Katherine O'Donnell

This article outlines relevant theory on service learning and discusses two models of intercultural work with service learning components. Two case studies are examined: Hartwick College first year seminar and upper level course in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Hartwick College Junior Jamaica Nursing Program. Ethical, intellectual, interpersonal, logistical, institutional, and safety issues are addressed.

Building Intercultural Bridges

One of the most significant benefits service learning provides students is exposure to communities that differ from their own by race, age, class, culture, and life experiences.

> Our experiences also shape our moral feelings and intuitions. Growing up in a white, middle-class neighborhood may make it very difficult for us to empathize with the pain, desolation, difficulties of minorities or the poor... Being immersed in a minority culture, becoming a minority in another culture may help us to better understand and empathize with the situation of the person whom our society regularly degrades and dehumanizes. Such experiences may awaken new moral feelings in us and so offer us new moral possibilities (Schultz,1990, p. 96).

In 1996, Hartwick College faculty members were invited to apply to participate in an innovative curriculum development project in global education. The focus was intercultural, international immersion programs for first-year students. The program's goal was to enhance first-year students' effectiveness as learners in an increasingly complicated, interrelated, multicultural world. Ultimately, through dialogue with one another, and through sharing years of intercultural and disciplinary work, the faculty chosen developed shared models for intercultural study programs. Implicit in this approach was the assumption that if first-year students were exposed to challenging, cross-cultural programming early, then as they passed through subsequent courses and majors they would bring to the entire campus a deeper and more personal understanding and knowledge of cross-cultural matters, resulting potentially in a more progressive and informed campus climate.

After meeting for nearly a year, and sharing information and views on learning, assessment, course structure, teaching methodology and group dynamics, my course on Chiapas, Mexico, and my colleagues' course on Germany/France became the initial models. Programs to Thailand, South Africa, and Jamaica were created the following year, and throughout the 1996-1999 years, we debated and analyzed our models from inception to completion.

Service in the Intercultural Context

Of the five first-year models, the course on Chiapas was the only one with service learning built into it. I based this decision on ten years of work in service learning and incorporation of this methodology into discipline-based courses including Women and Social Change, Contemporary Theory, Children's Lives, and Introduction to Women's Studies. I linked this foray into service in an international context to another course that I was teaching at the time, Children's Lives, and to contacts that I had made in San Cristobal, Chiapas, during two initial preparation visits.

The choice of Chiapas as a site also grew out of ten years of activist and ethnographic work with the rural poor in the upstate region of New York state. I had been working principally with women and children who were the families of farm workers. Chiapas offered the chance to analyze comparatively the gender, class, and ethnic dimensions of structural poverty, community organizing, public policy, and social change.

Hartwick College also had an exchange relationship with the University of Social Sciences in San Cristobal de las Casas.

Introducing a service component to my course presented challenges. As outlined in the Wingspread Report (Honnet and Poulson, 1989), effective service learning

- Engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good,
- Incorporates critical reflection in course design,
- Articulates clear service and learning goals,
- Allows communities to define needs,
- Expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment, and
- Includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.

Given the challenging situation in Chiapas, and after an initial trip to Mexico with students, I limited the scope of our community work to action that would be safe, requested by local organizations, and that matched my research and activism experience and training, as well as my students' career and major interests. Poverty and special emphases on the education and health of women and children emerged as service foci.

Tradition, Continuity, and Struggle in Chiapas, Mexico: First-Year Seminar

While the faculty engaged in the Henry Luce Foundation seminar favored a full semester, fall preparation course, coupled with a January four-week term, and spring reflection sessions, institutional constraints produced a schedule of seven weeks fall on-campus preparation, four weeks at an international site, and a seven-week spring reflection. Faculty members varied in their approaches to structuring the preparation

course. Some opted for more attention to group process and group formation, modest language preparation, and fewer readings; others weighted the course more heavily toward academic preparation. I preferred the latter.

