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Service-Learning and Information Literacy: Creating Powerful Synergies

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Information Literacy and Service-Learning: Creating Powerful Synergies

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> For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago–silently, without warning–that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century. (Putnam, 2001, p. 27)
>
> *-Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.*

Bowling Alone is the highly-influential essay (and later book) by American political scientist Robert Putnam. The title refers to one of Putnam's findings that while more people in the U. S. were bowling, significantly fewer than in the past were participating together in bowling leagues. It's not just declining participation in bowling leagues that should worry us. Putnam gathers a preponderance of evidence that includes shrinking voter turnout, apathy towards participation in community organizations, and decrease in volunteerism. He even found that fewer people were entertaining groups of friends in their homes when compared with earlier generations. Taken together, these trends document an alarming decline in American civic life and "social capital." Putnam (2000) defines social capital as simply: "connections among individuals –social networking and the norm of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19).

Higher education has been largely complicit, and at times, an active contributor to this erosion of social capital and civic engagement. Our nation's earliest institutions of higher education were founded on the concept of educating students to become active, democratic citizens. Service-learning scholar M.W. Smith points out that "Since the founding of Harvard College in 1636, the goals of American higher education have included the preparation of citizens for active involvement in community life" (1994, p.

55). This democratic and civically-minded conception of higher education was still the prevailing philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century. Woodrow Wilson, who was president of Princeton University before he became president of the United States, said in an 1896 commemorative address: "It is not learning, but the spirit of service that will give a college a place in the public annals of history" (Wilson, "Princeton in the Nation's Service"). Our great land-grant institutions as conceived by John Morrill and Abraham Lincoln were based on a "Public University" model that would teach a more practical curriculum in service of the nation. Teaching students to recognize and redress social injustices was for a long time implicit in this educational model.

During much of the same period (second half of the 20th century) in which Putnam traced the decline of American's civic involvement, higher education underwent a sea change in relation to its primary mission. Large research universities in particular were first called upon to support two World Wars by strongly emphasizing the research component of their mission. At the same time there was a trend within disciplines to focus on ever narrower fields of study thereby preserving the expertise and autonomy of a given field of study. In 2000 the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities declared: "If this nation is to succeed in a new century, the covenant between our institutions and the public they serve must be renewed again and made binding" (2000, "Renewing the Covenant"). As will be discussed later in this chapter, many calls for higher education reform in the last two decades have called for a similar return to civic engagement and experiential education.

Service-learning has been championed by many as one way for higher education to reverse course and engage students with the learning process and for universities to reconnect with their local communities and public service roots. Similarly, information literacy has been called an essential 21st skill and the foundation for lifelong learning. Thoughtfully combining service-learning and information literacy can create a powerful pedagogical

foundation to help students connect classroom learning with real-world problems. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the synergies between service-learning and information literacy. In the article, "Where's the Library in Service Learning?" John Riddle (2003) points out that:

> It would seem that opportunities exist, and have existed for some time, for scholars in both service learning and information literacy to recognize a common ground, perhaps join their efforts to demonstrate the efficacy of these pedagogies. Yet, one can examine separately the library and information science and the service learning scholarly literature and barely find a mention…of the impact of service learning on library services, information literacy, information-seeking behavior, or critical thinking. (p. 71)

To better establish the "common ground" that Riddle mentions, this chapter will first seek to define service-learning and information literacy. Each of these concepts is then situated within contemporary higher education and academic librarianship. Next, the educational and pedagogical theories that undergird service-learning are summarized. The chapter grounds the discussion of combining service-learning and information literacy with a case-study of an Environmental Studies course which the author co-taught. In way of summary, the synergies created by combining service-learning and information literacy are discussed and a list of emerging best practices for combining service-learning and information literacy is provided.

Defining Service-Learning and Information Literacy

• Service-Learning

As with any term that seeks to encompass a broad range of practices there has been a good deal of dissension when attempting to define service-learning. A 1990 review of the service-learning literature found 147 different terms and definitions related to service-learning (Kendall, 1990). Since that time, the creation of a few large, national organizations dedicated to service-learning has helped to establish some consensus regarding basic definitions of service-learning. The *National Service-Learning Clearinghouse*

defines service-learning as follows: "Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse). *Learn and Serve America*[44] offers a similar definition: "Service-learning engages students in the educational process, using what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems. Students not only learn about democracy and citizenship, they become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform" (Learn and Serve America). The most basic principle of service-learning has been stated as: "Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both" (Honnet & Poulsen, 1996, p. 1). Complicating the matter somewhat, is the fact that the terms "action research" and "community-based education" are often used interchangeably with "service-learning." Service-learning, action research, and community-based education are all forms of experiential learning that engage students with problems in their local communities. Determining whether or not a given course has all the characteristics of a service-learning course almost has to be done on a case-by-case basis. For example, sometimes action research courses place more emphasis on the doing (the action) and less on the critical reflection that is a key component of service-learning.

The greatest struggle in defining service-learning has arisen from the need to differentiate it from simple community service or volunteerism on one end of the spectrum and internships on the other end. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that community service is a critical component of service-learning. At issue is whether or not the service is grounded in the academic curriculum and whether or not opportunities are provided for critical reflection upon the service. Isolated community service still has some benefits to both students and the community, but it can't accomplish curricular learning outcomes in and of itself. On the other end of the spectrum internships are also a common form of experiential education

44 The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (est. 1997) and Learn and Serve America (est. 2001) are both national service-learning organizations funded by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. Taken together, these two organizations have been quite influential in promoting service-learning in the U.S.

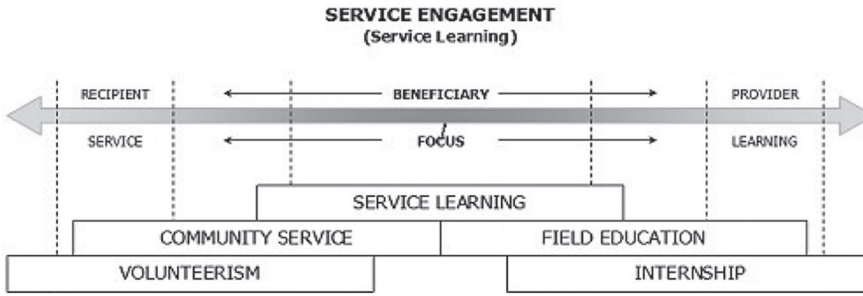
that is often conflated with service-learning. Similar to isolated community service, many internships are just focused on the experience without specific grounding in the curriculum or critical reflection. Depending on the structure and requirements of the internship, though, it could be made into a genuine service-learning experience.

The following example and diagram attempt to clarify service-learning. The *National Youth Leadership Council* provides this succinct distinction between service, learning, and service-learning.

- Cleaning up a riverbank is SERVICE
- Sitting in a science classroom looking at water samples under a microscope is LEARNING
- Science students taking samples from local water sources, then analyzing the samples, documenting the results and presenting the scientific information to a pollution control agency is SERVICE-LEARNING

(National Youth Leadership Council, 2012)

Prominent service-learning scholar Andrew Furco developed the diagram below to help illustrate the differences between community service, service-learning, internships and other forms of experiential education.



(Furco, 1996)

- Information Literacy

The terms information literacy and service-learning are roughly contemporary in their origins. Service-learning was first used as a distinct term in the mid-sixties while the term information literacy was coined in the mid-seventies (Zurkowski, 1974). Both terms were created to better

codify a group of practices that had been occurring in both fields for a long period of time. In education the idea of experiential education was popularized by John Dewey in the early 20th century and then faded from prominence only to re-emerge during the social unrest of the 1960s. In academic librarianship "bibliographic instruction" sessions led by librarians had been used to teach students the fundamentals of academic research for decades. Similar to service-learning the most oft-cited definition of information literacy comes from a prominent national organization, in this case the *Association of College and Research Libraries* (ACRL): "Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989). In the years since this definition became the standard one for the profession, many have criticized it as far too narrow and limiting. The detractors point out that the inherent civic and political aspects of information literacy are largely absent in the ACRL definition and the related Information Literacy Competency Standards. In 2005, the *International Federation of Library Associations and Federations* crafted *The Alexandria Proclamation* which highlights the sociopolitical aspects of information literacy:

> Information Literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations. Lifelong learning enables individuals, communities and nations to attain their goals and to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the evolving global environment for shared benefit. It assists them and their institutions to meet technological, economic and social challenges, to redress disadvantage and to advance the well being of all. (Alexandria Proclamation, 2005)

Within the expanded definition of information literacy provided by the *Alexandria Proclamation* one can begin to see some of the potential synergies of combining service-learning and information literacy as both are concerned with empowerment, social justice, and civic engagement. Some scholars have argued that the library profession shouldn't get hung up in debates over the definition of information literacy, but rather move

towards a "critical practice of librarianship" (Elmborg, 2006). In an 2006 article entitled "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice," James Elmborg asserts that "The real challenge for libraries in treating information literacy seriously lies not in defining it or describing it, but in developing a critical practice of librarianship- a theoretically informed praxis" (p. 198). Praxis is the recursive process whereby theory informs practice and practice informs theory. This chapter makes a small contribution towards the goal of developing a critical practice of librarianship through documenting the synergies between service-learning and information literacy and grounding both in sound educational theory.

Situating Service-Learning within Higher Education

To fully understand the role of service-learning in modern higher education, it is important to recognize recent national calls for education reform and increased civic engagement. The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse maintains an annotated history of service-learning that begins with the 1862 Morrill Act that established land grant institutions. For the purposes of this chapter, only the more recent history of significant events that shaped the service-learning movement within higher education will be considered.

