

“Service-Learning” and “Community-Engaged Learning”: Toward Practical Applications at SUJCD

Maria Lupas

Abstract

This paper examines some definitions and uses of the terms service-learning and community-engaged learning. It draws on qualitative observations conducted on site at Portland State University in the context of a short-term training program for community-engaged learning professionals and on course registration documentation from Sophia University Junior College Division (SUJCD) and school publications concerning volunteering and service-learning at SUJCD. It argues that both service-learning and community-engaged learning cover similar realities and suggests that the techniques identified as good practices by theorists of service-learning and of community-engaged learning are largely applicable in the context of Sophia University Junior College Division.

Introduction: Service-Learning and Community-Engaged Learning

Of the two terms, service-learning and community-engaged learning, service-learning has a longer history of use. Service-learning as a term was vehiculated largely thanks to the creation of Campus Compact in 1985. The founding members, university presidents, saw the need for the university as an institution to take the step of adopting service-learning in order to fulfill the university’s mission of forming citizens and not only creating knowledge.¹

The term “service” by itself had been used in the United States in the 1960s by organizations with Christian roots for whom the term “service” expressed faith-inspired attitudes of help toward persons in need.

Most theorists of service-learning agree that service-learning belongs to a larger category of learning methods called experiential learning. Experiential learning has its roots in the work of John Dewey (1859-1952), and common elements of all experiential learning include (1) concrete experience, (2) reflection on that experience, (3) the development of abstract concepts based on that reflection, (4) testing the concepts in new situations (Jacoby 6). The four elements circle back in spiral fashion with number four leading back to a new number one. While some forms of experiential learning begin

with the formulation of concepts and then proceed to test them and then observe the experience and reflect on it, service-learning tends to begin with the concrete experience (Jacoby 6).

Among the theorists who have defined and refined the term service-learning, Andrew Furco proposes to define service-learning by mapping it on a spectrum of experiential learning activities based on the beneficiary of the activities. On one side of the spectrum the beneficiary is the recipient of the service. These are volunteer activities that benefit the person or persons who are the target of the service. On the other side of the spectrum are field work experiences where the doer of the work is benefitting the most. Service-learning strikes a balance where both the receiver and doer of the action benefit equally (Furco 1996).

Barbara Jacoby, a leading expert who has published extensively on service-learning, offers the following definition of service-learning: “I define service-learning as a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes” (1-2). Jacoby gives a large place in her definition to critical reflection. While the term “learning” already suggests education and the word “service” already implies a person or group whose needs the learning activities tries to meet, nowhere in the term “service-learning” is critical reflection directly implied. It is the experiential learning model that demands that there be a reflection upon the experience in order for the experience to engender learning.

While some earlier advocates of service-learning may have stressed the action performed for the community, Jacoby emphasizes reflection and dedicates one of the nine chapters in her book, *Service-Learning Essentials*, to critical reflection.

Barbara Jacoby bases much of the advice she offers in *Service-Learning Essentials* on the ten good practices developed by the National Society for Experimental Education, known as the Wingspread principles (Jacoby 6). The first of ten principles deals with the action itself which should be for the common good. The second principle deals with the critical reflection upon the action. The third, fourth, and fifth principles deal with the goals of the service learning, the input of the community partners who are in need in defining their own needs, and the clear articulation of the responsibilities of each of the parties involved. The sixth, seventh, and eighth principles deal with structures put in place to allow the experience to happen: the structure should make it possible to recognize changing needs and adapt to them, the institution should put resources into supporting the service-learning, and there should be processes in place to train, monitor,

support, and recognize the actions and people involved. The last two principles deal with time commitments of those involved which should preferably be flexible while it is also recommended that the program as a whole be accessible to diverse populations.

Community Engagement

An important definition of the term “community engagement” or “community-engaged learning” is given by the Carnegie Foundation. The Carnegie Foundation has been central in creating a classification of universities in the United States that embraces and describes the very different types of institutions and realities that are covered by words such as “university,” “college,” and “post-secondary education,” and “higher education.” The foundation has also gathered considerable data on these institutions. In 2010 Carnegie began an optional, voluntary classification label called “community engagement.” Carnegie defines community engagement as a collaboration between the institution of higher education and the larger community. The essence of the definition focuses on the partnership between the university or college and a community. According to Carnegie, the goal of this collaboration or partnership is “to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.” A closer look at the definition shows the recurrence of the words “partnership,” “relationship,” and “reciprocity,” and seems to suggest a will to get away from hierarchical relations where giving and the giver are positioned higher than receiving and the receiver. The term “community engagement” consciously sets a tone of equality between the educational institution and the community. Neither is higher than the other and both are supposed to benefit. This is a possible correction to the term “service” which can be misinterpreted as implying inequality between the party doing the service and the party receiving it.