Preparation for the course entailed extensive reading in Mexican and Mayan culture, history, sociology, and politics. I made two initial trips to Mexico to establish ties with the community and university, and to make contacts with important civil society organizations. Upon my return, continual e-mail communication with these contacts was critical for setting up lectures, housing, cultural programming, transportation, and service opportunities. In addition, during this phase, I began Spanish language study.

As outlined in the course syllabus, learning goals included acquainting first-year students with the cultural traditions of the Mayan people within historical and contemporary contexts. Contemporary political, economic, and social issues would be examined in relation to Mexican and U.S. societies. The service component was designed to link the academic literature to real life experiences and to raise awareness about comparative gender, class, ethnic, and first-world/third-world inequality.

I chose to develop a structured academic syllabus containing classic texts in Mayan studies, readings on selected topics of poverty, health, and women's—and particularly Guatemalan refugee—issues. Ethnographies on the Lacandon Maya and the Guatemalan conflict were chosen because we would be visiting these areas. I also wanted to give students an overview text that would link Mexican history with the current Zapatista movement. Several chapters on observation methods and ethnographic field notes were also assigned. Ethnographic and documentary films were used extensively to stimulate discussion and to make readings more tangible. Most students had some Spanish language competency; this was augmented through work with a Spanish instructor at the college.

In addition to academic and language training, the class participated in a skill-based challenge, a day-long workshop at our campus lakeside facility. In preparing for this workshop, I had spoken to the trainers about issues, including communication difficulties, keeping the group together, tight transportation situations, and other health and safety concerns, that we would be confronting in Chiapas. At lunch, I spoke with students explicitly about sexual, political, and health safety issues, and directly addressed drug usage and Mexican laws. As part of this program, students and I constructed a contract for group behavior, one that we were forced to review several times while in Mexico. This day-long workshop was designed to put us through the paces of learning to work together, make cooperative decisions, communicate effectively with each other, and respect one another's needs, all in the context of other cultures and languages. At the end of the day, the group decided that we would need the following components to make the course in Chiapas work: flexibility, tolerance, respect, honesty, trust, communication (both speaking up and compromising by listening), cooperation, organization, open mindedness, patience, group awareness, support, *safe* fun, sense of humor, respect for other's opinions, team work, self control, balance, and time for stress relief, relaxation, and debriefing.

All but two of the students attended that workshop and signed the group contract. That document was carried in a plastic, waterproof pouch throughout the trip and became the reference point for many problematic situations.

Service at this stage was of two types. Funds for use in Mexico were collected through activities in my Children's Lives class. Students in the Chiapas course also did fundraising over the holidays and solicited medical and school supplies, largely via family networks, for distribution in refugee camps in Mexico with which we would have contact. Both contact organizations had specified the sort of materials that they needed most.

While in Mexico, guest lectures linked texts that we had used with issues that we would encounter in the field. Service was arranged in conjunction with the cultural center where we were housed and a refugee nongovernmental organization with which I had made contact during the previous summer. Students worked for several days with street kids in an after-school art program. When visiting refugee camps on the Mexican border with Guatemala, students were able to deliver the medical and school supplies that they had collected.

Reflection

Academic reflection was built into the fall preparation via reflection essays connecting ethnography with students' personal lives. During the January term, reflection took various forms, including ethnographic journals, site expert reports prepared at home and delivered on site, final research papers completed several weeks after our return, as well as frequent group reflection sessions in our hotel rooms. After returning from several days of visits to remote Guatemalan refugee border camps, some students complained, during a sometimes teary and heated session, of feeling useless merely observing and listening at the camps. They wanted to "do something." At such junctures it became important to remind students that without the proper contacts and clearances in a context such as Chiapas, it was possible to do more harm than good. This brought us back to pre-departure discussions of the politics of talk and action, alliances and allegiances, and long-standing land disputes, racism, and ethnic conflicts in Chiapas and Guatemala.

One pre-med major's journal entry embodies her heightened sense of frustration:

> There is no leisure time for the people in these camps. If they don't work, they don't eat, and even if they do work, that doesn't mean that there will ever be sufficient food on their tables. They told us that the conditions in Mexico are good and that they were fighting to stay here. It blows my mind; what kind of conditions were they living in while in Guatemala? (Student journal, 1998).

After our return to campus, we had eight weeks of reflection classes, beginning with one where we shared our pictures and talked about their importance to us. Eventually, the class culminated in a student-prepared, publicly presented slide show discussion of their work in Chiapas.

At the conclusion of these service learning experiments, funded by Henry Luce Foundation, the faculty involved concurred on the following:

- A full semester course of academic preparation should be included.

- Group dynamics should be formally addressed.
- Separate grades should be given for on-campus and off-campus components.
- Upper level students should mentor first-year students.
- Additional information on students' prior behavioral patterns is needed during recruitment.
- Strong reflection/debriefing experiences are required after the program.
- To broaden range of students able to go, financial assistance must be increased.
- Health and behavioral guidelines should be made explicit through signed group and individual contracts.
- Institutional support for course development and faculty time commitment should be increased.
- Faculty training workshops are needed.

In the following year, with a colleague from the other institution, I repeated the course with students, mostly upper-level anthropology and sociology majors, from two colleges. On the basis of the previous year's course, and in conjunction with the experiences of other colleagues in the Luce Program, I made the following changes:

- A required full semester preparation course under the sociology department rubric, "Third World Studies: Mexico," was developed. A text on field methods and group field observation exercise at the community meals site to enable students to grapple with feelings of being outsiders was added, and graded during the fall term.
- Written and oral presentations/reflections on readings and connections to students' lives, called "making connections" papers, was required, and graded during the fall term.
- Students were asked to use the internet for fact-finding and bibliography preparation, and graded during the fall term.
- Service in teams was incorporated into the fall course. Students chose to do fundraising for school and medical supplies in a number of different ways. Group written and oral reports linking service in Oneonta to issues in Chiapas were assigned, and graded during the fall term.
- In Mexico, service was more extensive but still linked to the organizations with which I had personal contacts. Through our cultural center organization, work in the Lacandon jungle in the village of Nahá was arranged. We worked with widows to clear their milpa, cleaned a school area and dug drainage ditches, and brought medical supplies to the local clinic. In subsequent discussions with our organizational contact and teachers at the school, we decided to use some of the money that was raised in fall activities to purchase school materials, sporting supplies, and tools for the village residents.
- Reflection sessions were to be held more frequently.

- Problem situations and resultant anger and frustration were dealt with immediately.
- Arrangements were made with the cultural center programmer to avoid certain sites where previously students had taken inordinate physical risks.
- The director of international programs even more explicitly addressed safety issues and issued to faculty cell phone information for emergency use.

Following this semester in Chiapas, I again felt the tremendous weight of responsibility that came with overseeing a group of students in an off-campus context. More than ever, I knew that having two faculty members was a bottom line necessity. Often, for example, one faculty member had to do banking while another arranged transportation. There were also moments when it took two heads to sort out the best plan of action in difficult circumstances, such as negotiating military checkpoints. Finally, I needed another person for emotional support, debriefing, laughing, and maintaining my energy.

When reflecting on our trip into the Lacandon and our encounters with scores of military men, a large group of gawking, staring, village men, and lots of mud which bogged down one of our vans, I tried to capture in poetry our group's fears, our attempts to communicate, and our reactions to these intense situations based on our own past experiences. Reactions ranged from withdrawal to anger, and as the faculty leader, I had to negotiate these emotions. I began my poem, titled, "Rumba en La Ruta,"

On a road so small that even the maps missed it
We encountered a cast of hundreds.
Conjured by a warlord's apprentice
jungle morphing into men
M-16 serpents
humming machines
Mayan mirrors
to an underworld of death
my eyes watching your eyes watching mine

and concluded it by saying,

FRIGHT FIGHT FLIGHT
no longer lodo-laden but mired in memory

Transcultural Nursing

In another service learning model, third-year nursing students at Hartwick College have the option of studying nursing in Jamaica. Having completed two years of training, third-year students have the skills to provide wellness services in a community setting. Before embarking on the off-campus component of their work, nursing majors are expected to attend a series of meetings at which Jamaican culture, customs, diet, history, and healthcare are discussed. Practical issues, such as packing, eating arrangements, travel plans, and safety and health concerns, are also covered.

