Faculty Empowerment Through Refined Service-Learning

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Abstract

This study examines the experience of 10 faculty members' pre -and post- participation in a faculty development seminar on service-learning pedagogy, theory, and methodology. The seminar, "Re-Visioning Your Service-Learning Course," was developed to further knowledge of service-learning concepts and increase skills in curricular integration, reflection, community partnerships, and assessment. The voices of faculty are elucidated with regards to the extent of empowerment experienced through refined knowledge and application of service-learning. The results reveal implications for sustaining and furthering service-learning programs.

The empowering effects of service-learning have been most often studied and documented in association with student outcomes after having implemented service-learning projects as a course requirement. The positive effects of service-learning on student moral and civic development, academic outcomes, and leadership abilities, have been well documented by research (Astin and Vogelgesang 2003, Batchelder and Root 1994, Eyler and Giles 1999). Service-learning and its potential to empower preservice teachers has also been documented, as teacher education programs incorporating service-learning have increased across the nation (Anderson 1999, Cromwell and Curran 2002, Furco and Root 2001; Freeman and Swick 2001).

A less well-researched area of service-learning and empowerment is that of experienced service-learning practitioners, namely faculty, who seek refinement of their knowledge, skills, and application. The studies that have been conducted indicate that service-learning is associated with gains for educators in the development of professional attitudes and values needed for successful teaching (Root 1997). Wade (1997) noted an increase in educators' positive attitudes about community participation and gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy. Root and Batchelder (1994) concluded that educators made significant gains in the complexity of their thinking about social problems, enhancing their understanding of children's needs. Educators have also been known to increase their sensitivity to diversity issues and reflect more deeply about their responses to diverse students (Seigel 1995). Wade (1997) further found that service-learning could be a means for empowering educators by providing them with authority and affirmation.

This existing research, although focusing on some positive aspects of integrating service-learning, does not specifically address the concept of how refined application

of service-learning may empower faculty. Schwerin (1997) concluded his paper, "Service-learning and Empowerment," by stating: "Future research on service-learning might usefully focus on determining the empowering impact of service-learning on the participants, community members and faculty involved" (216). In *Service-learning: A Movement's Pioneers Reflect on Its Origins, Practice, and Future* (Stanton, Giles and Cruz 1999) individual chapters are dedicated to empowering students and empowering communities, however none for empowering faculty. Most recently, Driscoll (2000) highlighted, "Studies of the impact of service-learning on faculty is a fertile research area" (38). In 2005, Pribbenow concurred, emphasizing the scarcity of research that considers how the use of service-learning pedagogy affects faculty.

In response to the identified need for more extensive research in this area this article assesses the experience of faculty who have experienced service-learning in four phases: initial application, identification of skill gaps, participation in service-learning seminar, and refined application of service-learning into coursework. Through documenting participant voices, this article articulates the extent of expressed faculty empowerment through refined application of service-learning knowledge and skills.

This article examines three main research questions:

1. How did the seminar, "Re-visioning Your Service-Learning Course," affect faculty's theoretical understanding and refined application of service-learning?

2. To what extent did theoretical and methodological refinement of service-learning knowledge and skills empower faculty?

3. What are the implications of these outcomes for service-learning coordinators and academic administrators?

Description of Seminar

In the fall of 2004, 10 faculty across disciplines from the same public metropolitan university in the western United States convened for a six-week, 15-hour seminar to refine their service-learning pedagogy, theory, and methodology. These faculty were each given a voluntary invitation to participate in a seminar, entitled, "Re-Visioning Your Service-Learning Course." Most faculty development programs target faculty before they incorporate service-learning into their courses. This seminar was designed in response to specific pedagogical and methodological needs expressed by faculty who had already experienced the challenges of integrating service-learning into their undergraduate courses. Faculty submitted a seminar application specifying their personal and academic goals prior to their participation. They were given a $500 stipend upon completion of the seminar, which included an introductory dinner with a regional service-learning expert, five 90-minute seminar sessions, and a longer culminating session. The seminar was designed to further faculty knowledge of service-learning concepts as they relate to each component of faculty professional life — teaching, research, and service. The faculty had a common interest in refining their

knowledge and application of service-learning, although most did not know each other prior to their participation in the seminar. Each of the sessions focused on one topic and included a variety of learning methods from small group problem-solving, case studies, and syllabi review. The content of the sessions was designed to address the following specific learning goals submitted on faculty applications:

• Interdisciplinary expansion of peers committed to using service-learning pedagogy in their teaching;

• Effective integration of service with course work;

• Enhanced service-learning reflection and assessment techniques;

• Improved understanding of community partnerships; and

• Increased ideas for research and publishing in service-learning.