In 2015, the number of institutions recognized with the community engaged label by the Carnegie Foundation reached 240. The application to receive the label contains the Carnegie Foundation’s description of good practices with regards to community engagement. These good practices are suggested by questions (the document framework) that try to help the institution document the existence or non-existence of good practices with respect to the institution itself, the curriculum, and community partnerships.

A first set of questions on the 2020 Carnegie application seeks to determine if the community engagement is institutionalized or, in the words of the application, it

assesses the existence of “Foundational Indicators and Institutional Commitment” for community engagement on the part of the university which is applying to be classified as “engaged.” Among these indicators of engagement are the inclusion of engagement with the community in the institution’s mission or vision statement, the institution’s hiring and tenure promotion policies, the institution’s reward systems and the institution’s development support systems, as well as the existence of institutional mechanisms to communicate with the community, invest finances in relationship-building with the community, and record/assess the engagement with the community. The application form itself politely but clearly advises that if there is an insufficient institutional support for community engagement on the part of the applicant institution, that institution should reconsider submitting the application.

Effectiveness of Service-Learning and Community-Engaged Learning

In a 2008 report for the Association of American Colleges and Universities, George Kuh identified ten high-impact educational practices, including service-learning, which the research demonstrated were “beneficial for college students from many backgrounds” and demonstrated increased rates “of student retention and student engagement.”² He called them High-Impact Practices or HIPs. The updated online version of the list on the association website uses both terms: service learning and community-based learning, to cover the same reality.³ Kuh’s definition of service-learning/community-based learning designates a course which has a field-based learning experience with a community partner. He adds that the program should include both moments where students apply their classroom knowledge to real-world settings and moments where they reflect in the classroom on the service experience that took place. According to Kuh, the benefit of such programs is that “giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.”⁴

For community colleges and two-year colleges in the United States, a report published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, intitled “A Matter of Degrees,” identifies thirteen practices that contribute to community college student success.⁵ One of these is “experiential learning outside the classroom” a term which, as we have seen, expresses several of the elements that define service-learning/community-engaged learning. Service-learning is a form of experiential learning and it includes an element outside the classroom. Service-learning is therefore particularly of use to

students in two-year colleges for meeting the challenges of success in college-life given the specific needs of those enrolled in two-year programs.

The specific needs of students enrolled in two-year programs may include acquiring skill and competency to compete on the job market in a short, two-year time frame, the need to maximize campus time in socializing and in academics due to the start of job searching half-way through the curriculum, and the various financial and personal challenges that make students opt for two-year instead of four-year programs in the first place.

Service-learning or community engagement?

Given the background on the use of service-learning and community, how should institutions choose the term that they will use? Jacoby recommends that institutions pick the term that best fits their history and needs. This advice has solid grounds in the theory of both service-learning and community engagement. In as much as both service-learning and community engagement stress the importance of relationships over unilateralism, and in so far as relationships are about people and institutions with their own unique histories and identities which should be able to express themselves, it is important that there be a good fit between the institutional identity and history and the choice of calling the program service-learning or community engagement. Institutions that are at ease with using the term “service” with its faith-based traditions can comfortably use service-learning while institutions whose roots are in civic responsibility may be more comfortable calling their program community-engaged learning.

The U.S.-based Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, for example, uses the term “service-learning professionals” for the affinity group within their organization.⁶ This fits with the faith-based identity of the institutions that belong to it. By extension, Sophia University Junior College Division also easily uses the term “service-learning” which fits well with its mission and vision as a Jesuit institution of higher learning.

