

## Program Characteristics of Effective Service-Learning

*All those things that we had to do for the service-learning, each one, successively helped me pull together what I'd learned. As you're going along, you're not really seeing what you're learning every minute. But when you have to pull it all together and really think about it, I think it helped me realize what had taken place.*

Is a one-day service event during student orientation worth doing? What about offering an extra hour of credit for a class for students who choose to add a service option? Should we structure student journals, or let students write whatever comes to mind? Do we need to read and respond to these personal journals? Should I require service in my class or make it an option?

There are no simple answers to questions like these; the answers will depend on our goals, as they do with most of what we do in higher education. Certainly students may make friends during a service-related orientation activity, and they may feel better about their college. They may, if the program is well designed, become acquainted with further service opportunities and thus be connected to service throughout their college years. Similarly, although an add-on extra-credit service project may not have much of an impact on student learning or cognitive development, it may foster personal

growth and future interest in more demanding service-learning options.

Although the personal and the intellectual cannot be separated—Dewey's notion of the wholeheartedness of effective education is well taken—the studies reported in this book support the view that many of the intellectual goals of higher education, including learning and application of material, critical thinking and problem solving, and perspective transformation, depend not on service experience alone but on how well integrated theory and practice are through application and reflection. And many goals, including personal development and perspective transformation, are enhanced by attention to the quality of diversity and community voice in service-learning. The quality of service-learning makes a difference.

In previous chapters we have focused on student outcomes of service-learning and explored some of the service-learning experiences that led to those outcomes; in this chapter we reverse the process, with a focus on the characteristics of effective service-learning programs.

This chapter is designed to help practitioners planning service-learning. First we discuss these characteristics, describing what practitioners should do if they are interested in particular goals of service-learning. We include a table that summarizes the relationships between program characteristics and categories of student outcomes. Then we discuss how service-learning might be adapted to the individual needs of students with different learning styles, different levels of service experience, and differences in cognitive development. We also touch briefly on the issue of requiring service in the context of our findings regarding how students who choose service differ from students who do not.

### Program Characteristics That Make a Difference

There is a consensus among practitioners about what constitutes good practice in service-learning, and students when surveyed have tended to concur (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989; Sigmon, 1979;

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Owens and Owen, 1979). When we interviewed students about what made their service-learning effective, they offered lots of examples of particular assignments and approaches, but they consistently stressed the importance of what they did in the community; their relationships with others—community members, peers, and faculty; and the challenge of integrating their service and academic study through reflection. When we looked at the impact of these kinds of program characteristics on student outcomes in our survey and analysis of problem solving and critical thinking, there was consistent support for what had begun as practitioner wisdom. Program characteristics make a modest but significant and consistent difference, and for the most challenging outcomes, such as development of critical thinking ability and transformation of social perspective, programs have to be very thoughtfully designed to create opportunities for sustained community involvement and intellectual challenge.





Here we examine some key characteristics and link them to the outcomes to which they are most central. Table 8.1 summarizes those relationships. We categorized the many variables into such outcomes as personal development or learning/understanding and application and then examined the extent to which particular program characteristics were significant predictors of the variables included in each outcome category. Dark blocks represent very consistent relationships between the characteristic and the outcome measures; the medium-shaded block indicates that the characteristic was linked to some of the measures in the category. White blocks represent little or no relationship and striped blocks either mixed positive and negative or negative relationships as indicated. It is a quick way to get a sense for what is most important to different kinds of outcomes. Regression tables that show the links between program characteristics and student outcomes are in Resources E and F.

### Placement Quality

Placement quality is about the service in service-learning. Before any other consideration, service-learning practitioners must pay attention to establishing community connections that will provide

Table 8.1. Program Characteristics That Are Predictors of Service-Learning Outcomes.