Description of Faculty Participants

The 10 faculty who self-selected to participate in this study had previous experience incorporating service-learning in their classes and were seeking advancement of their pedagogical, theoretical, and methodological service-learning knowledge. The faculty expressed a moderate level of institutional support for service-learning prior to this seminar. Although the institution has an established service-learning program, many faculty had not benefited from institutional support or resources prior to this seminar. Table I provides details of faculty participants' academic disciplines, tenure rank, and years incorporating service-learning.

Methodology

Investigators collaboratively employed the qualitative methodology of participatory research to assess faculty's sense of empowerment experienced through the refinement of service-learning knowledge and skills (Ada, Beutel and Peterson 1990; Park 1993; Patton 2002). Both researchers work at the same institution as the faculty participants, which facilitated access to gathering data. One researcher, who serves as the service-learning coordinator, designed and implemented the seminar. The second researcher is an assistant professor of education, specializing in the field of service-learning.

In the fall of 2004, faculty were invited to participate in the refinement seminar. The participant seminar content was guided by faculty specified goals. Upon completion of the seminar, faculty had the opportunity to apply their refined theoretical and methodological knowledge and skills into selected spring, 2005 courses. After the spring 2005, semester had terminated, faculty were given post-seminar questionnaires to assess their degree of theoretical and methodological refinement. Based on questionnaire responses, researchers developed follow-up oral interview questions to gather further insights. One month later, faculty participated in oral interviews with

researchers. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim for transcription analysis (Ada, Beutel and Peterson 1990; Patton 2002). Participants were given transcripts to check for accuracy. Questionnaires and transcriptions were then collaboratively analyzed for generative themes (McCaleb 1994). Themes were explored as they emerged independently, as well as in consideration of the concept of empowerment through refinement of service-learning knowledge and skills. Voices of the participants elucidate the discovered themes derived from research data.

Definitions of Empowerment

Research Definitions of Empowerment

Prior to considering participants' definitions of empowerment, researchers first considered the term empowerment on a broader perspective. Critical pedagogues today (Ada, Beutel and Peterson 1990, Giroux 1997, Freire 1970, McLaren 1989, Park 1993, Walsh 1991) propose that the purpose of education is not merely to help people find their place in the existing society, but to empower people with the self-respect and understanding needed to form a new and more just social order. Due to its widespread use, empowerment has taken on many meanings. It has been equated with concepts including self-esteem, self-reliance, self-actualization, self-transformation, community building, and social or political transformation. As a multidimensional concept with many forms, it can be relevant for individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and larger systems.

Within the context of education, Maeroff (1988) believes that the term empowerment is synonymous with professionalization. Short (1994) defined empowerment as "the process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems" (488). Melenyzer (1990) adds that "teacher empowerment is the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession" (4).

As numerous aspects of empowerment can be considered, even within the discipline of education, this article considers participants' personal definitions of empowerment and participants responses to the six distinct dimensions of teacher empowerment identified by Short and Rinehart: 1) teacher status; 2) autonomy; 3) teacher impact; 4) professional development; 5) self-efficacy, and 6) teacher involvement in decision-making. These dimensions were evaluated in consideration of participants' experience with service-learning and its refinement.

Participant Definitions of Empowerment

Participant definitions of empowerment overlap with those of existing research. Before discussing any literature related to empowerment or its relation to service-learning, each participant was asked to define the concept of empowerment for him/herself. When asked, "As a faculty member, what gives you a sense of empowerment?" most responses fell into the main category of impact on student learning. Participants defined empowerment as:

- Seeing concrete examples of student learning through application;

- Giving the students more responsibility for their own learning;

- Having a positive, long-term impact on student learning;

- Being able to empower students;

- Helping students gain new understanding; changing viewpoints or perspectives;

- Getting students to question; to be more critical thinkers, and,

- Creating the need to know.

