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Honored to be a Part of Service-Learning

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PATRICIA L. POWELL

Honored to be a Part of Service-Learning

PATRICIA L. POWELL

TRINITY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

What do an adolescent self-esteem workshop for African-American girls, a food and clothing pantry, a Young Authors event in Montego Bay, Jamaica, an HIV/AIDS awareness brochure for a Chicago health-care facility, an after-school program for low income students, and an international student awareness survey have in common? Each started as an idea born of a personal passion and then grew into a semester-long service-learning project for six honors students at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

Trinity Christian College has a long history of service to its community, a middle-class suburb south of Chicago that has a long Dutch tradition. In 2005 the college instituted an office of Community Partnerships to further its community service commitment, but efforts have just begun to incorporate service-learning into the academic arena of the college. Each year at Trinity professors are asked to submit course proposals for the Honors Program, and in the spring of 2006 I was pleased to find that my course submission, *Academic Partnered Learning or Service-Learning Across the Curriculum*, had been accepted as part of the fall course offerings, available to any Trinity student enrolled in the Honors Program. Trinity students accepted into the program must take Honors Writing, Honors Philosophy, one honors interim, one honors seminar, and at least two semester-hours of honors work in their major. My course met the honors seminar requirement and was geared to students' academic pursuits and majors as well as their extracurricular passions and interests.

Six students—juniors and seniors from various majors—elected to take the course, and our adventure together began. Students started the semester by introducing themselves, their interests and passions as well as their majors and minors. The intersection of academic interest and personal passion would form the basis for each of their service-learning projects. Students were also asked to reflect on previous service experiences, specifically the highlights of those experiences. Additionally, students were asked to identify their individual frames of reference, those individual life experiences, attitudes, beliefs, qualities, and expectations that gave them their unique perspective on life. This information would help guide each student to a particular semester-long project.

This service-learning course used two texts that proved to be an important foundation for the students' work. The first, *Learning through Serving: A Student*

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Guidebook for Service-Learning across the Disciplines by Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, and Associates, provided an analysis of the essential elements of both learning and serving, various inventories and reflection activities to guide the students in understanding their relationship with their community partner, academic scholarship and inquiry questions designed to help the students understand the nature and process of societal change, and exercises designed to help the students both understand and learn from their service-learning experience. The second text, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* by J. Eyler and D. E. Giles, offered definitions important to the field of service-learning, data about learning in general, and service-learning program characteristics with learning outcomes. Theoretical in nature, this book confronted the students with extensive data from two national research projects that focused on attitudes and perceptions of learning in relationship to the service-learning process. Finally, students read several service-learning articles, in particular "Why Service-Learning is Bad" by John W. Eby, "Service-Learning: a balanced approach to experiential education" by Andrew Furco, and "Service Learning as a Transgressive Pedagogy: A Must for Today's Generation" by Angela Leonard. Students also did extensive personal research related to their specific project and wrote a literature review based on that research.

The semester opened with intensive teaching on service-learning history, pedagogy, and practice. The students studied the vocabulary of service-learning and delved into the distinctions between community service, volunteerism, field placements, and service-learning. They were also exposed to the foundations of service-learning theory and practice and did extensive reading and journaling in both of these areas. The students needed to understand that service-learning work is messy and the process and results often unexpected. Though encouraged to develop a timeline, budget, and structure for their project, they needed to understand that there would be roadblocks and flat tires along the way to completion of their project, and all might not proceed smoothly from beginning to end.

Students heard from the Director of Trinity's Office of Community Partnerships, who presented a list of possible partnerships and project ideas that could become their service-learning projects. For many of these projects, the foundation had already been laid for a strong community partnership relationship, but some of the community needs did not match either the student's academic interest or passion. Each student evaluated the possibilities by speaking to me and to professors and advisors in their major area of study, eventually coming up with a project that connected to their major as well as a passion in their life and that could be completed within one semester.

