Service-Learning in the Humanities

Robin Fujikawa
Assistant Professor in Philosophy
Kapi'olani Community College
Honolulu, Hawai'i

In a happy coincidence and through a series of workshops presented at Kapi'olani Community College, I was introduced to one of the most effective volunteer agencies through which students in my class served. Called project Dana, it serves the Honolulu area providing home care services to the elderly and home bound, many of whom are of Asian ancestry. For my Asian philosophy students, the service-learning experiences derived through Project Dana have provided rich material for philosophical questions, cross-cultural investigations, reflection papers, and teacher-student discussions. I have found the hours of reflective and speculative discussions with these students to be among the most rewarding of my career. Incidentally, one student subsequently found employment and a new direction to her career partly because of her service-learning experiences with that project. The happy coincidences found in the arrangement with project Dana notwithstanding, that arrangement may serve as a general example of how community agencies and classroom curricula can enhance each other. It certainly demonstrated to me how effective academic discussions can be and how closely teacher and student can share common concerns when the questions arise out of ongoing field study work.

Project Dana was but one of many agencies that were introduced to me by workshops, institutes, service-learning program coordinators, pamphlets, and people from referral agencies over the course of the last two years. I was pleasantly surprised by the wealth of resources that are currently available in the field. While due credit must go to the conscientious dedication of the people who have developed these resources, I am encouraged to think that with a little investigation similar pleasant surprises may be discovered in any community.

The coincidence of Project Dana and my activities while teaching philosophy in the Humanities Department was especially striking because the term *dana*, or selfless giving, is a notion that developed in Indian Buddhism which was part of a general way of thinking that influences my teaching methodology and goals. The notion of *dana* in particular has since afforded my service-learning projects considerable meaning and grist for speculative discussion. *Dana* is not so much a theoretical abstraction or static thing; it is a virtue. As a virtue, *dana*, is an achievement of character and awareness that results from how one conducts oneself in the world. That conduct mirrors one's level of personal achievement. Selfless giving is thus not an act of condescension or self-mortification; it is a means by which one expresses and works out one's awareness. It is and honor to be able to serve selflessly at a temple or give selflessly to a beggar. This notion of service is not a badge; it is the paradigm of all genuine acts and is inherent in the most elevated of careers. The performance of *dana* is at once the means by which one attains genuineness of actions and the expression of that

(7) keep regular and detailed journal entries that include your reflections about the relationship between your experiences and the course content, your observations, and your thoughts and feelings about the experience (I will give you more detailed information on reflective journal writing.)

(8) agree to attend orientation/training sessions of your agency requires them

(9) share your project experiences in class

(10) write a final evaluation of the community service experience

Grading:

Your grade will depend upon your consistent participation in all aspects of the Service-Learning project, as listed above, and on the quality of your reflective journal. Your participation in this project may serve as the basis of all four papers, or any one of the four required papers. If you opt to use your service-learning as the basis for your research paper, you will be required to use fewer library resources. **You will receive an additional 10% for participating in this project.**

Schedule:

(1) Beginning of second week of class--your application is due

(2) End of second week--select an agency or site and make contact with a supervisor

(3) End of third week--confirmation of placement in an agency or at a site

(4) Weeks 4 -14--training and term of service

(5) Week 8--first portion of Reflective Journal due

(6) Week 15--agency evaluation due

(7) Week 16--Reflective journal due

You should choose Service-Learning as an option only if you are certain of your interest and certain that you have the time.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you are interested in this option.

attainment. Service in Buddhist cultures carries such connotations of honor and highest achievement. While the term may carry obviously religious overtones, the notion pervades secular society as well. The Japanese word for "husband," danna, or danna-sama, originates from this term. The term may also function effectively in service-learning discourse as well, for its ideals have helped veer our service-learning activities in my classes from patronization, condescension, and a sense of futility.

In more general terms, service-learning activities have revitalized my conception of what I do as a teacher in the humanities. Service-learning speaks the same language as my career as teacher and it offers alternative methodological options, vocabulary modes, and solutions to some types of curricular problems. Let me indicate in what follows how challenges that have arisen out of Asian cultural perspectives to my educational philosophy as a teacher in the humanities department have been met by service-learning. I hope my story affords some insight into how intimately service-learning can work with instructional goal and how the difficulties in talking about service-learning may stem from a more general problem of a need for a new vocabulary in education.

