

An Individualized Approach to Service-Learning: Partnerships to Enhance the Relevance of Education to Practice

Robin Kunstler
Lehman College of the City University of New York

Abstract

The relevance of higher education to professional practice is a topic of much discussion within the university and in the community. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration between these two groups have addressed the role of curricula in meeting community needs. Service-learning, a form of experiential education in which students provide a service to local community groups as part of a course that emphasizes reflection on the experience and reciprocity of the relationship, has emerged as a focused response to this concern. Three service-learning projects are described in which the community groups defined their own needs and contacted the college for programs or services to meet these needs. Students were recruited to participate in the specific projects according to their own interests and abilities. This individualized approach maximized the relevance of the service-learning projects to the needs of the community and to the education of the students, thereby strengthening the university-community partnership. A comparison of the structure and benefits of the three projects are presented.

Keywords: service-learning, experiential education, university-community partnership

Biographical Information

Robin Kunstler is an Associate Professor and Director of the Recreation Education Program, Department of Health Services, Lehman College of the City University of New York.

Introduction

The first years of the twenty-first century have focused much attention on the need to improve the quality of education, including higher education, and have even raised questions about the relevance of the university to the current economy. As recreation and leisure services have struggled to gain the public's acceptance of the need for educational qualifications for professionals in the field, news reports abound of new technology millionaires who never completed college. Partnerships between educators and practitioners may be the critical means by which the university, the public and community agencies and organizations learn to respect each other's contributions and viewpoints.

The traditional partnership between educators and practitioners has been successful in bringing practitioners into the university as guest speakers, members of curriculum advisory boards, and as student internship supervisors. Educators and practitioners interact at conferences and workshops, and serve together on committees. Educators often consult to practitioners on program development and evaluation, staff training or collaborative research. However, many voices in higher education and in the world of practice have called for new types of partnerships to better prepare students for practice and address work force shortages. Former United States Secretary of Labor Robert Reich stressed the importance of "practice-oriented education" (Ross, 1997), which improves student educational experiences, strengthens the work force, provides opportunities for joint research and ultimately improves client services. The university feels a strong sense of obligation to local communities to become an "interactive university," which is the antithesis of the ivory tower. The interactive university functions as an organization in the community that both initiates and responds to local community needs. Due to the rapid rate of change in societal institutions today, successful partnerships require more up-to-the-minute information, frequent input from all partners, and flexibility to respond to new demands.

Service-learning has been defined as "a dynamic partnership between educational institutions and communities resulting in the mutual benefits of service and learning" (Peterson & Schaffer, 1998, p. 208). This definition implies that both partners, the one providing and the one receiving the service, benefit from service-learning; it is a legitimate practice of the interactive university. A frequently cited definition of service-learning is Jacoby and Associates' (1996): a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. In this second definition, a slightly greater emphasis is placed on the benefits to the students as opposed to the community. A third definition, however, operationalizes the concept of service-learning from another standpoint. It refers to service-learning as partnerships in which the actual recipients of services, as well as the community groups and constituencies to which they belong, have the primary role in defining their own service needs (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Although all definitions stress providing a service to the community, this latter approach places the responsibility of initiating the project on the agency rather than the college or university. The university's willingness and ability to structure a meaningful response to the agency's needs goes to the heart of the interactive university concept. Yet the benefits are equally distributed between both parties. A final definition is more specific in referring to service-learning as a structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection, in response to community-identified concerns, in order to foster civic and social responsibility (Seifer, 2001). Table 1 presents these definitions.

During the decade of the nineties, numerous publications in health-related fields and other areas of higher education extolled the virtues of this form of experiential education (Ciaccio & Walker, 1998; Greenberg, 1999; Peterson & Schaffer, 1999; Ralston

& Ellis, 1997; Williams & Lankford, 1999). Service-learning differs from other forms of experiential education, such as field experience, volunteering, or internships, by incorporating the elements of reflection and reciprocity (Ralston & Ellis, 1997; Williams & Lankford, 1999). Reflection refers to drawing lessons from the service-learning experience with the guidance of the course instructor, both during and after the experience. The process of reflection can include keeping weekly logs, participating in discussions with classmates and the instructor, self-evaluation, and a summary paper. In this way, students analyze their own strengths and learning needs for their future practice. Through reflection, students can also learn about the connection between their service and their academic coursework (Seifer, 2001). In service-learning, students are learning about the relevance of academic courses, such as recreation leadership, program planning and administration, to "real life" (Estes, Wilson & Toupenca, 2001).