The work began. Early in the semester, students were asked to write an abstract of their service-learning project, including the name of their community partner, their assessment of the community partner's needs, and potential strategies to address those needs. Students also did several team-building exercises in class, learning about themselves and the types of team players they

were or, perhaps, were not. Additionally, students were introduced to several learning-styles quizzes that provided additional insight into obstacles they might face when they began working with their community partner.

Spirits were high as each student went through a service-learning project worksheet that included writing goals and objectives, defining the needs of their project's community partner, assessing that community partner's needs, defining potential strategies to meet those needs, designing a project timeline, estimating budget requirements, and assessing potential liability issues with continual reflection on both their process and progress. The students researched their area of interest, their community partner, and the historical basis for that community partner's work, and they wrote a literature review theoretically supporting and informing their service-learning project. Additionally, they arranged to meet or at least communicate with their community partner several times throughout the semester. Each student understood that, in order for the project to be effective and successful, there had to be mutual give and take, with both the student and the community partner learning from and serving the other.

It was important that the students have authentic and honest in-class discussions on deconstructing stereotypes and unpacking the privilege that is a part of many of their lives, so together the students read *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh. The students began to realize that they might have preconceived notions of their community partner and their community partner might also have preconceived notions about them, both of which might be false. Since most of the students were working with a community partner that represented people different from them racially, ethnically, geographically, and/or in health or disability, it was important that they each address what it might be like to work with and sometimes for a community partner with a different background and set of experiences than themselves. Students' self-assessments were honest and often eye-opening since, for some of them, this expedition into a different culture and/or socioeconomic sphere was a relatively new phenomenon. These issues led us to a discussion of critical theory, a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society, and its place in service-learning pedagogy and practice, another important and necessary conversation.

Each week, in addition to meeting as a class, students were required to progress through their service-learning working document and write written reflections based on that work. By week three, students had each identified their specific project and the hard work began. Students reported back to each other weekly on their progress including frustrations and breakthroughs in their work. They learned to support each other's successes and offer creative suggestions for getting around brick walls. They took class time to bounce ideas off each other about difficulties they encountered. One particularly interesting class period saw us brainstorming titles for the projects. We began by writing all of the words and phrases that came to mind regarding each one. Words were

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joined and separated, similes and metaphors discussed, plays on words and acronyms suggested. What evolved were six titles that both expressed the heart of the project and the project coordinator's unique personality and interests. For instance, one project focused on developing and implementing an after-school program for children in a neighboring school district that was primarily African American and underserved. The title "Oh the Places You'll Go: Providing Opportunities for Under-Acknowledged Students of Posen-Robbins School District 143½," taken from the title of one of Dr. Seuss's books, evoked the spirit of adventure and learning that the project coordinator hoped to achieve.

Students were also exposed to the idea of writing "thick description" in their journals, knowing that excerpts from those journals would become a part of their final paper and tri-fold display. Students responded to journal prompts weekly, and I had the opportunity to stay in close touch with each project and its progress via these journals. Students also shared their journals with classmates, prompting numerous worthwhile in-class discussions.

Along their service-learning journey, students were introduced to educational philosophers and practitioners whose work has heavily influenced service-learning pedagogy. From Vygotsky they learned the concept of social capital. Vygotsky believed learning from experience or "learning by doing" is the process whereby human development occurs. Knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, the essence of education being to help us see, hear, and experience the world more clearly, more completely, and with more understanding.

From John Dewey, author, educator, and philosopher, students studied the role of democracy and citizenship in education. Dewey argued that one's decisions and actions must be made with regard to the effect they have on others and that schools should be places where service and participatory citizenship are the norm, believing that schools are responsible for addressing social ills.

David Kolb's work helped them delve more deeply into the learning cycle. Kolb defined "experiential learning" as "learning that transforms . . . impulses, feelings, and desires . . . into higher-order purposeful action" (Cooper, 1998, p. 22). It involves a four-part experiential learning process: 1) concrete experience, 2) observations and reflections, 3) formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and 4) testing implications of concepts in new situations, with information mainly being derived from experience. (Kolb, 1984, p. 21) It offers the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process that is soundly based in the intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology and that insures critical linkages among education, work, and personal development.