The turmoil and activism of the 1960's created the foundation for a return to service marked by the civil rights movement, the formation of the Peace Corps, and Lyndon Johnson's Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. Educational philosopher Paulo Freire published his highly influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970. In this work Freire repositioned education as an inherently political act that could actually bring about revolution and liberation.

The early to mid 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in campus service and service-learning, with multiple high-profile critiques of higher education. Probably the most well known of these was *A Nation at Risk* published in 1983 by the *National Commission on Excellence in Education*. The commission's report took great pains to make it clear that American higher education was foundering:

> Our Nation is at risk… the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people…Our concern, however, goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society... A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom. (p. 5)

A Nation at Risk was in many ways a wake-up call for public higher education which in previous decades had cultivated a great deal of autonomy and had grown used to very little outside oversight or assessment. In 1985, shortly after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the presidents of Brown, Georgetown and Stanford came together to create *Campus Compact*. The mission of *Campus Compact* is to "advance the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility." Today *Campus Compact* includes more than 1,100 colleges and universities, representing 6 million students (Campus Compact, "Who We Are").

Following in the footsteps of the great educational reformers John Dewey and Paulo Freire, Ernest Boyer became known as one of the late 20th century's most influential critics of education. He was commissioner of education under President Jimmy Carter and then served for 16 years as president of the *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*. While working for *Carnegie Foundation*, he authored a number of important reports including *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987). A call for experiential education and a return to service were the core components of Boyer's philosophy:

> Boyer believed strongly in a broad concept of service at every level of education as a way of connecting schools to the world beyond the campus, while simultaneously creating an ethical base for learning. He felt that students, from the first-grader to the doctoral candidate, should understand that they have something to offer their communities. Serving was for him a critical part of the human experience, one of the ways in which we understand and fulfill life's purposes. (Coye, 1997, p. 22)

One of the next major milestones in the service-learning movement was the *Wingspread Declaration of Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University* written in 1999. This document is the final product of Wingspread conferences held in 1998 and 1999. These conferences involved a veritable who's who in American higher education including university presidents, provosts, deans, and faculty members as well as representatives of professional associations, private foundations, and civic organizations. The *Wingspread Declaration* concludes as follows:

> Research universities and leaders from all levels of our institutions need to rise to the occasion of our challenge as a democracy on the edge of a new millennium. We need to help catalyze and lead a national campaign or movement that reinvigorates the public purposes and civic mission of our great research universities and higher education broadly. We need to renew for the next century the idea that our institutions of higher education are, in a vital sense, both agents and architects of a flourishing democracy, bridges between individuals' work and the larger world. (Boyte and Hollander, p. 14)

Two more examples will serve to document the continued momentum of the service-learning movement in the 21st century. The *Carnegie Commission on Higher Education* first began the Carnegie Classification system in 1970 to help distinguish between the wide array of colleges and universities that make up the American education system. Some of the characteristics that the system uses to rank institutions include curricula, degrees offered, student enrollment, etc. In an acknowledgement of the growing importance of a return to civic engagement and the service-learning movement, the *Carnegie Classification on Community Engagement* was created in 2006. According to Carnegie, the Community Engagement Classification, "describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Carnegie Foundation, online). Elective classifications are voluntary and require substantially more evidence from an institution and are therefore more difficult to achieve. As of 2010, 115 institutions had been awarded this prestigious classification.

A final example demonstrates support for service-learning in higher

education. In 2008, the influential Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) released a report on *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.* The introduction to the report notes that high-impact educational practices speak, "… directly to what is arguably our most important national challenge in higher education: helping America's extraordinarily diverse students reap the full benefits –economic, civic, and personal- of their studies in college" (Kuh, 2008, p. 1). These practices are derived from recent research on student engagement. The report's author, George Kuh, identifies ten high-impact educational practices. While all ten high-impact practices could be applied to service-learning courses, the two that are most relevant to the subject matter of this chapter are Service Learning / Community-Based Learning and Undergraduate Research. In his description of service-learning experiences Kuh explicitly distinguishes authentic service-learning from community service:

> The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. (2008, p. 11)

The point of recounting this brief history of higher education reform and the service-learning movement is to enable the reader to better understand how service-learning can be used to fulfill the missions of many institutions and re-engage students in the learning process. The success and integration of service-learning into the undergraduate curriculum requires continued advocacy. To be an effective advocate for service-learning it is essential to understand contemporary calls for higher education reform and how service-learning can enable some of those reforms.