Other areas of empowerment that received less emphasis included:

- Autonomy — Participants expressed empowerment as being able to control outcomes; knowing there are resources available and that the priority of the institutions is straight, and knowing they could try new things.

- Credibility and having a voice.

- Decision making ability.

Participant Definitions of Empowerment within Service-Learning Context

When then asked how the use of service-learning affects their sense of empowerment, participants responded:

"Service-learning definitely does...that is why I like it so much because it really encourages people to see other perspectives and listen to other voices, beyond the mainstream."

"Service learning is a great way to potentially open peoples' eyes; not through my ranting and raving but through experiential learning so they can understand why people end up utilizing Medicaid services; why low income people can't just get a job; what are the barriers.... (T)hey learn answers through the experience."

The empowering aspects of service-learning have been clearly noted for students and community members (Astin and Sax 1999; Schwerin 1997; Stanton, Giles and Cruz 1999). The gap in literature on the empowering value of service-learning for faculty has also been noted (Abes, Jackson and Jones 2002, Bringle, Hatcher and Games 1997, Driscoll 2000, Giles and Eyler 1998, Pribbenow 2005). This study begins to fill that gap with a particular focus on how refining service-learning skills empowers faculty.

Results

Through collaborative analysis of questionnaires and follow-up interviews, the researchers discovered the following benefits participants gained from the refinement seminar and subsequent application of service-learning:

• Evidence of increased theoretical knowledge of service-learning;

• Evidence of refined application of service-learning;

• Empowerment as evidenced by increased knowledge and application of service-learning;

• Self-efficacy, and,

• Professional development.

Evidence of Increased Theoretical Knowledge of Service-Learning

Participants' refined knowledge and skills with regard to the how and why of service-learning empowered their teaching. More than half of the participants expressed an increase in their understanding of the overall purpose for integrating service-learning in their coursework. There were two levels of understanding on which faculty gained clarity: 1) personal goals for why they were using service-learning, and, 2) service-learning goals. Although these two goals are related, participants discovered that having a clearer sense of their own rationale for using service-learning positively transferred to their course objectives. As participants more clearly articulated their goals, they found that students were better able to reach them. The following quotes from interviews demonstrate the value of the seminar in refining participants' knowledge base:

"The seminar helped me to better integrate service-learning with the course materials, readings and course objectives."

"I am more cognizant of how I want service-learning to impact my course objectives since I can articulate it better."

"The seminar gave me a deeper sense of aspects of service-learning, which I then ended up imparting to my students."

As participants gained clarity on their personal goals, they simultaneously developed clearer service-learning goals, which included the educational significance they hoped to achieve for their students, from pedagogical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. A primary aspect of service-learning theory lies in the realm of reflection. "Through reflection, the community service can be studied and interpreted,

much like a text is read and studied for deeper understanding" (Hatcher, Bringle and Muthiah 2004: 39). Researchers further emphasize the enormous potential for learning when reflection activities engage the learner. Through the seminar, participants became more conscious of the need for reflections, how to implement different kinds of reflections and the depth to which reflections could take place:

"Reflection is such an ongoing skill for me in terms of how to word things, what level, to not just ask the same thing every time, I mean that is such an art; to get them to think deeper and deeper and deeper. I gained specific ideas from our guest speaker."

"Reflection was a key thing that kept coming up for me in the seminar; that's really what I have been working on — how to implement reflection and how to work with it, how students can learn from it."

Research confirms that high quality service-learning includes regular and structured reflection (Bringle and Hatcher 1996). Research also reveals the positive correlation between the nature of reflection activities and course quality (Hatcher Bringle and Muthiah 2004). One of the most important components of a service-learning course is the amount and type of reflection activities used to connect the service with the course content and learning objectives (Bringle and Hatcher 1996, Giles and Eyler 1998).

Participant gains in their understanding of service-learning goals specifically related to reflection were demonstrated as they applied their increased knowledge to post-seminar courses. Participants learned that reflection activities needed to have clear guidelines, be structured, and be a regular part of the course. Changes made by participants included increased number of reflections; added reflective activities such as journals and discussion boards; and depth of understanding of the need for regular, quality, and structured reflection. One participant, after realizing he didn't incorporate enough reflection added quite a bit more in his post-seminar course. As a result of his increased use of reflection, he enthusiastically shared;

"One of discussions that we had during my class was the difference between charity and social change. To me, it was like a dream reflection interaction where we were talking about what is actually happening at the agency…I thought it represented a minor sort of event of social change for my students."

