Community Service-Learning: Building a relationship between universities and priority neighbourhoods

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Introduction

The model of community service-learning (CSL) is not new; however, many universities still choose to primarily structure courses within the framework of learning in the classroom. Faculty members often present their lecture material standing at the front of the class while passive students quietly take notes. While this pedagogy is deemed appropriate for introductory courses, it is not sufficient for students preparing to graduate and join the workforce. Graduates of today often complete their degree with no experience in the field of their interest. The availability of CSL courses in an urban low-income neighbourhood supported and/or organized by a university should be increased.

CSL should be encouraged to students because incorporating higher education and involvement in the community will enhance the learning experience for students, educators and community partners through various avenues such as becoming active learners inside and outside the classroom. I argue that CSL in an urban low-income neighbourhood is beneficial because it is an effective counternormative pedagogy; it helps to develop skills applicable to students’ future careers while also enabling them to become active contributors in solving community issues. Creating equal partnerships between the university and community partners should be a priority because it bridges the gap between what’s going on in the classroom with what’s going on in the community.

Improving community concerns through CSL is an excellent methodology in development and experiential learning. More service-learning courses should be implemented and made available to students’ in university because the studio-based structure of the course and volunteer work rejuvenates the educational process for both faculty and students.
Research Question

Researching community service-learning is important because the structure of the course is quite different from a traditional lecture that often takes place in a classroom. Having experienced CITC02 (*Learning in Community Service*) in the summer of 2009, it was the first course I had taken off campus. When I ask several of my colleagues in college why they choose college over university, some answered grades, some even answered distance but many answered because of the hands on experience you do not get if you are in university. I believe CITC02 revitalizes the educational experience for students, faculty members and community partners. Students will feel motivated to be able to apply their skills and knowledge towards a working goal. Faculty members are able to teach in a studio based setting that enables an interactive relationship between the educators and students. Community members are provided with one or more volunteer students that will be able to lend a helping hand towards community goals and projects. The objective of the paper is to explore:

*The opportunities and challenges for CITC02 students, faculty and community partners in a community service-learning course.*

It is important to acknowledge that traditional lectures are effective for first and second year courses because it builds the foundations for students to become aware, knowledgeable, educated and motivated to apply their developed skills in third and fourth year courses that should be more hands on and interactive.
Methodology

The first step of the research plan is establishing a collection of current existing service-learning literature. Online resources such as library books, Google books, online academic articles, the University of Toronto library catalogue and the Blackboard will all be used as methods of researching existing literature. I have gained unlimited access to sources relating to service-learning on University of Toronto’s Blackboard for one month. The Centre for Community Partnership has a vast amount of material collected such as academic journals, pamphlets, brochures and newspapers. Existing academic articles will provide a framework for the structure of the paper. Research collected from different academic articles will provide general samples and studies conducting in other areas and educational facilities. Academic sources will include examining academic journals, previously conducted samples of service-learning, magazines, books, photos, newspaper articles and multimedia sources such as documentaries and online videos. It is important to gather such diverse sources because written articles will provide textual substance while photos and film provide a visual understanding. Qualitative research is beneficial for this study because it allows the researcher to observe the relationship between students, faculty members and community partners’ overtime. Thus, analyzing the progression of service-learning throughout the past decades enables the researcher to collect rich, detailed information.

The second step is conducting one on one interviews with participants involved with CITC02. Interviews are very important for the research paper because incorporating real life examples to support theories or ideas will further strengthen arguments presented in the paper. Experiential learning is an organic process because outcomes and
experiences vary. Some may form very close relationships with community partners and others may find the course too demanding. Learning about the experiences in CITC02 will inform future students, faculty and community partners what to expect from service-learning courses, whether they are negative and positive experiences.

Interviewing faculty members give insight to why and how service-learning courses first begin. The interview may address questions such as; is there a gap in the learning system at a university level? Should more service-learning courses be available? What do faculty members gain from teaching in a service-learning course as opposed to traditional lectures? Do students respond positively or negatively to volunteer work? Several sample questions students will be asked is why have they decided to take CITC02? What is your volunteer background prior to taking the course? Do you learn differently from a service-learning course compared to a traditional lecture? How was your experience volunteering with the community partner? How was the off-campus experience for you? What do you hope to learn or take with them once the course is finished? Several sample questions community partners will be asked is what was their expectation from the course? Do you feel the community benefits from service-learning courses? What are some of the positive and negative experiences you have encountered thus far with the service learning course? Do you hope to establish a long-term relationship with the University of Toronto?

Interviews may reveal things that would not be anticipated or measured otherwise in academic reading material relating to service-learning. In most interviews, there are prepared questions for the interviewee. However, it should be anticipated that interviews can be a very raw process because questions, answers and ideas can steer the interview
into a new direction that can be informative and useful towards the research. Using information from a broad spectrum of sources is the best possible way to achieve an unbiased and informed view, whether they are socio-cultural, economic or political. All interviews pose no risk for both parties. If for any reason, participants decide to withdraw information given towards the paper, there will be no penalty.

The research question will function as a focal point for the paper and answer why it is important to research. The methodology of research will give insight to how research was conducted. CITC02 will serve as an example of a local service-learning course at the university setting. First hand experiences discussed in the interviews from students, faculty, administration and community partners will serve as supporting arguments to whether service-learning courses create more opportunities or challenges to the learning experience.

**What is Community Service-Learning?**

The definition of community can vary, depending on how you want to look at it. Several different ways of looking at community can be from the range of goods and services provided and/or a geographical area and/or social attributes (Chaskin 2001). In this paper, community will be defined as “geographic areas within which there is a set of shared interests or symbolic attributes” (Chaskin 2001). Community service can be describe as “the engagement of students’ in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients” (Furco 1996, 11). What makes CSL different at the university setting is students are assigned to a community partner hoping to address issues that will enhance the local community (Furco 1996). The experience of service-learning enables faculty members and students
to be more integrated in the community and to see first hand how to effectively deal with the local community issues. Not only is the student’s education enhanced but also services provided for the community are greatly improved (Furco 1996). In other words, CSL can be defined as having three essential features: First, services are provided in the community as a response to the needs of the community (Billig & Waterman 2003); second, the academic learning for the students are enhanced (Billig & Waterman 2003); and third, there is an increase in civic participation, active democratic citizenship and/or social responsibility for students’, community partners and faculty members (Billig & Waterman 2003).

According to Felicia L. Wilczenski and Susan M. Coomey (2009), service-learning promotes positive social and emotional growth while at the same time enhancing career and academic outcomes from synergistic effects (Table 1) (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009).

![Diagram](image)

**Table 1.** Service-learning interconnecting relationship with four different areas: social, emotional, academic and career. (Wilczenski 2009)

Wilczenski and Coomey (2009) describe service-learning as linking service to academic (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009) through personal self and social learning
(Wilczenski & Coomey 2009). Students help determine and meet community needs (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009) that are beneficial for both the student and community while creating opportunities for career exploration (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009). CSL is suitable for all grade levels in any subject area (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009).

**Counternormative Pedagogy**

Technical, cultural, political and postmodern are described as four distinct lenses in which service-learning should be viewed (Butin 2005). Butin (2005) argues that service-learning is an effective pedagogical strategy (Butin 2005). Students’ learning should not be limited by lectures because learning and observing specific situations for example the impact of poverty on families calls for observing and working with actually families in poverty (Butin 2005). This example applies to students who already have a knowledgeable foundation of the subject. Butin (2005) believes service-learning serves as a tool for better learning (Butin 2005).

