Preface

The primacy and efficacy of learning by doing should be beyond dispute. When that first caveman discovered that fire caused by lightning would burn animal carcass that would make the carcass flavorful, available, and nutritious, that caveman had learned one of the uses of fire. The initial experiential learning was refined by experiments of trial and error. Use of fire on different foods and over different durations deepened and refined the cooking. It was learning by doing. Transferring that knowledge to others was done by demonstration of the doing. That caveman taught the next caveman how to obtain fire, maintain it, and use it for cooking. As a byproduct, it was discovered that fire also provided protection by discouraging predators. Then it was noticed that fire could prolong hours of light. Those hours of “leisure” led to the development of language. But language was also taught by doing. Though this “learning by doing” had not yet been conferred with the label of experiential learning; that categorization awaited the actions of people studying the active learning.

Learning by doing was particularly useful for concrete tasks but the introduction of language, the first disruptor of learning, allowed for transfer of knowledge of abstract ideas. Learning became the combination of observation of actions, memory, and replication. Trial and error was the method. However, with the advent of language, which was also taught by doing, came the ability to transfer knowledge of abstract ideas. Survival in the savanna required language in order to avoid the toll imposed on learning using trial and error. But transfer of knowledge or learning still was a micro activity.

Then came the next disruptor: writing. Starting with the foundational learning by doing, followed by learning language by doing, written language evolved as a method to transfer knowledge on a larger scale. The stories passed through generations by demonstration and oral teaching could be preserved and learned without embellishment and with corrections gained by experimentation. But the laborious nature of producing written manuscript still made learning the activity of a few individuals in the societal institutionalization of learning to be that delivered by tutors to students, Masters to apprentice. Writing allowed the memorialization of the learning by doing. The memorialization associated with written language allowed for the retention of knowledge over a longer period of time far beyond that of the life expectancy of given individuals. What had once been taught by Chiefs and shaman could now be conveyed by many more people to many more people.

The next disruptor, of course, was the printing press. What had once been “learning by doing” of concrete tasks and progressed through learning of abstract ideas memorialized over decades now could be distributed the large numbers of people. The transfer of knowledge, once confined to the tutor and student could now occur in societal institutions: schools and universities. The initial purpose for learning had moved from survival through long periods of time into availability to many. The transfer of knowledge became an end unto itself. But criticism of the institutions where knowledge was transferred arose. It was charged that the transfer of knowledge was for knowledge’s sake and the transfer needed
to be grounded in application for many. The knowledge holders were envy for having and keeping the knowledge from others. The erroneous metaphor of knowledge accumulation and transfer in an “ivy-covered tower” was levied. The criticism was largely unfounded. Throughout all of that time after the acquisition of abstract knowledge, many of the students were sent to positions where they could apply that knowledge and continue their learning. Certain disciplines of knowledge remain primarily transferred through “doing.” Learning by doing was transferred through the use of apprenticeships within the guilds, abbeys, convents and monasteries, both East and West. Stonemasons, silversmiths, monks, and Buddhist priests continued to learn by doing. What could not be provided by abstract transfer of knowledge in the institution was experience in the application of that knowledge. The benefit of experiential learning remained foundational to continue learning and expert knowledge. Lawyers learned by reading the law. Doctors learned through internships; teachers learn through an apprenticeship arrangement. Knowledge, techniques, methodology, and validity of the transfer of knowledge never remained in an ivy-covered tower. If it had, it would have atrophied in disuse. Monasteries produce cheeses and physicists build buildings. Mathematicians broke codes; theoretical physicists harnessed energy. Electronic technicians miniaturized and increased speeds.

Running parallel to that were acts of charity and service by all people including those students in the housed in the ivy-covered towers of academia. Social groups within universities went off to war; when called, activist groups at the University helped others during their free time. Eventually, learning of abstract terms by applying them to the providing of service became service learning.

Service learning is more than service. In fact, when done at a learning institution, its primary purpose is learning. Services provided in an effort to apply that learning to further the learning as well as provide services and benefits to those outside the learning institution. Those learning institutions were also affected by the disruptors which first created and then perpetuated their existence. The process expanded their scope. The important distinction is that in service learning occurs through the providing of the service. Though learning can occur when providing volunteer services, it is not the goal, it is a byproduct. In service learning, it is the learning that is paramount even when that learning affects the quality of the service. Trial and error, a form of experiential learning, is also included in service learning.

One of the recent conclusions reached in transfer of abstract ideas and the expansion of those ideas is that active learning by engaged learners deepens and solidifies the learning of the ideas. If the overall purpose of the institution is focused on the knowledge enterprise, engagement as a central environment of that learning enterprise is critical (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012). Foundational to that knowledge enterprise is the approach offered by service learning which results in community engagement to buttress the understanding that the Academy does not have a monopoly on the knowledge and expertise but that both expertise and great learning opportunities in teaching and scholarship also reside in non-academic settings.

