Enhancing “Leader Development” through Service Learning and Building Service-Learning Programs’ Capacity for Leadership: The Intercultural Leadership Program at Poole Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan

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Developing Leaders and Leadership in Service-Learning Programs

Nowadays it is widely acknowledged in America that service learning (SL) encompasses many types of learning: academic, social and civic as well as personal and interpersonal (Howard 2001). As Zlotkowski puts it, “service-learning projects promote the development of the ‘whole person’” (2006:5). In the last twenty years, many practitioners of service learning have recognized that this experience-based pedagogy offers a unique opportunity to develop leadership skills (Dillon and Van Riper 1993; Althaus 1997; Zlotkowski, et al. 2006). In a survey of ideas about effective leadership, the experiential educator Timothy Stanton identifies “vision, learning how to learn from experience, judgment in action, cognitive initiative, and enabling others to learn and take action” as the core educational content of leadership development (1990:336). In examining leadership courses and community service opportunities, he finds that they address some of the knowledge areas needed by leaders but fall short in effectively addressing “the cognitive learning-to-learn and ‘judgment in action’ skill areas or the aspects of leadership that involve the effective enabling and facilitating of action by others.” He concludes that “service learning is particularly well suited, maybe uniquely suited, to helping students acquire these last set of skills” (1990:345). Service learning, Stanton argues, represents “not just the application of these skills and abilities”, but more significantly can be “a catalyst for their development” (1990:338).

The challenge for those of us involved in service-learning programs, especially on small campuses where resources and expertise are limited, is how to establish and carry out effective leadership training when we ourselves have no background in this field. A case study of Poole Gakuin is instructive in this respect because we have had to arm ourselves with the literature on leadership and service learning, design a program as best as we could envision, and then
learn from our mistakes and from the feedback system that we set in place at the beginning. Reading through the literature available today on various types of service-learning leadership -- for example, the cases in the Zlotkowski volume (2006), “Students as Colleagues” -- it becomes apparent that most leadership components of service learning evolved similarly with varying degrees of success and ample experimentation and adjustment.

In this paper, we describe the evolution of our service-learning leadership program at Poole Gakuin University and what we have learned about leadership education as it relates to our students and our particular program. We argue that, on the one hand, the introduction of leadership education into our SL program has been a catalyst for the development of the skills mentioned by Stanton. We also draw on two concepts from The Center for Creative Leadership to assert that, on the other hand, the introduction of a leadership program strengthened and enhanced our entire SL organization. This unforeseen consequence has not been widely recognized in the SL literature.

The Service-Learning Program at Poole Gakuin University

The service-learning program has evolved over the last 12 years as our Faculty of Intercultural Studies has developed. In 1996 at the creation of the department, overseas group volunteer programs began and over the next ten years were carried out for 3 weeks in locations such as Nepal, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, United Kingdom and the USA. After the group trip, students could choose to return to the overseas site and, for credit, continue to volunteer for 6 months to 1 year. The volunteer activities ranged from introducing Japanese language and culture to baseball coaching, house building or working in an NGO/NPO. These activities were not originally referred to as “service learning.” We discovered the pedagogy of SL when we were exploring for ways to enhance the educational quality of the experiences. Even today, some of our faculty prefer to use the term “kyodou,” meaning “collaboration on equal terms for a mutual benefit,” rather than SL to describe the goal and nature of these programs (Musselwhite 2004).

During the 2004 changes in the curriculum that added an accredited course called “Service Learning”, four teachers began planning for a domestic community service-learning program that would start as a pilot project in April of 2005. Simultaneously, a leadership program was also designed for 2006. In 2005, we were fortunate to receive a 4-year grant of $10,000 per year from the Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan. We hired a part-
The Domestic Service-Learning Program

The specialty of the four teachers who initiated the program influenced the service-learning activities that could be offered to the local community; an educator specializing in multicultural activities that could be offered to the local community; an educator specializing in multicultural education, a sociologist specializing in social welfare, a linguist specializing in Japanese-language education, and an educational anthropologist working in intercultural education. The multicultural educator left for a new department in 2007 and was replaced by a faculty member from the English department in 2008. In 2009, another member of the Intercultural Education Department was added.

