

Service Learning as an Opportunity for Personal and Social Transformation

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Service-learning can be used as a teaching tool to promote social justice, and its implementation can encourage both students' personal development and social engagement. In this article, I illustrate how service-learning can help students become more self-aware, appreciative of diversity, and agents of social change. This process involves students reaching out to marginalized populations through community placements, reaching in through detailed reflection and introspection about their attitudes and experiences, and reaching around their communities through advocacy and activism to address social problems that are evident at field sites. I include supporting qualitative data that document how these experiences impacted students' personal growth and civic participation.

Too often students' experience in higher education is to absorb information passively. It is then students' responsibility to apply this material to areas of their lives (e.g., families, careers, or communities) at some later point in time. However, faculty can use a teaching method that simultaneously links information taught in the classroom with the skills and insights that students learn when they volunteer in their communities.

Service-learning improves education by enriching the curriculum and by encouraging students and instructors to put course matter into context. Consequently, academic work and service are completed together so that students study issues and become participants in addressing them in a particular community setting (Speck, 2001). An overarching goal of service-learning is to foster the development of citizenship by integrating theory and practice so that students can begin lifelong involvement in social issues and public life.

The success of service-learning as a powerful strategy to teach and encourage engaged citizenship is well-documented. Hundreds of investigations regarding its effectiveness have been conducted over the past 25 years (cf. Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Students who engage in service-learning perform better academically. They have higher graduation rates and are more satisfied with their college experience. They become more engaged citizens and demonstrate greater cultural and racial understanding. They often develop socially, emotionally, and morally because of this work (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Sax & Astin, 1997).

Personal development and social engagement are two particularly important and worthwhile goals for college education and are especially germane to discussions of service-learning. Regrettably, many professors prioritize content mastery over these objectives when teaching, but this does not have to be so. Seventy years ago, John Dewey (1938/1997) underscored that one of the main purposes of education

is to help individuals become active participants in their democracies, and that the boundaries between society and the school must be permeable to reflect this reality. Even earlier in his writings, Dewey (1897) expressed the conviction that "education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform." Contemporary progressive educators carry this sentiment forward and believe that college teaching must reflect and enrich students' lives, empower students, and promote equality (hooks, 2003). For instance, Ira Shor and Paulo Freire (1987) explained that professors who promote personal and social transformation allow students to grapple with and critically examine social issues regardless of their discipline while respecting students' experiences and values. A "liberating education" calls students to change society because it encourages them to envision a world that is different. As a pedagogical tool, service-learning is uniquely poised to address this challenge.

In this article, I explain how college faculty can use service-learning to encourage students' personal and social transformation. I highlight how service-learning can help students not only to become more self-aware, tolerant, and appreciative of diversity but also to become agents of social change. Specifically, I first outline how service-learning can provide undergraduates with opportunities to "reach out" and interact in meaningful ways with broad segments of their communities, providing them with valuable opportunities to work with the disenfranchised. Second, I explain how instructors can use reflection exercises to encourage students to "reach in" and connect their service-learning work with their own attitudes, values, and personal history through critical introspection. These bridges can widen the impact of service-learning on students' lives and facilitate their personal development. Finally, I describe how professors can use service-learning as a method to promote students' civic engagement and allow them to "reach around" their communities. Students' first-

hand experiences provide them with compelling stories that can be effectively incorporated into advocacy efforts consistent with course themes.

To support my suggestions in all three sections, I include narrative statements from undergraduates who have completed my own service-learning course, Field Placement with Children and Families, during the Spring 2005, Spring 2006, and Spring 2007 semesters. In this class, students work directly with at-risk children in the community for 6 hours each week. For example, they care for families living in domestic violence shelters, cradle hospitalized infants, tutor inner-city teenagers, and support children who grieve the loss of a parent. At the end of each semester, students complete a final essay documenting how these service-learning experiences and related assignments (i.e., completing journals, discussing field experiences in class, and contacting their legislators) impact their personal growth and civic engagement. I complement these representative excerpts with concrete descriptions of how I have used service-learning to promote personal and social change, and I suggest ways for faculty to accomplish these objectives, regardless of their professional discipline.

