SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?
LESSONS FROM A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

This paper explores efforts by Denison University to shift its service-learning efforts from service based on a charity model toward service based on collaboration and community-based social change. The author describes the institution’s process of adaptation and a series of service-learning courses that draw upon participatory action research, asset-based community development, and what Denison service-learning faculty call "place-based" service learning. Based on ethnographic data and reports from students' reflective journals from courses that have attempted to develop a partnership with a nearby community, the author outlines some of the challenges for faculty and institutions that are considering crossing-over from service learning based on charity to service learning for social justice.

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DENISON UNIVERSITY is attempting to move its service learning approach away from service based on "Charity" toward service based on collaboration and "Social Justice". Service learning based on charity provides students with an opportunity to serve less privileged individuals and reflect on their experiences in relation to their coursework. Service learning based on social justice engages students in academic experiences that attempt to empower communities and create more equitable institutional structures (Marullo and Edwards 2000). As service learning matures as a pedagogy and its use increases (Edwards and Marullo 1999; Marullo and Edwards 2000), it has come under scrutiny (for example, Eby 1998). Along with faculty throughout the country, Denison’s service-learning faculty is asking critical questions of service learning: What does service-learning accomplish? What is learned? Who is served? Is it credit for volunteerism? Can it contribute to solving social problems?

In his critique of service learning, Eby (1998) calls for case studies outlining both the successes and failures of service-learning projects. This paper describes Denison’s institutional process and a series of service-learning courses that attempt to create a community partnership for social justice. Based on these experiences, I outline some lessons for faculty and institutions that are considering crossing-over from charity service to work for social justice and social change. This case illustrates that even when an institution articulates goals of social justice and community collaboration, it is difficult to create and carry forth a program that accomplishes these ends. At Denison a critical flaw occurred at the beginning of the program: we did not spend enough time building relationships with the community. However, even if we had better managed the process, we question whether the structural model of the small liberal arts college can facilitate service learning for social justice. A social justice model has high costs in terms of faculty time and institutional commitment, and potential bene-

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SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

fits—community empowerment and social change—are not guaranteed. In the end, a consultant model of service learning, a model that falls closer to the charity model than the social justice model, is far easier to accommodate. Whether Eby and others would call this case a success or failure depends on the answer to the question: What are the goals of service learning? If the goal is community transformation and social justice, at least in the short run, the program is a failure. If the goal is student learning, the program is a success.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT:
DENISON UNIVERSITY

Denison University is a small liberal arts college (2,100 students) located in rural Granville, Ohio. Granville is home to a small but growing upper-middle class community of slightly under 9,000 residents with a median family income of $74,186 in 1999, and a majority of residents working as managers and professionals (U.S. Census 2000). Granville’s growth is mainly from Columbus, 30 miles to the west. Newcomers are drawn to the quaint village with excellent schools. In line with other educational institutions (Edwards and Marullo 1999), many of the faculty and administrators of Denison are searching for ways to contribute to the surrounding community. Unlike rural campuses that are located in low-income communities (Weinberg 1999), Denison finds its immediate surroundings to be relatively wealthy. In seeking service opportunities to assist those in need, Denison has looked to its nearby neighbor, Newark, a city of over 46,000 residents having a median family income of $46,279 in 1999 and an economy based on service, manufacturing and retail (U.S. Census 2000).

In 1997, Denison University founded the Center for Service Learning (referred to as the Center) with funding from an endowment. The Center has a half-time director and a full-time community liaison. The founding of the Center reflected Denison’s history of community engagement through Denison’s Community Association and the university’s regular offerings of a handful of service-learning courses that placed students in social service agencies throughout Licking County (serving Newark). In the 1999-2000 school year, Denison offered twenty service-learning courses, enrolling approximately 500 students. Since the founding of the Center, faculty and administrators accomplished three important steps toward the institutionalization of service learning. They 1) prepared a mission statement, 2) elaborated guidelines for and administered service-learning development grants, and 3) established criteria for courses to be designated "Curricular Service-Learning" courses and created the Curricular Service-Learning Committee, which makes these decisions. Service learning at Denison has institutional support and the interest of faculty, students, and administrators. Denison also exhibits ten of thirteen characteristics that the American Association for Higher Education (Schneider 1998/99) outlines for good practices of service learning.

DISCUSSIONS TOWARD SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

While service learning had taken place at Denison for many years, the establishment of the Center brought the faculty together to reflect on what service learning meant for the college. In the spring of 1997, faculty and administrators met at a three-day retreat to address the future of the Center. They addressed questions like: What would it be? What would it stand for? A number of faculty members were already using service learning in their courses.