The initial service activities were educational, welfare related, and Japan-based international activities, including community service and cultural exchange programs. profiles were created for the disabled or elderly, or a public run after-school daycare center for the disabled or elderly, or a publicly run after-school daycare center. The faculty agreed with the emphasis in the American service-learning literature that reflection is crucial and that the service period needs to be followed by a reflection session.
to be based on an extended contact with the host. During the first two years of the program, although students received credit for the course titled “Service Learning”, since the actual time of activities varied tremendously, the course was not placed into the weekly time schedule. This arrangement meant that reflection sessions had to be scheduled during lunchtime. At the beginning of the school year in April, several meetings were held to explain about service learning to the students, after which they could sign up to participate. The registration happened separately from the usual course registration. Next the students were matched with their preferred activity in a time slot that would fit their schedule. After the weekly service assignments started to take place in May, students would meet regularly, usually twice a month, during a lunch hour with the supervising teacher to hold reflection sessions. The lack of a regular time slot in which to manage the program and carry out focused reflection, not to mention the loss of lunchtime for teachers and students, proved to be a problem. From the April 2007 school year, a course entitled Service Learning has been integrated into the regular class schedule for each semester. All students who are signed up for Service Learning attend the weekly 90-minute class, in addition to weekly service activity. Reflection sessions now occur every week. For the first month of the semester we have interviews to match students with activities, orientation to the activity, a formal visitation to meet with the partner institution’s staff, confirmation about requirements of the program and then the service begins.

In order to obtain 2 credits for the Service Learning class, the students must actually “serve” at their assigned site for at least 40 hours. They are also expected to spend an additional 50 hours of “learning” time attending the orientation in April, the mid-semester presentations, their activity group’s reflection session, writing up their weekly reflection journal and the final report. In the case of students working in the public schools, even if they exceed 40 hours of activities, they are expected to continue their service until the end of the school year since the teachers rely on their help. If students choose to do so, they could apply the extra hours to the next 2-credit Service Learning “B.” In all, there are 4 classes of service learning: A, B, C, and D for a total of 8 credits.

Intercultural collaboration is a central theme in our International Studies Department and the main goal of our service-learning activities. Engagement in these educational and welfare-related service activities and participation in the program, itself, exposes the students to intercultural collaboration on multiple levels. Both Japanese and foreign students participate and the children with whom they work are Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Brazilian. There are also generational differences – interacting with young children or senior citizens – and the
differences of space and context that offer another dimension of intercultural experience. For a foreign student to enter a Japanese public school or a university student to enter a facility for the developmentally disabled is to interact in an entirely new sub-cultural setting and to grapple with its social and cultural meaning. This was the underlying vision for the educational content of our service-learning program. We had hoped the service experience would heighten students’ awareness of functioning in intercultural contexts and that reflection on intercultural communication and multicultural issues would occur in the class discussions. As will be seen later, we have not succeeded in this goal as far as our leaders are concerned.

In addition to students’ first-hand experiences with and reflection upon intercultural collaboration, the educational goals of the program are more specifically addressed in the activity-based reflection groups. These groups vary in size from three to twelve students. It is generally assumed that students engaged in, for example, Japanese language support, are or have been enrolled in the Japanese language education class taught by the faculty member who leads that reflection group. In this way, course content is used as a basis for student’s preparation for and analysis and understanding of their service experience. In other words, this discipline-based model of service learning is two-tiered. At one level, involvement in the program promotes the core departmental objective of teaching about intercultural collaboration. At a second level, more specific course content is also reinforced.

