Service-Learning and Intentionality: Creating and Assessing Cognitive Affective Learning Connections

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Abstract

This article outlines the design of a new service-learning component central to a graduate course on teaching elementary and middle school writing. The service-learning involves course participants acting as mentors to middle school students as they write personal histories of local African American, Cape Verdean, and Puerto Rican senior citizens. The course instructor's plan for assessment focuses on cognitive affective learning. Using Krathwohl's Affective Domain, the instructor has created reflective assignments that address the original cognitive goals of the course with new affective goals. Course participants complete a constructive action portfolio, which is a collection of focused and reflective pieces about their experiences and roles as mentors.

Introduction

This article outlines a project proposal for creating and assessing affective learning through a newly created service-learning component for a graduate-level education course. The initiative centers on teaching writing in elementary and middle school classrooms. The targeted affective learning goals for the course participants focus on integrating African American, Puerto Rican, and Cape Verdean cultures within a small city in southeastern Massachusetts. Similarly, the affective goals for the middle school student recipients intersect with the course participant goals in working to dispel racial and ethnic stereotypes, fostering an appreciation for unique gifts of the identified cultures, and improving middle school students' writing skills.

As with all service-learning ventures, the work is twofold. The student recipients of the service-learning write personal histories for identified senior citizens with the given cultural backgrounds while a course participant acts as mentor. Each course participant, as a service provider, mentors middle school recipients and keeps a structured and reflective journal. Written pieces represent the vehicle for documenting affective learning of the service-learning experience provided by course participants. Assessment tools for affective learning are created to use as a lens for measuring

the learning and providing acceptable evidence that this learning occurred.

What Is Service-Learning in Higher Education?

In higher education, service-learning can accommodate new notions of teaching and learning. But before these new notions can be unpacked, a workable definition of service-learning must be established to provide context for my project. The definition of service-learning for this project aligns with Jacoby's *(1996, 5)* conception:

> Service-learning is 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. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning.

As previously mentioned, the work of service-learning is two-fold. On the one hand, service-learning addresses identified community needs; on the other, the learning takes place in the person or persons engaging in the community service. The relationship between the service and the learning is of a symbiotic nature.

The Integration of Affective Assessment in Service-Learning

The intentional combination of service and learning into "service-learning" is much more than just community service or academic learning. As Bringle and Duffy *(1998, 1)* point out, "In high-quality service-learning courses, no one is exploited and reciprocity exists so that the service providers and service recipients each give and receive." In the best service-learning partnerships, the relationships are mutually beneficial, and improved learning yields benefits for all stakeholders.

If service-learning itself is not new, then what else is new within the world of service-learning? New models for assessing both cognitive and affective learning outcomes represent unmapped territory in service-learning partnerships. We need to recognize a broader definition of learning goals and outcomes, one that incorporates both cognitive and affective learning, so that both types of learning can be assessed.

In higher education, cognitive learning is usually privileged over affective learning. Affective learning involves more than just

emotions, which may be difficult to discuss in a higher education context. The human brain, however, does not separate emotions from cognitions, so when students' interest, motivation, appreciation, and attitudes are neglected, real and enduring learning is incomplete *(Owen-Smith 2004)*. For example, a college student gains the cognitive skills needed for writing formal papers, and in acquiring these skills, his or her attitude about writing changes for the better. Such changes in attitudes represent affective learning and are often undervalued in higher education. The cognitive can certainly stand alone, but when affective learning is integrated with cognitive, a deeper and richer manifestation of learning results.

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Human beings have the capacity for both cognitive and affective learning, and one without the other is an incomplete experience. By its nature, service-learning integrates cognitive with affective learning and builds bridges between theory and practice—all in a real-world context *(Bringle and Duffy 1998)*. We can no longer afford to overlook the affective parts of the learning in service-learning, and new models for assessment are needed.