Evidence of Refined Application of Service-Learning

Researchers concluded that the seminar itself resulted in an increase in participants' knowledge base. Consequently, as faculty became clearer on personal and pedagogical goals of service-learning, their clarity transferred to the applied refinement and deeper integration of service-learning into their coursework. Faculty not only articulated service-learning goals more effectively to their students; they also became more effective at integrating service-learning into their courses as a central rather than periphery aspect of the class.

"It is the value added piece — I have stronger sense now that service-learning actually adds value to the learning experience. Having a stronger sense of belief in service-learning has encouraged me to go ahead and do it."

"I got a better sense of how to integrate service-learning into the curriculum; how to make the learning part of the service-learning objectives; how to connect the service to the course goals more."

"I put a lot of effort into not just designing the service-learning but designing the rest of the class so that basically everything that students did had some connection to their service-learning project. So the papers they wrote, the seminars they did, everything connected to service-learning."

Research substantiates the importance of this aspect of refinement. Service-learning instructors "need to ensure that the service is not merely added to a course…but that the service is a meaningful and a well-integrated part of the overall course design for which there is a clear pedagogical rationale" (Hatcher, Bringle and Muthiah 2004: 42).

As faculty strengthened the integration of service-learning in their courses, they, in turn, experienced positive impacts on their students' learning. For example, they witnessed the power within service-learning to make course theory come to life.

"Instructor's theories and methods become more credible when students can see and do for themselves. When students begin to put theory into practice, this in turn gives me a sense of empowerment to see my impact on helping them make those connections."

"The service learning sparks more of an interest in the course work side of it. In addition to having a good sense of the academic material, they are more excited about it. It gives students a sense that these things can be applied and can actually make a difference in their lives and communities."

"If health is not applied then it is just a lot of content. When students can take information and apply it to their lives or see how it applies to the lives of others — that's the empowerment part."

"The refinement made it a whole lot more exciting for me and for the students. I saw them getting really involved in their projects; they 'got' why service-learning was there."

Research substantiates participants' expression of the positive affects service-learning has on students' educational motivation as well as students' ability to find relevance in their theoretical coursework (Astin and Sax 1999). As participants refined their application of service-learning, they experienced this increased value with their students.

Empowerment as Evidenced by Increased Knowledge and Refined Application of Service-Learning

After ascertaining participants' extent of increased knowledge and refined application of service-learning, researchers analyzed these criteria in light of their potential to empower participants. In the oral interviews, participants were shown a diagram of Short and Rinehart's "Six Dimensions of Empowerment." They were asked to consider which dimensions, if any, resonated with them and explain why. Several participants identified autonomy and teacher impact as empowering aspects of service-learning. However, the two most highly identified dimensions by participants were self-efficacy, and professional development.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as teachers' perceptions that they have the ability to positively affect student learning (Short and Rinehart 1992). Guskey (1987) similarly defined self-efficacy as teachers' perceived sense of responsibility for student learning. Both self-esteem and self-efficacy contribute to the formation of an individual's psychological empowerment (Scherwin 1997).

Nine out of 10 participants declared self-efficacy as experienced through the positive impact on student learning most clearly evidenced the empowering effects of applying refined service-learning. Research further validates participants' experience, showing that one of the main factors motivating faculty to use service-learning is the positive impact on student learning (Abes, Jackson and Jones 2002).

Participants first expressed a sense of self-efficacy through increased confidence and motivation gained through the seminar, having acquired deeper knowledge and skills for the integration of service-learning in their courses:

"I feel more confident being able to communicate with agencies. I have a better understanding of their needs, which I learned from our seminar. The seminar really strengthened my understanding and application of service-learning."

"This semester, for the first time, I had a much stronger sense of how to sequence reflections…. I am confident in the spring, or the fall I'll be more able to balance everything better."

As faculty gained clarity on service-learning goals, became more adept at integrating course theory and learning through service-learning, and improved reflective techniques, they noted distinct impacts on their students' learning. Students' increase in enthusiasm and connective learning gave faculty an additional sense of self-efficacy:

"The deeper understanding of service-learning ultimately gave me a greater sense of impact on their learning through seeing their deeper reflections."