Reaching Out: Direct Interactions with “The Other”

Faculty who use service-learning make the boundaries between the university and its surrounding community more permeable. By definition, students enrolled in service-learning classes interact with people in the community as part of their course responsibilities (Jacoby & Associates, 1996). This direct contact, per se, has demonstrable benefits. Large scale studies of undergraduates' participation in volunteer work or community service indicate a positive association with social responsibility, personal empowerment, a commitment to promote racial understanding, as well as educational benefits (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). In contrast to volunteerism or “pure service,” service-learning further ensures that (a) both students and community partners mutually benefit from the experience; (b) students provide services in settings or communities that are intentionally related to the content of the course; and (c) the design of the educational experience ensures frequent bridges between coursework and field work (Furco, 1996). These additional elements enhance students' benefits derived from their direct interactions in the community; however, the time that students spend helping others in their neighborhoods is often an independent catalyst for changes in their values, beliefs, and academic outcomes (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).

Through service-learning, students reach out and help others through sustained and meaningful interactions outside of the immediate college

community. Instructors can broaden the impact of these educational experiences by developing partnerships with sites that allow students to spend extended periods of time with others who have backgrounds different than their own. Serving at community-based organizations that address the needs of people who have been marginalized because of their race, social class, sexual orientation, or physical ability allow students to gain first-hand experiences so that they can shed their preconceived stereotypes.

This premise is supported by the research of social psychologists, who have documented that constructive contact between members of different groups promotes the development of greater understanding and acceptance (Sigelman & Welch, 1993). These attitude changes extend beyond a perception about a particular individual. Rather, reductions in prejudice and stereotyping expand to include the student's beliefs about entire racial or ethnic groups and attitudes about social policy affecting minority populations (Pettigrew, 1997).

The service-learning literature similarly highlights that students' reaching out to diverse populations reduces their negative stereotypes, helps them identify commonalities across groups, and promotes understanding (e.g., Kingsley & McPherson, 1995; Reardon, 1994). For instance, Eyler and Giles (1999) presented qualitative data demonstrating that community service enabled many undergraduates to meet people whom they would not have otherwise known and to become more empathic to social problems. For this reason, I encourage students to pursue service-learning placements that allow them to work with children or families who lack privilege and experience adversity. As suggested in the reflection of this student, such site work is often poignant and powerful:

As for my field placement experience itself, it has been a roller coaster of emotion that has left me 10 times stronger and wiser than I was before. I thought that I knew what compassion for another human being was. I am now able to give it to others in the most meaningful way imaginable.

I cannot explain how it feels to stare a battered woman in the face and try to tell her that everything will be all right when she is hurting inside and out. When the man that she loves who is the father of her children has stripped her of her dignity and self esteem. I cannot explain how it felt to have beautiful little children standing in front of me with sad eyes and broken hearts because they are scared and sad and they miss their dads. All that I can say is that I spent a lot of time thinking, praying, crying, and growing, and I will never again be the same, and I am so grateful for that. I

feel that I have done things to help the people at the shelter, but the life lessons that they taught me are worth their weight in gold.

Reaching out to others through service-learning widens students' perspectives and helps them to become more compassionate. It prompts personal engagement and self-examination in ways that reading, lecture, or discussion simply cannot.

When going into this adventure, I wish I knew how attached I would become to these children and what an impact they would have on me. I had a third grade girl cry in my arms because children were picking on her; I had a fifth grade girl open up to me about herself when she had no mother to turn to; and one day I actually was scared to have a five year old child talk to me because I feared what he would say -- his mother was in the army and never came back.

Moreover, service-learning allows students to make connections to broader issues that are embodied in the daily lived experience of people at their sites. As another student commented:

I think that, although no one would say their life is perfect, it can be easy to forget just how many families struggle with extreme poverty, abuse, and/or neglect when we aren't directly confronted with it every day. To continue to be in denial of the fact that there is still racism or destitution in this country is just naïve. Obviously, these factors also play a big part in what kinds of adults these children will grow up to be. I have become even more empathetic and open-minded to everyone I encounter, because you never know what a person may have to struggle with at home or behind closed doors.

The opportunity to serve diverse, marginalized, or underserved groups is not restricted to one discipline. Heffernan (2001) and others have provided many illustrations of relevant placements, such as architecture students participating in design projects to enhance the residences of people with physical disabilities; computer science undergraduates providing training for personnel at community organizations about how to use different software programs; linguistics students investigating the use and structure of African American Vernacular English and applying this knowledge to teach reading skills to African American elementary school children; or chemistry undergraduates assessing the presence of toxic chemicals in compressed wood used in playgrounds in poor neighborhoods.

In sum, reaching out through service-learning allows students to make real contributions to the lives of people residing in nearby communities while simultaneously demonstrating the relevance of abstract course topics. In the process of helping others, students actually develop greater feelings of individual well-being and demonstrate a range of positive outcomes. Moreover, professors have the opportunity to broaden the impact of service-learning by encouraging students to serve in organizations that cater to diverse populations. This focus challenges the insularity common among college students, in which undergraduates predominantly associate with those who are most like themselves (Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). Reaching out to disenfranchised people widens students' perspectives and can challenge commonly-held stereotypes.

Reaching In: Opportunities to Connect and Reflect

Students who assist community members in the context of service-learning often find the experiences exciting and rewarding; however, field work can also be confusing and stressful for them (Rhoads, 1997). One of the main reasons why this occurs is that many students encounter "disorienting dilemmas" (Mezirow, 1991) at their sites, especially when they work with people whose backgrounds and lives differ significantly from their own. During these times, students observe situations or have interactions that are radically discordant with their previous experiences or worldviews. Nevertheless, these disorienting dilemmas can prompt personal and intellectual growth for students. Professors can use such service-learning experiences in transformative ways when they help students critically examine their assumptions, encourage them to seek out additional perspectives, and ultimately acquire new knowledge, attitudes, and skills in light of these reflections (Mezirow & Associates, 2000).

In other words, students not only reach out during service-learning, but they also need to reach inward through an extensive reflection process about their experiences. Reflection allows students to bridge what they experience at the site with their academic studies. This reflection process also helps students gain greater self-awareness, clarify their values, and become more open to observed differences rather than reflexively imposing their beliefs on others during their site work (Robert, 2009).

Many faculty members who use service-learning facilitate introspection by the use of journaling or similar writing assignments. Bringle and Hatcher (1999) suggest that students can format reflection journals in a variety of ways, such as (a) a key phrase journal, in which they integrate a set list of course

concepts into their entries; (b) a double-entry journal, in which they detail their site experiences, personal thoughts, and reactions in one column and develop connections with class material in a second column; and (c) a critical incident journal, wherein students select a specific event, such as a disorienting dilemma or ethical quandary, and critically examine the experience and their responses. In my own classes, students use journals as a forum to describe their activities at their sites; document connections between their volunteer work and the course material and readings; and comment on what they learned, found interesting, found confusing, and their emotional reactions in separate sections:

Completing the journals was crucial to examining and absorbing important events during our volunteering. Instead of just showing up, leaving for the day and repeating it the next week until it's all a blur, we were forced to think about what we encountered, what we learned from those interactions, how that might shape our future choices.

Encouraging reflection is especially important for those professors using service-learning to teach tolerance and encourage the appreciation of pluralism. Although attainable and important, professors sometimes find this goal more difficult to achieve than expanding students' subject knowledge for several reasons. First, many students (like many people) are not necessarily aware of their own biases or values and how these in turn shape their interactions. Other students may believe that their own belief systems and views of "normal", desirable behavior are superior to others' (Robert, 2009). Reflection can help make students conscious of such preconceptions and understand the direct implications for their service-learning work. Second, students do not typically begin classes with firmly held ideas about the subject matter in most disciplines. However, they do arrive in classrooms with existing attitudes about race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. This is inevitable because (regardless of the specific content of their beliefs) such attitudes have been crystallized over the span of years based on their previous experiences, socialization, and internalization of societal beliefs. Professors can find it difficult to encourage some students to reflect and grapple with issues relevant to diversity and service-learning because this process may be implicitly challenging students' established worldviews.

Michelle Dunlap has written extensively about ways to support students who complete service-learning in multicultural settings. In particular, she expects that students' community work with disenfranchised groups

will likely elicit feelings of guilt, fear, and racism among those who have experienced societal privilege (Dunlap, 1998). Furthermore, Dunlap advises that many of these students will be uncomfortable when issues of diversity related to service-learning are broached in class; they may become defensive, quiet, or resistant to engage in discussion (Dunlap, 2000).

She proposes several strategies to facilitate greater understanding and tolerance. First, Dunlap explains that structured reflection about multiculturalism should be an integral part of service-learning. Journals become safe and productive places where students grapple with their personal struggles around issues of difference. This also gives instructors a venue to provide support and feedback to students in ways that do not engender shame or concerns of reprisal. Professors can similarly assign students autobiographical essays in which they explore their own racial, ethnic, religious, gender, or sexual orientation identities to increase self-awareness. Students can write about their emerging awareness of their identity; how family, friends, and institutions during childhood socialized them in this regard; their experiences with discrimination; and their current attitudes toward and experiences with membership in their particular group. This self-reflection brings students' assumptions to the foreground for critical analysis in their service-learning journal entries.

Second, Dunlap suggests providing students with readings and resources that help students understand how their own identities serve as a filter for their interactions with those who are different from them at their service-learning sites. These readings can sensitively and compellingly address issues such as white privilege (McIntosh, 1990), racial identity (Helms, 1990), and societal inequalities (Adams et al., 2000).

Instructors encourage students to reach inward and reflect on their service-learning experiences through classroom activities and discussions that complement written assignments. This is especially important when professors want to increase students' self-awareness about how issues such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, or classism are relevant for site work. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) present activities that raise consciousness about racism such as placing students in small groups to identify the aspects of their own racial/ethnic heritages about which they are proud, review patterns in their personal relationships regarding people from different backgrounds, articulate ways in which society supports racism, and encourage frank and respectful dialog between white students and students of color. This sort of interpersonal reflective dialog is not possible when students only complete individual journal entries.

In my classes, students share their experiences around diversity issues, listen to those of other students,

and make connections to the course material and site placements. Consider the following assignment:

Race, ethnicity, and culture matter in the lives of children. This is a critical theme that runs through the experiences of the children of color who are described in your textbook, *Ordinary Resurrections* (Kozol, 2001). In the book, race intersects with socioeconomic status to influence the daily experiences and life chances of children. However, race and ethnicity can shape our experiences in middle-class families and neighborhoods as well.

Discuss the central question in class today: What role do race and ethnicity play in childhood? Discuss specific illustrations that you find in *Ordinary Resurrections*, relevant observations from your field work, and your personal experiences. Remember that race also influences the experiences of White children; however, people in the group with power are generally less aware of these issues.

These occasionally difficult conversations, coupled with the direct interactions that occur in community settings, often foster insight and attitude change. Self-examination and candid personal reflection – regardless of whether students have similar backgrounds to those whom they serve in their placements – are critical for understanding difference and becoming more tolerant.

Coming from a family that has been labeled in “poverty” on and off throughout the years, I can see where these kids are coming from. I feel like those personal experiences really helped me to understand what many of the kids were going through, especially when it came to medical things since I have been on Medicaid as a child, and I have been uninsured for periods of time. I have seen first-hand how you are treated differently and can receive the minimal amount of care, and it is really sad.

In sum, reflection assignments are an essential component of service-learning. These not only communicate the expectation that students connect field work and coursework, but structured reflection also encourages students to reach inward to bridge these experiences with their own lives. Students’ careful contemplation of their site interactions provides them with a lens to critically examine their attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews. Reflection also permits students to grapple with fundamental social issues, especially when they serve at sites that cater to the disenfranchised. Professors often need to proceed with caution and

intention when addressing students’ value systems, but reflecting on these topics is wholly consistent with progressive and transformative educational approaches (e.g., Mezirow, 1991; Shor & Friere, 1987), and embraces service-learning as a tool to enhance personal and social growth.

Reaching Around: Speaking Out for Change

Reaching out to others through service-learning provides students with an avenue to care for those who may need their attention. Reaching in to reflect on how their site experiences dovetail with their values and worldviews establishes personal relevance for students. However, college faculty members who are committed to social transformation can use service-learning to encourage students to become agents of change in their neighborhoods and beyond. Students can magnify their impact by reaching around their communities to become a voice for those who often do not have one.

Inspiring advocacy and action is a logical but seldom implemented extension of service-learning that aligns with social justice. Specifically, social justice involves “a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (Adams et al., 1997, p. 3). Those who advocate for social justice believe that all members of society should have equal rights and access to opportunities, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, or sexual orientation. Social justice education involves increasing students’ awareness of current inequalities, uncovering the roles that individuals and institutions play in maintaining them, and taking action to correct these issues.

In other words, service-learning can do more than facilitate students’ personal transformation in which they critically examine their beliefs and learn to understand and accept those who are different. Service-learning can be a catalyst for change in which students challenge the marginalization of others on a broader level.

Addressing social problems evident at sites.

