Lessons Learned from Faculty Service-Learning Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning that targets issues of injustice within a community shares the goal with institutions of higher education of helping students become transformational citizens who deeply question and try to change unjust and ineffective social systems. Unfortunately, challenges to growing and sustaining service-learning pedagogy at institutions of higher education are many. This project discusses challenges and makes recommendations based on a pilot mentoring program at an urban, four-year university in the Northeast for faculty interested in integrating service-learning into their curriculum.

Keywords: community engagement, higher education, relationship-building, pedagogy

Many university presidents, provosts, and administrators recognize that higher education needs to engage students in local communities, and envision a service-learning infrastructure as a powerful means to create this reality (Arum, 2010; Boyer, 1990; Butin, 2010). Service-learning courses give students opportunities to become actively engaged with community organizations whose actions and service efforts renew and change the landscape of their communities. Both service-learning and institutions of higher education strive to help students become transformational citizens who question and try to change unjust and ineffective systems (Harkins, 2017). Service-learning benefits not only students and communities, but also faculty who can engage in meaningful research, teaching, and practice that contributes to a more just society (Furco, 2016).

Service-learning is a pedagogy where students learn through a cycle of experience, reflection, and learning (Knapp, Bradley, & Fisher, 2010). While studies show this type of community engagement provides extensive benefits for students, faculty, universities, and the local community (for a review, see Hollander, Saltmarsh, & Zlotkowski, 2001), service-learning is not easy to do or sustain. Although there is strong support for this pedagogy with administrators of higher education, unfortunately, service-learning is not growing as expected (Brukardt, Holland, Percey, & Simpher, 2004: Butin, 2006; Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2005). This paper provides recommendations, based on our pilot faculty mentoring project, for advancing the growth of critical service-learning with a goal of bringing about social change.

Researchers identify three keys to service-learning growth: open communication between all stakeholders (students, faculty, university administrators, and community partners); institutional support; and thoughtful, structured reflection (Hollander et al., 2001). To address open communication, all stakeholders need to commit to: a) carefully structured academic courses, b) well-developed community partnerships, and c) ensuring institutional support for service-learning-focused faculty. From the perspective of community organizations, it is important for institutions of higher education to identify and respect the knowledge and needs of the community partner (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). In addition, universities need to prepare students to be able to work in underserved communities by promoting understanding and reflection of

the socio-political, economic, and historical factors involved across privileged and oppressed groups in our society. Universities need to help students understand their own social identity and how their social identity impacts their ability to help those different from themselves. Finally, universities need to commit to recruiting a diverse pool of students to reflect, represent, and honor social-justice-focused helping (Harkins, 2017).

To be responsible and effective partners in service-learning, institutions of higher education must realign their focus. Instead of starting with how the community can help students learn, service-learning should begin with determining community need and evaluating what student learning could occur as community need is met (Stoecker, Tryon, & Loving, 2011). Stoecker and colleagues' argument suggests that a critical shift is needed to move service-learning pedagogy toward its potential of promoting justice by being "centered on real community impact rather than only on student learning objectives" (p. 3). For universities, as institutions of social reproduction, this means continuous self-assessment of how the university may inadvertently replicate unjust social structures. For example, Mitchell and colleagues write about how the whiteness of universities can serve to mirror current inequities in society. Without critical reflection on the race of the helper, we run the risk of paving the way to repeating unjust institutional structures (Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012). Another example of the need for institutional reflection is demonstrated by what happens when universities place students in schools. While college students generally leave school when their academic year ends in April, primary and secondary schools' academic year usually ends in June and schools are left without needed support. There is little conversation or reflection in higher education on this gap in "helping" (Harkins, 2017).

The key catalyst for this institutional culture shift is faculty (O'Meara et al., 2011). They build the curriculum and facilitate and shape the institution's overall agenda. However, faculty do not operate independently; this shift would require institutional restructuring through cooperation between faculty and administration. In addition, sustaining and cultivating community change requires years and decades of university-community partnerships that develop and mature through a multitude of personal relationships between faculty members and community leaders (Furco, 2016; Harkins, 2013; 2017).

