CHAPTER

Pedagogical Strategies

IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING

WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in service to address human and community needs while participating in structured reflection to connect those experiences to course content in an effort to promote student learning and development (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Jacoby & Associates, 1996). The pedagogy borrows from experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984), wherein learning and skill development emerges through active engagement and on-going critical reflection. This form of inquiry can provide opportunities for students to develop psychosocial and observational skills, an appreciation for diversity and a better understanding of the complex social contexts in which people live their lives, and to explore personal and professional issues in ways typically unavailable in traditional introductory psychology courses (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Root, & Giles, 1998; Giles & Eyler, 1994).

Service-learning programs embrace a broad conceptualization of learning that includes learning about people, life skills, and operating effectively in the “real world” in addition to assimilating discipline-based content from text and lectures (Gardner & Baron, 1999; Miller, 1994). Service-learning experiences have a positive impact on a variety of developmental outcomes such as self-awareness, personal development, academic achievement, involvement with the community, sensitivity to diversity, and awareness of a community’s strengths and history (Bringle & Duffy, 1998; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994). Service-learning research suggests that students feel they gain interpersonally and socially from their experiences (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994).

Service-learning can be a peripheral add-on component to a course, an integrated tie-in to course content, or be the entire basis for a course; students can work fairly independently in different settings doing direct or indirect service with community members or work collaboratively on community-based projects (e.g., Enos & Troppe, 1996; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999; Zlotkowski, 1998).

THE VALUE OF SERVICE-LEARNING FOR INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY

Incorporating service-learning into your introductory psychology class can be particularly helpful to students who may be considering psychology as a major. A few examples of what service-learning has to offer introductory psychology students are listed below.

Exposure to field experiences and career exploration. Students taking introductory psychology courses often have opportunities to participate in experimental research and/or to work as research assistants on a variety of projects. Less common are opportunities for students to obtain field experience working with diverse people in community-based settings in connection with their coursework. Service-learning can provide students with important “real life” encounters with schools, community centers, social service agencies, and mental health centers—all contexts where psychologists might work. In addition, because students will be conscious about being in a service setting as part of the class, they will spend more “time on task” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), actively looking to apply psychology concepts to
the experience. Contacts made with professionals in the community during service-learning experiences may be useful for students to obtain recommendations for internships and community-based research projects in the future.

**Exposure to qualitative research methods.** Students engaged in service-learning are responsible for observing behavior in a community-based setting in order to reflect and link observations to course content. In this way, students learn more about the hands-on experience of using research methods, both naturalistic observation, in which they observe without interfering in the natural environment, and participant observation, in which they watch while playing an established role in a setting (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). Participant observation is a qualitative approach used in ethnography, and you can teach students about strategies for writing ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Students can use these notes as the basis of a term paper, case study, or other written reflection activity linking course concepts to community-based observations.

**Putting psychology in action.** Students working in service contexts have opportunities to put what they’ve learned about psychology into action. For example, students can try to incorporate what they know about learning, social cognition and influence, cognitive abilities, personality, and psychological treatments to affect the people and contexts in which they are working in positive ways. A student working in an after school tutoring program might use positive reinforcement as a method of encouraging a youth partner or consider issues such as stereotype threat, learned helplessness, social impairment, and multiple intelligences in his/her approaches to working with a student and others in the school setting. Alternatively, a student working with people recovering from substance abuse problems might use techniques such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, active listening, and cognitive restructuring in efforts to build relationships with community participants and assist them in coping with stressors.

**SERVICE-LEARNING REFLECTION**

Reflection activity linking course objectives to service experiences is an essential component of service-learning in any course (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, 1999). Reflection appears to play a key role for social and cognitive student outcomes (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Cone & Harris, 1996; Conrad & Hedin, 1992; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Hamilton & Zeldin, 1987). Students involved in extensive reflection demonstrate greater cognitive development such as defining problems and solutions with more complexity (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Civic and social learning outcomes for students are more substantial when they participate in weekly in-class reflection, ongoing summative written reflection, and discussion of service activities with instructors or community supervisors (Mabry, 1998). Included below are several methods that can be used for reflection. Full credit for written responses should be contingent upon successful completion of the service requirement.

**Service-learning journal.** Journal writing is a reflection mechanism documented as an important part of learning in service-learning classes (e.g., Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; de Acosta, 1995; Dunlap, 1998; Morton, 1995). In order to make journaling a truly reflective activity that makes linkages to course content, Bringle and Hatcher (1999) suggest a number of formal journal types which are described briefly below: key phrase journal, double-entry journal, directed writings, critical incident journal, and three part journal.

In a key phrase journal, students write about their experiences and integrate a list of highlighted course concepts into the journals. Double-entry journals require students to use a spiral notebook. On the left side, they write about their personal reactions and experiences, and they connect course concepts to this writing on the right side of the journal. Directed writings provide an opportunity for students to reflect on how a specific aspect of the course material relates to their service experiences.

In a critical incident journal, students describe a situation in the service experience that created a dilemma because they did not know what to say or how to act. They respond to questions about the
critical incident such as: Why was it a confusing event. How did you, or others, feel about the situation. What did you do? List three actions that you might have taken and evaluate each of them. How does the course material relate to this event and the actions you took?

In a three part journal, students respond to three different issues in each entry. They describe what happened at the site (interactions, decisions that were made, etc.); analyze how the course content relates to the event; and apply the course content and the service experience to their personal lives (goals, attitudes, values, etc.).