Portland State University

An intramural university team research grant for a project intitled “Methods and Evaluation of Service-Learning,” permitted a group of faculty and staff from SUJCD including myself to take part in a workshop at Portland State University in the fall of 2018. As early as 1994 Portland State reshaped its general education curriculum around community engagement. Notably the undergraduate curriculum requires students to take a total of 45 credits in “university studies,” a program designed for engagement with the community and whose courses are spread across the four years

of the undergraduate university experience. The program has four stated learning goals: critical inquiry and thinking, communication, respect for the diversity of human experience, and social responsibility.⁷ The first three undergraduate years includes classes with a “soft” community engagement experience while the fourth-year capstone course often involves a “extended community-based learning project.”⁸

The Portland State University programs interested us for several reasons. First, the programs demonstrated deep institutional reforms that fit well with the university’s founding mission and vision. Second, in their more than twenty years of experience, the Portland State University programs had developed by trial and error a set of best practices for community engagement which we wanted to compare with our own practices. Finally, as a comprehensive university offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, Portland State University’s experience was based on a broad range of programs including several staffed by native Japanese faculty and staff or by faculty and staff who had experience working in the Japanese context and could more easily bridge some of the intercultural challenges in adapting practices overseas.

In the mid-1990s when Portland State University undertook a deep structural reform which fit with its founding mission, it made a radical change in the university’s culture because it changed not only the general education curriculum but also hiring practices and institutions organization. It “elevated community engagement as a central ethos for the university and its faculty and students. Promotion and tenure criteria were changed to reward civic engagement. New core curricula were developed to ensure students spent considerable time outside the classroom on community projects and service.”⁹ We were interested in the process and result of reforms that fit institutional mission and history.

The Portland State University (PSU) workshop gave us several important takeaways. The first takeaway was the importance of team building within the group. Over the course of five days and with several sessions each day, the twenty-one participants of the workshop were often invited to introduce themselves. This was done in various ways and facilitated by prompts that were appropriate to the activity we were about to do. For example, a workshop on community engagement in a class dealing with food insecurity invited participants to introduce themselves with their name and the name of an item of food they always buy when they go food shopping. Activities on getting to know each other filled a proportionately high amount of time in the PSU workshop. We understood from this that community building needs to take place within the group and not just with the community partner with whom that group is going to be working.

Another takeaway concerned the ending of the workshop. Given the limited amount of time for the whole workshop, the participants spent a large proportion of that time on the closing celebrations. Three celebrations were built into the program: one at the home of one of the instructors with good food and a chance to meet and have a question and answer session with Dr. Judith Ramalay who spearheaded the PSU reforms as university president in the 1990s, another celebration was designed as a poster presentation and reception with administrators and faculty of PSU who listened to the various participants’ poster presentations while enjoying some refreshments, and a final workshop diploma-awarding ceremony closed all the festivities. This emphasis on interacting with the various actors in a celebratory mood reenforced how much of community-engaged learning revolved around building relationships. The celebrations acknowledged the importance of the work and the learning being done precisely by saying it is so important that it needs a celebration or even two or three.

A third and fourth takeaway were about telling our stories and reflecting on experience. All participants were invited to already bring a poster explaining their own institution’s history and the current state of our institution’s community engagement. At the celebratory reception at the end of the program we added to those original posters, elements from the workshop experience that we thought were particularly applicable to our own institution. In doing so, the focus is on acknowledging an institution’s identity and the importance that identity plays in community engagement. Reforms and programs that are to be taken up are not one-size-fits-all solutions but rather should be evaluated in terms of the good fit with the institution. This presupposes the openness of the institution to change and adapt in order to better meet its vision and mission. The PSU staff and faculty then gave us feedback on our new posters.

A fifth takeaway concerned the use of scaffolds to ensure high-quality outcomes. Scaffolds can be defined as structures that support a project or goal and ensure that progress follows a certain course. In the case of the PSU community-based learning training session, scaffolded activities included worksheets with lists of four or five characteristics of good program design with space next to each characteristic to reflect and write down how our home institutions applied each of those characteristics.

A sixth takeaway from the PSU training program concerned the role of community partners in syllabus and course design. During the training we were allowed to sit in on the classroom component of a course with a high degree of community engagement and were shown the syllabus for the course. The instructor advised us to clearly identify and describe the community partner on the course syllabus and to introduce the community

partner to the students early on in the course. As much as possible the community partner should give regular feedback to the students about the community activity being performed. We were able to observe one such feedback session when we went to watch students doing their activity on site with the community partner. At the end of the day the program manager of the center where students were acting as guides gave the students feedback on how they had handled various situations during the day.