Characteristics	Placement Quality	Application	Reflection: Writing	Reflection: Discussion	Diversity	Community Voice
Stereotyping/tolerance	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Personal development	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Interpersonal development	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Closeness to faculty	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Citizenship	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Learning/understanding and application	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Problem solving/critical thinking	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Perspective transformation	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark

-  = program characteristic was a significant predictor of most measures of this outcome.
-  = program characteristic was a significant predictor of some measures of this outcome.
-  = characteristic was a mixed predictor of this outcome; some positive, some negative.
-  = program characteristic was a negative predictor of some measures of this outcome.

Source: Based on data from the FIPSE-sponsored survey and interview studies reported in this book.

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productive situations for students as well as genuine resources useful to the community. The service is where service-learning begins. The academic connections are also critical for success, but first comes service and the anchoring of learning in community experience. As one student interviewed noted, "I think the classroom is more of a support for the service and not the other way around. I just think that everything that has been valuable to me has been on the personal level with individuals." He weighed the community and academic elements of the process and then continued: "I'm not devaluing the academic part of it. I think it's necessary once you experience those things." In support of the importance of the academic, he talked about all the things he did in his service-learning class, including exploring social causes of the problem he was working with, the history of previous social movements, learning about change and how change is possible, and learning what others have done. But with all this serious academic work, he came back again to the roots of learning in the service: "I think the thing that hit me hardest about community service and the things that I'll remember the most are the things that I actually experienced firsthand—the service part." If the service does not work well for the student, the learning may not be productive.

The qualities that clustered together in our survey and were characterized as placement quality are consistent with earlier work on placements by Conrad and Hedin (1980) and others (Moore, 1981; Hursh and Borzak, 1979; Owens and Owen, 1979; Eyley, 1992). Placement quality provides a context in which students can exercise initiative, take responsibility, and work as peers with practitioners and community members. Students who worked with newly literate adults to collect reading materials to support future literacy efforts, those who helped a community center design brochures and a grant proposal, and those who planned an evaluation of an after-school program all experienced these challenges. A quality placement provides the real-world setting for learning that theorists from Dewey to cognitive scientists such as Resnick have

Source: Based on data from the FIPSE-sponsored survey and interview studies reported in this book.

- = program characteristic was a significant predictor of some measures of this outcome.
- = characteristic was a mixed predictor of this outcome; some positive, some negative.
- = program characteristic was a negative predictor of some measures of this outcome.

found useful for acquiring knowledge and abilities that can be used to solve actual problems (Resnick, 1987b).

*Placement quality affects personal and interpersonal development.* Placement quality was most consistently associated with impact on personal and interpersonal outcomes. It was a positive predictor of virtually all of our measures of tolerance and stereotyping—such as personal development as knowing the self better, spiritual growth, and reward in helping others, and interpersonal outcomes, such as leadership and communication skill and ability to work with others.

### Application

Application refers to the degree to which students can link what they are doing in the classroom to what they are experiencing in the community and vice versa.

*Application predicts academic learning outcomes.* There were hints that application might be an important factor in the impact of service-learning in previous studies. Conrad and Hedin (1980) found that high school students performed better on problem-solving tests when the problems they experienced in their field placement were similar to those tested. Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) found that students learned more when the issues discussed in their class seminar matched those being observed in a legislative session. Batchelder and Root (1994) found a similar link in a small study of college classes; students performed more sophisticated and complex analyses of a social problem when the problem was related to their service. Given these findings, we sought to test whether this link would hold up across a larger, more diverse group of college students and programs.

Application was associated with virtually every one of the academic learning outcomes in our studies. It was often the strongest predictor of learning outcomes, problem solving and critical thinking, and perspective transformation. Application predicted such survey outcomes as student reports that they learned more and were more intellectually stimulated by their service-learning than by

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### Reflection

Reflection is significant; it is the link between academic learning back and behavior reactions and contemplative, we already know the course of their informally with the community serve meet and discuss explicit attention thoughtful about into most core interviewed c

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other classes, as well as specific learning outcomes such as deeper understanding of subject matter, understanding the complexity of issues, and knowing about the work of specific social agencies. Students who studied medical care policy while escorting AIDS patients to clinics and helping them obtain medical equipment for their homes, those who helped immigrants newly arrived in the community while studying multicultural issues, and those who helped plant trees in deforested areas while studying environmental issues all told us they saw these connections. Application also predicted critical thinking outcomes, such as issue identification and ability to see consequences, and perspective transformation outcomes, such as seeing issues in a new way and a belief in the importance of using public policy to attain social justice. Integration of service and learning that included both reflection and application was a consistent predictor of student performance on problem analysis outcomes such as complexity of analysis and quality of strategic thinking, as well as on critical thinking in the interview study.

