

Editor's Notes

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The Editor's Notes

In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, ‘How to Bring ‘High-Impact Practices to Your Courses’” <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Bring-High-Impact/245836>, Dan Berrett summarizes discussions that took place at the national meeting of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) on whether high-impact practices bring the transformative learning they claim to. As Berrett points out, the phrase “high-impact practices” (HIP’s) traces back to George Kuh, Director of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and his consulting with Carole Geary Schneider, the then president of AACU. HIP’s involve teaching activities that “deepen learning and change the way students think and act”. Berrett notes that high-impact practices are “often associated with programs, like internships, learning communities, service learning, and study abroad. They’re also identified with elements of the curriculum, like collaborative assignments and e-portfolios”.

Berrett first turns to Matthew Mayhew and some of his co-authors of *How College Affects Students* who argued that there is little solid evidence that HIP’s impact academic success, retention, or better graduation rates. Mayhew and his colleagues, as Berrett reports, could not find a correlation between HIP’s and whether they impacted standard measures of learning – “verbal, quantitative, and subject-matter competence”. As Mayhew stated during his presentation, "If we don't know much about these at all why are we calling them high impact?"

Berrett then looks at another issue regarding HIP’s – that faculty may not engage in high-impact practices because they may perceive that they take too much work to incorporate. He points us to an opinion piece from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Does ‘High-Impact’ Teaching Cause High-Impact Fatigue?” <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Does-High-Impact-/245159?cid=tn>. The authors, whom you can look up through the link, outline what they call the “predictable hazards” they find in writing intensive courses, group projects, internships, and first year seminars which may also include mentoring that is beyond course content. The authors aim is to provide tips to lessen the “strain” of using HIP strategies, secure extra support from academic departments, and use the process during yearly review for merit and promotion.

Finally, Berrett shares 2 examples from the AACU session of what faculty at the conference called a high-impact practice in their classes. One is an assignment from an interdisciplinary astronomy course in which students “develop a model – it can be a physical object, a demonstration, or a drawing – for one of the concepts and use it explain the idea to friends or family”. The other is from a social work class in which students “attend a meeting or activity of a group that is unfamiliar and culturally different from them”.

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It is easy to see in these Matthew Mayhew's critique about HIP's.

Berrett's aim is not to critique HIP's. His aim is to start a discussion on how teaching can have a high-impact on students. And in this I think he succeeds. In doing this Berrett points to Kuh who argues that HIP's do not depend on the "programmatic shape," but on the experience the student has.

It is the features of HIP's experiences, as Kuh outlines, that I find important. According to Kuh these features "include appropriately high expectations, regular feedback, concentrated effort by students over an extended period, application of concepts to the real world, and interactions with people from different backgrounds". HIP's are not exclusive to the classroom and they do affect "dispositional attitudes".

Is it curious that this rings of service-learning? I think not. Can we claim that service-learning experiences impact students? Even with those students who have been most resistant to engaging service-learning in my classes, I can say that all have been impacted by the experience. Can I say that through service-learning my students became better academically, improving their ability to grasp class material better, raising their grade point averages, and more? At best I can say some did. But then that was not a learning outcome I hoped for through service-learning. Can I say my students were different after the service-learning experience? Yes, even those who were most adamant against doing it. My students reflected similar dispositional changes to what Janet Eyler, Dwight Giles, Christine Stenson and Charlene Gray have outlined (2001), including:

- a positive effect on student personal development;
- a sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development;
- a positive effect on interpersonal development and the ability to work well with others;
- a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural & racial understanding;
- a better ability to apply what they've learned in real world;
- stronger faculty relationships than those who are not involved in service-learning;
- a better sense of vocational and career purpose, and more.

These "dispositional changes" are clearly reflected in the essays we have published in *IUJSL*. But let me be the first to note that as we look at our authors they come mostly from excellent colleges and many come from privilege. Does this discount the impact service-learning can have from those in less privileged schools?

I have spent the latter part of my career working at schools that serve first-generation and low-income students, and through their service-learning experience they have realized these same outcomes. Service-learning created an "anomaly", a crisis, than challenged them to rethink their

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own “personal paradigms”. And you are right to read the allusion here to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Service-learning is transformative. Rather than me making this claim, let me share with you what they have said:

I found this class hard to grasp at first because I was thinking about every issue from a black and white perspective, not discovering yet how I had been normed to do so. I started dealing with issues in the “grey” of “make it messy for ya” area. The challenging of a person comes with a certain risk. Either that person will become offended and deny the truth heading their way, or they will face it with open arms and kneel at the altar of humility.

Another notes:

Talking and having conversations with the people in class has helped me tap into a different part of my brain more critically and logically, I think if we want things to change it would be best to start with the community and work your way up.

Still another notes:

The experience has opened my eyes to different ethical arguments and how to apply them. And I have learned that all it takes to spark change is one pissed off woman. In learning how to improve myself, I can go out and apply what I’ve learned to the rest of the world to help others who are in my same position.

It would be easy to share more. But I would be only share what so many of you have experienced with your students.

The engagement in service-learning is deliberate and intentional. It is an HIP at its best.

Works Cited

Eyler, Janet; Giles, Dwight E. Jr.; Stenson, Christine M.; and Gray, Charlene J., "At A Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993- 2000: Third Edition" (2001).Higher Education. Paper 139.
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--Ned Scott Laff, Ph.D.--

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