

SERVICE-LEARNING THINK-TANK

*Summary Report of Dec. 10, 1999 Meeting
in the SFU Harbour at Centre, Vancouver*

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SERVICE-LEARNING THINK TANK - Summary Report

I. **Background**

There is growing interest and activity in service-learning in Canada generally and British Columbia specifically. A recent survey of policy and practice of service-learning in the public education systems of Canada revealed that particularly Nova Scotia and British Columbia had developed a variety of forms of service-learning and were engaged in gradual expansion of the practice in both the formal and non-formal learning environments.¹ A recent Throne Speech of the Province of Prince Edward Island indicated their commitment to initiatives in the field.

The Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (C2T2) has played its traditional role of working with the BC post-secondary system to promote innovation, in this case by initiating collaborative action in the field of service-learning. The first step was taken in 1996-97 when the Centre co-funded, along with the Office of Learning Technologies of HRDC, the production of one of North America's first distance learning packages in the field of service-learning. Working with Royal Roads University, both HRDC and C2T2 supported a curriculum development team, and the subsequent pilot delivery via print and the internet, of a course entitled *Community Leadership - The Service-Learning Model*, as part of the university's new MA in Leadership and Training.

Having shown, by means of detailed formative and summative research reports, that an effective service-learning course could be delivered at a distance, the Centre next prepared to raise province-wide awareness of theory and practice of service-learning. Thus in December, 1998 an edition of the *Learning Quarterly* entitled *Service-Learning: Community's missing piece* not only focused on service-learning as a powerful means of experiential education but also showcased several case studies of quality service-learning initiatives by BC colleges.

Another step was taken in March, 1999 when over 60 participants met at a Service-Learning Forum in Vancouver, co-sponsored by C2T2 and the ministries of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and Education. They heard Dr. Rob Shumer, Director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse of the US, discuss over 20 years of American service-learning experience and research. They also discussed both the theory and practice of the field, with a special emphasis on the emerging but uncoordinated practice in British Columbia.

¹ Faris, Ron, 1999, *Service-Learning in Canada: A Survey of Policy and Practice in the Public Education systems of Canada and the Practice of Using Voluntary Service as a Means of Earning Post-Secondary Tuition Credit*, HRDC, Ottawa.

After several months of planning, a provincial Think-Tank on Service-Learning, co-sponsored by C2T2 and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and supported by the ministries of Education, and Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers was convened on December 10, 1999. Individuals and representatives from an array of post-secondary institutions and ministries met to discuss the development process and content of a working definition and guidelines for service-learning in BC's post-secondary system (see Appendix A for the Think - Tank Agenda and List of Attendees). The following is a summary of issues and answers discussed at the event.

II. **Think-Tank Summary**

The Think-Tank commenced with introductory remarks that emphasized the commitment of C2T2 to collaborate with the college and institute system to achieve the goals of *Charting A New Course*, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology's strategic plan for the future of British Columbia's college, institute and agency system. Reference was made to a substantial body of US research and experience of quality service-learning which has shown that, among other benefits, it:

- fosters positive citizenship attitudes and behaviour;
- enables meaningful career exploration; and
- is especially effective for at-risk youth (either in- or out-of-school).

Thus service-learning enhances the strategic plan's Goal 1. Relevance and Quality: -

To provide British Columbians with post-secondary education and training to improve the quality of life and citizenship experience in the province and to enhance current and future job opportunities.

Equally important, service-learning adds value to the overall provincial government commitment to build community capacity and to foster community and economic development via inter-ministry collaboration.

This summary will have three areas of focus, all of which stem from the Think-Tank deliberations:

- first, a synthesis and template of the values, principles, and practice of service-learning identified by the participants;
- second, the creation of an operational definition of service-learning based on elements discussed during the proceedings; and
- third, a proposed series of next steps.

