

Higher Education's new Mission - The Emergence of Service Learning

In 1749 Benjamin Franklin published a pamphlet stating the educational goals of the Academy of Philadelphia: ‘The Idea of what is *true Merit*, should also be often presented to Youth [...] as consisting in an *Inclination* join’d with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one’s Country, Friends and Family”¹. Franklin referred to what would become a unique feature of American higher education, namely its obligation to serving the public good. Even though this service mission has been essential to American academia from its early beginnings, it received new significance during the last quarter of the 20th century. Until that point, the services universities and colleges should address were decided primarily by the economy and the state. Consequently, the *Morrill Act*, the *GI Bill* and the *National Defense Education Act* all have become examples of services of pragmatic purpose. The beneficiaries were a selective group chosen by state officials and big businesses.

The larger sociological and anthropological changes occurring in the 1960s and 1970s would dramatically alter the perception of the relationship between academia and public service. On the political stage, President Johnson initiated a *War on Poverty* and the *Great Society* legislation². On campuses across the country, students and liberal faculty members protested against the war in Vietnam and for a renewed understanding of higher education purposes³. Academic reforms commencing in this period include initiatives such as affirmative action, multiculturalism and, key to this paper, service learning. Service learning belongs to the broad range of experiential education. Based on pedagogic theories of the Progressive Era and leading educationalist John Dewey, service learning programmes intended to make practical experience outside of the classroom an integral part of academic learning⁴. Through directly contributing to the communities surrounding them, colleges and universities began fulfilling a more utilitarian service mission, dedicating their powers to society in a broader sense. The 1970s proved a stepping stone for institutionalised service learning programmes, where they were mainly single initiatives at the margin of the institutes of higher learning, lacking any clear definition and institutionalised organisation. This changed at the end of the 1980s.

¹ Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, Philadelphia 1749, p. 30. http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?TextID=franklin_youth&PagePosition=28 (21.06.2012)

² Robert Dallek, *Flawed giant: Lyndon Johnson and his times, 1961 – 1973*, New York 1998, p. 310.

³ W.H. Cowley, Don Williams, *International and Historical Roots of American Higher Education*, New York, London 1991, p. 195; John S. Brubacher, Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition. A History of American Colleges and Universities*, New Brunswick, London 1997, p. 412.

⁴ Timothy K. Stanton, Dwight E. Giles Jr., Nadinne I. Cruz (eds.), *Service-learning. A Movement’s Pioneers Reflect on its Origins, Practice, and Future*, San Francisco 1999, p. 5.

Under Reagan's presidency, a "transition [took place] from the political and social arrangements built by post-World War II liberalism to the highly competitive, fast-changing, and technology-oriented system we know today"⁵. As it was affected by liberal meanings in the 1960s and 1970s, academia was equally affected by the conservative shift during this era when many of the liberal ideals established over the last two decades came under criticism. Regardless, service learning gained momentum during this period. This paper identifies four important features that made this success possible. Leading individuals of the early service learning development intensified their exchange of experience and ideas using and establishing networks leading to an increase in public knowledge regarding service learning. Soon, new institutes of higher education initiated service learning programmes. As a result, the formerly vague and undistinguished term service learning became more defined. In the 1980s it turned "from a 'program' [...] to a curricular 'method'"⁶. The method's popularity reached a peak with the *National and Community Service Act* of 1990, defining service learning as

"a method under which students [...] learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community [...]; and helps foster civic responsibility; and that is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students [...]"⁷.

So far, the history of the service learning movement has not been thoroughly analysed. Consequently, its contribution to redefining the service mission of American academia has not been fully acknowledged. This paper analyses how this development evolved. So far, different studies have either provided an in-depth analysis of how service learning has been successfully implemented at certain institutes of higher learning or gave a general overview of the genesis of service learning⁸. My works shows that it is not possible to thoroughly reveal how service learning evolved to a nationally recognised pedagogical method using only one methodological approach. Therefore, I combine a both micro- and meso-analysis. I focus on six institutes of higher education, four which started service learning programmes in the 1970s and two in the 1980s, thus concentrating on early initiators. I chose universities from the South/West and North/East of the US to permit broader geographical comparisons.

⁵ John Ehrman, *The Eighties. America in the Age of Reagan*, New Haven und London, 2005. p. 2.

⁶ Michael Lounsbury and Seth Pollack, "Institutionalizing Civic Engagement: Shifting Logics and the Cultural Repackaging of Service-Learning in U.S. Higher Education", forthcoming.

⁷ THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACT OF 1990 [As amended through December 17, 1999, P.L. 106-170], p.5.

⁸ Angela Schmiede, *The Legitimacy of Experiential Learning in Research Universities*, Ann Arbor 2003 [dissertation], Seth Pollack, *Three Decades of Service-Learning in Higher Education (1966-1996): The Contested Emergence of an Organizational Field*, Ann Arbor 1997 [dissertation]; Stanton et al., *Service-learning*.

My paper begins by examining how these different institutes initiated their respective service learning programmes. Comparing the six developments helps to find common characteristics which lead to the possibility of identifying 'sign posts' in the evolutionary process.

These sign posts will only be revealed by analysing those aspects that are central to all of the programmes. These aspects are the individuals involved in establishing the programmes, the funding of programmes and their location within the universities (either within a certain discipline or interdisciplinary). Also, it is necessary to reveal which language was used to describe service learning. This will show how the term itself evolved at different institutes. These six universities did not develop service learning programmes in complete isolation. Thus, on a meso-level, it is interesting to see in which organizations the initiators of the diverse programmes took part. Moreover, the conferences they attended and the publications they edited reveal how the term 'service learning' was defined and, probably, became more profound. Equally, my work notes how these exchanges were noticed and attracted further universities and colleges which went on to add service learning to their curriculum.

Analysing these six case studies and their broader linkage will contribute to a more profound understanding of how the development of service learning as a pedagogical method took place in detail. Today, service learning has attracted international attention and has been transferred to Asia, Africa and Europe⁹. Thus, revealing its early development can contribute to understanding the significance of the concept and help to ease future transfers to other cultural contexts. The service learning movement has shown that the question "What is Higher Education for?" can be answered by developing a new, more utilitarian meaning of the service mission of academia.

⁹ Shahabudin, Sharifah Hapsah (2008): Community Service at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Paper presented at the 11th Unesco-APEID Conference: Reinventing Higher Education: Toward Participatory and Sustainable Development, December 12-14, 2007; Sally Matthews, "Teaching and Researching Africa in an 'Engaged' Way: The Possibilities and Limitations of 'Community Engagement'", in: JHEA/RESA Vol. 8, No. 1, 2010, pp. 1-21; Anne Sliwka, "Service Learning: Verantwortung lernen in Schule und Gemeinde", in: Wolfgang Edelstein und Peter Fauser (Hrsg.), *Beiträge zur Demokratiepädagogik Eine Schriftenreihe des BLK-Programms „Demokratie lernen & leben“*, Berlin 2004.