"Service-learning tremendously improved my students learning."

"I had one student who was very quiet during class and she went on this service project that day. When she returned she said how this literature had transformed her. As an instructor, this is my highest goal; it is definitely what I want to see. It is a very concrete reward."

"The best part of service-learning is the impact; it makes me feel the best about this when I integrate it."

Participants experienced the impact on student learning on various levels:

a. Impacting students' personal growth:

"Participating in their personal growth and self-confidence, gives you, as a faculty, a sense of empowerment."

b. Impacting students to be able to see the world through a different lens:

"I can talk about psychological research on social exclusion and how it feels really awful for people to be in groups that aren't well regarded in society as a whole. When they read that kind of research at the same time they're working at an agency where they can see how people are affected by these things, it seems that that has a whole different kind of affect. It makes a whole different kind of impact when they're actually doing that work at the same time."

"Service-learning is the most useful for getting students to really critically think about things and to evaluate prior assumptions. It doesn't just give them a better understanding of what we're researching, it changes their attitudes about the very people with whom they're working. It's the changes in their attitudes that are most empowering to me."

c. Impacting students to not only recognize there are real problems that need to be addressed, but taking the next step in deciding that they are going to be part of the solution; enabling students to believe in their abilities to make a difference:

"You feel empowered by being able to empower them to make a difference in their communities — like your child has now been able to take that step, is doing it on their own; it is even better than me getting the recognition. She is getting the recognition and I am able to see the difference it makes in her life…ultimately you see the impact."

d. Impacting students' learning through witnessing depth of knowledge acquired:

"Service-learning is the most useful for getting students to really critically think about things and to evaluate prior assumptions."

"My students had to face the impact of poverty and then have a meaningful discussion about it. And I think that it worked… it brought the discussion up another level. The service-learning integration of theory and praxis was happening."

"Students were learning the theory through living out social constructivism in their communities of service."

e. Impacting students' learning, long-term:

"The idea their service-learning experience will have some long-term influence . . . that's why it seems very empowering."

The empowering sense of self-efficacy experienced by participants further enabled them to take service-learning beyond courses they were already teaching.

"The seminar gave me the confidence to incorporate in into another course, which is a big project that I am working on right now. It is a pretty big deal to incorporate it into a brand new course and it is somewhat revolutionary, too, because it is an introductory literature course. Everybody has to take this course so many more students will be introduced to service-learning."

"Some faculty commented in the seminar that I should really write up my class, so I'm thinking about a journal, like *Teaching in Psychology*, that's pretty well-regarded as far as publication."

As initially defined by participants, positive affects on student learning clearly evidence empowerment for faculty. The applied refinement of service-learning in post-seminar courses yielded this sense of empowerment, as experienced through an increase in self-efficacy.

Professional Development

The second most empowering aspect of the refined application of service-learning for participants was expressed in terms of professional development. Professional development includes both the opportunities and encouragement of others to participate in continuous learning experiences or professional growth (Short and Rinehart 1992). Professional growth can also be experienced as a teacher has the opportunity to become a community researcher with his/her students, to acquire new skills, to develop new knowledge and experience, observe changes in student attitudes to learning, and integrate humanist values into the educational process (Root 1997).

The aspects of professional development most noted by participants were collaboration with faculty and a deeper sense of community involvement. Collaboration with faculty was by far the most valuable aspect of the seminar for the majority of participants. A number of the participants equated its value to participating in a conference. They shared how it was empowering as it contributed to their own learning and development:

"The seminar helped develop me as a broader teacher; a teacher with new skills in my tool kit."

"I think that is why we all liked it so much is because it was refreshing to share ideas about teaching."

"It allowed me to connect with other people; I am empowered by networking."

The value of collaboration for faculty can frequently be underestimated but this study revealed how, in particular, interdisciplinary collaborative work was highly beneficial. Participants described the collaborative aspect of the seminar as "generative; energizing; refreshing; normalizing; networking; the best part was the camaraderie, being able to talk with like-minded people." Participant voices from this study are echoed through research revealing that encouragement from faculty who use service-learning is among the most highly rated forms of instructional support (Abes, Jackson and Jones 2002). In his study, "The Impact of Service-learning Pedagogy on Faculty Teaching and Learning," Pribbenow (2005) emphasized the significance of faculty collaboration in keeping faculty involved and increasing the likelihood of positive effects associated with the use of service-learning (28).

