

# Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 24, 1997

## SERVICE LEARNING: LINKING ACADEMIC STUDY TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT

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Education has been under scrutiny from government, business, and citizen groups regarding the role of educational institution in teaching values. "In a 1985 report for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Frank Newman concluded: "If there is a crisis in education in the United States today, it is *less* that test scores have declined that it is that we have failed to provide the education for citizenship that is still the most important responsibility of the nation's schools and colleges." (Cohen. 1994:98) Teachers *are* acting prudently in developing pedagogies to provide student technical proficiency in their chosen fields as well as in their civic responsibilities to the communities in which they live and work. One means of doing this is through service learning. Here, what student; learn within the confines of the classroom is directly linked to what they experience outside the classroom. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines service-learning as having four components:

1. Students actively participate in organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community
2. These experiences are integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity;
3. Student; have opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities;
4. These experiences help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others. (Adapted from Cohen, 1994:100).

Service learning must be distinguished from volunteerism, internships, and active research. One factor that distinguishes service learning from other community service projects is reciprocity. Individual citizenship requires service. However, in regard to service, "Many draw a misleading and dangerous (to democracy) picture of service as rich helping the poor (charity) or the poor paying a debt to their country (service in exchange for college scholarship) as if "community' means only the disadvantaged and needy and does not include those performing the service' (Barber 87). Instead, service as used in this case is the fulfillment of & community need that benefits not only the community as a whole but also the individual. Therefore, service in the case of organizational citizenship is an individual member's actions which benefit the other members of the institution, the organization as a whole, and also the member themselves. For Barber explains, "Service to the neighborhood and to the nation are not the gifts of altruists but a duty of free men and women whose freedom is itself wholly dependent on the assumption of political responsibilities" (Barber 86). This "avoids the traditionally paternalistic, one-way approach to service in which one person or

group has resources which they share 'charitable' or voluntarily' with a person or group that lacks resources...It is this reciprocity that creates a sense of mutual responsibility and respect between individuals in the service-learning exchange, what Howard Berry calls 'parity of esteem'. This service-learning exchange is also an important step toward a commitment of responsibility of the individual participant to the larger community." (Kendall et. al)

Many educators have enacted the practice of required internship, and cooperative education. Unfortunately, simply requiring students to perform an internship is not enough for internship and practicums generally lack a rigorous reflective process *necessary* for comprehensive learning. Ross (1989) provides the following outline of the essential elements of the reflective process:

1. Recognizing an educational dilemma
2. responding to a dilemma by recognizing both the similarities to other situations and the unique qualities of the particular situation;
3. framing and reframing the dilemma;
4. experimenting with the dilemma to discover the consequences and implications of various solutions; and
5. examining the intended *and* unintended consequences of an implemented solution and evaluation the solution by determining whether the consequences are desirable or not.

If student; are to engage in liberal learning, we must champion service-learning and the role of reflection it encompasses as a true link between classroom instruction, the active practice of such learning, and the evaluation of the consequences and anions based on their learning. The need for serious reflection is tied to the basic tenets on human learning. The works of such theorists as Piaget, Perry, Coleman, Dewey and Kilb suggest that humans learn via a combination of action and through practice and reflection, application and theory. The use of active reflection is the key to service learning and a means for assured academic legitimacy. It is through reflection that student; engage "in conscious, intentional and critical thinking for the examination of their services experiences. Reflection provides opportunities to : develop critical thinking skills; gain a better understanding of self, service site, societal problems, and course content strengthen civic literacy and capacity; and examine personal, academic, and occupationally related issues" (Henry s1995).

Many colleges and universities have recognized that service learning is an effective tool in civic education. Barber explains. "Where students use experience in the community as a basis for critical reflection in the classroom, and turn classroom reflection

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into a tool to examine the nature of democratic communities and the role of the citizen in them, there is an opportunity to teach liberty, to uncover the interdependence of self and other, to expose the intimate linkage between rights and responsibilities' (Barber 89).

Citizenship can effectively be taught in Management courses through the use of Service-learning. Management education has drawn heavily from the fields of economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, and mathematics, among others. Yet, often the interdisciplinary roots of managerial practice and theory are wider emphasized in business courses with focus being on technical content. One consequence of this is that students perceive business activities as separate and distant from other components of a manager's life, including family and civic responsibilities. This is especially noticeable when discussing issues of competition and ethics in business versus civic arenas. One means of introducing this interdependence to them is via the incorporation of service learning components into our management courses.

Management students, who have gained this understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence through service learning will be more open and understanding to other people's differences and perceptions. Additionally, this understanding brought about by stewardship addresses "the normative function found in nearly every culture, that those receiving goods or services from another incur an obligation to return something to the other of comparable value" (Cohen 562). Within the organization, its members are interconnected and receive goods and services from each other even if this is not a conscious act. If managers and employees are aware of this interconnectedness it will promote a organizational culture that encourages organizational citizenship, a mutual serving relationship amongst its members as well as between the organization and consumers.

The goal of service learning is "to develop lifelong learners who critically and reflexively think about their decisions and actions...to send out students off on their own journeys, better equipped to deal with the ethical questions that await them" (Rechner and Baucus 662). More specifically, in management education, to develop managers who engage in self-awareness, empathy, and ethical decision making and think and *act* critically towards corporate social responsibility, individual citizenship, and organizational citizenship as servant leaders in order to "provide an environment which people can learn and grow as they work and share together" (Pollard 246).

Managers who practice self-awareness and empathy create an organizational culture with an emphasis on citizenship of its members to each other in such ways that foster an environment in which all too common problems of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, racial discrimination, ethnocentricity, corporate crime, and other unethical actions are not tolerated. Instead, managers with self-awareness and empathy encourage members to recognize differences as advantages within the corporation in which learning can take place. They promote the importance of organizational citizenship - of serving coworkers, the

organization, and yourself simultaneously.

In addition, students need to be aware of the way managerial and business decisions may differentially impact various stakeholders. "Matters of management ethics are woefully inadequate if they lack the wisdom and insights which might be contributed by the liberal arts and sciences. For example, we find it difficult to conceive of how one might discuss affirmative action in more than a superficial way without a substantial understanding of the role of African-Americans (and other minority groups) have played in American history, the psychological and sociological aspects of being a member of a minority group, the economic and societal impacts of the implementations of Affirmative Action programs. Even more basic, of course, would be the input of philosophy, especially value theory and ethics. Truly significant discussions of ethical issues are impossible when the discussants fail to understand the meta-ethical principles and ethical propositions implicitly held by each of the parties involved.

Management educators have the responsibility to teach our students of the interrelationship of business and society and to prepare them for leadership roles in both arenas to secure successful democratic societies and humane workplaces. As a pedagogy, service-learning can help us to build relationships that serve our students, our institutions, our community, and ourselves. Higher Education's interests in diversity, examining values and effective citizenship can be best served through the practice of "learning by doing." One means of facilitating learning is via the inclusion of service-learning projects within our management courses.