

Assessing Service Learning Through the Categories of Content, Context, and Process

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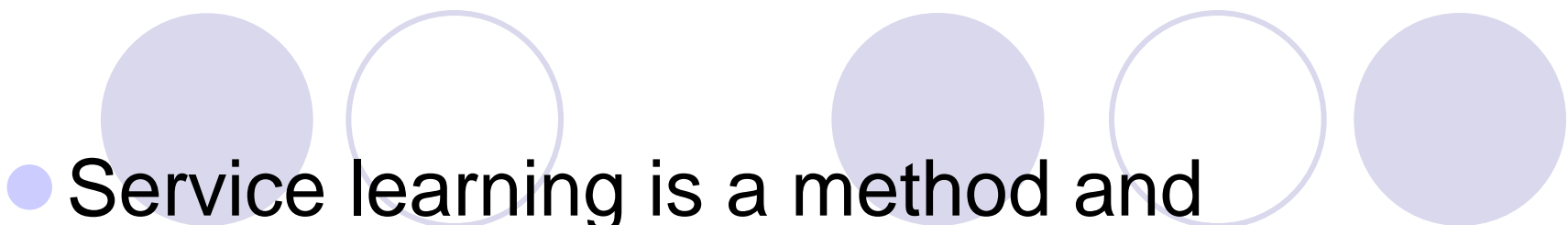
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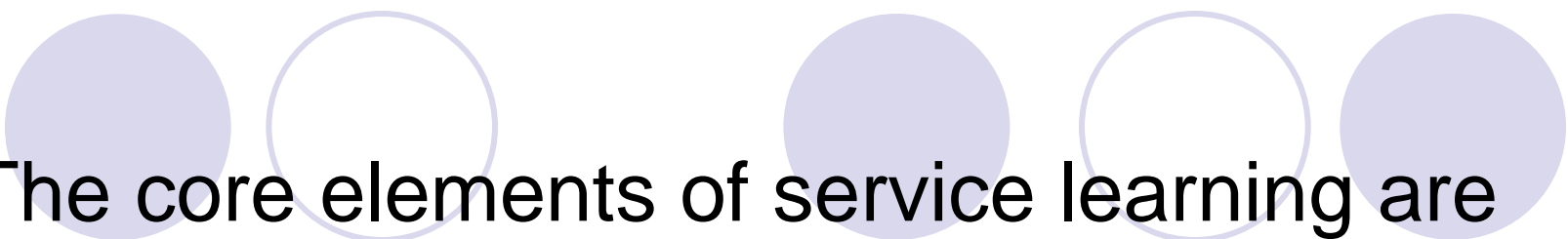


What is Service Learning?

- A credit bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on course content with a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense for civic responsibility.

Bringle & Hatcher '96

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- Service learning is a method and philosophy of experiential learning through which participants in community service meet community needs while developing their own abilities for critical thinking and group problem-solving, their commitments and values, and the skills they need for effective citizenship.


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- The core elements of service learning are (1) service activities that help meet community needs that the community finds important, and (2) structured educational components that challenge participants to think critically about and learn from their experiences. Service activities give rise to learning opportunities, and what participants learn further informs their service.

Mintz and Goodwin '93



Models for Service Learning Curricular Initiatives

- Stand alone service learning course
- Separate course credit
- Minimal involvement with faculty
- Minimal link with course material
- Learning by doing
- Stand alone learning course
- Separate course credit
- Varied involvement by faculty
- Minimal link with course material
- Several department field study courses
- Learning by doing with faculty involvement

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- Variable credit course
 - Some students in class participate/others don't
 - Link course material with community learning experience for additional credit
 - Learning and grade assessed by faculty
 - Integrated service learning within course structure
 - Everyone in class participates
 - Learning and assessment by faculty
 - Direct integration of class academic offering with out of class experience

The header features five light purple circles arranged horizontally. The text 'The Five Critical Elements of Community Service' is centered above the circles, and 'Learning Programming' is centered below the circles.

The Five Critical Elements of Community Service

Learning Programming

- Community Voice
- Orientation and Training
- Meaningful Action
- Reflection
- Evaluation



Honest Questions to Ask

- Does the process of integration (service learning) take away from academic tasks?
- The answer must include an assessment of learning goals. In what context do our goals impact the learner?