When the word for "human being" used in the Chinese and Japanese languages was first written a curious choice of ideograms was made to form it. The first ideogram depicts a person and the other depicts "interval" or "space." At first glance it might appear that the second of the two were superfluous or misdirected, for the first ideogram alone or even repeated would seem to sufficiently and accurately define the class of human beings by its membership. It is significant that the hallmark of being human was found not in individual persons but in their intervals, the space that surrounds each individual. That is, the hallmark of being human was found to be in the larger picture of the individual's external relations. In this conception of what it is to be human, the insight is repeated in Chinese cultures: when seeking our humanity, we find it or rather achieve it in our relatedness to others.

Similarly, schools today may find occasion to turn to the larger of two pictures when conceptualizing the locus and aims of education. If one picture is that of the individual (student, group, or thing), let the larger picture be the individual's external relationship that surround the other picture. Note that the membership of these two pictures differ. The first picture is populated by individuals who possess relations, the second by spaces (relations) that individuate individuals. Because of their difference in membership, languages appropriate to each differ. To the first picture belongs the language of individual "things" (persons, groups of persons, grades, objects, behaviors, items of knowledge and their attributes), and to the other belongs a language of relations (social, spatial, and temporal). The language of individual things may satisfactorily and accurately explain the locus and aims of education, but there are occasions when the other language may do so as well. Each language, moreover, expresses itself with different starting assumptions about what it is that populates its world. Normally, one would be inclined to say that the language of individual things is both sufficient to explain everything, including the relations that things have, and thereby obviates the need to consider the possibility and utility of a distinctly different language of relations. However, there may be conceptual and expressive limitations in any language that are released in a shift to another. It may be worth the effort to look to a language of relations for such conceptual and expressive possibilities in education.

Disciplinary Pathways to Service-Learning

A dilemma in service-learning frequently arises when a student asks, "What's in it for me?" While I want to respond by saying "Absolutely nothing," in order to preserve the voluntary and genuine service qualities of the program, this curt answer neither promotes the program nor answers the question; this retort also risks misrepresentation of the program and condescension toward the student. On the other hand, responding in terms of extra credits, replacement of specific requirements, adaptation to personal learning styles, more personal attention by the teacher, or other benefits fails to convey the reason and spirit of the program and jeopardizes its chances of meaningful success. This dilemma cannot by circumvented by making the service mandatory, for that also risks turning service-learning into yet another type of paid job.

Here is where a shift in languages may help. The above dilemma arises because both question and answers are locked into the language of things. Answered in this way, the question "What's in it for me?" can never be satisfactory. Shifting to a language of relations may be part of a solution. For example, the student may find the following question to be a suitable equivalent: "What changes in my learning experience might result from participating in this program?" Because this question is phrased in terms of relations, process, time, and experience, the possibility of a mutually satisfactory answer opens. The teacher can then talk about service-learning in such terms as turn-about experiences that others have had, possible inadequacies of didactic instruction, and shifts in relationships to the discipline that become possible.

Schools may choose to make the statement that the locus of education is not the student exclusively, that the humanistic aims of education are not fulfilled in individual students or in their aggregation. Instead, the student's relatedness to the rest of humanity can be affirmed to be a necessary part of the language of education. Teacher and student alike may conceptualize their common enterprise in terms that point toward the student exclusively, but the turning of the student's regard and actions outwardly in external relations is arguably an intrinsic function of education. Given that the outside world is universally talked about, if it is talked about as information that the student is to acquire or if it is discussed for the purpose of developing a student's skill, such discussion makes the assumption that we are preparing the student for his or her encounter with the real world that takes place outside of class or after the student graduates. The assumption being made here is that education educates the student, but this is inwardly directed (or individual-oriented) education may inadvertently proceed at the expense of a relation-oriented education that does not separate itself from the world that is either external or subsequent to itself.