One group had been placing students in government-sponsored and community-based service agencies. This group viewed service-learning placements as a social laboratory for theory-testing. Service learning was a pedagogical tool that focused on student learning with service being an added benefit. A second group saw service learning as a means to community empowerment. Professors in this group attempted to work outside of agencies. They had estab-
lished a literacy program in which Denison students tutored Newark students. They also aspired to politically empower the parents of underprivileged children to lobby on behalf of their children within the school system. While they had originally worked through the school system, they believed the schools inhibited social change. The second group worked in a radical tradition, using the critical pedagogical theories of Freire (1970), and argued that faculty should take a strong stance in favor of social change. While the first group was generally in favor of attempting to create more equitable social arrangements, it perceived the second group's actions as risky, too political, and as potentially alienating to individuals and institutions in the community. The first group's concerns were not based solely in ideological differences, they were also built upon experience. For instance, while working within schools, the literacy program had a negative tutoring experience that resulted in Denison University being asked not to return to the school. In this case, a Denison student had worked with a Newark student on an assignment for a creative writing class. The problem was that the essay's theme was on smoking marijuana. This was unacceptable to the Newark principal; however, Denison's faculty from the second group believed the act of writing the essay empowered the Newark youth.

Three thematic sets of questions summarize the parameters of the debate between these two groups. First, is the focus on service learning or on service learning? Are service opportunities providing a laboratory for students, or is student learning and action a vehicle for community empowerment? Which comes first, the student or the community? Second, is the program's content driven by intellectual questions or by community need? Who should decide which placements and projects are most important? Who should define the program? How much control should the college have versus the community? Third, do we support the status quo or systemic transformation? Should we be sending students to assist within agencies and systems or should we be working with "communities" to transform existing systems to make them more equitable? Would a focus on agency versus community affect whether students emerged with individualistic understandings of social problems or structural understandings?*

We agreed that we wanted students to have structural understandings of social issues and that they were getting some of this in agency-based experiences, often as objective researchers. For example, students were critical of the agencies, identifying ways that the agencies reproduced inequality rather than addressed the structural causes of inequality. However, in the agency-based model, there was not in-depth engagement with community members other than in their roles as "clients" and "consumers of services." Faculty worried that this reinforced negative stereotypes.

The retreat dialogue reflected Marullo and Edward's (2000) characterization of the differences between universities' work for charity and work for social justice. Acts of charity, which most closely reflect the agency-based model, "consist of an individual or an institution acting voluntarily to transfer some of its resources (money, food, shelter, knowledge, labor, time, etc.) to an individual or group that has fewer resources." (Marullo and Edwards 2000: 899). By contrast, social justice comes about through altering institutional arrangements by redistributing resources and enhancing capacities of those with less, so that such institutional operations no longer maintain such inequities.* (Marullo and Edwards 2000: 898). Although agency-based models could create changes in students' perceptions, the model tended to support the status quo; it did not empower the community.

*These questions reflect questions that Marullo and Edwards (2000) posit to consider in understanding the distinction between charity and social justice. Two in particular stand out: 1) "Does the community service work undertaken by students in their service-learning classes empower the recipients?" and 2) "Does the university-community collaboration build community [and] increase social capital...?"
SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Denison's faculty sought to empower the community.

The faculty articulated the charity-social justice ideas, but did not use that language. The dichotomy overstates the differences in practices and attitudes of Denison's faculty. Many saw the strengths and weaknesses of both models and searched for a nuanced third path. Most service-learning classes at Denison were agency-based. Faculty members using this model were not necessarily opposed to service learning that promoted social change. Social justice is a two-pronged goal: to empower marginalized communities and to change unjust institutional arrangements. Empowering people may best occur at a community-level, outside of social service agencies. However, to change institutional arrangements, universities must consider how existing structures, represented by social service agencies, must also change. Many faculty viewed the agency-based placements as doable and as a means for students to examine existing institutional structures. Thus, the agency-community dichotomy does not perfectly correspond with charity and social justice models.

Finally, faculty also debated whether action research or participatory research was the best approach to service learning. In this debate, action research paralleled the charity model and participatory research was closer to social justice work. Both of these applied research strategies seek to identify useful knowledge that can be used to improve social situations; however, they differ in their assumptions about the social order (Brown and Tandon 1983). In the action research model, the researcher typically works with a client who holds some organizational power to ameliorate a social (or private) problem by analyzing individuals and groups in the defined situation. The action research model assumes that the existing system is legitimate and that making it more effective and efficient will benefit all those in the system (Brown and Tandon 1983). By contrast, in the participatory research model, the researcher has a commitment to people who are “oppressed.” The assumption is that the social system is oppressive and should be transformed by empowering the oppressed to seek social justice and equitable social arrangements. The analysis focuses on social structures rather than interpersonal relationships (Brown and Tandon 1983). Participatory research is risky in that it challenges those in power and the system. These ideas are summarized in Table 1.

