

Principles of Good Practice for a Peer-Learning Approach to Critical Service-Learning

**Volunteers in Asia,
Stanford Programs**

Presenters: Kazutoh Ishida,
Ben Strong, Patrick Qian

**Seeking to promote social responsibility,
while avoiding likely pitfalls of service-learning.**

- Tania Mitchell, “Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning”(2008)
- John Eby, “Why Service-Learning is Bad”(1998)

Methods:

- Conduct evaluation of peer-learning approach to identify best practices for an application to service-learning.
- VIA's 2009 Serving American Community Program, a problem-based service-learning program focusing on homelessness in the US and Japan
- 12 university students from Japan (includes 1 returning student as a peer leader)
- 4 peer leaders from Stanford

From a peer-learning approach, it is possible to achieve this by:

- 1) Appropriate modeling of social advocacy and responsibility
- 2) Fostering advocacy and social responsibility through genuine communication
- 3) Enabling personal transformation through mentorship relationships

Summary

1. **Equipping peer-leaders to become models of critical service-learning**
 - Collaboration and team-work among peer leaders
 - Goal-setting and attention to pitfalls of service-learning
 - Individual research topics
2. **Approaches to dialogue and reflection that foster awareness**
 - Accessibility
 - Eliciting
 - Equal involvement
3. **Transfer and Transformation**
 - Transfer of responsibility
 - Transfer of project responsibility
 - Includes acknowledgment of leadership involvement
 - Final project supports

1. Equipping leaders to become models of critical service-learning

- Collaboration and team-work among peer leaders
- Goal-setting and attention to pitfalls of service-learning
- Individual research topics

1. Equipping leaders to become models of critical service-learning

- Collaboration and team-work among peer leaders
 - “Collaboration allowed many new ideas to form, or at least combine. Working together helped produce better ideas.” (Peer Leader Comment)
 - Survey Question: “How did you feel about working together and planning the program with other peer leaders? Was there one of the following which best describes your feeling?”
 - 2 peer leaders identified learning how to be interdependent, which made the work more manageable
 - 3 peer leaders identified learning how to be interdependent, which helped us also work more as a group with participants

Collaboration with other coordinators was important to model an environment centering around collaboration for students.

- Goal-setting and attention to pitfalls of service-learning
- Individual research topics

1. Equipping leaders to become models of critical service-learning

- Collaboration and team-work among peer leaders
- Goal-setting and attention to pitfalls of service-learning
 - All peer leaders recognized that service alone was not sufficient; to promote social change, required real learning and attention to the relationship between these issues and change.
 - As well, learning without genuine service was identified as a concern by peer leaders.

Goal-setting and awareness of potential pitfalls in service-learning strengthened the peer leaders' ability to guide the students in a purposeful way.

- Individual research topics

1. Equipping leaders to become models of critical service-learning

- Collaboration and team-work among peer leaders
- Goal-setting and attention to pitfalls of service-learning
- Individual research topics
 - Students commented that Peer leader's Research Presentations were: Well researched and informative, in some cases introducing novel/relevant concepts to students.
 - Survey Question: "Overall, I am satisfied with the Stanford Coordinator Presentations."
 - **64% Very satisfied 36% Satisfied 0% Not very satisfied 0% Dissatisfied**

More ownership by the peer leaders gives them more credibility and this extends to the program.

2. Approaches to dialogue and reflection that foster awareness

- Accessibility
- Eliciting
- Equal involvement

2. Approaches to dialogue and reflection that foster awareness

- Accessibility

“Everyone has their own recognition toward the issues. So there is no difference between experts or non-experts to lead participants about the issues. Moreover, one important point of service-learning for me is to overcome a sense of dividing between experts and non-experts and try to think about the issues as ‘citizen’”. (Peer Leader Comment)

All of the Peer leaders agreed, that their approach to reflection and dialogue was one where nobody was an “expert”, rather, everyone shared ideas and learned from each other.

- Eliciting

- Equal involvement

2. Approaches to dialogue and reflection that foster awareness

- Accessibility
- Eliciting
 - Survey Question: “What motivated you the most during this program to learn more about social issues?”
 - 7 students replied, service activities
 - 5 students replied, reflection activities
 - 1 student replied, the research project; 1 replied the final project
 - 3 of the 7 students who identified service activities also indicated reflection along with service
 - The student who chose the final project, indicated its function as a reflection exercise which allowed the group members to really think carefully about the issues.

Having students and peer-leaders join service paired with reflection was the most effective approach identified to allow for open dialogue and meaningful reflection that has a significant impact on students.