TABLE 1

Definitions of Service-Learning

A dynamic partnership between educational institutions and communities resulting in the mutual benefits of service and learning (Peterson & Schaffer, 1998).

A form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development (Jacoby and Associates, 1996).

Partnerships in which the actual recipients of services, as well as the community groups and constituencies to which they belong, have the primary role in defining their own service needs (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989).

A structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation and reflection. Students engaged in service-learning provide community service in response to community-identified concerns and learn about the context in which service is provided, the connection between their service and their academic coursework, and their roles as citizens (Seifer, 2001).

Reciprocity signifies that both the students and the community members being served are learners and teachers in the process. Reciprocity also implies a blurring of the traditional roles of who is the teacher and who is the learner (Seifer, 2001). In service-learning projects, faculty need to be open and willing to learn from the community and allow the community to serve in informal or formal teaching roles (Seifer, 2001). Service is done with others, not for them (Weah, Simmons & Hall, 2000). Reciprocity also fosters the notion of "civic responsibility" (Williams & Lankford, 1999). Civic responsibility implies that the students are performing a service, not just for the good of a particular group or agency, but also for the mutual benefit of all members of the community including the students themselves. It helps them learn about their roles as citizens (Seifer, 2001).

Another theme that has resounded in the recreation and leisure studies literature in the nineties has been how best to address cultural diversity (Aguilar & Washington, 1990; Kunstler, 1995; Ward, 1999). The Kellogg Foundation concluded that service-learning is a viable strategy for addressing issues of race and culture (Weah, et al., 2000) for four reasons. First, the experiential aspect of service-learning motivates students to learn about the perspectives of others; second, it provides opportunities for reflection that can lead to long-term attitudinal and behavioral change; third, students practice respect for diversity as they strive to find commonalities with others; and fourth, service-learning provides opportunities for all people in a community to participate in the solutions. These four positive practices can serve as benchmarks for service-learning projects in culturally diverse environments. It is the purpose of this article to advocate for the individualized service-learning approach as an alternative that may fit the needs, interests and capabilities of the agency, the students and the college or university; that may strengthen valuable partnerships; and that furthers respect for racial, ethnic and cultural diversity.

The Individualized Approach

The recreation education curriculum at Lehman College of the City University of New York (CUNY) became involved in several service-learning projects that were initiated by local agencies. The model that evolved within the recreation curriculum reflected the third definition of service-learning cited above. As local health care and community organizations sought to improve their services, they turned to the college for solutions to meet their specific needs. The college, in turn, helped develop services and enlisted students who had the aptitude to implement the service solution. Rather than the traditional model of a specific course being designated as having a service-learning component, particular students were recruited for different projects based on matching expressed needs of the agency with the skills, abilities and interests of the students. The model adopted at Lehman is well suited to the student body of the college, which is nontraditional and culturally diverse. The median age of students is twenty-six and many are employed full-time or part-time and have family responsibilities. It is difficult for groups of students to find common meeting times to carry out group projects. Therefore the individualized approach is realistic for their lifestyles. The level of skills and the maturity of the students were factors in the college being able to respond to the community's requests for these specific projects. Students range in age generally from the mid-20s to mid-40s. They have a set of skills that can be applied to challenging service-learning projects, as well as utilize service-learning to further develop their abilities. The individualized approach often involves students working fairly independently, in potentially challenging situations. The students can draw on their personal and academic resources to meet the demands of a given project. In addition, the student body at Lehman is culturally diverse (40 % Hispanic, 35% African-American, 30% White, and 5% Asian). Through interaction with community members of varying backgrounds, service-learning can address issues of race and culture (Weah, et al., 2000).

Student participants enrolled in an independent study or similar course where they met regularly with faculty and other students involved in the same project. Thus, the values of reflection, through the small group discussions, weekly logs and a summary paper; and reciprocity, providing a project that was desired by and beneficial to the community in which community members educated faculty and students; were maintained in the process, albeit with a smaller group than in a traditional class. Students also discussed how they were using what they had learned in their coursework, as well as what they still needed to learn or felt should be included in their classes, thereby providing useful feedback on curriculum.

