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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the history and demise of the service-learning component of a teacher education program. Beginning in 1968, service learning was a self-directed, community-based program within the student-teaching practicum at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Students were responsible for matching their learning needs with placement opportunities within the community and then providing at least 30 hours of service. By the late 1980s, program staff were exploring innovations to deepen the role of service learning in professional development, but were also struggling to defend program legitimacy and relevance to teacher education. An evaluation of the program in 1990 showed that it was meeting its mandate and confirmed that students valued self-directed, experiential opportunities as part of their professional preparation. Nevertheless, the program was terminated after 24 years of operation. Program structure and history show that the major factor in termination was pressure for budget reductions based on severe cutbacks in funding to universities. In retrospect, it is suggested that the evaluation neglected to appreciate the struggles of an organization under pressure to down-size and conserve; to address the concerns of all stakeholders involved; to identify contributions to organizational restructuring that could be made by service learning; and to examine the benefits and losses to the university should the program be terminated. Recent developments in evaluation practice encourage careful consideration of the structural, cultural, and political elements of organization; the context these elements provide for programs; and the experiences and information that may be necessary if organizations are to learn from evaluation data. Care should be taken to investigate the purposes that can best be served by evaluation, and to identify the methods of inquiry that will adequat ly serve those purposes. (Contains 10 references.) (TD)

Chapter 11

CAN PROGRAM EVALUATION RESCUE SERVICE LEARNING?

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Lyn and Jeff were closely connected with the service learning program, the success and failure of which they document. This chapter is an important contribution because, for all the lip service given to service as a learning opportunity in experiential education, it is relatively rare as an integral part of the curriculum. Here, two instructors in such a program tell its story and relate the part played by their evaluative efforts to demonstrate the program's worth. The fact that the program failed to survive is taken as a basis for learning lessons about the role and nature of program evaluation in any situation where unconventional program elements must reside within a more conventional institutional framework.

Introduction

This is the story of the rise and fall of service learning—one component of a teacher-education degree program in a university. This story will describe service learning's status within both teacher education and the community beyond the university walls. The history and evolution of our service-learning program contain the seeds of both its success and its eventual failure to survive. We think this story is worth telling because it reveals a pattern which may well apply to nontraditional experiential programs in other places.

In brief, service learning was a largely self-directed, community-based element within the student-teaching practicum. Students were responsible for matching their learning needs with placement opportunities within the community and then providing at least 30 hours of service. An evaluation of the program showed that it was meeting its mandate and confirmed that students valued self-directed, experiential opportunities as part of their professional preparation. Service learning was, nevertheless, deleted as a program component after 24 years of operation. The evaluation, an investigation of students' learning and the program's effectiveness, proved unable to help service-learning advocates contest the organizational agenda that ultimately shaped program policy.

What is the nature of community-based experiential learning? How can those responsible for the delivery of experiential programs avoid the dilemma and frustration of reporting that "the evaluation demonstrated program success, but the program died"? Our story is intended to guide those with the responsibility for both establishing and evaluating community-based experiential education programs such as service learning. The lessons we have learned, while hard won, may help to shed light on the complexity of grounding nontraditional learning in traditional educational settings.

Program Structure and Evolution

In 1968, Queen's University opened a new Faculty of Education, the primary function of which was to prepare post-baccalaureate students for teacher licensing and the BEd degree. (*Note*: The term "Faculty" refers to a major unit within a university, equivalent to the terms "School" or "College" in other jurisdictions.) Plans for the new Faculty reflected a progressive orientation toward teacher training. A community-based advisory board was established to support the planning process. Nontraditional thinking and innovation were encouraged. It was hardly surprising, then, that Faculty policy emphasized the professional commitment of educators to the broader social context, or that a service-learning project, called "Community Service," would be made part of the student-teaching practicum.

During the entire time that service learning was a compulsory part of teacher education, its basic format remained essentially the same. Within the general framework, however, some key changes did occur: in the educational philosophy that explained and justified the program to students, faculty members, and the wider community; in particular ingredients of the model's implementation; and in the general administrative and operational context of the Faculty itself. In any educational setting, the interaction between philosophy, delivery, and administrative context is important for analyzing the program's evolution within the broader context of experiential education and for analyzing the potential of evaluation to become a regular and desirable program activity.