MODELS OF SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the year following these discussions, two

| Table 1. Comparison of Charity Model and Social Justice Model of Service Learning |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Charity Model                  | Social Justice Model            |
| Contacts                        | Agency-based                    | Community-based               |
| View of Community               | Community as subject            | Community as partner           |
| Objectives                      | Student learning plus service   | Community empowerment plus    |
|                                 |                                 | student learning               |
| View of Society                 | Consensus model—social problems | Conflict model—social structure |
|                                 | need reform                     | needs transformation           |
| Parallels in Community-Based    | Action research                 | Participatory research         |
| Research                        |                                 | Participatory action research  |
|                                 |                                 | Asset-based development       |

proponents of service learning for social justice spoke on campus. They helped move the faculty forward with their ideas and practical approaches. In 1997, Ken Reardon from the University of Illinois visited campus and outlined a project in East St. Louis, Illinois that was based on participatory action research (PAR) (Reardon et al. 1993; Reardon 1995; Reardon 1997). PAR offers a way for academics, students, and community members to be co-researchers and to create social change, and it is in line with the social justice model outlined above (see Nyden et al. 1997; Simonson and Bushaw 1993). PAR offers a shift in epistemology, from academic as expert to citizen as expert. It privileges traditional knowledge and the knowledge of those on the margins—the poor and working class. Reardon and Shields (1997:23) summarize the goals of PAR:

- Participatory action researchers investigate the most serious social, economic, political, and environmental problems confronting the most powerless and marginalized groups in society. These researchers are committed to placing the social justice concerns of poor and working-class families on the research agendas of major universities and on the policy agendas of local, state, federal, and foreign governments. [They] value the enormous contribution poor and working-class individuals, affected by a particular social problem, can make towards understanding the social dynamics which produce these conditions and the alternative ways they can be resolved. As a result, they actively involve local residents in each step of the research process from problem identification to data analysis to plan implementation to program evaluation.

Reardon’s work at the University of Illinois was driven by the legislature, which asked, what is the university accomplishing for taxpayers? The University put $100,000 behind its efforts to show that academics were not divorced from “real life.” Reardon, a professor of urban and regional planning, started the East St. Louis Action Research Project in 1990, and it has been tremendously successful (Reardon and Shields 1997).

Reardon’s presentation to Denison students and faculty focused on one of the innovative techniques that he and his colleagues devised to engage residents in PAR—the disposable camera exercise. In initial contact with low-income communities through an existing community organization, disposable cameras are distributed to residents as a tool for research. Assuming that residents know their communities better than outside researchers, they are asked to document their assessment of the neighborhood through pictures of the strengths, weaknesses, and assets in their communities. In a second meeting, teams of students and community members summarize the assessment. This exercise puts the community in the role of expert and begins a process of partnering for PAR. Faculty and students at Denison were inspired by Reardon’s work.

In 1998, John McKnight presented the keynote address at the State Campus Compact conference held at Denison. McKnight presented a critique of social service systems (McKnight 1987) that corresponded with Denison’s interest in working with communities to create social change. McKnight draws a distinction between “institutions” and “community,” arguing that an institutional system of human social service is built hierarchically to control clients. Such a system, also referred to as a “therapeutic vision” of society, “envisions a world where there is a professional to meet every need” (McKnight 1987:57). McKnight and his collaborator, John Kretzmann, argue that this model creates a cycle of dependence by creating victims (social service clients) and professionals who, in turn, disempower individuals and communities.

In contrast to this system, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) advocate rebuilding communities through a community service model in which people are interconnected through face-to-face communications and citizens assist each other through consent, not control. The community path, also
called the “assets path” or “capacity-focused development,” is built on the premise that individuals and associations of a community can create change from the inside out, building on local strengths. This model attempts to empower. This strong internal focus is intended simply to stress the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:9).

Kretzmann and McKnight’s work reinforced Denison faculty’s discussions about social justice and empowerment. We were wary of supporting a therapeutic model. McKnight reminded us of the need to examine hierarchies and assumptions about our roles in service learning. Are we providing “services” to “needy” people (charity), or are we entering into social change relationships? Our desire to create social change was hindered by the existing relationships between Denison and Newark that were built on the therapeutic worldview. The class differences between Denison professors and students (upper-middle class) and Newark residents (working class), and the beliefs that many professors and students already held—that we can and should help the “less fortunate”—complicated a transition to a social justice practice.

