

# A Brief Examination of Experiential Learning and Service Learning

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Today, many college students expect to participate in internships, field studies, study abroad, and other “real world” or experiential forms of learning as part of their tertiary education. Colleges and universities both collaborate and compete to offer as wide a selection as possible to their students. Sojo University, for example, aims to have fifty percent of its student body participate in study abroad programs (Hirai & Wright, 2016). Meiji Gakuin University, on the other hand, states that seventy percent of its students are interested in volunteer work (Meiji Gakuin University Volunteer Center, 2015). Furthermore, in accordance with its motto, “Do For Others,” Meiji Gakuin organizes an event called “1 Day for Others,” which “offers students chances to learn about social action by experiencing short-term or ‘one-day’ internship with various volunteer groups, NGOs, non-profit organizations (NPOs), social entrepreneurs and social enterprises (Meiji Gakuin University Volunteer Center, 2015).”

While study abroad and internship programs provide experiential learning, do they provide service learning? Service learning is a term that is used widely by universities to promote a positive image. Ferris University, for example, has discussed changing the name of its Volunteer Center to the Service Learning Center. But what is service learning? This paper will examine experiential learning and service learning and provide a brief critique of service learning as practiced in Japan.

## I . Introduction

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Dewey was an American educational reformer who advocated learning through experience (Raphael, 2015, p.3). While apprenticeships were and are a method of learning through experience, formal education has not been. In Dewey's time, academic study took place strictly within the walls of a classroom. Thanks to Dewey and other educational reformers such as Arthur Dunn, we can now find experiential learning in higher education in many forms, including "clinicals, internships, co-op programs, field experiences, practica, [and] student teaching (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p.222)." This is in addition to the many extracurricular activities that students engage in. However, the former are mainly focused on professional development, while the latter is on benefits to the student (such as through sports or dance clubs) or to the community (such as in volunteer work). Service learning aims to combine these in the sense that there is both benefit to the student and the community in equal balance with the aim of developing civic responsibility (Heffernan, 2001, p.2).

In 2002, Feinburg stated that, "Among the people of both Japan and the United States, there is currently widespread concern that the student population is in trouble, that students are losing their interest in civic participation and, more broadly, their moral sensibility . . . Educators in both countries are looking toward service learning as a means of recapturing a sense of civic responsibility in today's young people (p. 368)." As service learning has become more widespread, there seems to be some ambiguity in what it is and how it is practiced. This paper will present some examples of experiential learning and service learning to clarify the civic focus of the latter and then analyze service learning as it is practiced in Japan today.

## II . Experiential Learning

As an undergraduate student, the author participated in two experiential learning courses. A brief explanation of these two courses is included here to demonstrate the difference between experiential learning and service learning.

### A. Example One: Field Study

Approximately thirty students attended a once a week, one term, 4-unit course. Students were divided into teams of four students by the professor and assigned a specific local non-profit organization to research. The professor had prior standing agreements with the non-profits so the organizations were forewarned of the details of the assignment and prepared to receive the students as observers.

Each team of students interviewed the executive director and other personnel about the services provided at their respective non-profit and observed the delivery of these services but did not participate. Total time spent on site ranged from one 8-hour day to a couple hours per day over the course of a week. This time arrangement depended on the availability of the students and the readiness of the organization to receive the students.

Each team then met to discuss information they had gathered, discussed their findings, and prepared a group presentation for the class. Observations were then presented in class by each team. The presentation was assessed on content, organization, and participation of team members.

Students in this class did not engage in any direct service through or with their organizations or provide the directors or staff of the organizations with any feedback from their observations. The supposition of the professor was that seeing how a small non-profit operated and hearing about our classmates' observations of other non-profits in the local area would be more meaningful and impactful than reading about them in a textbook or hearing

the professor relate his own observations and experiences at the same or other non-profit organizations. The purpose was not meant to assist the non-profit in any way; therefore, there was no service component.

#### B. Example Two: Internship

For each member of a graduating class of 35 students, an internship was required to be completed in the winter (middle) trimester of the senior year. A counselor from the campus career center met individually with each student at the end of the fall trimester of their senior year. She then matched each student with an organization that could provide a supervised internship in his or her desired field during the following 10-week winter term.