An indirect takeaway was the chance to use the facilities of the PSU Office of Academic Innovation. The office promotes the development of various kinds of innovation including community engagement. Through its staff, the office offers support to faculty trying to implement community engagement by offering consultations and resources including help for project design and implementation, and facilitating potential matches with community partners. The design of the office itself also sparked our desire to get creative: many of the walls served as floor-to-ceiling writable whiteboards and the furniture and walls were designed to be highly mobile.

Sophia University Junior College Division

Sophia University Junior College Division which had until 2012 used the name Sophia Junior College has a decades-long tradition of trying to reach out beyond the school community. A 1981 issue of *Sophia Junior College News*, shows the deep-rooted concern for the global community already present in the campus culture. Page four prints an article by a student group called the Galilea Circle which states that as early as 1979 they were collecting funds and making regular donations to the Christian Child Welfare Association (CCWA) to support a child in Iloilo City in the Philippines (Galilea Circle, 4).

With regards to the local community, in the early years of the junior college's existence, from 1973 to 1987, its involvement with Hadano City was notably through the activities of the sisters of the Company of Mary Our Lady and the students in the dormitory adjacent to the junior college campus and run by the sisters.¹⁰ Faculty from the junior college had also been offering courses to the wider community as early as 1982 in what was originally called the Extension program and later called the Community College.¹¹ The subjects offered were mostly language courses especially in English and Spanish from the beginner to the advanced level and more recently courses in supporting learners of Japanese or teaching English to young learners.

The twenty years from 1987 to roughly 2007 were particularly marked by the In-Home Volunteer Tutoring program.¹² One of the driving forces of the program, Rosa María Cortés Gómez, ODN, explains that the program was volunteer-based and

volunteer-driven meaning that the emphasis was first on giving time and desiring to help and that only secondly came a formal training in how to effectively help. The volunteer spirit was driving the program and the means to put that spirit into practice were found and evaluated by the criteria of that spirit.¹³ With regards to school administration, the Volunteer In-Home Tutoring program was an extracurricular activity attached to the school Campus Ministry.

In 2008 Sophia Junior College shifted from volunteer-driven programs to adopting a service-learning model. Whereas before 2008, the In-Home Volunteer Tutoring program was separate from the school course curriculum and used the office of Campus Ministry for its material support, in 2008, classes at the junior college could be labelled as having a connection to service-learning and space for a Service-Learning Center was designated on the school campus. The Service-Learning Center was inaugurated in November 2008 and included a large space with highly mobile tables and chairs, computers, space for offices and for a resource library.¹⁴

With respect to the integration of service-learning into the school curriculum, the first registration handbook to mark the relationship of a given class to service-learning was from 2009 and the indicator was marked at the top of each course syllabus in the handbook. The possible indicators were A, B, and C, with A indicating a strong relationship to service-learning, B indicating a moderate relationship to service-learning, and C indicating a slight relationship to service-learning. Classes with no relationship to service-learning showed no indicator. Each class syllabus connected to service-learning also specified the service-learning content of that particular course. For example, a seminar on linguistics with a focus on children’s acquisition of English as a second language might have an A indicator and the specific content would say that the course would be helpful for anyone wanting to support children learning English or Japanese. Some courses indicated the specific service activity that was connected to the course. Another class such as French I might have a C indicator and the specific content might say that learning French would introduce cultural differences and ways of thinking that would sensitize those wanting to do service as well as equip them with language skills for communicating with French speakers. These indicators continued to be marked on individual syllabus pages for all registration handbooks up to and including the 2013 school year. The registration handbooks from 2014 to 2017 had a separate page with the overview of all the course offerings and their various indicators including the service-learning indicator. Individual course syllabi might then specify the specific service-learning content. The level of connection to service-learning was

left to the individual instructor who self-identified the course as A, B, or C level. For these self-identification, the guidelines included evaluating how the course nurtured in students (1) the spirit of service to others in accordance with Christian humanism, (2) skills and knowledge necessary to embody the Sophia ethos of “for others, with others,” (3) the capacity to grow into an adult member of society, (4) active social involvement as an independent-minded member of global society, and (5) a positive attitude toward contributing to society through involvement in language-related teaching activities in the local community. 2017 was the last year to use the A, B, C indicator system for course syllabi.

