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From Spectators of Public Affairs to Agents of Social Change: Engaging Students in the Basic Course through Service-Learning

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Public participation is the very soul of democratic citizenship; yet increasingly, a wall separates us from the world outside and from others who have likewise taken refuge in private sanctuaries. Concerns about community permeate nearly every aspect of American life from corporate boardrooms to classrooms of higher education (Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001). An important theme in Putnam’s (2000) chronicle of the collapse and hopeful revival of American community is the relationship between social change and generational change. Far from being the civic-minded generation of their predecessors, baby-boomers and Generation X seem less likely to be involved with their community ranging from participating in Parent Teacher Associations, voting in political elections, writing letters to the editor, and attending church functions. Despite positive correlations between education and civic involvement as well as higher levels of education among Generation X and their successors, growing evidence suggests Generation X prefers to “bowl alone.”
The spectator mentality of Generation X is chronicled in Sacks’ (1996) account of teaching in postmodern America (see also McMillan & Cheney, 1996). As “consumers” of an educational product, Generation X students are often highly demanding. Sacks attributes this in part to an increasingly materialistic and media-driven society that has created a “culture of young people who were born and bred to sit back and enjoy the spectacle that engulfed them” (p. 9). While Sacks paints a dim picture, we do not believe that his students are too much different than the students we have taught. Yet, we also believe that many of our students yearn for opportunities to create community(s). The challenge becomes, how do we engage our students in the learning process in ways that promote life-long learning and civic engagement?

Paralleling the decline in civic engagement during the late 20th century and the rise of the consumer mentality in the classroom, we witnessed a growing movement in higher education toward more accountability for connecting what we do as teacher-scholars to a larger social context (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Cushman, 1999; Swick, 2001). The communication discipline has been at the forefront of such changes (e.g., Applegate & Morreale, 1999; Cheney, Wilhelmsson, & Zorn, 2002; Conville, 2001; Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001), with Craig (1989, 1999) offering a useful argument that communication is a “practical discipline” through which scholars can engage in creative projects that both contribute to our disciplinary knowledge and address societal issues. Of particular note is the emergence of the service-learning movement in higher education in general and communication studies specifically, which is intended...
to: (a) help educators better intersect with broader host communities, (b) encourage students to be active agents in the learning process, (c) illustrate connections between what students learn and how they live, and (d) encourage educators and students alike to become agents of social change rather than spectators of public affairs (Kezar & Rhoads, 2002). In our attempts to meet the needs of local, state, national, and international communities, the discipline is returning to its classical roots and Aristotelian concerns for the reflexive relationship between discursive interchanges and community (Depew & Peters, 2001).

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines service-learning as an instructional method allowing students to systematically apply course material in community-based projects (Campus Compact, 2001). Derived from John Dewey’s (1927) perspective on experiential education and pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s as a learning model, service-learning projects encourage students to integrate theory with practice, reflect on their roles as citizens in a democracy, and provide meaningful service to others. The academic component of service-learning requires the connection between course curriculum and community service. Unlike traditional volunteering, service-learning offers participants the opportunity to bridge classroom objectives with community outreach. Service experiences take on new meaning when students not only summarize their experience but also reflect upon how the work itself connects to course material and objectives.

Our purpose is to contribute to the growing discussion of service-learning by focusing on the pedagogical justification for service learning and its usefulness in
speech communication basic courses. We draw on diverse literature as well as our own teaching and learning experiences and one author's experience as the faculty director of a campus-wide service-learning center. We begin by organizing extant literature around two key themes: (a) the connection of self to subject matter and (b) the connection of self to community(s). Next, we illustrate the potential usefulness of service-learning in speech communication basic courses. Woven throughout the manuscript are what we believe to represent “best practices” leading to rigorous learning experiences for students and meaningful service to society. Finally, we end with a few cautionary notes concerning the use of service-learning pedagogy.