A. Values, Principles, and Practices of Service-Learning

The discussion that occurred during the Think-Tank has been arrayed in three inter-related value clusters or concepts that act as the foundations of service-learning practice, and a template for the summary table that follows on pages seven and eight:

- a) lifelong learning;
- b) democratic citizenship; and
- c) communitarianism.

1. Values

For purposes of this Summary, these concepts, and associated key values, are defined as follows: -

a) Lifelong Learning

According to the UNESCO definition of lifelong learning, the concept has both a life-span as well as a life-wide dimension. Through recognition of the life-wide aspect of learning in the community and its emphasis on equal valuing of learning whether acquired in the formal education or non-formal voluntary or workplace sector that experientially-based service-learning gains parity of esteem with traditional classroom learning. Further, UNESCO sees lifelong learning as a social goal that encompasses learning for the wider public good and active citizenship as well as for personal growth, and occupational competency. Finally, lifelong learning views learning both as a social process as well as an individual activity, and that some of the most important learning acquired is with or from others.²

b) Democratic Citizenship

Democratic values - those based on a belief in government of, for and by the people - entail a notion of responsible and capable citizenship in which public service is valued and inculcated by a variety of means - including both the formal education sector as well as non-formal learning opportunities in the family, the community, and the workplace.

c) Communitarianism

Communitarianism, the synthesis of liberal and social democratic values as expressed by Tony Blair and other leaders of the "Third Way" political economic movement, emphasizes;

- community capacity-building and empowerment,

² See UNESCO, 1996, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, UNESCO, Paris and OECD, 1996, *Lifelong Learning for All*, OECD, Paris for substantial discussions of the values, principles and practices of lifelong learning. For example, Part I, chapter 2 of the UNESCO report deals with the theme, *From social cohesion to democratic participation*, pp. 53-68. These documents, as well as the Think-Tank discussion, reflect the desirability of meaningful and reinforcing service-learning experiences throughout the formal system from kindergarten to graduate school – an increasingly feasible goal as a consensus develops as to the essential abilities and learning outcomes students need to acquire and use in a 21st century knowledge-based society.

- adding value to existing social capital (existing knowledge, shared values, networks, trust in the community),
- assuring social inclusion/cohesion,
- learning a sense of responsibility to others whether locally or globally, and
- learning/acting for the common good not just personal gain.³

2. Principles

A host of inter-related principles flow from the fundamental values of lifelong learning, democratic citizenship, and communitarianism. Some aspects of the principles that are at the heart of service-learning follow:

a) Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is seen by both UNESCO and OECD as an organizing principle and social goal. Learning is viewed as a social process and individual activity throughout life and learning in all its forms -- formal, non-formal and informal -- is recognized, valued, and celebrated, regardless of how or where it is acquired. Such learning enables one to become an active citizen, a productive worker, an effective and loving parent and family member, and a creative learner as one acquires the essential skills for the 21st century knowledge-based society - problem solving, critical thinking, literacy, numeracy, and teamwork skills, and learning how to learn. The concept also embraces the notion that learning is life-wide and that important learning also occurs outside the classroom, including the context of the family, the community and the workplace.

b) Democratic Citizenship

Sculpting future world citizens and fostering active citizenship is as much an art as a science. The insights, knowledge, and approaches of all disciplines can be used in the service of the public good through imaginative instruction in and out of the classroom.

Active citizenship is often most meaningful when initially learned and applied at the local level. It can then grow to a global perspective as the roots of empathy and service deepen. Civic engagement or participation is central to a healthy democracy, as is a populace that is capable of critical and reflective thought and action - all objectives of quality service-learning activities.

c) Communitarianism

Communitarian principles stress the balance of civic rights and responsibilities and the reciprocal relationship that exists between individuals and their communities - including, for example, an experiential learning method such as service-learning that links the community and the

³ See Etzioni, Amitai, 1994, *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society*, Simon and Shuster, New York for a seminal discussion of communitarian thought from an American perspective.

educational institution. It emphasizes the importance of building community capacity and social capital and hence social inclusion and cohesion. Service-learning is seen as one of the means by which communitarian principles may be advanced.⁴

3. Practices

The three value clusters and associated principles of lifelong learning, democratic citizenship, and communitarianism share common beliefs that affect the practice of service-learning. All recognize the importance of:

- experiential learning/education throughout the life-span;
- reflective thinking and action;
- reciprocal and respectful relationships among learners, communities and institutions in true partnerships;
- equal valuing of learning/knowledge/skills whether institution or community-based;
- using/building social capital as a means of increasing social inclusion/cohesion in communities; and
- fostering active citizenship in the 21st century global society.