Academic preparation includes reading both scholarly articles and popular literature. Formal and informal orientation begins when students are placed for two days in urban community-based care sites immediately on arrival in Jamaica. This initial healthcare field placement is accompanied by guest lectures that focus on Jamaican healthcare issues, presented by people living and working within the Jamaican culture and healthcare system.

Following this orientation, students are moved to rural settings for several weeks. Here they work closely with senior health nurses and provide hands-on care in homes and health clinics. Clinical experiences include well-child, prenatal, dental, family planning, immunization, nutrition, and wound care. Students also participate in home health care, daycare, local schools, and orphanage visits.

The course is designed to "assist students in understanding the meaning of providing culturally competent care to individuals, families, groups, and communities." Throughout, emphasis is placed on students learning as much as possible about Jamaican culture "while engaging in relationships of mutual exchange."

Because faculty were conscious of the outsider, first-world status of the students, they did not wish to promote a situation in which students saw themselves acting upon a population in a laboratory. Rather, the faculty drew on their established relationships in the community, and local professional and community resources, specifically, the Department of Advanced Nursing Education at the University of the West Indies campus, to create a culturally-sensitive structure rooted in community-based nursing. In order to make this possible, "bridges needed to be created and maintained from the neighborhood to academia" (Havener and Dettenrieder, 1999, p. 11). The result was mutual respect among the nursing students, the Jamaican healthcare professionals, and Hartwick faculty who helped students understand the realities of healthcare in the developing nation of Jamaica, and the "incongruities that exist between folk and professional health care systems" (Havener and Dettenrieder, 1999, p. 20).

Reflection

During the course of the work in Jamaica, students engaged in daily post-conferences. Here they were given the opportunity to deal with feelings, frustrations, and problem-solving. Agency staff and local residents were also encouraged to give feedback to the students. Professional feedback came from agency preceptors, senior public health nurses, and the Hartwick faculty. Student effectiveness was measured in case study presentations, teaching projects, and journals.

In summary, it must be emphasized that, to make such a program possible, faculty must share fundamental philosophies and practices, work as a team, and be able to take over for one another in a number of contexts. Similarly, faculty teams need each other for mutual support, both emotional and intellectual. Finally, such a program requires personnel willing to take risks and willing to be on call, 24-7, that is, 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Both in Chiapas and Jamaica, faculty members had to confront student interpersonal and sexual behaviors which at best could be misinterpreted and lead to difficulties and,

at worst, could result in violence or rape. Using poetry as a way to process my concerns and intense emotions, I wrote:

The Night is Male in Comitan

The night is male in Comitan
searchlight eyes rove
the zocalo
spotting giggling gringas
sauntering sirens
loud laughter
too much skin.
smiling, pointing at his bulging arsenal
"How do you say 'that' in Tzotzil?"

Summary

Building on the discussion above, I conclude by comparing the major structural elements of these model programs and discuss how well each accomplishes its service goals. I also address faculty concerns and unresolved issues that staff, administrators, and faculty on other campuses might want to consider when developing intercultural, international curricula with service components.

First, the achievement of cultural competence, or the experience-based cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills that emerge through cross-cultural interaction, is an overarching goal of each program. Both programs recognize the cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions of this process and attempt to prepare students to be highly visible outsiders, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Nursing students at Hartwick begin this process by choosing to place themselves within various communities in their first-year studies. They also acquire nursing skills for several years before being asked to apply them in the Jamaican context. Finally, many nursing students know each other as peers in the same cohort and have established student networks. These students, therefore, may maximize their learning, contributing more effectively to the service site for which they have been trained, and grow from the exposure to new and different health care situations and health problems. Matching student skills to community needs improves the experience for community agencies, students, and faculty alike. Student motivation, learning, and behavior can all be positively affected by matching needs to skills. While many of us do not have the luxury of recruiting within a major, focusing on skill development linked to community needs, mentoring, and training will strengthen programs.

