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# WHERE'S WISDOM *in* SERVICE-LEARNING?



EDITED BY  
**ROBERT SHUMER**

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## PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The purpose of this book is to capture the wisdom of those involved in the service-learning movement who have helped to shape its foundation, formation, and development. The book was inspired by the realization that many of us are getting a lot older and that our ability to live, to share, and to interact is diminishing and/or declining. While I am now 70 years old, our oldest contributor is 95. Everyone else is in their 50s, 60s, 70s, or 80s, and still actively continuing their life-long work.

The book is dedicated to those who have contributed so much to the field and the world and are no longer with us, except in spirit. To Diane Hedin, Joan Shine, Judy Rauner, Rahima Wade, Lynn Montrose, and to many others who have shaped our service-learning enterprise, we say thank you and want you to know you are not forgotten...and very much appreciated. We hope this contribution can rise to the level of your work and inspire young people to continue the cause.

It is the hope of these collective authors that the understandings shared through our chapters will illustrate and illuminate where the field started, where it went, and where it might continue to thrive. While the first book to address the modern beginnings, *Service-Learning: A Movement's Pioneers Reflect on Its Origins, Practice, and Future* (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999) attempted to capture the impressions from early adopters of how and why the movement started, this volume is focused on sharing the collective knowledge and wisdom of some of the early people involved in developing programs and connections that placed service learning where it is today.

Authors were asked to reflect on their lives and to capture the high and low points of the movement and to make recommendations for future

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participants to apply this wisdom to ensure that service learning is a viable program and a thriving initiative that will continue to accomplish its goals of social change and community improvement. While this was the charge of the book, most authors decided to express their interpretations of the strengths and weaknesses through personal stories of their lifelong involvement in engaging in service-learning actions or activities....or what we think of as service learning even when the term wasn't established when they were doing "it."

The value of the book will be known when, and if, young leaders find and use this wisdom to make improvements in the quality and quantity of programs that are labeled as "service learning." It is our hope that the contributions of "wise" older folks will have an effect and impact on those who are responsible for continuing the movement.

**—Robert Shumer**

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# FOREWORD

This book arrives on the scene at an important moment in the evolution of service-learning pedagogy. Fifty years ago, as described in chapters six and seven, Bill Ramsay and Bob Sigmon coined the term to describe their effort to establish a “Manpower Development Program” at the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies in eastern Tennessee. Their goal was to recruit and enable university students from the southern region of the United States to join their effort to build the capacity of local residents to qualify for employment at the lab. They sought a term that would describe the actions these students could take and to point out that they intended these experiences to be educational and growth producing for the students as well as ones of charitable giving of their time and skills.

We were trying to find a phrase that would describe the program, and we tried all kinds of things—experiential learning, experience learning, work learning, action learning, all these different things. We decided to call it service learning, because service implied a value consideration that none of the other words that we came up with did.... It was more of an attitude, more of an approach to be of service.... You could have experience with the Mafia and it would be tremendous learning perhaps, but it's not the kind of thing we were talking about. We were looking for something with a value connotation.... It had to be real service, not academics, not made up, not superficial, not tangential, but real. (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, p. 67)

In encouraging and enabling the contributing authors to tell their stories from these 50 years and share the wisdom they gained through their

reflections, editor Shumer provides our field with a valuable opportunity to step back and reflect on where we came from, where we have come, and perhaps where we are going or ought to go.

The book's authors ruminate over three sets of wisdoms: those related to reflection on the field's early days; those related to its extraordinary development over these 50 years; and those related considering the field's future within a broader movement now labeled "community engaged learning" or "civic or community engagement."

