

A Continuum of Approaches to Service-Learning within Canadian Post-secondary Education

Tony Chambers
OISE/University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This article provides a multi-level conceptual framework for service-learning that can serve as a decision-making guide for service-learning initiatives in Canadian post-secondary education. Service-learning approach options along a non-hierarchical continuum (philanthropic, social justice, and social transformation) are examined; the theoretical clusters used to frame this examination include experiential education, social learning, student development, and liberatory education. Various dimensions and potential implications of each approach are explored. Regardless of the particular service-learning approach adopted by Canadian institutions, decision makers and participants should be conscious of the parameters and potential impact of their chosen approach.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce document fournit un cadre conceptuel à niveaux multiples pour l'apprentissage par le service communautaire et sert de guide à la prise de décisions sur les initiatives d'apprentissage par le service dans l'enseignement postsecondaire au Canada. Le document examine les choix d'approches en matière d'apprentissage par le service d'après un continuum non hiérarchique (philanthropique, justice sociale et transformation sociale). Les grappes théoriques ayant servi à encadrer l'examen des approches à l'apprentissage par le service comprennent l'éducation par l'expérience, l'apprentissage social, le développement de l'étudiant et l'éducation libératrice. Diverses dimensions et répercussions possibles de chaque approche sont présentées. Peu importe l'approche particulière adoptée par les établissements d'enseignement canadiens, les décideurs et participants doivent être conscients des paramètres et de l'effet possible de l'approche choisie.

INTRODUCTION

Although service-learning has been an educational practice and philosophy for several decades in the United States, it is a fairly recent experience in Canada. Little is known about the choices of various service-learning approaches and their potential implications among Canadian post-secondary education institutions and their community partners. Few, if any, conceptual models have been developed to guide the Canadian experiences with service-learning. Thus, the primary purpose of this article is to provide a conceptual framework of service-learning approaches that can guide the construction, development, and assessment of service-learning initiatives in Canadian post-secondary education. A definition of service-learning is offered next, as a basis for the subsequent discussion.

What is Service-Learning?

One of the essential qualities of service-learning involves a partnership between communities and post-secondary institutions that focuses on community-defined needs and on educator- (and sometimes community-) determined learning experiences and objectives for students (Campus Compact, 2002). Students engage in critical reflection about the social forces that created the community need and about their social responsibility to address that need (Stanton, 1990). For the purposes of this article, Eyler and Giles's (1999) definition of service-learning is used:

Service-learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves. (p. 7)

Among its distinctive characteristics, service-learning links to academic content and standards; helps to determine and meet real, defined community needs; is reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers by combining service experience with a learning experience; and can be used in any subject area that is appropriate to learning goals (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002).

A Context for Service-Learning in Post-secondary Education

Most post-secondary education institutions claim as one of their central commitments the preparation of responsible and engaged citizens (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AACU], 2002; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Morris, 2006). However, many college and university students believe that the range of dynamic and complex social problems is either too overwhelming to know where to start, not worth addressing at all, or requires a very different

approach than what has been traditionally available to them (Campus Compact, 2002; Longo & Meyer, 2006). During the last quarter of the 20th century, service-learning emerged as a popular and powerful educational philosophy and pedagogical approach that integrated academic subject matter with applied social engagement and critical reflection. Within the past several years, Canadian institutions and communities have explored service-learning as a way to advance both student learning and engagement and community improvement.

A scan of service-learning initiatives in Canadian post-secondary institutions by the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (2006) identified 30 separate institutions, with 40 separate service-learning initiatives, which represented a fairly even split between curricular- and co-curricular-based programs. Although a variety of types of service-learning initiatives are found in Canadian post-secondary education, each of these initiatives adheres to the common definition and set of distinguishing characteristics of service-learning that were noted earlier. Because service-learning is a relatively new practice in Canada, it is critical to establish a sense of the range of forms that service-learning can and cannot take, as well as the potential impact of the chosen form(s) for each institution and its community partners.

To help establish the basis of service-learning as a pedagogical and philosophical approach, as well as locate service-learning within a broader social-change context, four theoretical clusters – experiential education, social learning, student development, and liberatory education – are explored in the literature review. This exploration centres on three overlapping touch points that occur along a continuum of service-learning approaches. These touch points, the philanthropic approach, the social justice approach, and the social transformation approach, are not intended to represent all possible positions or to suggest independent, inflexible positions on the continuum. Regardless of the particular service-learning approach (or approaches) adopted by Canadian institutions and communities, decision makers and participants should be conscious of the parameters and potential implications of their chosen approach, as this level of intentionality can be useful in planning, implementing, and evaluating their service-learning efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Do We Know about Service-Learning?