For this 4-unit course, each student wrote a term paper explaining what he or she did during and learned from the internship. Although the same group of students met once a week for an honors thesis course, there were no weekly class meetings, presentations, or discussions related to the internship. The course was in effect an independent study.

Term papers were submitted directly to the academic advisor/professor, who then spoke to the internship supervisors at each placement for feedback on student performance. After this, each student met with the advisor individually to discuss the overall learning experience and was assessed on the paper, performance according to each intern's supervisor, and interview with the advisor. The purpose was to give each student job experience in their field and to reflect on the suitability and desirability of their field after being in a real world environment. Although the intern-hosting organizations did benefit and there was a reflective component, the primary goal of this was to gain professional skills. While many of the students participated in internships with governmental or non-profit organizations, not all did. There was no specific intention of or focus on developing or engendering a sense of civic responsibility.

There are, of course, many different kinds of field studies and internships, some of which may incorporate a service learning component. However, even among service learning projects, there seems to be some ambiguity about the learning component and civic responsibility development. An explanation of service learning and some examples of service learning in practice are presented in the following sections.

### **III . Service Learning**

What sets service learning apart from other forms of experiential learning is the civic component. Campus Compact, a US non-profit organization focused on service learning, has 950 colleges registered (Butin, 2006, p. 473). Given that there are more than four thousand post-secondary institutions in the US (Raphael, 2012, p. 1 ), service learning is therefore not only accessible, but also actively promoted on one-fourth of American college campuses. Dan Butin, who has published widely on the topic of service learning, states that, “Tens of thousands of faculty engage millions of college students in some form of service-learning practice each and every year (2006, p. 473).”

Kerrissa Heffernan of Campus Compact states, “perhaps the most important benefit of service-learning is the motivation and opportunity it can provide for students to connect to a community and identify their civic role in that community (2001, p.2).” According to the Faculty Manual on Service-Learning at National-Louis University, service learning is “an extension of an academic course, which provides tangible, meaningful, and valuable service to the community combined with a clear connection to a course curriculum and gives students an opportunity for reflection in which students explain how the activity clarified, reinforced, expanded, or illustrated course concepts (Lukenchuk, Jagla, & Eigel, n.d., p. 4 ).”

In 1904, the educator Arthur Dunn asked students in his community

civics class to “identify specific community problems and develop and apply solutions (“The History of Service Learning,” n.d., p. 3 ).” By the 1970’s, the term “service learning” had been coined, and by 1993, service learning had developed to the stage where it was defined in the National and Community Service Trust Act (“The History of Service Learning,” n.d., p. 3 ). The Act states that service learning is a method that meets the needs of the community, is coordinated between the community and an educational institute, fosters civic responsibility, is integrated in an academic curriculum, and provides structure for reflection on the experience (“The History of Service Learning,” n.d., p. 3-4). Therefore, unlike experiential learning such as internships, service learning is not focused on developing professional skills (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).” Furthermore, unlike volunteer work, service learning is linked with specific course goals (Lukenchuk et al., n.d., p. 5). Moreover, in service learning, the service and learning components are of equal weight. Lukenchuk et al. state that “[Service Learning] as we have defined it thus far is of equal benefit to the student and the participating community-based organization (n.d., p. 5 ).”

Consequently, in the anecdotes related above, the first example did not constitute service learning as there was no benefit to the community. In the second example, the primary goal was developing the student’s professional skills.

