

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Scholarship for Sustaining Service-learning and Civic Engagement

*edited by Melody A. Bowdon, Shelley H. Billig, & Barbara A. Holland
(Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008, 210 pages)*

This book is one of a series of edited volumes that appear annually in a series titled “Advances in Service-Learning Research.” Each is the result of an invitation sent to presenters at the annual conference of the International Association for Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) to expand their conference presentations into book chapters. This volume was built on the submissions from presenters at the October 2007 conference in Tampa, Florida.

The IARSLCE is essentially an American association, and the contents of this volume reflect that fact. It has virtually no Canadian content. However, interest in and practice of service-learning (usually referred to as “community service-learning” in Canada) has increased considerably in this country in recent years, and this increased interest may have resulted in the October 2009 conference of the IARSLCE being held in Ottawa. The conference had a considerable number of Canadian presenters, and the 2010 volume in this series may reflect that fact.

Conference presentations usually have a “hit and miss” quality, and this volume shares that characteristic. Taken collectively, its eight chapters do not present anything like a balanced and comprehensive overview of all the issues surrounding the practice of (community) service-learning, let alone the broader topic of civic engagement. If you are looking for a comprehensive and balanced introduction to service-learning in higher education, this book is not it. You would be better advised to consult the classic volume edited by Barbara Jacoby (1996) or the more critical collection edited by Dan Butin (2005). The recent focus on the connection between service-learning and civic engagement, evident in the name of the IARSLCE, is given a balanced treatment in Jacoby & Associates (2009).

What the present volume does is focus on a few narrowly defined topics within the rather broad field of research having to do with service-learning and civic engagement. As series editor Shelley H. Billig points out in her Foreword to this volume, both practice and research in this field have come a long way over the past decade or so, but there is still a long way to go in both developing greater conceptual clarity in the field of practice and raising the quality of related research (pp. x–xi). The volumes in this series, according to Billig, are a significant contribution to both of these goals.

This contribution seems to have been enabled by the strong synergy between the K-12 sector and the post-secondary sector in both this series of publications and the research

conferences from which contributions are drawn. Of the four sections in this volume, one section, with two chapters, is devoted to research on the impact of service-learning on students and teachers in the K-12 system. Although these chapters are well worth reading by those interested in this segment of the education system, they will probably not be of great interest to most readers of this journal.

The first two chapters of this collection comprise a section titled "Sustaining interdisciplinary programs in higher education," and chapter 1 is possibly the chapter that will be of most interest to readers of *CJUCE*. Titled "Investigating student learning within and across linked service-learning courses," it looks at how service-learning helps to attain the goals of a higher education program, as contrasted with the single-course focus of most research on service-learning. Program developers wanting to build this mode of community engagement into a new or revised program will find this chapter thought provoking and of practical value.

Those of us involved in trying to build university-community engagement will find the section "Sustaining faculty engagement in service-learning and community engagement" of particular interest. Chapter 5, "Service-learning research as a feedback loop for faculty development," is an enlightening discussion of how research on service-learning can help to improve not only student outcomes but also support from faculty and university administration.

The last two chapters of this collection comprise a section titled "Service-learning and ethics education." Although much of the research on this general topic has to do with service-learning in the K-12 system, both chapters in this section report results of studies on university students. This topic is closely related to an intense focus in the American education system, strongly supported by funding from the U.S. government, on civic engagement and good citizenship. Such a focus has not arisen, at least as yet, in Canada—possibly because of the federal government's lack of influence on the education system, in sharp contrast to the situation in the United States. *CJUCE* readers and, I believe, Canadian educators generally will, therefore, find these final two chapters of little direct relevance to their own work.

In general, this is a book for people who are already somewhat familiar with the fields of (community) service-learning and civic engagement—people who are likely to attend and perhaps present at the series of conferences from which this series of edited volumes is derived. For people completely unfamiliar with these fields, there are other books, as noted above, that would serve as better introductions.

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REFERENCES

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