Examples

Essential to a service-learning project is the provision of a necessary community service and a dialogue between the parties throughout the service encounter (Simoni & McKinney, 1998). Three service-learning projects at Lehman College were initiated by community agencies to meet a need the agencies had identified. The agencies and the college engaged in collaborative planning from goal setting to evaluation, and frequent and regular communication. In addition, service-learning projects require that student carry out multiple tasks, with personal responsibility for planning and implementing the project (Estes, et al., 2001). In the three projects described, the students conducted individual assessments, developed individual or group program plans, conducted recreation activities, evaluated participants' progress, evaluated the program, and interacted with professionals from other disciplines. Table 2 shows a comparison of the three projects by key variables. These include structural variables, such as: the initiator of the project, the purpose of the project, the setting for the project, the number of students involved, the relevant academic course content, methods of reflection, reciprocity in terms of the agency's teaching, and diversity elements. The remaining variables relate to the benefits of the projects: advantages of the individualized approach, and outcomes for the students, the college and the agency. As can be seen in Table 2, the agencies had significant roles in initiating their projects to meet their self-defined needs; the purposes of the projects were mutually beneficial to all parties involved; the projects had strong and direct ties to academic courses; and diversity was valued and respected. There were many positive outcomes of the projects and the individualized nature of the service-learning allowed for timely and customized services that were realistic and feasible for students to carry out.

The Hispanic Habilitation Specialist Internship Program

The Hispanic Habilitation Specialist Internship Program (HHSIP) was initiated by the New York State Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) to address a pressing work force need. OMRDD is the New York State agency responsible for providing services, such as housing, education, health care, job training, and recreation, to individuals with developmental disabilities. The predominant language spoken by the individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in the dis-

TABLE 2
Comparison of Three Service-Learning Projects

Key Variables	HHSIP	FRESH	NORC
Purpose of Project	To develop a bilingual workforce educated in cutting edge and up-to-date information on developmental disabilities	To provide innovative health-related programs to local community members	To provide in-home therapeutic recreation for elderly residents of a naturally occurring retirement community who were becoming socially isolated
Who Initiated	Agency	Joint effort of senior centers and college faculty	Agency
Setting	Agency-run group homes and day programs	College athletic and fitness facility	Private homes in the NORC
# of Students	17	4	5
Related academic coursework	Courses in speech, psychology, therapeutic recreation, bilingual education, special education; course in developmental disabilities	Recreation leadership, program planning, and introduction to therapeutic recreation (content on aging)	Introduction to therapeutic recreation, therapeutic recreation program design, processes and techniques of therapeutic recreation
Reflection methods	Weekly logs, weekly group meetings, individual meetings with faculty	Weekly logs, weekly meetings with faculty, final paper with summary and self-evaluation	Weekly meetings, final paper with summary and self-evaluation
Reciprocity (agency's "teaching" role)	Agency staff gave input on course content, guest lectured in course	Senior center members described their needs and interests to shape the program	Agency provided innovative setting for therapeutic recreation and weekly supervision to students
Diversity issues	Bilingual in Spanish and English required for student participation; clients were of diverse backgrounds and disabilities; students who knew American Sign Language used it as needed	Hispanic and African-American senior citizens felt welcome at college after initially questioning white faculty regarding their reception	White Jewish elderly served by diverse students, one Hispanic, one African-American, one Asian-American, one Italian-American
Advantage of individualized service-learning approach	Agency initially requested five students; due to high interest, expanded program to 20 students; students were able to work out schedules at the sites cooperatively according to their own needs and the needs of the agency	Group of 20 seniors only required two student leaders; made it easier to find a time to accommodate many schedules (the senior centers, transportation, the students came on campus an additional day, facility availability)	Agency and college wanted to start small as it was a new concept and required mature students who could provide services in an individual's home; project required intensive supervision by agency staff with individual meetings weekly with students
Student outcomes	Three obtained full-time jobs; others used experience and education to qualify for other jobs; gained experience with challenging population; felt increased desire to advocate for rights of people with developmental disabilities	Applied skills to a new population; gained knowledge of needs of well elderly; gained confidence in leadership and program planning; developed interest in and understanding of the population	Felt proud to be part of an innovative setting for services; felt desire to advocate for in-home therapeutic recreation; one student had article accepted for publication in the <i>Therapeutic Recreation Journal</i>
College outcomes	New minor and new course in developmental disabilities; new field placements in agency; guest speakers enriched the curriculum; led to projects with other state agencies and curricula in psychiatric rehabilitation and youth studies	Enhanced college's relationship with the community; extended use of college resources by community members; led to development of new courses and options in exercise science; led to grant development for fitness for minority senior citizens; led to use of fitness facility by recreation curriculum as a teaching environment	Recognition of participation in innovative project; enriched curriculum in therapeutic recreation with new content on in-home services
Agency outcomes	Gained staff with desired qualifications; expanded services to underserved clients; had an impact on curriculum for education of future employees; clients received services from dedicated students	Utilized new community resource; health and fitness benefits to seniors; seniors could continue to come to the college to use the facility	Provided a unique and needed service; expanded services; sought further funding for services due to success of project; elderly participants benefited from social and cognitive stimulation and felt a part of the community again