Research on Good Teaching Practice

Quality undergraduate instruction builds in:

- Active learning
- Assessment and prompt, frequent feedback
- Collaboration- teams and workgroups
- Time to task- better results with more time devoted
- Out of class contact with faculty
- Experiential learning

Adapted from Romer, 1995

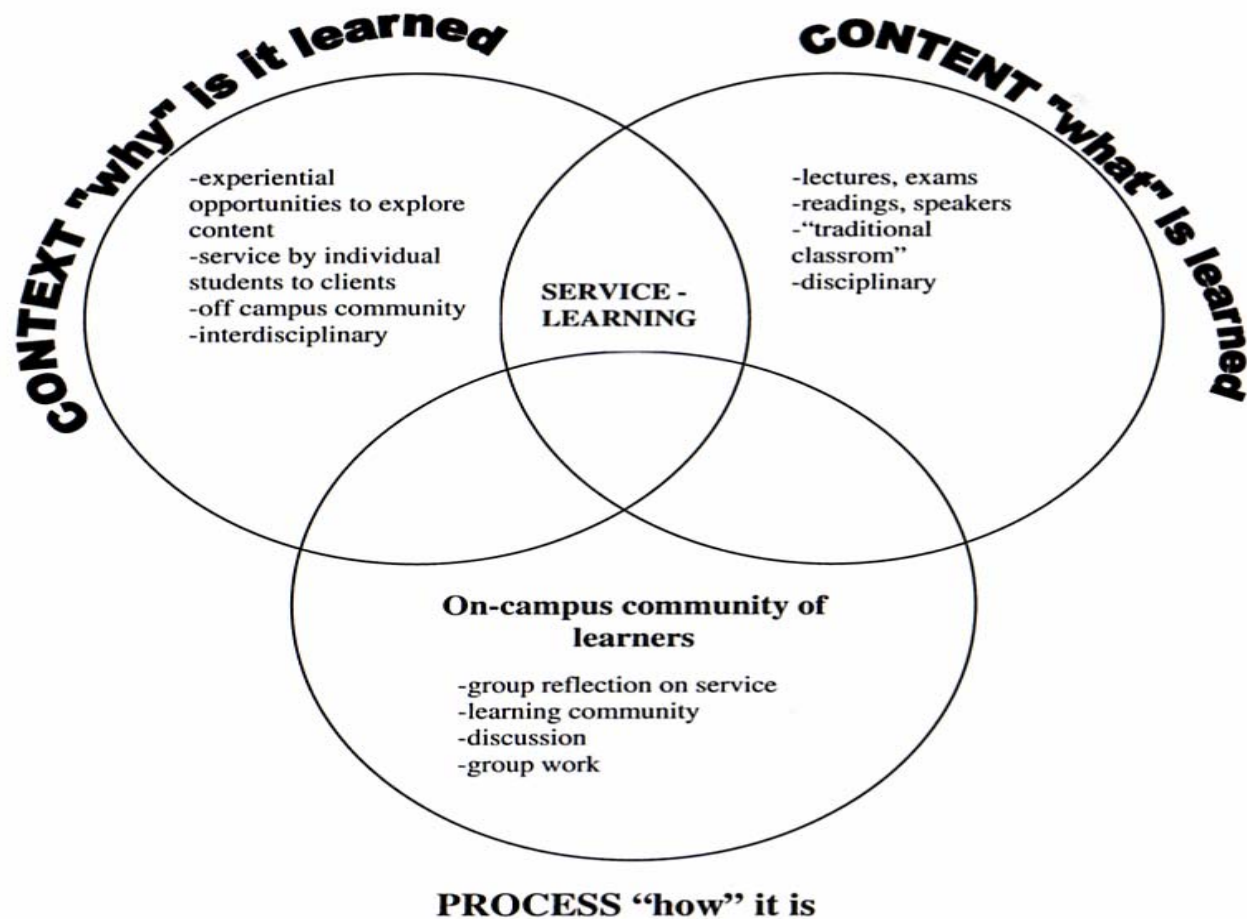


