

Powerful Teaching: A Framework for Utilizing Service Learning in the Classroom

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“... I believe that whatever we receive we must share. . . . granted, our task is to inform, but information must be transformed in knowledge, knowledge into sensitivity, and sensitivity into commitment. How can we therefore speak, unless we believe that our words have meaning? That our words will help others?” (Elie Wiesel, 2008)

Introduction

Our work examines the powerful role of service-learning in preparing future teachers to change the world. Using the words of Elie Wiesel as a guide, we propose a framework guiding college faculty toward teacher transformation and illustrate these steps with examples from our own work.

Service-learning and Teacher Education

Service-learning is a form of experiential education, linking academic content with community service (National Service-learning Clearinghouse, 2011). Often encouraged in higher education communities, it is also a popular form of early field experiences in teacher preparation programs (Etheridge, 2006). The components supporting strong learning outcomes have long been articulated, with several recurring themes (Eyler, Giles, & Schmeide, 1996). These themes include interconnecting course content and field experiences, reflective analysis of service experiences, providing opportunities for service-learning students to do meaningful work in service sites, and service experiences that recur over an extended time period (see for example, Marchel 2003).

Service learning pedagogy supports the important teacher belief that all students—especially those from diverse groups—can be successful (Butcher et al., 2003). Therefore, it is no surprise that colleges of education lead other academic divisions in the use of service-learning (Butin, 2006). Currently, a discussion encouraging stronger partnerships between university teacher educators and educators in the field (Zeichner, 2010) and the emphasis on early and increased teacher candidate field experiences are likely to enhance the value of service-learning in teacher preparation programs (see for example, the video press-release by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010).

Challenges of Service-learning

Despite its potential, service-learning sometimes promises more than it produces (Butin, 2006; Jones, 2002). Unless carefully designed, service-learning experiences will not achieve desired student learning outcomes. Design problems include the mismatch between classroom teaching approaches and field aspects of service-learning experiences (Butin, 2006; Maxwell, 2009), failure to navigate student resistance to participation in service (Jones,

Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005) and fluctuating or insufficient institutional support of service-learning, making it difficult for faculty to organize and monitor service (Butin, 2006).

We also struggle to use service-learning for many of these same reasons. We believe service-learning is an integral component of our teacher preparation courses, envisioned the outcomes we hoped to achieve, but lacked a compass to help us get there. One day, we got unexpected guidance from the words of Elie Wiesel when listening to a podcast from the NPR “This I Believe” radio series. Using his ideas, we have created a rubric for service-learning that we believe provides a sensible plan for designing and implementing service-learning course components. In our paper, we explain how Wiesel’s ideas form an organizational framework for service-learning course design, illustrated by examples from our own courses.

Eli Wiesel’s Rubric

Elie Wiesel’s simple words form a rubric for powerful education. His words suggest a four-part process, one that starts with information and is not complete until it results in commitment (Wiesel, 2008). First, students must learn basic facts and a body of information. Second, the facts must become meaningful, interconnected knowledge. Third, students must apply knowledge so they are more deeply sensitive and aware of its use in the world. Finally, students must be transformed by committing themselves to use the knowledge to impact others. Given that the intended outcome of service-learning is commitment to social change (Cipole, 2010), Wiesel’s words are a natural fit with service-learning experiences.

Wiesel’s words also provide a perfect map for the preparation of highly qualified teachers. Effective teachers must teach in ways that result in meaningful learning for all students, including students less likely to achieve because of economic, language, learning, or racial differences (Grant & Gillette, 2006). Central to effective teaching is the belief that all students, including those from underrepresented

groups, can learn (see for example, Jensen, 2009), but this disposition often requires personal transformations in thinking (Klug, Luckey, Wilkins, and Whitfield, 2006). Pre-service teachers in particular need strong support of disposition development, because they often enter preparation programs with idealistic and inaccurate views of P-12 students who struggle with learning (Maxwell, 2009). When idealism meets real-world practice, pre-service teachers may easily become disenchanted with teaching or adopt negative beliefs.

In this article we describe each rubric step, using service-learning experiences from our own teacher education courses to illustrate elements of course design for each.

Steps of Service-learning Design: From Facts to Transformation

Although the steps below are presented in numerical order, we envision some flexibility in the order in which they occur. In fact, it is of more value to see these steps as ongoing, informing each other, and integrated as students move through a service-learning experience.