Program Structure

Students were expected to select sites where they could assist in the delivery of educationally or socially valuable services. There was always a broad array of opportunities, within our city community and beyond: social and cultural agencies, healthcare institutions, correctional centres, religious organizations, and recreational programs. Students could also select schools, as long as the service-learning work did not duplicate their practice-teaching roles. A project undertaken by a student could be part of a site's

normal routine, or it could represent a special initiative established just for this purpose. Each student's own project was expected to involve a minimum of 30-40 hours of service delivery. It could be scheduled over longer or more concentrated periods of time. Most students chose settings nearby, but to serve agencies in their home communities during weekends was also appropriate.

"Host professional" was the term eventually adopted to identify the individual at the project site who was responsible for directing and supporting the student's work. Host professionals interviewed student applicants and selected the successful candidate(s). Host professionals were expected to have sufficient training and expertise to supervise students in the tasks central to the service project. Ongoing feedback and support were key expectations of the host professional's role. As well, these individuals provided formal confirmation that the terms established in the initial learning agreement had been fulfilled.

The primary function of the University academic and secretarial staff allocated to the service-learning program was coordination of the process. This involved introducing students to the program's rationale and goals, clarifying its formal and informal expectations, facilitating initial contacts with potential placement sites, maintaining detailed records, reading and approving student journals and reports, and certifying successful completion. At times, project-related problems engaged staff in additional counselling and support both with students and with host professionals. Most placements, however, did not require any direct communication or intervention. Contact with the ever-changing group of active and potential host professionals was a central focus of staff work, primarily to encourage continued enthusiasm for the program, to facilitate understanding of its purposes, and to enhance the quality of its delivery.

Students had major responsibility for implementing the specific details of the program. They needed to assess their own professional development requirements, select the kinds of experience they wanted their service project to provide, locate sites that could be expected to provide such experience, schedule interviews, negotiate learning agreements, and perform the work they had agreed to do. They also managed the paper flow that was

required to coordinate the program. In addition, students interpreted, through assigned reports and journals, the experience they had received, reflecting on its implications for their personal and professional development. Because it was actually a required part of their professional BEd program, students did not view their work as "voluntary."

Three general stages of the service-learning program's development can be identified: an early period, from 1968 to the late 1970s; a middle period, through the mid-1980s; and a late period, lasting until 1992. Although the reality of its evolution was far more incremental, some basic patterns emerged, making it possible—and analytically useful—to address each stage separately and to compare their characteristics.

The Early Period—Establishing the Program

During this time, the program staff established the role of service learning within the Faculty's teacher-training program, clarified the underlying educational principles, and focused the operations.

The dominant philosophy of learning that guided the early operation of Community Service was the view that schools and, therefore, teachers, were organically related to the people, groups, and social forces of their surrounding communities. It was essential, therefore, for beginning teachers to learn about the complexity and potential of these connections. Included in the program's own formal descriptions were comments about teachers "helping the community" to function and "giving back to the community" the kinds of service that would reflect and respect the resources and support it gave to them. Related to this was the explicit notion that teacher education needed to transmit understanding and respect for the "diversity" that existed in the wider society.

The field of experiential education, new and rapidly growing at the time, provided key input into the program's rationale. Crucial in this was the idea of locating training within concrete learning projects, in which comprehensive, task-focused activities would generate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in an integrated way. It was important that the contexts for such projects be applied and interpersonal, rather than abstract and purely academic, and that

they generate a sense of genuine social importance and personal responsibility.

Although early documents described Community Service as a separate and distinct training requirement, its actual operation—functionally and physically—was allocated to the staff and facilities of the special program in Outdoor and Experiential Education (OEE). In reference to their Community Service activities, the staff described and viewed themselves as a "team"—a term, as well as a view, which continued to be used throughout the life of the program. The team members considered their primary role to be background support, distant from the learning that occurred at placement sites and focused on providing to students a balanced blend of planning and counselling. Although such input was fairly well distributed over the length of the service placements, its strongest impact on learning came when written reports and journals that students were required to submit were reviewed and commented on.