### Reflection

Reflection is sometimes described as the hyphen in service-learning; it is the link that ties student experience in the community to academic learning. At its simplest, reflection is being able to step back and be thoughtful about experience—to monitor one's own reactions and thinking processes. Some people are naturally contemplative, wondering how what they are doing fits with what they already know or pursuing questions that pique their curiosity in the course of their community service. Some readily share and reflect informally with roommates, friends, parents, and others, and some community service offers built-in reflection as staff and volunteers meet and discuss issues and strategies. But for many students, it takes explicit attention to the reflection process before they become thoughtful about what they do, and reflection is not routinely built into most community work (Moore, 1981). Some students we interviewed commented that their service raised questions that

interested them but that they did not pursue because "I had these questions, but the class was over, and so that was that." This seemed to be the case when the service project was not discussed throughout the class but was an extra project to submit at the end of the semester.

In our reflection interviews when we asked what the student had gained from service, we found that students who had been engaged in volunteer service activities tended to talk about the people they had met and feelings about their experiences; when they talked about what they took from service, it was usually in terms of personal and interpersonal growth—gratitude for their own good fortune, greater tolerance, greater appreciation of other cultures, or learning to work with others. Students who had been engaged in service-learning that included opportunities for structured reflection also talked about these things, but often went beyond to talk about what they learned and how they could apply it to the real world. Involvement in reflective activities moved students to link the personal and the academic.

*Reflection predicts academic outcomes.* Reflection has long been considered central to effective service-learning, but there has been sketchy evidence to support this practitioner wisdom. In high school studies, Conrad and Hedin (1980) found that having a formal seminar to discuss the service was the most important predictor of student outcomes; Rutter and Newman (1989) found such seminars to be important for positive interactions between students and community members; Waterman (1993) found service-learning that included a reflective seminar to be associated with self-esteem and social responsibility. In Chapter Three we discussed several studies that found a relationship between service-learning and academic outcomes in college, but there have been only a couple of small studies in which reflection is isolated from other aspects of the experience. In a study of internships that included, but was not limited to, community service internships, Eyer (1993) found that extensive reflection was a positive predictor of transfer of curriculum-

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related concepts to a new situation but that regular but modest levels of reflection were not. In the study most relevant to service-learning, Myers-Lipton (1994, 1996) compared volunteers, students in an intensive two-year service-learning program, and students who were nonparticipants; he found that intensive service-learning had a positive impact on measures of international understanding, civic responsibility, and decreased racism, which was not the case for volunteer work or for nonparticipants. In both the Myers-Lipton and Eyler studies intensive reflection was necessary for impact, and in Myers-Lipton's study, this effect was measurable only at the end of a two-year period.

In our survey amount and quality of reflection—writing or discussion, or both—was a modest but significant predictor of almost all of the outcomes we examined. It was associated with at least some of the outcome measures in each outcome category except interpersonal development: leadership and communication skills and working well with others. The quantity and quality of reflection was most consistently associated with academic learning outcomes: deeper understanding and better application of subject matter and increased knowledge of social agencies, increased complexity of problem and solution analysis, and greater use of subject matter knowledge in analyzing a problem. This also included students' reports that they learned more, were more intellectually stimulated, and were motivated to work harder by service-learning than in other classes. Reflection was also a predictor of openness to new ideas, issue identification skill, problem-solving and critical thinking skill, and such perspective transformation outcomes as seeing issues in a new way, increased commitment to use of public policy to achieve social justice, and a more systemic locus of problem causes and solutions. Reflection is a useful tool for most service-learning goals, but it is central to a question for improved academic outcomes.