The service-learning faculty decided that in addition to supporting agency-based service-learning placements, the Center would attempt to cultivate a close relationship with the Near North Neighborhood of Newark, where we already had some well-established relationships. We called this geographic commitment “place-based” service learning, a less politicized term for a social justice model. Denison’s emerging place-based service learning was built upon a series of reflections, critique, presentations, and dialogue primarily within the campus community. The goals of place-based service learning were to: 1) focus our efforts in a geographically defined community, 2) form a partnership based on trust and continuity, 3) empower communities to identify their assets and prioritize actions, 4) engage students in communities to learn, and 5) offer our resources to communities to promote social change.

SHAPING SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH COURSES

Since 1998, I have taught three service-learning courses that attempted to move toward a social justice model: American Society (an upper level honors course with 18 students), Social Problems (a first year seminar with 18 students), and Community Development (a directed study with 11 students). A fourth course, taught by another faculty member, Environmental Studies Capstone, was also part of this effort. Table 2 provides a chronology of service-learning events. I will describe the service-learning components of these courses and discuss them in relation to the attributes of the social justice model laid out in Table 1.

Course 1: American Society (Spring 1998)

Encouraged by the community liaison of the Center, I incorporated service learning into a new course. I mirrored Reardon’s disposable camera exercise with a community organization that had approached Denison’s Center—the Near North Community Policing Association (NNCPA) of Newark, an organization that started as a “Block Watch” group. We were encouraged that the community had contacted us. The NNCPA was a fairly new group organized by a community policing officer and neighborhood leaders. The goal of our collaboration was to create a community assessment based on community members’ photographs of the strengths, the weaknesses, and the assets in their community. Service-learning faculty were supportive and intrigued by the application of Reardon’s exercise. They saw the project as a possible way to begin the shift toward service learning for social change.

The American Society course faced a number of obstacles in meeting the goals of place-based/social justice service learning. The first difficulty was “getting in” so that
we could build trust. Would the community accept us? After our first meeting with the community in which we explained the camera project and passed out disposable cameras, students felt alienated and were acutely aware of the fact that the officer, not the community members, invited us. Students’ reflection papers characterize their sentiments: “I ignorantly, I expected the residents to want to talk about the project, but as I approached a table of residents in order to introduce myself, I received the cold shoulder by all of the residents except one.” Another noted, “We felt as though we were invaders who were not welcomed.” Despite our reflections about the importance of the community defining their issues and having control of the process, we had left the community out of the planning process. The “community” (really just the community policing officer) came to us just when we had been discussing the desire to do service learning based on community needs. However, while the timing was right, the planning effort was insufficient. We opportunistically developed the assessment plan with the officer and one of the neighborhood leaders. This was not enough. As a result, the initial reaction by the community was the feeling of being put upon rather than a sense that a partnership was being established.

While students’ interpretations of the first meeting were mixed, all were frustrated. Some became critical of PAR. Relating to discussions about our upper-middle class expectations of “service” one asked, “I wonder if it is patronizing of PAR to believe that only lower, working class communities need help in bettering their environment.” Others expressed disappointment in the level of civic engagement since the meeting was not well attended by the community. Students questioned how much

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Type of Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prior to 1997: Students placed in social service agencies and schools in</td>
<td>Agency-based service learning</td>
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<td>Newark</td>
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<td>1997: Creation of Center for Service Learning at Denison University</td>
<td>Institutional commitment</td>
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<td>Service-learning retreat for faculty at Denison University</td>
<td>Reflection and dialogue</td>
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<td>Ken Reardon speaks to students and faculty at Denison University about PAR</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>1998: John Mc Knight speaks to faculty at Denison University about “assets-led” development</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Spring—American Society class works with NNCPA on “camera project”</td>
<td>PAR</td>
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<td>Fall—Social Problems class works with NNCPA on “after school program”</td>
<td>Program implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999: Spring—Community Development class works with NNCPA to continue after school program</td>
<td>Program implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring—Environmental Studies Capstone course works with NNCPA to create “Community Garden Guide” and “Abandoned Buildings Guide”</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer—Organizational Studies program assists Near North Civic Association get non-profit status</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall—After school program incorporated into Denison Community Association, a volunteer group</td>
<td>Volunteerism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall—Research methods class assists NNCPA with community policing survey</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
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"residents cared about their community." A student noted, "Attendance was small and mostly passive...I wonder how interested people are in improving their neighborhood or if they feel it is the police department's responsibility." On one hand, I worried that students were stereotyping neighborhood residents. On the other hand, students were observing how an agency-centered structure had disempowered many residents.

