

## **Service Learning**

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### Published

2014

### Book Title

HERDSA Guide: Work integrated learning in the curriculum

### Version

Version of Record (VoR)

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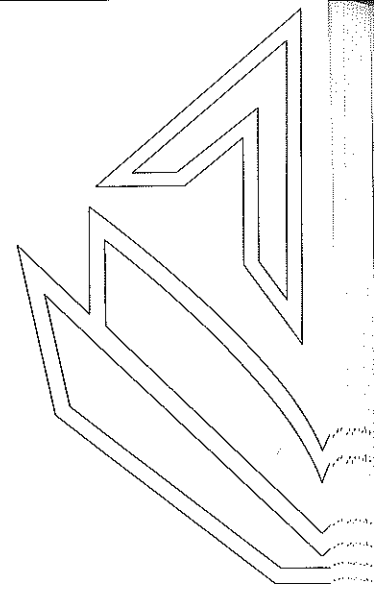
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# CHAPTER 3

## SERVICE-LEARNING

Carol-joy Patrick



Service-learning as a unique approach to WIL and is growing in popularity in Australian and New Zealand universities both as a model for WIL and in its own right as a powerful way to engage students and the university with community needs and citizenship growth. Many universities use service-learning within a discipline context. A unique advantage is that unlike WIL, which is generally offered as a discipline-based senior experience, service-learning can be designed to enable students to step outside their discipline and experience the integration of work and study in the early years of their degree.

Service-learning has a multitude of definitions. Many existing WIL definitions can be readily adapted to represent the features of service-learning with the proviso that service-learning is identified as being specifically enacted for community or not-for-profit benefit and that the student is engaged in serving while learning. The Furco (1996) model (Figure 3.1) demonstrates how service-learning bridges the gap between activities which can otherwise be single-purposed and describes a curriculum approach with the dual purposes of service and learning for reciprocal benefit for the service provider and recipient.

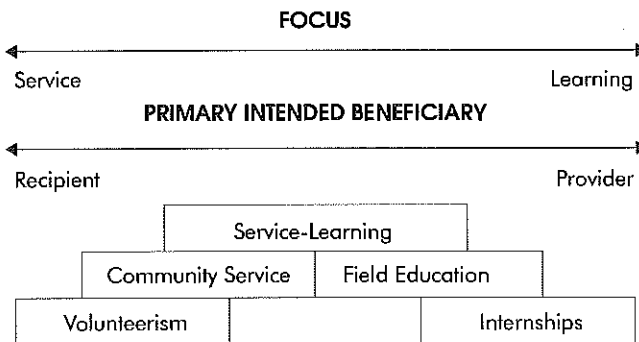


Figure 3.1 Furco model of service-learning

Research in North America has identified a range of positive outcomes for students participating in service-learning (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins & Stevens 2010; Huber & Hutchings 2010). Many of these benefits can be obtained through WIL experiences, but as the work by Astin, Sax and Avalos (1999) demonstrates, there are elements that go beyond what WIL normally provisions. Their research showed that

- (1) Service participation positively affects students' commitment to their communities, to helping others in difficulty, to promoting racial understanding, and to influencing social values.
- (2) In addition, service participation directly influences the development of important life skills, such as leadership ability, social self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and conflict resolution skills.
- (3) Service participation also has unique positive effects on academic development, including knowledge gained, grades earned, degrees sought, and time devoted to academic endeavours (p.188).

In addition to student outcomes, other advantages of service-learning include

- can be enacted in the early years of a student's degree program
- development of a range of graduate attributes beyond discipline constraints
- universities and students develop relationships with community partners that extend beyond the service-learning activity
- opens students to the possibility of applying their discipline-based learning beyond their anticipated career options
- provisions a wider number of partners for WIL experiences
- avoids concerns regarding legislation (e.g. Fair Work Act) regarding unpaid work
- supports transformational learning by enabling students to "encounter new and different understandings of the world", and "to engage in identity exploration" (Seider & Butin, 2012, p.2).