The three value clusters and their inter-related principles and practices as discussed by the meeting participants are summarized in the following table.

Summary Table

Values	Principles	Practices
<i>Lifelong Learning</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning is lifelong and life-wide • learning transcends formal education • equal valuing of all learning • learning enhances all human activities/roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning as a “social or community process” • parity of esteem of all learning regardless of how or where acquired • learning happens in many different contexts • must provide opportunity to learn a repertoire of essential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involves/recognizes knowledge/skills found in a community (community expertise/leaders/elders) • values experiential learning • promotes development of team/co-operative learning approaches

⁴ Andersen, Susan M., 1998, *Service Learning: A National Strategy for Youth Development*, The Communitarian Network, at URL: http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/pop_svc.html.

	<p>skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • link between working/learning in community and institution • coherent/seamless formal education/learning opportunities from K to 20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enables both civic learning and career exploration • enables receipt of academic credit (direct or via PLAR) • features reflective practice (individual and group) • builds success into projects • enables service-learning at all academic levels
<i>Democratic Citizenship</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inculcate public service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sculpting future citizens • enhance learner appreciation of social responsibility and public/common good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disciplinary and/or multi-disciplinary (team teaching) • creates learning environments that build empathy and celebrate diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster local responsibility and involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster local participatory democracy • community, institution and learner involved in project planning & evaluation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizen/community participation throughout project • clear project goal, communication, and outcomes • institutions follow explicit code of conduct/good practice guidelines
<i>Communitarianism</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility of all to contribute to society • seek the common good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reciprocal relationships among learners, communities and institutions • promotes global citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnerships of formal/non-formal sectors • fosters equitable, mutually beneficial, non-exploitative and respectful relationships • ensures that citizens as

		well as students learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> community capacity-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> empowering community (to act for itself) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> requires adequate supports for volunteers/institutions/learners develops critical thinking and reflective practice increases community access to institutional resources provides opportunities for transformative learning for all involved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognize social capital ensure social inclusion/cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> values knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of all community members learning opportunities for all not just an elite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informs changes to curriculum to ensure respect for diversity incorporates curriculum development theory, practice approaches (community involvement/vision)
Values	Principles	Practices

B. Towards a Working Description and Definition

Think-Tank participants identified the following elements of the service-learning concept as central to its operational definition:

1. **Partnership**

- a. Reciprocal relationship amongst all partners – students, community and educational institutions
- b. Mutual benefits to all partners including educational, social or economic

2. **Reflective Practice**

- a. Builds on community strengths and students' prior learning
- b. Integrates formal learning with service
- c. Promotes development of citizenship values, attitudes, and skills
- d. Enhances career exploration

C. Towards an Operational Definition

Think-Tank members selected a number of elements that they considered necessary to include in an operational definition British Columbia's post-secondary system. The following is an attempt to weave these into a working definition.⁵

Service-learning integrates students' services in the voluntary or not-for-profit sector with academic credit courses of educational institutions so that there is a direct relationship to the curriculum, and learning outcomes are systematically evaluated.

Service-learning involves:

- *an equal partnership and learning relationship amongst communities, learners and institutions;*
- *a reciprocal relationship which benefits all partners educationally, socially or economically;*
- *building on communities strengths and students' prior learning; and*
- *reflective practice that enables active citizenship learning and/or career exploration.*

D. What Is Needed To Move Forward?

A range of suggestions focused on the need for a series of co-ordinated and coherent initiatives at the provincial and institutional levels.