**Applied concepts journal.** The service-learning applied concepts journal can be an important means of reflection with the objective of strengthening connections between experiential and academic learning. Journal entries can be submitted weekly and require writing a short (a few sentences) but precise example of four major concepts in the textbook. Examples must be based on students’ experiences in the service setting. The examples must be drawn from reflections on the service experience and demonstrate a clear comprehension and accurate application of the concepts. Students should attempt to apply concepts from all of the chapters and not repeat the same concepts.

**Computer-mediated communication.** Supplementing face-to-face class discussion with asynchronous computer-mediated communication such as a course computer conference or discussion board can support service-learning reflection. Students report that participating in computer-mediated discussions facilitates learning course material (Althaus, 1997). Computer-mediated communication can provide a shared space for students to build knowledge and connection with each other through learning in real-life contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Schrage, 1990; Zhu, 1998).

A computer conference can engage students in more critical reflection about their own observations and experiences during the service-learning activities, and it can encourage students to make explicit connections to introductory psychology concepts. The online conference also can facilitate peer-to-peer learning, especially if you structure the activity such that students are expected to devote time to reading the posts of their peers. Credit should be given to responses which are descriptive, specific, thoughtful, and substantive. The writing should be engaging to peers and serve the purpose of fostering dialogue online and/or during weekly face-to-face meetings. To create an interactive dialogue, ask students to include the following components in each post to receive full credit:

1. a response to one (or more) posts by other students in the class.
2. reflection on the service experience.
3. an explicit connection to one (or more) course concepts.

**Face-to-face discussion.** Students can participate in a weekly one-hour discussion period, which will enable further elaboration on course concepts as well as reflection on other facets of experiential learning from the service activities. The meeting also can provide time for students to share ideas and collaborate on service activities, thus encouraging cooperation among students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Themes and important issues/questions posted on a course computer conference also can serve as the basis for facilitating face-to-face discussion.

**Final reflection paper.** Students can submit final reflection papers that discuss the service-learning experience in terms of major course concepts or psychological theories. Reflection about what was learned or gained from the experience should also be included. You can provide students with specific questions to address in the papers. Alternatively, final papers can be in the form of a case study of a person or setting in which the service takes place, linking course concepts to a rich description of the experience.

**Short topic paper.** Students can reflect on psychology content through a series of short topic papers that correspond with chapters and/or activities that are suggested in this manual. Many options for service-
learning activities are provided in the supplements, and suggestions for topics to include in reflection connected to those activities are included in the supplement options.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT SERVICE-LEARNING—CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS

- Students can engage in direct human service activity in a community-based setting for a minimum of twenty hours over the course of the semester. They should plan on volunteering once per week for about two hours, although this service schedule should be flexible to meet the needs of the community site as long as the minimum service hours are obtained.

- Students should create mutual goals and a tentative service plan in collaboration with a supervisor in a community-based setting and are responsible for documenting and providing verification of the service hours at the end of the course. It is helpful to provide a service log for students to verify their service placement and hours of service.

- Ask students to consult with you about appropriate activities and settings and to sign a service contract before beginning work at a community site. In general, the service experience must include regular one-on-one or group interaction with people to provide the best opportunities to observe behavior and to make linkages to psychology content. Thus, service experiences that primarily include activities like office work, physical labor, grant writing, event planning, for example, are NOT appropriate for this course.

- Many college campuses have an office of volunteer programs or service-learning center where instructors and students can gain assistance in locating service opportunities in the community. Some centers also sponsor volunteer web sites, which post updated descriptions of local service opportunities. There are many excellent opportunities to work in local contexts addressing a variety of social issues, including work with senior citizens, people experiencing mental illness and substance abuse problems, families who are homeless or in transition from a domestic violence situation, international families and refugees, runaway teenagers, and special education students. Students can work in after school programs or youth centers, mental health centers, community art programs, buddy or mentoring programs, tutoring programs, advocacy programs, etc.

- It is important to remind students that it is essential that the youth, families, staff, and/or community members who may be encountered during their service-learning experiences are treated with respect and dignity. Students must be compliant with the rules and regulations of the community partner/organization, and appointments for service must be consistent and reliable. Students must be conscientious about the influence of their own words and behaviors, and interactions with community participants must always be safe and nurturing. The service experiences should be reciprocal in nature—students are not the only ones who have something to offer to the relationship(s). They should look for opportunities to learn from others as well.

- Service-learning can be incorporated into the introductory psychology course in a variety of ways. Less intensive requirements with regard to service hours and reflective writing can be integrated into a regular course. More elaborate service-learning programs, including programs which involve students in collaborative activities, more service hours, extensive writing, or an additional face-to-face meeting can be integrated into introductory courses as an add-on unit or an honors section. In addition, you can teach an advanced service-learning seminar that follows your introductory course during the subsequent semester, or you can advise a co-curricular psychology club that links reflection activities to service experiences.
In addition to providing specific strategies for service-learning reflection activities, this manual provides many suggestions for activities that your students can incorporate into service-learning experiences. Some supplements are listed as freestanding service-learning activities and others are included with activity supplements as service-learning options. You can integrate these activities into your course through reflection activities such as special topic papers or mini assignments, service-learning journal entries, term papers, or posting to a course computer conference. Ideas for linkages with course content are provided in the supplements.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES


