



Reflecting on Service-Learning in Higher Education

Hickey, Gail, ed.
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Book Review

Tags: community based learning | engaged learning | service learning

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M. Gail Hickey has gathered together a valuable resource in *Reflecting on Service-Learning in Higher Education*. The chapters provide a vast collection of best practices and important principles to consider when engaging students in academic service-learning. The book is divided into three sections focusing on different perspectives for reflection: Community Partnerships, Classroom Practice, and Diversity.

Although the first section is titled “Reflection on Community Partnerships,” it is really more a reflection on institutional commitment to building community partnerships. The section has two provocative chapters that take the reader through a reflection on just what impact an educational institution should have within its surrounding community and how service-learning can help the institution attend to the voices of the community in which it is placed. Sherrie Steiner’s principles for implementing reciprocity provide a great framework for institutions and faculty to consider while developing service-learning curriculums. Joe D. Nichols asks important questions about the focus on research and specialization at the expense of community and civic engagement and draws from multiple sources to foster reflection around alternatives to faculty recognition of such public work.

“Reflecting on Classroom Practice” is the second and largest section of the book. Each chapter offers a perspective on how service-learning has worked in a particular context. This collection of cases from fields as varied as education, sociology, fine arts, and dental hygiene offers a myriad of suggestions for how to structure a curriculum that incorporates service-learning. There are suggested rubrics, logistical considerations, a solid bibliography with each chapter, and suggestions for what worked well and how one might improve the process over time.

Readers will find this section full of ideas, suggestions, and methods focused on building a curriculum, partnering with community members, and methods for reflection with students.

The final section, "Reflecting on Diversity," pushes even further into the questions that come up when students engage in service-learning with diverse communities. Here the case studies offer insights into how students perceive and articulate the impact of their service-learning on their growing sense of their own contextual lenses and the lenses of those with whom they work. Faculty and administrators are invited to anticipate the types of responses their own students will have in an effort to foster positive reflection and growth in the students that is fruitful for the partner communities as well.

One concern with the book is that community partners are not represented as writers of the chapters. The effort to shed light on the importance of effective community partnerships and the responsibility of higher education institutions to develop service-learning curriculum in partnership with the surrounding community is important. The inclusion of the voices of partner communities as authors could have added to the depth of the book.

Reflecting on Service-Learning in Higher Education is a resource that will be appreciated by high school and university faculty and administrators. The questions raised and the suggestions shared will be useful for any institution looking to begin or strengthen their commitment to service-learning in higher education. Institutions, faculty, students, and the communities with which they partner will all benefit from M. Gail Hickey's invitation to reflect.

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