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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING IN AGING

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This article focuses on the potential benefits of service-learning in aging to students, the university, and the community. We first discuss the concept of service-learning, clarify its parameters, and describe the types of projects that best exemplify its unique blend of service and learning. Opportunities for service-learning are examined using examples from the current Intergenerational Service-Learning Project of the National Council on Aging. The complexity of initiating and gaining acceptance of service-learning in aging projects is explored, with particular attention given to supervisory and curriculum issues. Finally, the national implications of service-learning in aging are discussed, as well as the possibilities for including service-learning approaches in some of the new federal initiatives in aging.

INTRODUCTION

Learning outside the classroom has long been the stepchild of higher education. Although major attention has been paid to curriculum development, equal attention has not been given to the potential of linking experiential learning to academic objectives. In this paper we first examine the concept of service-learning and compare it to more traditional approaches of extending services to the community. Then we describe the types of projects that characterize service-learning and some basic issues involved in implementing service learning projects in the field of gerontology. Finally, we examine the progress of the Intergenerational Service-Learning Project, now implemented through the National Council on the Aging (NCOA) at seven colleges and universities across the country.

ASPECTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Service and Expertise

The concept of the university as an institution serving the community was advocated by Francis Whalen of Brown University as early as

1850. Over the past 100 years, there has been a general acceptance of the premise that colleges and universities have some responsibility "to extend the resources of the campus to individuals and groups who are not part of the regular academic community, and to bring the institution's special competence to bear on society's problems" (Carnegie Foundation, 1968, p. 10).

Since the early 1900s, the dominant model for the extension of university resources to meet community needs has been the scholarly or expertise model. Within this framework, organizations or individuals contract with educational institutions or faculty to obtain needed expertise or technical assistance. In the early 1960s, the service-learning model began to emerge on college campuses as an alternative approach to the university's contribution to the solution of societal problems.

There are significant differences between the expertise and service-learning models. In the former, faculty members are the primary service providers; in service-learning "supervised learners are the instruments for information, action research and actual change between the college or university and the needy organization or agency" (Berte & O'Neil, 1977, p. 19). In the expertise model any learning is incidental to the work of the consultant. In the service-learning model the learning element is an intrinsic component of the model and not a chance side benefit.

The expertise and service-learning models are also distinguished by the resources that they make available to the community. The expertise model utilizes faculty members with highly technical knowledge and skills that may not be available elsewhere in the community. The service-learning model relies on students, a less skilled but potentially larger employment pool, with capabilities usually available elsewhere but often in short supply. Faculty members are capable of providing highly sophisticated consultation, technical assistance, and training to organizations and individuals. Undergraduate and beginning graduate students may be appropriate for providing less technical but more labor-intensive services. Advanced graduate students may be able to provide services that faculty decline to undertake as a result of lack of time or compensation.

The sociological distinction between the "clinical" and "engineering" approaches provides another insight into the differences between the service-learning and expertise models. The expertise model parallels the clinical approach, stressing the diagnosis of a problem. The service-learning model is much closer to the engineering approach, stressing change. The ideal service-learning model combines elements of both by leading students through a process of studying a problem, planning a solution, and working on its implementation.

Given these distinctions, it becomes apparent that the expertise and service-learning models are appropriate for solving or alleviating different kinds of societal problems. The expertise of faculty members is needed to help solve most of the long-range and highly technical problems facing society, especially scientific and social problems for which feasible solutions have yet to be developed. On the other hand there are many societal problems for which solutions are already partially known, but for which the labor to apply the expertise or to deliver a needed service is in short supply. Societal problems that can be solved through the application of current knowledge to local situations or through the introduction of supplementary labor to provide needed services are the opportunity areas for the service-learning model.

BOUNDARIES OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Although seemingly simple, the boundaries of service-learning are difficult to delineate. Service-learning would appear to be distinguished by an emphasis on preplanned faculty-assisted nonclassroom experiences on the part of students. Unfortunately, this assertion raises a number of questions: Can volunteer work be considered service-learning? To what extent must the faculty be involved in the service-learning? Over what length of time must a project be conducted for it to qualify as service-learning?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Our assumption is that student learning is increased by faculty involvement in the structuring of a service project. Thus volunteer work that a student performs independently may not provide as strong a learning experience as a course-related project that spells out learning objectives. There may also be a minimum number of hours per week required for implementation of an effective service-learning project, but the clear delineation of the learning goals of the student-delivered services and effective supervision are probably the more important factors in determining the quality of the field work.