In the problem-solving interviews we compared levels of reflection intensity; the highly integrated service-learning classes were

characterized by the centrality of the service to the day-to-day work of the class. These classes continuously reflected on the relationship between the service experience and the subject matter of the class; the less integrated classes were less likely to hold reflective discussion, and in several, the experience was never brought into the whole class for discussion but was an extra assignment, with reflection confined to assignments completed individually by the student participants. Just as Myers-Lipton and Eyer found that the level of reflection was important, we found that the centrality of reflection to the academic enterprise had a significant impact on problem solving and critical thinking and on the complexity of students' problem analysis and issue understanding.

There was an interesting pattern linking writing—a reflection variable that combined classroom writing assignments and journal writing—and outcomes that seemed quite divergent. Writing was most consistently linked to such personal outcomes as reductions in stereotyping and increased tolerance and to the academic outcomes of problem solving and critical thinking and perspective transformation. Although they seem at somewhat opposite poles of service-learning outcomes, they may represent one of the many ways in which these elements are in fact linked in student development. The self-exploration that often occurs in journals and in dialogue with faculty through journals is particularly useful for helping students come to understand themselves and others better. These early reflections on service in journals may stimulate the kinds of questions and insights that lead students to improved problem solving and new ways of looking at the world—in other words, perspective transformation. The kind of disciplined analytic work that is often integral to written classroom assignments may help to cement this growth. Personal development does not necessarily lead to academic development, but it is also not in conflict with it; service-learning is a vehicle for integrating the personal and the intellectual.

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*Written Reflection*

Among the eleven hundred service-learning students we surveyed, about 60 percent kept a journal, with about 25 percent of the eleven hundred writing in it "very often"; nearly 70 percent completed a written assignment, with 30 percent reporting that this type of assignment was completed "very often." Students we interviewed sometimes had a love-hate relationship with the use of written assignments for reflection during service-learning. Students who are by temperament active learners may be less than enthralled by writing, but some noted that in spite of the work of sitting down to write, this was a productive process for several reasons. It helped them think more clearly, as this student noted: "I don't like to keep a journal, . . . but the assignment that really helped me get things clear in my mind was the journal keeping . . . taking the issues and turning them around and making them personal to the experiences we were having in our service project. It was taking the academic and making it personal." It provided the occasion for taking the time to process the experience: "The most important thing has been the journals. . . . I really hated having to force myself to write in a journal when I didn't feel like it, but there were times at the homeless shelter when I really needed that space. That was my world that I could retreat into, and it was times like that where the most internalization of the issues took place."

Writing, particularly journal writing, creates a permanent record of the service-learning process that many students find helpful, as this student put it: "Journals are the most helpful, because sometimes you can't remember everything. So when it's written down, it's there in black and white, and it's never going anywhere." A written record is useful as the students think about how they or their community project has changed over the course of the semester. This student noted about her journal, "You write it the day you do your service, and you can go back and look and you can see progress."

You can look back and say, 'How did this person progress? What did I do to help?'" These observations then serve as raw data for later reflection activities. As another student explained, "I think it's good for me to write things down. Writing the journal was great because it was a form of expression and memory. . . . I'll forget what I was experiencing, and when I was writing the paper, it was interesting to go back and recall the trouble I had in the very beginning and then my impression later and how it had changed."

The discipline imposed by having to put thoughts into written words was also viewed as a way to clarify thought by many of the students in the reflection interviews. One noted, "After I write down my thoughts and everything, I can look back and find answers to questions that I thought were impossible to find. . . . I've found answers to some questions through just writing what happened." Another said, "When you put something down on paper, it helps you straighten out your thoughts—or it helps me anyway. If I am confused about something or bungled up in my mind, if I can get it written down on paper and see exactly what experience I have had . . . , it straightens out my thinking."

