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Kajsa Larson

*Northern Kentucky University*

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## Ninth Volume in Service-Learning Series Focuses on Identity and Integration

Reviewed by Kajsa Larson

*Creating Our Identities in Service-Learning and Community Engagement.* B.E. Moely, S.H. Billig, and B.A. Holland (Eds.). IAP-Information Age Publishing: Charlotte, NC, 2009, 282 pages. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-60752-289-8

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As the ninth volume of the Advances in Service-Learning Research series, an initiative that began in 2002, *Creating Our Identities in Service-Learning and Community Engagement* addresses an area of research that has not been widely discussed: the topic of identity in relation to service-learning and community engagement. Each of the authors of this edited volume touches upon different aspects of identity theory, described as “an organizing concept around which the individual is able to integrate varied aspects of the self and aim for consistency in behavior” (p. x). This volume appeals to a wide readership, including university faculty and staff, community partners, students, or any other service-learning stakeholder that is interested in the topic of creating and sustaining identity through service-learning and civic engagement partnerships.

The book is organized into four parts. The three chapters in Part I examine the role of service-learning in higher education institutional identity through the examination of promotion and tenure guidelines, institutional websites, and critical reflection mechanisms developed by faculty. Chapter 1 analyzes survey responses to the 2006 applications for the Elective Classification for Community Engagement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The authors found that most of these institutions place community engagement in the category of service in the evaluation of promotion and tenure. In Chapter 2, the authors reviewed online websites of 25 “research-extensive” universities to see how engaged scholarship was promoted. Then, the authors developed a matrix of this material to stimulate a national effort to collect, maintain, and share information about programs, activities, and policies to grow the field of practice. Chapter 3 utilizes case study methodology to examine data

from a faculty initiative using the DEAL Model of Critical Reflection (Description, Examination, Articulation of the Learning). The conclusion of this case study points to the benefits that faculty gained through collaboration and how their “pedagogy” was transformed. Six themes also emerged: the role of institutional support; the rationale for using reflective writing; the importance of structuring assignments; the necessity of facilitating feedback to students; evidence of effectiveness; and challenges for faculty. The studies in this section suggest that universities are more widely recognizing service-learning initiatives but this approach is not often fully integrated into the system.

The two chapters of Part II explore the topic of partnership identity through the lens of the community partner. In Chapter 4, the research of five cases seeks to address whether faculty-community partnerships are capable of developing organizational identities, guided by the principles of partnership: “a shared understanding of ‘who we are’ as a [partnership] entity” (p. 75). Through the analysis of the organizational attitudes about partnership (the mission, organizational structure, expectations), the author concludes that partnership identity may help those organizations make sense of what it means to be a partner with each other. Chapter 5 discusses the results of a questionnaire sent to campus and community partners, as well as interviews that were conducted about university-community partnerships, in order to show how to create and sustain meaningful relationships between these two entities. The authors discuss the success and pitfalls of partnerships and point to the importance of frequent communication and that the vision, mission, purposes, and expectations of the partnership should be formalized in writing. The authors of both

chapters conclude that a mutual identity can be achieved through service-learning initiatives between university and community partners through open communication and dialogue.

The three chapters of Part III focus on the student perspective through comparative studies of student performance between learners who engaged in service-learning and those who did not. Chapter 6 provides a literature review on this topic and then presents an analysis of the K-12 standards associated with middle and high school programs implemented in a school district in Philadelphia, along with the positive outcomes. The results of the study pointed to how students involved in service-learning had higher test scores and had improved behavior. In Chapter 7, the authors present a two-year investigation of an after-school mentoring project through a middle school-university partnership. The study addresses both the perspective of the mentor and that of the student and compares group mentoring with one-on-one mentoring. The results show that middle school youth improved both emotionally and academically and benefited the most from group mentoring. Mentors felt that they developed teaching skills, knowledge of youth, and community understanding. Chapter 8 addresses “cultural-based service-learning,” defined as “a pedagogical approach that intentionally integrates race- or diversity-related content with community service by providing students with opportunities to learn about social disparities associated with diverse communities” (p. 190). By administering a pretest and posttest to an albeit demographically homogenous group of students, the authors found positive changes over the semester in their problem-solving skills, awareness of racial privilege and blatant racial issues, ethnic identity, and racial attitudes. From the research presented in this section, readers can see that students benefit from community or service-learning projects that take place during and after school.

The four chapters in Part IV provide a synopsis about the past, current, and future research initiatives of service-learning and civic engagement, including the international perspective of scholars from several countries and the differences between research in K-12 and university settings. Chapter 9 examines the interdisciplinary nature of service-learning through library and information science research. The authors examined literature represented in

journals such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* and the *Advances in Service-Learning Research* series, as well as masters’ theses and dissertations on service learning published between 2004 and 2006. The results show a wide range of departmental affiliation of service-learning scholars and diversity in the research from which they draw. The authors noted differences between those writing theses and dissertations versus those writing articles. The conclusions of the study point to the importance of cross-collaboration among disciplines as an opportunity for tapping a wider range of sources.

Chapters 10 and 11 are transcriptions of presentations given at service-learning conferences. In Chapter 10, Lori J. Vogelgesang gave a plenary address at an unnamed service-learning conference. Vogelgesang suggests that motivation is a strong reason for faculty commitment to service-learning and offers five tips for researchers to help them address the interconnectedness of service learning and what it means to live in a multicultural world: network, do good work, practice what you preach, publish and disseminate your work. Chapter 11 consists of a transcription of a plenary panel session during the Eighth International Research Conference. The speakers represented the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Australia, and Canada. They were asked to discuss and provide tips about service-learning and community engagement research. All of the panelists were in agreement about the importance of building community and being mindful of the context where this research takes place. An analysis of the individual presentations reveals both commonalities and differences among panelist responses. Chapter 12 summarizes the process by which K-12 standards for service-learning were developed with the end goal of encouraging the development of similar standards in the realm of higher education. The authors reconfirm several important themes from other chapters: the usefulness of interdisciplinary collaboration, the need to foster a shared sense of community through service-learning and community engagement, and developing standards for this type of work. The authors address the ways in which research can better inform practice: “As the field develops, researchers need to develop broader research questions that go beyond program evaluation” (p. 275).

The investigative aspect of service-learning takes precedence in this volume, with the most

amount of material found in Part IV. Part II, on partnership identity, has the fewest chapters. Nonetheless, the authors of this compilation provide excellent literature reviews on service-learning and identity theory by citing both influential scholars in the field (Boyer, 1996) as well as more recent studies about the long-term effects of service learning and identity (Spring, Dietz & Grimm, 2006). Most of the chapters also include information about research limitations. Those most commonly discussed were the small number of institutions or partnerships that were studied, demographic or geographic limitations of the research participants, or a narrow research scope (web-based only or for a brief amount of time).

This volume provides an engaging and inspiring assessment of the interplay between service-learning and identity from all angles, thus paving the way for enriched conversations about the impact of community engagement on self, other, and collective. It can be placed within a larger trajectory, ranging from John Dewey's seminal works about identity, service, and democracy (1916; 1927) to Saltmarsh and Hartley's recent compilation *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement and Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education* (2011).

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## About the Reviewer

Kajsa Larson is an assistant professor of Spanish at Northern Kentucky University.