SERVICE-LEARNING REALITIES

Although a variety of projects may qualify as service-learning, each service-learning program must decide what levels of service and learning it is attempting to reach. Although university faculty may regard the optimal service-learning project as one that maximizes both services and learning, the reality of university structures, faculty time commitments, as well as student time commitments and goals, often means adoption of more limited and realistic goals. Each model

of service-learning entails varied ratios of benefits and costs, and each is appropriate for meeting different sets of learning and service objectives.

In practically all models of service-learning, integration of the services with learning components is a necessary but not easily realized objective. When external funding is available, integration is often easier because funding permits the purchase of faculty time for supervision or curriculum development related to service-oriented projects. Unless some integration intrinsic to the university's educational model is developed (e.g., credit mechanisms), the loss of external funding may also spell the demise of service-learning programs. The legitimacy and institutionalization of service-learning models through the development of credit mechanisms is being widely discussed at a number of universities, but other avenues need still to be fully explored.

In sum, service-learning covers a wide range of activities. Eberly (1977) has suggested classifying service-learning projects in terms of the dominant modes of student involvement:[1]

1. Academic mode: A field placement, class project, clinical program, practicum, or independent study;
2. Employment mode: A work study project, paid internship, cooperative education, or nonprofit student enterprise; and
3. Altruistic mode: A volunteer project.

Volunteer activities are usually only minimally structured learning experiences. Although volunteer activities do not maximize service-learning, they may help to develop an interest among students in further projects related to a particular problem or target population.

Interest in more extensive efforts can be developed through projects undertaken by fraternities and sororities on a one-time basis. Many of the services rendered by these fraternities and sororities may be highly tangible, such as escorting individuals to the doctor or holding a party at a local hospital. Activities that address mental health needs may be more difficult to classify. Among the less tangible services might be visiting an older person, an activity that does not address shelter or food but does address the loneliness pervading the life of many seniors. Assessing the value of a particular service-learning activity thus requires a careful examination of the

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[1] Eberly discusses a fourth mode of student involvement, a national service mode, currently manifested by nonacademic programs such as VISTA and the Peace Corps.

underlying premise of the activity and its ability to deal with important concerns of a particular individual or group.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN AGING

The Aged and Services

Any assessment of the current needs of older adults in the United States points to the validity of both expertise and service-learning approaches in service delivery to the aged. The expertise model can have its greatest impact on long-term issues. The service-learning model's greatest potential is its ability to address the more immediate needs of older individuals and to supplement the local organizations that serve the older population.

The majority of older persons have extensive direct and indirect service needs. Many seniors need to be informed of available services or provided with a means of transportation to reach services. In other instances the lack of simple in-home and supportive services forces individuals who could remain in the community to move into nursing homes or other long-term institutional facilities.

The failure to obtain a variety of services is often related to the older adult's eligibility for benefits. Eligibility problems have thus become a concern of legal clinics serving older adults and a subject of continued legislative scrutiny. The advocacy required to redress inequitable eligibility requirements does not involve the older individual in direct decision making or in substantial direct contact with service providers. Senior citizen organizations, nutrition councils, and personal advocacy groups are in need of additional staff to serve as advocates and organizers for the elderly. Other agencies serving the elderly, particularly those in new communities or rural areas, are also in need of technical assistance or supplementary staff to improve or expand their current service mix.

These direct and indirect programs provide potential opportunity areas for use of the service-learning model. A properly planned and executed service-learning program can meet the need of all age cohorts to gain an understanding of the personal and social implications of aging. Service-learning also provides graduate students from professional disciplines an opportunity to gain experience in working with older clients.

Service-Learning In Aging Projects

Considering the above conceptualization of service-leaning, we can differentiate among a number of service-learning projects. A project

to rewire an older person's house can alert students to the aged's needs. This type of project fails to include a learning component related to aging unless preproject and postproject sessions are developed to relate the experience to the living conditions of older adults. Discussions about aging are important, because students undertaking electrical work in the house may have little contact with the older resident and no involvement with a faculty member.

