Chapter 2

Service-Learning at National-Louis University

The notion of service is embedded in the history, philosophy, mission, conceptual framework, and daily life of National-Louis University. SL is aligned with National-Louis University’s mission “to develop highly competent and humane individuals to serve and lead in an increasingly diverse and global society.” SL is in tune with NLU’s purpose to “educate individuals for service and leadership.”

SL is a powerful pedagogy in which faculty and students engage in activities that address diverse individual and community needs. SL is intentionally designed to promote student learning as well as career, personal, and leadership development through engagement and reflection.

Service-Learning and NLU Values

- **Respect**: SL embodies “high regard for the cultures, backgrounds, experiences and dignity of each person”
- **Access**: SL contributes to “culturally relevant curriculum”
- **Collaboration**: SL “encourages interdependent learning relationships among students, faculty and staff, and between the university and its communities”
- **Passion**: as a living pedagogy, SL “transforms individual lives, organizations, and communities”
- **Inquiry**: SL encourages “love of learning” and contributes to “intellectual inquiry in all its forms”
- **Innovation**: SL enhances the ability to “understand and address educational challenges in a diverse and dynamic global era”; SL takes place in “real-world environments” that are “integrated with theory, creative thinking, and a commitment to social justice”
- **Engagement**: SL is engagement that “reaches out to students, schools, businesses, and communities, working hand in hand to achieve mutual goals”; SL encourages faculty to “work collaboratively with their colleagues to provide services and instruction to each student”

**Service-Learning and NLU Vision for 2011 & Beyond**

SL will contribute to:

- enhancing the role of NLU as “nationally recognized for providing access to educational opportunities and for effective teaching, scholarship, and learning, which blend theory and practice in order to make each individual student successful”
- education that goes “beyond the traditional classroom to forge long-term relationships with adult students in the communities where they live, work, and learn”
- NLU as a model to “enhance teaching and learning, to increase student access, and to provide excellent service to all stakeholders”

**Service-Learning and NLU Strategic Issues**

- **Continuous Improvement (1a)**
  SL will contribute to NLU’s “philosophical commitment to quality and its practices”

- **Linking Academic Work with Career Goals and Lifelong Learning (1c)**
  SL will contribute to NLU’s attempts to fuse “academic preparation and career preparation/success and lifelong learning”

- **Marketing and Branding (2b)**
  SL will contribute to NLU’s “institutional brand” and a “comprehensive long-term marketing plan”

- **Maintaining a Tradition of Innovation (3a)**
  SL will contribute generously to “innovative teaching in the classroom” that continues the “tradition of progressive, constructivist education”

- **Supporting Inquiry and Scholarship (3b)**
  SL will model experience-based scholarship that stimulates “environment where critical inquiry and reflection are encouraged.” SL will exemplify “a unique view of scholarship” that “includes community engagement; participatory practices, and multiple ways of knowing and learning”
A Unified Institutional Vision for Community Engagement (4a)
SL will play essential role in creating NLU’s unified vision of what is meant by “blending scholarship and practice in the communities where students live, work, and learn.” SL will be on the forefront in NLU’s creation of a unified and unifying vision for community engagement

Restructuring the Institution for Community Engagement (4b)
SL will play essential role in NLU’s efforts for community engagement

Location/Geography (4c)
SL will assist in solidifying “NLU’s identity regardless of different geographic areas”

Institutional Reputation that Reflects NLU’s Work in Communities (4d)
SL will be on the forefront of “capitalizing community efforts (e.g. educational initiatives, grants, partnerships) to increase our institutional reputation” and to “increase a national reputation for impact on schools, businesses, and other organizations within communities”

Leveraging Our Community Engagement in International Markets (4e)
SL will assist in creating a coherent plan for “partnering with immigrant communities” and for establishing “effective relationships with international communities and partners”

