PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AND SERVICE LEARNING: COMMUNITY MAPPING TOOLS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND K-12 TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Based on the scholarship of teaching, this paper explores the impact of teaching tools used in the university and K-12 classroom during lessons preparing students for service learning. The specific teaching tool is community mapping, an activity that can set the stage for students' understanding of their community, both environmentally and culturally, the assets and resources as well as challenges their community may face. The researcher prepares future teachers in the California State University with a service learning model and consults with K-12 teachers to support their efforts in implementing service learning in K-12 classrooms. Her conclusion is that the community mapping activity can support SL activities and lead to successful partnerships and integration of service learning and that an understanding of place-based education can increase the impact of these activities.

Versión en español disponible al pie de las referencias bibliográficas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The California State University, Monterey Bay, founded in 1994 is one of few U.S. universities that requires service learning for all undergraduate students. With the support of the Service Learning Institute, faculty implement a service learning pedagogy within a content-based university course, utilizing an array of community partner placements where students spend 20 to 30 hours during the semester. For the preparation of elementary multi-subject teachers in California, the first step is a B.A. in Liberal Studies. In this major, students complete their early field experience with a service learning model, taking up to three classes to satisfy 55 hours of service in community based elementary classrooms. This paper explores the community mapping assignment given in service learning classes that engages students in visualizing and researching the community where they will be of service.

In addition, this paper examines K-12 — university collaborative projects where the service learning process for K-12 students has been supported by university students and the training of teachers through professional development to use the mapping activity in K-12 settings. The researcher is the California Department of Education Region Five K-12 Service Learner Technical Assistance lead under Youth Community Service and Partners for the Advancement of Teaching. Under this role, she provides professional development directly to K-12 teachers in the area of Service Learning pedagogy. Her own personal service began in Argentina where she spent one and a half years in Buenos Aires working in CEAS, a center for homeless women in the early 1980s. This experience was crucial to her own development as a service-learning oriented activist and educator.

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2. PROCEDURE

To create a scholarship of teaching, the researcher reflected on ten years of teaching undergraduate Liberal Studies majors and eight years of training K-12 teacher practitioners in service learning, and compared her methodology and classroom results with the literature on community asset mapping and place-based education.

The mapping activities are presented in the classroom to future and current teachers with the following objectives.

1. Introduce participants to the tools needed for community scans and mapping; both social-historical, demographic, cultural and environmental-ecological characteristics of the community.
2. Engage participants in using the tools to create a cultural and environmental "map".
3. Use the data from mapping to empower youth to select their service learning community issue.
4. Monitor students' understanding of community and compare local data between California projects in order to discuss the power of place to inform service-learning projects.
5. Document how these methodologies have been used to support K-12 — University partnerships.
6. Explore the concept of place-based education as a framework for understanding the effect of the mapping activity on service learning. Place-based education research provides a basis in understanding both the environmental characteristics of the community and the multicultural aspects of the community.

3. DISSCUSSION

Mapping communities where service learning will take place can take a variety of forms; concept maps, accurate physical maps, or visual and verbal diagrams. This activity increases student participation through hands on and visual learning. Once the "map" is created the university or K-12 student can use it as a tool for gaining more information; first about his or her own assumptions, what information is lacking, what concerns and assets are in the community. By focusing on a positive view of community assets, service-learning activities are grounded in an assets-based view that draws upon strengths before turning to community problem solving. This viewpoint deeply influences the service experience.

In projects such as watershed restoration, simple mapping provides a methodology for understanding the past, present and future state of the environment. Visual art has also been used by the researcher to tell the story of service learning in watersheds (Colby 2010), (Colby 2004). Mapping in these cases, can not only be used in preliminary work in classrooms, but also to tell the story of the service projects' results.

With an emphasis on the learning to be gained in the service-learning project, the mapping provides routes into deeper learning and collaboration when it is designed as a group activity. With new technology, university students have even performed the community mapping activity for Dr. Colby's class on I-Phones; simultaneously loading up their pictures to a web interface with Google maps. The mapping can provide the structure for holding oral histories, documentary photos and service learning reflections.

Finally by examining the research on place-based education a context is given to the success the researcher-educator had with using community mapping in California. The literature corroborates that mapping is successful in urban and rural areas (Amsden and Ao 2003), (Blanchet-Cohen, N., Ragan, D., & Amsden, J. 2003), (Lydon 2000), (Sobel 1998); that asset mapping is important (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993); and that a local approach to education is crucial in light of the emphasis on national state standards (Aberley 1993, Gibbs and Howley 2000). Developing a deeper understanding of place-based education as a national and international movement Gruenewald, D.A. and Smith,

G.A. (2007) can lead to a richer, nuanced understanding of the relationship between cultural and community factors and environmental factors and the need to ground our youth in an understanding of their local, regional, national and global communities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Place-based community mapping activities do not always lead to service learning projects, however this is the rich territory for further exploration, pushing the place-based educators to understand the value of service learning and in reverse the service learning practitioners to embrace the evidence on place-based education. This can deepen the service-learning practice with the integration of a sense of place that embraces multicultural communities and place-based ecologies. The researcher hopes that bringing her experiences in California to the dialog on service-learning in Argentina can be helpful. Because this research is about a hands on and visual process, the presentation of this research requires images of the "maps" produced by students, which will be instructive to the audience in understanding the process and potential for this process in their own local teaching. She also hopes that the opportunity to return to Buenos Aires Argentina after 30 years absence can renew her own understanding of a place that she has held dear in her heart all these years; the place where she learned "aprendizaje-servicio and solidaridad".

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RESUMEN:

Basado en las pasantías para los futuros docentes, el artículo explora el impacto de las estrategias de enseñanza utilizadas en la universidad y en clases de K-12 con el objetivo de formar a los estudiantes en el aprendizaje -servicio. La estrategia de enseñanza específica es el mapeo de la comunidad, una actividad que puede sentar las bases para la comprensión por parte de los estudiantes de su comunidad, tanto ambiental como cultural; los bienes y recursos, así como los desafíos que aquella puede enfrentar. El investigador prepara a los futuros docentes en la Universidad Estatal de California con un modelo de aprendizaje - servicio y trabaja con los maestros de K-12 para apoyar sus esfuerzos en la implementación de este tipo de proyectos en sus aulas. Su conclusión es que las actividades de mapeo de la comunidad pueden apoyar los proyectos de aprendizaje-servicio y conducir a alianzas exitosas; y que la educación basada el aprendizaje situado puede aumentar el impacto de estas iniciativas.