Students were asked to assess, revise, and reassess their service-learning projects, knowing that this was to be a dynamic learning experience that was continually changing and growing. Discouragement became accomplishment as goals were adapted to changing community partners' needs and expectations. Students learned to critically assess themselves and their work and began to ask

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themselves hard questions about why they were doing the work they were doing. For instance, they might have had difficulty communicating effectively with their community partner, either by phone or e-mail, and would then need to come up with alternate ways to communicate and accomplish their goals that aligned with the goals of their community partner. They were also asked to consider whether the work undertaken would be a one-time experience or part of the framework of their lives. Would they continue to be a server, a learner, a community partner, an informed citizen, a democratic participant?

The students wrote segments of their service-learning paper throughout the semester, giving me the opportunity to provide critical feedback and suggestions throughout each stage of the journey. Beginning with their literature review and proceeding with their preparation, action, reflection, celebration, and conclusion sections, students would write initial, corrected, and final drafts until both the student and I were satisfied with the work. Toward the end of the semester, students began designing a final tri-fold display that would visually portray a semester's worth of work, time, and energy. Again students critiqued and supported each other's work, and I saw the projects get better and stronger as students learned from and leaned on each other.

The semester ended with a celebration of the student's projects as they shared their tri-fold displays and papers with interested students and faculty from the college. Each student was ready to discuss his or her work and journey, and each rose to the occasion. The "Honored to Be a Part of Service-Learning" event was held in Trinity's Grand Lobby, and the president and provost of the college stopped by for refreshments and a chance to converse with each of the students. Not only were the students able to put their work into words and a visual display, but they also verbally shared the process of their project, hoping others might join them on their service-learning journeys.

Was the road smooth? Did the students confront any overwhelming obstacles? Were their goals and their community partners' goals met? Were the community partners pleased with the results of the students' work? Perhaps it is best to hear from the students themselves. Following is a brief synopsis of three of the students' projects, including a portion of the literature review, preparation, action and reflection components as well as some concluding thoughts. As these synopses reveal, the students grew in the confidence that they could make changes in their community and their world; they understood that passion is an excellent basis for societal change; and they realized that authentic service and learning can be integrated in ways that lead to personal growth and academic enrichment as well as societal change.

Following are excerpts from the projects undertaken by three of the students.

**OH THE PLACES YOU'LL GO: PROVIDING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDER-ACKNOWLEDGED
STUDENTS OF POSEN-ROBBINS SCHOOL
DISTRICT 143½**

BETSY DYK: JUNIOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJOR/SPANISH MINOR

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”—Literature Review

After-school programs offer what students growing up in low socioeconomic situations crave. Students receive the academic help they need to soar to new heights in their scholastic achievement. They are presented with the social and community stability necessary for healthy personal growth, which impacts not only their immediate childhood, but their future as well. Children are also given a safe-haven and place of refuge to avoid the many dangers which present themselves to unsupervised children. The establishment of after-school programs works to offset the roadblocks which are often experienced in life in underprivileged areas.

“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You’re on your own. And you know what you know. You are the guy who’ll decide where to go.”—Preparation

We were led into a small cramped office, where we were met by vibrant African decorations and a smiling young woman who introduced herself as Principal Olawumi. She went over the story that was already well known to us, telling us how she had recently taken charge of the school and certain parts of our project hadn’t been passed onto her. We presented both our ideas, as well as those conceived by Keith Dykstra and Emily Kilbourn in their research from the spring. As Principal Olawumi perused the paperwork and asked us questions, we sat on cold metal folding chairs, still trying to calm our fears. Finally she looked up, smiling and said, “Can you start today?” We were so relieved to hear such a positive reaction we could hardly respond.