A Question of Rigor

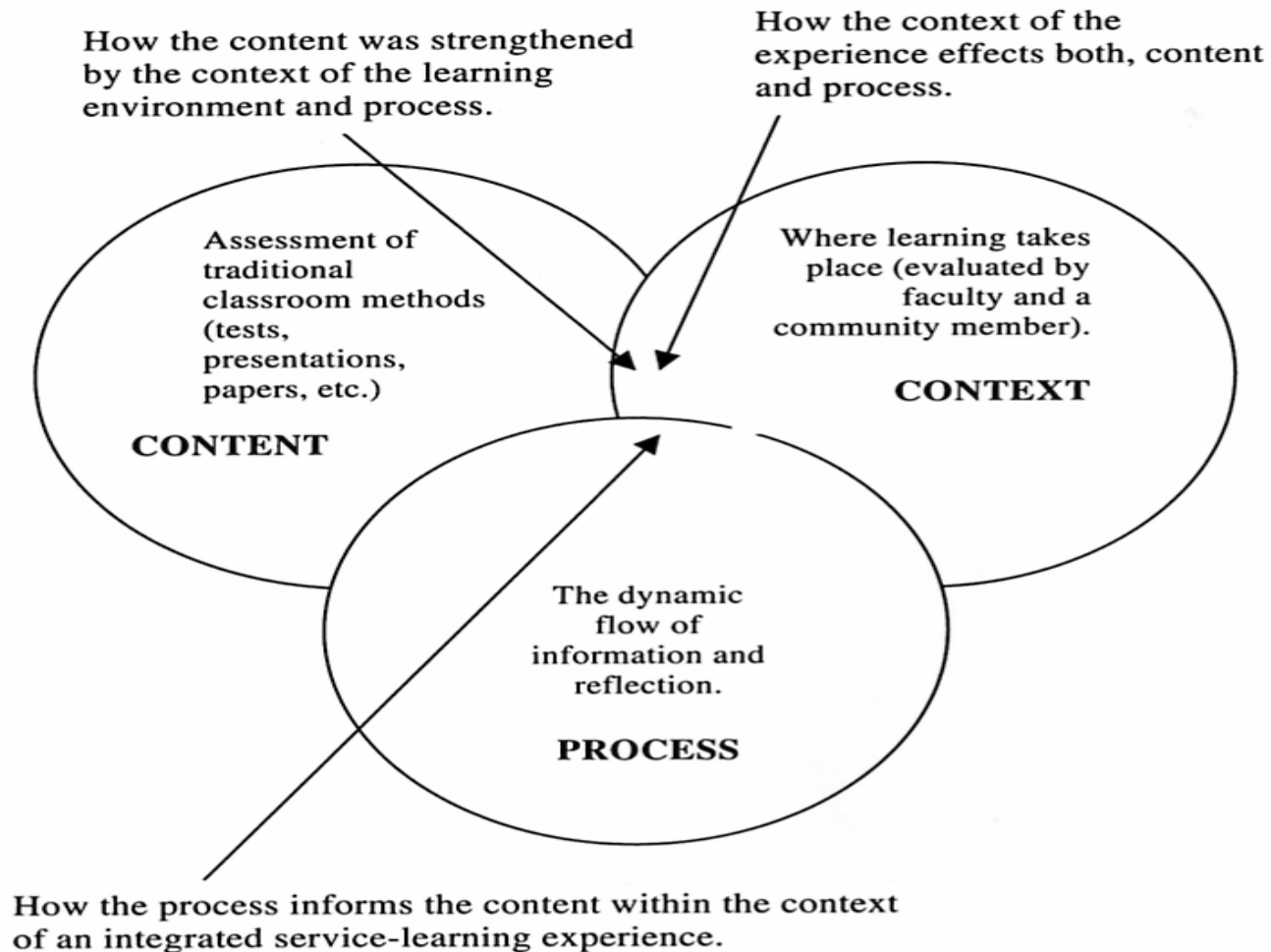
- Definition is important: (Palmer Parker 1998)
- Rigor arises from a willingness to disagree, to engage in honest questioning, to challenge, current thought and in acknowledgement of what one does not know.

Rigor can only occur when students feel the environment is hospitable to such dynamics.