### Designing Service-learning Curriculum

The need for quality curriculum design applies equally to service-learning as to WIL. A key element however of service-learning curriculum design is the absolute imperative for a specific focus on reflection to ensure that the range of service-learning outcomes are achieved. Whereas WIL has grown to encompass a wide range of curriculum approaches including virtual and simulated experiences, service-learning has a fundamental principle that it must almost always be conducted with real clients, organisations and results. Heffernan (2001) outlined a number of service-learning models (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Models of service-learning (Heffernan, 2001)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| "Pure" Service-learning                       | Students sent into the community to serve; not typically lodged in any one discipline.  |
| Discipline-based Service-learning             | Students are expected to have a presence in the community and reflect on their experiences on a regular basis using degree content as a basis for their analysis and understanding throughout the semester.   |
| Problem-based Service-learning                | Students relate to the community as much as consultants working for a client, working with community members to understand a particular community problem or need.  |
| Capstone Course                               | Courses are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline offered almost exclusively to students in their final year. Capstone courses ask students to draw upon the knowledge they have obtained throughout their coursework and combine it with relevant service work in the community.                    |
| Service Internships                           | Like traditional internships, these experiences are more intense than typical service learning courses, with students working as many as 10 to 20 hours a week in a community setting. As in traditional internships, students are generally charged with producing a body of work that is of value to the community or site. |
| Undergraduate Community-based Action Research | A relatively new approach that is gaining popularity, community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for students to research and serve as advocates for communities.  |

### Reflection in Service-learning

Reflection is a core component of service learning. Service learning practitioners and researchers have concluded that the most effective service-learning experiences are those that provide structured opportunities for learners to critically reflect upon their service experience. Structured opportunities for reflection can enable learners to examine and form their beliefs, values, opinions, assumptions, judgments and practices related to an action or experience, gain a deeper understanding of them, and construct their own meaning and significance for future actions. "Reflection 'facilitates the student's making connections between their service and their learning experience' and indeed the hyphen in the phrase 'service-learning' has been interpreted as representing this connection" (Eyler & Giles, 1999, as cited in Connors & Seifer, 2005, p. 1).

Eyler, Giles & Schmiede (1996) identify that the timing of reflections is important. Reflections should commence prior to the service-learning and following the activity. Students need to be prepared for reflection and supported to draw the links between the service-learning activity and their class work. In their university-wide approach to implementing service-learning, the State University of New York (SUNY) identified options for student reflections through journaling (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Types of journals for reflection

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Critical incident journal | Record reactions to particular incidents and contemplate potential future actions in similar circumstances.   |
| Three-part journal        | Intentional reflection in three specific ways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Application.</li> </ul>               |
| Highlighted journal       | For assessment purposes, students highlight sections in their journal that relate to course content, personal and professional growth.                                  |
| Key-phrase journal        | Provide students with a list of key phrases to be used in journal entries and students reflect on each concept in relation to their service-learning activity.          |
| Double-entry journal      | Journal pages are ruled into two columns, experiences recorded on the left, alignment with course content on the right and students draw links between the two columns. |

SUNY also identified journaling for summative assessment (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Types of journals for summative assessment

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Artistic journal    | Students choose an artistic medium, poetry, drawings, videos, poetry. This may be appropriate for summative assessment. |
| Personal narratives | Using journals, students write a more structured narrative for summative assessment.                                    |
| Class presentations | Students draw on their journals to reflect.   |
| Letter to Self      | Students write letters to self about the service-learning experience, reflecting on most important things they learned. |

Australia has earned a reputation of being at the forefront in providing a range of quality WIL curriculum approaches. Translating existing WIL practice to community settings and facilitating the growth of students as contributing citizens across all discipline contexts, adds richness to the WIL agenda enabling more robust engagement by universities, staff and students with a broader community than necessarily encountered in normal WIL approaches.

### Key Points

- Service-learning is considered a type of WIL but is also valued as its own stand-alone pedagogy.
- Service-learning provides very similar outcomes to WIL and provides additional personal and citizenship development.
- Service-learning broadens the range of WIL experiences available.
- There are many ways to design service-learning activities which may be different to WIL.
- Reflection is key to students achieving the transformative outcomes available through service-learning.