Building a Service-Oriented Institution (5a)
SL exemplifies “service excellence.” It will assist in “maximizing NLU’s ‘hands-on’ approach to student services”; SL will become a major initiative in the “improved service to all other stakeholder groups, such as alumni, faculty, staff, and other external clients”

Exceptional People (5b)
SL will be a major asset to “professional development resources”

Diversity (5c)
SL will assist in “building a culture of inclusion”

Benefits of Service-Learning

NLU students benefit from SL by having real opportunities in which to work, understand and serve communities. When students begin to see this emphasis across all their course work, they will understand the implications and focus of our mission. Students involved in SL projects benefit from highly engaged and meaningful scholarship.
NLU faculty benefit from SL by creating new channels for engaged research in collaboration with their students. Faculty gain fresh insight into the potential of civic engagement in the higher education learning process.

NLU community benefits from SL by enhancing its community partnerships. NLU will enhance its recognition as inspiring knowledge of SL pedagogy is spread through scholarly presentations and publications. SL assists in building a greater sense of community and awareness among the Colleges at NLU regarding the teaching, research, and community service activities of faculty.

Community partners directly benefit through service projects.

NLU Service-learning goals:

- Promote a wider understanding of the concept of SL within the university community
- Assist NLU faculty in adopting creative, experiential community-based methods into their courses
- Help students incorporate community service experiences into their education
- Provide teacher preparation on the pedagogy of SL
- Assist students in establishing community contacts
- Ensure recognition for university faculty who engage in innovative collaborations

SL in teacher education programs demonstrates the benefits of SL and its relevance to Illinois Professional Teaching Standards:

- **Content Knowledge (#1):** SL enhances “experiences that make the content meaningful to all students”
- **Diversity (#3):** SL assists teachers to understand better “how students differ in their approaches to learning”; SL creates more “instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners”
- **Learning Environment (#5):** SL assists in creating a “learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation”
- **Collaborative Relationships (#9):** SL enhances teachers’ “understanding of the role of the community in education”; SL helps to develop and maintain “collaborative relationships with colleagues, parents/guardians, and the community to support student learning and well-being”
- **Reflection and Professional Growth (#10):** Reflection is the key component of SL. It enhances teachers competence as a “reflective practitioner who continually evaluates how choices and actions affect students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community”
Service-Learning: Living Pedagogy and Living Research

SL is a fairly young yet flourishing field of qualitative studies that can take on forms of action, participatory, practitioner, or critical emancipator research. SL has received increased recognition in educational research. A great variety of studies demonstrate that “service-learning has a positive effect on student personal development in the areas of personal efficacy, moral development, leadership, social responsibility, and civic participation” (Weber et al, 2008, p. 30).

An exploratory study by Weber et al (2008) showed that students were more likely (68.2%) to choose SL projects over traditional library research projects, and that all majors either preferred the SL project or found it of equal interest to a library research project. The results of this study “provide faculty with empirical support for assuring administration that both low and high performing students are interested in service-learning” (p. 34).

Lucas (2005) examined a university professor’s effort to incorporate SL into a course for prospective teachers. Lucas’ study concludes that SL has “great promise for promoting a commitment to social justice among prospective teachers” (p. 186). As a result of SL involvement, social justice issues were brought to life, and students became “more sensitive to socio-cultural diversity and to issues of social justice” (p. 186).

Following the footsteps of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), who introduced portraiture as a method of inquiry in sociology, Stanford University Service Learning Center (2000) facilitated a workshop on portraiture as a method to document and promote service-learning in teacher education. Out of the workshop’s discussions came agreement that portraiture constitutes a powerful resource for service-learning educators.

SL shares strong affinity with action research. To many, SL is a living pedagogy, just like action research is a living research. In engaging in SL, we deal with individuals at the deepest human level, we enter into an “I-Thou” dialogue and a reciprocal relationships of giving-and-receiving. Like action research, SL is a cyclical process, with reflection and self-reflection in the core of experience. In undertaking SL projects, we become practitioner researchers who investigate their own practice. We acquire first-hand experience in practical contexts. SL practitioner researchers create living theories of practice.