Learning and understanding information varies between each student. It is important to incorporate different pedagogical learning processes in the university setting because it will meet the needs for those who excel in experiential education. Traditional lectures often emphasize a “top-down” (Markus et al. 1993) approach to learning which is typically conducted within the university campus (Markus et al. 1993). The primary mode of learning is presenting principles, facts and applications through deductive reasoning (Markus et al. 1993). Students often do not retain information learned from the course once completed. CSL is a “bottom-up” (Markus et al. 1993) approach where students’ learn not only in their classroom but also through the personal experiences and observations from community placement providers (Markus et al. 1993). Students’ will
be able to share their experiences because they will “not only take the lessons they learn in class out into the community, but bring the lessons they learn in the community back into the classroom” (Markus et al. 1993, 417). CSL is recognized as a powerful vehicle to ethnic’s education (Saltmarsh 1997). Service-learning facilitates the pedagogy of “connected knowing” (Saltmarsh 1997, 81). In other words, the education of learning is integrated into life. The dynamic relationship between the faculty and students become more equal through the process of trust. Faculty members trust the students’ to be organized and consistently engaged with the community partners while representing the university in a professional manner. Faculty members must adjust their curriculum that fits within the framework of learning about urban low-income community issues. The structure of a CSL course allows students’ to create a relationship from the university to the community. The university legitimizes the learning experience outside the classroom (Saltmarsh 1997). Students are more independent and responsible because they must self-regulate and commit their volunteer hours in co-ordination with their community partners. Students in a traditional lecture will not feel as obligated to commit to the course because there is no accountability if you do not attend lectures.

Each volunteer placement is different; therefore, each student’s experiences will be different. This type of experience is important because it reflects the real world. Students will gain skills and knowledge applicable to real life because they will be working along side humans and not textbooks. For example, learning in a traditional lecture may teach you several theories or steps of how to approach a development project in a low-income urban neighbourhood. Yet, every community is different. As a result, the application to building a development project may be much more complex due to various
issues such as available resources, funding, organization, and number of available volunteers. A student situated in a placement will be able to see a detail insight of how an organization functions through development project obstacles. Students gain skills of how to recognize or make ethnical choices that often arise in life (Saltmarsh 1997). Connected knowing crosses over into moral education (Saltmarsh 1997) through developing a quest for understanding issues and concerns in the community through moral judgement of caring (Saltmarsh 1997). A student who cares about projects and community concerns becomes a more active citizen in the community. Ethical education provides a site where students’ feel a sense of relatedness and where the knower is a personal part of the known (Saltmarsh 1997). Students are given the opportunity to “directly connect books to experience, ideas and introspection to continuing activity” (Saltmarsh 1997, 84). Moral reasoning is gained from students who engage in community service activities compared to those who do not (Saltmarsh 1997). Students learning experience should not be limited by lectures because learning and observing specific situations for example the impact of poverty on families calls for observing and working with actually families in poverty (Butin 2005). This example applies to students who already have a knowledgeable foundation of the subject.

Faculty members benefit from the reciprocal relationship with students. A new window is opened for faculty members because it is an opportunity to learn more about the students as learners and individuals (Pribbenow 2005). The increase level of interaction enable faculty members to have a deeper understanding of how students construct knowledge and experience (Pribbenow 2005). Traditional lectures often require students to hand in one or two papers that reflect the themes introduce in the course,
however, faculty members learn nothing from their students whether it be how they approached the paper or even their name.

“Service-learning can involve such as decentering of the instructor, as education occurs outside the classroom and the lecture of the instructor. The experiences of the student outside of class – in the service environment - tend to be recognized as having a validity of their own, testing, supplementing, or even undermining the theoretical and factual knowledge discussed in class. Instructor, students, and community all become collaborators in the course of the projects” (Speck & Hoppe 2004, 17).

Faculty members engaged in service-learning reported that they felt they could enhance students’ theoretical and practical learning by increasing the level of interaction with their students (Pribbenow 2005).

**Preparation for Future Career**

Students of CSL will get a taste of reality because they must situate themselves in circumstances that are not experienced within the framework of a traditional lecture. Students not only become engaged in the process of community service but “they must embrace, whether consciously or not, the actions within the experience because they are actors within it. Service-learning experiences can thus be viewed not as attempting to make a point, but to actually be the point” (Butin 2005, 101).

Learning from reading textbooks and academic journals will build the foundation of acquiring knowledge. However, the application of knowledge is a much more complex process, especially when you are dealing with humans. In a complex society, problems in the community are not isolated (Gronski & Pigg 2000). CSL enables students a curriculum that provides opportunities for creative problems solving and critical thinking (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009) because students will be exposed to complex problems in a complex setting (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009).
Despite universities’ best intention for technical solutions to societal problems, the education system is failing to prepare students for lives of social responsibility and civic and political engagement (Cutforth et al. 2003). Ernest Boyer (2003) criticizes the definition of scholarship because the pursuit of new knowledge is too limited and narrow to serve as a key to acceptable learning (Cutforth et al. 2003). Students engaged in CSL will feel a sense of cooperation rather than competition amongst other students. As a result, students will develop feelings that are positive, meaningful and real, “generating emotional consequences that challenge values as well as ideas that support social, emotional, and cognitive development” (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009, xiv).