As we move into the 21st century, technology is the latest disruptor in the transfer of knowledge. Technology in education exponentially increases the distribution of knowledge, first experienced with the printing press, to people and places to the ends of the earth. Smart devices, cellular transmission, and the Internet, makes the transfer of and access to knowledge available to just about everyone over the globe. Although the control of those distribution routes remains or even increases certain problems, it provides an opportunity in service learning beyond the regional application of service learning that has occurred thus far. It also allows for learning of different cultures, different norms and mores, different work ethics, and a celebration of the vast diversity of the human species. Service learning students are encouraged to explore innovation and creativity.
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Through service learning, the application of that exploration becomes international or global in scope. Having gone through three distinct generations of development, educational technology is now entering a fourth generation. That fourth-generation envisions distributed and digitally shaped technologies of adaptive learning, distributed infrastructure, and competency models. Each stage in this for generational development involves a relationship of factors, complex in their integration. Those involved control between the learner and the institution, ownership of data and content, integration that is institutionalized, and a centralized and decentralized teaching and learning approaches in structure (Siemens, Gasevic, & Dawson, 2015). All of these factors are integrated in the engaged experiential learning of service learning.

In service learning, the transfer of knowledge is also reciprocal. Students acquire knowledge and apply it in providing service. Students gain that knowledge from the institution. Learners also gain knowledge transferred to them through the service experience, including their grounded in their interaction with diverse peoples and ideas. All are engaged and active learners. We have just begun to explore how technology can open service learning from the regional application to a global one.

The purpose of this volume is to offer ideas of some of the advanced scouts, the early adopters of the power of service learning in the institutions of higher learning, that have tested and explored uses beyond the traditional ones that have become established pedagogical practices.

Drs. Ashley & Hall contend that community engagement through service learning result in mutual and reciprocal schooling and open the narrative of the specific service learning experience to long-term social movement to support the goals of humanizing education. Rosalia and Sorensen offer instances demonstrating the impact of service learning on teacher expectations and resilience who are working with students in a low income urban high school for whom English is a second language. Authors Coffey, Hardin, Brown, and Williams offer a curriculum using an interdisciplinary approach to service learning as an FO’s for high school students to examine the relationship between education and citizenship in an immersive experience. The students are guided to design and implement their own service learning projects. In Chapter 4, Williams and Labelle from the University of Maine at Farmington examine and its challenges and practices in K-12 activities. In addition to other challenges, are those presented by an increase in emphasis on common educational standards and standardized testing. In Chapter 5, Williams and another colleague, Carol Lee, explore service learning and community partnerships among elementary schools and higher education for science subjects. The types and characteristics of a framework are considered and potential benefits of the collaborative efforts offered. Marano’s chapter provides recent support for the older idea and evidence that college students benefit from service learning practices not only when taking the course but in the future. She also provides evidence of the benefits of service learning to community-based organizations that are served, especially through grant opportunities which become more readily available through the partnership with the organization within the student service learning experience. Placed in a global context, Michelle Regalla of the University of Central Florida offers guidelines to institutions and faculty members considering implementing an international service learning experience for teacher candidates. The guidelines are designed to assist faculty members, and are supported with qualitative feedback from participants of the service learning experience in Costa Rica. Building on the global perspective, authors Montaudon-Tomas and Vilalta-Perdomo offer an analysis of a service learning experience in rural central Mexico developed by students from the University located in the area. The activity was embedded in a core module focused on developing students writing abilities and research skills. A bottom up approach was knocked initially recognized by the students.
In Chapter 9, Simunich from Kent State University addresses the broad category of service learning in online courses, including benefits and challenges. An extensive literature review is offered. The following chapter, from Dr. Crosby offers a specific analysis of a community engagement project implemented in an online graduate course for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). It offered an obvious opportunity to apply TESOL theory in working with these specific learners. Chapter 11 by Dr. Chesnut at Northern Kentucky University describes the incorporation of service learning into an online college course that involves a philanthropic partnership that is used in any significant commitment to service learning at her institution. In addition to addressing benefits and challenges, she also describes unanticipated rewards correlated to the online component.

For unique examples of community engagement across curricula and context, Chapter 12 is offered by Drs. Yan Li, Morgan, Yan Li, and Jiacheng Li, who collaborated from their positions at East China Normal University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in applying qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the current environment of children’s service learning in China. Their goal was to develop better understanding of the expectations and potential of community-based learning. Further recommendations for future exploration are offered. DiEnno and Taylor offer evidence to support the assertion that service learning students’ capacity from passive spectators to active participants in the betterment of communities. This foundation prepares students to apply their knowledge in active democratic participation in the mission of all levels of universities creating a civic minded campus in which faculty will be an integral component. Handler discusses the efficacy of a holistic education for students that reaches beyond their own improvement as individuals. That holistic education is enhanced when student’s learning is pointed to a higher purpose of creating a global community in which social justice is served. Service learning as experiential learning empowers students of diverse groups to advocate a more inclusive lens towards that social justice.

We are now into the second decade of the 21st century. We are past the threshold of the century and are beginning to see outlines and shadows of experiential learning in higher education that is to come in this century. That learning will be global in nature and grounded in technology. The curricula and context are global in perspective and incorporated in technological connectivity. The editors and authors of this volume offer these examples of practices as those outlines. That offering is in the hope that others will apply, enlarge, refine, and innovate from these ideas. After all, this will be done by those teachers and facilitators, those ‘educators - idea purveyors” who hope to inspire others whose professional lives are committed to active learning in an engaged community in service to many. This volume is offered to those who are engaged in the important work of implementation of community engagement programs for teacher preparation for education in the twenty-first century.

REFERENCES


ENDNOTE

1 The primacy of learning was supported by the development of mirror neurons in the human brain which fire when observing someone doing something just as though the observer was doing it.