The Service-Learning Leadership Program: Initial Conception

We began in fall semester of 2006 with two basic types of leadership roles: domestic service learning leaders and overseas service learning leaders. The overall structure here is still in place at this time. Any student can apply if they have already participated in either the domestic or overseas programs (2-4 credits), can obtain a positive letter of recommendation from the SL faculty in charge and have good academic standing. The teachers tend to keep an eye out for promising students and approach them towards the end of the year about becoming a leader for the next year. However students can nominate themselves and we have not turned anyone down yet. The basic requirements of the program are that the students will serve for at least one year as a leader, in the case of domestic SL, or for one overseas trip, in the case of the international SL leader. They will also satisfactorily complete the leadership seminar (2 credits). Upon graduation, they receive a certificate from the President of the university recognizing their participation in the leadership program.
At the end of fall semester in 2006 we sent one student on an overseas trip as a leader. This was a “pilot project” and this student helped to define the role that the overseas leaders could play. In 2007, nine students enrolled in the leadership seminar, and therefore the program; five were overseas SL leaders and four were domestic SL leaders. The 2008 seminar had an enrollment of eleven students; again, four students served as domestic SL leaders. For reasons that will be explained later, most of the analysis below focuses on the domestic SL group rather than the overseas group.

Students who serve as leaders receive a stipend. A remuneration system for students who help with classes already existed and we applied to have our domestic SL leaders compensated accordingly. The university permits up to 30,000 yen, approximately $388.00 at 2011 exchange rates for each “SA” (student assistant) at 1,000 yen per hour. In the case of leaders for the overseas SL programs, we initially wanted to pay their entire expenses to go on the 3-week trip. This did not work out for several reasons and by 2008 the compensation for being a leader on the overseas trips was 30,000 to 40,000 yen, in line with the domestic leader’s payments.

The Concept of Leader and Leadership

At the beginning of our program, we had examined several definitions of leadership, all of which had components that we felt comfortable with: inclusive leadership, the servant-leader concept, which was very difficult to translate into Japanese, transformational leadership, the leadership styles approach and collaborative or team leadership. Recent research on leadership had shifted from emphasizing particular traits with which a person is born to a more complex model of leadership that recognized it as a skill and ability that could be acquired, behaviors that could be emulated and a relational process centered in communication and collaboration between leaders and followers (Northouse 2009:3). As Peter Northouse states in the first chapter of his new textbook, Introduction to Leadership, Concepts and Practice, we all are asked to be a leader, “whether to lead a classroom discussion, coach a children’s soccer team, or direct a fund-raising campaign” (2009:1). While a part of our daily lives, leadership is something that we continue to learn about for most of our lives. Another emphasis in these models is respect for difference and varying leadership styles. In the case of The Center for Creative Leadership, the researchers had examined the commonalities across models of leadership and outlined

“a number of capabilities that are necessary for leader development: self-management and
self-awareness capabilities, ability to balance conflicting demands, ability to learn, possessing leadership values such as honesty, integrity, personal initiative, and a positive attitude; ability to build and maintain relationships, ability to build effective work groups, communication skills, ability to develop others; management skills, ability to think and act strategically, think creatively, initiate and implement change (McCauley 2004:12-15).

As mentioned earlier, a central theme in our department and an educational objective for our SL program is grasping the concept of “intercultural collaboration.” The underlying idea that leadership skills and abilities could be acquired, that effective leadership entailed including all members, respecting difference and enabling everyone to contribute to the group’s goal comprised an approach to leadership that fit well into our program. We decided to call this “collaborative leadership.”

We began the program with the following goals for our leadership program:
1. To gain an extended experience and understanding of the notion of “intercultural” and what it means to communicate cross-culturally.
2. To experience a collaborative (協働) activity and understand what it means to function effectively as a leader.
3. To have opportunities to improve one’s communication skills and learn new ones.
4. To have opportunities to improve one’s social skills and learn new ones.
5. To have opportunities to develop one’s ability to reflect on one’s self (self-awareness).

The Intercultural Leadership Seminar

Students in the SL leadership program must take the 2-credit 1 semester (once a week for 15 weeks) Intercultural Leadership Seminar either before they serve as a leader or concurrently with their first semester as a leader. The students taking this seminar include both domestic SL leaders and overseas SL leaders. The original design of the seminar introduced students to various concepts of “leadership” and to interpersonal skills for leadership. This included ice-breaking techniques, team building, time management, goal setting, vision setting, active listening, establishing trust, communication and intercultural communication techniques, conflict resolution techniques, the nature of learning in SL and reflection techniques.

As will be discussed below, the greatest weakness of this seminar is its complete
detachment from the actual leader experience. Given the make-up of the group, it is not necessarily the case that all students are actively engaged in leadership practice at the time they take this course. The potential overseas SL students may not become leaders until months or even a year later. This means that it is difficult to bridge theory and practice in the context of the seminar, since the actual application happens later.

As a result, the leadership seminar has evolved into a balance between the introduction of theory and skills and significant emphasis on simulations and problem solving. This latter focus developed from actual problems that emerged during the SL activities, both domestic and overseas.

Assessment of the Program

The SL coordinator interviewed the leaders twice during their service year in 2007: after their first semester and again at the end of the second semester. The purpose of the interview was to gauge what students were getting out of the program and to what extent they grasped the “collaborative leadership” or “intercultural collaboration” concepts. All interviews were recorded. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, starting with a set of questions that were asked to all leaders, but allowing students to elaborate their answers or introduce related thoughts. The coordinator then summarized the content of the interviews. The results of those interviews became the basis for the changes that we made in the program as described below.

The Evolution of the Program and Unexpected Outcomes

By the end of the first semester in 2007, we realized that there was not a firm consensus among the faculty about what the leader-students should be expected to do, or, indeed, could do. The American member was influenced by the American SL literature. For example, the University of San Diego was using leaders for both service-learning workshops and site coordinators. The program at North Carolina State University trained their students to be “reflection leaders.” Many universities reported that SL programs and leadership programs had been set up at the insistence of and in partnership with the students. This American teacher, understandably, had high, but perhaps unrealistic, expectations for student involvement. In contrast, the three Japanese faculty members had much lower expectations. The students
should function as the teachers’ assistants, acting as announcers for presentations, giving talks about their own SL experience at orientations and help with manual work related to making copies and brochures. While the American teacher was telling the students in the leadership seminar that this was their program and they should help to shape it, the actual roles as leaders were more along the lines of following instructions from teachers and the coordinator. This confusion about what exactly was their role was reflected in the results of the interviews. Leader-students were not clear about what they were supposed to do. One student did not even understand clearly the connection between the leadership program and the SL program. It was pointed out that the students had had an informal and brief explanation of the leadership program but no formal orientation.

The interviews also highlighted other problems. The leadership seminar’s content appeared to be too theoretical and not practical enough for the needs of the program. The 2007 leader students could not even talk about models of leadership and what kind of leader we were aiming for in this program. Another finding was that leaders failed to appreciate the “intercultural” dimension of their leadership context. This was despite the fact that two of the 2007 leaders were foreign students and in 2008, one student was Brazilian Japanese and one was Chinese Japanese. As an educational goal, this remains unrealized. Finally, one positive result from the interviews was that the students expressed satisfaction at being in the program and each personally felt that their leadership skills had improved.

In reflecting on these results, we identified several problems. One that was easily addressed concerned the seniority of the leaders. In 2007 all of the 9 leaders, both domestic and overseas, were seniors except for one. In Japan, seniors tend to be extremely busy with job hunting and frequently miss classes. The attendance in the leadership seminar was poor. This meant that many of the concepts and skills that had been introduced were missed by a significant number of the students. We concluded that seniors were not committed enough and we should make a point of “raising” first year students to become leaders in their second and third year. From 2008 two sophomores, one junior and one senior enrolled as domestic SL leaders and three seniors and 4 sophomores signed up for the overseas group. It was also communicated to the group that absences would not be tolerated in the seminar. As a result, the interviews with the 2008 students indicated that they fluently understood the concept of leadership for which we were aiming. Moreover their understanding and satisfaction with their roles significantly improved.

In 2008 we introduced several changes that made our second year much more successful.
First, on the day of the SL class, a lunch meeting was established at which all leaders, instructors and the SL coordinator would attend. This was an opportunity to share information: the plans for that day’s class and any other scheduling matters, progress reports on reflection sessions, student absences, upcoming presentations, and so on. But it was more than this. To attend a regular meeting with the instructors and coordinator instilled in the students a sense that their role was important, their participation vital and their perspective essential to building a solid and effective SL program. Trust was built and they became partners in this endeavor. Over the course of the year, we watched the students’ identity as leaders develop and blossom. They shifted from students who followed the teacher’s directions to students who thought for themselves, expressed their opinions and acted. This occurred, in part, because they had this shared identity as “leaders” and were stimulated by each other. While working with the SL students allowed them to practice some leadership skills, it was in this mutually supportive and sometimes combative environment that self-awareness, initiative, communication skills and understanding of teamwork were nurtured.

In effect, the locus of leadership training for the domestic SL leaders had been shifted from the leadership seminar, comprised of two different groups of students, to a lunchtime setting that had a sense of belonging. This shift will allow us to continue to build more structured and appropriate feedback techniques into the training of our leaders.

Simultaneously, the role of the coordinator intensified, and the overall internal organization of the program, including clarification of each group’s roles, was strengthened. Until 2008 the coordinator handled the office side of the SL program and was one interface between the partner community organizations and the university. From 2008 the coordinator joined in the leadership seminar, the SL classes and all other functions related to SL including the orientation, vaccination check, presentations, reflection sessions and initial introduction for students to the service site. The connections between teachers and coordinator, coordinator and leaders, and leaders and teachers were clarified and solidified. Leadership became the “property of the whole organization” (McCaeley & Van Velsor 2004:418).

There are two concepts, both drawn from The Center for Creative Leadership, that help make sense of what we have encountered in our first two years. First, the needs of the target population must be well understood when designing a leader’s training program. What would be relevant to the leadership challenges that your group faces? For example, they continue,

“a program for entry-level managers might be aimed at helping them learn to influence others
and build credibility for their management skills. A program for mid-level managers may be focused on developing others and maintaining effective life balance. A program for senior executives might focus on enhancing strategic leadership skills or changing the ingrained behavior patterns that helped them to move up in their organizations but are becoming less effective as they near the top of the ladder.” (2004:28)

We did not fully appreciate this idea at the beginning. At their age and given the socialization that they have had in the Japanese school system, our students needed structure and belonging. They required that learning to be a leader occur within the context of a team of leaders. In this setting, they were able to feel safe about learning to express themselves in a group with adults, taking initiative to raise issues and voice their opinions and prepare for the work of acting as leader vis-à-vis the students in the SL class. For students who have not had many chances to be leaders before, there is considerable discomfort with this role and they need legitimization from the group context. The second concept takes us beyond understanding the needs of the target group to considering the needs of the organization itself.

*The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development* draws a distinction between “leader development,” focused on the individual, and “leadership development.” The latter, leadership development, concerns not the individual but the functioning of the institution. It is the “expansion of the organization’s capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks needed for collective work: setting direction, creating alignment and maintaining commitment” (McCauley & Van Velsor 2004:18). This is particularly true, they argue, for the complex challenges that organizations face today – many too complex for individual leaders to fully comprehend alone. In other words, “organizations must not only develop individuals but also develop the leadership capacities of collectives (for example, work groups, teams, and communities)” (2004:19). This idea can be interpreted at various levels in one’s organization. For us, in the case of a SL program at a small institution (1500 students), it first poses the question had we sufficiently set the stage – developed the leadership capacities – for our program as a whole? Would the collective work of the program, the teacher’s role, the coordinator’s duties, and the leaders’ contributions – function smoothly and reinforce the aims and commitments of the parties involved? This was what we failed to recognize at the beginning: raising individual leaders was not enough. We had to create a program with organizational capacity for leadership:

“… if leadership is viewed as a property of the whole organization, success in facing complex
challenges is dependent on the organization’s ability to develop all aspects of the organization that contribute to leadership. From this expanded perspective, leadership development also includes developing elements other than individual leaders, such as the interconnections among organizational members and the organizational practices and systems that enable people to work together (Bal and Quinn 2001; Liu and O’Connor 2001; O’Connor 2002)” (McCauley & Van Velsor 2004:418-419).

Of course, the above refers to huge complex organizations, but the point, nevertheless, applies to our small-scale case. In order to effectively develop and enhance the leadership experience and skills of the students, the program itself must have interconnections, organizational practices and systems that embody and enable leadership. This is what we started to build in our second year of the leadership program when the internal organization and interconnectedness of the service-learning supervisors were strengthened. It could be argued that we established our leadership program too early – before we had a solid SL organization in place. Another explanation is that the formation of the leadership program, which required us to grapple with inspiring and including students in the core of the program, inadvertently helped to enrich and improve the functioning of the SL program. Our organization’s overall “capacity for leadership” was developed through the introduction of leadership education.

One remaining challenge is the rethinking of the overseas leader program. As an educational experience for leadership, the time frame of three weeks is quite limited, even though the overseas leaders participate in pre-departure, on-site and debriefing sessions. Since their service is not sustained, it has been difficult to instill a sense of identity as an overseas leader. This is currently under examination and one possibility may be linking this role to activities set up for first year students in order to situate these leaders better into the departmental culture. A less satisfactory solution from the point of view of the Japanese faculty would be to leave this as a limited, individual-centered leadership opportunity whose oversight would be the responsibility of the accompanying faculty member.

Conclusion

Service learning can become a catalyst for the development of leadership in individual students. This is especially the case when the target population’s needs —our students’— are carefully understood and adjusted when necessary. In turn, the introduction of a leadership
program may strengthen the service-learning program because leadership education at the level of university students necessitates developing the leadership capacity of work groups and the campus SL community. In our case, we were challenged to rethink the structure that we provided for leaders - regular meetings, new commitment and involvement from the coordinator, and improved communication among the faculty and between all members. The result was leader development for the individual student and leadership development for the overall organization. As stated at the begining, Zlotkowski asserts that “service-learning projects promote the development of the ‘whole person’”, to which we would add, a leadership program promotes the development of the "whole organization".

References


(ABSTRACT)

Enhancing “Leader Development” through Service Learning and Building Service-Learning Programs’ Capacity for Leadership: The Intercultural Leadership Program at Poole Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan

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In the last twenty years many practitioners of service learning have recognized that this experience-based pedagogy offers a unique opportunity to develop leadership skills. Stanton, in particular, has argued that service learning can be a catalyst for the development of skills such as “judgment in action” and the effective enabling of others. In this paper we describe the evolution of our service-learning leadership program and its lessons both for service learning and leadership education. Drawing on the concepts of institutional “leadership development” and individual “leader development” from the Center for Creative Leadership, we argue that these leadership programs not only enhance individual student’s leadership skills, but also build and strengthen the leadership capacity for the entire service learning organization.
So before undertaking a leadership development program, we should be sure that we know what we are talking about. Learning could be interpreted as new: Knowledge, which is information that is useful in accomplishing a certain activity that is important, for example, to solve a problem, achieve a goal or see a situation in entirely different light. Skills, which is the expertise -- consciously or unconsciously - - to continually use the new information to accomplish that certain activity.Â Then, the next place to start learning about leadership is to get some sense of what leadership really is -- in particular, get an impression of the areas of knowledge and skills recommended for effective leadership in organizations. Review the information in the Library's topic: What is Leadership? How Do I Lead? Even the best leadership tactics fail when unexpected changes happen. But we've identified more than tactics for leaders to use. Gallup understands the talent, experiences and development that leaders need to bring teams together and make the right decisions when times get tough - - and every day. Leadership strength is both innate and developed.Â Less than 2 in 10 employees strongly agree the leadership of their organization makes them feel enthusiastic about the future. Less than 1/4 of employees strongly agree their performance is managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work. Our Framework. Gallup's Leadership Development Framework. You can learn more about the options for leadership courses below. Browse the programs or narrow your search using the search boxes above. Take the next step towards your goals today!Â Get to know yourself and learn the improvement and improvement techniques thanks to the training in the Leadership and management of catering teams course. With this Gastro So + Featured. Get to know yourself and learn the improvement and improvement techniques thanks to the training in the Leadership and management of catering teams course. With this Gastro Solution on emotional intelligence, you will understand the techniques to master emotions, thoughts and become a good leader and thus motivate your team in order to trigger the results of your business.