LITERATURE ON FACULTY AND SERVICE-LEARNING

The research on the role of faculty in service-learning focuses on how faculty time, resources, and professional development impact faculty willingness and interest to engage in service-learning (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Driscoll, 2000). Faculty represent the leverage point providing the means to create meaningful and lasting change at all levels of service-learning (Bloomgarden & O'Meara, 2007). If faculty engage in critical service-learning, their teaching, research, and service/practice shifts, creating more long-lasting change for students, communities, and colleges. The research on the role of faculty in service-learning focuses on how faculty time, resources, and professional development impact faculty willingness and interest to engage in service-learning (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Driscoll, 2000). Missing from prior research is the role that faculty mentoring plays in building high-functioning critical service-learning experiences. By faculty mentoring, we mean faculty seasoned in teaching service-learning courses mentoring faculty new to this pedagogy.

Unfortunately, the limited literature on mentoring within service-learning focuses on students rather than faculty. It shows that mentoring provides students with an academic, as well as an experiential understanding of a topic, and positively influences their civic attitudes and orientation

toward civic engagement (Banks, 2010; Haddock, Weiler, Krafchick et al., 2013).

Although many definitions of mentoring exist, the following captures many of the elements this project considers important in a faculty mentoring relationship: Mentoring is "the process whereby an experienced, highly regarded, empathic individual (the mentor), by listening and talking in confidence, guides another individual...in the development and reexamination of the mentee's own ideas, learning, personal and professional development..." (McKimm, Jollie, & Hatter, 2007).

This paper describes, based on the authors' experiences, how to design and implement a faculty mentoring relationship, beginning with providing peer support for faculty with little or no experience with service-learning. This paper reports specifically on a pilot mentoring program set up at an urban, four-year university in the Northeast United States for faculty with interest in integrating service-learning into their curriculum. To help faculty navigate the components and responsibilities of service-learning, studies have found helpful elements include the presence of learning communities, safe spaces, critical feedback, and opportunities to deepen relationships with community partners (Blanchard et al., 2009; Furco, 2016; Jordan et al., 2012). From our own research, we found that faculty mentoring provided the elements suggested above and more. In this paper, we share the lessons learned through our faculty service-learning mentoring process.

METHOD

We (First Author as mentee and Second Author as mentor) engaged in a mentoring relationship for one year (September through August) by meeting for one hour each week in our offices discussing the challenges and opportunities of implementing service-learning. There are several evaluative tools available for recording and making sense of the mentoring process including learning log portfolios, SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analyses, mind-mapping (Montgomery, 2017), logging, diary, and journaling. The learning log portfolio approach involves a set of 12 questions including what happened and why, what led to the outcome and how it was planned, who was involved and their roles, feelings about incident, what was learned and how to deal in the future, strategies to develop, and actions to take in the future (McKimm, Jollie, & Hatter, 2007). Other approaches include keeping a log (to record basic information), a diary (to identify feelings of incidents), and/or a journal (to reflect on the meaning and importance of incidents) that can be used to help problem solve and set future goals (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989).

Building on previous work using SWOT analyses across university-community partnerships (Harkins, 2013; 2017), we used this tool to evaluate our own faculty relationship, as a means of data collection and as an analytic tool. A SWOT analysis is a structured business tool to assess and evaluate progress of a group, organization, or project (Sarsby, 2016). We adapted the SWOT analyses to self-reflect on the internal strengths and weaknesses of our work and the potential external opportunities and threats to our work together.

We finished each meeting by completing individual SWOT analyses and sharing our individual SWOTs with each other. These SWOTs were collected in a document stored on a Google drive. We periodically examined our SWOTs for themes related to mentoring style and process as well as service-learning support. Analyzing 29 SWOTs, we discovered five important lessons: build an alliance, provide support, maintain structure, evaluate progress, and collaborate. Below we explain each of these lessons and reflect on why these lessons were important to our mentoring relationship.

LESSONS LEARNED

First Lesson: Build an Alliance

We found building an alliance to be the most important aspect of our mentoring relationship. As the mentee, I came to the first meeting of a faculty professional learning community on service-learning because it seemed to be a good fit with the work I had been doing of preparing teachers, and because I wanted to expand my collaborations with schools and other community-based organizations. However, I was hesitant to sign up for another commitment when I had been told to focus on my scholarship in order to earn tenure. As the meeting progressed, the mentor offered to mentor me. Initially I thought her mentoring would focus only on my service-learning course. As we became better acquainted and discussed my interests, research projects, and classes, I realized that with a mentor's help I was able to make important connections between all of the different components of my job. I left that first meeting with the feeling that I had just won the lottery. I was amazed that someone would offer to help me and that I could for the very first time see how all of the work I was involved in could support my professional growth and help me achieve my goals.