As in the Chinese characters for human being, we may claim that the picture comprised of individual persons is unable to express certain things, and we must conduct our enterprise in terms of the spaces that are found in their intervals, that is, in external relations. The notion of the totality of external relations can replace the individual as locus of education and is likely to be abstracted and formulated in terms of the language of things, so I borrow from the Asian tradition, this time from Buddhism and its notion of *dharma*. *Dharma*, or thing as experienced moment, may be construed in the present discussion as lived world of experience. In this sense, we may say that what a teacher cultivates is not exclusively what a student has within (aptitudes, attitudes, and achievements under one's belt), but is the lived

world of experience that the student achieves in his or her external relations. A student's world of experience may be narrow or expansive, contentious or cooperative, vicious or just, vain or filled with possibility, and whether it is one or the other is not merely a matter of attitude, decision, or heredity. These are personal matters into which education cannot intrude but from which education cannot divorce itself. If a student's lived world of experience is a negotiated achievement and not a given, then education ought to be of some help to the student in that negotiation. It might be further claimed that genuine learning takes place precisely in that negotiation and has a vested interest in its outcome. Similarly, the humanity to which education dedicates itself to cultivating is not a condition at birth; it is an achievement upon which depends the entire educational enterprise. The locus of this achievement of humanity is the individual's lived world of experience, and this locus lies squarely within the purview of education. To the extent that this is true, service-learning addresses an essential need in education today.

Using a language of relations, the process and aims of education may be described in the following terms. Education cultivates the process by which the individual relates to and engages reality, and as such it deals primarily with relations that then determine how both individual and reality change in that individual's lived world of experience. The nature of neither individual student nor reality is a fixed and pre-established given, but rather both depend upon the student's lived world of experience. If the expression "You are what you know" makes sense in this context, it might also be said that "You are your achieved relations with the world" and "Your world is your achieved relations with others." To clarify this sense of achieved relations, let me borrow from the Confucian tradition. In a Confucian way of thinking, neither teacher nor student would be what they are without the achievement of a relatedness and process called education. Teacher alone without student, or teacher without the relatedness and process of education would be a meaningless and impossible conception. Student alone without teacher, or student without the relatedness and process of education can never be student. Each individual is what one is by virtue of the achievement of lived relations. Teacher becomes teacher and student becomes student simultaneously when and only when education occurs. The achievement of relatedness comes first, and individuation and identity arises out of that achievement. Neither who one is nor one's world as student are pre-established and fixed given facts. They are not matters of subjective resolve or invention. The nature of self and reality are accomplishments that arise through one's negotiation through lived experience. Thus Confucianism employs a language of relations rather than the language of individual things.

Viewed in this light, it makes sense to say that humanity is an achievement, not a given set of attributes and not an imaginary construct. Furthermore, if humanity is not achieved, then there can be no genuine teacher or genuine student. Education would be a meaningless impossibility, for that relatedness and process of education presupposes the unfolding possibilities and openness of achieved human beings. If humanity is an achievement, then service-learning provides an opportunity for attaining it in action that is an inherent part of education but not available within the classroom because of its own world of rewards and motivations. Thus, service-learning may be an appropriate and effective method for revitalizing the role humanity plays in education.

Disciplinary Pathways to Service-Learning

Service-learning may help to uncover a profound commonality that is shared by service-learning and academic disciplines: the attainment of each is preceded by a stage of relinquishment. The performance and appreciation of service-learning is attainable only after assumptions that formerly drove most actions in school and elsewhere are relinquished and found to be no longer operative. The same is true in academic disciplines. The shift to seeing and living as a biologist, for example, is preceded by a relinquishment of former assumptions that initially drive the study of biology. To continue the example, as long as a student persists in objectifying biology and its concerns, the student continues to think within the language of individual things: biology, tests, grades, terms, teacher, and specimens. The biologist as biologist, however, is not interested in specimens for their own sake, but rather in the *logos*, their logic of relations to which the specimens point as clues. Attaining the eye and questing mind of the biologist occurs when former assumptions about what constitutes the study are relinquished and replaced by a relation-based model. The *logos* suffix of the term biology means more that "the study of" a field, it refers to the Way, the elusive principle of order and meaning that underlies the world. The various academic disciplines generally share this notion of *logos* as a model. Undergoing the process of relinquishment and attainment within service-learning can be an effective key that a teacher can use to unlock the similar process that constitutes the attainment of the heart of an academic discipline. Rather than an extracurricular activity, service-learning may be a pathway to the core of a discipline when more didactic curricular activities fail.