It was Whitehead (2006) who in the 1970s developed the idea of living theories. Whitehead provided a strong criticism of positivistic nature of knowledge and research. Instead, he proposed a living theory, a living epistemology, and a living research. “As we practice, we observe what we do and reflect on it. We make sense of what we are doing through researching it. We gather data and generate evidence to support our claims that we know what we are doing and why we are doing it (our theories of practice), and we test these knowledge
claims for their validity through the critical feedback of others. These theories are our living theories” (Whitehead, McNiff, 2006, p. 24).

SL as a living pedagogy and action-research espouses “humanitarian values of care and compassion,” includes “all people and their practices within the field of inquiry,” and celebrates “visions, the realization of values, and the redemptive qualities of transforming pain into joy” (Whitehead, McNiff, 2006, p. 39).

Like action research, SL is a methodology for real-world social change. The best accounts of SL projects at NLU demonstrate what McNiff and Whitehead call “transformation of practice into living theories.” Like action research, SL is “visionary.” It exemplifies the “capacity for self-renewal as a living theory.” It celebrates individual narratives and has the potential “to exercise transformative influences in significant ways at global level” (Whitehead, McNiff, 2006).

At the 2008 NLU Service-Learning Spring Symposium, Dr. Patrick Green of Loyola University in Chicago gave an inspiring keynote address on the power of SL as a living pedagogy. Central to his SL research is reflection. The following is an abstract from Dr. Green’s research and presentation.

**Service-Reflection-Learning Framework**

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The service-reflection-learning framework represents the complex processes that occur within service-learning through reflection:

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![Service-Reflection-Learning Framework Diagram](image)
This framework, as the graphic suggests, is complex and represents the multi-faceted approach of the service-learning pedagogy. The following components define the service-reflection-learning framework:

*The framework is a cyclic model.* The movement of this model is cyclic, not linear. A student moves from the service experience to reflection, from meaning making and facilitated learning and back to the service experience. After each cycle, it is repeated, and fostered by instructional reflection and reframed questions. In this developmental model, new learning occurs after several cycles.

*The framework is an open-ended helix.* The helix formation of this framework is representative of the continuous and repeated learning occurrences that the students potentially may experience in a forward-moving, developmental model. The repetition of experiences and reflection coupled with facilitated learning lead to meaning making. The instructor mediation, in the form of instructor reflection and reframed questions, lead to new learning. The helix is open to indicate that the learning process is ongoing. Within the pedagogy of service-learning the students are continuously learning and connecting their experiences to the course content. New learning may occur at any point in this framework, and some learning outcomes may be achieved after the repetition of many cycles.

*The framework is a developmental process.* The framework is a process connecting the service experiences and learning through several steps:

(a) Reflection, in which students reflect on their service experiences;
(b) Meaning making, in which, through reflection, students create and identify meaning of their experiences;
(c) Facilitated learning, in which the instructor facilitates connections between the service experiences and course content learning through guided reflection questions and discussion;
(d) Instructional reflection, in which the instructor of the course reflects on student reflection responses in accordance with the pedagogical strategies, creating a revised instructional plan;
(e) Reframed prompts, in which, based on instructional reflection, the instructor reframes the questions to further connect the service experience to the course content for students.
(f) New learning, in which the repeated process of the above steps leads to a new understanding or new concepts within the context of the course.

This study focuses on the implementation of service-learning in a world history course through the service-reflection-learning framework. The participants in this study are students from a Midwestern, metropolitan university of about 7,500 students. The student enrollment consists of a majority of non-traditional students, with a traditional age population of about 38%. Each of the students have self-selected into the world history course. Upon entrance to the course, the service-learning course was explained; there was no prior knowledge of service-learning with this course.
The data gathered in this study include observations and reflections of the researcher, and the reflections of students. In this study, I recorded observations and wrote research reflections after each class through the instructional research log. The instructional research log, based on the action research models of Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) and Stringer (1996; 1999; 2004), consists of class field notes, class observations, location of student development, revised instructional strategies, and instructor reflections.

