ResearchOnline@ND

University of Notre Dame Australia
ResearchOnline@ND

Education Conference Papers

School of Education

2007

Service-Learning – preparing students for leadership

Shane D. Lavery
University of Notre Dame Australia, Shane.Lavery@nd.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/edu_conference

Part of the Education Commons

This conference paper was originally published as:
Lavery, S. D. (2007). Service-Learning – preparing students for leadership. *Australian Association for Research in Education Conference*.

This conference paper is posted on ResearchOnline@ND at http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/edu_conference/4. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.

LAV07097

NAME: Dr Shane Lavery

Institution: University of Notre Dame Australia

Title: Service-Learning – preparing students for leadership

Student leadership development is a process of involving students in meaningful ways, both in and beyond the classroom. It is providing opportunities for students to exercise their talents, skills, and interests while, at the same time, continuing to develop new skills. It is about giving students ownership of the programs they take part in (Sacerdote, 2003). It is concerned with promoting initiative in students and challenging students to be other-centred.

One practical, yet an often under-utilised means of preparing students for leadership is through their participation in service-learning programs. Frequently, schools use leadership camps, leadership days, and leadership seminars to prepare students as leaders. Such preparation, however, is usually only available to the elected few. This paper does not suggest that educational institutions abandon such activities. What is suggested is that service-learning programs also have an important role to play in preparing students for leadership, in that service-learning can be used to enhance and complement current school leadership programs. In Western Australia, where the Department of Education and Training (2007) has begun to introduce community service as part of the school curriculum, opportunities now exist to incorporate service, and service-learning, as a means of enhancing student leadership abilities in the vast majority of students in this state.

Theoretical Context

Three themes form the theoretical context underpinning this research into ways service-learning can enhance student leadership in secondary students. Firstly, literature on service-learning provides a strategy by which students can actively serve those in the community. Secondly, literature on student leadership offers certain guidelines about what student leaders are called to do. Thirdly, literature on servant leadership provides a basis for the type of leadership students might exercise.

Service-Learning

Definitions of service-learning vary considerably among those who embrace it. One such definition, which reflects the most commonly enunciated principles of service-learning, comes from the Centre for Service and Leadership (n.d.):

> Service-learning is a teaching method, which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organised community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community (p. 1).

As a method of teaching and learning, service-learning aims to enrich the lives of students by engaging them in meaningful hands-on service to address real-life needs in the community while also gaining valuable knowledge and skills that connect with classroom studies (Schoenfeld, 2006, p. 1).

Service-learning programs are usually tailored to meet specific learning goals and community needs. Nonetheless, while programs tend to be unique, commentators highlight a series of components critical for success. For instance, Schoenfeld (2006, pp. 1-2) highlights seven commonly held components: connecting service with learning, reflection, civic engagement, working as a team, experiential learning,

journaling, and celebration. These components are briefly explained below. Connecting service with learning occurs when students are actively engaged in meaningful service that has a positive impact on the community, which also fulfils a stated academic aim. Reflection is essential in developing critical thinking in students. Civic engagement places students in situations that will expand their civic awareness, compassion for others, and desire to be civically engaged. By working as a team students learn to strive for a common goal and by doing so acquire a variety of skills such as learning to communicate, be accountable, listen, and to lead. Experiential learning encourages students to take initiative, assume responsibility, and develop effective problem-solving skills through direct experience and hands-on learning. Journaling is a fundamental element of service-learning as it enhances the reflection process, improves thinking and writing skills. Celebration makes the culmination of the project meaningful where students have the opportunity to highlight their achievements and be congratulated on the work they have done for the community.

Literature on service-learning also points out links between service-learning and student leadership. For instance, Cooper (n.d.) highlights the need, when planning community service projects, to ensure that the project offers opportunities for student leadership. Rue (1996) argues that institutions with well-developed service-learning programs pay particular attention to student leadership development. She notes that such institutions not only take advantage of existing leadership programs, but create "specific programs for service-learning student leaders" (p. 257). A case in point is the intensive pre-orientation service-learning program for new students, where experienced student leaders introduce incoming students to service-learning in the context of the institution and its community (Rue, p. 258). Youniss and Yates (1997)

draw attention to the positive longer-term effects of service involvement on the leadership development of young people.