Situating Service-Learning and Information Literacy within Academic Libraries

As mentioned above, undergraduate research was one of the high-impact educational practices identified by the AACU in 2008. The potential

synergies between information literacy and service-learning become more apparent in relation to undergraduate research. Intensive undergraduate research, whether in the sciences or the humanities, requires information literacy skills at every stage, from forming a hypothesis through synthesizing results. Service-learning and research are high-impact educational practices that can easily be combined in a single course. Before exploring those synergies more fully, the following section situates both service-learning and information literacy within the contemporary academic library environment.

The earliest American conception of the "Free Public Library" was based on the idea that citizens in a democracy require equal access to information to fulfill their civic duties. In the preface to *Libraries and Democracy: the Cornerstones of Liberty*, Nancy Kranich (2001) writes:

> Democracies need libraries. An informed public constitutes the very foundation of a democracy; after all, democracies are about discourse – discourse among the people. If a free society is to survive, it must ensure the preservation of its records and provide free and open access to this information to its citizens. It must ensure that citizens have the resources to develop the information literacy skills necessary to participate in the democratic process. It must allow unfettered dialogue and guarantee freedom of expression. Libraries deepen the foundation of democracy in our communities. (p. *v*)

As noted above, information literacy is a relatively new term, but its' key components: accessing, evaluating, synthesizing and ethically using information pervade the historical foundations of American libraries.

In the last 30 years, higher education as a whole has generally focused more on the essential concepts and processes that are critical to learning. Library instruction has followed suit with an increased focus on "big picture" learning goals in addition to teaching basic research tools and skills. This marked the beginning of a transition from focusing on academic libraries as more than just passive repositories of information to the concept of "Teaching Libraries." A teaching library "is characterized by its commitment to instruction as a core library service and by robust instructional service program that reflects not only the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom, but also that which goes on in the

co-curriculum, the extra-curriculum, and the surrounding community" (Scott, 2007 p. 2).

As mentioned earlier, information literacy was introduced as a distinct term in the 1970s, but it didn't gain universal recognition as a core component of the modern academic library until the *American Library Association* (ALA) formed the *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy* in 1987. The committee was formed with three specific purposes:

- to define Information Literacy within the higher literacies and its importance to student performance, lifelong learning, and active citizenship;
- to design one or more models for information literacy development appropriate to formal and informal learning environments throughout people's lifetimes; and
- to determine implications for the continuing education and development for teachers. (American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989, online)

It took more than ten years for the library profession to create an agreed upon set of *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000). The five standards and twenty-two performance indicators were designed as a framework for assessing the information literacy abilities of students. The information literate student:

- defines and articulates the need for information;
- accesses needed information effectively and efficiently;
- evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system;
- uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and
- understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally

(ACRL, 2000, online)

These standards were successful in creating a standardized framework for assessing information literacy, but some have criticized the standards as sterilizing information literacy and diminishing the larger sociopolitical contexts of information literacy. Jacobs (2008) elaborated on this point

when she wrote: "This is not to say that we should not use the ACRL standards… we need to use them judiciously so that information literacy's tremendous potential for creative, critical and visionary thinking does not become –literally and figuratively- boxed in and compartmentalized" (Jacobs, 2008, p. 258).

It should be noted that the existence of these standards has contributed greatly to legitimizing information literacy within higher education. It should also be noted that the *Information Literacy Competency Standards* listed above are currently (2012) being revised. An important question for the library profession, and the arguments put forth in this chapter, is whether or not these standards work for assessing information literacy within service-learning contexts? Are the core goals of service-learning courses which include fostering civic engagement and using classroom knowledge to solve real-world problems adequately covered by the standards? One could argue that these pedagogical goals are implicit in the Information Literacy Competency Standards, but a direct correlation is not there.

In their seminal work *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?*, Eyler and Giles (1999) recount the results of a national survey of over 1500 students in service-learning classes. Although none of the survey questions asked students directly about information literacy or the research process, some of the conclusions the authors reached demonstrate the need to better integrate information literacy and service-learning. For example, the survey found that "Service Learning students talked more about the need to gather information and define issues regarding community problem solving" (Riddle, 2003, p. 73). This finding aligns quite closely with the Information Literacy Competency Standards, #1 and #2. The authors also concluded that "Service learning students are better able to apply subject concepts, authorities, and information to new problems" (p. 73). Applying concepts and information to new problems shows that students in service-learning courses are meeting standards #3 and #4. These survey findings demonstrate some of the synergies that can be created when service-learning and information literacy are combined. Combining information literacy and service-learning makes sense not only from the perspective of meeting standards, but it also ties into important trends

within the library profession. The ACRL *Research Planning and Review Committee* regularly reviews the recent library science literature and administers a broad-based survey to determine "Top Trends in Academic Libraries." The 2010 report included ten trends, one of them especially relevant to the subject matter of this chapter: "Increased collaboration will expand the role of the library within the institution and beyond. Collaboration efforts will continue to diversify: collaborating with faculty to integrate library resources into the curriculum and to seek out information literacy instruction, and as an embedded librarian" (2010 Top Trends, p. 287-288).