Part of students' frustrations related to their expectations about service learning. Many of them had enrolled in American Society because it was a service-learning course and they had had positive experiences in agency-based service-learning courses in the past. In their prior experiences, their responsibilities had been to negotiate hours with a contact person at an agency (provided by professor), go to the agency at the agreed upon times, do what they were asked to do, and reflect, discuss, and write about the experience. Working with the community was very different. Our initial plan had to be quickly revised as we realized it was not appropriate. Following Reardon's model, we had hoped that students would facilitate small work groups broken down among block watch committees before the next monthly meeting. However, students were justifiably anxious and intimidated as they faced the difficulties of organizing for social change. Students were frustrated by what they perceived as a "lack of leadership" and a "lack of clear procedures" in the PAR process. Repeatedly I had to assure them that in doing community work, there are no guarantees for success. I emphasized process, adaptability, and risk-taking. Students learned through the process that PAR is not linear and that research and community activism needs to be framed and reframed over and over again as new information is brought to the table. Students' anxieties lessened as they and the community members accepted responsibilities and as our interactions with the community improved.

Students raised a concern about who the "community" was and about the hierarchical relationships within the community. In retrospect, I now recognize that I romanticized working with a "community" group and did not thoughtfully examine power relationships within the community as I might have in an agency-based setting. In our second meeting with the NNCPA, we worried that the community-policing officer who led the meetings was shifting the focus from being about the community to being about the students. A student explains:

[The officer] started the meeting by having a presentation on rape and sexual assault that was specifically directed at us. I felt very uncomfortable about this. Although it was very nice of him to try to educate us, the presentation did not seem very relevant to the meeting and seemed to shut out a number of the community members.

Again, the students saw the disempowering effects of this structure. A student reflects:

"To be honest, I am a little disturbed by [the officer]. I do not think that he believes in the citizens enough... I definitely think that the people rely on him too much, but I think that we are one step in the right direction towards their own independence and realizing that they can take some control of the neighborhood. I really do think that they are gaining a true sense of empowerment. They are a motivated, concerned group of people, and their ideas for the future are real, attainable goals.

In a later, well-attended meeting, we worked in groups to assess and categorize the photographs that the community members had taken. Something changed in this interaction. Students felt welcomed as trust was being developed: "residents seemed genuinely glad to see us." In addition, the community members began having their voices heard. A student explains:

When Krista [a student] and I asked Steven [a community member] if he wanted to explain some of his ideas to the [larger] group...[he said no] and thought it would be better if we did it. But, to our surprise Steven watched his fellow community members speak on behalf of
their pictures and decided to talk about his also. I really enjoyed hearing from the community members and through it they definitely got a chance to be in power which was one of our goals.

Students began to see the community’s assets. The workgroups tended to focus on the pictures that dealt with opportunities rather than weaknesses. Neighbors were full of “enthusiasm, energy, and possibilities.” Of this meeting, another student adds:

I think the biggest success was the way people seemed to come out of their shells, with us as well as each other. I think that we all of a sudden became more credible now that we had some type of tangible product. It seemed like everyone suddenly wanted to stay and talk about the pictures and the community, not just go home after the meeting. I got the feeling that everyone felt like something was actually being done, not just blowing smoke. I think that in itself was very empowering.

The neighborhood gained a voice and there was a surprising amount of community building as participants saw the high degree of consensus regarding their concerns. Residents felt that together they could accomplish change.

Students summarized the assessment in a colorful report, “Newark’s Near North Community Assessment,” using the resident’s photos. The NNCPA monthly newsletter reported:

Some themes emerged from the photographs. First, the community has a number of strengths to build upon. Some of these strengths include families, parks, new businesses, individuals who are fixing up run down homes, and the children who represent the future. Some of the weaknesses discussed include trash, abandoned buildings, pollution in the air and the water... An exciting aspect of the discussion was the optimism that people shared. Most participants saw that weaknesses could be opportunities. For example, while run down homes were viewed as a weakness, they were also seen as an opportunity because they could be fixed up. The conversation about the opportunities yielded a number of creative possibilities! Some of the exciting suggestions included: planting a garden in a vacant lot to help feed people in the community, cleaning the river so that it could be used for recreation, and converting open lots into playgrounds for the children and teens.

Based on these themes that emerged from the assessment, in a final meeting attended by the students, residents prioritized the issues that they wanted to address as a group. One of the top issues was youth. Residents felt that to have a healthy community that the youth needed structured opportunities to meet their potential and to become valuable assets for the future of the community.

Some trust was established through the series of meetings, but students were concerned that their and the community’s hard work would be for naught. Would there be follow through? Some students commented:

Overall I think the meetings went really well. I think the people started to accept and trust us and really get into the project. I just worry that we are doing this assessment and then there will be no follow through on what we find—either by us or the residents—but maybe not—I will remain optimistic.

