptions of program quality to social responsibility and citizenship skill outcomes. Students in nine college service-learning classes and six alternative spring break projects completed surveys in which they assessed program characteristics of their service as well as pre-post outcomes measures including social responsibility and citizenship skills.

Quality of the experience, which included such elements as having important responsibilities, challenging tasks, varied tasks, acting rather than observing and having one's opinions challenged, was consistently a significant predictor of growth in social responsibility outcomes including: the importance of influencing public policy, of personally taking leadership positions in the community, of believing both citizens and they personally should volunteer, and of believing service provides personal as well as social benefits. Also, when students felt they had made important contributions during service, there was growth on all social responsibility measures (Eyler & Giles, 1995).

This link between doing meaningful work, that is, making a contribution and outcomes was also found in the survey of 1,500 college students. In both the larger sample of all students doing some type of service-learning and the subsample of those in arts and science service-learning courses, making a contribution was a predictor of students' belief that the service-learning experience was of higher quality than regular classes and that they worked harder, learned more and were more intellectually stimulated. It was also associated with student belief that the service contributed to learning subject matter, personal growth, social commitment,

interpersonal skills, and specific task related skills. Students who found their service experiences to be interesting were also more likely to report these same outcomes (Eyler et al., 1995).

*Collegiality and Social Relationships.* There is also support for the view that the chance to work as a peer with professionals in the field, as well as to interact with service clients, faculty, and other volunteers, contributes to the impact of service-learning. Conrad and Hedin (1980) found that placements that encouraged collegial relationships with adults including discussion with teachers, family and friends and those they worked with at the site contributed to social responsibility outcomes.

In the Comparing Models survey, students who reported high levels of collegiality including attention from those at the site were more likely to report personal growth and the development of specific task-related skills during their service-learning. They also reported greater personal growth, social commitment, and interpersonal growth if they were in a setting where they worked with people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Frequent discussion with faculty and peers was associated with interpersonal growth (Eyler et al., 1995).

*Reflection and Integration.* Students surveyed in the Comparing Models study were asked a number of questions about reflection activities including amount and complexity of writing, discussion, presentation, and journaling. These were combined into a variable called "structured reflection." They were also asked about the applicability of what they did in the field to their studies and vice versa. For the total sample, structured reflection was a predictor of student perceptions that the service experience was of higher quality and that they worked harder, learned more and were more intellectually stimulated than in regular classes. It was also a predictor of student belief that they had learned subject matter, and experienced personal growth, social commitment, interpersonal growth, and specific task skills as a result of their service. For the liberal arts subsample, it was a predictor that they learned more and were more intellectually stimulated as well as increased in subject matter learning, personal growth, interpersonal growth, and specific skill development.

Application of service to study and study to the service experience also led to a belief that the service-learning was superior to regular classes on quality, hard work, learning, and intellectual stimulation, as well as to positive outcomes on nearly all of the other learning variables (Eyler et al., 1995). In the pilot study, application was a consistent predictor in the growth of students' assessment of their skillfulness from pretest to posttest. Application predicted growth in participation skill, communications skill, tolerance, and interest in social issues (Eyler & Giles, 1995).

There is thus, a growing body of support for the views of practitioners and experiential education theorists that the quality of the program will have an impact on outcomes. Program impacts, however, have been rather modest. Any service experience, no matter how well designed, is just one small aspect of the complex

set of experiences that each student has. We should not be expecting dramatic changes, but looking for the types of program activities that best contribute to what is a long developmental process.

### WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM PLANNING CAN WE TAKE FROM THE RESEARCH LITERATURE?

Although much remains to be learned, there are some consistent findings. Some of these recommendations are easiest to implement in curriculum-based service-learning programs, but all have implications for learning.

#### Duration

How long does a program have to last to be effective? It depends on the effect that we hope to achieve.

- For most program objectives, students should be in their service-learning placements for extended periods of time. If service can be built into classes over the course of 1 year or more, it will have a more powerful effect on students than single-term experiences. And to the extent that schools can create volunteer service centers that support continuous student involvement, some of these goals can be achieved through extracurricular programs as well.

- If a service project is of short duration, it can still be useful in helping students change their stereotypes of people receiving the service. To accomplish this, it is important that students have a chance to work with the service clients directly and a chance to reflect on that experience.

