

Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research

Volume 13

Article 2

2014

Complicating Practice with Success: Service-Learning Perspectives at a Research-Intensive University

Jessica A. Pauly
University of Kansas

Follow this and additional works at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope>

Recommended Citation

Pauly, Jessica A. (2014) "Complicating Practice with Success: Service-Learning Perspectives at a Research-Intensive University," *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*: Vol. 13 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope/vol13/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Complicating Practice with Success: Service-Learning Perspectives at a Research-Intensive University

Jessica A. Pauly
University of Kansas
jpauly@purdue.edu

Although extant research has demonstrated the benefits of service-learning for students and the greater community, faculty involvement in service-learning at research-intensive universities remains a challenge. In order to critically explore faculty perceptions of service-learning and to challenge everyday understandings, this study utilizes politically attentive relational constructionism to analyze faculty focus groups. Findings constructed service-learning as facilitating student success, but constrained by self-defined practice. Based on this analysis, transformative possibilities around the perception, practice, and institutionalization of service-learning emerge. Combined, these findings extend research on service-learning by highlighting a research-intensive university as a unique context and proposing ways to overcome service-learning challenges. This study provides pragmatic suggestions for service-learning and university administration such as the need for greater administrative support, university-wide buy-in, and the need to reflexively review faculty understanding—and practice—of service-learning.

Keywords: Service-Learning; Politically Attentive Relational Constructionist Approach; Communication Pedagogy

Universities, administrators, and faculty have given an increasing amount of attention to service-learning over the past two decades (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Wells & Grabert, 2004). Although various definitions of service-learning exist, service-learning generally consists of course-based educational experiences combined with organized community-based service (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Extant research has revealed that service-learning enriches classroom learning for students (Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Goldberg, Richburg & Wood, 2006), enhances the scholarship of teaching and learning for faculty members (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2009), and creates valued connections and benefits for community members (Bringle, Hatcher, & Games, 1997).

Jessica Ann Pauly is a doctoral student in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. This paper was presented at the National Communication Association's 99th annual convention in Washington D.C. This research was supported in part by a grant from the Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas. The author would like to thank Dr. Suzy D'Enbeau for her encouragement and assistance in manuscript preparation.

Despite service-learning pedagogy's surge of popularity and the touted benefits, there remains institutional challenges that may limit efficacy or preclude its implementation. These problems include a lack of faculty involvement (Ward, 1998), a dearth of institutional support and funding (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000), and restrictive curriculum requirements (Bringle, Hatcher, & Games, 1997; Hinck & Brandell, 2000). Of these factors, Ward (1998) speculates that the greatest challenge facing service-learning is faculty involvement. Indeed, faculty members are the key stakeholders in developing and implementing service learning into the curriculum (Bringle, Hatcher & Games, 1997). Once faculty members engage service-learning, this pedagogy can gain momentum through departmental and peer support, which then has potential to grow recognition from higher-level administration (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Hinck & Brandell, 2000). Because faculty members are faced with unique challenges based on the institution that they are employed at, it is important to consider the type of institution (i.e. liberal arts, community college, research-intensive, etc.) when investigating these issues. Although service-learning is more typically associated with small, private institutions (Antonio, Astin & Cress, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000), researchers have yet to consider the perceptions of faculty members at research-intensive universities¹ in regard to service-learning. Doing so has the potential to uncover strategies to overcome faculty involvement challenges that may be unique to a research-intensive context.

This study investigates perceptions of faculty at research-intensive universities to illuminate the discursive constructions, challenges, and possibilities for transformation in terms of service-learning implementation. A politically attentive relational constructionist (PARC) approach (McClellan & Deetz, 2011) was used to critically explore the dominant understandings that constitute service-learning within university life. The themes that emerged expose unique service-learning motivations, the personalization of service-learning, and insecurities experienced in practice. These findings have practical implications for university administration in improving their support systems and service-learning centers in strengthening their faculty programs.

In order to understand the ways that service learning is discursively practiced in research-intensive universities, this article first reviews literature concerning the common struggles and resolutions faculty members have encountered with service-learning. Next, I explain and justify my choice of focus group methodology before then explicating my use of a PARC approach of data analysis. I conclude by reporting the findings as they relate to the three moments within a PARC analysis and propose that the personalization of service-learning undermines efficacy in the established pedagogy.