The service-reflection-learning framework guided the student reflection questions on the syllabus. The students were assigned written reflection assignments coupled with their service-learning experiences, which served as documentation for this study. Student reflections consisted of raw, experiential reflections, based on the service experience, and a final reflection research paper served as the informed, cognitive reflections, based on experiences, research, and critical analysis of the topic.

The data in this study was analyzed through two lenses: 1) analyzing epiphanies, and 2) categorizing and coding. The data was presented in narrative form. Through the analysis of epiphanies and the categorization of data, the results were written into a narrative.

The narrative provided by the data of this study described and explained the dual process of how students make meaning of service through reflection in a service-learning course and how a faculty instructor may facilitate the meaning-making processes through student reflections on service experiences in a service-learning course.

The presentation of the data provides an overview of the student reflections and final reflection and research projects that suggest specific stages occurring within the student reflection in a service-learning course. The suggested stages are representative of the significant themes identified through the analysis of the data. These stages are framed by the model of pre-reflection, multiple reflections on experiences, and post-reflection utilized in this study. The following graphic represents the developmental stages that students experienced through reflection on their service experiences:

**Recurring Stages of Reflection in a Service-Learning Course Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Reaction</th>
<th>Personalization</th>
<th>Increased Connection to Course Content</th>
<th>Transformational Thinking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
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Parallel Processes of Meaning-Making

Recurring Stages of Student Reflection in a Service-Learning Course

Range of emotions: Discomfort, fear, sadness, shock, anger, gratitude for personal situation

Observing, talking to, interacting with individuals at service site; Relating individually; Breaking from initial impressions, Forming a personalized perspective on issue

Identifying issue complexity, causes of issue, moving to multi-dimensional perspective, breaking stereotypes

Making direct and indirect connections; identifying relationship with course objectives

Perspective changed, critical analysis, identifying strategies for social improvement

Emotional Reaction

Personalization

Increased Understanding

Connection to Course Content

Transformational Thinking

Range of emotions: Frustration, anger, uncertainty, discomfort

Interpreting the needs of individual students, fostering individual understanding and development of students through individualized reframed prompts

Identifying relationship between service work, course dialogue, written reflections, and course readings; Alter instructional plan

Add group activities, supplemental readings, and contemporary articles to facilitate direct relationship with course content

Mediating students’ service experience, course content readings and discussion; Allow students to reflect on meaning of experiences

Emotional Reaction

Individualization (of student learning)

Increased Understanding

Connection to Course Content

Transformational Teaching / Learning
Figure 1. Recurring Stages of Student Reflection in a Service-Learning Course.

Figure 1 graphically represents the Recurring Stages of Student Reflection in a service-learning course as a single helix. This figure visually demonstrates the multiple stages and the movement that students may experience potentially through reflection on service experiences connected to course content. Although the stages are presented in a linear format, the stages are actually recurring and cyclic as students move back and forth between stages.

It is within these stages of reflection in a service-learning course that students experience the meaning-making process. By humanizing and personalizing the issue, students were more likely to think abstractly about multiple causes and to think conceptually about connections between past and present. By journeying through these stages, students create meaningful service experiences in which they connect the service-learning experiences to the course content and objectives. In the end, the potential for transformational thinking and social action is increased. The Recurring Stages of Student Reflection have significant implications for faculty instructors facilitating a service-learning course and mediating learning through reflection.