“Developing students’ social consciousness” is rarely on a faculty member’s list of course learning outcomes. Although some supporters of service-learning see the pedagogical approach as a vehicle for attaining social justice, there is no consensus among service-learning proponents that social justice should be an intended outcome of participation in service-learning (Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Zlotkowski, 1996). However, a considerable amount of scholarship on the impact of service-learning does support the claim of improved learning outcomes (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gray et al., 1998).

As for the civic and social engagement of service-learning participants, Eyler and Giles (1999) argued persuasively that service-learning and higher education “need to pay attention to the problem-solving capacities of college graduates in order to sustain lifelong constructive involvement in the community” (p. 155). Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) supported Eyler and Giles’s findings that service-learning strengthens civic and social values, skills, and impact, while Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999) showed that even when pre-college service participation is controlled, student participation in volunteer service during their undergraduate years was positively associated with a variety of cognitive and affective outcomes measured nine years after entering post-secondary education.

Among the studies of pedagogical practices in post-secondary education, VanWynsberghe and Andruske (2007) applied a “research in the service of co-learning,” or RSL, approach (Barazangi, Greenwood, Burns, & Finnie, 2003; Reardon, 1998; Schutz & Ruggles, 1998; Weinberg, 2003; Wiechman, 1996) in introductory sociology courses at the University of British Columbia to explore how classroom based research increases students’ understanding of political participation, public involvement, and public spaces in community service-learning courses. Their findings suggested that students in RSL courses were encouraged and committed to making a difference in communities and developing a deeper understanding of sociological concepts.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), there are essentially three broad categories of outcomes for service-learning: educational, vocational, and social. Educationally, there are either positive relationships between service-learning and academic performance (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Tartter, 1996) or no relationship (Hudson, 1996; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). Vocationally, students who participate in service-learning are more likely to participate in community service in the future (Astin et al., 2000) and choose service-oriented professions (Astin et al., 1999). Socially, service-learning involvement is associated with the reduction of racial stereotyping and the promotion of racial understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Rhoads, 1997) and with a more-developed commitment to social issues and social responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Keen & Keen, 1998).

Theories Underlying the Practice and Impact of Service-Learning

This section offers a brief review of the four theoretical clusters noted earlier, that is, experiential education, social learning, student development, and liberatory education, as the basis of service-learning approaches and outcomes.

Experiential Education

Experiential education is predicated on the conscious and intentional integration of students’ experiences into the formal curriculum. John Dewey, who is often credited with being the father of experiential education, stressed that *how*

students learn is inseparable from *what* students learn. For Dewey, education and learning were processes of growth characterized by active experimentation and reflective thought. However, even though learning emerges through experience, Dewey was clear in his belief that “all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (1938, p. 25) and that a prime requisite for a quality education experience was that it “live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (1938, p. 28).

David Kolb (1984) chose the term “experiential learning” to link his ideas to their roots in the work of Dewey (1958), Lewin (1951), and Piaget (1971) and to underscore the role of experience in the learning process. Kolb defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). According to Kolb, concrete experiences form the basis of observation and reflection; in turn, these observations are used to develop one’s ideas, including generalizations and theories, and from this development of ideas, new implications for action can be discerned. To be effective, learners must be able to involve themselves fully and without bias in learning experiences, observe and reflect on these experiences from multiple perspectives, formulate concepts that integrate their observations into theories, and put such theories to use in making further decisions and solving problems.

Kolb’s theory is perhaps most directly linked to the tenets of service-learning as an experiential-learning approach that requires both action and reflection. Within the service-learning paradigm, however, the actions taken are not those of the learner alone; rather, the actions are carried out by the learner and the members of communities, who actually define the problems or issues to be addressed. The additional element of collective action would be an extension of Kolb’s theory as it pertains to service-learning.

Co-operative education is often viewed as a precursor to service-learning in post-secondary education. As defined by the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (2007), it is “a program that formally integrates a student’s academic studies with work experience in co-operative employer relationship organizations” (p. 1). However, despite the contribution of co-operative education to the emergence of service-learning as a philosophy and educational approach in post-secondary education, it is distinct from service-learning. That is, co-operative education focuses on extending students’ professional skills, whereas service-learning focuses on educationally linked, credit-bearing experiences through service to communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Social Learning

According to Bandura (1977), people learn through observing others’ behaviours and attitudes and the outcomes of those behaviours and attitudes. In the structure of service-learning, human behaviours are functions of the interaction between students’ meaning-making processes and action choices, academic information, and human and environmental forces in the communi-

ties in which they are engaged. The factors that motivate students to attend to, retain, and apply the lessons learned from their various experiences are viewed by Bandura as essential to effective social learning.