There are many ways in which professors can use service-learning to promote social action that is consistent with students’ site work. One strategy is to direct students’ attention to how societal forces affect the people whom the community partner assists. This is important because many students focus exclusively on individual-level functioning when they volunteer. However, a commitment to social transformation requires that students and faculty attend to the broader dynamics of inequality that are evident in the placement and contribute to the challenges that people ultimately face. Conversely, students who work in settings that

serve more affluent populations can observe the effects of racial or socioeconomic privilege.

Furthermore, instructors can use problem-based service-learning or community-based action research in which students work with site personnel to understand and remedy a community problem (Heffernan & Cone, 2003). Students' service can go beyond working with individuals in need to focus on advocacy or policy reform using knowledge and skills derived from their academic field of study. Students can interview community members to identify relevant issues, conduct relevant policy analysis, write a literature review on the topic, use research methods to assess the scope of the problem, identify potential allies to collaborate in addressing the issue, and disseminate findings to influence change (Community Social Action Project Groups and Community Partners, n.d.; see also Sen, 2003).

Consider the example of students who distribute free meals to people with low income at a local church as part of their service-learning requirement for a course in the social sciences. Problem-based service-learning or community-based action research could involve students: (a) interviewing church staff to understand the site's history, role, and aspirations in addressing hunger in the community; (b) researching the prevalence of hunger at the state and community levels using sources of data in the public domain; (c) conducting a literature review about hunger in the United States that elucidates the groups of people most affected, its causes, and its implications; (d) interviewing people who receive food from the church to understand their related struggles and experiences; (e) identifying and collaborating with other organizations in the community that also focus on feeding or serving the hungry; and (f) raising awareness about the issue of hunger in the community through writing advocacy editorials to local or university newspapers, creating or participating in relevant co-curricular activities, conducting campus-wide education events and projects, and organizing a march or demonstration.

More generally, Goodman and Schapiro (1997) provide students with a framework for planning social action by having them define their proposed actions in concrete terms, list the resources and materials needed to accomplish their objectives, develop strategies to obtain the needed resources, create realistic timeframes, identify risks involved in taking action, anticipate and counteract likely obstacles, identify sources of support, and articulate ways to evaluate the success of their work. Regardless of the particular focus, social action projects capitalize on the heightened awareness that students develop through service-learning and allow them to become agents of change who help create a more tolerant and equitable society. These sorts of

exercises empower students, persuade them that their convictions matter, and promote their enduring community engagement.

I saw at my site and around my community how policy and socioeconomic situations effect children's development. I always knew that there were problems, I just never knew why. Until I was a part of this class I was fighting an ambiguous enemy. Taking this class opened my eyes. I have never seen that before, now I feel more prepared. I will go back to my site even after this class is over to continue the growth in my community.

Legislative advocacy. Professors can also build on service-learning to create class assignments that impact others on a political level and allow students to advocate for those who are disenfranchised. In particular, students can research federal and state legislation that is relevant to course topics and students' service-learning placements (see Meyers, 2008). Students can find active legislation in the United States Congress through the Internet at <http://www.senate.gov>, <http://www.house.gov>, and <http://thomas.loc.gov>. Many state legislatures have similar online resources. Students can search key words related to course content to determine an agenda.

With this information in hand, students can then correspond with their legislators to support or oppose particular policies. They can call their elected officials and can follow-up with written correspondence in which they state their position on the issue using the knowledge gained from the course. Students can also concretely explain how the piece of legislation has a direct bearing on the community in which they serve. Importantly, students' service-learning experiences provide the means through which they can describe the potential impact of policy in vivid and personalized ways to increase the effectiveness of their contact. Here is an excerpt of a letter that one of my students wrote to her United States Senator in support of increased funding for early childhood education programs:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 152, the Early Education Act of 2007. Following my recent call to your office, I was very pleased to learn of your commitment to ensuring that quality education is provided to every American from pre-school through adulthood.

I am a college student in Chicago who is part of a class that encourages civic participation regarding child and family issues. To this end, I volunteer as a tutor with children in the community. The children I work with are from low-income

families, and many of them have never had the opportunity to attend pre-school. As a result, many enter kindergarten and first grade not knowing their alphabet, or are unable to spell their names. I currently work with a third grader name Cortez. Cortez is a very engaging child, full of life, and has a very engaging personality. He recently took the state tests, but his teacher, though wanting to be optimistic, believes that he did not receive passing grades. The problem is that Cortez cannot read, even though he is nine years old. His teacher and I firmly believe that this would not be the case if he had the opportunity to attend pre-school...