“I have heard there are troubles of more than one kind. Some come from ahead and some come from behind. But I’ve bought a big bat. I’m all ready you see. Now my troubles are going to have troubles with me!”—Planning to Meet Project Needs

As with most projects our first concern was financial. Without large accounts of money to draw from, as we are poor college students, we had to rely on our own creativity and ingenuity. After our initial worries surrounding the budget had subsided, we began to consider other aspects for which we should be prepared. We discussed many possible parts of our program such as: liability issues, media coverage, participant roles, schedules, and transportation needs. Our primary worry (after finances of course) was that of our liability. In working with the public school system, many different legal responsibilities

come into play. I wrote up a "Discipline Statement" for our volunteers, stating acceptable and unacceptable discipline tactics and procedures. We also discussed and determined what actions should be taken to get background checks for all volunteers working in the public school system.

"And will you succeed? Yes, indeed, yes indeed! Ninety-eight and three-quarters percent guaranteed!"—Action

Our first attempt to start our program proved to be quite rocky. We were quickly faced with the rude awakening and realization that in working with other people, communication break-downs and glitches easily occur. We had planned to begin the program in mid-October and when we contacted the secretary at Childs Elementary school to verify this fact, we were informed that they were not expecting us. A simple misunderstanding over the responsibility of contacting Principal Olawumi resulted in a team of overly-prepared and highly anxious volunteers. We used this opportunity to take a few volunteers to Childs Elementary so that they could become accustomed to the environment of the school

We worked hard to clean up our communication mishap, and were eager to officially begin two weeks later on the first day of November. A much larger group of volunteers piled into the van and headed to Childs Elementary School. When we arrived we were greeted warmly by Principal Olawumi, who led us into the gym and introduced us to the group of students with whom we would be working. After a brief lecture to the students about the result of bad behavior (and a few resounding chorus' of "If we're bad we get kicked out!") she handed the power to our nervous team of college students. Instantly coming to life, the volunteers split in various directions sitting down at the tables and getting to know the students while three of us quickly made up nametags for each of the students. Our project is not over and will continue to grow and change, however the first step has been taken and we are off to an amazing start. Our volunteers, along with us learned that, (in the timeless wisdom of Dr. Seuss) "If you never did, you should. These things are fun, and fun is good."

"Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."—Reflection

Not only have I taken great lessons and tips about education and working with students (which will serve me well in my future occupation), but I have learned quite a bit about myself as well. In my journal I stated, "I have learned how much of a control-freak I can be and how unwilling I can be to put my trust in others, and have become more flexible and easy-going." It is incredible how drastically situations can change a person and force them to evaluate themselves.

TWO SCHOOLS, TWO COUNTRIES, ONE MISSION: HOW A COLLEGE IN THE U.S. AND A SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF IN JAMAICA PARTNERED TO STRENGTHEN LITERACY

SARAH ENGBERS, SENIOR SPECIAL EDUCATION/ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJOR

The Story Introducing the Story

How can two schools be so different, and yet so alike? Can two cultures mesh to form one community? Can that community be united under one goal? These are three questions that are answered by this story. This is my story. This is the story of two schools, two countries, one mission.

Trinity Christian College and the Caribbean Christian Center for the Deaf have been in partnership for just over five years. This partnership started as a work trip, when a group from Trinity went to CCCD for interim as a work team. This partnership has grown and changed, and is now in the form of a week of learning for both the Trinity team and the people at CCCD. Every January, a group from Trinity goes to CCCD and works in the classrooms with the students. While this is going on, the teachers from the school meet with a Trinity professor or two for a week of in-service.

The Story of How I Got Involved

I was sitting at my computer at home one day during the summer, and decided to check my e-mail. I did not usually get many e-mails, so I really wasn't expecting to see anything in my in-box. But on this particular day, there just happened to be an e-mail from one of my professors. I opened the e-mail and as I started reading it joy and sadness welled up in me at once. She was asking about my interest in a special class that she was planning for the upcoming fall semester that was all about service-learning. When registering for classes I had read about this class and had immense interest, but it simply did not fit in my schedule. She said that she had a special project in mind for me that would help fulfill the requirements of her class. The project: to plan a Young Authors Festival to be held at the Caribbean Christian Centre of the Deaf (CCCD) in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the very place I had gone and worked at for interim half a year previous.

The Story of Reading about Reading—Literature Review

Community needs are often different from the needs in the community the “servers” are coming from; international community needs are commonly needs felt by many countries. A majority of communities serviced in international projects are in developing nations. All this is true for my project. Having been to the community once before, I know the impact that culture had on me, and I now have a better understanding of how to work with that community. This, however, does not limit the possibilities for learning through this project. I think that by addressing the need of literacy at CCCD, I have become more aware of the academic divides between the United States and other areas.

The Story of What Happened—Action

With the planning is done, my duty seems complete, but there is so much more to come. This project focuses on the planning of the festival, but I must not ignore the fact that the actual festival day is fast approaching. I have no doubt that little changes will be made as the event approaches, especially once we are in Jamaica. But this does not worry me, for the work that I have done already is quality work, and there is much flexibility and room for change. As long as the event is enjoyable for the students, I will be pleased.

The Story of Celebration

This project allows for a unique form of celebration. This project is composed of planning, and I can celebrate the completion of the planning. That celebration comes through the turning in of this paper, and the final gathering of my service-learning class for our tri-fold presentations. But due to the fact that what I planned is yet to happen, more celebration is due.

Following the Young Authors Festival at CCCD, we plan on having a “feast” with the students, to close that part of the day with celebrating. This will be part of my celebration, for it will be after the event is finished, and I’ll be in celebration with my community partners and also the students, the ones for whom all this planning took place.

The Story of What I Learned—Reflection

Now that the project is complete, I cannot help but be aware of what I have learned. The first big thing is patience. I always thought that I was a patient person, but this showed me that patience is an area that can continually be worked on. It was very frustrating to me to have to do everything in a step-by-step process. I could not place Trinity students in different roles until I knew what roles were needed. I could not buy supplies until I had a supply list. I needed patience in each step.

I also learned a big lesson in partnership. So often I try to do things on my own. I do not like asking other people for help, and am usually quite stubborn when it comes to relying on others. But for this project I needed help from others, and was very grateful to receive it. I realized that I love to help others accomplish tasks; that is part of why I took this project on, but I struggle in letting others help me. To best complete this project, I needed input from my community partners, and support from my classmates, group mates, and friends.

The Story of Future Stories

Although this project is completed, it has paved the way for future potential. It would be difficult to walk away from this project and only say “That was fun.” What is actually said is “That was fun. I wonder where this might lead me to. Perhaps . . . or . . . ” The possibilities are endless. One thing is certain: there are possibilities.

A NEW SEASON: INVOLVING THE LAWNDALE COMMUNITY IN HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND CARE

KIMBERLY MONSMA: SENIOR COMMUNICATION ARTS/ENGLISH MAJOR

Introduction and Literature Review

My interest in the topic of HIV/AIDS began in May 2005 when I traveled to South Africa to teach HIV/AIDS prevention in rural high schools. While I was there, I got a crash course in the issues facing Africans with this disease. When I returned to school the following year, I joined Trinity's Acting on AIDS chapter, which was in its initial stages. With Acting on AIDS now in its second year, I have taken over as co-director. One area we are trying to develop is a focus on local communities affected by HIV/AIDS. One such community is Lawndale, home of the Lawndale Christian Health Centers, my community partner. The Lawndale Christian Health Center serves a low-income community where HIV/AIDS has become a significant problem. There is a great need for greater awareness and education as well as care for HIV positive people in communities like Lawndale.

To provide clients a way to unite to fight this epidemic and a way for their voices to be heard, the Lawndale Christian Health Center has created a newsletter entitled *A New Season*. This quarterly newsletter provides an outlet for patients to tell their story, a place for the clinic doctor to share health information, a "meet the staff" section for clients to get connected to the center, and a question and answer section for clients to voice their concerns and get answers. This newsletter is the first step in encouraging the community to eradicate this stigma and join together to fight this disease. The HIV Consumer Newsletter is a part of a support system for those who are infected. With this newsletter, the clients finally have a place to have their questions answered, learn about new developments in HIV/AIDS treatments and hear about people like themselves. I have been asked to assist in writing this newsletter.