#### *Discussion Reflection*

Nearly 70 percent of the service-learning students in our survey reported some formal discussion of their service, but relatively few reported frequent discussion; 18 percent reported meeting to share feelings "very often." There were also relatively few who reported discussions that went beyond sharing feelings and observations; only about 15 percent reported frequent discussions for analysis or for application of service to course subject matter. Discussion was a popular choice for "most useful" form of reflection because it is so flexible; it can occur formally in class or informally with friends, colleagues, or community partners, and it is easy to do compared to the discipline of taking up pen and paper. The social aspects of the process are also valued as a way of gathering new insights. One student thought that the "journals are pretty effective, but the problem

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with journals is that it's so self-contained, and you can't share your reflections with other people. Sometimes it takes like one word—where you're like, 'Wow!'—from someone else's mouth that really helps you reflect more. I think it's really sharing . . . ideas within the group, verbalizing them, when everyone learns. Everybody gains."

Discussion is easy, but there is a danger that it will get stuck at the level of sharing feelings and experiences and not move beyond. In our survey study, 97 percent of the instructors of the service-learning classes claimed to provide at least some time for sharing feelings and experiences from the service component of the class; only about 70 percent reported discussions of related issues, and 70 percent reported application of service experience to what was going on in the class. Although about 15 percent of the classes engaged in substantial issue or application discussion, devoting at least 10 percent or more of class time to integrative discussion, 30 percent engaged in none at all. Attention needs to be given to linking experience and academic subject matter during the reflective process, and sharing feelings is only the first step in this process. This is another area where use of the Kolb cycle or similar models helps push discussion beyond what happened and what the participants' feelings are about it to deeper understanding and application.

### Diversity

Diversity was measured by asking students if they had an opportunity to work with people from diverse ethnic groups during the course of their service-learning. Nearly two-thirds reported having this opportunity at least fairly often. There are, of course, other dimensions of diversity, and many of the students we interviewed talked about religious diversity, working with people from different income levels, and gender issues. Practitioners who are advocates of diversity or multicultural education do not necessarily agree on goals. For some, diversity should lead to greater tolerance and understanding within the present status quo—a sort of human relations perspective; for others, the goal is social transformation, which

allows the contributions of different cultural perspectives to change the status quo of the university as well as the society (Rhoads, 1998).

*Diversity predicts both tolerance and transformation.* The results of our survey showed a connection between diversity during service-learning and both types of goals: the mainstream or assimilationist view and the transformational view. Diversity was a predictor of most measures of stereotype reduction and tolerance and personal development, such as belief that community partners were "like me," greater cultural appreciation, better self-knowledge, spiritual growth, finding reward in service, and valuing a future career that includes service. At the level of problem solving and critical thinking and perspective transformation, diversity was a significant predictor of most of the outcomes measured in these categories, including openness to new ideas, issue identification skill, the ability to see social issues in a new way, and commitment to social justice. Thus whether a program's goal is to create better relations among people from different backgrounds or to begin the process of questioning current social arrangements and transforming society, it is important to create opportunities for diversity.

The role of diversity was less clear in students' reports of learning and application of subject matter. Diversity had a mixed relationship to academic learning; students in highly diverse situations were less likely to find the experience intellectually stimulating or that it increased their ability to apply what they were learning. On the other hand, diversity did contribute to their sense that they learned more than in regular classes and that they better understood the complexity of social problems.

### Community Voice

We measured community voice by asking students if the work they did "met needs identified by members of the community." About 30 percent felt this was the case very often, and 66 percent felt that it was the case fairly or very often. Because higher education practi-

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tioners tend to focus on student development as their primary goal, there has been criticism and concern that both community needs and community participation in decision making get short shrift in service-learning (Sigmon, 1996). Using the community as a laboratory rather than working with the community on jointly useful projects may stunt the development of partnerships that offer continuous benefits to both parties. It may also ironically make it more difficult to create situations for learners that facilitate learning, critical thinking, and perspective transformation. For a number of the students we interviewed, valuing community voice represented a goal of service—something that stretched them and helped them to grow as individuals and as citizens. One student observed, "I've learned that my goals are not what I should be working for there. If I am going to be of service to them, then I need to hear what their goals are, not my own." Appreciating the importance of this perspective and involvement in projects where this perspective was honored had a positive impact on some of the outcomes we measured.