Studies show that the early years of a child's life are extremely critical for brain development. Children enrolled in early education programs perform better academically than children of similar backgrounds who have never participated in these programs. Unfortunately, however, not every child gets the opportunity to participate in early education programs. This is especially true of poor children living in poor neighborhoods. Quite often, they attend public schools that are inadequately funded in comparison to schools in wealthier areas...

We take pride in the knowledge that we are the richest nation with some of the most educated people in the world. Thousands enter this country everyday in search of receiving quality education provided in our academic institutions. We need to provide similar opportunities for every child in all of our communities regardless of race or income. Your support of this bill is extremely important. It will help to provide our nation's children with opportunities to receive early education that will no doubt increase their chances for success later on in life.

Undergraduates in my classes have lobbied for greater support of lesbian and gay students in public schools, petitioned for expanded services for children with developmental disabilities, and advocated for additional assistance for children in foster care. These students, most of whom are the first generation in their families to attend college, have met personally with their state Senators, have questioned members of their local school boards, and have spoken directly with the legislative staff of their United States Senators and Representatives.

I realize that things can only change if I speak up and not sit silent. As I read various bills, I was very shocked to see that many that would benefit children are not being passed mainly because

there are not enough sponsors, or require that more people speak up in support. I found that many elected officials are not doing what they had promised to do before they were elected -- fighting for the rights of disadvantaged children and individuals. I see that I have the ability to make a difference, by writing to these officials, to let them know that they are not doing what they said they would.

This legislative advocacy assignment is highly flexible for use across disciplines. For example, economics undergraduates who complete service-learning projects with neighborhood business councils can explore bills related to job creation, the minimum wage, or tax policy; biology or premedical students who complete their placements in hospitals can advocate for health care reform; education students who serve in low-income schools can articulate their position on school funding initiatives; and women's studies students who assist in domestic violence shelters can advocate for programs that curtail the abuse of women. Admittedly, the process of contacting a legislator is intimidating for many students. They often feel unprepared because many have been socialized into believing that their opinions cannot have an impact on policy.

I feel that although I was scared to death of this project, I have learned a lot about what I can do to encourage my position on legislation and how relatively easy it is to actually talk to the people involved. Also, I learned that talking to political leaders on the phone is not as scary as I first imagined.

However, professors' support and encouragement often prompt students to take the actions that are ultimately needed to create a fairer and more respectful society. In sum, service-learning allows students to observe and to have an impact at two levels: the individual, micro-level as well as the social, macro-level. Undergraduates are generally aware of the moment-by-moment interactions that they have with people at their sites and the challenges that they encounter. However, instructors can use service-learning help students to amplify their impact by "reaching around" their communities and to become active citizens. Individuals' experiences at sites where students serve often illustrate and illuminate broader social problems for students and policy makers alike. Professors and service-learning supervisors can help students make these links and develop skills needed to take effective action in ways consistent with course content. Students can use service-learning not only to make a difference one person at a time, but more

broadly through community-based research, advocacy, and political involvement.

Conclusion

There is a story of a Chasidic rabbi who instructed others to place a slip of paper in their two pockets, each containing a different passage from the Jewish scriptures. The note for the right pocket read, "For my sake the whole world was created," whereas the one for the left side stated, "I am but dust and ashes." Service-learning gives students the opportunity to truly appreciate this duality. The message for the right pocket reinforces the importance of students' personal growth through their examination of the ways that their unique experiences, histories, and values shape how they perceive the world. However, the second slip represents a counterbalance, and highlights the need for students to see far beyond themselves and to use their knowledge and skills to help others in compassionate and just ways. Reaching out, reaching in, and reaching around through service-learning allows students to become more self-aware, sensitive to the plight of others, and engaged in their communities. Personal and social transformations become intertwined in the learning process. This provides them with more than an opportunity to learn information -- students can use this experience to discover who they are capable of being and what they are capable of doing.

You cannot come away from this class the same as you went in. If you are willing to be a work in progress, openly admitting that our world or society, in its humanness is flawed, then you will have the opportunity to make sure that everyone is privileged to a measure of social justice. I leave this class forever changed; happy to have stood in someone else's shoes, knowing that I still had my own, if those didn't quite fit.

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