The Work Begins—Preparation

My learning for this project began before my first meeting with Allison. I had never been to this area of the city before, so getting to the clinic was a new experience that pushed me out of the comfort of my normal experiences. LCHC is in an area of Chicago that is significantly different than areas in which I have lived. I definitely originally felt out of place in this neighborhood. Once I found the clinic, I was immediately put at ease by the friendly and helpful staff, everyone from the parking attendant to the receptionist.

The Work Continues—Action

Later on in the semester, I met with Patricia Johnson, the case manager in charge of the Consumer Advisory Committee. One of my responsibilities for this project was to work with Patricia to facilitate the next CAC meeting, which was scheduled for December 5. During the course of this meeting, we drew up a list of guidelines for the CAC and brainstormed possible clients to invite. We

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decided that it was best to get a broad spectrum of diverse clients, including Hispanics and African Americans, men and women. Patricia agreed to be in charge of recruiting the members of the committee while I planned the agenda.

This meeting with Patricia was significant because I learned a lot more than details for the meeting. Patricia began to ask me questions about my motivation, my goals for this committee, and my heart for this issue. Patricia made me examine my self and she asked me some tough questions. For one of the first times in my whole experience with HIV/AIDS, I was forced to articulate the things I want to do to change this problem. I talked with Patricia about the common problem of trying to cure AIDS by looking only at the problem and not the people. As I reflected with Patricia, we discussed how many of the problems that people face are connected, such as homelessness, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS. Because of this, it is impossible to fix just one problem. We cannot fight HIV/AIDS by focusing on the problem. We must care for one person at a time with a holistic approach, caring for every aspect of the person.

The Work is Evaluated—Reflection

Throughout this semester, I have been put in many new situations that have taught me many new things. As I produced the newsletter, I was able to develop my skills and learn new things. I was able to expand upon the writing I'd done in classes and use these skills in real life situations. In order to produce the newsletter, I learned how to use Microsoft Publisher for the first time. I was able to use my interviewing skills for a few of the sections and I did a lot of editing and proofreading. The additional writing experience and work with Publisher are skills that will help me as I pursue a career in journalism.

Aside from the technical and career oriented learning that took place, I have changed a lot in my understanding of HIV/AIDS. I still will not claim to know everything—I know I have a lot to learn and probably will never understand it all. But I have a much richer understanding of the different issues that are involved in caring for HIV positive people and the struggles they face everyday.

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(also the primary resources used by students in their final papers and bibliography)

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APPENDIX

SERVICE-LEARNING WORKSHEET

Title: _____

Project Administrator: _____

Abstract (a brief description of your project—around 50 words)

Issue and or concern you are addressing (one descriptive sentence)

Preparation: Collaboration and Community Building

1. Name and Brief Description of Community Partner (s): how and why did you choose this partner
2. Assessment of Community Need
3. Potential Strategies to Address this Need

Action: Planning and Implementation

1. Planning to Meet Project Needs

- Preparation
 - Budget Requirements for Project
 - Celebration Budget
 - Potential Liability Issues
 - Potential Media Coverage: Trinity and Beyond
 - Participant Roles (both for you and your community partner (s))
 - Project Schedule
 - Project Structure
 - Supervision/Support Requirements: People or Otherwise
 - Timeline for Project Completion
 - Required Training: You or Your Community Partner
 - Transportation Needs

2. Implementing the Service-Learning Project

Reflection: Assessing the Service-Learning Project

- Student Learning
- Student Service
- Student Experience
- Community Learning
- Community Service
- Community Experience

Service-Learning Project Outcome (s) Connected to your Christian World and Life View

Celebration: Celebrating with your Community Partner

Citations or References: Literature Review