Embedded librarianship is an important trend within academic libraries and was the model used in the case study discussed later in the chapter. The term was first applied to journalists who were "embedded" on the frontlines of the Iraq War. The embedded librarian model is, of course, far less dangerous than the embedded journalist model, but both involve close, extended interactions. In a final report to the Special Libraries Association, titled "Models of Embedded Librarianship" Shumaker and Talley (2010) specify that embedded librarianship involves: "focusing on the needs of one or more specific groups, building relationships with these groups, developing a deep understanding of their work, and providing information services that are highly customized and targeted to their greatest needs. It involves shifting the model from transactional to high trust, close collaboration, and shared responsibility of outcomes" (p. 9). This discussion of embedded librarianship as an important trend is significant because it is one of the best models for integrating information literacy into service-learning courses. There is certainly value in offering traditional "one-shot" research instruction sessions to students in service-learning courses, but to maximize the synergies between service-learning and information literacy a more intimate, extended relationship is required.

One final example will serve to further situate information literacy with service-learning in the modern academic library environment. In 2011, ACRL released an updated strategic plan (*ACRL Plan for Excellence*). This plan begins with a "Vivid Description of a Desired Future" for academic libraries that includes: **"**Librarians drive and enable transformation of libraries, student learning, and scholarly research by building powerful

coalitions and collaborations, setting standards, exploring innovative methods and approaches, modeling behavior, and embedding their results in dynamic user environments" (ACRL, 2011). Beneath the heading of "Student Learning" is the following goal: "Librarians transform student learning, pedagogy, and instructional practices through creative and innovative collaborations" (ACRL, 2011). One method to meet these challenges is through library integration with service-learning courses.

To best advocate for integration of information literacy into the academic curriculum it is important for librarians to be able to demonstrate that information literacy is not just part of the academic library agenda, but is increasingly recognized by educational associations, government organizations and corporate America as an essential 21st century skill. As our country continues its conversion to an information economy, businesses are demanding that educational institutions produce information literate graduates. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education in conjunction with major businesses including Apple, Dell, Microsoft and Cisco, formed the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*. This group identified information literacy as a key 21st century skill students need "to succeed as effective citizens, workers and leaders" ("Partnership," n.d.).

In addition to *AACU*'s "High Impact Educational Practices" another important initiative called "Liberal Education and America's Promise" has specifically recognized information literacy as one of the "Essential Learning Outcomes." Beyond academia, the importance of information literacy in the 21st Century was acknowledged through a Presidential Proclamation when Barack Obama designated October 2009, *National Information Literacy Awareness Month*. The Proclamation notes, "In addition to the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, it is equally important that our students are given the tools required to take advantage of the information available to them. The ability to seek, find, and decipher information can be applied to countless life decisions, whether financial, medical, educational, or technical" (Obama, 2009).

Situating service-learning and information literacy within higher education and the academic library environment was a necessary exercise in understanding how both have evolved and how they meet modern edu-

cational challenges. As Fowler and Walter pointed out in a 2003 article, library "instruction programs are becoming increasingly complex, and ever more closely tied to initiatives of import across the campus because of broader trends both in the profession and in higher education" (p. 466). The next step in developing a praxis of service-learning and information literacy is grounding both in educational theory and philosophy. Without this theoretical grounding it is all too easy to discount service-learning as mere community service lacking in academic rigor.

Towards a Philosophy of Service-Learning Wedded to Information Literacy

According to James Elmborg, "instructional librarianship requires extensive knowledge of pedagogies and of the cultures and discourse communities of higher education" (2006, p. 198). Without this theoretical background it is difficult to effectively argue for integration of information literacy into the academic curriculum, yet very little attention is given to educational theory and pedagogy in most library and information science degree programs. In regards to promotion and tenure for librarians it is quite useful to be able to explain the theoretical underpinnings of time-intensive activities such as teaching in service-learning courses and embedded librarianship.

Dewey

Service-learning most often looks to constructivist educational theories for support. Constructivist theorists say that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. As such experiential and active learning are common constructivist pedagogies. John Dewey (1859-1952) is generally recognized as the founding father of constructivism.

Dewey's educational philosophy is based on three principles:

- Education must lead to personal growth.
- Education must contribute to humane conditions.
- Education must engage citizens in association with one another

(Hatcher, 1997)

Given these three core principles, it is easy to see why Dewey's constructivist theories are so often cited in support of service-learning. Any well-designed service-learning course will lead to personal growth, contribute to humane conditions, and engage citizens in association with one another. Also central to Dewey's theories was the need to reconcile naturally arising dualisms in the educational process. For example he states that the classic knowledge versus action dualism can be resolved through a process of experience and reflection. This same dualism when encountered in service-learning courses is also resolved through critical reflection upon the service experiences. Another dualism that was important to Dewey was individual versus society. Dewey argued that this particular dualism could be resolved by combining education with civic participation, another cornerstone of service-learning. For Dewey, service was inextricably linked to education: "When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious" (1900, p. 44).