I feel really bad thinking that we are going to go to the last meeting to say, “Ok, this is what we have identified as issues. Thank you very much. We enjoyed the experience. Do whatever you want with the findings.” I know we can’t make or tell them what to do, but we can’t just give them [the report] and leave.

Please keep doing this project with students. It can only get stronger and with time hopefully Denison and the Newark community will form a stronger bond.

The partnership was just building, but the end of the semester and the summer slowed the momentum. The Center’s community liaison and I continued to attend meetings, but there were no students engaged. Denison does not offer courses in the summer and at this point, the Center did not offer service-learning programs during the summer. A fall course picked up where this
SERVICE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Course 2: Social Problems (Fall 1998)
The first year seminar on Social Problems built on "Newark's Near North Community Assessment." The Assessment called for the creation of youth programs. The students in Social Problems researched and conducted an after school program for youth in collaboration with neighborhood leaders. Students interviewed residents to learn more about their concerns regarding youth, to determine what age group they would like targeted, what type of activities residents and children would enjoy, and where the activities should take place. Three senior teaching assistants who had been enrolled in the American Society course assisted the Social Problems students. Six events for youth were conducted Tuesday afternoons in the North Street Park. These included a talent show, making rain sticks, and repainting the park benches and tables.

The first event, a scavenger hunt, was not well attended. For the second event, pumpkin painting, students revised their publicity strategy, utilizing the Community Policing Officer to a greater extent. It was attended by over 30 youths and community members. When we repainted the park benches, over fifty people were present, including children, teachers from the local middle school, and parents. Residents, who came up with the idea to have the youths paint the park, hypothesized that by allowing the youths to personalize benches, tables, and playground equipment they would have a sense of ownership that would prevent vandalism. In addition to attendance of the target group (fourth through seventh graders), high school students attended the programs and used the opportunity to talk to the Denison students about college life.

In addition to planning and conducting the programs, the students wrote reflections and related the experiences to course theories and concepts. Students' structural understandings of social problems increased based on their interactions with children in the park programs. In reflections, they discussed specific instances from the program to illustrate theoretical concepts. Marullo and Edwards (2000: 903) ask: "Does the service-learning encourage students to see that the shortcomings of individuals in need are not the sole cause of the problems that service-learning activities attempt to address?" In this instance, students were able to see that what seemed to be personal troubles were actually public issues (Mills 1959). Through readings in social stratification (Davis and Moore 1945; Tumin 1953) and their experiences, students were able to develop a sociological understanding of stratification—moving beyond blaming the individual—and recognize social structures. Students reflected on their privileged position in society and the role of structure versus merit in their "high" status. They began to acknowledge that social structure has a tremendous impact on an individual's life chances and accomplishments. A successful volleyball player wrote this in her reflective journal, acknowledging that talent alone could not get a person to the varsity team:

Interacting with the [teenage] girls made me realize the differences between my family and their families...The opportunities I have available are much greater...These opportunities are related to the difference in social class...For example, if one of the girls was interested in playing sports in high school and college, she would need a lot of practice and coaching. If her family cannot afford to send her to two or three summer camps each year, the probability that she will become a success is not as high as someone whose family can afford two and three camps a year....

Even one of the most conservative students in the course, who began the class believing that "poor people are poor because they are lazy," recognized the role of economic structures. He noted that the only difference between the kids in the park and him was class: "The kids in Newark did not choose their economic class."

Course 3: Directed Study—Community Development (Spring 1999)
The students in the Social Problems class and their TAs were motivated by the project. They did not want to leave the community at the end of the semester and proposed that we continue the program. Because I was not scheduled to teach a class in which this type of service-learning project was appropriate, I worked with 11 students in a directed study. We read *Building Community* (Nyden et al. 1997) and articles about youth programs. The students incorporated ideas from the readings to model six after-school programs that they conducted. They tried, with limited success, to work more directly with community members on the program. In this case, the students' role became more like hired-hand camp counselors than community collaborators.

Students aptly noted that their participation was a great learning experience for them, but that it did not change the life chances of the children with whom they worked. Students saw the program as a temporary solution. They were right. The program started shifting away from creating an empowered neighborhood toward providing charity. Two students have since incorporated the after school program into the Denison Community Association. The project is ongoing and is staffed by this volunteer group. The social justice agenda of the first course appeared to be sliding back toward the charity model by the third course in the sequence.

Through Center workshops, I shared information about these projects with other faculty. Many were interested in working in the Near North. I received a Service-Learning Development Grant to facilitate projects in the community, and I worked with five faculty members who wanted to offer service-learning courses in the Near North. I assisted them by: 1) defining specific projects based on the community's self-assessment and ongoing contact with the community, 2) providing key contact information, and 3) preparing annotated bibliographies for teaching and student use. Only one of the faculty members was able to implement service learning into a course the following semester. At least two of the non-implementing faculty could not implement service learning due to departmental constraints—they were not scheduled to teach the courses in which they envisioned implementing the service-learning component.

