

Building Bridges Between Communication Studies and Community: A Praxis-Approach

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In an effort to demonstrate the field's usefulness and essentiality to our world, communication studies' praxis orientation needs to be clearly pursued and publicized. Implementing service-learning into the communication studies classroom could achieve this goal. Through extending the scholarship of Britt (2012) and Pollack (1999), this article proposes that communication educators ground and articulate their service-learning pedagogy from three different paradigmatic lenses; the experiential paradigm, the social change paradigm, and the citizenship paradigm. Moreover, communication administrators ought to understand the different paradigmatic foundations, which drive service-learning enactment, in an effort to not privilege one perspective over another. The service-learning literature is vast and discusses service-learning's history, definitional ground, and benefits. This article responds to one criticism of service-learning and provides a way in which communication educators and administrators could respond. By implementing service-learning from a clearly articulated paradigmatic foundation, the pedagogy's praxis orientation is strengthened, opening up the opportunity for more bridges to be built between academy and community.

Some service-learning critics believe the movement has forgotten its philosophical roots. At times, students are not working from a praxis-approach; they purely apply technique. This application of technique leaves students academically empty. Service-learning has its philosophical roots in the work of John Dewey (Giles and Eyler, 1994, p. 77; Morton and Saltmarsh, 1997, p. 137), Paulo Freire (Kahl, 2010, p. 221–22), and Jane Addams (Daynes and Longo, 2004, p. 5; Morton and Saltmarsh, 1997, p. 137).

Although many believe service-learning is the same pedagogical practice, research has shown that educators *do* approach service-learning differently. After extensive research, Britt (2012) created a typology of service-learning approaches in the communication studies field. According to Britt (2012), service-learning, as a communication pedagogy, works to develop students' identities in unique ways but a different student identity is called forth and developed depending on the type of service, reflection, and learning engaged by a student. These identities are learner, citizen, and social activist (Britt, 2012, p. 81–2).

Pollack (1999) created a similar typology (not specific to communication studies) where he portrays the relationship between education, service, and democracy as one that exists between contested terms. Pollack (1999) presents a triangle with three axes. For educators working along the *Education « Service* axis, their main motivation concerns a way to connect education to aid social needs. For educators who engage in service-learning from the *Service « Democracy* axis, their main motivation concerns relationship between service and social justice. For educators working from the *Democracy « Education* axis, their main motivation includes ways education can help encourage students to become more engaged in democratic processes and citizenship enactment (Pollack, 1999, p. 18, 20, 27, 30).

Communication educators could enact service-learning pedagogy from three different paradigmatic grounds termed the experiential paradigm, the social change paradigm, and the citizenship paradigm created through integrating the work of Britt (2012)

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and Pollack (1999). While all of the paradigms contain aspects of each other, the focus of the educational environment foregrounds particular aspects of Britt's (2012) and Pollack's (1999) typologies and backgrounds other aspects.

The Experiential Paradigm

Communication educators working from the experiential paradigm perspective primarily incorporate service-learning activities to motivate students to learn through active, engaged, and 'real-life' projects. Communication educators want to create experiences in their classroom where students become active participants in the learning process, instead of passive observers. The experiential paradigm corresponds to Britt's (2012) *Student as Learner* category and Pollack's (1999) *Education « Service* axis.

The work of John Dewey provides philosophical ground for this paradigm. Dewey's educational philosophy places importance on the relationship between lived experience and learning. For Dewey (1938/1997), new problems are created and resolved through situated experiences (p. 20–2, 42, 44–7). Habit is of key importance in the creation of attitudes (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 35) and curiosity must be aroused in the learning process (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 38). If an instructor were working from the experiential paradigm, she might incorporate a public relations project for non-profit organizations. In this type of project, students would be creating, and perhaps implementing, communication campaigns for the non-profit organization.

The Social Change Paradigm

Communication educators who work from the social change paradigm wish for their students to understand not only the social problems that exist in their communities, but to also understand the societal structures that lead to these problems. The social change paradigm draws upon Britt's (2012) *Student as a Change Agent* category and Pollack's (1999) *Service « Democracy* axis. Communication educators working from this perspective integrate service-learning activities into their classroom because they want to motivate their students to be change agents in the world.

Freire's (1970/2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* serves as the philosophical ground for communication educators working from this paradigm. Freire's educational philosophy advocates self-realization; the oppressed recognize their own oppression through work and self-discovery, thus opening the door for liberation to occur (1970/2000). In addition to the directive of working *with*, not working *for*, Freire's pedagogy is grounded in praxis. Thus, Freire's educational philosophy naturally serves as philosophical ground for the social change paradigm. One example of a service-learning project enacted from the social change paradigm is a Neighborhood Night Out project. Students could work with community leaders to create a neighborhood event. Not only could students create messages and plan the event, but this project's key learning objective would be to learn about societal violence and work to find solutions for change.

The Citizenship Paradigm

Communication educators who work from the citizenship paradigm perspective design instructional activities that stress the relationship between communication, community, and democracy. This paradigm is theoretically aligned with Britt's (2012) *Student*

as *Citizen* category and Pollack's (1999) *Democracy* « *Education* axis. The communication educator implementing service-learning from this pedagogical perspective focuses on good citizenship practices while engaging students with their course objectives.

The work and thought of Jane Addams provides a philosophical lens for this paradigm. In 1889, Addams opened Hull House, a settlement house, in Chicago. One of Addams's greatest concerns was that by working together in community, people understood and accepted their roles as citizens (Addams, 1910/1961, p. 64–6). Her thought and action serve as an inspiration for the citizenship paradigm because she stresses the cohesiveness and praxis that is necessary for the community members' civic endeavors. Some sample service-learning activities from communication educators engaging in this paradigmatic approach would be the creation of grassroots political campaign communication materials or local history research for community centers or local museums.

Conclusion

Through understanding the three paradigms: the experiential paradigm, the social change paradigm, and the citizenship paradigm, service-learning practice and objectives can be thoughtfully integrated into student coursework and curricula. Careful course planning and preparation, in addition to course and project objective reflexivity, is a crucial aspect for service-learning practice implementation. By implementing service-learning from a clearly articulated paradigmatic foundation, the pedagogy's praxis orientation is strengthened.

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