CONNECTING SELF WITH SUBJECT MATTER

For many of our students their civic lives begin in school, which is second only to their family as a formative socializing force (Jablin, 2001). Through both formal and informal socialization students are taught (or not) the virtues of democratic participation, public discourse, and even economic mobility as they consume the capital of knowledge. The importance of educational institutions as socializing agents holds both promise and peril for the future of civic engagement. Sacks (1996) argues that students are generally unengaged and apathetic about learning. If students lack the motivation to learn, how can they suddenly materialize into citizens committed to civic engagement? Likewise, Postman (1985) argues that the materialistic and glitzy MTV culture has forced educators to adopt less rigorous and
even shallow techniques for entertaining (rather than teaching) students. Regardless of which perspective is used, the conclusion is the same: Students of Generation X (and their successors) do not demonstrate the same promise for civic engagement evident in previous generations. We do not necessarily maintain such a pessimistic viewpoint. We agree with Sprague (1993) that the most important arena for communication praxis is in our classrooms. As teachers we have the power to inspire, excite and engage—it is our responsibility to determine the appropriate techniques for using such power. Service-learning has become one of our most powerful tools for creating and maintaining student engagement. In this section we discuss service-learning in terms of its ability to connect self with subject matter.

Most teaching efforts at the college level are directed at matters of procedural knowledge — presenting theories, methods, and findings of our field (Aleman, 2002; Novek, 1999). Consequently, we often overlook the pivotal perspective of subjective knowing. When subjective knowing is dismissed, students may lose a sense of not only having, but owning their voices and opinions. The capacity for connected knowing must be nurtured to acquire more powerful thinking strategies. Feminist writers have long argued for reconfiguring teaching and knowing in the classroom in ways that connect students with the production of knowledge (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Clinchy, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Stanton, 1996). For instance, Stanton describes education as relational — a relationship that involves knowledge, attentiveness, and care directed not only at disciplinary material but also to students’ experiences and ever-evolving identity construction.
learning represents a pedagogy that allows students to explore and understand themselves—who they are and what they can become. As such, Novek (1999) describes service-learning as a feminist pedagogy because “service-learning is a useful strategy for challenging the (traditional) power relationships of traditional pedagogy” (p. 231). By connecting self with subject, students become part of learning communities in which knowledge is co-constructed and often emerge better able to articulate their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Connecting self with subject matter through service-learning illustrates Parker Palmer’s (1998) call for “courageous” teaching and learning. Palmer uses the principal of paradox to understand classroom dynamics and stress subjective engagement. He argues that teaching and learning require a higher degree of awareness than we ordinarily possess — an awareness that is heightened when we are caught in creative tensions. For example, Parker suggests that classrooms should honor the “little” stories of students and the “big” stories of disciplinary knowledge. Service-learning allows teachers to induce this creative tension. Because service-learning provides students with community-based experiences, space is created to hear stories of personal experience and identity construction in which the students’ inner teachers are at work. At the same time, the big stories of our discipline can be used to help frame students’ narratives and help them make sense of their experiences. “Teaching always takes place at the crossroads of the personal and the public,” argues Palmer, “and if I want to teach well, I must learn to stand where these opposites intersect” (p. 63).
Extant literature suggests that when service-learning is deliberately designed and rigorously implemented, it can help students build a bridge between academic texts and their experienced realities — the stories of a discipline and the stories of students’ lives (e.g., Artz, 2001; Eyler, 2000; Driscoll, 2000; Gibson, Kostecki, & Lucas, 2001; Novek, 1999; Shue O’Hara; Tucker & McCarthy, 2001; Zlotkowski, 2000). In optimal circumstances, a reflexive relationship occurs between theory and practice; service-learning experiences provide opportunities for students to use classroom material to inform their service experiences, and concomitantly, students use service experiences and their sense of self to examine, critique, and shape systems of thought. The true potential of service-learning is thus realized when students can evaluate evidence, judge conflicting claims, and understand material from a variety of perspectives. This standpoint reflects recent calls to engage in theorizing as transformative practice (Barge, 2001).

Viewing scholarship as transformative practice focuses our attention beyond a translation metaphor (e.g., Petronio, 1999) and on the relationships between theory and the lived experience and identities of the parties involved at the particular moment (Barge, 2001). Theorizing as transformative practice honors the contribution of those we work with and moves us to co-create a better life with them. Opportunities for critical thinking about the process of service-learning and the connection between self and subject matter (e.g., journaling, class discussion, essay questions, public presentations) are critical for the service-learning experience itself and to foster a lifetime of reflection for students (Cheney et al., 2001).
To summarize, we argue service-learning is an important pedagogy because it helps students connect with the subject. We now address how students make connections with their community(s) through service-learning experiences.