1. Provincial Level

a) Funding

- Recognize service-learning as a legitimate learning activity in formula funding
- Develop a number of pilot or pathfinder projects
- Develop a special service-learning cost-sharing formula by which one-third of all recognized costs are shared by the province, the federal HRDC, and the institution
- Enable release time for provincial co-ordination, and participants of a proposed Provincial Advisory Committee
- Use existing funding sources for curriculum, program, and professional development wherever possible to further service-learning initiatives

b) Provincial Articulation

- Promote BCCAT support for transfer of courses with a service-learning component
- Discuss how voluntary service hours are accredited and thus funded

⁵ The Think-Tank, focused on an operational definition for the formal post-secondary sector, discussed the importance of credit-bearing activity. A similar concern would be expressed by educators in the school system. However, service-learning that emanated from the non-formal sector i.e. not-for-profit, community, or community sector, that results in demonstrable acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values could, if so desired, be formally recognized through Prior Learning Assessment techniques.

- Develop and maintain an inventory of current courses/projects
- c) Policy/Program Development
- Create a Provincial Advisory Committee of stakeholders and practitioners
 - Develop a quality assurance system that includes good practice guidelines and standards, and assessment/evaluation tools
 - Produce a practical guide on what works and what doesn't
 - Create and maintain a directory (possibly virtual) of opportunities, existing expertise, and products of work
 - Develop a communications strategy including showcasing events
 - Promote a network of champions from all stakeholders
 - Use service-learning as a criterion for existing mechanisms for new program and curriculum approvals

2. Institutional Level

- a) Support Structure
- Service-learning co-ordinator (part- or full-time)
 - Community-based advisory committee
 - Faculty development (internal advisory committee)
- b) Funding
- Build funding partnerships (e.g. business, Third sector, foundations)
 - Enable release time
 - Recognize in-kind donations from community
 - Establish developmental funds for project development
- c) Policy/Program Development
- Incorporate service-learning into strategic directions and planning/reporting documents
 - Establish good practice guidelines/protocols and standards including assessment/evaluation tools
 - Initiate communications/marketing strategies including information in institutional calendars etc.
 - Address workload issues

III. Conclusion

Government overall may have an interest in supporting a service-learning initiative that:

- further strengthens its youth service/development initiatives;
- fosters effective career exploration for in- and out-of-school youth and adults;
- promotes community capacity-building and the enhanced use and growth of social capital in diverse communities throughout the province; and

- provides clear opportunities for inter-ministry collaboration and resource-sharing (e.g. ministries such as Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers as well as Children and Families are natural partners with the two education ministries) as well as potential collaboration with the federal government.

The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology can further support its college, institute and agency system "to improve the quality of life and citizenship experienced in the province and to enhance current and future job opportunities" by means of strategic development of a post-secondary service-learning initiative that:

- assists institutions to improve the relevance and quality of their programs as described in *Charting A New Course* ;
- builds on excellent co-operative education work (another effective form of experiential education, albeit with compensation) for which British Columbia is an acknowledged leader;
- creates future employment opportunities for graduates;
- increases the number of effective partnerships between post-secondary institutions and the not-for-profit sector; and
- ensures an applied focus to education for many learners.

The Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology has an expanded mandate to work with its system partners to explore innovations in teaching and learning, and to further assist MAETT in accomplishing the goals of the system's strategic plan. At the same time, the Centre is carrying out its new *Strategic Directions* as it works

with communities, the voluntary sector and various levels of government to promote lifelong learning opportunities that enhance the roles of British Columbians as active global citizens.

The Centre can continue to take a lead role in working with MAETT, other provincial ministries, the federal government, and its system partners to further develop a coherent service-learning initiative in British Columbia.

IV. Appendices

A. Think-Tank Agenda and List of Attendees

B. Think-Tank Background Material (definitions and principles)