



Dialogue

Creating the Next 60 Years

Project Report

December 7, 2013

ICU 60th Anniversary Project

The Significance and Future of Service Learning in Context of Japanese
Education: Reflection on Service Learning in Higher Education



60th Anniversary Project

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY



December 7, 2013
International Conference Room
2F Kyoshi Togasaki Memorial Dialogue House
International Christian University

Dr. Robert G. Bringle is Professor Emeritus at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI.) He served as executive director of the IUPUI Center for Service and Learning from 1994 to 2012, and his work resulted in a number of service learning and community programs being implemented. One of his research focuses has been in service learning and civic engagement, which puts him in a good position to make suggestions on how service learning could be improved in the future.

Bringle was invited to the International Christian University (ICU) to give his lecture on December 7th, 2013, during which he presented the most basic – and potentially most necessary – foundation on which to build a service learning program: a definition for the term “service learning” itself.

His definition may have been somewhat controversial, but what saw no argument was Bringle’s claim that there needs to be more focus on service learning in education, which is why he decided to create a single definition for the term on which further work can be based.



After a short introduction thanking ICU and its various staff and faculty for inviting him to give the talk this day, Bringle moved right into the definition of service learning he developed with his colleague Julie Hatcher, the present executive director of IUPUI's Center for Service and Learning.

“Service learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students:

- A) Participate in mutually identified and organized service activities that benefit the community, and
- B) Reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation for the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.”

Bringle believes that each part of this definition is essential to creating a program that truly embodies the ideals of service learning. Before going into greater detail, Bringle pointed out his belief that not all community-based instruction can be called service learning. For Bringle, while “community-based learning” is valuable in its own right, it is not the same as “service learning.”

Community-based learning encompasses such activities as fieldwork in museum studies or anthropology, cooperative programs or internships through companies and other organizations, professional experience such as hospital clinical programs and student teaching, and of course, it also includes service learning. But by necessity, while service learning is one aspect of community-based learning, not all community-based learning can be called service learning. Bringle explained how his definition highlights four critical components that are necessary to a program being a true service learning program. It must be course-based and credit-bearing. It must involve participation in mutually identified and organized service activities that benefit the community. It must include student reflection regarding their activities (as a key component). Finally, it must provide students with an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

1. Course-based and credit-bearing

The first of these components requires that a service learning program be course-based, and that it award credit based upon how much the student learns during the program.

As Bringle himself stated,

“Volunteer service programs are good, worthwhile programs that can have clearly defined learning objectives, but if they don’t have assessment of those learning outcomes, and don’t result in course credits that are part of a degree program, they should not be called service learning.”

Bringle explained how service learning has made many inroads into the educational curriculum in the U.S. on “a course by course basis.” Faculty members have been encouraged to include service learning elements in their own courses, and departments are also getting in on the act by offering full courses and other programs. These programs include:

- First year success seminars to help student adjust to college.
- Themed learning communities
- Gateway courses (i.e. large enrollment courses with a service component)
- Peer mentoring
- Capstone Courses
- Service Internships
- Participatory action research that helps the community

As Bringle put it, these initiatives have the advantage of being developed on a curricular, organized level. Also, as they are being developed on the departmental level, they “can think of sequences of courses, not just single courses.” He explained how IUPUI goes about encouraging the adoption of such service learning courses, before explaining to the audience why he believes this definition of service learning is so important.

It is not simply a desire to create a definition that excludes other programs. Bringle truly believes that, even beyond the benefit such programs offer the community, service learning that is built upon an academic foundation is one of the best pedagogical systems available.

Bringle returned to a statement he made in 2011 to illustrate this point.



If a medical researcher discovered a cure for cancer or other serious illness, there would be great enthusiasm about the development, and a sense of urgency for publicizing its availability to the benefit of as many patients as possible. By analogy, what if higher education identified a pedagogical approach that had educational outcomes that are:

Extensive – offering a broad array of outcomes

Robust – appropriate to a wide range of conditions and students.

Transformational – producing deep, long-lasting change

And

Distinctive – producing educationally unique change.

I will speculate that International Service Learning is the most powerful pedagogy that exists in higher education, and that it is the best pedagogy for preparing students for the 21st century...

2. Participate in mutually identified and organized service activities that benefit the community

The second component of service learning is one that Bringle believes is one of the most important, though it may seem to be obvious at first glance as essentially all definitions of the term “service learning” involve participants providing a service to the community. However, according to Bringle, the important element of this component is not the implementation of service activities, but rather the provision of “mutually identified and organized” service activities.

Because of the necessity of working with the community not just in or on behalf of, the nature of the relationships is a central defining characteristic dimension of service learning in particular. Robert Siekmann, one pioneer of American service learning, recommended that in good service learning, ‘All teach, all learn, all serve, all are served.’

The predominant “Campus-Community” characterization, of only two partners making up a service learning program, is too simplistic for Bringle. He and his colleagues created what they call the SOFAR model, which expands the partnership from two to five partners. He admitted that even with five, the model cannot represent all stakeholders, but it does include the most relevant. The SOFAR model is made up of: Students, community Organizations, Faculty, Administrators, and community Residents.