From the 2019 academic year, what was originally begun as a non-credit guidance to introduce the service-learning system to students at SUJCD and had developed over the years into a seven-week course, the Service-Learning introductory course became a credit-earning course. Four other course offerings that involved service-learning also changed their course coding in 2019 to reflect the service-learning component and received the service-learning label for registration. These courses had previously either had a practicum component as is the case with the Japanese-language teaching course which was already being fulfilled in conjunction with programs such as “College Friend” recognized by Hadano City’s Board of Education and the municipal office, or they existed as faculty-led volunteer opportunities for students who had completed the then non-credit service-learning introductory course (“Community Friend”).

For institutional reasons, when the introductory course became a credit course, the main facilitator needed to be a faculty member and all the speakers, including the community partners, needed to be approved by the department as qualified to speak about their specialized fields. The community partners included personnel from the Hadano City Municipal Office and from the Hadano City Board of Education.

Other lecturers for the introductory course spoke about the school’s faith-based vision and mission and rooted the service-learning experience in the school’s founding Christian tradition of love for neighbor. This multiplied the opportunities that students had to reflect upon the school’s mission which already were institutionalized in the mandatory philosophical anthropology course for first-year students and other elective course offerings. Faculty specializing in linguistics and education gave lectures on best practices for supporting language learners.

Toward Good Service-Learning Practices at SUJCD

At SUJCD, the introduction of service learning programs in 2008 was generally well

received both within the university community and externally by the Japanese Ministry of Education which gave the program a “Good Practice” award in 2008 (Heisei 20).¹⁵ In explaining its decision to designate the program as a “Good Practice” the ministry commended how the program was a timely adaptation of the junior college’s founding mission and vision of training students in internationality, Christian Humanism, and language competence. As we have seen, service-learning is particularly suited to the educational needs of two-year college students and so finds fertile ground for expansion at Sophia University Junior College Division.

When looking back upon the take-aways from the Portland State University training on community-engaged learning, we can see that Sophia University Junior College Division is on track for institutionalizing service-learning with best practices. Service-learning courses at SUJCD often do put into practice community building within the group doing activities. Group work is a big part of the multiple “Friend” activities and students are trained to work in groups from the introduction course. With regards to celebrations, the Service-Learning Center does organize Christmas parties for various activities and students who have completed Service-Learning activities are invited to return for “brush-up” courses that are more festive than normal courses. There is however room to innovate on how to celebrate and recognize more the activities and community building that is being done. Concerning reflection upon experience, service-learning courses all have reflection activities often at the end of every meeting. There may be room to innovate on how to tell our stories both on the side of the students doing service-learning and the learners who receive the students. Creating appropriate scaffolds to achieve high quality service-learning activities remains challenging. The task is unique to each institution, situation and project and involves training, planning and some trial and error. The integration of community partners into the course design and syllabus takes place during the one-credit introduction to service-learning course where early on high-ranking members of the city office and board of education come to teach entire lessons in the course. Finally, the Service-Learning Center itself as a hub for activities is a welcome and welcoming addition to the campus. In the future it may be a resource also for more program design in implementing service-learning on a larger scale.

End Notes

- ¹ <https://compact.org/who-we-are/history/>
- ² <https://www.aacu.org/node/4084>. The list grew to include eleven practices in 2017. See Kuh, George, “Foreward” in Eynon, Bret, and Laura M. Gambino. *High Impact EPortfolio Practice: A Catalyst for Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*. Stylus, 2017, p. vii.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Center for Community College Student Engagement. *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*. The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program, 2012, https://www.ccsse.org/docs/Matter_of_Degrees.pdf.
- ⁶ See <https://www.ajcunet.edu/conferences>
- ⁷ Wortham-Galvin, B. D., et al., editors. *Let Knowledge Serve the City*. Greenleaf Publishing, 2016, p. 22.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 24
- ⁹ Ibid., p. ix.
- ¹⁰ See for example some of the activities of Sr. Maria Maldonado with blood drives for local hospitals in “Hadano no Shizen mo Hito mo Daisuki desu.” p. 2.
- ¹¹ Jōchi Gakuin, p. 115.
- ¹² See Lupas, Maria, and Sachie Miyazaki, 2020.
- ¹³ Cortés Gómez, p. 127, “Sophia Junior College started in April 1973. It would not be an exaggeration to state that a volunteer spirit was already present at that time on our campus. Although everything was new, there was the Sophia Spirit pervading the atmosphere. One could feel the long tradition that always sustains it – Christian Humanism based on Christ’s life and teaching.”
- ¹⁴ Jōchi Gakuin, p. 132.
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/kaikaku/gakusei/08073030/017.htm.

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