Step 1: Understanding Facts

Students need strong preparation in background information before they begin service: They need to understand goals and content of the course, must understand features of service experiences, and must see how each informs the other. Specifically, students must be prepared for the specific actions and information to be used in service-learning settings (Wilczenski & Coomy, 2007). For example, in a child development course, education students learn basic information about physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional development of P-12 school students. Service providers must also have basic information about the site, including its needs and resources. Finally, skills students will use at sites require prior preparation: they must learn how to observe P-12 student development, how to take observation notes, how to develop relationships with a P-12 student, along with additional skills

specific to the site, such as basic tutoring skills. The better-prepared students are prior to their service-learning experiences, the stronger are student outcomes (Simonet, 2008).

Step 2: Facts Become Knowledge

After learning relevant information, the next step is to help education students contextualize knowledge. Connecting knowledge to real-world contexts with deeper understanding of social contexts is a key strength of service-learning pedagogies (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Information shifts from information known by oneself to knowledge with a purpose in world outside the self. This shift from self-focus toward a deeper understanding of the larger school world is of key importance to future educators, a point currently repeated in teacher preparation circles (National Network for Educational Renew, [NNER], 2010). Two important service-learning features aid the contextualization of knowledge: First, integrating course content with service experiences to help students understand the meaning and impact of course content; and second, assignments and discussions requiring students to engage in self-reflection to reinterpret service experiences (see for example, Eyler et al., 1996; Hamner, 2002; Steinke & Buresch, 2002). For example, requiring students to bring information from service experiences to class for analysis and discussion allows faculty to reinforce links to important course content (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2007).

College-aged students do not come equally prepared to engage in self-reflection (Jones, 2002), a skill that sometimes requires guidance, practice, and feedback through field experiences journals, related assignments, and class discussion. Jones notes that without support and practice in self-reflection, some service-learning students may not “get it” and can easily come away from service experiences with ideas we least want them to have about P-12 students and school. It is possible and important to evaluate self-reflection and provide the kind of assessments and feedback that supports this challenging skill (Steinke & Buresch, 2002; Marchel, 2004).

Step 3: Knowledge is Applied

For Wiesel, learning must be shared in order for it to become powerful. Our students share what they learn by applying knowledge, skills, and time in service sites. Application is actually the strongest predictor of student learning in service-learning courses (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Several important service-learning features are relevant to the application of knowledge. First, students must be at sites where they can truly use and develop existing skills and information they have (Maxwell, 2009). This means that students should be at sites allowing active involvement and that encourage them to take the initiative. Second, students must have the requisite skills to allow them to be actively involved, sometimes requiring preparation before going to sites. For example, students may need to know how to begin tutoring relationships, must know how to contact and work with teachers at sites, and must have relevant assignments that guide their actions (See helpful preparation checklist in Wilsczenski & Coomey, 2007, p. 39). Third, and perhaps most important, students must have multiple opportunities for application over an extended time period linked with feedback and analysis in order to apply what they continue to learn (Marchel, 2003).

Application opportunities can be made clear through the use of clearly defined assignments requiring the application of skills, but these should be designed so that they are challenging, meaningful, and explored in-depth (Ostrow, as cited in Langseth & Plater, 2004). To the extent that field-based course assignments require students to apply and integrate course content to solve field-based problems, that knowledge becomes linked to important teaching actions. For example, requiring students to use recently taught tutoring skills to support literacy with English Language Learners and to provide evidence of P-12 student gains requires the use of important education skills in a challenging context.

Step 4: Transformation

Of all elements in Wiesel's rubric, it is at the transformation level

that service-learning offers the most. Service-learning is a pedagogy often cited for its power to change student perspectives on a wide range of social issues (Crews, 2002). In teacher preparation, service-learning is often chosen over other field experiences because of its potential for outcomes linked to important teacher dispositions (See for example, Grant & Gillette, 2006; and NCATE, 2002). These outcomes include increased motivation for the welfare of all students (Vadenboncouer & Rahm, 1996), increased understanding and motivation to work with diverse P-12 students (Alexandrowicz, 2001; Klug et al., 2006), and adopting the role of change agent (Swick, 2001) as students begin to move from self-occupied to more other-occupied frameworks (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, 2004). Below we briefly discuss service-learning features that enhance these transformative experiences: making a difference, the power of relationships, and ongoing and integrated reflection.