A project in which students observed older persons in a nursing home would not qualify as service-learning because of the lack of services in the activity. A volunteer project using students as file clerks in a senior center would not be regarded as service-learning because of questions about the nature of the service and the total absence of a preplanned learning component. Criticisms of these activities are not meant to imply that they are not valuable but rather that they are not service-learning projects as defined in this paper.

There are numerous opportunities for service-learning activities with differing degrees of service and learning potential. These range from friendly visiting in nursing homes to follow-up projects for chronically ill older adults. Careful structuring of these projects increases their potential for meaningful service-learning. Friendly visiting, for example, can be developed into a life review project. A legal counseling or health education project can include both information and referral components, providing students and older persons with a thorough understanding of current aging programs.

When the service-learning project is not connected to a course, it is important to provide orientation and consultation opportunities to ensure that students are competently prepared to undertake their assigned work. Orientation materials should include substantive material on physical and social processes of aging, as well as specific material on working with the aged in direct or indirect services. Information on working with the aged in direct or indirect services. Regularly scheduled consultation on an individual or a group basis can also help the students overcome problems encountered in service-learning experiences.

Structuring Service-Learning

Service-learning is not the only and certainly not the easiest way to maximize a student's academic experiences. At the outset it involves students and faculty in the inherent tension that exists between the community's service needs and the university's academic needs. The needs of older people for time-consuming services can easily come into conflict with students' needs to devote time to traditional work

requirements. The disappearance of students from many campuses during summer and holiday periods can also conflict with the need of many organizations and individuals for continuity of service.

It is also possible that students may become emotionally involved with older adults with whom they are working. The emotional relationship may be reciprocal and seniors may become dependent on a student whose time commitment to the service-learning project is limited. When the student's course or service-learning project is completed the older person may be distraught to find the services no longer available and alternative resources difficult to locate. Agencies may also find themselves planning services involving students and then facing the problem of losing workers as the end of the quarter or semester approaches.

Careful structuring of the service-learning experience is required to avoid the development of a dependency relationship between students and older adults and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes on the part of students. A well-planned orientation session, along with supervision, is a vital component of service-learning. To neglect orientation or supervision may mean that students involved in service-learning in a chronic care hospital will come to believe that most older adults are incapacitated. It is unlikely that service-learning activities will range over a wide variety of settings; thus student perceptions are likely to be strongly influenced by the older persons with whom they come in contact at one particular type of site.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

The Intergenerational Service-Learning Project (ISLP) of the National Council on the Aging, Inc. (NCOA) is now in the second year of a demonstration program with seven institutions of higher education. The schools represent a planned mix of public and private institutions, located in rural and urban communities and serving white and nonwhite students.[2] At each of the sites a coordinator has been hired to develop a service-learning in aging center, through which student projects can be developed and implemented. No limitations are placed on the disciplines from which students may be

[2] Institutions participating in the Intergenerational Service-Learning Project include Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts; the Consortium on Urban Education, Indianapolis, Indiana; University of Denver, Denver, Colorado; George Washington University, Washington, D.C.; Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia; Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon; and University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

recruited, and a variety of service-learning models are being initiated. The only stipulations placed on the coordinators are that the projects emphasize services to poverty-level older adults and that some of the projects be related to health issues. Given the inadequate services now available to older persons and the considerable number of older persons living below poverty levels, neither of these mandates is difficult to meet.

During the first year of the project, more than 950 students from at least 20 disciplines provided services to older people. Projects implemented during the year ranged from house painting by fraternities to field work as part of aging courses to clinical services in law, medicine, and allied health fields. Rather than describing each of the projects, this article highlights issues of service-learning that were clarified in the movement from the theoretical aspects to the practical problems of implementing a program. The problems can be grouped into a number of categories pertaining to the issues of acceptance, supervision, and curriculum development.

Acceptance Of Service-Learning

A major hypothesis of the NCOA effort is that both university and community needs can be met through service-learning projects. Scheier's (1975) Needs Overlap Analysis (NOA) states that service-learning projects can be conceptualized as the overlap of the needs of various participants. Our experience with service-learning in aging indicates that it must respond to the needs of at least six different groups: students, faculty, campus administrators, community agencies, individual service recipients, and funding sources (see Figure 1).