Freire

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian professor and educational theorist. In some ways Freire was responsible for a re-popularizing of a constructivist approach similar to that advocated by Dewey. Freire's theories as exemplified in his well-known *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) diverged from Dewey in their radical foundations. Freire believed that education was an inherently political act and could be used to overcome oppression and could even lead to revolution. Ira Shor lists the basic descriptors of Freirean pedagogy as "participatory, situated (in student thought and language), critical, democratic, dialogic, desocializing, multi-cultural, research-oriented, activist and affective" (Deans, 1999, p. 21). Another key component of Freirean pedagogy is the development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is the ability to perceive social, political, and

economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society. Critical consciousness consisted of four primary components: "power awareness (understanding social history), critical literacy (analytically reading, writing and discussing social matters), desocialization (examining the internalized myths and values of mass culture), and self-organization/self-education (taking initiative in ongoing social change) (Deans, 1999, p. 22). Service-learning advocates cite Freire's theories to support both the educational and social goals of service-learning. Service-learning courses can develop critical consciousness in students by opening their eyes to oppressive structures in society and education. In *Service-Learning and Social Justice* (2010), Susan Benigni Cipolle does an excellent job documenting service-learning's ability to develop critical consciousness in students. In this work, Cipolle provides many direct quotations from students in service-learning courses that show their awakening to social justice issues. For example, one student commented:

> My experiences helped me realize that there are so many disenfranchised people in this country for whatever reasons. You learn that it is not fair or appropriate to blame individuals for their poverty or other problems. Somewhere along the line the community or government has failed them. (p. 24)

Praxis is also an important component of Freire's theories. He defines praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1986, p. 36). Here again the Freirean roots of service-learning are apparent. Service-learning courses require both action and critical reflection before any meaningful transformations can occur. Thomas Deans (1999) compares Dewey and Freire in regards to service-learning and concludes:

> Both offer sound theoretical frameworks for service-learning. They overlap on several key characteristics essential to any philosophy of service-learning: an anti-foundationalist epistemology; an affirmation of the centrality of experience in learning; an articulation of the intimate relationship between action, reflection, and learning; an emphasis on dialogue; and an abiding hope for social change through education combined with community action. (p. 26)

Dewey and Freire are probably the best known theorists whose work is often cited as the basis for service-learning. Contemporary theorists such as David Kolb (1981) and recent developments in cognitive psychology also support service-learning as a viable pedagogy. This brief overview lays the groundwork for the following case study, as well as further discussions on information literacy and service learning in higher education.

Case Study: Creating a Sustainable Society: Illinois Wesleyan University's Environmental Studies Senior Seminar

In the spring of 2010, a call for proposals went out to Illinois Wesleyan University faculty that sought ideas for incorporating some of the above-mentioned AACU "High-Impact Educational Practices" into our campus curriculum. Funded by a grant from the Teagle Foundation, the call was for "teams of faculty (two or more participants), to submit proposals for curricular initiatives that would focus upon developing, implementing and assessing the consequences on faculty work of a variety of 'high-impact' pedagogical practices that reflect progressively more radical approaches to changing faculty work through engaging in a collaborative effort." I serve as the library liaison to the Environmental Studies Program and had in the past successfully worked with a variety of faculty and courses. The senior seminar capstone course is titled "Creating a Sustainable Society" and is designed around a service-learning model. This seminar also met the criteria for "Writing-Intensive Courses, Focus on Undergraduate Research and Capstone Courses." In short, the course was a perfect candidate for exploring how collaborative faculty efforts could help to promote these practices on our campus.

Because of its integration of research, writing, and service learning, the Environmental Studies Senior Seminar exemplifies the service-learning model and engagement with local communities. Students enrolled in this course each "identify a specific environmental project, find a community partner interested in the project, design [a] project in consultation with the community partner, conduct the research, and offer policy proposals" (course syllabus). According to the de-

partment chair, Dr. Abby Jahiel, who designed this course, it also serves another pedagogical goal. Jahiel explains that the very nature of Environmental Studies can be depressing. Over the course of four years students learn about the vast array of environmental problems facing our society. Some of these problems exist on a worldwide scale such as global warming, ocean pollution and deforestation. At the end of their studies Jahiel wanted to show students that they could make a contribution towards sustainability and social justice in their own communities. Like any well-designed service-learning course the service is contextualized through classroom learning and critical reflection. Students have to complete a thorough literature review to demonstrate an intimate understanding of the issues surrounding their topic; they must conduct focused, detailed, research to produce successful projects; and they must use this research to demonstrate to their community partners the feasibility of their proposals. Information literacy was always a critical component of this course, but after the approval of this new collaboration, I became embedded in the course by becoming a co-teacher who was actively involved in every class session.