Student Development

Although student development theories have not been formally credited as a basis for service-learning, these theories have nonetheless been viewed by community-based education scholars and practitioners (Boss, 1994; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Giles & Eyler, 1994) and by student development scholars and practitioners (Schuh, Andreas, & Strange, 1991) as foundational to understanding and implementing service-learning efforts. In particular, student development theories facilitate a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the impact of service-learning experiences on students' cognitive, social, and cultural growth and development within post-secondary institutions (Simons & Cleary, 2006). Furthermore, these theories have served as the conceptual frameworks for scholarship exploring the impact of service-learning experiences in students' lives (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

Categories of student development theories include students' growth, change, and development in areas such as the cognitive-structural realm (how students receive, process, make meaning of, and apply information), the psycho-social realm (how students develop a sense of themselves in relation to others and within various circumstances), the ecological realm (how students' backgrounds, motivations, and other characteristics interact with the environments in which they find themselves to produce certain outcomes), and the typological realm (how students respond differently, depending on their particular types and styles, when faced with similar developmental challenges, environmental factors, or living situations). Several of the student development frameworks facilitate a better understanding of the process and potential impact of service-learning; these frameworks include Alexander Astin's (1984) involvement theory, Robert Pace's (1979) notion of quality of effort, Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure, and David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory.

The first three of these frameworks (Astin, Pace, and Tinto) are viewed as central contributors to the current notion of student engagement. According to Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005), student engagement that contributes to student success involves students' investment of time and effort, both inside and outside the classroom, and institutions' provision of student-learning opportunities and services.

In his involvement theory, Astin (1984) stresses the role of student involvement in development, defining involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). He further clarifies "involvement" as referring to students' behaviour, rather than their feelings or thoughts.

Astin's approach focuses on factors that facilitate development, not development itself. He argues that for student learning and growth to take place, students must actively engage in their environment; thus, post-secondary educators need to create opportunities for students to be involved, both in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, institutional policies and practices regarding student learning and development are effective only to the extent that they increase students' capacity for involvement.

The idea of quality of effort was conceptualized by Pace (1979) as a way of further refining the discourse on the link between students' behavioural choices while in post-secondary education and certain desirable educational outcomes. The opportunities for engagement that an institution offers and student participation in various activities or events are clearly important, but it is the quality of their engagement that most impacts students' growth and development (Ethington & Horn, 2007; Pace, 1984). As for students' engagement in service-learning initiatives, Pace would argue that the quality of the service-learning experience and of students' investment of energy and commitment is a major factor in determining both the educational and social (or community) value of the experience.

Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure describes an interactive model of student departure from post-secondary institutions, which focuses primarily on the events that occur within an institution just prior to or immediately following a student's entry into that institution. Tinto argued that positive and integrative experiences reinforce persistence, whereas negative or disconnecting experiences – or the absence of interaction – can weaken intentions and commitments, thereby enhancing the likelihood of students leaving an educational institution before completing their studies. The fundamental position of Tinto's theory is that a student's integration into the academic and social systems of an institution is vital to student persistence, a position that is consistent with Astin's theory of involvement and Pace's quality of effort notion, all of which are conceptually tied to the construct of student engagement.

Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning through cycles of experience, reflection, and experimentation, directly captures Dewey's notion that education and learning are processes of growth, characterized by active experimentation and reflective thought. Although Kolb has been viewed as an experiential theorist, his model of learning has also been linked and studied as a way to explain how students in post-secondary institutions develop cognitively and socially and, thus, it falls both in the areas of experiential education and student development theories. Among student development scholars, his experiential learning theory is generally and broadly categorized within the class of student development theories called typological models. These models do not explain how one changes or what one believes, but focus more on individual differences and characteristics distinctive to each person, with the idea that these differences have an influence on development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Liberatory Education

Liberatory education is an approach that helps learners identify their strengths and abilities in order to change social conditions for themselves and others. The late Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, was considered its leading supporter. Liberatory education focuses on local-level problems or societal-level deficiencies.

Freire (1970) saw the development of critical consciousness as the main goal of liberatory education for students. Critical consciousness differs from critical thinking in that it requires social action, not simply an understanding of the social, political, and economic forces that impact lives. Freire (1973) contended that critical consciousness evolves through three non-linear stages: semi-intransitive, naïve transitive, and critically transitive. Each stage is characterized by an individual's relationship to society; that is, the semi-intransitive stage reflects one's immersion in the dominant mass consciousness of society; the naïve transitive stage reflects an emerging awareness of oneself and societal structures; and the critical transitive stage involves a critical and historical problematization of society and one's relationship to it (Freire, 1985).

Within the liberatory education paradigm, social change begins when individuals develop a clearer sense of their own values, of their concern for a more equitable society, and of their willingness to support others in various communities. As individuals learn about themselves and understand their strengths and limitations, they are better able to recognize and understand the political, economic, and social conditions that impact their lives and the lives of community members, all of which is consistent with the Freirian notion of conscientization. In effect, liberatory education through critical thinking and honest dialogue increases critical consciousness and thus the rationale for incorporating service-learning in post-secondary organizations.

The contribution of liberatory education to service-learning is the linkage between discipline-based learning, individual identity formation, and socio-centric engagement, a linkage that changes inequitable conditions for self and others. As previously stated, social justice may not be the intended outcome of particular service-learning initiatives; however, depending on the service-learning approach adopted by post-secondary institutions and their community partners, there may be varying degrees of intense self and social examination, as well as degrees of social activism that are characteristic of liberatory education among service-learning participants.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A Continuum of Approaches to Service-Learning

This section reviews the three "touch points" noted earlier (philanthropic, social justice, and social transformation) that occur along the evolving continuum of approaches to service-learning. The review includes a description of each point and its relevant dimensions.

Although each of the approaches is viewed as embracing the basic characteristics of the definition of service-learning, they differ significantly by degree of intention in their design and outcome. While some may argue that not all of the touch points, particularly the philanthropic approach, represent common notions of service-learning, I view each approach as clearly engaging in a dialectic of action and reflection, with the intent of connecting academic learning with community service for the benefit of both the community and the learner.

The purpose here is limited to presenting a conceptual framework from which these types of systematic explorations can take place.¹ Subsequent research is being planned by this author to ascertain the specific type and efficacy of service-learning activities within Canadian post-secondary institutions that align with particular points along the continuum framework presented in this article.

The three touch points chosen to represent key transitions on the continuum of service-learning approaches – the philanthropic approach, the social justice approach, and the social transformation approach – serve as bridges, not walls. In other words, the touch points connect and overlap and are not seen as strict impenetrable cut-offs between approaches. Moreover, these approaches do not manifest the same way in every situation. There are, however, basic differences that should be considered when mapping a design or guiding the implementation of initiatives that fall along the continuum. Table 1 provides an overview of each approach and the various dimensions of each touch point along the evolving continuum of approaches to service-learning.

Philanthropic Service-Learning Approach

Given the vast and often conflicting definitions of philanthropy, a composite definition that captures some of the qualities that are consistent with this article's notion of a philanthropic approach to service-learning is offered here. Thus, philanthropy is defined as the voluntary sharing of a portion of one's time, resources (including money, knowledge, skills, experience, and influence), and general goodwill with those less fortunate, over a determined period of time, that is intended to provide learning opportunities and improve specific circumstances for the recipients of the philanthropy.

The term "philanthropy" has been chosen instead of the oft-used term "charity" to represent a service-learning approach that is built on the fundamental principles and practice of the privileged extending "help" to the less fortunate in an effort to improve the human condition of the less fortunate. As used here, philanthropy is a more complex dynamic, which integrates a distribution of resources (albeit unidirectional) with varying degrees of intentional social and individual improvement. It is much more than that defined by Dewey and Tufts (1908): "a superior class achieving merit by doing things gratuitously for an inferior class" (p. 334). Rather, philanthropy, although still often involving a one-way distribution of resources from those with more privilege to those with less privilege and an imbalanced power dynamic between "giver" and "receiver," is

Table 1
Dimensions of Service-Learning Approaches

	Philanthropic Service-learning	Social Justice Service-learning	Social Transformation Service-learning
Power	Power resides with those who have social privilege, resources, and opportunities.	Power resides within the laws and codified structures that address inequalities and injustice, as well as within the partnerships between those targeted for injustice and those who consider themselves allies.	Power resides within the network of institutions and organizations in a broad system. The power that exists within the network is much stronger than the power that exists within any single component (institution/organization) of it; power also exists within the network's formal and informal structures.
Service-Learning Participant Preparation	<p>Participants are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> oriented to the relationship of their academic subject and the social problem of focus; knowledgeable about the specific social problem to be studied; knowledgeable about the effects of the social problem on the community of focus and generally on the broader society; trained in general cultural competencies (i.e., how to enter and exit communities with respect); and knowledgeable about the parameters or limits of their "service" to communities. 	<p>Participants are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowledgeable about the specific social injustice to be studied; knowledgeable about the effects of the specific social injustice on specific social groups and generally on the broader society; oriented to the relationship between the social injustice, their academic subject, and the critical approach to their examination of the issues; knowledgeable about their roles as partners, allies, and learners in the social justice dynamic; and aware that there are no end dates or "end of term" when addressing injustices. 	<p>Participants are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> oriented to the complexities of social problems and their broad sustaining effects; knowledgeable about how networks of organizations and institutions contribute to social problems and their solutions; prepared to think and act in ways that consider multiple dimensions of social problems and social opportunities; knowledgeable about their roles as partners, allies, and learners in the social-transformation dynamic and aware that they are sometimes direct or indirect contributors to the social problems in need of transformation; and aware that transformation takes considerable time and involves considerable resistance from all components of the transformation process.
Primary "Target" of Analysis	Learners	Individuals and Social Groups	Systems and Networks

<p>Assumptions about Learning</p>	<p>Learning occurs through an analysis of specific populations' circumstances, as it relates to a social deficiency and what learners can "do" to address the apparent deficiency.</p>	<p>Learning occurs through a critical understanding of the history and contemporary conditions and circumstances experienced by populations that are, and have historically been, the target of injustices and inequality.</p>	<p>Learning occurs through a critical understanding of the ways in which institutions/organizations contribute and benefit, as a whole, in the creation and continuation of social problems.</p>
<p>Assumptions about Community</p>	<p>Community is a "problem" to fix (i.e., deficient and needy). Community is the "recipient"; the learner is the "server."</p>	<p>Community is comprised of individuals and groups that have been "wronged" and need support to "right" the wrong and develop the capacity to sustain improved status. Community has "assets" and is a partner.</p>	<p>Community is part of a larger, more complex system of institutions and networks that are both contributors to and recipients of social injustices.</p>
<p>Assumptions about Change</p>	<p>Change occurs when individuals and/or groups get the help they need to function on their own and to take advantage of opportunities on an equal footing with others who are more fortunate in society.</p>	<p>Change occurs when the group that is wronged is no longer the target of the wrongdoers and may even have received some form of compensation for past inequities. Structures are also put in place to signal the end of the injustice and to provide an avenue for redress if the injustice reoccurs.</p>	<p>Change occurs when components of the system acknowledge their role in contributing to the problem and participate actively, with others in the system, in employing resources to address the core and manifestations of the problem. The mindsets and social and institutional conditions that contributed to the problem in the first place must be altered and, as in the social justice approach, systemic structures must be established to monitor and address conditions that may evolve and create injustices that target specific groups or individuals.</p>
<p>Intended Outcomes</p>	<p>Communities have some basic need addressed, and learners develop an understanding of how they can help those less fortunate.</p>	<p>Unjust treatment toward groups or individuals is eliminated or reduced. Learners become aware of the links between their academic studies and broader social injustices.</p>	<p>A process is developed to allow the components of a social system to work together to address complex social problems to which they have contributed and which they have sustained. Learners become conscious of the complexity of social problems and begin thinking and acting in more complex creative ways to address those problems.</p>

nonetheless a paradigm that is intended to address concerns identified by communities and provide an academic-based learning experience for students.

One of the more widely accepted definitions of philanthropy is that employed by Lester Salamon (1992), who defined philanthropy as “the private giving of time or valuables (money, security, property) for public purposes” (p. 26). Service-learning initiatives often operate from the perspective of helping the less fortunate (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kahne & Westheimer, 1999; Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000; Langseth & Troppe, 1997; Maybach, 1996; Rhoads, 1997); rarely, however, do those engaged in philanthropic activities as the “giver” explore the dynamic circumstances of the “needy” beyond their own distribution of time or resources (Kahne et al., 2000; Reardon, 1994). According to those who explore various forms of community-based learning, charity focuses specifically on the altruism and joy (and, I would add, relief) that comes from giving (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999), whereas justice and transformation emphasize political action and engagement as solutions to systemic social problems.

From my observations, various dimensions of a philanthropic service-learning approach distinguish it as a touch point along the service-learning continuum. The primary “target” of analysis (or the primary unit of concern) within this approach is the learner; at the same time, effects may be experienced by communities and others. Learning occurs through an analysis of specific populations’ circumstances, as it relates to a social deficiency and what learners can “do” to address the apparent deficiency. Community is viewed as being a “problem” to be fixed, where the learner is the “server” and the community is the “recipient” of help. Desired change occurs when individuals and/or groups get the help they need to function on their own and to take advantage of opportunities on an equal footing with the more fortunate in society. The intended outcome of this approach is that communities have some basic need addressed and learners develop an understanding of how they can help those less fortunate. Within this service-learning approach, power is seen to reside with those who have social privilege, resources, and opportunities, while the preparation of participants includes not only an orientation to the relationship between their service, their academic subject, and the social problem of focus but also training in general cultural competencies (i.e., how to enter and exit communities with respect) and an understanding of the parameters or limits of their “service commitment” to communities.

Social Justice Service-Learning Approach

As with the philanthropic approach, the social justice approach to service-learning involves working with community (social) groups and individuals in need. However, it has a significantly greater reflective component than the philanthropic approach and requires participants to produce a more-nuanced interrogation of the social, economic, and political conditions that impact the lives of those in communities.

Marullo and Edwards (2000) have outlined the key points in taking a social justice approach to crafting a service-learning program. Service-learning work should empower those in communities as equal partners. Root causes of social injustice are to be examined and addressed, and the individuals who are targets of injustice should not be blamed for their situation. Institutionally, there must be a commitment to support collaboration between students, faculty, and community members, including formal recognition of faculty service in communities. The program should build community, increase social capital, enhance diversity, and, most crucially, engage all participants in problem solving. Institutions that base their programs on a social justice approach should adhere to the principle that “[they are] not merely using the community as a social laboratory with human guinea pigs” (p. 908).

Social justice is interpreted and practiced in different ways, depending on the principles or criteria used to define “just.” The artificial distinction that is often presented is whether justice refers to “a just distribution of resources” or a “just outcome,” but distribution of resources and outcomes cannot be separated. Rawls’s (1971) notion of distributive justice is rooted in the hypothetical concern about how people would behave and think if their relative starting positions in life were equal and they had no knowledge of what positions they would occupy later. In terms of this hypothetical concern, Rawls viewed social justice from the basic principles of individual freedom and equal distribution of material and social goods, positions that have been criticized as being too market oriented (Apple, 1998; Rizvi & Lingard, 1996; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997) and as lacking adequate attention to the processes by which individuals acquire material and social goods (Nozick, 1976).

The recognitive social justice approach is based upon critically rethinking the meaning of social justice and further acknowledging the significance of social groups within an emergent notion of social justice (Gale, 2000). Chesler (1993) provided a set of interpretations of justice that embraced various degrees of both distributive and recognitive perspectives; included among his interpretations are the “just” notions of liberty, equity, equality, and need.

For the purposes of this article, social justice involves access to the equitable and equal distribution of social resources, goods, opportunities, and responsibilities (Rawls, 1971), as well as the development of social structures that codify that access and provide an avenue for redress if that access is unjustly restricted (Fraser, 1995; Gale, 2000; Young, 1990). More specifically, the redistribution of access to resources, goods, opportunities, and responsibilities is a response to prior unjust restrictions placed on certain groups of people in a society. Social justice, then, is correcting a history of injustice done to specific groups or individuals and providing legitimate assurances that those injustices are not repeated without recourse.

The primary “target” of analysis within this approach to service-learning is the individual and/or a social group. Learning occurs through a critical understanding of the history and contemporary conditions experienced by

populations that are, and have historically been, the target of injustices and inequality. Community is comprised of individuals and groups that have been “wronged” and are in need of support to “right” the wrong and develop the capacity to sustain an improved social status. Community is also viewed as having assets and as engaging as a partner in the service-learning process. Desired change occurs when the group that was wronged is no longer the target of the wrong doers and may even have received some form of compensation for past inequities. Structures are also put in place to signal the end of the injustice and to provide an avenue for redress if the injustice reoccurs. The intended outcome of the approach is to eliminate or reduce unjust treatment toward groups or individuals; an additional outcome is for learners to become aware of the links between their academic studies and broader social injustices. Power is seen to reside within the laws and codified structures that address inequalities and injustice, as well as within the partnerships between those targeted for injustice and those who consider themselves allies. The preparation of participants within the social justice approach includes the development of knowledge about the specific social injustice to be studied and the personal and social effects of that specific social injustice; an orientation to the relationship between the social injustice, their academic subject, and a critical approach to examining the issues; the development of knowledge about their roles as partners, allies, and learners in the social-justice dynamic; and the development of an awareness that there are no end dates or “end of term” when addressing injustices.

Social Transformation Service-Learning Approach

This approach has a dual focus: 1) examining broad systemic factors that contribute to the causes and continuation of social inequities, and 2) exploring the means to undertake a multi-level transformation that not only addresses the apparent causes of problems but also changes the assumptions and mindsets that sustain problematic conditions. Transformation requires fundamental cultural shifts in an environment, which must be both intentional and pervasive. When transformation occurs, all of the underlying assumptions, behaviours, processes, and products that created and sustained previous conditions are critically examined and ultimately altered (Green, Eckel, & Hill, 1998).

Influenced by theories of liberatory education, a central goal of the social transformation approach is for learners to change and challenge the world, rather than adapt to it without critical thought. Political, economic, and personal empowerment are sought through dialogue between educators, learners, and community members as they engage in an effort to support broader social struggles (Freire, 1970). A major difference between the social justice and the social transformation approach to service-learning is that social justice focuses on “righting a wrong” done to individuals or specific groups, whereas social transformation focuses on altering the system, the assumptions, the mindsets, and the relationships that create and sustain inequities.