As the faculty mentor, when I think about how the mentee and I built an alliance, I realized that the mentee's open-mindedness and eagerness to learn about service-learning was key. She was willing to make the commitment to meet weekly, to reflect on how service-learning was different than other forms of community service, and to create a course curriculum that integrated service-learning into all aspects of her course. My mentee was excited to learn the many ways that service-learning could serve not only her teaching goals, but also her research and practice. The greatest strength of my mentee that made this alliance powerful was her willingness to take the leap of faith in trusting that our relationship would benefit her, her students, and the community.

Hay (1995) describes how alliance-building involves preparing the relationship (e.g., what do I want to accomplish, how much time do I have, when and where shall we meet, etc.) and bonding (occurs when voice, body, breathing, and gestures begin to align). In reflection, we found that we had all the elements of a mentoring alliance. We often laughed when we completed each other's thoughts; when our SWOT analyses aligned; and when we came up with similar ideas for attending conferences, writing papers, and working with communities, not realizing at the time that this is what happens in great mentoring relationships. Within the alliance, Lewis (1996) adds the element of ethos (consistency, integrity, honesty, and credibility), genuine interest (empathy, positive regard, warmth, disclosure, and rapport), and goals toward positive mentoring experiences. As we started to write these lessons and read the academic literature by Hay and Lewis on mentoring, we realized that perhaps our backgrounds as clinical psychologist (mentor) and educator (mentee) helped us naturally build ethos, interest, and goals toward a strong alliance. Most importantly, our mentoring was successful because we were well matched on our shared motivations, interests, and goals. Lewis (1996) finds that matching mentors and mentees is an essential component of productive mentoring relationships.

We were open with each other about the professional struggles of doing the work we believe in, the work we think increases students' critical thinking, the work we believe universities should provide to local communities. We began our weekly meetings with personal check-ins discussing issues that impacted us at the department, college, and national level before delving into the details of service-learning. These check-ins created a bond between us as we realized we each cared about the other personally and professionally, which led to deeper trust in sharing our vulnerabilities, fears, and challenges. We learned the im-

portance of confidentiality, compatibility, commitment, cooperation, support, trust, and goal setting in the mentoring process.

Second Lesson: Provide Support

Our collaborative mentoring relationship provided support, motivation, and scaffolded learning for teaching, research, and dealing with internal and external politics (Haddock et al., 2013). As a senior faculty member, the mentor was able to mentor me in all three components of faculty jobs: teaching, research, and service. In building a course syllabus for my service-learning course, her feedback helped me think more critically about important components of service-learning. For example, she reminded me of the importance of reflection in my course assignments and the need for students to give back to communities beyond just completing their hours. The mentor helped me to see how the work we were doing could be collected and analyzed and written up as conference presentations and research articles.

It was amazing how much we accomplished in one hour a week. We would check in, discuss how to integrate service-learning into course curriculum, discuss how we would measure our success in mentoring and service-learning, and how to expand service-learning among faculty across departments within our institution. The mentee valued service-learning as much as I, and that made our work stronger.

Building a faculty mentoring program provided a valuable service to both our university and our partner community organizations. Our mentoring relationship provided support for facing challenges at many levels. Together we found we were able to navigate strategically the difficulties we faced in teaching, researching, and building a program in the midst of instability in order to continue our work.

Third Lesson: Maintain Structure

We found that structure protects and strengthens the mentoring relationship. The elements that we committed to each other in order to build our structure were time, space, and resources. Because of the value service-learning held for both of us, we were willing to commit to scheduling a weekly mentoring meeting. We met for one hour every Wednesday before teaching our classes. The consistency and frequency of this weekly meeting created a block of time we came to rely on to address the myriad things occurring in our lives. This meeting time was so important for both of us that when we were not able to meet on our university campus we would meet at restaurants or coffee shops. In the summer when we didn't have to travel to our university, we continued to meet by phone, Skype, or FaceTime and we worked collaboratively using Google Drive. The resources we shared with one another to sustain our structure were community contacts, reading material, and money. Together we sought support from administration (e.g., president and provost) presenting survey findings of university-wide faculty interest in community engagement, and presenting a proposal for a university-wide faculty service-learning mentoring program. Unfortunately, we were not successful with obtaining funds from higher administration. However, we obtained funds from our Community Engagement Office and the Center for Teaching and Scholarly Excellence through mini-grants and a Davis Foundation grant.