Unfortunately, community agencies report working with graduating professionals is a problem because the majority have strong technical skills but lack the knowledge or ability to work together to solve complex community problems of families and neighbourhood with the community partners (Gronski & Pigg 2000). A student is often limited when a university does not offer interprofessional education and community collaboration through curriculum and experiential learning (Gronski & Pigg 2000). Interaction with professionals and community partners enable the application of their expertise to the larger practice of problem solving in societal life (Gronski & Pigg 2000). Students in traditional lectures are failing to link the material learned in class to what occurs in society (Gronski & Pigg 2000). In the context of CITC02, students and community partners’ responses have been positive thus far regarding building a positive relationship with one another. Students build trusting relationships in order to collaborate in the workplace, as a result, create connections and networks that benefit for future career opportunities. Values applied in professional practice are gain through CSL
opportunities for learning civic responsibility (Gronski & Pigg 2000). Community representatives can sometimes break the barrier of an authoritarian relationship because they may see themselves more as partners or co-teachers when working with a student (Weigert 1998).

**Students Become Active Participates in the Community**

Gray et al. conducted a study about combining service-learning programs in higher education. The results indicated that there is a strong correlation between increased civic responsibility with students participating in service-learning courses (Gray et. Al 1999). Alexander W. Astin and Lin J. Sax article titled *How Undergraduates Are Affected by Service Participation* explore the personal and educational development of students who participate in volunteer service programs. CSL projects encourage students’ to think outside of the classroom by caring for others and to contribute to the needs of the community (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009). Students will be able to gain a better understanding of how the community is impacted by participating in service-learning projects (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009). Bruce W. Speck and Sherry Lee Hoppe (2004) noted Plato and Aristotle believed education was intended to produce good persons with knowledge and a “disposition to act on that knowledge in pursuit of good ends” (Speck & Hoppe 2004, 3). CSL courses enable students the application of unique skills and knowledge to different projects that will serve benefits to the community.

American political scientist Robert Putnam’s (2000) book titled *Bowling Alone* discusses the meaning of social capital which Putnam defines as:

> Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arises from them…” (Putnam 2000)
Robert Putnam (2000) believes bowling is symbolic, arguing that the world previously described with service club activities in the past is beginning to disappear. According to Putnam, bowling leagues are down significantly and more individuals are now bowling alone (Hutter 2007). Community participation and activities are declining which indicates a decline in social ties. Putnam’s thesis argues that: (1) social capital has been shrinking (2) relationships have been eroding (3) reasons are technology, financial pressure, and suburbanization. CSL offers students the opportunities to build community capacity with residents in the community by participating in various service projects.

According to Robert Chaskin (2001), community capacity building focuses on characteristics and factors that create a well functioning and cohesive community. There are four community-level characteristics (sense of community, commitment, mechanisms of problem solving, and access to resources) that create a well defined community capacity (Chaskin 2001). The listed characteristics all operate through three specific levels of social agency (individuals, organizations, and networks) in order to carry out specific functions that include production, planning, collective decision making, and advocacy (Chaskin 2001).

Students learn through addressing needs of the community. The support of a faculty member who is engaged in similar community work will transmit a deeper level of teaching and learning in the course (Marullo & Edwards 2000). With the support of a faculty member and their community placement providers, students’ are empowered to become active participates in community issues. A student’s relationship with the community is an organic experience, one that interconnects dealing with dilemmas and ambiguities of different scenarios. The experience and application of knowledge towards
different issues will reflect on the individual. Students’ are able to offer their skills and expertise towards various tasks such as an art project for youths or safety initiatives in the community. CSL can be a forum for political dialogue and the negotiation of complex power relationships (Speck & Hoppe 2004). Students not only learn about community problems and develop an initiative or push to help but students break down barriers and challenge community hierarchies having learnt ethical problems and political challenges intrinsic in undertaking community service (Speck & Hoppe 2004).

CSL is an effective pedagogy of reflective learning. Students become reflective learners through reflection assignments that require personal and attempts at honesty about their experiences with community placement providers. The reflection responses are not limited to the functions of the organization but expand to personal encounters and experiences felt in the community. Reflection assignments foster a dialogue that enables faculty members and students to exchange perspectives on how students are relating to the process of learning by his or her own terms (Saltmarsh 1997). Students can actively engage in their personal feelings about what types of activities they are doing, what they would like to do, how they would go about doing it, and what they having difficulties doing (Saltmarsh 1997). Journal reflections provide a candid testimony of a student’s community placement. Journal reflections enable students to critical analyze or reflect their experiences the way they want to express it. Traditional lecture often require written material regarding the main themes of the course, there is a loss of opportunity to hear students’ perspectives on the course material in relations to their experience in everyday life.
As a current student at the University of Toronto Scarborough, I have observed students in traditional lectures will often alienate themselves from the course because of the hierarchy relationship. Faculty members are looked upon by students as the lecturer and marker. If the classroom is not small and intimate, students tend to shy away from voicing their opinion about the course or the course material. CSL in a studio base setting gives more power to students because they have gained more responsibility through being consistent in completing hours, presenting a presentation for community partners and delivering their perspective on issues or solutions to urban low-income community through their final papers.

CITC02

Wilczenski & Coomey (2009) stated in their book titled *A practical guide to service learning: strategies for positive development* that “high rates of boredom, alienation, and disconnection from meaningful challenges and purpose in life among students are not signs of psychopathology in most cases, but rather signs of a deficiency in positive development” (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009, 21). Creating spaces for positive mental health should be a priority in university. The role of the university in the community is to create a meaningful, continuous relationship with children and families over time (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009), therefore, CITC02 is in a position to take a “positive development stance” (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009, 21).

According to Student B there is no bridge between academic learning and what is going on in the outside world. CITC02 created a bridge between the university and the community through fostering partnerships between faculty, students, the university and different community partners. Interest in CSL can be contributed to that
fact that professors and universities recognized they were becoming overly separate from the surrounding communities (Speck & Hoppe 2004), as a result, the education system was not having immediate implications for students’ lives or society (Speck & Hoppe 2004). Community partner A expressed how a relationship with the university can be beneficial to the community:

“through the partnership [with the university], it certainly open the community organizations eyes to more things happening at the university, things that are going on campus or off campus, strategic directions, possibly forming other partnerships, sometimes students can bring back information that we may not know about, for example, when students do research on different subjects and they can share it with everyone [community], I think people do learn from the work that they are doing, which is beneficial” (Community Partner A, 2010)

The reciprocal relationship with the students, community partners and the university through CITC02 allowed students to learn about what is happening and what is possible in the community (Community Partner B, 2010). The expectation from the course as stated by Community Partner B is that “students are integrated” (Community Partner B, 2010). A network of independent contributors will all do something different, creating a cross-over that impacts each other (Community Partner B, 2010).

All students interviewed for the research agree that CITC02 created a better learning environment to prepare for future careers. Student B noted that witnessing colleagues graduating with no volunteer experience can set them back from those who do have experience. To be integrated into the community and seeing residents coming together to be apart of community projects is an experience that cannot be practiced in a traditional lecture (Student D, 2010). CSL is more practical and ideal to learn about what goes on in the community rather than a traditional lecture (Community Partner D, 2010). Students will experience a lot of eye opening situations that enable learning at multi-
levels (Community Partner D, 2010). In most cases, college is understood as community based or more hands-on, when you look at universities, they are typically not hands-on or involved with the community (Community Partner D, 2010). CITC02 allow students from a diverse academic background to take the course and gain personal experience for themselves and for future careers (Community Partner D, 2010). Resources offered in a community often do not get used or close down (Community Partner D, 2010), especially in the priority neighbourhood such as Kingston-Galloway and Orton Park. Students gain outreach skills when they advocate on behalf of the community partners regarding available services in the community. Community Partner C and D agree that breaking down barriers is the best method to achieve goals in the community. Students in CITC02 help break down barriers by interacting with residents or families in the community through different activities such as financial workshops, maintaining an edible community garden for elementary school children, surveying local businesses in the community, community safety walks and so much more. Community Partner C noted that partnerships that usually work are those that require no payment because there is no reliability for funding to do research and advocacy (Community Partner C, 2010).