For institutions and communities that adopt this approach to service-learning, the primary “targets” of analysis are the systems and networks that contribute to and sustain the social condition in need of transformation. Learning occurs through a critical understanding of the ways in which institutions/organizations contribute to and benefit from, as a whole, the creation and continuation of social problems. Community is part of a larger, more complex system of institutions and networks that are both contributors to and recipients of social injustices. Desired change occurs when components of the system acknowledge their role in contributing to the social problem and participate actively, with others in the system, in employing resources to address the core and manifestations of the problem. The mindsets and the social and institutional conditions that contributed to the problem in the first place must be altered, and, as in the social justice approach, systemic structures must be established to monitor and address conditions that may evolve and create injustices that target specific groups or individuals. The intended outcome of the approach is the development of a process that allows the components of a social system to work together to address complex social problems to which they have contributed and which they have sustained. Learners become conscious of the complexity of social problems and begin thinking and acting in more complex and creative ways to address those problems. Power is seen to reside within the network of institutions and organizations in a broad system. The power that exists within the network is much stronger than the power that exists within any single component (institution/organization) of it; power also exists within the network’s formal and informal structures. The preparation of participants includes an orientation to the complexities of social problems and their broad sustaining effects; the development of knowledge about how networks of organizations and institutions contribute to social problems and their solutions; the foundation required to think and act in ways that consider multiple dimensions of social problems and social opportunities; and the development of knowledge about their roles as partners, allies, and learners in the social-transformation dynamic. Participants also become aware that they themselves are sometimes direct or indirect contributors to the social problems in need of transformation and that transformation takes considerable time and involves considerable resistance from all components of the transformation process.

Implications of Choosing Approaches to Service-Learning

The very nature of service-learning is such that all stakeholders – communities, faculty, students, institutions, and policy-makers – are impacted by the particular purpose, assumptions, and practices of various service-learning initiatives. Each of the three approaches presented in this article (philanthropic, social justice, and social transformation), as well as their degrees of integration along the continuum, provide signals about the personal and social dynamics that may be activated when academic approaches to community-based service-learning are being developed. Although many of the implications of such

choices are broad and applicable in several jurisdictions where service-learning exists, there are specific and potentially significant implications for Canadian social and post-secondary contexts. Some of the broader implications for each of the stakeholder groups are reviewed next, followed by implications that are specific to Canada.

Broad Implications

The choice of approach (or approaches) to service-learning presents significant implications for individuals and communities. The options range from addressing the immediate and specific needs of communities to attempting to radically alter social systems and ways of thinking about social problems. The chosen service-learning approach will require different degrees of engagement and partnership on the part of communities and have different degrees of risk from and benefit to individuals and communities. Community-defined needs/issues, acknowledged community resources, timing (degree of urgency), levels of awareness about the dynamics of the issue, and levels of trust in higher-education partners play key roles in the choice made by communities engaging in a service-learning initiative. Furthermore, the community's chosen approach may result in an expansion of resources available to tackle fundamental local issues and problems, as well as opportunities to address short- and long-term priorities and concerns with key constituencies. Depending on the agreed-upon approach, service-learning efforts can not only contribute to the development of economic, political, and social capacity within communities but also provide the capacity to examine and address local issues from a systems perspective and (hopefully) to resist quick fixes to problems. One of the challenges faced by communities is to develop clarity about their needs, priorities, and assets and about their limitations and expectations within the service-learning relationship.

Faculty who teach service-learning courses can use the continuum of approaches as a guideline for determining if and how their course objectives and pedagogy align with each approach's assumptions and dimensions. Of course, the issues of time, availability of service opportunity, course content, student readiness, and pedagogical philosophy play a role in the degree to which a course's approach aligns with a particular service-learning approach. Moreover, what, how, and why students learn and develop in particular service-learning courses are influenced greatly by the construction of the course, the learning expectations, the quality of teaching, and the faculty member's general beliefs about the intent of particular service-learning efforts. Other implications for faculty who participate in service-learning initiatives include the possibility of adding new meaning and measurable content to their "service" responsibility. And, since service-learning is often interdisciplinary, faculty will glean different perspectives and questions to stimulate their teaching and research activities.

Students who participate in service-learning gain a more-substantial awareness of the linkage between theory and practice, compared to what might

be presented in a traditional setting. The curriculum is likely to bring critical-thinking and problem-solving capacities alive, thus making the classroom experience more interesting, current, and responsive to student learning needs and social dynamics. If structured appropriately, service-learning opportunities prepare students for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and present them with various personal and educational challenges. Indeed, students are often challenged not only to step outside their “comfort zones” and confront some of their own assumptions and beliefs about society and its systems but also to seek for themselves the relevance and meaning of their education and their responsibility as members of a privileged social class. Finally, depending on the chosen service-learning approach, students are often challenged to think more deeply about their day-to-day decisions about resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness and justice, and a host of other matters that can influence the lives of others. A consistent concern is how long and in what ways students are impacted by their service-learning experiences. Minimal longitudinal scholarship has been conducted in this area, and much more is needed to get a clearer picture of the sustaining impact of service-learning.

As for post-secondary institutions, service-learning initiatives provide additional means of demonstrating the value of investing public dollars in post-secondary education. When done well, such initiatives present the institution as a positive and contributing member of the community and give substance to the rhetoric of partnership and outreach. Service-learning partnerships with communities have enormous potential to improve certain conditions in the community in which the institution operates and from which the bulk of its students are drawn. Institutions that embrace service-learning as a key community-engagement and student-learning process are challenged to examine their own culture and values relative to serving communities, transforming societies, and promoting experiential student learning.