Making a difference. Knowing that one's actions make a difference encourages further action, and service-learning allows students to see how their actions impact others (Eyler & Giles, 1999). A host of studies report real and meaningful changes to P-12 service-learning recipients (Barton, 2000; Copeland et al., 2004; Ritter, Barnett, Denny, & Albin, 2009). It is evidence of meaningful change as a result of one's actions that provides evidence of personal efficacy (Kitzrow, as cited in Bringle & Duffy, 1998). Evidence of one's actions matters—especially in early field-based experiences, where often younger college students might have more naïve expectations and fewer field-experiences to support their interpretations of field experience outcomes (Jones, 2002).

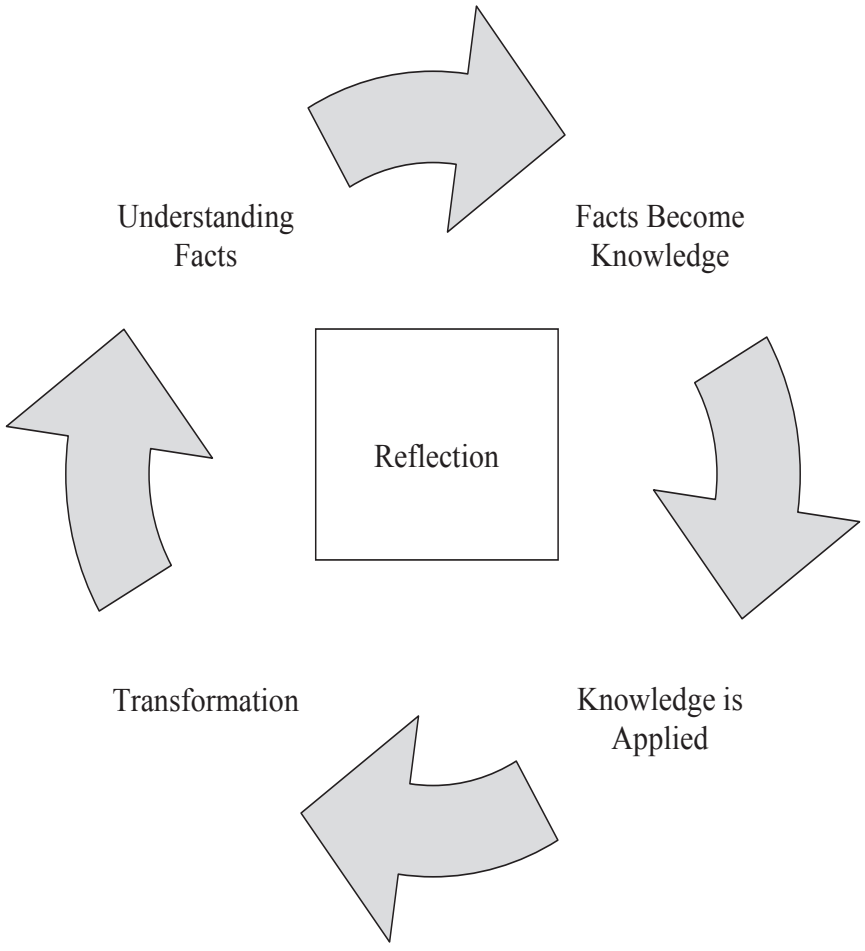
Toward this end, service-learning designs that encourage meaningful actions provide more evidence of efficacy. Increased self-efficacy is even more likely when service providers have direct evidence of the impact of their actions. For example, having students collect pre- and post-assessment information on P-12 student learning allows helpers to not only gauge the quality of their tutoring skills, but provides direct evidence of their impact on others. When

helpers are able to use their unique skills, they are also more likely to feel they make a difference (Marchel, 2003). Table 1 provides examples from our own work in which students report making a difference, but there are many helpful resources on service-learning pedagogy for difference-making (see for example, the National Service-learning Clearinghouse *Quality Components and Standards* for helpful service-learning implementation guidelines.)

Relationships. Forming interpersonal relationships with P-12 students during service-learning allows students to learn about students from backgrounds other than their own. It is this knowledge that dispels the often stereotypic views of difference held by college students (Giles & Eyler, 1994). Relationships also encourage dispositions of helping others. When helpers personalize those they assist, they also have increased desire to help others in the future (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). Relationship building takes time. Therefore, service-learning experiences that require extended interaction with P-12 students are more likely to result in meaningful relationships.