- Equal involvement

2. Approaches to dialogue and reflection that foster awareness

- Accessibility
- Eliciting
- Equal involvement
 - Survey Question: “How did you regard your peer leaders?”
 - Students regarded their peer leaders as both leader and friend.
 - 5 of 11 students indicated appreciation for the Research Presentations given by the Peer Leaders as a real learning opportunity.
 - “The last reflection was most impressive, since all the students talked about their feeling through the whole program. And not just students, but also peer leaders talked about the feeling and experience throughout the program. When I heard their sharing; I was really motivated. “ (Student Comment)

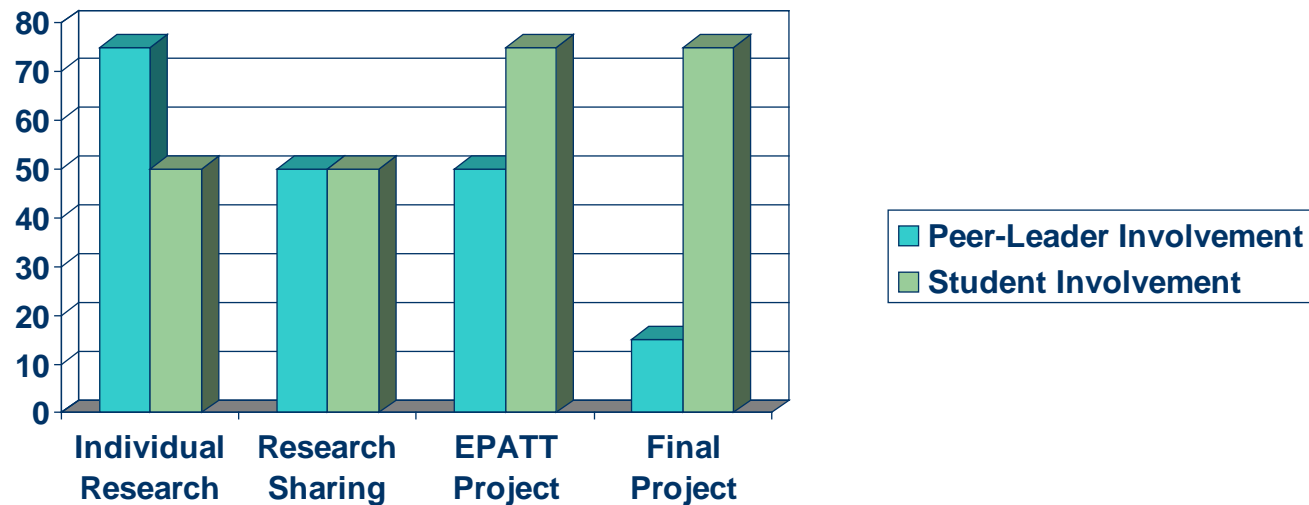
A feeling of level and equal involvement by students and peer leaders can generate increased motivation to study about social issues.

4. Transfer and Transformation

- Transfer of responsibility
 - Increasing/decreasing levels of Project Responsibility
 - Acknowledgment of leadership involvement
- Final Project Supports

4. Transfer and Transformation

- Transfer of responsibility
 - Transfer of project responsibility



Increase in responsibility, and decrease in involvement from peer-leaders gave students higher motivation to be more involved, both during and after the program

- Acknowledgment of leadership involvement
- Final project supports

4. Transfer and Transformation

- Transfer of responsibility
 - Transfer of project responsibility
 - Acknowledgment of leadership involvement
 - “The final ceremony was indispensable as a conclusion” (Student Comment)
 - Survey Question: “During the final ceremony what impressed you most?”
 - 5 students indicated realizing the work of coordinators
 - 4 students indicated seeing change in participants

During programs, the final ceremony serves as an opportunity for leaders and participants to recognize the work and effort of the peer leaders and acknowledge the involvement and growth of the students, in this way reinforcing the students' development as leaders.

- Final project supports

4. Transfer and Transformation

- Transfer of responsibility
 - Transfer of project responsibility
 - Acknowledgment of leadership involvement
- Final project supports
 - Survey Question: “Please explain what will really help your final project to become a real student-led project.”
 - 6 students responded that they need support of other interested students.
 - 6 students also said they needed support from program or university staff members.
 - 1 students suggested that this requires more motivation coming from students themselves.

Despite students' very strong motivation, a lack of greater support (from other students or from program staff) leaves students unable to overcome skepticism about their real ability to be leaders (especially as students are busy with school, lack expertise, and confidence).

Further Development

- Final project supports
- Teamwork development
- Role reversal
- Applying to a multi-national program
- Applying to specific communities