**Course 4: Environmental Studies Capstone (Spring 1999)**

The professor who integrated Near North service-learning did so in the Environmental Studies Capstone, a required course for senior Environmental Studies majors. This group also used the community assessment as a starting point. Students worked with Near North residents to produce a guide to create a community garden and a guide to address the problems of abandoned buildings. The class created two impressive guides. Despite this, students felt that they were not able to get much community participation or support. One notes, "I have learned that it takes community members to initiate a project like this on their own and not a third party." Part of the frustration was that the community had expectations that the students would actually help them start a garden. Instead, the professor and students were working more from a consultant-based model, which is common in environmental studies programs (Hornig 1999).

The consulting model, similar to action research, works from the idea of generating a "product" for a "client" in contrast to collaborating and creating change side-by-side. Positive aspects of this model are that the tasks are discrete, which works well within the framework of an academic calendar. The limitations are that the students and faculty are regarded as "experts," and the community has limited input and ownership of the program. In this case, the community hoped to work side-by-side with the class to plant a community garden, but was disappointed with a paper product.

Other projects, not explicitly "service learning," have tapped into what was started as PAR. These experiences also tended more toward the consulting style, which appears to be an easier way for lib-
eral arts colleges to make a difference (Channels and Zannoni 1999). Students in Denison’s Organizational Studies summer program worked with the “Near North Civic Association” to help them develop a mission statement, apply for tax exempt status, and to identify grants for youth programming. Students in a sociology/anthropology research methods course entered and analyzed data from a community policing survey. An environmental studies student wrote a senior thesis on park design, using the North Street Park as a case study. The Denison Community Association is collaborating with the Near North Civic Association to raise funds for the Association to hire a grant writer (See Table 2).

FROM CHARITY TO SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Denison has a variety of service options available to students. On a spectrum, with “charity” options on one end and “social justice” options on the other, a few courses have attempted to shift Denison’s offerings toward the social justice end, but this shift is far from encompassing or complete. Before attempting this type of change, faculty and institutions should consider the following points based on this case.

First, our informal assessments of service-learning courses in both the “charity” model and the “social justice” model reinforce findings from formal evaluations of service learning (Marullo 1998; Myers-Lipton 1998) that show that students appear to gain a greater depth of academic knowledge and sense of responsibility than they have in courses that do not contain service components. While faculty may aspire to have their courses be models for community-based social change, both models deepen student learning and the charity model has the advantage of being more manageable for faculty.

Second, for faculty, service learning for social change is a time intensive, high risk undertaking. This is especially true for junior faculty who may be most likely to have the enthusiasm to try new teaching methods. There is a heavy, though necessary, up-front investment in getting to know a community. Social change cannot take place in one semester; it requires a long-term commitment. This commitment is intensive for staff too. Large institutions may be better suited to hire staff to manage projects and facilitate workshops and on-going communication. Public institutions may be better aligned to this work since their mission is to serve the “public.”

Third, key contacts from the college and the community are critical to the on-going relationships that are needed for creating social change; however, it is tenuous to rely on only a few people. Trust is built over time through repeated interactions. Neighbors in the Near North have begun to trust me and I am beginning to understand community members’ assets. However, a team of faculty from multiple disciplines is needed to work with the community on their multiple concerns. Trying to integrate other faculty is difficult and changes in lead instructors do not make sense to the community. For instance, community members continually contacted me with questions about the gardening project, though another professor led this project. On the community side, the community-policing officer and his assistant were dominant leaders. Unfortunately, the community-policing officer was reassigned. While it is essential for a few key contacts to develop collaborative relationships, this is also a weakness. Including more people from the college and the community in the initial planning process would be a way to address this. Following initial contact, faculty teams could focus on the neighborhood.

A fourth challenge relates to multidisciplinary work. Faculty members from different

2This parallels what Brown and Tandon (1983:290-1) say about the risks of participatory research: “Participatory researchers themselves often run substantial risks, for challenged authorities may attack their institutional bases [and] their professional standing.”
disciplines hold different epistemological assumptions; this can become a problem when they do not share a clear and articulated mission regarding service learning. In creating interdisciplinary connections, discipline-specific epistemologies should be considered. For example, at Denison, the disciplines that have been most in favor of creating a social justice mission are sociology and English. Both have been affected by "the postmodern turn," meaning that they have consciously asked questions about whose voices are heard and the validity of "expert" versus "folk" knowledge. The ethnographic tradition in sociology, especially, has made sociologists attentive to the social construction of knowledge (for examples, Harding 1991; Naples 1996; Smith 1987). By contrast, faculty in other departments have not been trained to ask such questions. In many disciplines, it is more common for academics to serve as "experts" or "consultants." Sociologists also do this in action research (see Stoecker 1999 and Table 1). To build partnerships, we as faculty need to explore our assumptions about knowledge and hierarchies regarding communities just as we ask our students to do.