At 13 students, this was Illinois Wesleyan's largest-ever Environmental Studies Senior Seminar. This may seem like an enviably small number, but given the additional demands of service-learning courses, it would have been incredibly difficult to teach the course in the same manner as in previous semesters with one instructor. Preparatory work for this class always begins many months before the class begins. Students are actually brought together the semester before the seminar begins so that we can communicate expectations and encourage students to think about projects they may want to pursue. There is also a great deal of communication that needs to occur between faculty members and representatives of various community organizations before, during, and after the class. Rather than teaching specific content such as international environmental politics, this course focuses primarily on social science research methods. In addition to learning how to do comprehensive research for their

literature review, students also learn how to conduct interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

The majority of the student projects included environmental or social justice elements in addition to sustainability goals. One successful project involved a student who researched ways to alleviate "food deserts"[45] and to provide access to healthy foods in an economically depressed area near the Wesleyan campus. His project eventually led to creating a system for area residents on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Plan (formerly food stamps) to use their cards at the local farmers market. This concept has now been applied to other farmers markets in Illinois and around the country (Hatch, 2009). During the semester that I co-taught the course, students were working on projects such as: improving the inclusion of minorities in local environmental work, bringing back endangered barn owls, establishing a campus eco-house, and documenting the environmental benefits of roadside prairies.

Embedding in this course was the single most meaningful teaching experience in my career as an academic librarian. I observed students apply research to solve local sustainability problems. I also built rapport with students far beyond the normal one- or two- shot library instruction sessions. This sentiment was echoed by other librarians who have either taught, or been embedded in service-learning courses. Maureen Barry, regarding her experiences embedded in a composition course at Wright State University writes, "It was, without a doubt, the most positive and extensive interaction I have experienced with undergraduates aside from those in my own IL courses" (2011, p. 9). Nancy Herther, on her work with service-learning classes at the University of Minnesota, said they have "allowed for deeper, more personal, ongoing contact with students... Long after the course is over, I often get e-mails asking for assistance with other classes, advice on job hunting, etc. Making this type of connection with undergraduates is rare in academic libraries" (2008, p. 387). I would add to this that librarians experience many of the hardships of teaching, but

45 Food deserts occur anywhere in industrialized countries where access to healthy, affordable foods is either difficult or non-existent.

miss out on some of these fundamental rewards. As a whole librarians care about enabling lifelong learning and educating our students so that they have the opportunity to become effective citizens, employees, and parents. This type of education happens over time and the results can't be seen within the confines of visiting a class once or twice.

After teaching this course it is my belief that service-learning is one of the most effective methods for teaching students information literacy skills and concepts. Service-learning courses are such an effective model for teaching information literacy because students begin to understand how research is used in the "real world." Most academic research is done in a sort of vacuum; as part of a course assignment that ends when the professor grades the final product. In this service-learning model, students were held accountable to the community partner and conducted research to find the feasibility of their project, established best practices, similar projects, potential problems, etc. Information literacy and the ability to evaluate information are certainly essential life skills, but many undergraduates only experience research as means for meeting the bibliography quota on a term paper. On the final course evaluation when asked, *What did your experience conducting research and working on a real world problem teach you?,* one student responded: "I learned that it is quite enjoyable researching a topic you're passionate about. This was my first opportunity to do so in such depth. I also learned what a difference one person can make in making something happen." Another student when asked, *What is the most significant outcome you've gained from this course?,* responded: "I am proud that I actually did something meaningful instead of another seemingly pointless class project." These student comments highlight the synergies that can be created when service-learning is combined with information literacy.

Service-Learning and Information Literacy Synergies

As stated earlier, the most basic principle of service-learning can be summarized as: "Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both" (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). This statement could be modified to capture the synergies between service-learning and information literacy:

"Service-learning, combined with information literacy adds value to each and transforms both." The integration assists students with understanding the "why" and "how" behind a service-learning project. Service-learning that is not properly situated within the appropriate sociopolitical contexts is simple volunteerism. Information literacy requires students to seek, evaluate and synthesize information. Most well-designed service-learning courses require this sort of background research from students to better understand the problems at hand and the organizations/communities that students will be working with. This type of contextual research may not be referred to as information literacy by either the instructor or students, but it is quite commonplace in most authentic service-learning courses. As Hernandez and Knight point out, "The learning goals of SL [service-learning] can be enhanced by intentional inclusion of information literacy in the curriculum to foster a broader understanding of the relationship between agencies and the communities that they serve based on the social, political and historical issues at play" (2010, p. 10). To improve involvement with service-learning efforts, academic libraries could identify information literacy elements that are already part of service-learning courses on campus and suggest ways to strengthen and improve those components.