The final broader implication to be noted here concerns policy. Policy-makers pay considerable attention to various indicators of educational quality and public accountability in post-secondary education. Their decisions are impacted by information that demonstrates the value of post-secondary education to the broader public. The chosen service-learning approach, the relationships between institutions and communities, and the related outcomes and impacts of those approaches and relationships can yield significant information about an institution’s educational quality profile and its contributions to social vitality and innovation. Policies that influence public support for and awareness of post-secondary education’s public value can benefit from effective service-learning efforts.

Implications Specific to Canada

Clearly, all of the broad implications reviewed previously apply to Canadian post-secondary education as well. There are, however, dynamics in and

around the Canadian case that are distinct, and four of the dynamics that pose particular implications – 1) student mobility and regional fidelity; 2) quality measures and accountability; 3) Canada’s social contract; and 4) population dynamics – are discussed next.

As for the first dynamic, undergraduate Canadian students in post-secondary institutions rarely attend colleges or universities outside their home province (Finnie & Qiu, 2009). As a consequence, service and the related learning exists in a local and regional context, where outcomes and impact can be experienced more directly by students, institutions, and communities. Students’ relative fidelity to their home region may also enable more sustained involvement in service-learning sites than is otherwise dictated by truncated, term-based academic calendars.

Second, although service to communities is not among Canada’s performance indicators for post-secondary institutions, several reports and institutional and provincial-level undergraduate degree expectations (CMEC, 2007) have expressed a growing demand for certain social outcomes of post-secondary education. Calls for these outcomes establish service-learning as a key vehicle through which institutions can both demonstrate their degree of quality as a public entity and inform society of the ways in which public support is being translated into public goods.

Third, commitment to the social well-being of Canadian citizens and public institutions is viewed as a central value of the Canadian identity. *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians* (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 1999) noted that the values of “respect for diversity, fairness, individual dignity and responsibility, and mutual aid and our responsibility for one another” (p. 1) establish the foundation of Canada’s social contract among its citizens. Service-learning can enliven the values that are central to the Canadian ideal, as well as the social contract between Canadian post-secondary education and the broader society.

Finally, population trends in Canada reflect increasing diversity among new Canadians currently and through the foreseeable future. Most of the growth in the Canadian population will be from immigration, and most of these new Canadians will settle in communities that are served in various ways by colleges and universities. Thus, considerable opportunities will arise for students to engage with these distinct communities in mutually creative developmental and learning opportunities. Service-learning can build powerful bridges between institutions and all types of diverse communities, as well as prepare students with skills and knowledge to live in a diverse democracy.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to offer a multi-level conceptual framework for service-learning that can guide decision making about service-learning initiatives in Canadian post-secondary education. The continuum of approaches provides service-learning program planners, participants, policy-makers, and

evaluators with the information they need to decide on the intentionality of their programs and the related value and requisite levels of support these programs engender. The theoretical underpinnings of service-learning offer a basis for understanding how learning occurs within a social context (experiential education and social learning), how student participants are impacted, personally and educationally, by their involvement in service-learning (student development), and how social change and social consciousness can occur through service-learning (liberatory education). The degree and form of learning, development, and social change depend, in part, on the level of intentionality that service-learning planners and participants put into the design, implementation, and meaning-making components of the process. Each of the touch points along the continuum of approaches to service-learning can yield different degrees and forms of learning, development, and social change; all of these have implications within Canada and beyond that can alter community conditions, as well as student learning and development. Constructing a continuum of service-learning approaches that resists valuing one approach over another is of particular importance as it offers more opportunities not only to engage in learning and serving but also to further refine a growing understanding of the ways in which post-secondary education in Canada can contribute to a broader public good. ♣

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Tony Chambers
Centre for the Study of Students in Postsecondary Education
OISE/University of Toronto
Toronto, ON M5S 2R7
tchambers@oise.utoronto.ca

Tony Chambers is assistant professor and director of the Centre for the Study of Students in Postsecondary Education at OISE/University of Toronto, where he researches and teaches in the areas of student learning and development and the social purposes of post-secondary education. Previously, he served as associate vice-provost, Students, at the University of Toronto, as associate director of the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, and as adjunct associate professor at the University of Michigan. His publications include the co-edited book *Higher Education for the Public Good: Emerging Voices from a National Movement* (Jossey-Bass, 2005).

ENDNOTE

1. I consciously chose not to provide specific examples of current service-learning initiatives in Canadian institutions to illustrate the application of the various approaches along the continuum. Although many of the service-learning initiatives in Canadian higher education align with the characteristics of each of the approaches, I believe it would be premature and inappropriate to speculate on the intent of specific initiatives prior to systematically providing the authors of each initiative an opportunity to express their intent relative to the approaches along the continuum.