**CONNECTING SELF WITH COMMUNITY(S)**

Colby and her colleagues (2000) remind us that a primary purpose of the first American colleges and universities was the development of students’ characters as well as their intellects — especially their moral and civic development. Reflecting this orientation, Howard (2001) argues that for pedagogy to truly be called *service-learning*, it must emphasize “purposeful civic learning” and directly and intentionally prepare students for active civic participation and engagement in a diverse democratic society (see also Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamon, & Conners, 1998; Seifer, 1998). Civic learning is an important educational goal in an era where student interest in politics is declining (Sax, 2000). Indeed, research has documented learning outcomes of increased social awareness and civic responsibility when students participate in community service (Astin & Sax, 1998).

The research of Moely and her colleagues (2002) reinforces the benefits of having students connect with their community(s) through service-learning. They utilized the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) at the beginning and end of a semester to measure the attitudes of 541 undergraduate students — 217 who were doing service-learning and 324 students...
who were not. Students who were doing service-learning showed significant increases in (a) their plans for civic action, (b) assessments of their own interpersonal, problem-solving, and leadership skills, and (c) agreement with items related to issues of social justice.

One outcome of “purposeful civic learning” facilitated by community service emerges as students develop their “social capital.” The core idea of social capital theory is that connections among individuals — and corresponding norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness — have value, and so civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a network of reciprocal social relations (Putnam, 2000). Yet many students have not been socialized to truly appreciate social capital apart from networking for job-related contacts. As Putnam illustrates, in the last third of the 20th century, only mailing list membership to organizations whose members never meet has continued to expand, while “active involvement in face-to-face organizations has plummeted” (p. 630). We have seen this phenomenon in some of our students who might be referred to as “resume joiners” — involved in many organizations in name, but only active participants in a few of these.

McKnight (1995) contends a byproduct of decreased involvement and increased individualism in recent generations is the creation of systems to achieve the desire of most human services — care. Yet this is not possible because “care is the consenting commitment of citizens to one another. Care cannot be produced, provided, managed, organized, administered or commodified … Care is, indeed, the manifestation of a community” (p. x). Rhoads (1997) concurs that central to the process of community building is an ethic of care, which may be
fostered among students by community service participation including service-learning activities. The framing of care as commitment of citizens to one another highlights the importance of social capital. Students need to be aware of the connections among themselves and others; as Putnam (2000) describes, we need to widen awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked.

The more our students engage their community(s), the more they realize that people in general are trustworthy and operate with norms of reciprocity. We argue that service-learning provides opportunities for students to increase their social capital in ways that many pedagogical strategies cannot. Specifically, service-learning activities typically create opportunities for developing “bridging” social capital, which is outward looking and encompasses people across diverse social cleavages (Putnam, 2000). Individuals who are engaged with “bridging” their communities are generally more tolerant; the more people are involved with community organizations, the more open they are to gender equality and racial integration.

Loeb (1999) argues that many of our students sit on the sidelines not because they lack understanding of the complexities of community issues but rather because they do not believe that individual involvement in the public sphere is worthwhile. In this culture of individualism, people often feel there is not enough time to take care of anyone outside of “me and mine” and are caught up in busyness, consumerism and cynicism (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996). Those who find the time to serve others are thus “cast in the forms of heroism, altruism, activism, and volunteering.” This
creates (mistaken) beliefs that in order to become civically engaged we must be larger-than-life—someone with more time, energy, courage, vision or knowledge than most people could ever possess. Impulses toward involvement are dampened by a culture that does not view heroism as the work of ordinary human beings. Subsequently, we often become what Arendt (1961) once called “inner immigrants,” privately outraged at our society’s directions and problems, but publicly silent because we mistrust our ability to make a difference.

Extant literature suggests that service-learning can increase students’ self-perceptions about their abilities to make a difference (e.g., Elwell & Bean, 2001; Tucker & McCarthy, 2001; O’Hara, 2001). One outcome of service-learning we have witnessed in ourselves as well as our students is the cultivation of confidence in our abilities to make unique contributions to our communities. Additionally, service-learning seems to expand students’ awareness of the diversity of community organizations and their unmet needs. At a time when it seems that too often we leave social change to some distant heroes, service-learning provides opportunities for students to find their voice and create visions for a better future. Service-learning can connect students in the basic course with community by “challeng[ing] them to think about the larger social issues and how they might be able to contribute to change as members of a connected society” (Rhoads, 1997, p. 164).
ACADEMIC SERVICE-LEARNING IN COMMUNICATION BASIC COURSES

Daly (2002) argues that communication educators must find ways to make what we teach relevant to communication experiences outside of the classroom. He contends that “we have an ethical responsibility to address the concerns of people who want to become better communicators” (p. 381). The basic course is a foundational class which fosters new learning opportunities and exposure to the discipline of communication (Dance, 2002). Thus, it is vital to engage basic course students in learning opportunities that embrace the age-old dialectic of theory and practice. This can and should occur through active participation in service-learning projects in the basic course. In this section, we discuss various ways service-learning programs can be implemented in the basic course. While we particularize our suggestions for service-learning projects according to the specific type of basic course (public speaking or hybrid introduction to communication), many of our suggestions can be adapted across types.