The pressure to change was consistent throughout the life of the service-learning program. In the early '70s, a large number of new teaching positions opened up within the Faculty. Not having participated in the development and expression of the Faculty's original ideals about community involvement and social responsibility, and often recruited from closer to the traditional centre than to the progressive edges of academic education, many of these new professors were not immediately convinced of the validity and relevance of any service-learning practicum component. In practical terms, it was a component that appeared to extract a sizable chunk of students' time—in addition to practice teaching—and crowded an already limited academic year.

The Middle Period—Institutionalizing the Program

Over a relatively short period during the early to mid-1980s, program personnel revised the general purpose and orientation. Renamed "Service Learning," the program delivery began to integrate more extensively with other specialized programs offered within the Faculty.

Although its total staff-time allocation remained essentially the same, the program was moved from its original home within OEE to a new location, much closer (in both physical and functional terms) to the Practice Teaching office. Responsibility for program coordination was also transferred from OEE instructors to other teaching and secretarial staff. This transition occurred at a point when the Faculty, itself, was undergoing substantial restructuring —a combined reaction to pressures from the university to cut costs, eagerness by some faculty leaders to orient teacher preparation in a more professionally orthodox direction, and the initiation of several, specially focused programs. The name change to Service Learning also reflected the alignment of the program within the general field of experiential education.

Influenced by the ideas and experiences of its new staff, and also in response to changes in the broader educational and administrative context, the program rationale was revised in several ways. Experiential education remained a key source of both general philosophy and specific terminology. Emphasis on the social responsibility of the teaching profession was maintained. Increased stress was placed on principles and practices from the field of adult education. Although self-directed learning had always been a major program theme, the steps and processes required to accomplish it had never been articulated clearly or emphasized strongly in earlier Community Service documents. The relationship between experience, reflection, self-insight, and personal growth was highlighted in greater detail—especially in information about the program that was provided to students, faculty members, and host professionals.

Staff began to suggest the potential of the program for career exploration beyond the teaching field, although care was also taken to reassure other faculty members about the continuing relevance of Service Learning for teacher preparation. Indeed, staff made several attempts to lobby their colleagues on behalf of the merit and worth of Service Learning. In response to doubts and questions concerning this kind of training experience, data were collected about the total hours of "free" professional experience and instruction that students were given by the community, and of "free" service that students gave to the community in return. Mention was made of the

educational benefit that was accomplished on one side of this exchange, and the good will that was created on the other.

Although the job market for teachers remained tight during this period, the number of applications to the Faculty grew substantially. The response was a new admissions policy that weighted equally grade point average and applicants' experience in teaching-related activities. Administrative rationalization of the entire teacher education program began to favour a more orthodox view of professional preparation. As well, five specialized programs within the Faculty began to find new ways to use Service Learning for their own instructional purposes. While it was by no means inconsistent with experiential and adult education principles to integrate Service Learning with programs such as these, their own uses of Service Learning made it more difficult to generate a clear and coherent image of the program's unique purpose in the Faculty at large, and to sustain widespread agreement about its special value among students and faculty. The combined effect of all these substantial changes and pressures was to dilute institutional consensus about the purpose of Service Learning and to weaken commitment to its ongoing operation.

The Late Period—Refining and Defending Service Learning

During a time when the program personnel were refining their analysis of Service Learning and identifying potential innovations in program delivery that could deepen and extend its role in professional development, they were continuing to struggle—unsuccessfully, as it turned out—to sustain broad support for the legitimacy and relevance of the program.

By far the most important contextual factor during this period was pressure on the Faculty to quickly and substantially reduce its total budget, based on severe cutbacks in funding to universities. This led to a comprehensive Faculty-wide review of its entire structure, content, and schedule of pre-service teacher preparation. Although Service Learning was by no means the only program to face serious questions of value, effectiveness, and relevance, its compulsory status, complex rationale, and nontraditional format

made its situation more precarious than most of the others. It was during this period that we (the authors), as adjunct instructors, along with a new secretary, formed the Service Learning team.