trict where the college was located, and served by the agency, was Spanish; yet only six percent of the clinical staff in the developmental disabilities workforce was Hispanic (City University of New York, 1993). Most of the agency's clients lived in group homes and attended day treatment or day training programs where teachers, habilitation specialists, speech therapists, psychologists, and recreation therapists served them. In these programs, there was a dearth of Spanish-speaking professionals. To qualify for these jobs, a bachelor's degree is required. The agency wished to recruit qualified, bilingual college students into a paid internship program coupled with a credit-bearing educational component in the area of the latest trends and information on developmental disabilities. Upon completion of their internships and college degrees, the new graduates would be hired into full-time positions in the agency. OMRDD approached the Consortium on Disability Studies at the City University of New York (CUNY), which in turn approached Lehman College of CUNY because Lehman has the largest percentage of Hispanic students in the university. Lehman also has majors in the fields relevant to the needs of OMRDD: bilingual education, therapeutic recreation, speech pathology and psychology. The agency was seeking students whose academic coursework was directly related to the type of project being planned. At this point the two partners, the agency and the college, began a dialogue and planning process to develop and initiate the desired program. Inadequate coordination between service providers and educational programs has been cited as a cause of work force shortages (Jones, Johnson & Beasley, 1995). One goal of HHSIP was to increase coordination in order to alleviate a shortage of educated personnel. It was the intent of the partners to engage in collaborative planning as much as possible in order to ensure that students would have the education that was relevant to workforce needs. In using this approach, the college was attempting to be responsive to community-identified concerns.

The partners worked together on recruitment, selection and placement of students. They developed the content of the interdisciplinary seminar on developmental disabilities that would provide the opportunity for reflection, and oversaw supervision of students during their internships. Therefore, the agency approached the college with a need, the college formulated (with the agency's collaboration) a solution, and appropriate students were recruited to implement the project. The initial goal was to recruit five students. Due to student interest, the program expanded to twenty students. This necessitated expansion of the infrastructure of the program to include more sites and a second faculty member to provide supervision. Seventeen students completed the program and three were hired full-time by the agency upon graduation.

The students provided recreation activities and life skills instruction to the clients, and assisted them in working toward their designated goals. The students reported that the HHSIP work experience and relevant college course work were key qualifications in their obtaining employment in special education, therapeutic recreation, and teaching speech. The agency obtained the services of dedicated and mature students who were able to communicate effectively with clients as well as introduce new ideas and practices into the day programs and group homes. The clients benefited from the interaction and

caring of the students that hopefully inspired other staff. The college developed a new course of study in developmental disabilities and had an innovative model to serve as a blueprint for similar programs.

Another benefit of this project was the development of a successful model for addressing work force shortages. According to Jones et al. (1995), "the most promising approach to reducing workforce shortages and service delivery deficiencies would combine educational expansion through unique linkages among state universities and colleges and increased formal cooperation between educators and health services providers in ... curriculum design and training" (pp. 145-6). Elwood (1995) also stated that actively recruiting students (particularly from minority and underserved portions of the population) to academic programs through internships could play a central role in reducing personnel shortages. This may also be true of service-learning experiences. "Service-learning begins with experiential learning, but extends beyond it and includes an emphasis on revitalizing the community (p. 175)...The community gains from the provision of human resources to meet specific needs" (p. 177) (Ciaccio & Walker, 1998). HHSIP provided human resources to address a specific need defined by an agency whose community needed revitalizing.

