ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING AS A CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces an interdisciplinary approach to service-learning as a consultative enterprise. Students use the consultative stages of pre-entry, entry, diagnosis, implementation, and disengagement, allowing for the practice of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and empathy. Students then write case studies based on service learning experiences, which are later shared with fellow classmates through student-facilitated discussion. In this paper, consultative service-learning is defined and analyzed according to recent theoretical and research findings. The implementation of a pilot project to 27 students is described, observed results are discussed, and lessons learned are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Generating critical thinkers capable of analysis and synthesis is one of the principal goals of many higher education institutions (Halx & Reybold, 2005). Higher-level thinking stimulates informed and intelligent decision making (Page & Mukherjee, 2007), and critical thinking can be enhanced through properly structured service-learning (Halx and Reybold, 2005; Kienzler, 2001; Kezar and Rhoads, 2001; Sedlak, Doheny, and Panthofer, 2003). Using critical reasoning while undertaking service-learning can increase the chance of a perspective change (Halx & Reybold), a major goal of service-learning (Kronick, 2007). The analysis of perspective leads to the identification and questioning of assumptions, which enhance student empathy and development of genuine social and civic connections (Kienzler). Service-learning can also foster critical thinking through direct application of theoretical knowledge.

Consultative processes that are well-known in the business world can be integrated into college-level service-learning projects. A consultative approach to service-learning provides a structure to help students develop and enhance higher order thinking skills. Consultative stages of pre-entry, entry, diagnosis, implementation, and disengagement (Dougherty, 1999) help students through a reasoning process, which includes observing, questioning, and learning about their placement organization, to perpetuate higher-level thinking.

In the next two sections, critical thinking is defined, benefits and guidelines of using consultation in the classroom are clarified, and advantages of using the consultation process with service-learning are illustrated. Following these sections, the consultative service-learning project is outlined and described, followed by a description of how higher-level thinking is distinguished, observed, and measured by using Kienzler's (2001) components of critical thinking development. The paper ends with observed results and lessons learned.

CRITICAL THINKING DEFINED

Critical thinking is displayed by a person's capacity to identify issues, make inferences, evaluate evidence, and generate conclusions. It is a reasoning process that involves ideas, actions, and decisions that lead to logical and intelligent thought (Halx & Reybold, 2005; Sedlak, Doheny, & Panthofer, 2003). Critical thinking processes lead to original ideas that can be tested in the real-world, thus resulting in the stimulation of even newer ideas and concepts (Keen, 2006). As applied to service-learning, critical thinking occurs when students reflect on their experiences, interpret what they have learned, create new knowledge, and use this new knowledge in future learning situations.

CRITICAL THINKING ENHANCEMENT THROUGH CONSULTATIVE SERVICE-LEARNING

Evidence shows that higher-level thinking skills, when used in tandem with service-learning, can lead to positive long term changes (Celuch & Slama, 2002; Strage, 2004). These changes can sustain a student's inclination toward service-learning throughout his or her academic career (Strage), and perpetuate critical skills throughout his or her lifetime (Celuch & Slama). Therefore, it is proposed that students' civic spirit will be developed and will continue to exist beyond the timeframe of the course if they have had a successful service-learning experience that involves higher-level learning.

CRITICAL THINKING DELINEATED THORUGH KIENZLER'S PEDAGOGY

Four components of critical thinking are used to measure student critical thinking development and to explain how critical thinking was manifested in the consultative service-learning projects (Kienzler, 2001). These components are (a) identifying and questioning assumptions, (b) seeking a multiplicity of alternatives, (c) making social and intellectual connections, and (d) fostering active involvement with the community.

IDENTIFYING AND OUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS

Students need to identify and question their own assumptions and those of others to discover new perspectives, critically evaluate the status quo, and challenge stereotypes and prejudices (Dewey, 1910/2008). Through teamwork, students recognize that individual perspectives are not necessarily universal, and thus will examine their own social, cultural, political, and moral assumptions (Kienzler, 2001). During service, students have many contact hours with supervisors and community members. The proactive nature of the consultative process exposes them to new perspectives and situations and to people with different backgrounds and characteristics. Individual reflection through journal entries allows students to process this information. Additionally, the annotated bibliography encourages questioning of assumptions by exposure to information that either validates or challenges the assumptions.

SEEKING A MULTIPLICITY OF ALTERNATIVES

The search for a multiplicity of alternatives (Kienzler, 2001) is tantamount to Ash and Clayton's (2004) finding that exploring various voices often creates perplexity and doubt, the precise situations needed for effective critical thinking development. Ash and Clayton thought that success during this stage of critical thinking may lead to an increase in tolerance and openness. The written case study, case study presentation, student facilitation of class discussion, and experience and collaboration leading up to these assignments allow students to gain alternative interpretations and solutions.