Although not itself a new model, Krathwohl's Affective Domain model *(Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia 1964; diagram 1)* is new to application in service-learning settings. Krathwohl's model can be interpreted as a developmental continuum of internalization where each stage of learning contributes to the next. This domain includes five components (from the initial to the most developed): (1) receiving, (2) responding, (3) valuing, (4) organizing, and (5) characterizing by value or set. Internalization encompasses those steps in the learning process whereby a person's attitude toward an object progresses from a general awareness to a point where the attitude or affect is internalized and begins to guide behavior. In this case, the internalization will manifest in new ways of teaching and learning, and in addressing the diversity of students' needs.

In the service-learning component of the course described in this article, each participant builds a relationship with the identified middle school student. This work of being a mentor to a student in the context of a writing project aligns well with the components of each stage of Krathwohl's Affective Domain.

The first stage, *receiving,* represents the course participants' awareness of the project and its aims. Each course participant

Diagram 1. Krathwohl's Affective Domain Model

Characterization by value set

Organization

Valuing

Responding

Receiving
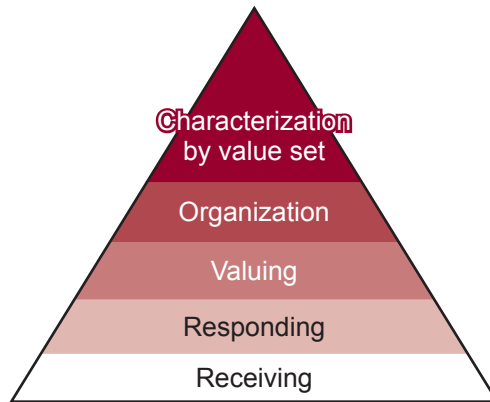
receives information about the task of becoming a writing mentor for an identified middle school student. Course participants receive information about the middle school student and the project in meetings of the course Teaching Elementary and Middle School Writing (EDU 612). Course participants must find an interesting interview with a sports professional or a person of some fame to share with one of the identified middle school students. One e-mail assignment serves to prepare the middle school students for meeting with the local senior citizens for the first time. Course participants send a letter of advice to the middle school students; this letter gives information about how to deal with older people in a respectful way. The foundation for ongoing relations is established.

Responding is the second stage, and it is an indication of a commitment to discovery. Within the EDU 612 course requirements, course participants are assigned a similar writing project. They too must interview a senior citizen and create a personal history of that person from the interview information. Both middle school students and EDU 612 course participants begin to see what kinds of resources they may need to accomplish their writing tasks.

The third stage of Krathwohl's Affective Domain is *valuing*. This includes, but is not limited to, taking ownership of one's learning. One aspect of assessment would be to determine how engaged the middle school students have become in the work of the project. Valuing can also be a part of the ongoing and developing relationship between the EDU 612 participant and the middle school student. Is the relationship beneficial and helpful on both

sides? Is value increasing in terms of the course participants' views on the role of mentoring in writing? Questions like these can be used to assess engagement in the learning and writing process.

Krathwohl's fourth stage involves *organizing.* Have the course participants begun to construct a system for mentoring writers that grows in the relationship between writer and mentor? Such a system of organization incorporates attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are all a part of the developing relationship of each to the others.

The fifth and last stage, *characterizing by a value or set,* involves the potential transferability of what has been learned. To what extent can the course participants utilize the learning from the service-learning in other contexts? Have they developed new values and a philosophy for mentoring writers that can be applied in different settings? All EDU 612 course participants are practicing teachers. Can what they learned in an interaction/writing mentor opportunity with an individual student be applied in the context of their own teaching and learning spaces?

2006 Teaching Institute

The 2006 Teaching Institute at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth provides a collaborative environment to support course improvement projects. Five University of Massachusetts Dartmouth faculty are chosen to work together to pursue projects that substantially improve their teaching effectiveness. This program is provided by the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The supportive infrastructure of the CTE works to intellectually engage faculty by providing opportunities and initiatives focused on improving teaching and enhancing student learning. The CTE supports professional development for faculty as educators and provides venues and opportunities for sharing teaching approaches and for faculty involvement in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). These efforts all contribute to a campus culture that emphasizes excellence in teaching and learning.