This period also saw the rationale of Service Learning evolve in some important directions. The implications of self-directed learning for teacher training were clarified—as an appropriate and powerful model of professional development, and also as a necessary instructional tool for teachers interested in helping students become independent learners. Both the process of choosing the placement site and the dynamics of negotiating the learning agreement were given increased recognition and more detailed attention. The value of integrating service experiences with other aspects of the professional degree program was also emphasized.

Most importantly, Service Learning became definable in curricular terms. A program description, with clearly articulated goals, a rationale, objectives (experience, skill, attitude), and criteria for successful performance, was introduced as part of the orientation to the program. Service Learning was thus explicitly presented to students, faculty members, and the community as a formalized program component. In part this was due to our belief that the program's teaching and learning processes could benefit from a set of clearly stated and explicit intentions. In part it was our attempt to make the program a more integral part of the pre-service teacher education curriculum—that is, to answer in familiar and professional language the underlying question, "Why are we running a compulsory Service Learning program?"

During the late period, the structure and the substance—if not the solidarity—of the Service Learning team began to fade. Year by year, although the demands of the program remained the same, instructor time was depleted; the secretary's responsibilities increased accordingly. A decision was made to invest much of the available staff time into the preparation of students for the practicum. New student orientation sessions were instituted: a) to anchor the program within the overall BEd program; b) to emphasize the significance of self-direction in professional preparation as well as in teaching and learning in general; c) to introduce students to the conceptual and practical world of learning agreements; and d) to

orient students to the procedural tasks necessary to complete the course.

Journals were by now assigned but not collected, and the "Progress" and "Final Report" forms were streamlined and shortened. Within the framework of self-directed professional development, the onus was placed on the students to identify to their host professionals or to program staff any placement problems that might require remedial counselling or personal support.

Because feedback, reflection, and mentoring were now centred almost entirely within each project setting, increased attention was given to collective communication with host professionals, clarifying with them the details of what was expected and acknowledging their important contributions to the teacher education process. Attempts were made—without much success—to include other members of the faculty in this process.

As the program closed the books on its 20th year of operation, it found itself in an eminently weakened and certainly defensive position. Forecasts of even more severe cutbacks had administrators and faculty members glancing more frequently toward Service Learning. Clearly, those who had been members of the program's instructional team understood the details and potential of the Service Learning model far better than did most of their colleagues, many of whom continued to refer to the program by its pre-1981 title, Community Service. Interestingly, most students—their extensive volunteer backgrounds notwithstanding—were still reporting informally and through program Final Report forms that they valued the contributions made by this program to their preparation as teachers.

The Evolutionary Process

Students enrolled in Service Learning in 1992 would probably have found the program to be very similar to that of their predecessors who had completed Community Service in 1968. The orientation they were given would have been better organized, located within a more systematically professional analytic framework, and focused on somewhat different objectives for learning. The number and format of the reports they were required to submit would have

changed. They would have less ongoing contact with the faculty team and would play a more direct and active role in the negotiation of their own learning agreements. The instructors of their other courses would comment less often—and express less enthusiasm—about the importance of their nontraditional practicum experiences. More students would find the program directly tied to special programs, and fewer would establish their projects through independent contacts with agencies and institutions.

However, the firsthand experience of service and learning in community settings, and the professional development it thereby generated, retained its essential shape and form over the entire life of the program. While the distribution of placement sites evolved, increasing in number and variety, the general nature of students' tasks and responsibilities remained fairly constant. In their final reports, the great majority of students still commented, in concrete and detailed ways, about the learning they had accomplished, the personal growth they had noticed, and the professional development they had gained.

Thus, aspects of the program's rationale, structure, and context apparently changed more than its experiential content. In particular, the analysis by program staff of the role of experiential education in teacher development and their understanding of what was involved in such learning and how it occurred, acquired greater depth and clarity. The same insights, however, were not widely distributed among other faculty members.

After an early honeymoon period for Community Service, program personnel began what would continue to be a constant, if informally articulated, aspect of their role: the ongoing search for a rationale that would legitimate the existence of the program within a teacher education Faculty, and a manageable structure that would fully express that rationale. Over a succession of staff and instructor changes, there was a never-ending process of program development, usually informed by attention—sometimes anecdotal, other times more systematic—to program evaluation data.

