

Understanding College Volunteers Through Student Development Theory

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“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” ---David Kolb

Challenge and support: A challenge stimulates a student to develop new ways of making meaning. Should the challenge seem overwhelming then significant support needs to be in place, so that the student does not stagnation or seek escape from the situation. As you progress to the next “stage” in a theory, a balance of challenge and support needs to be in place. With this balance of challenge and support the student achieves growth.

Integration of the Cycle of Learning Model and the Service-Learning Model

Exploration: This represents the student’s **concrete experience**. This phase is all about the sense or feeling you are getting from the service. At this stage, community service is a new concept. The student is in an unknown context and has a personal or self-centered motivation for being there.

Example: Sarah, a first-year student, participates in an organized campus program sponsored by a campus group. They are painting a local community center. Sarah does not interact with the target population; instead, she is participating in an activity that peripherally affects the population. At the end of her service, she receives a free t-shirt and has gained a sense of personal satisfaction.

Challenge & Support: Invite the student to participate in a different way. If they helped paint the community center, then invite them to work with your after school programs, too. Show them all the ways they can serve at the community center. Encourage the student to bring friends or other groups to varying programs. Sharing the service experience with peers is important here.

Clarification: Students come to this phase after exploring a variety of service opportunities. They begin to participate in service activities in a more systemic manner, usually with a certain peer group (with a class, service club, or sorority). Participating in the service and creating relationships with fellow students are of equal value at this stage. Students not only feel and sense the experience, but they also begin to explore the meaning behind it. They take all of their experiences and begin to **reflect on their feelings**.

Example: Jim, a second-year student, is part of the campus service club. They sponsor a Thanksgiving dinner at the local homeless shelter. Jim is one of the servers at the shelter on the day of the program. He is motivated by the fact that the service group expects him to actively participate in order to be a part of their club. He is beginning to make friends within the service club, and he enjoys the various projects the club gets to participate in. He is beginning to think about taking on a leadership role within the campus service club. He is interested in coordinating the Thanksgiving dinner next year.

Challenge & Support: This student will need to be exposed more to the issues relating to this particular service project. Invite him to a meeting with your program directors/board to discuss the needs of the clientele and how to best structure the Thanksgiving Day program for next year. Share with him what you thought worked and did not with this year's program. He may have many questions. For example, "How do people become homeless?" Be prepared to answer them. It is important to provide the student with information on the clients and community you are and they will be serving.

Realization: Students begin to realize how the diverse parts of their service fit together. Through observations, they are exploring larger truths about themselves and the population. Through their **conceptualizations**, they become more focused on a particular population and more confident in their beliefs toward that issue. They begin to generate ideas.

Example: Kim, a student in the second or third year, is a tutor once a week in a nearby elementary school. Over time, she becomes more involved with the concept of tutoring and with the life of the child she tutors. Kim begins to explore the concept of her being more than a tutor, but also serving as a role model. Kim is motivated by a sense of commitment, by her career interests, and the fact that she looks forward to the visit with her elementary student. She is at a point where she needs the student as much as they need Kim.

Challenge & Support: Kim is realizing that the need for tutors goes beyond the classroom and reaches into the home and community. She is thinking about the difference between tutor and mentor. She will need help processing this. Encourage Kim and other students to create something new from their thoughts, such as improvements to the tutoring program. Perhaps the elementary school coordinator can set up a forum, like a structured reflection session, where tutors can discuss and explore their experience and thoughts. Students are beginning to make connections. For example, poor education can lead to economic inequities. What can we do about this?

Activation: Student goes from cognitive bystander to **full participant** asking the more complex questions (-isms). The student begins to feel solidarity with the population. The student spends a great deal of time with the community they identify with. The student **advocates** for issues relevant to the community with which the members of this community identify. The student may develop friendships within the community.

Example: John is an upper-class student. He volunteers with the Migrant Worker Advocacy Center. John has become attached to his volunteer work and frequently socializes with the staff and the clientele. Not only does John volunteer with the Center's regular programs, but he helps create new programs that empower the migrant worker population to play an active role in improving their situations. For example, he helps the workers set up meetings with local politicians to help initiate change. The injustices he witnesses only propel his drive to further help the population he is serving.

Challenge & Support: Make sure John does not become burned out or disillusioned. He may feel that he is the only one taking this battle seriously. Have him meet with other students or community groups that share his commitments and concerns. Have the group create a network where they can communicate their concerns, problems, and ideas; become a support group for each other. Someone from the agency needs to help John to understand that the process of change involves many factions and no one entity is to blame. Help him to see that many injustices may be connected. It is also important to let them know change takes time.

Internalization: Students strive to live a lifestyle integrated with their volunteer work. Students make lifestyle and career choices consistent with the values gained from their service experience. They make a lifetime commitment to pursue social justice issues in our society.

Example: Katherine is an older student with varied exposure to communities and their issues. She spent some time in the Peace Corps working in developing nations. She returns to school to pursue a degree that will help her change policy and work directly with populations in need. She works to promote social justice issues on campus. She is motivated by the integration of social issues into her daily life. She has an inner peace knowing that she is living up to her principles.

Challenge & Support: At this point, this student has made a commitment to social justice concerns in the community and has integrated concepts learned from her service experience into her life choices.

References

Cecilia Delve, Suzanne D. Mintz, Greig M. Stewart. "Promoting Values Development Through Community Service: A Design." *Community Service as Values Education*. Ed. Cecilia Delve, et. Al. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. 7-30.

Stewart, Greig M.. "Learning Styles as a Filter for Developing Service-Learning Interventions." *Community Education, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. Ed. Cecilia Delve, et. Al. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. 31-42.

Both articles can also be found in the *Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit: Readings and Resources for Faculty*, Campus Compact, 2000, pp 35-41, 163-174.