Institute participants are chosen from a pool of applicants who submit a course improvement plan. The theme for the 2006 CTE Teaching Institute was "thinking globally, teaching locally." The goal was to facilitate the exploration of teaching approaches that effectively link student involvement with local communities to the classroom goals of developing content mastery, critical thinking, and communication skills. These approaches may

include but are not limited to service and experiential learning, internships, incorporation of students into locally based faculty research projects, and student research in the communities of southeastern Massachusetts. The work of Institute participants supports University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's strong connection and commitment to the communities of southeastern Massachusetts as well as the development of regional studies on our campus.

The centerpiece of my course improvement project for the 2006 Teaching Institute involves a service-learning component the course Teaching Elementary and Middle School Writing (EDU 612). Students in this class are local teachers who are working on master of arts in teaching (MAT) degrees, which represent one route to professional licensure in Massachusetts. Specifically, I am working on integrating affective goals for course participants (with Krathwohl's Affective Domain model as a rubric), aligning these affective goals with the existing cognitive course goals, and developing new methods of assessment for use in an ongoing formative

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evaluation. My pedagogy centers on constructivist and social constructivist ideologies. I believe that people learn best in community *(Hall 2003)*. I believe that the creation of community stands as one important link between cognitive and affective learning *(Hall 2005)*, and I continue to make these connections in my teaching and in my scholarship. This Teaching Institute provides an opportunity for me to create community with others at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth who are also working to improve their teaching and scholarship.

My project connects to the scholarship of teaching, application, integration, engagement, and discovery *(Boyer 1990)*. Boyer presents the notion that the term *scholarship* is too narrowly defined and that teaching should be accorded the same importance as more traditional scholarly activity. Scholarship, Boyer argues, should include how we communicate knowledge to our students and provide opportunities for students to build upon their own knowledge. Service-learning provides a community service, and it bridges theory and practice in the university classroom. My project provides an example of how service-learning forms ties to the scholarships of teaching, application, integration, and dis-

covery—that is, all the elements in Boyer's broadened notion of scholarship.

My project: Integrating and creating legacies: The current goals of EDU 612 include: (1) teacher as writer, (2) creating (and/or enhancing) your own writing classroom, and (3) creating community in the writing classroom. These goals focus mainly on teaching writing to elementary and middle school students, using approaches that take into consideration these students' needs and abilities. These goals are not broken down into cognitive and affective goals; they are holistic goals that encompass both cognitive and affective domains. My work in the 2006 Teaching Institute includes separating the cognitive goals from the affective goals and then recombining them using an assessment lens.

This course improvement project proposal for EDU 612 reaches out to the local community through the development of a comprehensive service-learning component dually focused on improving writing and celebrating diversity. This reflects the methodology of a quality service-learning endeavor: it responds to a real need in the community and then meaningfully integrates this service back into the curriculum.

My work involves collaborating with a local alternative secondary school in an urban setting, and I have been working to promote and establish community with the teachers at this school through professional development programs tailored to their specific needs and doing follow-up classroom observations that provide these teachers with non-evaluative feedback. It takes time to build community with these teachers and to establish and maintain clear communication channels. The importance of time in building partnerships between higher education and the community is echoed in the service-learning literature:

> In the eagerness to get started, programs that require solid interpersonal relationships often do not take the time to form those relationships before beginning programmatic work. The only way that partnership work can be accomplished is in the context of interpersonal relationships built on trust and mutual respect. *(Birge, Beaird, and Torres, 2003, 135)*

Spending the needed time fostering interpersonal relationships with individual teachers and administrators at this local alternative school is an ongoing endeavor for me. Such building of community

between the university and the local school is necessary to the creation of a solid partnership focused on service-learning.

The real community need that this project responds to involves students in grades 5–8 and senior citizens of Cape Verdean, African American, and/or Puerto Rican descent within the local community. I have identified the needs of the community and translated these needs into goals for these stakeholders that are addressed within the context of this service-learning project:

New Bedford students (grades 5–8):

- Improve writing skills and standardized writing test scores through a project in which each student captures the personal history of a New Bedford senior citizen of African American, Puerto Rican, or Cape Verdean descent.