Establishing Program Merit and Worth

Responding to Perceived Threats

As predictions of severe fiscal constraint and down-sizing continued, there was increasing informal talk that Service Learning had outlived its time. The first question the program team faced was whether we should, or could, be advocates for our own program. It was clear that testimonies from us about the value of the program would not be sufficient to sustain it. Because only one tenured faculty member was still connected to Service Learning, we understood that removing the program from teacher education would be a simple and relatively painless way to save money without causing trauma to the working life of the full-time community. It appeared to us that if the program was to stake a claim in the Faculty's future, it would have to demonstrate its value within teacher education and to our education students. This assumption—one that would be revisited—led us to our first investigation, the perceived worth of Service Learning as a component of progressive teacher education.

During the academic year 1988-89, we undertook two external tests of the program. In the first, the Service Learning as part of a teacher's training practicum was described by our university's representative to a Province-wide committee on teacher education with a request for comment and reaction. There was a very favourable response to the inclusion of this alternative type of community-based experiential learning. Our second step was to present the program for review and critique at the annual meeting of Canada's premier scholarly society for studies in education. There, we described both the program and some of the student-reported outcomes. The supportive comments and lively discussion from graduate students in education and practising teachers and academics were both encouraging and motivating.

The endorsements of these key stakeholders in teacher education gave us confidence that Service Learning could claim a legitimate place, at least philosophically, within teacher education. The remaining question was whether the program was achieving its potential. This question called out for a more formal program evaluation. We believed, at the time, that in the presence of accurate

information about student and community experiences, faculty members and decision makers would be more likely to extend to Service Learning a fair hearing regarding its future. This belief was supported by administrative approval for a formal evaluation.

Getting Evaluation Started

A review of the literature revealed that almost all experience-based programs leave participants with personal satisfaction, enhanced social conscience, and increased measures of self-confidence (Warner, 1984). While we considered these to be significant outcomes, we realized that confirmation of these would do little to alter our colleagues' judgments of the program's value. We concluded that Service Learning would need to demonstrate outcomes specific to teacher education if it was to argue for a legitimate place within the Faculty of Education.

The literature also informed us that experiential learning for preservice teachers was most effective when it a) did not replicate well-entrenched models of conventional teaching and learning (Law, 1982), and b) was accompanied by a framework of systematic reflection (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1983). We felt confident that Service Learning did have a strong history, at least in its intentions, of attending to these criteria. This could be traced through course descriptions, brochures, and student materials. What the evaluation needed to test was how fully students actually experienced the intent of the program. It would also be important to generate specific detail about how to strengthen these program features.

The question of how to actually carry out the evaluation proved to be complex. Warner (1984) had warned that those intent on discounting experiential education outcomes usually begin by targeting weaknesses, or at least controversy, in the research methodology. Since the fate of the program would ultimately be determined by a faculty vote, it was very important that faculty members perceive the information generated by the evaluation as creditable. We each came from different research backgrounds. By pooling our experiences, we were confident that we could design a thorough and reputable investigation. While we had only

introductory experiences in evaluation, we speculated that information gathered from multiple methods would be the most convincing. This would mean including both outcome data (primarily quantitative) and rich descriptions of the experiences of students and hosts (qualitative).

Our first question was how to gain a better understanding of Service Learning as a learning process. Using the literature in experiential education as a guide (Warner, 1984), we determined that our methods would need to access the motivations, activities, decisions, and reflections of both our students and their hosts in the community. Observations and interviews grounded in the program settings would inform us about individual experiences. Collectively, these experiences could provide a description of the program, reveal patterns of meaningful participation, contribute to judgments about program utility, and, finally, guide decisions about program improvement.

Reminded by Dewey (1938) that not all experiences are equally educative, our second question was how students varied in their learnings and outcomes. Surveying the entire population of students following the completion of the program would, given a good response rate, allow us to talk about the experiences of students in general and to make some meaningful statements about the worth of the program.