When asked what further training would be useful for them, the majority of participants focused on further collaboration in the form of sharing syllabi, brainstorming reflection activities, and sharing of experiences with student learning. The sharing of ideas across disciplines brings the added value of external perspectives. Participants enthusiastically shared the value gained from collaboration:

"There are far too few opportunities to get together with faculty and talk about anything. Having the opportunity to talk to other faculty is great. This being sort of new to me and I guess to everyone in a way, it was particularly helpful in that regard."

"It was helpful and to hear what other people where doing it and how they were approaching it."

"The seminar was really helpful in terms of being able to be with others across the campus rather than my own very small department. I learned a lot from them. I think it has made a huge difference."

The design of the seminar (1 1/2- hour sessions over the course of six weeks) was another aspect that facilitated deeper collaboration rather than a one/two-day
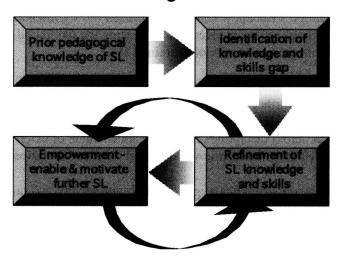
workshop. This longevity allowed for greater relationship building among faculty, more trust, and thus a significant level of sharing ideas. It also gave participants the confidence to contact one another post-seminar, to continue giving and receiving feedback from one another. For many it was a breath of fresh air, which provided renewed enthusiasm to sustain and further revitalize individual and institutional service-learning efforts.

Although deeper community involvement was not discussed to the same degree as collaboration, participants did share the value they gained from an increased awareness of agency needs. Those who implemented seminar ideas, such as inviting agency members to class, had very positive results with regards to their own and student relationships with community members. This in turn gave faculty increased confidence in the impact of service-learning methodology.

Conclusions

This study revealed two explicit areas of empowerment – self-efficacy and professional development — experienced by participants as a result of service-learning refinement. Based on these findings, researchers designed a model of refinement for faculty with prior service-learning experience:

Service Learning and Refinement

As a social constructivist model (Fosnot 1996, Vygostsky 1986) faculty are empowered through the process of using prior service-learning knowledge, identifying gaps, and collaboratively constructing new knowledge to refine their pedagogical, theoretical and methodological skills. The value of faculty constructing knowledge while using service-learning pedagogy cannot be underestimated (Pribbenow 2005).

Through the analysis of the empowering aspects of refining service-learning, the researchers unintentionally discovered challenges to being empowered through course integration of service-learning. As participants discussed how service-learning empowered their teaching, they also invariably shared the challenges or aspects of service-learning that were disempowering for them. The primary identified obstacles to increased use of service-learning were:

- Lack of time to develop a service-learning component of courses and build community relationships;

- Lack of support within promotion and tenure guidelines, and,

- Lack of financial or other compensation.

Educational Significance of Study

The identified challenges of service-learning as voiced by participants have been documented in other research (Abes, Jackson and Jones 2002, Mundy 2003). In order to make significant changes to sustain and further enhance service-learning programs, this research must be disseminated to department chairs, provosts and university presidents to not only consider, but to act upon. Specific suggestions to address the previously mentioned obstacles encountered by service-learning practitioners include:

- Institutionally supported collaboration for service-learning faculty across disciplines;

- Release time from normal course loads;

- Revision of promotion and tenure guidelines to reflect legitimate recognition of service-learning as part of research, as well as service and teaching;

- Grant money or additional faculty trainings (such as the seminar) to offset additional time required for service-learning courses, and,

- Seminars dedicated to service-learning and research, with the goal of gaining knowledge for collaborative research and publication across disciplines.

Without the adequate support system, departmentally and university-wide, the empowering aspects of service-learning can be lost. This study evidences the gains in faculty sense of professional development and self-efficacy experienced through participation in and application of a service-learning refinement seminar. Universities, which capitalize on these gains with continued support, will yield far-reaching returns, not only in faculty empowerment, but also in student and community empowerment (Stanton, Giles and Cruz 1999). Hubelbank and Baron (2002) describe the powerful intersection of faculty members' internal motivations, the support of colleagues and staff, and the institution's administrative support system working together to encourage the development of service-learning campus-wide.

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