Service-learning provides meaningful, real-life experiences to students. The students in HHSIP were faced, daily, with the challenges of providing services to a needy population. No other educational experience could have been as effective a teacher. Service-learning also exposes students to life as lived by their clients. The students in HHSIP accompanied their clients on their daily activities, in group homes and in day programs, and experienced empathy and gained insight. In the seminar, as well as in regular meetings with supervisors, the students reflected upon their experiences to develop insight into their own reactions, skills, and increased understanding of their clients' lives and the workings of the agency. Students kept logs of their experiences and engaged in group discussions with faculty during the seminar, and during site visits by the faculty to the students at their placements. They reflected on both the positives and negatives, and came up with suggestions and recommendations for improvements.

Project FRESH: Fitness, Recreation and Education for Senior Health

Project FRESH grew out of a series of meetings between Lehman College faculty and a group of directors and volunteer board members from senior centers, serving predominately black and Hispanic residents, in close proximity to the college. The faculty was eager to provide health-related services to the local community in order to share the college's resources and expertise. The senior center representatives expressed that they were saturated with health and nutrition information, as well as social programs at their centers, and wanted to know what the college had to offer that was unique and would involve them with the campus. The faculty representative from the recreation education program suggested a program that would utilize the new sport, physical activity, and exercise complex with its Olympic-size swimming pool, indoor track, weight room, and

fitness center. The response was enthusiastic, as here was a unique resource that could be utilized for innovative programming and health promotion. Although the benefits of regular physical activity are well documented (Clark, 1995), most senior citizens lead sedentary lifestyles. Minority elderly have even lower rates of exercise than do older white Americans (Clark, 1995). Yet older adults can be persuaded to participate if facilities are available, special hours are reserved, safety and transportation is assured and instruction provided. FRESH incorporated these considerations.

The community members wanted a structured, supervised program. The college was willing to provide the facility as long as the seniors were participating in a program that contributed to the students' education. It was essential that the student leaders be skilled and qualified, yet be able to benefit educationally from the experience. Two students majoring in recreation, one undergraduate and one graduate, both mature adults with their own businesses and appropriate certifications, were eager to participate. This illustrates the benefits of an individualized service-learning approach for nontraditional students who can expand their professional experience and knowledge base, through their education, into new arenas. The exercise instructor was a female graduate student in therapeutic recreation who was certified in aerobics, CPR and personal training. The swimming instructor was a male undergraduate therapeutic recreation major certified in water safety, first aid and CPR, and as a lifeguard trainer, adapted aquatics instructor, and pool operator. Once a week, for ten weeks, the seniors came to the college to participate in a morning fitness program consisting of a forty-five minute exercise program, followed by forty-five minutes of aquatic exercise and swimming instruction. Each student prepared a ten-session program in their respective areas of exercise and aquatics. Although both students had experience in these areas, neither had ever worked with senior citizens. FRESH gave the students the opportunity to apply what they had learned in courses in recreation program planning, leadership and aging. Students and faculty met weekly to discuss each session. The students kept weekly logs and wrote a report at the end of the program, reflecting upon and summarizing the total experience. At the conclusion of the ten weeks, the seniors and the students evaluated the program.

From a service-learning perspective, Project FRESH was a successful partnership that improved services to the seniors and provided learning to the students. It incorporated collaborative planning based on a dialogue regarding unmet needs of the community and unique offerings of the college. The community members refined their needs and interests through the dialogue that led to the design of an appropriate program. The seniors were exposed to a new resource that they could continue having access to after the program ended. They were enthusiastic about the opportunity to utilize such a beautiful facility and felt a sense of pride that they were now a part of the college community. They were instructed in exercise, fitness and healthy lifestyle practices. On their evaluations they indicated that, as a result of their participation in FRESH, they were exercising more and had improved their eating habits and planned to continue to develop healthier behaviors.