Throughout this early thinking, we were sensitive to the possibility that an evaluation could be seen as an attempt on our part to produce "good news" propaganda. The Faculty's administration had already reported in general documents and in meetings that students from the previous year had complained about the relevance and necessity of Service Learning. We suspected that these complaints could be attributed, at least partially, to the forum in which the information was collected (an open meeting for feedback about the entire BEd program, attended by less than 20% of the students and held at a time when students were under great pressure to complete assignments).

While negative perceptions at this point in the students' year were not necessarily accurate indications of the program's overall efficacy, they did signal that some students found working through the program problematic in context with other course demands. An

accurate and useful evaluation must, therefore, be able to account for the student dissatisfaction that had been publicized to faculty members as well as recommend changes that would improve the experience.

Designing an Evaluation

At first, we were perplexed by the seemingly impossible task of being both program implementors and program evaluators. If the evaluation confirmed our beliefs about the program's value, no matter how rigorous the methodology, results would likely be dismissed by many as self-serving. We decided that one way to bring credibility to the evaluation process and its findings was to form an evaluation team. Since students were the group that was supposedly most critical of the program, students appeared to be the ideal choice as colleagues for the project. From the 1989-1990 student body, eleven students expressed an interest in becoming members of an evaluation team. The six chosen had a sincere interest in trying to improve teacher education and in developing their own research skills.

Four of these students would work with one of us (JP) to map out a series of visits and interviews with both students and their host professionals. A total of 8 case studies were to provide an in-depth investigation of program processes, from students' introduction to Service Learning to their final evaluation report. As a set, these stories would reveal the extent to which activities and decision-making processes central to Service Learning prepared students for teaching.

The task for the other of us (LS) and two students was to generate information through a survey that would provide an accurate description of the characteristics and experiences of the affected student population in general. It would be important to determine not only the significance students attributed to Service Learning but the extent to which the intended outcomes of the program were being achieved.

The two research groups worked both independently and collectively. In October, we began by clarifying, through the literature and program documents, our understanding of experiential

learning as it related to teacher preparation. This was followed by an investigation of the strengths and limitations of research methods, a sharpening of the evaluation questions, and a refining of the design. Even as the tasks of the two groups began to differ, we continued to meet collectively to review and critique each other's work.

By January 1990, instrument development and data collection had begun. Qualitative data were collected until early spring. The student population was surveyed following the completion of their entire BEd program. Data analysis was to be a joint responsibility, as time allowed, with both of us taking responsibility for submitting the final report.

Constraints and Compromises

One month later, by February 1990, the integrity of both the program and the evaluation was at risk. First, it was confirmed that one of us (LS) would be granted a one-year study leave starting in the summer of 1990. This was not problematic for the evaluation since the quantitative data analysis could be continued in this context. More significant for the program was the decision that her vacancy on the Service Learning team would not be filled. These events, however, were not nearly as perplexing as the loss of the remaining team member (JP) from the program because of the need to seek out a more secure professional future.

By April 1990, the staffing decisions for the next academic year were finalized. The Service Learning team would be reduced to one part-time faculty member and a senior secretary. These staffing decisions weighed heavily not only on the program's future but on the evaluation as well. Even if an evaluation could report significant findings in favour of Service Learning as a unique and valuable component of teacher education, it would be praise for a program that in practice no longer existed.

It is likely that experienced evaluators, under these circumstances, would have reassessed the feasibility and utility of continuing their work. With only a commitment to the idea of Service Learning guiding our decisions, the evaluation team continued working until the last day of the school year.

We eventually abandoned our hopes for a qualitative component to the evaluation report. Student members of the evaluation team had learned a great deal about selected placements and student experiences, but this task had absorbed all of their allotted time. With the students gone and their team partner no longer contracted by the Faculty, there was no one left to take on the responsibility of coding, analyzing, and interpreting the data. This, in turn, left the evaluation vulnerable to those who preferred to judge value using evidence grounded in context and the participants' own voices. Earlier plans to have some of the students and host professionals who had contributed to the evaluation also participate in reporting the results dissolved along with the entire qualitative segment.