Student Leadership

There is a strong sense in the literature that student leadership should be centred on ministration, namely civic service (Chapman & Aspin, 2001; Moen, 1997), servant leadership (East, 1994) or leadership as ministry (Willmett, 1997). For instance, Chapman and Aspin argue that programs which develop student leadership need to promote social responsibility, community leadership, active citizenship and service leadership. East, in noting five principles of student leadership, suggests: "the blessing and burden of leadership can be chosen by people who feel ready to become servant to the community" (p. 147). Willmett underlines the need for a school community to "identify and develop the practice of student leadership as ministry" (p. 27). In addition, he argues: "if service is understood to mean to bring out the potential of another person because of a belief in the dignity of each person, then the particular approach to student leadership … will need to be invitational, cooperative and collaborative" (p. 27). Moen comments on the merit of service as a component of student leadership, noting "students not only learn the value of giving something back to society, but can readily practise skills while participating in a service project" (p. 1).

Various commentators have looked at what is involved in being a student leader. For instance, Wilding (2001) argues that student leadership requires integrity and good values. He notes that such leadership has its cost in time, energy and emotion, and is

essentially "service for others" (p. 1). Wright (1999) stresses that the right kind of leadership is "fundamentally about nurturing a better quality of humanity" (p. 26):

> leadership is about seeking to clarify what is most good, most true and most worthwhile and why it is such and then of seeking to create that environment of discipline, order, ritual, tradition and trust which will best enable noble action to follow noble thought or ideal. (p. 26)

Such requirements, Wright contends, are not beyond the capabilities of schools. In the same way, Hawkes (1999) points out that the task of school leadership is "to bring about within the school community a desire to know the good, desire the good, and do the good" (p. 24). He raises the need for school leaders to exercise a "servant heart" (p. 23) and suggests frequent checks to ensure this is the case. What this means for student leaders, Hawkes observes, is that they "are required to animate their communities, to excite their school to do the things that are worthy of them" (p. 23). Hawkes notes that student leaders are also required to anticipate, be pro-active, inspire confidence, believe in themselves and believe in others.

However, what does it mean to desire, bring about and do "the good"? Firstly, leadership is not all about heroics. One does not need to be a Xena Warrior Princess, a Lara Croft, a John Rambo or a Spiderman. Students do not have to be members of the senior cricket, softball, netball, or football teams to exercise leadership. Rather, as Hawkes (1999) points out, most leadership is covert and unassuming. It can be found "in the gentle word of encouragement, in the helping of another, the steering of a conversation, a suggestion, or some small service" (Hawkes, p. 21). Secondly, leadership is about meeting the needs of others. Student leadership should be based on the paradigm of servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

At first glance the notion of servant leadership can appear problematic. How can one serve while at the same time act as a leader? Greenleaf (1977) attempts to address this apparent contradiction by conceptualising the idea of servant leadership. He argues that servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first before leading. Greenleaf stresses that at the heart of such leadership is the wish "to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served" (p. 13). He concludes that the best test of servant leadership is: "Do those being served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 13). Greenleaf also asks what effect one's leadership will have "on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?" (p. 14). Such an approach to leadership not only casts doubts on an attitude where people "shoulder their way into leadership positions, driven by upward mobility and a thirst for personal success" (Beare, 1998, p. 2) but suggests an alternative that is "selfless, large-souled, (and) expansively visioned" (Beare, p. 3). It is a model of leadership which stands in stark opposition to leadership that is self-serving, manipulative and power-oriented.

Methodology

This research seeks to explore ways service-learning can promote and develop student leadership in secondary students. Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia have managed service-learning programs since 1997. As such, eleven Catholic schools in Perth and Bunbury were invited to participate in the research. The schools selected offer a cross-section of service-learning programs presently in use in secondary education in Western Australia. Five schools are co-educational: Bunbury

Catholic College, Corpus Christi College, La Salle College, Mercy College, and Servite College; three are all-boys schools: Aquinas College, Christian Brothers' College, Trinity College; and three are all-girls schools: Iona College, Mercedes College, Santa Maria College. From each, a teacher (respondent), who is closely involved in the school's service-learning program, was asked to complete a six-item qualitative questionnaire. Respondents were encouraged to discuss the questions with colleagues if they so desired. The questions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Questionnaire for teachers

1. What is the structure of the service-learning program at your school?
2. Why does your school undertake a service-learning program?
3. Does service-learning, either explicitly or implicitly, play a role in the development of student leadership? Please explain.
4. Please relate (if possible) one or two specific cases at your school of service-learning enhancing student leadership.
5. What else could be done within the service-learning program to promote student leadership at your school?
6. Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding student leadership and service learning at your school?

Questions 1 and 2 provide background information on each school's service-learning program. Questions 3 to 6 explore perceived ways service-learning programs could enhance students' leadership potential. Four themes emerged from the data. These were: Structure of Service-Learning, Rationale for Service-Learning, Developing Student Leadership, and Examples of Service-Learning Promoting Student Leadership.

Structure of Service-Learning

While each of the schools has tailored its service-learning program to the needs of the students and of the community, a number of common elements are evident. Firstly,

service-learning is strongly embedded in the schools. Students undertake programs commencing in Year 8 and complete their service-learning in either Year 11 or Year 12. Secondly, participation in service-learning is usually completed outside College hours. Thirdly, programs indicate a range of service activities commensurate with the age and maturity of the students. For example, Year 8 students are almost always involved in "Home Based" activities with a focus on family service. In Year 9 students generally participate in activities surrounding the home, neighbourhood and school. The focus in Year 10 is broadened to involve civic service. At Year 11 and Year 12, programs often take a strong social justice perspective. Examples include: a senior service project, a social action retreat where students work with service agencies over three days, participation in Street Appeals, and involvement with not-for-profit organizations like the Red Cross soup kitchen, Cerebral Palsy Association, and St Pat's Care breakfast preparation. Fourthly, while the number of hours of service required at each school varies, it generally increases as the students move from Year 8 to Year 11 or Year 12. Table 2 outlines one such school program:

Table 2

School Service-Learning Program

Year Level	Minimum Hours	Activity
Year 8	15	Home based
Year 9	15	Parish and Neighbourhood
Year 10	25	Parish and Civic
Year 11	30	Civic

Finally, all schools monitor student progress and assess their students at each of the Year levels. The most commonly used methods are journal writing, diary questions, discussion groups, class presentations, individual interviews and reflective papers.

Rationale for Service-Learning

Respondents provided a range of reasons for involving students in service-learning. These reasons can be categorized under three broad headings: faith in action, personal development, and social awareness. All respondents remarked on the connection between service and the Catholic ethos of their school, in particular, service as a way of putting faith into action. One respondent observed: "the service-learning program is a vital part of the College as both an extension of our Catholic teaching and for its unique educational value." Another respondent commented: "for young people, action, as a learning tool, reinforces words; there could not be a more appropriate way to teach the students to follow the example of Christ." A third respondent noted: "to be a follower of Jesus is to be committed to service which is rooted in mercy and justice for all, especially for the most marginalised and deprived people in our world." There was also strong reference to service exemplifying "core values" taught in a Catholic school.

Respondents commented on the way service-learning impacted on the personal development of students. For example, one respondent noted: "It is our understanding that through our Catholic Service Program we will aid in the development of young men who will become future leaders in their community and who will act with compassion and a strong sense of justice." Another respondent remarked that a student's involvement in service-learning "must demonstrate commitment, reliability, ability to complete a task, and a positive manner in the way she approaches a particular project." Other comments focused on learning life skills, encouraging the habit of giving, using gifts and abilities to care for others, character enhancement of students (and staff), and youth development.

The third main reason suggested by respondents for undertaking service-learning was that such experiences promoted social awareness. Comments included: "it opens students' eyes to social justice issues", "it empowers students to make necessary change in society", it promotes "the realisation that even though we see Charity as necessary, we must examine the causation of poverty, suffering and powerlessness which causes us to be charitable." Respondents remarked on the value of serving others in the community, especially the marginalised, the poor and the vulnerable. One respondent noted that service-learning is an important part of the College educational program because it "effectively empowers those who live comfortably to help others who don't." Another respondent commented that service-learning gave students "insight into the needs of our society" along with the opportunity "to develop a compassionate response to those needs through the building of meaningful relationships." Yet another respondent remarked: "we expect that the girls will find the time to serve the needs of others in our community through the service program."

Developing Student Leadership

There was a strong sense amongst respondents that service-learning provides opportunities for students to develop and exercise leadership skills. Comments include: "the development of student leadership is a 'hands on thing' with service", "meeting the challenges of service-learning develops character", "the Catholic Service and Justice Program plays an integral part in the growth of the boys' leadership development." Respondents also remarked on the fact that involvement in service-learning had the potential to develop leadership attributes in students which might not otherwise be developed. As one respondent pointed out: "the experience of giving service to others often enables students to develop confidence and appreciate abilities

that they were not aware of before." A second respondent noted, "many students, who may not have been earmarked as leaders in lower secondary, developed important qualities of leadership after being involved in service-learning programs." A third respondent remarked, "it is almost like some, through their service, develop a confidence that may not have come until much later in their life." This respondent went on to state, "I have seen this development more often in the quieter students who commit to challenging service activities … as a result the leadership qualities begin to develop or become apparent."