A central feature of the wisdom shared by the authors gained from their early days came through their struggles to establish, develop, and maintain their programs and positions within typically hostile university or school environments. Service-learning wasn't exactly new 50 years ago. It's roots reach back to the land grant legislation of the 1860s that spawned university extension programs, to John Dewey's pragmatism of the early years of the last century and its expression in laboratory schools and settlement houses, etc. (Sigmon, 1995). However, something snapped in the 1960s in the culture of young people, a snap that stretched from politics to popular music. All of a sudden young people wanted to and were encouraged to explore their communities and the wider world through volunteerism, VISTA, Peace Corps. As described by some of the book's authors, who came of age during those tumultuous times of civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, many of them carried this yearning for social change into educational settings where they could experiment with new forms of more active, critical experiential education designed to encourage civic activism on the part of students and tangible benefit to communities. However, everyone tinkering with this work in those early days had to come to terms with the assets and liabilities connected to their marginal status as newcomers practicing an innovative, but suspect approach to teaching and learning and to partnering higher education institutions used to an "ivory tower" existence to the "disorderly chaos" of communities. Readers should sift through these chapters to identify and reflect on what these early practitioners learned about institutional marginality, especially now that service-learning practice finds itself in much safer, more central positions in the academy with identifiable professional roles, when dialogue seems to have shifted from marginality to discussion of how to establish graduate professional certification programs.

Moving chronologically forward, readers will find a set of ruminations in these chapters, which are animated by critical reflection on the hard work of establishing and maintaining programs and positions within institutions and building a field. At this stage, authors highlight wisdom gained from their success at this work, as well as the challenges that came with it. Many comment on dual roles they found themselves in. On the one hand they were strongly focused internally, building their programs from marginal beachheads into core academic programs, with some asking what is gained

and what may be lost when a field solidifies itself, expands and matures. On the other hand, some of these same authors speak of the efforts they made in wider field building through national organizations such as NSIEE and Campus Compact, which became key support bases providing form for professional exchange, mutual support, and opportunities for research and publication. Some speak of this work at the field level as movement building, while their campus work resembled infiltration.

Many authors conclude their chapters wondering about what has been accomplished and where the field may go or should go in the future. Here a central concern is a perception that practitioners and researchers, having now achieved status and position within schools and the academy, appear more concerned with students' development than with the needs, issues, and challenges of the communities in which their students work. Has the field, perhaps unintentionally, lost its early commitment to the notion that learning and service must not only be joined so that students can experience communities, learn about and from them, and perhaps leave some lasting impact? The learning and service must be so mutually interdependent that each transforms the other (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989); that one learns about development by doing development.

It can be argued that the source of the wisdom in service learning is in the community. Not only was this field founded in a community setting but the wisdom stories in this book illustrate that the "chance" or the "happenstance" events, as Shumer calls them, (See Chapter 15) overwhelmingly took place in community settings. Perhaps this is because most service-learning pioneers came from or originated their work in community settings. Those who arose in university or school settings were usually not in traditional faculty or staff roles.

This observation may be analogous to a comparison that one of us (Giles) likes to cite. When Willie Sutton, the famous bank robber, was asked why he robbed banks, he replied, "That is where the money is." The wisdom stories here answer the title question of the book, "the community is where the wisdom is."

In the Foreword to the first service-learning history book (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999) Goodwin Liu (Liu, 1999, p. xii) asked, "What does it mean to enlist the community as a true partner in education?" How we answer that question over the next 50 years will determine what the wisdom for sustaining this movement has been and perhaps can be as we move forward. As readers make their way through this impressive volume, we suggest the following as some questions worthy of reflection.

- How do we construe our work in such a way that it continues to build a safe, secure, and embedded home within higher education institutions while also honoring the wisdom, knowledge, capaci-

ties and learning desires of our community partners? Bob Sigmon (1979) asserted that “all the partners in service learning are learners” (p.11). If so, what can we and our students learn from community partners? What may they learn while working with us?

- How do we establish deep, long lasting partnerships with communities and their organizations through which the partners become more than placements for our students? What is our program’s and/or our institution’s community development agenda (do we have one?) and how do our partnerships fit within and serve these community development goals?
- How might we redefine what distinguishes service learning and relocate it within the larger umbrella of community/civic engagement/scholarship, with a much stronger emphasis, role, and perspective from the community side? Would it include Sigmon’s (1979, p. 10) admonition that students’ “learning objectives are formed in the context of what needs to be done to serve others?” Would such conceptualization include a greater emphasis on “learning service” (Boyle-Baise et al., 2006) as well as providing it?