It is important for students to learn the foundation of community issues in the first and second year, therefore, laying the ground work for upper level courses such as third and fourth year to apply the knowledge and skills learned to a real and working community.

“you need to be grounded in theory but that fact that theory does not necessarily play out in day to day life, I think it is wonderful to be able to graduate university really knowing that and having experience that, rather than graduating university with only theory and then waiting till you go to your first job and realize it does not always work out that way, and also the fact
that it is human beings were talking about, if it is only out of the book it is really hard to connect with personal lives and personal stories, it really brings it into perspective” (Community Partner B, 2010)

Community Partner B hopes to gain once each semester ends is broadening and deepening community work through the possibilities of academic work (Community Partner B, 2010). The nature of the course is beneficial to community partners because students are not coming in to learn and leave but come into the community with a critical point of view “which is very refreshing” (Community Partner D, 2010).

It has been argued by philosophers of education that the central goal of higher education is to prepare productive citizens that will serve the community (Speck & Hoppe 2004). Community Partner D viewed CITC02 students as workers in training because in university “the last three to six months they spend with us may be the last three to six months before they [students] go out into the field, how you perform out in the field will directly or indirectly reflect the last person you trained with” (Community Partner D, 2010). CSL is different from traditional lecture because students typically just sitting, listening and taking notes and regurgitate the material for the exam, with CSL it is the “action of doing it, networking and making relationships, it is a different way of learning but is really nice supplement to the lectures because you get the whole picture as oppose to just part of it with the theory, actually seeing projects implemented in real life, what is doable, what is not and what are the challenges” (Community Partner C, 2010) makes CSL a good way for students to learn. Understanding society, explanatory theories and ethical principles will be beneficial to students planning positions with the government or other leadership positions (Speck & Hoppe 2004).
Some of the challenges with CITC02 are the length of the course, location and reliability. The general consensus among all community partners interviewed is that the course is too short; it creates an obstacle for students to be involved with a particular project from start to finish because of different length times. Student D prefers community service-learning courses in the summer time because there is much more flexibility, students course load will be much lighter and more activities will be held outside. However, Community Partner D believes regardless of the length of the course, students will be leaving with “something” (Community Partner D, 2010). CITC02 is located off-campus; this was seen as a challenge for students taking public transit because of the multiple transfers. An effective method to solve this problem was to car-pool. It was a great way to help students to attend class on time on campus after-wards and increased bonding between students. What made the class appealing to most students in CITC02 is the off-campus location. Students at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus are willing and embracing new styles of learning. The location of CITC02 is important to mention because being located within a priority neighbourhood (Map 1) such as Kingston-Galloway and Orton Park facilitates an easier transition for students to understand the community better rather than being on campus.
Map 1. Map of City of Toronto’s Priority Areas (City of Toronto 2006)

Student B expressed hesitation with the course at the beginning because of prior negative volunteer experience with a large organization. Relying on different community partners to provide effective guidance and leadership was a source of anxiety; however, CSL provides opportunities to students to take a leadership role in the community. Students are not discouraged to discuss negative experiences with community partners with faculty or through journal reflections.

**Drawbacks**

The definition of CSL has yet to be universal across the table because there is a lack of agreement when it comes to the definition of service-learning (Billig & Waterman 2003). The structure of a CSL course can vary depending on the faculty member, therefore having a concrete definition that embodies what a CSL entails is tricky. Although more recent description of CSL reflect the term as a pedagogy (Billig & Waterman 2003), over the past ten years, there have been at least 200 different definitions for service-learning (Billig & waterman 2003). Faculty members will have educational
goals for their students which are subject to numerous interpretations (Billig & Waterman 2003). The overall design of the program such as the duration of the CSL course, what community placement providers are available and degree of student involvement creates complex interactions amongst the students, community partners and faculty members.