As well as providing general opportunities for leadership development, active involvement in service was an important consideration for formal leadership positions in the schools surveyed. Comments include: "all students who aspire and seek leadership roles at the College must have demonstrated a willingness and effort to serve others less fortunate than themselves", "in applying for leadership roles students are asked to indicate ways in which they have supported the Service and Justice aspects of the College values." Most schools incorporate a Service Captain, a Service Prefect, or a designated position for Service-Learning on the Year 12 Student Representative Council or Prefect Body. At some schools students who display "outstanding service and generosity" are awarded Community Service Colours.

Examples of Service-Learning Promoting Student Leadership

All respondents provided either specific or general examples where they believed service-learning enhanced student leadership development. Four examples serve to illustrate this point. The first relates to a group of "very community-minded female Year 11 students" in a coeducational college who assisted with the school's Education

Support Unit and the Perth Red Cross Soup Patrol. The respondent noted a change in these "quiet, conservative, studious young ladies", and suggested that their increased confidence "was born out of their passion for social justice." The students' confidence ultimately extended to speaking at assemblies and organising other service activities at the school. One from their number became head girl in 2007.

A second example pertains to the present Year 12 Prefects at another of the schools. The respondent noted that many of the Prefects are members of the Edmund Rice Outreach Group. Involvement in this group "requires students to take the lead in promoting and organising service activities in the school, speaking to classes, at assemblies and liaising with teachers and College staff." A third example concerns participation with a Red Cross Soup Patrol. The respondent noted that students are scheduled on every Sunday of the year, and involvement requires students "to use initiative, commitment, dedication, sacrifice and empathy." The respondent argued that such participation broadens students' "very narrow world view, making them more receptive to the challenges of being a leader in Year 12, and thus the wider community." In the fourth example the respondent remarked: "The Young Mercies and the Christian Service Learning Program in the College have been particularly good formation experiences for students wanting to take up a leadership position in the College." The respondent goes on to add, "many past head girls have been heavily involved in Young Mercies or particularly active in a number of service projects."

Implications for Improving Student Leadership

The research indicates four implications when considering how service-learning programs can enrich student leadership. The first three relate directly to student involvement. These are: service-learning provides increased opportunities for leadership, it has a positive impact on student leadership development, and it engenders an appropriate model of leadership for students. The fourth implication concerns how service-learning is resourced in schools.

Respondents were unanimous in their belief that participation in service-learning can enhance the development of leadership abilities in students. Their experiences of working with students in service-learning programs suggested that service-learning provides a range of opportunities where students are challenged to "step up", be proactive, act maturely, and exercise organisational skills. Furthermore, it appears from respondents' observations that many of their students are prepared to accept this leadership challenge.

Respondents indicated that service-learning can have a constructive impact on the leadership development of a student, irrespective of whether that student holds a formal leadership position. Such comments are of note, given the clear emphasis in the literature pointing to a range of benefits for students involved in school-based leadership (Appleton, 2002; Carey, 1994; Gordon, 1994). Moreover, many respondents indicated that service-learning experiences can positively enhance a student's prospects of being elected to a formal leadership position. A case in point is highlighted by one respondent, who conducts a three-day Social Justice Retreat for Year 11 students at his school. During this retreat students give of their time to work

with different not-for-profit agencies. The respondent stated: "Some students who have experienced this retreat have come back to school and pursued leadership roles in the school when they would not have done so without the retreat experience."

It was felt by many respondents that service-learning promotes the right kind of leadership in students. As one respondent remarked, "in a Catholic school the model of leadership we present to our students must be based on the teaching and life of Jesus Christ who clearly identified that the source of true authority and the sign of genuine leadership is the service of others." This respondent also observed that at her school "we are trying to develop a model of leadership which is grounded in the service of others." She went on to comment: "The values of compassion and justice, demonstrated by a genuine concern for others, are promoted as the true measure of a leader." Another respondent stated: "The real leaders are the ones that, despite their lack of public appointment, raise up out of the student body at times when others are looking for direction." This respondent believed that service involvement was a powerful indicator of these potential leaders. A third respondent commented that service-learning activities provided "a wonderful ministry to learn the humility of servant leadership", and noted that such service activities were a "fantastic formation for our young leaders of tomorrow." Yet a fourth respondent remarked on the "outstanding generosity, awareness of others and excellent communication skills" that students developed through involvement in service – attributes that students brought to their leadership. In addition, this respondent remarked that graduates from her College "can now be found working in East Timor, Medicine Sans Frontier, St Vincent de Paul and other worthy careers." Such sentiments sit well with literature on student leadership, which argues that student leadership should be centred on ministry

and service. Moreover, a leadership model based on the notion of service shifts the focus of leadership from power that emphasises the "I", to a notion of servant leadership with an emphasis on "the other".