Reflection upon service activities is another essential component of service-learning courses and another place where information literacy can play a strong supporting role. Basic reflection activities might include student journaling about service experiences or follow-up classroom discussions. Many service-learning advocates, in particular those who ground service-learning in Paulo Freire's theories, call for much more rigorous reflection: "While there are many worthwhile service projects that meet real needs in the community, for service-learning to be critical, students and teachers need to examine issues of power, privilege, and oppression; question the hidden bias and assumptions of race, class and gender; and to work to change the social and economic system for equity and justice" (Cipolle, 2010, p. 5). This sort of thoughtful, nuanced reflection is impossible to achieve without the application of information literacy skills. Providing students with information literacy instruction can greatly strengthen and enhance the reflection component of service-learning courses.

Combining service-learning and information literacy also strengthens the information literacy side of the equation. At the beginning of this chapter I recounted the challenge made by James Elmborg for libraries to develop a praxis of "Critical Information Literacy" (2006). Strategic collaboration with service-learning courses is one method to meet this challenge. In her article, "Information Literacy and Reflective Pedagogical Praxis" Heidi Jacobs notes "What I am suggesting is that the dialogues we have surrounding information literacy instruction strive to find a balance in the daily and the visionary, the local and the global, the practices and the theories, the ideal and the possible" (2008, p. 258). Combining service-learning and information literacy is one way to resolve the dualisms mentioned by Jacobs. Within the service-learning environment many of the lofty, abstract goals, such as increasing civic engagement and promoting social justice, of information literacy are made concrete through application to very real-world problems. Instead of conducting research for yet another academic paper which will only be read by the professor, students do research to solve an actual problem in their local community. Furthermore, the results are often shared with partnering organizations and their local communities. This outside audience often motivates students to go above and beyond in their research and writing for service-learning courses.

Outside of the direct pedagogical benefits in the classroom, combining service-learning and information literacy can lead to powerful synergies for accomplishing institutional and library missions. Many institutional mission statements or strategic plans include something about increasing students' civic engagement. Service-learning courses, in particular service-learning courses with a strong information literacy component, are one way to advance these goals.

Emerging Best Practices for Library Support of Service-Learning Courses

As discussed above, the scholarly literature that examines combining service-learning and information literacy is scant, at best. This list of emerging best practices is a first attempt at providing some guidelines to libraries

wanting to support and enhance service-learning on their campuses.

- Be able to situate both service-learning and information literacy within pedagogical theory and higher education reform movements.
- When appropriate be able to tie service-learning to institutional and library mission statements and/or strategic plans.
- Identify existing information literacy elements in service-learning courses and explain how they could be strengthened through collaboration with the library.
- Focus on information literacy's ability to strengthen the contextualizing and reflection portions of service-learning courses.
- Know your campus organizations and faculty that are involved in service-learning
- Know your local social service organizations and their needs.
- Monitor listservs that focus on service-learning such as those maintained by Campus Compact and the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.
- Collaborative, embedded librarian models are one of the best ways to support service-learning, but one-shot research instruction sessions can also be of benefit to service-learning courses.
- Librarian-led courses, particularly information literacy courses, can also benefit when structured around a service-learning model.

Final Thoughts

This chapter began with a quote that summarized the main theme of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Taken out of context, that quote would seem to indicate a doom and gloom vision of civic engagement that peaked mid-20th century and has been in decline ever since. While documenting that decline is the primary focus of *Bowling Alone*, Putnam makes it clear that he believes American civic engagement is cyclical:

> It is emphatically not my view that community bonds in America have weakened steadily throughout our history- or even throughout the last hundred years. On the contrary, American history carefully examined is a story of ups and downs in civic engagement, *not just downs* –a story of collapse *and* of renewal...it is within our power to reverse the decline of the last several decades. (p. 25)

In a follow-up work to *Bowling Alone*, called *Better Together: Restoring the American Community,* Putnam and co-author Lewis Felstein document individuals and groups that are actively promoting social activism and civic renewal. Interestingly, one of the examples of civic renewal that this book cites is the revival of the Chicago Public Library system. The authors note

> The CPL [Chicago Public Library] thrives today because it embodies a new idea of how a library functions. No longer a passive repository of books and information or an outpost of culture, quiet and decorum in a noisy world, the new library is an active and responsive part of the community and an agent of change. (2004, p. 35)

In the same manner, enthusiastic academic library support of service-learning can also lead to increases in social capital and civic engagement. Powerful synergies are created when information literacy and service-learning are combined. These courses teach students to apply classroom knowledge to become "agents of change" and to address real social justice issues in their local communities. Recent calls for the reform of the American system of higher education and a return to its civic roots have been broad-based and influential. If American civic engagement comes and goes in waves as Putnam suggests, then embracing the service-learning movement may be one of the best ways for higher education, to turn the tide in the 21st century.

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