The student participants gained experience in planning and adapting a program for a specific population. They learned that the seniors were very motivated to address their health and recreation needs, and that the nature of the caring leadership to provide a fun and team-oriented experience was essential to the program's success. They experienced the benefits of service-learning with the elderly, as described by McCrea (1998): enhanced sensitivity to and understanding of the elderly, improved communication and interpersonal skills with the elderly, and increased leadership skills through the planning and implementation of the service activities. These lessons may have a lasting impact, based as they were on the students' firsthand experiences and not merely classroom teachings. Reciprocity was experienced as students and seniors learned from and taught each other. The seniors helped the students by sharing their ideas for exercises, as well as their needs and capabilities, to incorporate in programming. The community also served a teaching role, as described by Seifer (2001), in that the agency staff educated the faculty about the needs and interests of the seniors. The seniors taught the college, faculty and students their capabilities and goals. The college provided a valued program to the community, enhancing its image as an interactive organization. FRESH became a model for other groups who wished to use the facility. FRESH continued for a second session with two additional undergraduate students providing aerobics instruction. They also benefited from the opportunity to plan and lead a program independently. In both sessions, students reflected on the experience in weekly meetings with faculty, through writing weekly logs, and writing a final paper. Reciprocity was evidenced as both students and seniors shared what they learned from each other and the experience.

The final meeting of both sessions of FRESH was marked by thanks and expressions of appreciation on both sides. One concern expressed by a senior center representative, at the initial planning meeting, was would the seniors feel comfortable coming to the college? The seniors were Hispanic and African-American and the faculty at the meeting were white. She was assured that the student body, including the recreation majors, was culturally diverse and that the recreation majors themselves interacted comfortably with each other. At the first session, the seniors were welcomed warmly and told how fortunate the college felt in being able to share its facilities with them. In this way, FRESH was an opportunity for all members of the community to come together in a positive environment.

Therapeutic Recreation in the Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)

A third example of service-learning was initiated completely by a community organization which knew exactly what it wanted and was seeking students to implement the desired program. A naturally occurring retirement community is an apartment complex or neighborhood in which a majority of the residents are sixty years of age and older, and which was not initially designed for the elderly (Nathanson, 1996). Many NORCs contract with local organizations to provide health and social services. Often there are recreation programs available. But a number of residents, as they age, become socially and physically isolated and unwilling or unable to attend programs outside of

the home. MacNeil (1988) found that lack of transportation, lack of companions, and poor health were major barriers to leisure participation by the elderly. According to Wilhite (1987), home-based recreation programs have enormous potential for improving the well-being of elderly participants.

In this case, a social worker and a nurse at a NORC located several blocks from the college were eager to implement a therapeutic recreation program utilizing students to do individual sessions with elderly residents, known as cooperators, in their own apartments. The NORC staff contacted the college's recreation program faculty to design and implement a program. The program consisted of eight weekly sessions in the cooperators' own homes. The first session was an opportunity for the students and the cooperator to get acquainted and complete an assessment. Then the students developed individualized therapeutic recreation plans to be implemented over the next seven weeks. The final session was a luncheon for all the participants and staff. The students met weekly with the faculty coordinator to reflect on their weekly visits in the small group and plan for upcoming sessions.

To carry out the project, it was essential to have mature, responsible, experienced and highly skilled students. Four students were available who were seniors, had completed their internships and were eligible to graduate with honors in the major if they conducted an honors project. They all had paid experience in recreation settings or health care, and had either paid or internship experience with the elderly. They had conducted assessments, developed treatment plans, led programs and documented progress. The students also represented the diversity of the student body, with a Hispanic male in his forties, an African-American woman in her thirties, an Italian-American woman in her thirties and an Asian-American woman in her twenties. The cooperators were Jewish. The students were successful in carrying out the project, each responsible for three cooperators. They scheduled their sessions, designed and carried out the therapeutic recreation program, recorded progress notes and completed exit interviews and written evaluations of the project. The therapeutic recreation programs included arts and crafts, horticulture, exercise, reminiscence, and discussions on literature and current events.

At the completion of the project, the NORC staff, the cooperators, the students, and the faculty member concluded that it was a success. The staff felt their goals of providing physical, social, and cognitive stimulation were met; and they were stimulated to develop more recreation activities for groups of cooperators, as well as to seek funding to increase the in-home therapeutic recreation program. Bollin, Voelkl and Lapidos (1998) found that in-home recreation programs facilitated clients' participation in the community and home environments. In fact, the reasons that the cooperators gave for why they wanted the program to continue were that they felt more motivated and more a part of the community, and as if someone cared. They benefited from the companionship, the cognitive stimulation and the social interaction. The students were extremely enthusiastic about applying their skills and knowledge in an innovative setting and functioning as independent service providers on a one-to-one basis. Their reflective writings

revealed this. As one student wrote, "I have also gained educationally because I have had the opportunity to analyze their [the cooperators'] needs, strengths, problems and implement a program with goals and objectives to benefit them...This is an experience never to be forgotten." Another student traced her own growth, "My first reaction...was...I was nervous and a little intimidated...If we could develop a trusting relationship, then trust would reduce the fear and nervousness for both clients and myself. After three weeks, when we achieved a mutual acceptance and comfort, all my reservations were eliminated, and enthusiasm started to kick in." This student also identified the reciprocity in the project: it benefited not only the clients, but also the therapeutic recreation profession in that it led to the community's recognition of the value of therapeutic recreation for this population.