There are also questions that beg attention on the institutional, academic side of service learning. Among them might be:

- As practitioners and scholars how do we not lose the critical “eye” and edge we once had when we labored on the margins of higher education or in schools as we continue the effort to institutionalize our work and strengthen the field? How has successful institutionalization of service learning possibly impeded us from reaching our goals for both students and communities?
- Have we adequately understood and outlined just what effective service-learning pedagogy is? For example, can we go beyond talking about the importance of reflection to more specifically and concretely defining and describing what facilitating reflection effectively in the context of specific goals students bring to it—knowledge development; skill building; attitude exploration, etc.—looks like?
- Why do we have such trouble with our field’s language whether it be “service-leaning” or “community/civic engagement? What is it about service learning that is so hard to define in a simple, clear way? What do we mean by “learning” in service-learning or civic/community engagement? What do we mean by “service?” What does “engagement” actually mean?
- How and why does service learning appear to develop with different distinguishing features and emphases in different parts of the world? What can we learn, what wisdom can be derived, from com-

paring and contrasting these efforts and promoting more dialogue among practitioners and scholars across international borders?

- How can we narrow the gap that exists between the goals and outcomes of service-learning research and the learning needs of practitioners and community partners? Might the next 50-year “wisdom” volume include storytelling and wisdom from community partners?

Neither one of us will be around 50 years from now. But if we were to be around, we would be eager to see what has transpired, how this field may have matured and developed. We owe much gratitude to Rob Shumer and his contributors for providing us the opportunity to sit back and ponder these and other questions.

—Dwight E. Giles, Jr.  
Timothy K. Stanton

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# **WISDOM**

## **The Ultimate Goal of Education and Learning**

Wisdom is defined in many ways. It is referred to as accumulated knowledge or erudition or enlightenment. It also is described as “the trait of utilizing knowledge and experience with common sense and insight; the ability to apply knowledge or experience or understanding or common sense and insight.” It appears from these definitions that key concepts of the term include applying knowledge or using knowledge and experience. Thus, wisdom goes beyond knowing something; it includes the notion of using knowledge and experience in ways that make common or reasonable sense.

Robert Sternberg, director of the Center for Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise at Yale University, has suggested we need to teach for wisdom, not knowledge (Sternberg, 2003). He suggests that intelligence is composed of three constructs: analytical knowledge and skills, creative knowledge and skills, and practical knowledge/skills. Thus, developing wise students requires the cultivation of all three concepts of knowledge and skill in areas related to analyzing knowledge and information, developing creative interpretations and applications of those analyses, and conceiving of that knowledge and information in terms of practical applications. It always results in using knowledge to demonstrate reasonable approaches to doing things.

It appears from these concepts that wisdom is dependent on practical experience, which informs a knowledge base, is tempered with some creative

observations/understandings, and manifests itself through application in new settings. Wisdom is thus dependent on age...the assumption that the older you are, the more experience you have, and the more opportunity you have to engage experiences with practical outcomes. Wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age, but it certainly can contribute the additional opportunities to observe knowledge applied in the real world.

It is one goal of this book to demonstrate the wisdom of a few people who have been involved in the service-learning movement for more than the last 30+ years. They have seen the ups and downs of service-learning over this time period and hopefully can share with us important notions about what they have learned from these experiences and what younger people can do in the future to ensure the sustainability of the practice and continue to show that it has made a difference in schools and society.

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I would especially like to thank Dwight Giles and Tim Stanton who agreed to write the introduction/preface and who helped to suggest some of the contributors. Their history with a previous book dealing with the “pioneers” helped to expand the foundation of the effort and to ensure that the book added additional information and perspectives not found in their earlier work.

I would also like to thank my family, especially my wife, Susan, for encouraging me to pursue this effort and who provided insights into how the book could be worthwhile. She provided an additional dose of wisdom to the stories, plus a little editing, as well.