The cooperation and participation of each of these groups is vital if a service-learning in aging project is to succeed and continue over time. Perhaps the most difficult task of the local program coordinators has been to structure service-learning experiences that provide rewards for all these diverse groups.

In some communities agency personnel have been wary of student-delivered services, a reflection of negative past experiences. Many agencies have been reluctant to utilize students who can only work a few hours a week. Confusion about student, faculty, and agency roles has often created problems in field work efforts. The ISLP has instituted service-learning contracts to deal with the issue of differing expectations. Among the majority of agencies, the difficulties posed by past experiences are outweighed by the positive gains from increased student assistance.

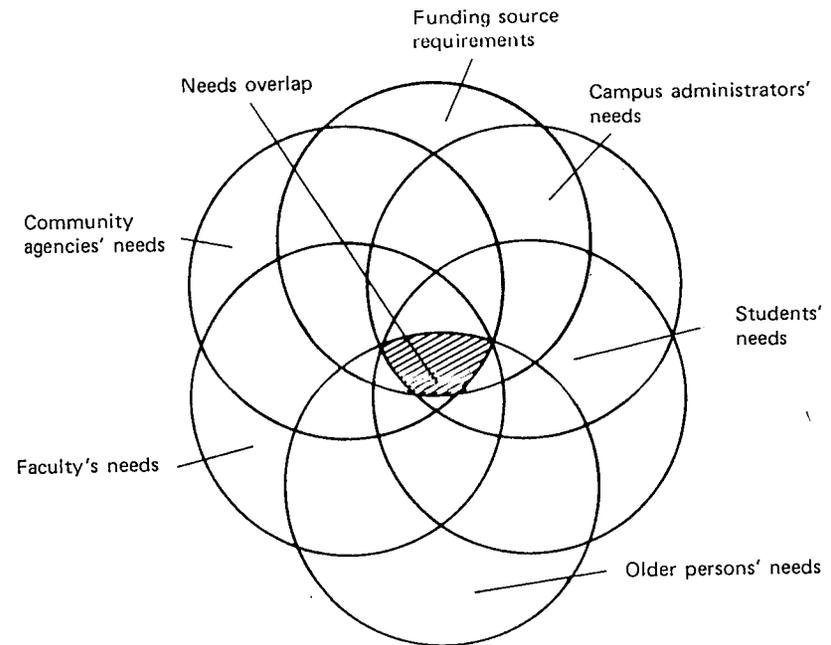Acceptance and participation by faculty in service-learning pro-

FIGURE 1   Needs overlap: Opportunity area for service-learning.

jects is more problematic. Many faculty members are either uninterested in service delivery issues or unclear about how the service-learning model fits into their academic objectives. Other faculty perceive no professional rewards in undertaking service-learning projects. In general there has been acceptance of a limited model of involvement on the part of faculty. This usually involves the supervision of a few students through directed studies. A more active approach, requiring students to do fieldwork as part of a course, has been more difficult to promote among faculty.

For students, academic credit is probably the primary attraction of service-learning programs. It cannot be assumed that students are idealistic and ready to give their time to assisting older adults. Students must be recruited for projects that mesh with their time schedules and attitudes. Although house painting is deficient in providing learning experiences about older people, it does offer an appropriate activity for sororities and fraternities interested in a one-time community project. Students stimulated by the housepainting project have been recruited for more extensive and sophisticated projects with older adults.

The role of administrators extends beyond providing general support for a service-learning program. Work-study and cooperative

education officers can provide financial assistance to students and projects. Success in securing the cooperation of these administrators appears to be a function of their receptivity to off-campus student experiences and the willingness of service-learning coordinators to build the necessary relationships with administrators.

Supervisory Issues

Although students may be ready to undertake service-learning projects that community agencies view as filling important needs of older persons, the requirements of various disciplines for supervision may conflict. Therefore the disciplines with the strongest orientation toward service-learning, such as social work, medicine, and nursing, may also be the most difficult to work with because of their supervisory requirements. They usually stress that an individual supervisor have an advanced degree in the field and some practical experience—a difficult requirement in rural areas. One underutilized resource is retired faculty or emeritus faculty members living in the community. As retired faculty and practitioners are involved more extensively, the problems of supervision may be more effectively met.