MAKING SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONNECTIONS

Social and intellectual connections are manifested in the application of theoretical and academic material to the service-learning experience, mainly through the journals, the written case study, the implementation plan, and the final paper. Hershey & Walker (2006) found that the use of case method analysis can teach higher order critical thinking skills, and in writing their own case studies, students share their perceptions with other students in the class, creating social and intellectual links. Similar to service-learning, case studies are contextually based, so each group can communicate the significance of the context of the particular organization they served.

The resulting outcomes of the case study analysis are both substantive and procedural. Substantive contributions

involve what advice is given, while procedural contributions involve how the advice is given (Salacuse, 2000), intellectual connections that are made, and the processes of critical thinking that are developed (Kienzler; McDade, 1995). The social connections resulting from this assignment are exemplified through student collaboration with one another and organizational and community members.

FOSTERING ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Active involvement in the community is displayed throughout the entry, diagnosis, and implementation stages. Students are involved with team members, class members, and the professor, as well as service-learning supervisors, other organizational members, customers, and community organizers. This involvement requires collaboration, problem-solving, and interpersonal skill development (Kienzler, 2001), all of which are important traits of critical thinking. Active student involvement with the service organization and community, paired with a structured academic format, form the participatory pedagogy needed to help the students become self-guided learners and to perform their best (Kienzler).

PROJECT PLAN AND OBJECTIVES

The learning goals for this project within the context of the course pertained to the development of intellectual, social, and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 2006). The specific objectives were to:

- 1. Provide a needed service to a nonprofit social service organization, a community-run business, or a business that serves local community needs.
- Make intellectual connections between service and pedagogical aims of the course.
- 3. Make intellectual connections between service and the functioning of the service organization.
- 4. Practice, use, and enhance critical thinking skills.
- 5. Acquire an increased overall interest in civic participation.
- 6. Allow members of the class to work together to analyze issues and solve problems, both within their own service organizations and among those of other students.
- As indicated in Table 1, these objectives are measured through a variety of means.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT

During the third week of the semester in an Organizational Behavior and Leadership class, 27 students was divided into teams of four to five members and given a written schedule and overview of a project involving a consultative approach to service-learning (see Footnote 1). The overview indicated that the student would engage in

Project Checklist of Assignments Table 1

Assignment	Percentage	Group or Individual	Due Date
	of Project Grade	Contribution	
Organization	5	Group	September 21 (signed)
Identification			
Project Proposal	5	Group	October 1 (signed)
Reflective	10	Individual	October 15-31
Journal Submittal 1			
Reflective	10	Individual	November 12-23
Journal Submittal 2			
Reflective	10	Individual	November 26-December 3
Journal Submittal 3			
Annotated	10	Individual	November 21
Bibliography			
Written Case	10	Group	November 26 (signed)
Study			
Case	10	Group	Various dates specified in
Presentation			syllabus schedule
Implementation	10	Group	December 5
Plan			
Final Paper	15	Individual	December 7
Supervisor	5	Individual	December 7
Assessment			

approximately 20 hours of service-learning by fulfilling tasks in a nonprofit or community based organization while analyzing a specific situation internal to the organization. The overview outlined due dates of specific deliverables such as team identification of service-learning organization, team project proposal, individual journal entries, individual annotated bibliography, team case study, team case presentation, team implementation plan, individual analysis paper, and supervisor assessment (see Table 1). The students' overall grade for this project was based partially on a team effort and partially on individual contributions.

This author's adaptation of Dougherty's (1999) description of consultation defined service-learning as an interactive and collaborative process in which an organization or organizational member is assisted with a work-related or organizational-related problem, with the goal of helping the organization or organizational member in some specified way. Dougherty created four stages of organizational consultation, and for the purposes of this project an additional stage, pre-entry, is added, resulting in five stages: pre-entry, entry, diagnosis, implementation, and disengagement (see Table 2).

STAGE ONE: PRE-ENTRY

Three objectives for the pre-entry stage were to begin development of critical thinking, engage in the first stages of team development, and identify the team's service organization. Student teams were equipped with an overview of the five stages of consultation and an outline of the service-learning project. Practice sessions for using critical thought processes were administered, such as analyzing case studies through application of organizational behavior, leadership, and management theories, developing and answering higher-level discussion questions, and practicing consultation interview techniques. Students practiced higher-level thinking by giving two oral presentations on critical adaptations of textbook chapter material. Students who were not presenting were required to form and ask questions to student presenters. Requiring students to ask questions in class was an effective way to improve critical thinking and questioning skills (Donohue-Smith, 2006).