1 Research-intensive universities are designated as doctorate-granting universities, specifically as "RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity)" by the Carnegie Foundation classification.

Literature Review

The history of service learning is marked by a multiplicity of definitions and practices (O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009). The unclear nature of this pedagogical tradition poses a challenge to many practitioners, yet different approaches to service-learning can encourage instructors to implement this pedagogy in nuanced ways that complement their specific discipline or course (Britt, 2012).

Existing research has documented three challenges to service-learning implementation. The first challenge is the perceived integration of service-learning into the discipline. As O'Meara (2008) states, "Faculty members' perception of the fit between their discipline and engagement will influence their involvement" (p. 16). O'Meara's research found that many service-oriented faculty members from various institution types perceive their field to be inseparable from service. Abes, Jackson, and Jones (2002) found this perception is hardly the case for all disciplines; surveys completed at 29 diverse institutions suggested that instructors within the physical and biological sciences, as well as mathematics and chemistry, do not recognize the relevance of service-learning to their discipline. This challenge is mitigated by established service-learning centers on campus. Bringle and Hatcher point out that, "Having a centralized office that provides technical assistance, logistical support... is an important aspect of institutional infrastructure that can assist in the recruitment of... faculty to service-learning" (2000, p. 284). A positive correlation exists between the administrative support of service-learning and the faculty support of service-learning (Hinck & Brandell, 2000); therefore, the existence of a service-learning office is an important predictor of a university's overall dedication to the implementation and encouragement of service-learning (Antonio, Astin & Cress, 2000). Service-learning centers provide assistance and support in developing service-learning courses by offering resources such as example syllabi, funding, and workshops (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Furthermore these centers may serve to help establish service-learning within various academic disciplines. Much of this previous research may apply generally to the current state of academia, but empirical studies have not considered the nuanced curricula, teaching expectations, and support centers specific to research-intensive universities.

The second challenge to service-learning is time and scheduling. Banerjee and Hausafus (2007) conducted a study with faculty in the human sciences and found that the strongest deterrent to implementing service-learning into curriculum was the time intensive nature of service-learning preparation. Similarly, Hammond (1994) found that a majority of faculty respondents at major colleges and universities in Michigan indicated that coordinating a large amount of people, increasing demands, and multi-tasking were the biggest challenges to service-learning. However, respondents in the study also claimed that the goal of increasing student understanding of course materials

was the primary motivator for teaching a service-learning course. This finding suggests that practitioners often privilege students' learning outcomes over the additional time and effort required for service-learning courses. For example, after analyzing service-learning award nomination submissions, O'Meara (2008) found that 94% of the files examined mentioned that "the nominees were enthusiastic advocates of service-learning as a pedagogy for deepening understanding of content in 'real-world settings,' enhancing critical thinking, [etc.]" (p. 15). Once again, previous research takes a comprehensive perspective on these issues and strategies instead of offering a contextually specific view of service learning. Faculty schedules, demands, and class sizes vary by institution, and justifies the need for localized understanding of service-learning.

The third challenge to faculty involvement with service-learning is the promotion and tenure process (Abes, Jackson & Jones, 2002; Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; McKay & Rozee, 2004). With the numerous responsibilities faculty members face, service-learning is often not a curricular requirement. Some faculty, concerned that their service-learning will not be recognized or rewarded within the evaluation process, conclude that their time and energies are better spent elsewhere (McKay & Rozee, 2004). Most faculty members at large, research-based institutions view research as a strong component within the tenure process while teaching is seen as barely linked to tenure evaluation (Tagg, 2003). Therefore, many faculty members perceive time spent teaching as simply a duty to fulfill in order to focus on the greater responsibility: research (Moore & Ward, 2010; Tagg, 2003). However, research has shown that support from mentors, peers and department heads can be a crucial component in efforts to counteract this challenge (Hammond, 1994; Moore & Ward, 2010; O'Meara, 2008). Bringle, Hatcher, and Games (1997) suggest that deans, chairs, and promotion and tenure committees are key in sustaining faculty involvement in service-learning. With enhanced departmental support, service-learning faculty may be able to better navigate the promotion and tenure challenge (Hinck & Brandell, 2000), perhaps combining their service-learning experience with research opportunities (e.g., action research, community-based research). Promotion and tenure is a known challenge within research-intensive universities (Tagg, 2003), but the majority of previous research has failed to showcase the complexities involved in the support—or lack thereof—of service-learning at these institutions.