Still, with a survey, developed by students, pilot-tested, and validated in hand, we decided to salvage the outcomes aspect of the evaluation. Throughout the spring and early summer, survey forms were sent out. We had never accepted the popular claims of colleagues that students were, at best, indifferent to Service Learning. For this reason, we felt somewhat vindicated when slightly over 73% of the 464 students surveyed responded. While we yet had no idea what students had said about Service Learning, they obviously felt strongly enough about their experiences and the program's future role in teacher education to register their opinions.

Reporting the Evaluation Findings

The first part of the evaluation report (Shulha, 1990) described the student body. The class of 1990 did report an average of four, volunteer, community-based experiences during the five years previous to their admission to the Faculty. This confirmed speculation that the new admissions policy was ensuring a student population with a rich background in community service. What needed to be determined was whether the accompanying argument, that students therefore viewed their Service Learning component as simply more of the same, was also true. On this question, most students (86%) reported that the Service Learning experience within their teacher education context had lived up to its name by providing them with unique service and learning opportunities.

Another rumour among faculty members was that most students found ways to get credit for Service Learning without putting in the required minimum 30 hours. We did find that about 16% of students got credit for Service Learning without completing the 30-hour requirement. We also discovered that most students (70%) met or exceeded the expectation for contact hours and 20% of students reported serving over 40 hours in their host setting. Some of the most encouraging findings had to do with students' perceptions of the program. One unique feature of Service Learning was the responsibility it gave students to determine how, when, and where preparation for teaching and learning might best occur. When the evaluation asked about the value of this approach to teacher education, almost all students (97%) said that pre-service teachers should

be provided with opportunities to make these kinds of decisions about their professional development.

But, was this particular Service Learning practicum a useful addition to students' education? Half of the students confirmed that the program in its current form had been a significant element of their educational experience; three quarters felt that Service Learning had provided them with new insights into teaching and learning; and an even greater number (81%) felt that this form of experiential learning should be maintained as a credited part of pre-service preparation.

It is ironic that while we believed that the needs and experiences of students would guide us in making useful recommendations about Service Learning, students were telling us it was the needs and dispositions of faculty members that had the greatest influence on the program credibility. Students reported that few faculty members acknowledged Service Learning as a legitimate part of teacher education. Students talked about receiving little encouragement to link theoretical or practical issues discussed in classes to their alternative service setting. In the absence of institutional reinforcement, students tended to look to their peers for feedback and confirmation of their experiences. The students who declared they had completed the program without any formal or informal opportunities for reflection or integration tended to be the same 20% who recommended that Service Learning be deleted as a program component. The remainder (80%) encouraged the Faculty to maintain Service Learning as a part of pre-service teacher education.

Despite these findings, and students' claims that community-based experience within a context of professional preparation was different from traditional volunteer service, the argument that students were entering their teacher-training year with adequate related experience continued. In a vote of faculty members, the program was terminated.

Lessons Learned

On one hand, it seems unjust that a program with demonstrated value could be systematically reduced in the way that this one was. On the other hand, it is amazing that given the philosophical, political, economic, and personnel changes over 24 years, the program not only survived but continually found ways to be responsive to students and the community. What was it about this community-based practicum that made it viable for so long in the face of organizational inclinations to abandon it?

The success of this program was its ability to be responsive to changing times without losing sight of its primary purpose: to be educative. Learning, not service, was the one uncompromising cornerstone of the program. Even under the original name, Community Service, the seriousness with which program coordinators treated the importance of planning, reflection, and assessment demonstrated to students the connections between the program and their professional education.

Successive program personnel brought to bear their understandings of experiential education, adult learning, mentoring, cooperative education, curriculum design, and information management. The program's rationale and delivery structures benefited from all of these ingredients. As staffing resources, institutional interest, and connections with other faculty members diminished, it became essential to find structural ways to augment the essential activities of goal setting, reflection, and mentoring. Program guidelines became more explicit, providing students and host professionals with guidance in negotiating and decision making. These adjustments in program organization and delivery made it possible to sustain significant levels of student and community learning and satisfaction.

The reality remains that, in this example, the program was discontinued. Was there anything that we, as program personnel, could have done differently in those final years to preserve a niche for this nontraditional approach to teacher preparation? It is a question we have often asked.