Finally, respondents remarked on the importance of adequately resourcing service-learning programs. In particular, comments indicated an apparent disparity in the status, working conditions, and workload of service-learning coordinators. At one school service-learning is coordinated by a designed "Across School Director" who is given a 0.6 FTE, a promotional salary, and an agreed operating budget to run the program. Another school has a Coordinator of Christian Service who works closely with the Director of Student Ministry. Then again, in some schools service-learning is but one of a number of responsibilities for the person in charge. While at one school the hope is to engage the services of a Service Coordinator "in the not too distant future." Yet, as respondents pointed out, the demands of coordinating service-learning are considerable, especially when one factors in duty of care, record keeping, liability, and the volume of students involved in the program. Such demands, especially record keeping, may become more onerous in Western Australia now that the State Government has made service compulsory in secondary schools. The literature recommends, moreover, that service-learning programs need to be suitably budgeted, and staffed by people who have both the expertise and time to do the job properly (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Lavery & Richards, 2006; Rue, 1996).

Conclusion

This research set out to explore ways involvement in a service-learning program can enhance student leadership. What became clear in the comments of the eleven

teacher-respondents is that participation in service-learning can and does have a genuine and positive impact on the development of students' leadership abilities. Furthermore, because of the way the service-learning programs are embedded in the eleven-targeted schools, involvement in service-learning has the potential to provide leadership opportunities to a vast majority of students in these schools over a four or five year period. However, this research has only scratched the surface. The opinions of other key stakeholders (students, parents, service agencies) are essential if one is to build a comprehensive understanding of the various ways service-learning can promote leadership in secondary students.

References

Appleton, I. (2002). Fostering Leadership. *Learning Matters, 7*(1), 18-20

Beare, H. (1998). O For Leaders Who Have Great Souls. William Walker Oration, 27 September 1998, National Conference of the ACEA. Retrieved 3 March 2000 from Educatinal Leadership Online-Aus/Asia program; http://elo.eddirect.com/welcome.html.

Carey, P. (1994). Student Councils, Youth Programs and Critical Theory. *Connect 89*. 15-19.

Centre for Service and Leadership. (n.d.). *What is Service Learning?* Retrieved March 14, 2007 from http://csl.gmv/servicelearning.html

Chapman, J. & Aspin, D. (2001). Schools and the Learning Community: Laying the Basis for Learning Across the Lifespan, In D. S. Aspin, J. D. Chapman, M. Hatton & Y. Sawano (Eds.), *International Handbook on Lifelong Learning Part 2*. Dordecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Cooper, M. (n.d.). *Planning Your Next Successful Volunteer Project*. Retrieved 22 June 2005 from http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/planning.html

Department of Education and Training. (2007). *Community Service Program – Policy, Procedures and Guidelines*. Government of Western Australia.

East, T. (1994). Developing Systems that Support Youth Ministry. In T. East & J. Roberto, (Eds.), *Guides to Youth Ministry: Leadership*. New Rochelle: Don Bosco Multimedia.

Eyler, J. & Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Greenleaf, R. (1977). *Servant Leadership*. New York: Paulist Press.

Gordon, S. (1994). Encouraging Student Leadership. *International Schools Journal 14*(1). 43-51.

Hawkes, T. (1999). Conversation, *Independence* Autumn, 21-24.

Lavery, S. & Richards, J. (2006). Service-Learning: More than Just Volunteering. *Principal Matters* Autumn. 17-18.

Moen, N. (1997). *School Reform: Your Leadership Program Can Thrive Amidst the Challenges*. Rerieved July 13, 1999, from NASSP Home Page, National Association fo Secondary Principals http://www.nassp.org/news/1197lead.htm.

Rue, P. (1996). Administering Successful Service-Learning Programs. In B. Jacoby and Associates. *Service-Learning in Higher Education*. San Franscisco: Jossey Bass Publications.

Sacerdote, M. (2003). Student Leadership: How to Start and Support a Student Council at Your Program. Retrieved November 16, 2007 from http://www.sabes.org/administration/studentcourncils.htm

Schoenfeld, R. (2006). *Service-Learning: Bringing Together Students, Parents, and Community to Create a Better World.* Retrieved March 19, 2007 from http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/service_learning/schoenfeld.html

Wilding, W. (2001). Headmaster's Report, *College Magazine,* St Kevin's College.

Willmett, T. (1997). The Religious Dimension of Student Leadership: More than Captains and Prefects in a Catholic School. *Word of Life*. *45*(4), 25-28.

Wright, D. (1999). Fundamentals. *Independence* Autumn, 25-26.

Youniss, J. & Yates, M. (1997). *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.