In sum, the implementation of service-learning is threatened by seemingly uncooperative disciplines, time constraints, and the lack of recognition within the promotion and tenure process. Although each challenge can be counteracted with a supportive strategy, most of this previous research fails to consider specific institutional realities. Research-based institutions constitute different cultures, expectations, and support systems than private, or liberal arts colleges (Antonio, Astin & Cress, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). Recognizing and considering these environmental differences creates

opportunity for the practice of service-learning to grow in complexity and possibility. Moreover, there have been requests for future research to look at the motivations and deterrents specific to institution type (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002), as well as a call for discourse analysis of the power relations within conversations of service-learning (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2009).

Taking previous research into consideration, this study sought to better understand the perceptions of service-learning faculty members at a research-intensive university. Therefore, the following research question was proposed: How do research-intensive university faculty discuss conceptualizations of service-learning in higher education classrooms? The following section details this study's method and analytic framework.

Methodology

In this study, I utilized focus group methodology (Morgan, 1988) in order to better understand the ways that faculty members discuss service learning. This dynamic of focus group methodology allowed for participant interaction and spontaneous responses, which were important for this study. The goal of this research was to explore commonly held perceptions of service-learning, challenge understandings, and ultimately reveal transformative possibilities in practice.

Key Informants

Participants in the study were 24 faculty members currently employed by a large, research-based Midwestern university.² After obtaining IRB approval for the study, participants were contacted with the help of the university service-learning center. Based on faculty members who were signed up for the service-learning listserv, purposive sampling was used to contact individuals via email. Efforts were made to include a variety of disciplines and faculty positions. Participants engaged in one of five focus groups across five dates. Their demographic information as well as general faculty information (i.e. discipline, position, etc.) was collected upon arrival at the focus group site. Ten of the participants identified as women, and 14 identified as men. Eleven participants were faculty from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, one from Design, two from Architecture, Design and Planning, two from the School of Journalism, two from Engineering, one from the School of Business, one from Public Affairs and Administration, one from Arts, and three from Education. Five participants identified as full professors, 12 identified as associate professors, six identified as assistant professors, and one identified as visiting assistant professor. Faculty members' time at this university ranged from one to 33 years, with an average of 12 years.

² Tenure requirements at this particular university focus on performance in teaching, scholarship, and service (or professional performance specific to department and position). Teaching is said to be the primary focus, scholarship is an essential component, and service is viewed as an essential responsibility.

Procedures

Participants were organized into groups prior to the meeting in order to avoid close colleagues being in the same focus group. Due to the busy schedules of the faculty members, it was not always possible to create groups with unfamiliar participants; however, group members were fairly well-distributed. Upon arrival, participants completed the general demographic information and an informed consent form. Four general discussion starters were asked during the session: (a) What is service-learning?, (b) What do you think of service-learning?, (c) How have you been encouraged or discouraged to use service-learning?, and (d) What are the challenges of incorporating service-learning into your curriculum? A hallmark of focus groups is their ability to allow for group interaction and insights (Morgan, 1988), therefore, participants were asked to share examples of personal experiences as well as engage one another in the discussion to create a genuine conversation. Focus groups ranged from 31 minutes to 57 minutes, with an average of 46 minutes in length. The sessions were videotaped, as well as audio taped. Notes were taken during the duration of the focus group. Interviews were transcribed, and all original names were replaced with pseudonyms. Transcription resulted in 116 pages of double-spaced text, accompanied by 25 pages of single-spaced notes.

Data Analysis

To investigate the normative discourses and opportunities for transformation, a politically attentive relational constructionist (PARC) perspective was utilized for the analysis of this study.