Curriculum Issues

In some disciplines supervision may be matched by fairly rigid curriculum models that do not allow students many elective choices or even time to engage in volunteer work. In other universities and disciplines it may be possible to develop curricula that incorporate service-learning in existing courses. Alternatively, an independent course may be developed that brings together students engaged in various service-learning projects. The barrier to these courses is often the difficulty in determining the aegis under which they should be developed. To avoid the "turf" issues and the prerequisites that hamper cross-registration, course sponsorship should be secured under a nonacademic component of the university. Course-related service-learning projects guarantee a strong emphasis on the learning components of the students' fieldwork. The ISLP has thus concentrated its efforts on maximizing curriculum models that include field projects rather than large-scale volunteer programs.

IMPLICATIONS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Benefits Of Service-Learning In Aging

Service-learning offers multiple benefits for community agencies, students, the elderly, and the university. It brings additional re-

sources into agencies working with older persons. The addition of students to the work force may allow an expansion or enrichment of current agency programs or the inception of new programs. The availability of students to undertake a variety of services may also allow professional staff to concentrate their efforts on tasks requiring specialized training.

Service-learning offers students the opportunity to gain skills and experiences in working with older adults and to engage in intrinsically rewarding service activities. Many students will also be able to develop interpersonal relationships with older individuals, an effective means of overcoming widely held negative stereotypes about the elderly. For many students the possibility of obtaining academic credit for their service activities will further increase the attractiveness of the service-learning approach.

Older persons benefit in two major ways from the development of service-learning in aging programs. First, they are the beneficiaries of the increase in available services. Second, a service-learning program can be organized so that older people share their skills, ideas, and knowledge while interacting with students.

For college and universities, service-learning in aging offers the opportunity to strengthen both educational and community service programs. Through the provision of needed community services on behalf of older people, institutions of higher education can confirm their position as broadly based community resources deserving financial support from both legislatures and philanthropies. The close cooperation between academic institutions and community agencies required in service-learning can alleviate some of the town and gown problems persisting in many areas. Most significantly from the educational perspective, service-learning in aging strengthens current gerontology programs by providing a variety of interdisciplinary projects. These projects can attract new sources of funds for activities in gerontology.

Undertaking Service-Learning

Despite its substantial benefits, service-learning in aging is a complex undertaking, requiring clear understanding by all parties of the commitments entailed. To succeed, service-learning projects must reinforce both the educational goals of the university and the community's attitudes toward service provision. Many projects require substantial time commitments from both faculty and students. Projects that ignore other time commitments, such as vacations, are usually doomed to fail. Most service-learning projects also require administrative support. Difficult to fund externally on a long-term

basis, support services usually require some commitment from the university administration.

CONCLUSION

As we begin to better understand the potential benefits of service-learning and to conceptualize it more clearly, the opportunities for incorporating service-learning programs in federal programs become more evident. Both existing work-study programs and the initiatives in long-term care being proposed by the Administration on Aging (AoA), offers opportunities for the inclusion of service-learning.

Service-Learning and Work-Study Programs

The College Work-Study Program can be the driving force for developing a service-learning program. Work-study fund authorizations will increase from $550 million per year to $830 million over the next 5 years. The many schools reluctant to allow work-study funds to be used for off-campus activities may be hard pressed to create enough attractive on-campus positions to spend their allocated funds. NCOA successfully advocated a change in the legislation that allows universities that choose to sponsor off-campus community service programs to pay for a service-learning coordinator by receiving a higher administrative cost rate from work-study funds.

Service-Learning and Long-Term Care Centers

Under the 1978 amendments to the Older American Act, the Administration on Aging is supporting the development of long-term care centers. The centers are expected to provide interdisciplinary research and training, technical assistance, public information, and new service delivery modes. Recent AoA statements indicate that the centers will be modeled after the agricultural extension and cancer research centers currently operating in universities across the country, the expertise models. Given the clear potential of the service-learning model to meet both training and service needs, we believe it would be a serious mistake for AoA and the participating unversities to fail to incorporate service-learning models in the operation of long term care centers.

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