Team development during this stage was essential for expansion of emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 2006). Presentations allowed team members to collaborate and develop familiarity with one another before entering the organization.

Another function of the pre-entry stage was for student teams to choose the organization they would serve. In organization identification, students provided the name and location of the chosen organization and contact information of their potential supervisor. All team members were expected to indicate their endorsement by signing the submittal. The professor's discretion was used to qualify organizations on a case-by-case basis. General guidelines were that the organizations were nonprofit, community-run, or served a community purpose.

Consultative Stages With Corresponding Project Assignments Table 2

Consultative stages	Project assignments
Pre-entry	Team organization identification
Entry	Team project proposal
Diagnosis	Individual journals
_	Individual annotated bibliography
	Team case study and discussion questions
	Team case presentation and discussion/facilitation
Implementation	Final paper
•	Implementation plan
Disengagement	Supervisor assessment of service learner

STAGE TWO: ENTRY

In the entry stage of consultation, the consultant explores organizational needs, writes a contract, and enters the organization (Dougherty, 1999). In preparation for writing the proposal, students engaged in exploration, interaction, collaboration, and planning with members of the service organization.

In lieu of a contract, students submitted a written team proposal to the professor. The proposal outlined the needs of the organization and the ways in which students would address those needs. Here, the critical questioning and consultation techniques learned during the pre-entry stage were employed. Students recognized that the needs outlined in the proposal might change, and that new problems or issues may emerge throughout the semester requiring them to be alert, aware, and responsive to new needs as they arose.

After proposal approval, students began agreed-upon tasks in the organization, hence entering the system. The consultative process involved interviewing, shadowing, and observing in order to familiarize themselves with organizational structures and processes related to the identified needs.

STAGE THREE: DIAGNOSIS

During the diagnosis stage, student consultants gathered information, defined the problems/issues, and generated possible solutions (Dougherty, 1999). The definition of problems and generation of possible solutions were for academic purposes only. Students were required to submit this assignment only to the professor. If students felt comfortable presenting their ideas to their on-site supervisor, however, the professor encouraged them to do so.

While most information was gathered through observation, some was gained through informational interviews with various employees. To record their experiences, students submitted intermittent journals that provided a log of hours worked, detailed record keeping of

all interactions with the organization and the student, and analysis and synthesis of their individual thoughts, observations, and experiences during each journal interval.

After serving their organizations for a few weeks, students were instructed to engage in individual library research of the issues they were observing. Each student wrote an annotated bibliography of a minimum of five peer-reviewed articles and books that directly pertained to these organizational issues. Each student approached this assignment independently in order to focus on issues of individual importance, thus inhibiting redundancy of sources.

During the last quarter of the semester, each team collaborated to write a case study that focused on one particular organizational problem encountered during service-learning. In this situation, case studies involved organizational behavior, leadership, or management topics. However, the use of student-written cases is applicable to various disciplines, as long as cases scenarios relevant to course topics. Through the written case study assignment, students demonstrated their critical thinking skills by analyzing a real world situation (see Footnote 2). The issues included in the case studies were specific in nature, and were limited to one page with single-spacing. Student teams also submitted three discussion questions for their case studies along with possible answers or solutions.

On designated dates, each team gave a 15 minute case presentation. Then, the team facilitated a discussion/question and answer session meant to gather feedback on intervention possibilities. A copy of the case was provided to each student in the class, and class members were asked to respond creatively to each case presentation with suggestions. As a result of the case study presentations and discussions, each team ended up with a well-researched account of the issues and was ready to develop theoretically substantive final papers. In addition, other students in the class were tuned in to issues going on in service organizations other than their own.

STAGE FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION

Although implementation in the organization was not part of the assignment, students were required to formally evaluate their individual experiences in a 10 to 12 page paper focusing on description, analysis, and articulation of learning outcomes. The structure of this paper was based on Ash and Clayton's (2004) concept of articulated learning, a reflection process based on theories of Kolb (1984) and Dewey (1910/2008), which maximizes learning and refines reflective and critical thinking skills by allowing students to explain their experiences and observations in various ways (Ash & Clayton). The description component asks for an explanation of where the service-learning took place, who was involved, what was accomplished, why it was important, and how it was done (Ash and Clayton). The analysis component involves a consideration of how participation in this service project further informed the student's assessment and understanding of his or her own managerial and leadership strengths and weaknesses, how the service learning was related and applied to contemporary issues within the field of organizational behavior and leadership, how the study of the course content assisted the student in contributing to the resolution of the organizational need, and how it related to other structural elements in the organization or community (Ash and Clayton). Finally, the articulation component entails a delineation of the service-learning as considered through personal and civic responsibilities and requires the student to write from a personal perspective through consideration of his or her feelings, assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses (Ash and Clayton).