A PARC approach “directs attention to the relational understandings embedded in language to critique how some meanings are enabled in conversation while others are simultaneously constrained” (McClellan & Deetz, 2011, p.34). PARC aims to challenge avoided topics (e.g. official components involved in service-learning) to ultimately provide a way to rethink common understandings and conceptions. By understanding taken-for-granted perspectives, researchers can reveal areas of discussion that are being devalued, ignored, or forgotten. Revisiting these areas of talk can help transform understanding, and possibly contribute in a greater way to scholarship. Utilizing a PARC approach for this study—complemented by the use of focus groups to emphasize conversation and dialogue—encourages an analysis that pushes thinking about service-learning in new and insightful ways.

Three moments of analysis constitute a PARC approach: (1) understanding; (2) critique; and (3) transformation (McClellan & Deetz, 2011). Understanding is comprised of the meanings that emerge naturally from discussion, and thus authentically depicts the interpretation and practice of service-learning within the culture of the university. Critique reveals the ways that discussion favors certain ways of understanding service-learning,

and withholds other perspectives and/or viewpoints. Finally, transformation aims at restoring alternative meanings, that is, meanings that are previously hidden, ignored, or avoided, thus complicating the discourse by enabling marginalized topics (McClellan & Deetz, 2011).

In working through the three moments of PARC, this analysis was guided by data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To develop the moment of understanding, transcripts were read multiple times. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method ensued, and initial codes were developed using different words or phrases to describe the motivating or discouraging factors in play within the conversation. Some of these sample codes included: experiential learning, disconnect, improvement, interdisciplinary, positive feedback, purpose, reward, support, and values. At this level of analysis, basic ways of knowing and meaning emerged from discussion. In order to move analysis to the moment of critique, data displays including a checklist matrix and conceptual framework were developed to organize information and confirm relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This visual representation illuminated privileged topics within conversation, and problematized initial understandings by revealing inconsistencies. Memoing took place throughout this time in order to clarify and extend previously generated concepts. In order to draw conclusions, patterns and themes were developed from the initial codes and clustering was used to categorize those codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Sample patterns and themes included: experiential learning for students, facilitates recruiting, enhances culture of department, ownership statements, and lack of connection with other practitioners.

Findings were confirmed through a presentation with administrative staff at the service-learning center where the author works. Presenting to service-learning experts in this fashion allowed the author to receive feedback and field questions from colleagues. Ultimately, presentations complement the written form; as Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest, "Without writing and presenting, professional knowledge cannot be advanced, nor can implication for practice and theory be put into effect" (p. 276).

Results and Interpretation

The purpose of this study is to identify how faculty members at research-intensive universities perceive service-learning. My analysis reveals two key findings, which I organize according to a PARC approach. The first theme, predicated upon the moment of understanding, shows how participants communicatively construct service-learning as a facilitator for student success. The second theme, based in the moment of critique, exposes service-learning as an individual endeavor, downplaying its affiliation with the official method. The moment of transformation is born from critique, therefore this final moment is considered in the discussion section.

Understanding: Service-learning as Facilitating Success for Students

Within a PARC analysis, the moment of understanding focuses on the meanings that emerge naturally from discussion. Therefore, this moment focuses on the ways participants make sense of service-learning and its importance within their work as a university faculty member. Participants discursively construct service-learning as a pedagogical tool that fuses learning opportunities and privileges student success. This understanding is evidenced in two ways. First, participants perceive service-learning as a means of sense-making for students. In other words, service-learning focuses on breaching the boundaries of classroom learning and community service. Second, participants discursively construct service-learning as experience that carries tangible value. That is, service-learning equips students with “real world” experience that is not often available through customary teaching methods.

To begin, participants often refer to the significant impact service-learning has on student’s understanding of coursework. This way of talking about service-learning emphasizes the method’s ability to provide understanding and purpose to coursework. For instance, Cat explains the predicament she experienced before adding service-learning to her coursework:

Before I started doing anything like service-learning, ... at the end of the course, students would always say, “Yeah but what can we do? Now that we know all this, what can we do?” And so I thought this would be the missing piece.

In this way, Cat admits that her course was not fulfilling her students in terms of sensible application until she added a service-learning component. Students are knowledgeable in their area of study, but because they are not introduced to effective ways to apply their newfound understanding they stop short of comprehending the practical value of her instruction.