- A service project of short duration can help students connect with service organizations and opportunities and continue as volunteers for longer periods. Organizers of single-day or short-term projects should make a special effort to encourage further service work and to help students identify and hook up with appropriate volunteer organizations.

#### Reflection

There is good evidence that students benefit from service experience when they think about it and how it relates to their other experiences. In fact, the term service-learning is commonly taken to refer to service programs that incorporate a reflective component. Different types of programs present different challenges to planners trying to facilitate effective reflection activities.

- All programs, whether volunteer service or curriculum-based should include regular opportunities for group discussion of the experience.

- Extracurricular volunteer programs sometimes find resistance to reflection activities that are formal or "classroom" like. Directors of these programs should

try to create norms and techniques to encourage informal reflection. Student leaders can encourage and structure discussion "in the van" as they return from service sites or students might be encouraged to create a group journal of insights and comments that students have a chance to read, respond to, and pass along. Asking students to develop and make presentations to school or community groups can also encourage examination of the meaning of their experience.

- In classes where service is designed as an add-on enrichment activity for some students, be aware of what the volunteer students are doing and ask them to contribute examples to class discussions. In some cases, case studies or other presentations from the service may enrich the experience of the whole class. Application is central to effective service-learning.

- Where service is part of a class or curriculum, structure student assignments so that they can apply what they are learning in class to the field and vice versa. Assignments should require students to continuously observe and draw inferences from their experience. Where journals are used, structure the task so that students analyze and evaluate their experience using insights from their academic study and linking insights from their experience.

- Reflection activities should be designed to challenge students. Move from simple tasks like sharing feelings and descriptions to more complex tasks like analysis of assumptions and application of theory to practice.

#### Site and Task Selection

How sites are selected and managed makes a difference in the quality of the experience that students will have.

- Place students in situations where their service can make a real difference and they will receive feedback so that they know it is important. For example, when students work with the same child over 1 semester they can see the impact of their tutoring; when a community organization uses materials they have created, students feel a sense of accomplishment.

- Develop sites where organizational staff are willing to engage students as peers or colleagues and allow them significant responsibility. In long-term placements this should include varied tasks and assignments and limited amounts of gopher or routine work.

- Use classroom assignments associated with the service-learning project to help shape the service experience. Site staff need to be aware of the academic demands on the student and help to create meaningful projects to meet client and classroom needs. Developing a contract between student and site director can be a way of assuring that these needs are met and avoiding use of the student for undemanding tasks.

- Match the nature of the service assignment to curricular objectives. Chemistry students can tutor high school chemistry students or do demonstrations; students in a political science class might work with legislative committees or with community groups trying to influence policy.

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## 6

### Teachers of Service-Learning

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Teachers are central to the practice of service-learning in American schools. Whereas some districts mandate service-learning, more often teachers have the option whether to infuse service in their curriculum. Even in service-learning programs that are promoted by an enthusiastic administrator or facilitated by a district coordinator, invariably teachers have the primary responsibility for guiding their students in serving the community and learning from the process of doing so. At every level of schooling, the ultimate success of a service-learning project depends, at least in part, on the skill, knowledge, and creativity of the classroom teacher (Nathan & Kielsmeier, 1991).

Given the significance of the teacher's role in service-learning activities, it is important to understand what factors motivate teachers to begin and continue their service-learning efforts. Who are the teachers who choose to engage in service-learning? What are their beliefs about teaching? Do they have a history themselves of community involvement? Who do they involve in their service-learning activities? How much time do they spend on service, related learning, and reflection? What do they find rewarding or problematic about their service-learning experiences? These are the questions that guide the discussion in this chapter. The answers prove useful not only for teachers, but also for teacher educators, in-service trainers, program coordinators, and others who work with teachers in service-learning programs.

Whereas there have been a number of articles published on preservice teachers' service-learning involvement (Anderson & Guest, 1994, 1995; Erickson & Bayless, 1996; Root, 1994; Selke, 1996; Wade, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Wade & Anderson, 1996), only a few studies have focused on public school teachers' experiences of service-learning (Seigel, 1995; Shumer, 1994; Wade & Eland, 1995). The primary sources for the information presented in this chapter are in-depth interviews with 10 teachers and surveys completed by an additional 74 elementary and secondary