Reflection. The necessity for self-reflection is central in service-learning courses (Butin, 2010). Reflection encourages students to re-examine and rethink the meaning of their service-experience. Reflection provides a “look back,” at changes students make in their own thinking, and thus is central to transformation. Transformation of beliefs is possible only through ongoing reflective analysis of service-learning experiences. To be successful, reflective activities often require guidance and support (Connors & Seifer, 2005). Common examples of reflective practice are the use of journals, reflective analysis of critical incidents after each field visit, and the use of small critical dialogue groups. Multiple sources and ideas exist (see for example Cipole, 2010, 185-106). In Figure 1, we provide a model demonstrating reflection as the core to powerful service-learning design, based on the four steps of service-learning design.

Figure 1: The Role of Reflection in Transformative Learning



Using Wiesel's Ideas

In this section, we illustrate our use of Elie Wiesel's four steps to design our own service learning experiences. We begin by briefly explaining our courses. In Table 1, we provide examples of course design to illustrate these important design course features.

Table 1: Rubric Step Features and Examples

Facts to Transformation Rubric Steps	Important Features	Examples
Understanding Facts	Students learn important course content	Students learn basic concepts and skills related to lesson and unit planning. Students learn how to plan lessons based on standards; write objectives; relate content to students' lives; use formative and summative assessments, sequence and imagine needed procedures, transitions, extensions, and adaptations; analyze student data; and reflect upon lesson delivery.
	Students learn characteristics of the service setting	Students learn about a school's resources and challenges using digital sources, a community drive-through, and interviews of teachers and students.
Facts become Knowledge	Integrating course content with field experiences	Students bring information to class collected during P-12 student interviews and observations. Small group analyze the information to develop suggested tutoring strategies.
	Ongoing analysis and self-reflection of experiences.	Students analyze each service visit using a critical incident technique (taught in college class prior to first visit). Incidents are shared with colleagues and faculty for feedback.
Knowledge is Applied	Good match between desired outcomes and service site characteristics	An online database allows classroom teachers to share needs with education students who can select sites where their talents and experiences can be used.
	Preparation for skills needed to apply learning	Students learn how to support language development of English Language Learners using pictures from magazines, music, and theater activities
	Multiple field visits over extended time	All students log 12 -15 hours over at least 5 visits during a semester.
Transformation	Reflective analysis of experiences	Students submit interactive diaries describing service events and reactions. Peers and faculty write responses in diaries. Classroom discussions present counter-stereotypic information.
	Seeing that actions make a difference	Students work with classroom teachers to target a needed skill, then gather pre-assessment and post-assessment information to see how their teaching influenced student learning.
	Meaningful relationships	At least 12 hours per semester of service-learning are required, and hours must be spent over at least 5 weeks, in order to help students develop relationships with P-12 students. Students are recognized for extra service time spent.

Example one: Diana's S-L project description

For the service learning project in social studies methods, I asked the early childhood teacher at a school for abused and neglected children to come in to discuss the challenges of planning social studies curriculum for grades K-3 in a multi-age classroom. She described the transient nature of her K-3 students' educational experiences and the resulting differences in knowledge and content backgrounds of the students. Along with helping my pre-service teachers gain a new perspective of the types of challenges they might face as future teachers, this project allowed my students to consider how their work in planning social studies curriculum might benefit this teacher and therefore, her students. Over the course of the semester, my students then created social studies unit plans based on the state social studies standards for Kindergarten through third grades. Students presented the unit plans and created supporting documents for the teacher. The students then responded about the impact of the experience in written reflection.

Example two: Carol's S-L project description.

In this core early field experience course, all students use a database to select a site in a regional school. The database contains hundreds of requests from regional P-12 teachers who post specific student and classroom needs. For example, a teacher working with English Language Learner (ELL) students might ask for two education students interested in tutoring three 4th-grade ELL students in Geography. This request is posted on a database, with "4th Grade," "English Language Learners," and "Geography" used as highlighted keywords. Education students select sites based on the skills and interests they have, and contact teachers to arrange service. Once at a site, a series of integrated course assignments guides education students through observation, reflection, and analysis of P-12 student learning and language.

Conclusions

Teacher educators overlook a possible avenue to transformative, powerful teaching if they overlook service-learning field experiences. Thoughtful design, however, is necessary to reap the benefits of service-learning. Wiesel's words provide a simple rubric to guide designers of service-learning experiences so they encourage student transformation. We can design experiences that "open up" the minds of future teachers, so they develop greater commitment, sensitivity, and share themselves with future generations. Our own work is complete only when our students offer their learning in turn to students of their own:

I believe that whatever we receive we must share. When we endure an experience, the experience cannot stay with me alone. It must be opened, it must become an offering, it must be deepened and given and shared. (Elie Wiesel, 2008)

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