Complexities of an Integrated Service-Learning Community



Complexities of Assessing an Integrated Service-Learning Model





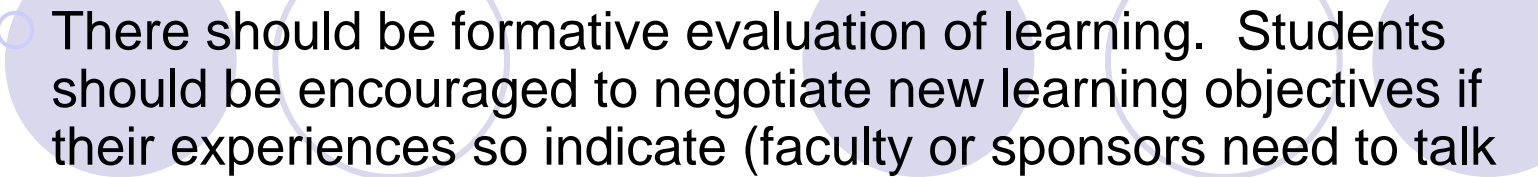
Some Common Steps for Dissemination

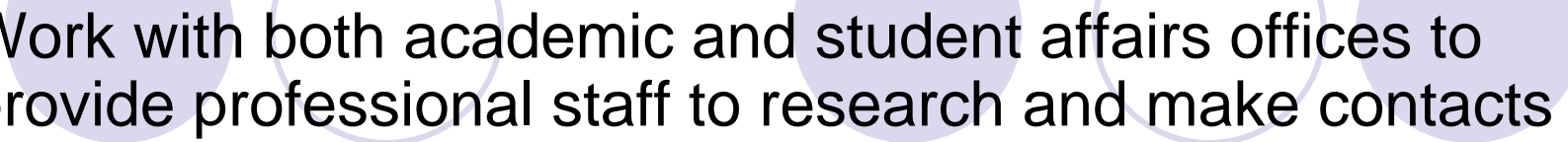
- Link the integrated service-learning initiative directly to the mission of the university.
- Devote university-wide faculty development seminars to the topic (this is often done through the university's faculty development program board or teaching excellence centers).
- Bring in a dynamic speaker from a prestigious institution to present best practices derived at their institution.
- Be political- talk with your faculty senators, curriculum committee, provost, and head of the university life to get their support.
- Apply for small seed grants to establish a dissemination program



CAEL Recommendations

- Experiential education programs abide by these standards can be confident of the quality of their assessment practices. The Principles include over 100 statements and extensive commentary on each. Just a few include the following:
 - Students should be required to differentiate clearly between learning and experience. College credit is not appropriate for an experience (connecting to classroom material is essential).
 - Prior to the experience itself, students should develop a learning plan that specifies the principle tasks to be performed, learning objectives, how learning objectives will be pursued, and the evidence required to document the learning (specific forms keeping this on record should be developed and applied by faculty)

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- There should be formative evaluation of learning. Students should be encouraged to negotiate new learning objectives if their experiences so indicate (faculty or sponsors need to talk with student on a regular basis).
 - Care should be taken to discriminate whether particular documentation describes experience, describes learning, or provides evidence of learning.
 - In measuring an individual's learning, assessors should use techniques that are appropriate to the background and characteristics of the learner, e.g. learning style (journals, portfolios, papers, video, booklets, etc.).
 - Assessment itself should be a useful learning experience. Prompt feedback is important.
 - To improve consistency in assessment, more than one sample of learning should be examined, and more than one assessor should be used unless evidence indicates that one is sufficient (partner with community mentor and/or student affairs personnel).

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- Work with both academic and student affairs offices to provide professional staff to research and make contacts with community agencies.
 - Find success stories and tell these stories over and over again.
 - Reach faculty testimonials as well as student journals describing the difference the integrated service-learning experiences has made in their learning.
 - Fund release time for faculty interested in learning more about integrated service-learning who will develop a new integrated service-learning offering as a result. The release time should come in the form of a competitive grant (to attend to promotion and tenure issues).



Best Practices

- Plan in advance
- Complete learning contracts
- Create a shared vision statement
- Establish group ground rules
- Discuss rights and responsibilities
- Clarify roles
- Set standards for group work
- Know campus resources