As a team, students are also expected to write an implementation plan. This plan includes recommended steps to be taken to address the issue or problem stated in the case study. The plans are based on external research, suggestions form other classmates during the case facilitation, and organizational behavior and leadership theory and material learned in class and from textbooks.

STAGE FIVE: DISENGAGEMENT

During the disengagement stage, student teams evaluated the consultation process, planned post-consultation matters, reduced involvement, and terminated (Dougherty, 1999). Organizational supervisors were asked to assess each team member in areas such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, organizational effectiveness skills, basic work habits, and character attributes. These evaluations helped ensure that work was of high quality, completed as needed, and done in a consistent and reliable manner.

As the semester came to a close, students disengaged from the service organizations after post-consultation matters such as completion and delivery of final products, attendance at final meetings or events, and completion of supervisor assessment reports were completed. Students were encouraged to thank their service supervisors for their generosity and time, both in person and in writing. Complete termination from service organizations occurred with many students, but some maintained contact for future service-learning opportunities or act as liaisons for new student teams the following semester. This carry-over of service displayed student camaraderie, extended campus-community relationships, and continued the service-learning spirit.

CRITICAL THINKING ENHANCEMENT THROUGH STUDENT REPORTS

The enhancement of critical thinking was demonstrated through students' papers and journals. Entries revealed that through the consultative nature of the project, students realized the importance of trust, respect, and responsibility in organizational settings. They recognized the significance of their actions and that their hard work resulted in changed organizational processes, which increased their confidence in their own professional abilities. Students knew that they were also the learners, and that it was important to take criticism and direction from others. Table 3 systematically displays observed critical thinking outcomes.

One student proclaimed, "The knowledge I gained from this experience was priceless. I had a mental model going into this situation that my team was going to be looked at as the typical college students looking to get service hours done. The mental model was far from the truth. I learned that respecting others' ideas and giving people a chance to speak their opinion is how respect is gained" (G. Benson, personal communication, November 23, 2007).

Papers displayed that students emerged from this project with the ability to question assumptions, their own and those of others, and to recognize, respect, and analyze various perspectives. A student and her team gained experience in a multicultural workplace, and were able to develop knowledge of how members in this family-run business operated, and communicated (J. Rehm, personal communication, November 20, 2007). The student then conducted her own research on Middle Eastern communication styles and wrote an excellent compilation of bibliographic annotations from various peer-reviewed sources.

Another student talked about his own prior assumptions about himself and others and how, after completing this project, he became aware of the source of his own motivations and the value of perspectives of others (J. Iosso, personal communication, November 27, 2007). Therefore, students learned that having a bit of humility contributed to the development of active listening and critical thinking development.

Students reflected on the significance of listening, respect for others, and their own work ethics, and confirmed that service-learning through consultation gave them real-world experience and contacts useful in future career endeavors.

Observed Critical Thinking Outcomes Table 3

Critical Thinking Component	Observed Student Outcomes
Identifying and questioning assumptions	Student quote in final paper: "I had a mental model going into this situation that my team was going to be looked at as the typical college students looking to get service hours done. The mental model was far from the truth."
	Working in a team, one student realized that her individual perspectives were not universal. Reflections in various journals indicated specific growth in the areas of self-awareness, recognition of assumptions, and acceptance of differences in others.
Seeking a multiplicity of alternatives	Student quote in final paper: "I learned that respecting others' ideas and giving people a chance to speak their opinion is how respect is gained."
	After encountering communication problems while working with a foreign family at a Saturday morning market, a student conducted her own research on Middle Eastern communication styles and wrote an excellent compilation of bibliographic annotations from various peer-reviewed sources.
	Student quote in journal: "I became aware of the sources of my own motivations and the value of perspectives of others."
	Several students displayed in their journals and final papers that having a bit of humility contributed to the development of active listening, which is needed when seeking alternatives.
	Sharing written case studies and facilitating class discussion allowed students to collaborate on ideas, gaining alternative interpretations, and solutions that the immediate group may not have encountered.
	By being required to facilitation discussion, students learned that tolerance and openness are key. While some students failed to allow others to have a voice, instead forcing their own opinions, failure in the classroom is a safe way to learn that this does not allow for gathering all alternatives.
Making social and intellectual connections	Social connections were exemplified through student collaboration with one another and organizational and community members.
	A student and her team gained experience in a multicultural workplace and were able to develop knowledge of how members in this family-run business operated and communicated.
	In writing their own case studies, students shared intellectual connections with others in the class. Previously, service-learning in this class was done individually and not shared, thus students only learned from their own experiences.
	Case studies were contextually based, so each group could communicate the significance of the context of the particular organization they served while simultaneously relating their experiences to course material, creating intellectual links
Fostering active involvement with the community	Active involvement in the community was displayed when students contacted and worked with their service organizations. Examples of organizations included:
	Saturday Morning Market, a compilation of vendors in downtown Saint Petersburg Midtown Project, an endeavor to help small businesses in order to revive a particular section of town Tampa Bay Watch, protection and restoration of the Tampa Bay estuary Louise Graham Regeneration Center, a recycling center that provides training and jobs to developmentally disabled clients. Southeaster Guide Dogs, seeing eye dog training facility
	In order to encourage continuity of involvement, team members were encouraged to meet with the following semester students. Former students thus passed on control of their project, showed pride and passion in their work, motivating new students to take ownership of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