McCrea (1998) described intergenerational service-learning in gerontology as being able to enhance students' sensitivity to, and understanding of, the elderly. Similar to the students involved in Project FRESH, these students improved their communication, leadership and interpersonal skills. As in the HHSIP, the students were exposed to life as lived by their clients and provided a needed human resource. This was also an opportunity for people from different backgrounds to participate together in meaningful activities. These are important values of service-learning. Projects such as this one connect the community with the curriculum, strengthening the relationship between current societal issues and the academic discipline.

Summary

Seifer (2001) identified six characteristics of service-learning that distinguishes it from traditional experiential learning. As a means of evaluating the three projects described above as viable forms of service-learning, a description of each characteristic will highlight how the three projects incorporated the characteristics.

Balance between service and learning objectives. The projects were first conceived to meet the needs of the community and then to provide a learning experience for the students. Careful planning insured that both sets of objectives were met fully.

Emphasis on reciprocal learning. The traditional roles of faculty, teacher, and learner were blurred. Agency staff and participants educated students and the college about their needs and interests, as well as provided formal teaching and supervision to students. Faculty learned from the community, and students taught through program leadership, as well as learned.

Emphasis on addressing community-identified concerns, understanding broad factors influencing health and quality of life and fostering citizenship skills. Again, the community identified its needs and concerns and the types of services it was seeking; the projects had a focus on health and quality of life issues for the community members; and the students enhanced their sense of citizenship by taking an interest in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, the elderly, and the profession.

Emphasis on reflective practice. Through attending weekly meetings, writing weekly logs, writing summary papers of their experiences, and conducting a self-evaluation, students reflected on the value of their experience to their own learning and to the participants they served.

Integral role of community partners. The community partners were involved in designing the curriculum content by presenting their needs and trusting the college to plan a relevant program for the students.

Service-learning has far-reaching impacts. The benefits of the projects were not just to the students, as in traditional experiential learning, but were also to the faculty, educational programs, community organizations and community members. Students increased their understanding of community issues, the new avenues for teaching and curriculum reinvigorated faculty, and the community found innovative ways to address its needs.

The advantages of the individualized service-learning approach utilized in these three projects were as follows. First, the agencies received tailor-made responses to their requests for services. Second, the students made use of their unique knowledge, skills, and abilities to address real-life situations. Third, the college was able to provide an invaluable learning experience, thereby enhancing the curriculum. Fourth, the ability of the recreation profession to structure a creative and timely response was a form of social advocacy. Social advocacy refers to the marketing and public relations efforts of a profession directed toward a target group of consumers (Bullock & Mahon, 1997). The college also enhanced its role and image as an interactive community member.

The three service-learning projects were designed and implemented as a result of community members defining their own service needs and developing a partnership with the college that had mutual benefits for both partners. Students with the characteristics best suited to meet these needs were recruited to participate in the programs. The nontraditional students at Lehman College possess a range of skills, work experiences, and commitment to the local community, unlike the typical college students described by Estes, et al. (2001). They are often eager to obtain professional experience while in college and can make a long-term commitment to a job or project. These service-learning projects gave them the opportunities to utilize their specific skills and knowledge. The students found this empowering, that their academic coursework and unique characteristics were valued in the community. They were able to participate with others in developing meaningful solutions to the challenges of living in today's society, thereby enriching their own education and fulfilling the objectives of civic and social responsibility. For recreation and leisure services curricula and professions, service-learning projects can be a successful means of bringing the benefits of recreation participation to wider audiences. Utilizing an individualized approach allows colleges to respond quickly to requests from the community, as the project does not need to be part of a traditional course but can be carried out more flexibly. This reflects the service-learning perspective that the recipients of services define their service needs (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989) to the

college. As calls for increased relevance of education to practice continue to be heard, the individualized approach to service-learning may offer a viable and effective response.

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