*Community voice predicts personal development.* In our survey, community voice was most consistently a significant predictor of personal growth outcomes. It predicted tolerance, cultural appreciation, reward in service, valuing a career of service, and realizing that community partners "are like me." Community voice was also connected to a few other outcomes, all of which seemed to involve being closer to and having a better understanding of the community; for example, it was a predictor of feeling connected to community, of believing that people should do volunteer service, and of a more systematic locus of social problems.

Like diversity community voice was also a negative predictor of intellectual stimulation during service-learning; students who reported that their service met needs identified by community members were less likely to report that their class was intellectually stimulating. There may be a tension between doing what a community group plans and wants done and meeting student interest and learning needs. In genuine partnerships, students and community

members may work and plan together; when students simply complete tasks identified by community groups, they may feel less engaged than when doing tasks they have chosen themselves or chosen to fulfill a particular academic goal. It is easy to see that students who are being useful to the community by completing a community wish list by picking up trash, painting a shelter, or stuffing envelopes for a mailing might find the work not well connected to their academic interests. Awareness of this possible outcome should alert practitioners to build joint planning into community projects.

### Other Factors

In our analysis we controlled for gender, age, minority status, family income, and other service, so that differences between comparison groups on these factors would not account for outcome differences. Women outnumbered men about two to one in all three of our samples, which is fairly typical of service-learning programs. We did find for many outcomes that being female was a significant predictor of positive changes over the course of the semester of service over and above the impact of program characteristics. The other factor associated with some positive outcomes was involvement in other community service outside the service-learning experience. Some of the benefits of service-learning are intensified by the addition of volunteer service, and of course those who choose more service are more likely to report that it has value. The minority variable combines all non-Caucasians for purpose of analysis; minority students made up about 16 percent of the survey sample. There were few effects of minority status, family income, or age on the outcomes measured. Separate analysis contrasting African American students with all other students also showed no independent effect of race.

### Program Characteristics and Closeness to Faculty

Having a close relationship with at least one faculty member is associated in the higher education literature with most of the positive

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outcomes of the college experience, from staying to graduate to academic achievement. Many of the key program characteristics we identified had an impact on whether students did become close to faculty members as a result of their service. We found that within service-learning, good placement quality as well as placements that were made by the faculty member rather than by the student or service office, application of service to the academic subject matter, and both written and oral reflection were significant predictors that students would become closer to faculty. Well-designed service-learning provides opportunities for students to get to know faculty informally, sometimes as they work alongside each other in the service site. It also creates reflective classes with high faculty-student interaction, with students getting to know the instructor better than in most traditional lecture-oriented classes. Regression tables that use closeness to faculty as a predictor of outcomes are in Resource D; Table E.4 in Resource E shows the relationship of program characteristics to the outcome of faculty closeness during service-learning.

### Requiring Service-Learning?

As service requirements for high school or college graduation have become more popular, there has been a backlash of activism and even lawsuits by people who feel that it is not legitimate to require service and that, indeed, "requiring volunteer work" is a contradiction in terms. Even within our group of eleven hundred service-learning students there was not agreement; 61 percent believed that it was appropriate to require community service, but 17 percent were opposed to the idea. Whether service or service-learning should be a required part of the college experience will depend on the institutional mission and on how decision makers see the role of community service in education.

There are two rationales for requiring service. One argument is that service is part of civic duty and contributes to the development

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of citizenship; the other is that it is a useful component of academic development, leading to skills and knowledge beyond what is commonly acquired in the classroom. Since preparation for citizenship is part of the mission of public schools, it seems consistent with that mission to require practice in service, especially if students have considerable control over where their efforts are applied. Not everyone agrees with this. Although the legitimacy of requiring community service as citizenship in public high schools, colleges, and universities is debatable, private institutions may include service as part of their mission and select students for admission who endorse that commitment.