Fourth Lesson: Evaluate Progress

SWOT analysis was a valuable service-learning mentoring tool for us. We found using a SWOT analysis to be useful, quick, and easy for making sense of our mentoring process providing all of the above elements of the log, diary, and journal in one reflective tool. A SWOT provides an immediate reflection of the mentoring process both internally and externally. Additionally, we meta-reflected by creating monthly SWOTs based on our weekly SWOTs that we used to determine our progress and help in goal setting.

Fifth Lesson: Collaborate

Mentoring allowed us to do exponentially more than we would have without it! We both continually noticed that one of our consistent strengths as a mentoring pair was how much we were able to accomplish. For all the reasons elaborated on above, our relationship was an extremely positive one. We both looked forward to our collaborations and felt a sense of accomplishment each week as we set goals and achieved them. Below is a list of the products of one year of our collaboration.

- Through mentoring, the first author conceptualized and proposed a TESOL Certification Program that was approved by the university to begin in the fall of 2017.
- Through mentoring, the mentee created a new Intro to Teaching Service-Learning Course to meet the requests of various departments and students for a class that would provide students with some experience in schools.
- We presented at two conferences: "Building Mentoring into Service-Learning" at the Gulf-South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement in Charlotte, South Carolina, and "Addressing Service-Learning Challenges with Mentoring" at the New England Educational Research Organization in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.
- We proposed our service-learning mentoring program to the university president and provost.
- We began a Cross-University Collaboration, a working group of faculty conducting and researching service-learning at different college campuses in Massachusetts.
- We planned and ran a retreat for Service -Learning Mentoring with students and faculty.
- We have built a Service-Learning Mentoring Pilot and Program.
- We have written this journal article and are working on forthcoming publication (s).

IMPLICATIONS

University-community partnerships are usually considered critical for successful service-learning (Enos & Morton, 2003; Hosman, 2014; Jentleson, 2011). Unfortunately, research finds that few partnerships are mutually beneficial (Butin, 2010; Worrall, 2007). Reasons given for the lack of successful relationships point to the structures of higher education where meritocracy often prevails. Value is given to individuals over groups through the process of promotion and tenure review. The focus is on encouraging and rewarding individual teaching, research, and service, and supporting students. There is generally support for community at the student level but not at the faculty level. Historically, within the university structure, community building is less valued or supported than other faculty objectives (Hosman, 2014; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

We believe we must build communities within the university in order to be good community partners. The assumption seems to be that the university is already a community. However, most universities are structured as individual and departments silos. If universities are to uphold their missions to support local communities, community-building must happen within the university at the faculty level. If faculty model community-building, students can learn the importance and value of community, and the community partners will have a prepared university partner that helps them achieve their mission.

Within the university community, it is fairly common practice for mentors to be assigned to new faculty. While research supports the value of this type of mentoring for the recipient or mentee (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010) the benefits for those serving as mentors are not as well established or often not even considered. We believe it is important for both mentor and mentee to have a shared purpose and

individual benefits. In our relationship, defining and crafting our collective purpose to help other faculty engage in service-learning united us. Mentoring that is relevant and valuable for both mentor and mentee may be the missing piece for successful faculty mentoring programs.

Similar to faculty mentoring relationships, university-community partnerships must be equally valued and meaningful for all participants. This means higher education needs to seriously consider Randy Stoecker's (2016) provocative and challenging arguments to flip our academic and civic priorities regarding service-learning. Instead of operating from a focus on student learning, we need to start our community-based pedagogy with the goal of social change, and then determine how to fit student learning and student service into that goal of social change.

Those of us in higher education need to look deeply at our mission (Arum, 2010; Boyer, 1990). If our goal is to truly educate to create social change through service-learning, we must begin with determining what needs to institutionally change and what resources are needed at the faculty level to create such a change. Faculty mentoring offers a way we can deeply reflect on the challenge of accomplishing the mission of higher education within an institutional structure that often does not align with the goals and practice of service-learning. Our critical reflective practice within faculty mentoring provided the ideal opportunity to enhance our service-learning teaching, practice and research.

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