“All service-learning activities, regardless of their overall design and programmatic goals, involve a complex interaction of students, service activities, curricular content, and learning outcomes. What results are highly idiosyncratic, situational experiences for which there is minimal predictability of how each service-learning experience will unfold. Indeed, no two service-learning activities are alike…Such idiosyncrasy and unpredictability has significant implications for how one should approach the study of service-learning” (Billig & Waterman 2003, 13).

Some faculty members may choose to title their course experiential learning, community service-learning, community-service, interning, field research and/or volunteering. As a result, gathering information about how many CSL courses were available at the university setting became quite difficult. In other words, it is difficult to have a true representative sampling of programs available in universities (Billig & Waterman 2003).

It may be difficult for faculty members’ to validate their marking scheme because the process of CSL is organic and every student’s experiences will be different. How can the experience or engagement be measured? According to Kathleen Maas Weigert (1998), faculty members’ are grading the learning and not the service provided for community partners (Weigert 1998). However, each student’s experience will vary. This can potentially impact the quality of assignments handed in because some students’ may have more substance for their writing while others may not because of several circumstances such as starting placements late, not feeling connected or no tasks have been assigned.
However, not all articles praise the success of service-learning courses. The New York Times (Strom 2009) published an article titled *Does Service Learning Really Help?* The article stated that some community leaders found the experience “as much a curse as a blessing” (Strom 2009, 1) because some students do not have enough time to get a meaningful experience, as well as, having community partners clients feel like guinea pigs for students research (Strom 2009). Most non-profit organizations do not have the funds to train and supervise students (Strom 2009), as well as, lacking the funds for administrative support can result in a bigger burden for the community partner is the service-learning course is not well organized (Strom 2009). All experiences with CSL vary. This is just one example of the drawbacks community partners may feel.

Students’ will be put into situation where they may feel uncomfortable. For example, attending court or falling victim to harassment. However, these experiences put students’ in the forefront to make responsible decisions, just like they would in the real world.

It is interesting to note that Wilczenski and Coomey (2009) state that service-learning is not a sporadic volunteer program because it can be added to an existing curriculum (Wilczenski & Coomey 2009). However, this is not always the case, faculty member A expressed the difficulty of kick-starting a community service-learning course in the university setting because there can be lack of support from other faculty members that believe community service-learning is not an effective method of teaching (faculty A).
Future Literature

There is a need for continual commitment to the research of CSL because it will give insight on how to improve the practice, build on existing knowledge base for reference and broaden the capacity for students, community partners and faculty members to advocate (Billig & Waterman 2003). If there is an expansion of research to better understand the practice of CSL, it will provide better opportunities for future students to have the chance to be enrolled in similar courses because universities will recognize the importance of CSL as an effective pedagogy.

Conclusion

There is a need to restructure upper level university courses. According to John Dewey (2004), students should be taught the basic facts and principles, this will allow a better understanding of how to approach future problems once the basics are mastered (Speck & Hoppe 2004). Identifying the positive and negative experiences of service-learning will give a new perspective of effective teaching and learning methods in university. All participants associated with the service-learning course may benefit in some way. Students may feel motivated to be able to apply their skills and knowledge towards a working goal. Faculty members are able to teach in a studio based setting that enables an interactive relationship between the educators and students. Community members are provided with volunteer students’ that will be able to lend a helping hand towards community goals and projects. Service learning is valuable because it increases a sense of personal worth, an increase awareness of society, an increase in awareness of one’s personal values, and increase interaction and engagement in the classroom (Astin et al. 2000).
Service-learning in Canada is not a new practice; however, university courses rarely offer experiential course learning for students who are looking to gain skills and assets that traditional courses set in lecture rooms fails to provide. Ernest Boyer believes higher education on campuses is failing to prepare students for lives of social responsibility and civic and political engagement (Cutforth et al. 2003). CSL should be encouraged to students because incorporating higher education and involvement in the community will enhance the learning experience for students’, educators and community partners through various avenues such as becoming active learners in and outside the classroom from counternormative pedagogy, develop skills applicable to future careers while becoming active participates in solving community issues. CSL focuses on enhances students’ knowledge by situating their learning experience with working community organization.
Bibliography