Our most critical mistake in attempting to create service learning for social change occurred at the outset: We did not know enough about the community, nor did we spend enough time building relationships at the beginning. Prior to attempting a long-term social justice project, research on the existing neighborhood organizations and political cleavages should be undertaken and community leaders should be incorporated into the planning process. Despite working in social service organizations in this community, we knew little about its non-agency organizational life. We entered a relatively unorganized community with many existing conflicts. We might have heeded the advice of others who suggest being wary of groups without strong organizational structures (Simonson and Bushaw 1993). Students remarked in their journals that it was unlikely that we could create community.

The "organized" groups were relatively affluent in comparison to the groups we chose to work with. In working with the community policing organization, we left out some important groups. One was an historic preservation group that has been credited with installing lights on the main street of the neighborhood. This group is perceived as the "rich" organization, and the community policing group as working class. When the environmental studies class tried to gain broader community support for the gardening and abandoned buildings projects through the historic preservation organization, activists in the community policing organization felt betrayed. A lot of time has been put into mending this and other "turf" situations. Such political infighting is a situation experienced by others (for example, Stoecker 1997). On the Denison side, social justice advocates questioned whether the more affluent groups should be part of the project.

In retrospect, we rushed into our relationship with the NNCPA. The contact with them occurred as we were having thoughtful discussions about "place-based/social justice" service learning. Our aims were not well-articulated, yet we were excited about trying something. However, we should have spent that first semester getting to know the community better before starting the camera project. Though the stars seemed aligned—our retreat discussions, Reardon's visit, the community contact, and perfect fit of the camera project in the American Society class—the costs outweighed the seemingly good timing. Since we embarked on the collaboration with the NNCPA, a number of useful studies have been published about how to establish successful service learning collaborations. For example, Brown's (2001) methodology for establishing a program would have contributed to making our collaboration more successful. She lays out a five-step process for establishing service learning relationships that sustains programs beyond single projects and puts diverse community members in communication. The steps include: 1) initiating contacts, 2)
holding workshops to generate goals, 3) reporting on partnerships, 4) collectively assessing projects, and 5) creating a resource that documents the collaboration in ways that will be useful in sustaining the work (Brown 2001:6-7). If a college takes a stand for social justice, it must be proactive in engaging community members in planning efforts.

Following Brown’s process with the community could have prevented the program from backsliding. The backsliding began with the third “course,” the directed study in community development. Two problems arose at this juncture that might have been prevented. First there was limited community involvement. If there had been greater buy-in from the beginning, accomplished by holding workshops to generate goals, a larger group of community members could have been available to collaborate. Many of the connections were based on individual relationships rather than institutional arrangements. Second, I did not have a course to fit the project into, and as a result taught the directed study uncompensated and on top of my normal course load. I did not have the time to put into this endeavor what I had put into the earlier courses. In addition to Brown’s recommendations, engaging “faculty teams,” perhaps along the model of learning communities, may have created a circumstance in which more courses could integrate service learning for social change.

The program needs to be shared by a number of faculty and be connected to a significant number of leaders in the community.

Educational institutions must seriously consider whether they are more interested in student learning or in community transformation. Service learning based on charity, which is easier for faculty and students to undertake, accomplishes the goal of student learning. While social justice advocates argue that the charity model tends to support the status quo, there are benefits to charity service learning versus no service learning. The effects of service learning over the long term need investigation. Though students engaged in short-term charity service learning are not creating social change in the course of the semester, students are able to gain structural understandings of service providers that can be translated into social change later in their careers. While it appears that either type of service-learning model is beneficial to the student, it is important to evaluate which type of service learning has the greater impact on the community and the greater possibility of social transformation in the long-term.

In sum, while the goals of service learning for social justice may be closer to the value-orientations of faculty engaged in service learning, even with institutional support, there are many difficulties in implementing this type of program. The case of Denison demonstrates that planning and process are critical. Despite good intentions and many resources, at Denison, we are learning how difficult it is to create the long-term social change collaboration we seek with our neighbors.

REFERENCES


Tammy Lewis has moved from Denison University to Muhlenberg College where she participates in the Public Engagement Project which seeks to promote a more civically engaged college community. She teaches and researches in the areas of social movements and environmental sociology.