Similarly, Marty admits that service-learning enhances classroom work, saying, “I think service-learning really provides that sort of framework for theory, for very difficult concepts, etc., for students to apply them in real life.” Again, Marty describes service-learning as a crystallizing agent within students’ academic progress. Service-learning allows students to reach a higher level of understanding within their discipline where they can integrate text-based concepts and theories with purpose. Carter expresses this same idea when he adds:

By using service-learning and saying, ‘Hey, there’s an end goal here that you’ve got to meet that satisfies this company’s outcomes... but you need to not just do it in your own context, but understand the context of what’s around it and what benefits all,’ to me, it’s a perfect way of helping get them to make a well-educated decision instead of [saying] “Just do this.”

Constructed in this fashion, service-learning encourages students to be active participants in their educational experience by considering the immediate implications of their work. By understanding purpose and providing meaning to accompany knowledge, students are able to achieve success in and through their education.

The second understanding of service-learning as facilitating success is with regard to the tangible value this method offers. Although related to sense-making, this separate point is nuanced in its focus on value of experience for future career purposes. Community service is a fundamental piece of the service-learning pedagogy, and this hands-on experience is considered worthwhile for student success. Tom shares his perspective here: “Students serve a real client... it is very, very useful for job hunting. I have had quite a few students tell me that they just showed the employer their [project book] and they offered a job right away.” In this example, Tom speaks directly to the value associated with completing his courses that have a service-learning component. Participants recognize that students, faculty, and employers view service-learning as a viable method for transforming text-based knowledge into practical application and experience

Bill points out another tangible value associated with service-learning when he adds,

“Also, this is something that they put on their vitae... unlike another course, they’ve done something out in the real world to put on their vitae, which I think they should.” Constructing service-learning in this way illuminates it as something they can add to their list of professional experiences. The experience from the course is something they can carry with them and reference as they head into their future.

These examples showcase the participants’ belief that service-learning has the potential to facilitate student success. By illuminating the fundamental framework this pedagogy embraces, these participants describe the learning opportunities associated with service-learning as nuanced and noteworthy. Furthermore, they suggest that without service-learning, it is possible students will not feel competent in applying their newfound knowledge.

This initial finding supports previous research on faculty motivators (Hammond, 1994; O’Meara, 2008). Moreover, faculty members emphasize student success, but they do not equally highlight benefits to self or community. This finding is interesting considering that many faculty view teaching as unrelated to the promotion and tenure process at research-intensive universities (Tagg, 2003).

Critique: Service-learning as an Individual Endeavor

The second moment of a PARC analysis is the moment of critique. This analysis focuses on the ways power is marshaled within conversations in

ways that favor certain social constructions and preclude other perspectives and/or viewpoints. In the context of service-learning, the moment of critique reveals dominant understandings of this method while also shedding light on insecurities within practice. Participants discursively construct service-learning as a self-defined strategy that, although practiced individually, could be improved through networking. Two key findings were noted here. First, service-learning is not recognized as an established pedagogical practice. In other words, each participant speaks directly to the ways in which he or she practice service-learning and avoid describing the pedagogy as a practice incorporating specific steps. Second, a perceived lack of support and resources for faculty members exacerbates faculty insecurities. These two findings result in a contradiction of understanding and practice that is further reviewed.

First, participants describe service-learning as a self-defined pedagogy, avoiding affiliation with an established practice. By constructing service-learning as a strategy that is entirely interpreted and organized according to the practitioner, this talk devalues service-learning as an authorized method. For example, the first question shared with focus group participants is: *What is service-learning?* A variety of answers are given, but each answer is prefaced with an ownership statement. Drew responds with “*I interpret it as learning... experiential learning.*” In a separate group Cat states, “*I might add experiential learning. I think it’s experiential learning outside the classroom.*” Another participant, Jenna, admits, “*I wrote: The engagement of students in experiential learning opportunities that supplements classroom activities and serves a need of a partner...*” Each of these responses appears to overlook service-learning as an established practice. Although the constructions themselves share an overlapping theme – specifically, the idea of experiential learning as synonymous with service-learning – the ownership statements prohibit the acknowledgment of alternative understandings. Furthermore, when considered in conjunction with the previous finding—service-learning as facilitating student success—it is possible that faculty members may personalize this pedagogy in order to better aid student success within the context of their course. Greg further explains this point in his description. He said:

My sense is that there’s the kind of standard definition of what constitutes a service-learning course, and that’s not necessarily what I do, but there’s also a broader definition of what it is, and ... so I try to do that.