A stronger rationale for requiring community service is found in the academic value of service-learning explored in this book. Simply requiring service hours has a tenuous link to student outcomes, but community service that is well integrated with an academic course of study contributes to personal and interpersonal development, learning and application of knowledge, critical thinking ability, and perspective transformation, all of which are relevant to citizenship participation as well as scholarship. Service-learning is often better academic learning and thus a legitimate requirement of an academic program.

In our survey, we found that the students who participated in service-learning differed significantly from those who did not participate on almost every outcome we measured (Eyler, Giles, and Braxton, 1997). Thus students who are most in need of the developmental opportunities afforded by service-learning may be less likely to choose such course options voluntarily. This is compounded by the fact that we also found that high school and family experiences with social and community service activities also predicted which students would become active in community service during the college years (Eyler-Walker, 1997). Thus the students most active in high school tend to maintain that activity in college and are also more likely to choose service-learning.

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### **Summary: Some Principles of Effective Service-Learning**

Although all the program characteristics we have examined here are important, it is clear that the quality of application and reflection is central to achieving academic goals of higher education. When we listened to what students had to say about the reflection that worked for them and examined the relationship between integrated service-learning and the problem solving demonstrated by students, a series of reflection principles emerged for us. Effective service-learning reflection can be summed up in the Five C's: connection, continuity, context, challenge, and coaching.

#### **Connection**

Connection is a central concept of effective service-learning. At its heart, service-learning rests on the assumption that learning cannot be compartmentalized between the classroom and the use of what is learned later, in the community, or between affective and cognitive learning. Service-learning connects people—students and their diverse peers, students and community partners, and students and faculty. It also connects college and community, experience and analysis, feeling and thinking, now and future. Effective programs maximize these connections. Requiring participation may help build these connections for those who would not select them otherwise.

#### **Continuity**

The principle of continuity was central to Dewey's thinking; learning is never finished but is a lifelong process of understanding. Reflection must be continuous: throughout a service-learning course, across the four college years, throughout life. For college administrators, that means thinking of service-learning and community service components of the academic and social programs over the entire course of the college experience. For the instructor,

care should be given to reflection before, during, and after service experience. It is through multiple opportunities for service and reflection that students have the opportunity to test and retest their ways of understanding and thus to grow and develop.

### Context

Reflection is not just about thinking, but about thinking about something. People do not become good problem solvers or experts in the abstract; they become expert about particular subject matter and learn to solve particular kinds of problems. The messiness of the community setting is not just noise; it is integral to learning. Knowledge and skills are contextual; we learn in ways that prepare us for using knowledge by using it on real problems in the real world. This is why application is such an integral element of the reflective process and central to academic learning outcomes. Service-learning allows students to think and learn with the tools, concepts, and facts of the particular learning situation.

Context is also a consideration in selecting the style and place for conducting reflection. Conducting reflection sessions in the community with community partners can be a powerful tool where the reflective process is designed to be meaningful for all participants. Matching the formality of the reflection to the situation is also important. Students in service-learning classes will probably find structured reflection and written assignments helpful and legitimate; volunteer situations may require a lighter touch to keep students involved in reflection.

### Challenge

The central event in learning from a constructivist perspective is the challenge of new experiences and information to the way things are believed to be. Growth rests on puzzlement, on challenge to current perspectives, and on the challenge to resolve the conflict. Students develop more complex and adequate ways of viewing the

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world when they are challenged but not overwhelmed by new experiences. The challenge has to match the needs of the student.

### Coaching

Challenge is central to growth, but without adequate support it is likely either to discourage the student or lead to the rejection of new insights and information so that the student falls back on previous ways of viewing the world. Students need considerable emotional support when they work in settings that are new to them; there needs to be safe space where they know that their feelings and insights will be respected and appreciated. As their service develops and their questions become more sophisticated, they need intellectual support to think in new ways, develop alternative explanations for experiences and observations, and question their original interpretations of issues and events.

One of the most difficult challenges for faculty is to provide the interaction and feedback necessary to offer both challenge and support to students. It entails not only the usual grasp of the academic content of the course, but also detailed awareness of the students' service experience and ample opportunity for interaction. This can be difficult without adequate institutional support for faculty engaged in service-learning.