While there is, of course, a need and a benefit to the various kinds of experiential learning as well as to volunteer work and community service, the purposes are different. “Service-learning is premised on experiential education as the foundation for intellectual, moral, and civic growth. This focus on the synergy of the intellectual, moral, and civic dimensions of learning distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential education (Heffernan, 2001, p. 2 ).” For example, according to an anonymous student quoted in the Faculty Manual on Service-Learning at National-Louis University (Lukenchuk et al., n.d., p. 3 ):

*A service-learning project seems like such a simple thing. All I need to do is to volunteer a bit of time and then move on with the rest of my life, right? Maybe I'll do this a few times of year so that I can pat myself on the back and know that I've done a good thing. It's a nice gesture and to be honest, that's what most of my previous volunteer experiences have been. But with this class, I was asked to look at the whole picture and to actually see the social injustice that takes place in the community around me.*

Another student commented, "Through my project, I discovered a place with so many wonderful people all working together to create a great community for those who are developmentally challenged. This experience changed me, and if it weren't for this class I'm not sure I would have ever had that experience (Lukenchuk et al., n.d., p. 3)." Therefore, the civic intention of service learning and its academic component are important attributes. Reflection is an important aspect of the learning. According to Feinburg, "Service learning, like community service or volunteerism, engages the students in real-life problem, differing only in that the problem-solving experience is integrated with academic requirements and involves structured student reflection (2002, p. 368-369)."

#### **IV. Service Learning in Action**

This section looks at some examples of service learning at the university level in Japan. The first is a pilot program organized through International Christian University and Middlebury College. The second, SUIJI, is a degree program for Japanese and Indonesian students studying in both Japan and Indonesia. The third is a one-semester course taught at Osaka Gakuin University.

##### **A. Example One**

International Christian University (ICU) established a Service

Learning Center on its campus in October 2002 (“SLCのご案内 [Service Learning Information],” n.d.). However, the descriptions of the activities, which are posted on the Service Learning Center’s page of the ICU website, seem to indicate that these are in fact volunteer opportunities, not service learning. There appears to be no academic component to the activities posted, such as lectures, reflections through journaling or discussions, assessments, or course credits. While these may be incorporated into the activities, there is nothing explicitly stated in the descriptions available online.

An article in *The Middlebury Campus*, a weekly magazine of Middlebury College in Vermont, describes an intensive four-week ICU service-learning program in Japan in which four Middlebury students took part (Mueller, 2016, p. 1 ). The pilot program was developed by Sanae Eda, who is the director of the Middlebury C.V. Starr School in Japan, and Kristin Mullins, Middlebury College’s Language in Motion Coordinator. In addition to the four Middlebury students, four students from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and two ICU students participated (Mueller, 2016, p. 1 ).

The creators of this project “wanted an intercultural program that encouraged students to explore the meaning of service within an international context (Mueller, 2016, p.2).” The participation and collaboration of different institutions and students from different institutions was an important part of this project, according to Mullins (Mueller, 2016, p. 2). One participant, Michiko Yoshino, said that “during orientation, students discussed the idea of service but did not leave with one concrete definition (Mueller, 2016, p.3).” Aside from this, there was no description of the learning component in the article.

In terms of service, the participants spent time with the elderly in a rural community, picking blueberries, planting soybeans, and playing gateball with the residents. In Tokyo, the participants helped with school and after-school activities (Mueller, 2016, p.3-4). These activities were requested by the host institutions. Mullins described the program as a success and a



“wonderful learning opportunity” (Mueller, 2016, p.5), though the extent to which the students reflected on their experience and gained a sense of civic responsibility is unclear from information available on either the ICU or Middlebury College websites.

## B. Example Two

Six University Initiative Japan Indonesia (SUIJI) is a consortium of three Japanese universities and three Indonesia universities. These are Ehime University, Kagawa University, and Kochi University in Japan and Gadjah Mada University, Bogor Agricultural University, and Hasanuddin University in Indonesia (“SUIJI Service Learning Program,” n.d.). The goal of this agricultural service-learning program is to “train international ‘servant leaders’ who, by supporting primary industry at the regional level, will contribute to sustainability for future society (“SUIJI Consortium,” n.d.).”

Students in the undergraduate program participate in a service-learning project in their home country in the first year, and in the second year, students participate in a service-learning project in the partner country (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 4). Students live one week to three months in a local community while engaged in the service-learning projects (“SUIJI Service Learning Program,” n.d.). After the first two years, students can then exit the program through graduation or continue on to graduate studies (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 4).

The graduate programs include study abroad at a member university in the areas of tropical agriculture, food security and community service, and comprehensive agricultural science. Graduate students who participate in the program are eligible for joint degrees in agriculture (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 11).