Here, Greg admits what others have not: A standard definition of service-learning exists, and with it, certain expectations; however, there also exists a more general, shared understanding of what service-learning constitutes, and that is what he works to achieve. Although strategy is encouraged within the service-learning pedagogy, personalization of this method can threaten mutual understanding and support. Without a shared understanding, service-

learning may quickly die from a lack of comprehensive practice.

The second finding noted within the moment of critique reveals the insecurities that accompany the self-defined practice of service-learning. This type of talk illuminates the lack of support and guidance practitioners experience, and the interest in opportunities to share best practices. Many instances depict this uncertainty such as participants questioning each other or requesting advice from their peers. For example, Sally mentions her difficulty in conveying the purpose of service-learning with her students, stating “And I wonder how—and I’d love to hear from other folks about that—how you sort of flip that script somewhat and say, ‘Well, no, it’s about the experience.’” In another instance, Jenna admits trouble finding a balance in expectations with the pedagogy: “So, I don’t know, I’ve found that to be kind of a slightly delicate ... I’m open to any advice because I’m still balancing that a little bit.” This overarching interest in sharing practices and stories is an obvious request for advice.

Furthermore, this interest in shared resources preferences an opportunity to network with each other. This way of talking focuses on the ways each individual’s service-learning efforts could be bolstered. For example, Carter points out that “from a support standpoint, I’d like to make more connections, because I think if I have other faculty in other departments who can provide another focus that takes a little bit of the [weight off] of me...” This discursive construction often ignores published resources, but rather, privileges time spent with other service-learning faculty members. This point is reinforced by Marty’s interests:

Because I know that the Center for Service-learning puts some of us into contact, but I feel like I know like, ‘Oh, she’s doing that in the business department.’ Oh, well, how? How? I want the mechanics, not the pedagogical hoighty-toight talk. I want to actually get with people and have butcher paper and process how you do yours in engineering, because I’m like, how *are* you doing that or how are you doing that? So I really crave that sort of interaction. I don’t want to read any more academic articles about service-learning. I want to talk nuts and bolts about service-learning.

All of these excerpts reveal the individualized nature of the service-learning pedagogy. Participants favor the discursive ownership involved in their understanding of service-learning, while also privileging requests for collaboration and support. Although the request for opportunities to network and share in support confirms previous findings (Hammond, 1994; Moore & Ward, 2010; O’Meara, 2008), juxtaposed, these examples indicate a significant contradiction in understanding and practice. Practitioners develop their own service-learning strategy, however, they desire opportunities to work together in order to shed the uncertainties involved in solitary practice.

The direction of influence remains unclear, but the key take away is evident: In coming together, faculty may be able to gain confidence in shared practice and strengthen their understanding of service-learning. When shared, best practices can encourage a common understanding of the method. Ultimately, potential exists to overcome the challenge of faculty implementation through opportunities to unite.

Discussion

Service-learning is a popular teaching strategy that incorporates classroom learning with community service (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Despite the significant benefits of service-learning, challenges around faculty involvement remain that can be exacerbated at research-intensive universities. This study explored faculty perceptions of service-learning at a research-based university, and found that participants construct service-learning as a nuanced teaching method that facilitates student success through sense making and “real world” experience. However, by privileging student success, faculty members devoted to service-learning at research-intensive universities compromise service-learning standards in order to support course-based learning outcomes for the student. Participants also perceive service-learning as an individual endeavor that is self-defined, and yet, can be enhanced through networking with other practitioners.

Using a PARC approach, themes were discovered and organized according to the three moments of critical analysis: understanding, critique, and transformation (McClellan & Deetz, 2011). The moment of understanding looks for emergent meanings in privileged discussion topics; this moment constructed service-learning as facilitating student success. By talking about service-learning as a nuanced opportunity for students to connect classroom learning with “real world” experience, participants verified their shared motivation in using this pedagogy. These findings confirm previous research on service-learning motivators (Hammond, 1994; O’Meara, 2008). Service-learning is perceived as a vital piece of a student’s academic career and allows them to make practical sense of their knowledge. Furthermore, service learning encourages students to reference the value of their service experience when meeting with potential employers.