The most potent element of the service-learning arrangements that I have employed has been the reflection paper. Selecting a suitable disciplinary problem for the paper is at first a daunting task for the student, but with help from the teacher, the student learns how inquiry proceeds within the discipline to find challenges within initially unrelated experiences. At a certain point, a light shines in the student's eyes and the search for a topic is no longer a problem. The student next returns, usually bringing questions about resources and methodology within the discipline. Again we do philosophy. Students take charge and do philosophy rather than listen to me talk about it. So it proceeds until the paper is turned in, read and returned. At that point, I like to send the students back to the service site with the task of testing their paper conclusions. In actuality, however, the end of the semester is usually so filled with other class requirements that this final phase of conclusion testing seldom reaches its consummation. Nevertheless, the process of working on the reflection papers has seldom ended wanting academic richness.

School life engenders frustrations, joys, and cause for gratitude that seldom find suitable occasions for their expression in school. It may be that this ironic condition heightens frustrations and diminishes joys, and if this is true, then a very important function can be fulfilled by service-learning. Service-learning as selfless giving can be rendered as an act of gratitude that vents or expresses unnamed frustrations and joys. Perhaps this is why service-learning experiences seem to tap wellsprings of affective richness, even within intellectual discussions. Service-learning encourages the affective and real-world conditions of a student's life to be as much a natural part of academia as the conceptual.

My two young sons and I weed and transplant bromeliads in a corner of a schoolyard. "Do we have to?" they ask plaintively at the beginning of each work session, but when work

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges

is done, they talk glowingly about the experiences gained and the things learned. They even compare and boast of their scratches. They see their father alongside them work on a task that does not yield the usual answers to their question "Do we have to?" and work takes on a different cast. When talk glows with the achievements and insights of a different light, everything changes. Values clarify, words become grounded and relationships grow. Service-learning is genuine learning.

Service-Learning and Psychology

Tanya Renner, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Psychology
Kapi'olani Community College
Honolulu, Hawai'i

F ive years ago I left the San Francisco Bay Area and came to Honolulu to take a teaching position at Kapi'olani Community College (KCC). I had decided that I preferred a position at a community college because I am at my best when I am working directly with students. Teaching is the most stimulating, the most challenging, and the most satisfying professional endeavor I have ever pursued, and I wanted that to be my primary vocation.

While at KCC I have taught introductory psychology, psychology of women, biological psychology, and theories of personality, and I have developed a new methods course that I'll be teaching for the first time this fall. I have also been a practicum instructor for an education course that provides students (primarily education majors) with tutoring experience.

Personal Pathways:
How I became involved with service-learning

My graduate education was focused on research, and there was relatively little support for the development of teaching skills. Because of my interest in teaching, I became involved in the one course offered that covered instructional methodology. Thus, when I started teaching here in Honolulu, I had completed only that one course. Many of my colleagues tell me that's one more than they had when they started. Also, I had never taught full time before, and did not realize what it would mean to deliver the same lecture three, four, or even five times in the same week. I realized very quickly that I would not survive long in that mode, and I strongly suspected that my students wouldn't either. So I began to develop, strictly in self-defense, alternatives to the traditional lecture/discussion format that had been the mainstay of my undergraduate education. My first strategy was to invite more discussion and become highly interactive. This was great because it helped me gauge what the students were understanding, and it also meant that no two lectures were exactly the same. The lectures had to become flexible in order to accommodate the unexpected directions the students would suggest or demand or need. Once the interactive mode was in place, however, it became all too apparent that students were still only getting a superficial understanding of much of the course material. Therefore, I began to seek out opportunities for demonstrating academic concepts and creating hands-on experiences for my students.

The ongoing search that ensued has been one of the most important professional development activities I have engaged in. It has spurred me on to finding new connections between life and the classroom, new ways to communicate, and new ways to stimulate students to think. So, when Bob Franco (now our service-learning director) told me three