- Explore the cultural background of a local senior citizen.

- Explore the student's own cultural background in relation to the one studied.

New Bedford senior citizens of African American, Puerto Rican, and/or Cape Verdean descent:

- Explore their own cultural background and the diverse backgrounds of others.

- Have their personal histories documented through the service-learning component of EDU 612.

- Share their cultural legacies with the community of New Bedford, the communities of southeastern Massachusetts, and the larger community.

Course participants in EDU 612:

- Improve their own writing skills connected to the "teacher as writer" theme identified in the course goals.

- Address a perceived need (deficient writing skills) within the community and work to improve standardized writing test scores for these students.

- Integrate what they internalize from this service-learning component through the lens of Krathwohl's Affective Domain model. The service-learning component facilitates a focus on celebrating diversity and improving both one's own writing and ways of teaching writing.

Although this service-learning component addresses the needs of students and senior citizens in the local community, the project centers on improving learning for the course participants in EDU 612 (Teaching Elementary and Middle School Writing). Each course participant is matched up with one local middle school student and a local senior citizen; the course participant acts as a mentor to this middle school student as he or she collects data and creates a written personal history for the senior citizen.

Assessment plan for measuring cognitive affective learning for EDU 612 course participants: It is important to note that, in the best service-learning partnerships between universities and schools, assessment plans are cocreated and shared. For my 2006 Teaching Institute grant, I began by focusing on assessment of the learning for EDU 612 course participants. They are the service providers, and they are also teachers with their own classrooms full of students who need to improve their writing skills. I have collaborated with teachers and administrators at this urban alternative school in identifying the needs of the middle school students, and I look forward to collaborating with teachers and administrators on assessment plans for those students and senior citizens involved in the service-learning. However, I have chosen this initial focus on the EDU 612 participants as a necessary first step toward the creation of a quality and functioning service-learning partnership.

The culminating project for course participants is a constructive action portfolio, in which they demonstrate their competencies using the five stages of Krathwohl's Affective Domain (receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing by a value or set) as a rubric for measuring the following competencies outlined in the course goals:

    A. Teacher as writer

        1. Implement stages of the writing project

        2. Write reflective pieces on service-learning

    B. Effective planning to integrate and celebrate diversity in their writing classroom.

This culminating project will include self-reflective writing in which course participants "unpack" these two course goals in the light of Krathwohl's Affective Domain. I will also utilize Krathwohl's five affective domain components to assess course participants' learning.

Timeline for course improvement project:

- Implement this course improvement in spring 2007 section of EDU 612.

- Share personal history projects with University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and the local community in fall 2007.

- Write an article showing the outcomes of this project.

I plan to further disseminate my work through two presentations at my university (through a CTE-sponsored teaching presentation, Brown Bag Lunch Series, etc.). I am also coordinating a Community Legacy Night at the urban alternative school, where the personal histories will be displayed and presented. This event will be open to the public and coordinated with New Bedford's Thursday AHA (Art, History, and Architecture) night series in fall 2007.

I see this project for the 2006 Teaching Institute as a seed for a larger project. Following the model of Camille Cosby and Renee Poussant's book *A Wealth of Wisdom*, I would like to write a book that features these personal histories of the Cape Verdean, Puerto Rican, and/or African American citizens of the local community. This book would represent a way to share and integrate the important work of service-learning into a larger community of conversation that promotes best practices in teaching and learning.

Implications for Further Research

For others working in higher education who want to implement cognitive affective connections through a service-learning component, this project showcases an example of a functioning partnership with K-12 education. Outreach is an important part of the mission of public universities, and service-learning can act as a conduit for expanding possibilities in teaching and learning. However, it can achieve optimum results only when all aspects of the learning experience are taken into account. This requires new models of assessment that do not privilege cognitive learning, nor artificially separate the cognitive and affective learning inherent in any learning experience.

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