The constructed understanding influences the moment of critique, revealing dominant meanings of organizational life and works to recover the hidden, or suppressed viewpoints. This moment highlights how the participants communicatively construct service-learning as an individual endeavor. Results showed that faculty understand service-learning as a custom-made method, ignoring its official definition and potentially prohibiting its growth as an established pedagogical strategy. This personalization of the pedagogy could be due—in part—to the privileging of student success. In privileging student success, faculty members may be ignoring certain components of the service-learning strategy in order to simplify expectations and demands of the course.

However, in constructing a modified definition, faculty members are not only failing to share in a common practice, but they are also problematizing their confidence within this practice. This lack of confidence results in a request for more peer support in order to theorize best practices. Ultimately, this type of talk uncovers the complexity of discourse surrounding service-learning, and struggles within practice.

Transforming Discourse

The final moment within a PARC approach is the moment of transformation. This moment revisits emergent meanings and considers what has not been said in order to engender alternative meanings within organizational life. The two key themes revealed in the moment of critique pose important implications for transformation. These themes can be complicated and challenged so to encourage growth in understanding, meaning, and possibility for this pedagogy's future.

First, service-learning is considered a self-defined, malleable practice. By talking about service-learning in this way, participants avoided talk suggesting that there are official elements involved in this strategy, and that it exists as a nationally-renowned method of teaching. This inevitably weakens the pedagogy with a lack of common ground, and therefore, undermines networking and connection efforts. Future focus group sessions might consider attending to this void in discussion by proposing service-learning as guided by various tenets – such as reflection, and documentation (which were both mentioned in discussion, but quickly dismissed). Alternative ways of talking about the practice of service-learning could produce new and insightful understandings such as service-learning as facilitating job requirements, or service-learning as enhancing teaching experience. This inspiration could reinvigorate service-learning as a pedagogical strategy and potentially change the current disjointed perception.

The second critical theme—related to the first—was a lack of confidence in practice, and thus, a request for support. This type of talk provided an opportunity for other participants to reclaim uncertainties in practice and disclose interest in opportunities to network. Future research should consider navigating this uneasiness to produce insightful suggestions for improvement and restoring a sense of confidence in process. Although there exists a standard structure for the service-learning method, practice of this method is varied and much discretion is left to the practitioner. Focusing on this alternative understanding may encourage newfound confidence in practice and increase retention in service-learning. Potential contributions could clarify understandings and renegotiate perspectives.

Pragmatic Implications

The exposed understandings and concerns provided by this study offer ways that universities can improve their support systems to better aid

faculty members at research-intensive universities who employ service-learning. University administrators at research-intensive institutions must take interest in supporting faculty in their efforts to aid student success and betterment in order to revitalize the implementation of service-learning. This revival can be done by modifying the promotion and tenure process to acknowledge successful efforts in enhancing student learning. University administrators should consider meeting with service-learning practitioners to review and discuss ways that the current promotion and tenure requirements can be adjusted. This type of information session could focus on how service-learning currently applies to the promotion and tenure process, and suggest ways connections can be strengthened. University service-learning centers, too, should encourage faculty members by identifying successful practitioners and rewarding them (e.g., monetary support for future service-learning courses, or inviting them to lunch with other honored practitioners). Moreover, faculty members are advised to be proactive in their service-learning interests and successes by connecting their practice to research opportunities.

The findings of this study also reveal that service-learning practitioners construct this pedagogy as self-defined. Moreover, faculty members request more opportunities to come together to share in its development and practice. This finding directly responds to Ward's (1998) challenge of faculty involvement. Service-learning centers must assist in clarifying perceptions of the meaning of this pedagogy. In doing so, practitioners can share in a mutual understanding of service-learning, which will strengthen the pedagogy's future success. Service-learning workshops focusing on components and best practices, brown-bag lunch opportunities for practitioners to unite and discuss experiences, and university-wide service-learning conferences (focusing on interdisciplinarity, community partners, and balancing the pedagogy) are all great opportunities for practitioners to unite and share common ground.