Bringle believes that the relationships between these five stakeholders should be “guided by democratic principles,” a definition for which he borrowed from John Saltmarsh:



Democratic processes should be fair, inclusive, and participatory.

Bringle pointed out that the term “reciprocity” is sometimes used to imply a relationship that is “transactional.” Transactional relationships tend to be short-term and project-based, and allow for all stakeholders to benefit. Transactional relationships are both beneficial and quite common, but Bringle pointed out that service learning should be about building a “higher-order” partnership that is “transformational.”

Transformational relationships allow all partners to grow and change because of the “deeper commitments” involved in such a program. Such programs tend to be dynamic, long-term, and issue-based rather than project-based, which allows for the creation of new systems and new, or sometimes merged, identities.

Bringle believes that this is a “picture of service learning that is complex, multifaceted and challenging. It suggests that there are multiple persons to consider, several ways to approach each of the relationships, and particular goals and outcomes that each person can have.”



He also stated that this model of service learning allows everyone, not just the student, to learn in a transformational way, providing the opportunity for all

stakeholders to take part in the issue identification and planning processes for service learning programs in a community.

3. Reflection upon one’s activities

Returning to the definition of service learning, Bringle explained to the attendees that the third necessary component is “reflection”. However, the idea of reflection cannot simply be the writing of “open-ended journals or...descriptive papers on their experience.” These forms of reflection are not “structured around learning objectives,” and are thereby “not good reflection.” Reflection must be a key component of a service learning program, and “good reflection” requires students to make the connection between their activity in the community and their academic learning objectives, and from there to “civic learning objectives and their own personal growth.” It also requires assessment of what was learned by an instructor.

Bringle provided an example of a structured method of reflection called the “DEAL Model of Critical Reflection.” The model requires students to:

1. Describe their experience

2. Examine their experience in regards to their personal, civic, and academic learning objectives
3. Articulate Learning: articulate what they learned, how they learned it, why it matters, and how will they use it in the future

Bringle believes that all service learning courses can benefit from such “enhanced reflection.”

4. An enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility

Bringle’s final important component can be found towards the end of his definition in the requirement that service learning provide students with “an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.”

For Bringle, this is the most unique element that service learning can contribute to higher education, and it is why he believes that service learning will remain a part of civic education into the future. In his own words, “What service learning does well and better than any other pedagogy, is having students not only serving to learn, but learning to serve. What service learning should accomplish is having students think about, consider and analyze what their role is in society with regard to civic, social, and political issues, now and in the future.”

Civic Learning & Service Learning: The Connection to Liberal Arts

The concept of civic learning is, in Bringle’s opinion, one that is “shaped by context, course, setting, and the instructor’s perspective.” It is also shaped by the history and culture of the region or nation it is being conducted in. This is why the idea of “civic learning” may differ between two countries such as Japan and the U.S., and why that difference may lead to a difference in how service learning is conducted in the two countries. However, this is a strength of service learning, rather than a weakness, as it allows people to “address a wide range of conceptualizations.”

Towards the end of his lecture, Bringle explained why service learning, and thereby civic learning, is so important to not only a student’s education but also to a society itself.

Service learning provides students with ideas of social responsibility and social justice. It engages them in the society they are about to become full-fledged members of – by giving them a sense of civic professionalism and by building a connection between them and the rest of their society. This is why service learning is such an important part of a liberal arts education.

At the beginning of his talk, Bringle talked about the college at which he received his undergraduate degree, “a small Liberal Arts college like ICU.” There was a distinct contrast between the environment at his college and the environment at IUPUI, where he eventually taught. That contrast showed that, “many (IUPUI) educators see higher education as technical training focused narrowly



on preparation of students for careers, rather than viewing higher education as educating the whole person for broader purposes in society.”

At the end of his talk, he again referred to that “tension in education” with a quote by D. Matthews.

Why do we need more than a vocational education? In part, because we live more than a vocational life: we live a larger civic life and we have to be educated for it.

Bringle pointed that there is evidence that a nation’s economic well-being is linked to its civic well-being. During a consultation in Ireland, he provided his client with research that “showed that U.S. communities with the highest civic participation fared the best during bad economic times.” In other words, if a community is civically healthy, it will be economically more resilient.

The evidence is there: students who are provided with a service learning education enhance their employability in the workplace, and also enhance their ability to contribute to the civic well-being of their own communities. This latter part has been shown even in places like South Africa, where service learning and civic learning are becoming an ingrained part of the educational system.

Finally, Bringle wrapped up by saying that he believes more universities need to expand their service learning curriculums with significant modifications to the curriculum. He borrowed an idea



developed by Caryn McTighe Musil to illustrate what is needed in order to expand service learning as a whole.

- 1) We must make service learning expected.
- 2) We must make it developmental and progressive.
- 3) We must make it collaborative because it produces better learning
- 4) We must make it pervasive across faculty and disciplines
- 5) We must make it integrated.

If service learning can be expanded and enhanced in this way, Bringle believes “we will have graduates who will make a difference in their communities throughout their lives.”