Public Speaking Basic Courses

Public speaking courses offer rich environments for implementing service-learning programs. Service-learning can enrich the classroom environment while still achieving the basic goals of speech preparation, organization, and delivery. Furthermore, service-learning is a flexible pedagogy — depending on teacher needs, it can be designed for individual or collective assignments.
As one potential assignment, teachers can require speech topics (informative or persuasive) that include a community concern. Students would then investigate the community topic and develop a project allowing them to engage in the learning process through community involvement. For example, if a student chose to speak about the Big Brother/Sister program, there are various ways that she could engage in community participation. The student might present her speech to community and university organizations encouraging further participation in the program — acting as a spokesperson/recruiter while also practicing the very techniques of public speaking she is learning in the classroom. Subsequently, the student might even serve as a Big Brother/Sister, engaging in the community involvement she has suggested of her audience during the speech.

Another way we can involve our classes in service-learning is to choose a community issue (large enough to meet the needs of the class size) and have students choose topics of interest that fall within that broader issue. For instance, if the community issue chosen for or by the class was education, students would have a variety of topics to choose from — ranging from financial support for teachers to healthy eating habits in elementary schools. The audiences could range from the Board of Education to kindergarten classrooms. All students would target their speeches to a specific audience, which encourages active engagement in audience adaptation as well as a hands-on, “real world” application of public speaking activities. As a variation, the class could be broken into small groups that work together to present...
speeches collectively, which also allows students to practice their group communication skills.

Primary objectives of public speaking courses include enhancing speaking and listening skills through learning new vocabularies, developing distinctive patterns of speaking, and learning about the multi-sensory process of symbolic interaction through which we define ourselves and our environment (Friedrich & Boileau, 1999). Community based projects afford basic course instructors opportunities to evaluate students’ achievement of these objectives in ways that also encourage students, through first-hand experience, to reflect on the role of symbolizing in a diverse, democratic society. Many community settings and social topics are characterized by co-cultural issues including gender roles, family structure, religious and spiritual identification, space and distance orientations. Service-learning in the public speaking course becomes a vehicle for understanding the diversity of challenges facing speakers in a postmodern world.

It is important for basic course instructors to remember that structured formal feedback is essential in the learning process. Unless service-learning results in substantive cognitive development, we believe that it has no place inside the classroom. When we integrate service-learning in our courses, we award academic credit for the learning associated with service and not for the service itself. If applied properly, service-learning pedagogy can be more rigorous than traditional teaching strategies. Students are not only required to master the standard text and lecture material (e.g., rhetorical canons of invention, arrangement, style, and de-
(delivery), but they must also apply those concepts/theories in an appropriate context.

When designing service-learning projects, a key question for basic course faculty is “how can I assess student performance in order to fairly evaluate the learning outcomes from the service experience?” What did each student learn? To what degree did students fulfill the course objectives? First and foremost, service-learning (like any other assignment) should represent an authentic assessment opportunity. At the heart of the public speaking course is the intersection between speaker, audience, and speech. Assessment of service-learning projects should include analyses of students’ abilities to analyze (and adapt to) community audiences, conduct and critique research, develop and organize arguments using valid and reliable evidence and sound reasoning, and create identification with audiences.

**Hybrid Introduction to Communication Courses**

Hybrid introduction classes span the field of communication by teaching aspects of interpersonal, group, organizational and/or public communication. Consequently, the nature of the class offers several possibilities to engage students in service-learning projects. When teaching group concepts and skills, student groups might identify a need of the community and then develop (i.e., coordinate, plan and enact) a program to address that particular need. For example, a group could identify a need for supporting the American Red Cross and coordinate a blood drive on campus or in the community. Here the students would be engaged in working as a collective group aimed at serving a com-
mon goal as well as actively participating as community members. This would also serve to illustrate and use the skills of organizational communication, in that the students would be working closely with an established organization in the community.

Students can also be engaged at the interpersonal level. One possibility is to develop a community reading program at local schools or the public library. Students could serve as mentors for children in the community in their reading while at the same time practicing skills of interpersonal communication by interacting with young children. Similarly, classes could coordinate community activity fairs (for education and/or entertainment) for families to interact on a personal basis with college students in their community. These fairs would provide students an opportunity to utilize group, interpersonal, and organizational skills attained in the class. From this project the students gain practical application of classroom learned skills and the community gains a positive relationship with the university and an opportunity for family activity.

It is our responsibility as educators to create concrete reflection assignments to assess the connection of the service experience to course objectives (Gibson, Kostecki, & Lucas, 2001). Weintraub (1999) suggests, “for service-learning to be pedagogically sound, reflection must also be a key element in the service-learning process” (p. 123). One way to assess students’ understanding of course material and application to community need is to require regular journal entries applying the communication concepts to their experiences outside of the classroom. Another option for assessment is final papers encapsulating the entire service-learning experi-
ence through an illustration of communication theory and practice. These evaluation methods allow students to articulate what they have learned through the coursework and allow instructors to assess the merit of the service-learning assignment. For instance, basic course instructors can encourage students to reflect on connections between theories that have relational components (e.g., attributional confidence, social exchange theory) and the service-learning experience. At the same time, students can write about issues of uncertainty reduction, information processing, identification, group roles, and managing conflict as they emerged through the service-learning project.

It is important to note that given the nature of the basic course (lower level/younger classes), some students may not possess the appropriate maturity level to appreciate and engage in the activity in a meaningful way. Therefore, it is necessary that the instructor is aware of this potential hindrance and actively takes into consideration methods to overcome it. Mandatory regular assessment and instructor observations of the service-learning project can aid in the management of this potential problem. Students also could be required to keep committee logs documenting hours of participation and levels of participation over time. Overall, these examples serve as a starting point for basic course instructors — variations of these projects can be adapted to best serve the needs of the community as well as the classroom.

As previously argued, by connecting self with subject, students become part of learning communities in which knowledge is co-constructed, and subsequently often emerge better able to articulate their knowledge,
skills, and abilities. These examples of academic service-learning can aid students and instructors in the process of developing a sense of identity through active engagement with course materials in personal experiences outside of the classroom. When they have opportunities to apply communication theory to relevant real world experiences, students may more fully understand their position or identity within the subject matter at hand. Weintraub (1999) suggests, “service-learning works because it bridges theory and practice and allows students to meet the goals of any given course while accomplishing something worthwhile” (p. 123). This connection between theory and practice should not be ignored in the basic course, but should instead be embraced.

Further, these assignments (or ones like them) provide means for students to better understand their role in the community through civic participation in service-learning programs. Many of the options we have outlined above provide students with exposure to various opportunities that promote long-term community involvement. One of the outcomes of service-learning programs is that it benefits both the student and the community by creating lasting partnerships with the potential for future involvement. As we have argued, engaging students from Generation X and their successors in community issues can be difficult. Service-learning provides meaningful opportunities that aid in the bridging of self and community.
A Few Cautions on Service-Learning

Service-learning, like any pedagogical tool, presents risks and rewards. Instructors need to be aware of potentials and pitfalls before committing themselves to a service-learning project. Throughout our reflections we have emphasized the importance of community. Yet we would be remiss to imply that all communities and the social capital that bind them are positive. Some forms of bonding social capital can encourage intolerance and prejudice toward other “different” communities. In fact, communities are often defined by exclusion as well as inclusion (Shepherd & Rothenbulher, 2001). In addition, scholars across disciplines have questioned whether community/social capital, liberty and tolerance are inherently in opposition. As Putnam (2000) reflects, there is a perception among many that “community” restricts freedom and encourages intolerance.

Yet because service-learning is an academic endeavor, classroom reflection can center on these very questions. Trethewey (1999) challenges educators to adopt a critical standpoint when using service-learning by encouraging students to ask questions about social structures, ideology, and social justice as well as the ways that others’ lives are shaped by such forces. How can we create strong communities that are not disenfranchising? Who should be planning social justice, through what processes, toward what ends, and for whose benefit? Through programmatic reflexivity, students may come to understand the socially constructed nature of societal problems and solutions as well as how individuals they encounter in the service-learning expe-
rience are positioned in certain ways by such social discourses.

One service project is not a panacea for deeply rooted social problems, and educators must reflect on concerns the long-term effects of one semester’s project on an agency (Crabtree, 1999). A semester (or quarter) system is often too short to allow for bona fide participation at the community-level. This long-term issue needs to be confronted by faculty and students if service-learning is to be implemented ethically and responsibly. Additionally, the issue of potential exploitation must be addressed. Individuals and organizations within communities should not be exploited for the learning opportunities of (sometimes) elite college students. “We must recognize that communities are not voids to be organized and filled by the more knowledgeable; they are well-developed, complex, and sophisticated organisms that demand to be understood on their own terms” (Gamson, 1997, p. 13). Artz (2001) describes a phenomenon called “service-learning-as-charity” in which middle-class students become aware of particular injustices, generally participate in community service intervention, but stop short of serious consideration of the systemic practices and relations that give rise to the social conditions at hand. Problematizing the service-learning experience itself may lead to critical awareness and perhaps lasting social change.

Another immediate response to the call for educators to participate in service-learning is that there is not enough time for instructors or professors to do everything they want to in a course, especially in light of professional pressures on faculty which often place emphasis on refereed publications (Stacey & Foreman, 1999).
One author served as faculty director of a campus-wide center whose mission was to institutionalize service-learning across campus. Time and again, she heard faculty suggest that service-learning takes too much time and too many resources. We recognize that many service-learning projects take more time and energy than traditional classroom assignments and that reward structures tend to devalue teaching innovations and service. We also believe that if service-learning is to reach its true potential, tenure and promotion considerations must favorably recognize the student learning and community outcomes associated with service-learning projects as well as the time commitment on the part of faculty. However, too often service-learning is perceived as taking time away from the study of course content and requiring additional resources that could be used for other existing needs. Service-learning need not be an addition to current course requirements. Likewise, service-learning should not change or add to what we teach; rather, it changes how we teach. Some of the traditional classroom content accumulation activity is replaced with more dynamic information processing activity.

Service-learning pedagogy does require educators to reconsider the belief that time spent infusing students with knowledge is the sole or most important function of higher education. It is important that faculty reserve enough class time for meaningful reflection. Additionally, educators will usually spend more time planning a course with a service-learning component — time spent cultivating relationships with community partners. In fact, an important principle in developing a service-learning based course is “intention” which can occur...
months before the actual class begins (Gibson, Kostecki, & Lucas, 2001). Authentic and meaningful service-learning experiences require educators to clearly connect learning objectives and desired outcomes with community needs before the experience begins. Campus-wide centers for service-learning can play an important support role for faculty in the planning and implementation of service-learning. Such centralized centers can cultivate campus-community connections, match course content with service sites and their needs, help instructors design assessment procedures for the service-learning experience, and trouble-shoot problems that may occur throughout the learning experience. Ultimately, the question to resolve is this: Are resources (e.g., classtime, preptime, etc.) well spent, or could they be better spent in other ways? As proponents of service-learning, we affirm its use because of personal experience and ample evidence that service-learning positively impacts students’ personal and social development and enhances cognitive learning (e.g., Astin & Saks, 1998; Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, 2000).

**Conclusion**

Universities are often accused of being out of touch with the publics they serve. Generation X and their successors are often accused of lacking civic-mindedness. Professors are often accused of being overly esoteric. Communication studies can and should measure its success, in part, by how it comes to terms with the full array of social issues that characterize our age (Cheney et
Service-learning pedagogy is a way to unite these various community stakeholders and engage in self-reflection and dialogue around values, skills, and interests. Service-learning requires a willingness to take risks and embrace uncertainty on the part of the teacher, especially the risk of inviting open dialogue and not knowing where it will lead. Yet, some of our most rewarding teaching and learning experiences occurred through the messiness of student-teacher-community dialogue.

As an introduction to the 2001 special issue of *Southern Journal of Communication* on service-learning in communication studies, editor Richard Conville relies on Northrop Frye’s notion of the “educated imagination” to suggest that service-learning is a powerful pedagogical tool for educating the imaginations of our students. Students’ imaginations of how society can be, and their ability to help create it, can be cultivated through experiences provided by service-learning. “Experience educates; thus service-learning educates the imagination: by joining community service with classroom theorizing, our students enlarge their vision of the society they want to live in” (p. 185). We would add to Conville’s analogy that because service-learning helps students connect both self with subject and self with community, as pedagogy it is a vehicle to engage basic course students and ourselves as agents of social change rather than as mere spectators of public affairs.


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