Emotional Reaction: Students revealed a number of emotions in the early stage of the service work. In the initial reflection, students expressed guilt as well as discomfort with the unfamiliarity of the situation. After the first service experience, student emotions varied from sadness and guilt to shock, from fear to anxiety, and from anger to expressing gratitude for the student’s living situation. The emotional reaction was the most common theme among the students during the initial service-experiences. In the Recurring Stages of Student Reflection, the emotional reaction is the beginning of this meaning-making process.

Personalization: Once the students interacted with the volunteers and especially the guests of the homeless shelter, they began to understand the different issues surrounding homeless. This process of personalization, relating to an issue through talking with and learning from the stories of individuals, allowed students to understand the multiple dimensions of the homeless situation. As students observed and talked with the individuals in a homeless situation, they humanized the individuals and related to them on a personal level. This is indicative of the need for service-learning experiences to include direct contact with people in order to engage students in personalization. It is particularly in this stage that students expressed the most significant challenge to their stereotypes of homeless people.

In sum, this shift from a stereotypical perspective occurred through 1) breaking bread with them, 2) thereby, relating to them individually, 3) and breaking from initial impressions, and 4) forming a personalized perspective on the issue. Their experiences allowed students to see some homeless as educated, skilled people with working experiences, the direct opposite of their initial impression and stereotype. The issue of homelessness was contextualized, and the guests became people in a situation, rather than a generalized population. In the process, they also began to discuss homelessness as an issue, as well as intermediate variables impacting homelessness, more directly in their reflections.
**Increased Understanding:** Through interacting with the individuals, students were able to identify a number of issues related to homelessness. They were able to articulate social structures (e.g., health care systems, wage structures, housing and rent systems) that contributed to homeless situations of individuals. In the process, students expressed an increased understanding of the multiple layers of homeless, the multiple causality of this issue, and the complexity of the situation. This occurred after multiple service experiences and several interactions with people at the service site. This stage results in the increased awareness of the issue and an improved comprehension of the complexity of the issue.

**Connection to Course Content:** Once students began to understand the complexity of the issue, they began to see connections to the content of the course. This stage allowed students to make direct connections between past and present, to identify direct connections between industrialization and the present social structures impacting homelessness. Student made direct and indirect connections between homelessness, social structures that impact homelessness, and the social, economic, and structural impact of the industrial revolution. In effect, the result of this stage is increased empathy and a more sophisticated thinking in which students achieve the learning objectives of the service-learning course.

**Transformational Thinking:** The students in this stage may express a transformation of their thinking, such as how their perspectives on homelessness have changed. As students synthesize their learning, students also voiced criticisms of the organization, possible solutions, and began articulating strategies for change. The transformational thinking often leads to more involvement with issue, including volunteering at the organization or working on community solutions to solve the issue. This active engagement is a direct result of the learning process and transformational thinking involved in service-learning. It is within these stages of reflection in a service-learning course that students experience the meaning-making process.

It is essential to provide the space for students to express their feelings and articulate their thinking about the topic or issue. Once students moved through their emotional reaction, students advanced to the stages of Increased Awareness, Connection to Course Content, and Transformational Thinking through their interactions with people and personal stories, specifically the process of personalization. The stage of personalization served as the core of the meaning-making process for students, which challenged the students’ stereotypes and propelled students into the stages of advanced learning.

This stage of personalization serves as the vital link in the meaning-making process of reflection in a service-learning course. The extent to which students built relationships with individuals through direct contact provided the necessary connection to the issue of homelessness. By humanizing the issue, students were more likely to think abstractly about multiple causes and to think conceptually about connections between past and present. By journeying through these stages, students create meaningful service experiences in which they connect the service-
learning experiences to the course content and objectives. In the end, the potential for transformational thinking is increased.

The implications of these stages, especially the degree to which the stage of personalization created the vital connection to meaning-making in reflection, establish several potent considerations for faculty instructors mediating student learning in a service-learning course, including the need for direct contact with individuals on the service site, for fostering meaningful relationships, and for mediating connections through personal interaction.


References