According to Osamu Kobayashi of Ehime University, in the learning component, the goal of the SUIJI program is for students to learn to communicate and to improve their research skills. In the service component,

the goal is for students to broaden their thinking and consider other viewpoints and to “challenge the problem by respecting diverse human values (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 5).”

The SUIJI program clearly includes experiential learning, particularly study abroad, as well as participation in a service project. However, if some service-learning projects are as short as one week, it is unclear what level of reflection or civic growth might take place.

In the period of 2012-2015, 183 Japanese and 112 Indonesian students participated in service-learning projects at eight sites in Japan (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 6). For the same period, 103 Japanese students and 126 Indonesian students participated in projects at five sites in Indonesia (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 7). In 2014, Japanese students who participated in Indonesia rated their satisfaction as 44% very satisfied, 52% satisfied, and 4% neutral (Kobayashi, 2015, slide 9). However, this does not indicate that there was any growth in their sense of civic responsibility.

### C. Example Three

Stephen Dalton of Osaka Gakuin University taught a course entitled “Service Learning for Japan & the World” in Fall 2012-2013. According to his syllabus, which is available online, the class met twice a week for ninety minutes per meeting. In addition, students participated in community work for eight weeks of the fifteen-week course (Dalton, 2012). The size of the class and the number of hours of community work required were not stated in the syllabus.

During the eight-week period of community service, students visited a number of local community groups in pairs made up of one Japanese student and one foreign (non-Japanese) student. Students then had discussions with their partners and with other class members to process their experience and also kept a weekly reflection journal (“OGU’s Service Learning Class,” 2013). Assessment was based on the discussions, presentations on their experience,

and the volunteer work (Dalton, 2012).

According to OGU's *International Center Newsletter*, the service learning class "focuses on global issues while helping students improve their confidence in English and serving the community in the bargain ("OGU's Service Learning Class," 2013)." The syllabus online states that "Foreign students accepted into the course will be paired with a Japanese OGU student to form a service learning team (Dalton, 2012)." Therefore, an academic component of the class was the development of second language skills of both Japanese and non-Japanese students by pairing them together. In his description of the course in *The Language Teacher* (2013), Dalton writes:

*The service learning class I introduced at OGU accepts both foreign and Japanese students irrespective of language ability. Although I taught in English, every word was consecutively translated into Japanese. This created an atmosphere in which the Japanese and foreign students felt comfortable talking in both languages—when paired with a foreign counterpart, they could act as both language learner and teacher. Each hybrid pair of students worked together to check understanding of the classroom lectures on global problems. They also created activities that they executed while volunteering with local NPOs in Kansai.*

Therefore, reflection was embedded in a language activity.

Service opportunities in the course included working with a non-profit organization that assists evacuees from Fukushima as well as elderly care facilities. Students also collected used textbooks for a book store that would sell the used books to raise money to purchase new textbooks for students in Tohoku. In addition to lectures from the professor on global issues, guest speakers also visited and spoke during the class times ("OGU's Service Learning Class," 2013).

Based on the syllabus and course description, there seems to be a clear balance of service to the community as well as reflection and learning on the

part of the students. Dalton stated:

*In the current semester, exchange students studying at OGU from around the world will partner with Japanese students to feed the homeless, assist the elderly, and provide solace and stimulation for those fleeing nuclear contamination. Although the volunteering is local, the challenges are global: increasing inequality, aging societies, and how to generate power safely and cheaply. Whether it's an exchange student speaking Japanese, or a Japanese student speaking English, they are learning to work together, think critically, and reflect on how to create solutions for the world (2013).*

“Learning to work together and reflecting on how to create solutions for the world” demonstrates the intention to foster a sense of civic responsibility.

## V . Criticism of Service Learning

In the three examples of service learning presented in the previous section, only the third example clearly demonstrates the three key elements of service learning, which are “connection to course objectives, service to the community, and structured and/or unstructured opportunities for reflection (Lukenchuk et al., n.d., p.4).” These are the essential qualities of service learning stated in the National and Community Service Trust Act. As this is an American law, SUIJI in particular, being a joint Japanese-Indonesian initiative, may have different ideas of what service learning should or does entail. On the contrary, it could very well be that all three examples in section IV do in fact implement the three-pronged approach quoted above, even though literature available publicly does not spell this out explicitly. Therefore, it is not clear whether the term *service learning* is being used to attract students and elevate a university’s image or whether it is actually being practiced. Another criticism of service learning is the lack of research on its impact on communities.