The author learned lessons regarding disclosing results, student responsibility, service continuity, time constraints, team formation, organizational socialization, and peer assessments.

DISCLOSING RESULTS TO SERVICE **ORGANIZATIONS**

Students were encouraged (but not required) to present case studies and implementation plans to supervisors and decision-makers at service organizations. However, due to the candid nature of the reports, students were urged to seek counsel with the professor before disclosing information. For example, if students find that the root problems in their organization stem from leadership or communication deficiencies in their direct supervisor, it would not be in their best interest to disclose this information. Even though students were considered to be professional consultants in the classroom, viewpoints of personnel at service organizations varied in terms of how student input was valued.

HOLDING STUDENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR **MISTAKES**

"In collaborative learning, accountability for learning shifts from the instructor and is transformed into a collective object of the student groups" (Heim, et al., 2005, p. 433). It is inevitable that a student or team will err or not follow through with agreed upon responsibilities. Nonetheless, this author learned that these occurrences can be turned into developmental experiences for students. Students were required to own the consequences of their actions, leading to the realization that lack of dependability can have ramifications beyond themselves. The professor learned that prompting students to understand that their service work was significant to the host organization and that irresponsibility had negative systemic consequences was beneficial to students' experiential learning outcomes.

CONTINUITY OF SERVICE

In order to increase continuity of relationships with organizations, team members were encouraged to meet with the following semester students to pass on their knowledge. Former students thus passed on control of their project, showed their pride and passion in their work, and motivated new students to take ownership of the project. Continuation of service was an effective way to reduce start up time for students, professors, service supervisors, and other entities involved.

FITTING SERVICE-LEARNING INTO A TIGHT **SCHEDULE**

Class lecture time always seems to be in short supply. However, professors can arrange and design this project so that only a few full class sessions are dedicated to it, with a scattering of additional minutes throughout the remainder of the semester. The majority of the class time dedicated to this project was during the pre-entry and diagnosis stages, and additional class time occupied by the project was integrated with existing course material. In addition, students did much of the work outside of class meetings. For example, many of the case study analyses were completed as homework assignments, and case discussions were integrated with regularly scheduled material. Case studies need to involve scenarios relevant to course topics.

STUDENTS FORMING THEIR OWN GROUPS

Professors may consider allowing students to form their own groups based on service-learning interest. While this allows students to join together based on a specific service appeal, one disadvantage is that groups may be too homogeneous. This may obstruct the occurrence of differences in opinion that are essential for critical thinking and problem-solving development. Students also might bond on basis of friendship rather than true interests. However, these disadvantages may be offset by the fact that, due to the consultative nature of this project, students will inevitably face issues unrelated to their area of interest, thus bringing about differences in opinions and assumptions that are so crucial.

REQUIRING PEER EVALUATIONS

Although most team members functioned well together, some incidences of social loafing, or the tendency for people to reduce effort when working with groups (Robbins & Judge, 2008), were reported. In order to avoid this, students should be informed that their peers will evaluate them on team tasks such as reliability, conscientiousness, professionalism, and attitude and that the peer evaluations will affect their final project grade.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this paper, using a consultative pre-entry, involving entry, diagnosis. implementation, and disengagement, along with effective reflection assignments, enhances service-learning for thirdyear college students. This approach intensifies critical thinking development and enhances application of academic and theoretical material to service-learning. It also persuades students to actively observe, question, and learn, and to display higher-level thinking, make civic connections, and change their perspectives.

From this experience, students become conscious of the fact that their work has structural implications, develop empathy, question assumptions, and search for alternative resolutions to problems. This guides students toward making the social and intellectual connections needed to understand their place in the world of service, community, and organization.

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