Second, both programs emphasize critical reflection and build it into all phases of the curriculum. I favor a required, formal course with graded projects, discussion, films, speakers, readings, evaluation, and group dynamics projects as a prerequisite for intercultural study. In the Luce Project discussions, faculty noted that some students perceived intercultural work as travel, rather than as coursework, a perception that undermines academic and behavioral standards. Post-immersion reflection is also critical and can take many forms. Student presentations, using multimedia or slide

shows, regroups the students and allows them to put their learning into academic and emotional perspective. Student research papers, completed several weeks after the students return from the off-campus experience, are also powerful learning devices.

Third, each program connected the service initiatives to the course's learning objectives and to community needs. To do this effectively and responsibly, faculty had to establish strong community ties, such as licensing in the case of the nursing program. Critical to the success of the program were affiliation with the staff in the department of advanced nursing at the University of the West Indies and use of the Isaac Barrant Comprehensive Clinic as a main clinic training base. Such relations promoted student professionalism, staff mentoring, and community feedback on both student practice and behavior.

Because students graduate, it remains the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that community contact and concern are sustained.

Through my participation in the Luce Project and in many conversations with faculty engaged in intercultural program development, I found the following issues problematic. To choose the appropriate students for such a program, faculty might need institutional assistance to assess student emotional capacity for such programs. Institutions also should evaluate whether faculty can work effectively as teams. Finally, faculty need orientation, training, and time to develop such programs and, to create programs with integrity, institutional resources must be available.

In sum, intercultural programs with service learning components involve levels of risk and commitment that go well beyond traditional courses. The programs outlined above share long-term commitments to people and communities, structured reflection on ethical and intellectual issues, and respect for diverse cultures. To a great extent, the programs seek local community input to define needs and match those needs with student skills. The goal is to create a learning experience that benefits students and community members alike and that proves to be an unforgettable, transformational experience for all.

Note: The curriculum development in global education for first-year students at Hartwick College was made possible through a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. I thank the foundation, David Bachner, PhD, director of the Sondhi Limthongkul Center for Interdependence at Hartwick College, and my colleagues for their support.

Suggested Readings

Havener, J. M., and S. Dettenrieder, "Providing Care in the Neighborhoods Abroad," in *Teaching Nursing in the Neighborhoods: Innovative Responses* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., in press).

Honnet, E., and S. Poulsen, "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning," Wingspread Special Report, 1989.

O'Donnell, K., Interview with S. Dettenrieder, Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY, August, 1999.

Schultz, S., "From Isolation to Commitment: The Role of the Community in Values Education," in C. Delve, et al., *Community Service as Values Education 50* (Summer) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990): pp. 91-100.

Metropolitan Universities: Who Are We?

We are located in or near the urban center of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least 250,000.

We are universities, public and private, whose mission includes teaching, research, and professional service. We offer both graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and two or more professional fields. The latter programs are strongly practice-oriented and make extensive use of clinical sites in the metropolitan area.

The majority of our students come from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socioeconomic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.

We are oriented toward and identify with our regions, proudly and by deliberate design. Our programs respond to regional needs while striving for national excellence.

We are strongly interactive. We are dedicated to serving as intellectual and creative resources to our metropolitan regions in order to contribute to their economic development, social health, and cultural vitality, through education, research, and professional outreach. We are committed to collaboration and cooperation with the many communities and clienteles in our metropolitan regions and to helping to bridge the socioeconomic, cultural, and political barriers among them.

We are shaping and adapting our own structures, policies, and practices to enhance our effectiveness as key institutions in the lives of our metropolitan regions and their citizens.