Much research has been done on the impacts of service-learning

on participants. For example, the publication, *At A Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition*, provides ample details about the positive effects of service learning on students. However, d'Arlach et al. note that "Few studies have directly examined how recipients of service view the service (2009, p. 5)."

Takeshi Miyazaki of Soka University examined six universities in Japan and one in the United States to see how the impact on their service recipients was measured (2013). The names of the universities in his research were not provided. He found that two of the six universities in Japan did not conduct any investigation into the impact on the communities, while two of the others collected information as feedback on student performance. In the remaining two cases, one university holds meetings twice a year between the students and the service recipients, and the other university observes students on site and speaks with the students afterwards (Miyazaki, 2013, slides 19-20). Miyazaki concluded that:

*In Japan, at the six universities, standardized methods for evaluating community impact were not implemented.*

*Even when the schools receive evaluations from the community partners, the evaluations are still centered around student efforts.*

*The universities are aware of the importance of investigating the community impact for good relationships (2013, slide 21).*

Furthermore, he stated that, "The community impact was a vital element for a case in the US, but for Japanese universities, the matter of community impact was not taken so seriously, or seen as so important." The Japanese universities primarily collected information on "how community partners view the students and their performance (Miyazaki, 2013, slide 29)." Miyazaki stated that one of the limitations of his research is that he could not demonstrate "the concrete existence of a community impact that is

rooted in Japanese culture (2013, slide 31).”

## VI. Conclusion

Universities offer their student populations a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities, as well as providing students with an abundance of extracurricular clubs and volunteer activities. Do they offer service learning? It is not clear from this research whether service learning is actually and effectively being implemented or not.

Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) instituted “The Education Reform Plan for the Twenty-First Century” in 2001. Community service was one of the seven priorities of the plan. The plan requires elementary and junior high school students participate for a period of two weeks, while one month was required for senior high school students (Feinburg, 2002, p. 369). However, Feinburg laments that “the ideals of service learning are not realized in Japan or in many schools in the United States because clear connections are not made with the curriculum and learning outcomes (Feinburg, 2002, p. 370).” While Feinburg’s research is centered on high schools, the same observation can be made in two of the examples of service learning described in section IV above.

The program hosted by International Christian University clearly shows direct service but it does not demonstrate an academic component from the information available online. On the other hand, SUIJI clearly shows an academic component but does not describe its direct service in its publicly available information. Only the program at Osaka Gakuin University shows, as quoted above, “connection to course objectives, service to the community, and structured and/or unstructured opportunities for reflection (Lukenchuk et al., n.d., p. 4).” However, even though the OGU course addresses and encompasses these points, the level to which students developed a sense of

civic responsibility is unknown.

In his research, Miyazaki demonstrates that universities are more concerned about their students' experiences than those of the communities they serve. This does not show equal benefit to both parties. Furthermore, one of Miyazaki's goals in his research was to demonstrate a sense of community culture in Japan, but he was unable to do that given the limitations of the programs in his study. Therefore, service learning still has far to go as it is practiced in Japan today.

The author of this paper became interested in service learning after working for three years for the National Corporation for Community Service, which was established to implement the National and Community Service Trust Act. After she came to Japan, she subsequently taught service learning at a university in 2002 (see Yabuno, 2002, for details). While service learning is now prevalent on university campuses in the United States, it appears not to be implemented to its full potential in its current state of practice in Japan. Depending on the goals of a university, it may be better to promote and implement experiential learning opportunities than service learning and to develop and host Volunteer Centers than Service Learning Centers. Developing a sense of civic responsibility, as MEXT desires, may be more easily accomplished in younger student populations taking compulsory education than in universities that must remain competitive.

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## A Brief Examination of Experiential Learning and Service Learning

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