We still feel strongly that a systematic program evaluation was an appropriate course of action, given the uncertainty we had about

the effects on the program of diminishing resources and growing criticism from within the Faculty. What is much clearer with the benefit of time and distance is that our evaluation, in general, likely asked the wrong question. So intent were we in generating concrete evidence of the learning processes and outcomes of Service Learning that we neglected to fully appreciate the struggles of an organization under pressure to down-size and conserve.

In almost any program, but especially in nontraditional ones, an important analytic distinction can be made between insiders and outsiders. Several groups had a stake in the operation and continuation of Service Learning: the program team and students, certainly. But the presence of the program also had an impact on the community at large, host professionals (and indirectly, the clients of their organizations), and the Faculty's administration, as well as other faculty members and support staff. Although it is tempting to locate program personnel on the inside and everyone else on the outside, actually students and host professionals were insiders, too—at least part of the time. Even though students and hosts might not have developed as intricate and substantial an analysis (or theory) of experiential education as the program staff, still they had an experience-based understanding of the process. Not so for the bulk of faculty members.

Seduced by the unique features and outcomes of our program, we assumed that accurate information about the internal dynamics and consequences of Service Learning would be enough to influence the dispositions of teaching and administrative colleagues toward the program. Our belief was always, "Once you really understand the program, you will endorse it." The flaw in this approach was that it excluded the interaction of the program with the needs and values of those who would shape institutional policy. While educationally sound processes and outcomes were necessary for program viability, they were not sufficient.

The evaluation we conducted failed to examine the actual and perceived benefits and losses to the Faculty should the Service Learning program be terminated. Had we pursued this line of inquiry, program outsiders as well as students and host professionals would have become major stakeholders in the data-gathering and analysis activities. Instead, we produced a report of very little

interest to anyone other than ourselves and other insiders. No evaluation can afford to focus on one group to the exclusion of others, especially if the power in decision making rests outside the program.

It is likely that in professional preparation where nontraditional programs and more conventional courses co-exist, tensions also exist. The extent of such tensions will be at least partially dependent on the degree to which the programs must compete for resources. In times of prosperity (such as the late 1960s and early 1970s), institutions can easily support both conventional and alternative practices. In times of diminishing resources (like the late 1980s and the 1990s) institutions begin to face difficult choices. At times like these, especially without influential program champions, programs such as Service Learning will benefit from evaluation, especially if it allows program personnel to participate in visioning the organization's future. Evaluation data could encourage discussion about the program's ability to contribute to overall organizational well-being. When an organization must reduce expenditures, evaluation results that suggest maintenance of the status quo may be self-defeating.

Given the Faculty's need to economize, more useful evaluation questions would likely have been: What contributions to organizational restructuring could be made by Service Learning? What would be the consequences to the Faculty of changing the existing program? These questions would have allowed an investigation of the role of Service Learning in teacher education and in the organization of a shrinking Faculty.

It is notable that since leaving Service Learning, we have both pursued, in quite different ways, career paths in evaluation. In coming together to tell this story, we have used more recent experiences to reflect on the complexity of having the responsibility both to operate a program and to periodically assess its worth. Conducting an evaluation to monitor and improve program effectiveness certainly attends to the needs of the program's staff and primary users. Conducting an evaluation to facilitate organizational learning and policy making requires that the context that surrounds the program also be addressed. As we have reported here, methods used in the

first type of evaluation do not necessarily provide useful information for the second.

Can program evaluation rescue alternative experiential programs like Service Learning? Newer developments in evaluation practice encourage careful consideration of a) the structural, cultural, and political elements of organizations, b) the context these elements provide for programs, and c) the experiences and information that may be necessary if organizations are to learn from evaluation data (Cousins & Earl, in press; Stevens & Dial, 1994; Madison, 1992; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Larson & Preskill, 1991). Evaluations performed without this grounding run the risk of either being misused or not being used at all. By taking care "up front" to investigate the purposes that can best be served by evaluation, and by identifying the methods of inquiry that would adequately serve those purposes, we might have avoided the disappointment of learning that the program had worth but no context within which to operate.

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