Limitations

The current study has a few notable limitations. There was an imbalance in faculty positions (i.e. Assistant/Associate Professor vs. Full Professor) across the participants, which could affect the results. Pre-tenure faculty members face different requirements compared to tenured professors, making their time and opportunity for service-learning potentially strained. Another limitation to mention is the fact that the researcher is an employee at the university's service-learning center, which was openly shared with all participants in the initial email correspondence. This knowledge could have inhibited participants from feeling comfortable sharing their honest thoughts about service-learning due to personal relationships faculty members may have with other administrative staff within the service-learning office.

Although this study focused on a research-intensive university, future studies specific to liberal arts universities, community colleges, etc. would be valuable. Additionally, this study chose to focus on faculty members' perceptions, but it could have generated a larger scope had it included graduate teaching assistants and/or university administrators. Thus, future research surrounding perceptions of service-learning specific to these populations would be worthwhile.

Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal new insights into the ways that research-intensive service-learning practitioners construct their understanding of service-learning and its importance in their work. By privileging student success and marginalizing the official service-learning pedagogy, faculty members may be diluting the practice of service-learning and problematizing their understanding. Faculty members are the guarantors for the future of service-learning, and thus their construction of, and interest in this pedagogy, has great implications for the future of education.

References

- Abes, E.S., Jackson, G. & Jones, S.R. (2002). Factors that motivate and deter faculty use of Service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, 9(1), 5-17.
- Antonio, A.L., Astin, H.S. & Cress, C.M. (2000). Community service in higher education: A look at the nation's faculty. *The Review of Higher Education*, 23(4), 373-397. doi:10.1353/rhe.2000.0015
- Banerjee, M. & Hausafus, C.O. (2007). Faculty use of service-learning: Perceptions, motivations, and impediments for the human sciences. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, 14(1), 32-45.
- Bringle, R.G., Hatcher, J.A. & Games, R. (1997). Engaging and supporting faculty in service learning. *Journal of Public Service & Outreach*, 2(1), 43-51.
- Bringle, R.G. & Hatcher, J.A. (1996). Implementing service-learning in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 67(2), 221-239. doi:10.2307/2943981
- Bringle, R.G. & Hatcher, J.A. (2000). Institutionalization of service-learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(3), 273-290. doi:10.2307/2649291
- Britt, L. L. (2012). Why we use service-learning: A report outlining a typology of three approaches to this form of communication pedagogy. *Communication Education*, 61(1), 80-88. doi: 10.1080/03634523.2011.632017
- Corbett, J.B. & Kendall, A.R. (1999). Evaluating service-learning in the communication discipline. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 53(4), 66-76. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/215293596?accountid=14556>
- Goldberg, L.R., Richburg, C.M. & Wood, L.A. (2006). Active learning through service-learning. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 27(3), 131-145. doi:10.1177/15257401060270030201

- Hammond, C. (1994). Integrating service and academic study: Faculty motivation and satisfaction in michigan higher education. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 1(1), 21-28.
- Hinck, S.S. & Brandell, M.E. (2000). The relationship between institutional support and campus acceptance of academic service-learning. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 868-881. doi:10.1177/00027640021955522
- McKay, V.C. & Rozee, P.D. (2004). Characteristics of faculty who adopt community service learning pedagogy. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, 10(2), 21-33.
- McClellan, J. & Deetz, S. (2011). Sustainable change: A politically attentive discursive analysis of collaborative talk. In J. Aritz & R. Walker (eds.), *Discourse perspectives on organizational communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moore, T.L. & Ward, K. (2010). Institutionalizing faculty engagement through research, teaching, and service at research universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 17(1), 44-58.
- Morgan, D. L. (1988). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Qualitative Research Methods, 16. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Niehaus, E. & O'Meara, K.A. (2009). Service-learning is ... how faculty explain their practice. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, 16(1), 17-32.
- O'Meara, K.A. (2008). Motivation for faculty community engagement: Learning from exemplars. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 12(1), 7-29.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tagg, J. (2003, January/February). Why does the faculty resist change? *Change Magazine*, 7-15. Retrieved from <http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/2012/January-February%202012/facultychange-full.html>
- Ward, K. (1998). Addressing academic culture: Service-learning, organizations, and faculty work. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 73, 73-80.
- Wells, C.V. & Grabert, C. (2004). Service-learning and mentoring: Effective pedagogical strategies. *College Student Journal*, 38(4), 573-579.