

Book on eService-Learning Posits Goals of Service-Learning Pedagogy and Technology's Role in Achieving Them

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Jean Strait and Katherine J. Nordyke (Eds.), *eService-Learning: Creating Experiential Learning and Civic Engagement Through Online and Hybrid Courses*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2015, 182 pages. ISBN 978-1-62036-064-4.

Higher education has become increasingly technology-centric with massive open online courses (MOOCs), hybrid courses, and classroom technologies pushing us to reconsider how knowledge is shared, how identities develop, and how learners are reached. With this shift, there are both challenges and opportunities for the field of service-learning and civic engagement to consider. At the recent Pathways to Achieving Civic Engagement Conference hosted by North Carolina Campus Compact, a clear theme emerged with regard to technology's impact on the future of service-learning and civic engagement. Some spoke with trepidation, and others with bold hope for innovations that could make service-learning even more accessible in the online format.

As educators, if we seek to develop the civic knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes of our students, that practice can take place in many different forms and formats. Harnessing technology's power to support that diverse sharing of ideas, connections to modes of communication across boundaries, and scaffolding of critical reflection and growth are all domains in which the experience of service-learning and civic engagement can be deepened. However, not all are hopeful for technology's role in education or society. Psychologist and MIT Professor Sherry Turkle (2012) has done extensive work on the divisive nature of technology and its capacity to push people further apart and encourage less "human" interactions. Clearly, there is much to be learned and new horizons to explore if we are to meaningfully and effectively implement technology in the service-learning and civic engagement field.

Editors Jean Strait and Katherine Nordyke are ahead of the curve in this respect, having published a volume that delves into the many expressions, benefits, and potential pitfalls of engaging in the online world. In their work *eService-Learn-*

ing: Creating Experiential Learning and Civic Engagement Through Online and Hybrid Courses, the editors bring together a diverse collection of author experience to speak to the future of service-learning in an online capacity. Divided into three main sections, the book provides a scaffold for readers to think through the ways in which experiential learning and civic engagement can take place in online and hybrid courses.

Moving from essentials to models to future directions, the book clearly scaffolds the knowledge about e-service-learning for the reader to both learn new frameworks and imagine the possibilities for their own practice. In the opening chapter, the editors—joined by Jane Turk—provide a comprehensive review that sets up many of the issues and implications of service-learning, both digitally and analog. They identify civic knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes as the ultimate goal of the pedagogy that is service-learning, and thus posit the question of how technology helps us to realize those goals. Leora Waldner provides a critical understanding of the components of e-service-learning and, further, what the values of a high-quality experience should encompass. In chapter 3, Nordyke explores the ways in which service-learning at large can be realized in a course, and then asks us to think about the appropriate usage when technology is involved. Whether it be direct or indirect service, integrated or standalone, there are many options for what service-learning can look like in the digital realm, and it is incumbent upon the curriculum designer to make intentional choices about that delivery. Finally, Strait rounds out this section of chapters by exploring the role of technology as a support system for service-learning, and specifically e-service-learning models.

In the next set of chapters, models for e-service-learning across disciplines and geographic areas are explored. Each provides a

specific context for e-service-learning, from university adoption at-large to an online business course to the assessment of experiences in an established service-learning office. One of the chapters that focuses on exemplars is a case study on service-learning after Hurricane Katrina. Striking a parallel between today's political landscape and the intense focus on the Syrian refugee crisis, one can look at this chapter as especially salient. A spike in attention and awareness can lead to a situation that is susceptible to largely technocratic or unsustainable engagement. In the chapter on post-Katrina efforts, the example of the Each One, Teach One program provides evidence of a successful model that integrated hybrid online, in-person experiences for sustainable engagement and community partner relationship development. This section reminds us that we must think critically and carefully about the way in which service-learning and civic engagement is being implemented in truly meaningful, high-quality ways regardless of the realm—online or in-person.

Moving into the final section of the book, the focus shifts to the future. The penultimate chapter is a call from John Hamerlinck to leverage technology and community engagement to make higher education more purposeful and impactful. Trends in neoliberalism and internationalization in higher education—coupled with an increased focus on providing asynchronous experiences—have driven the growth and development of MOOCs and hybrid courses. Hamerlinck cites a number of examples from domains of cost, student success, and debt that point toward the need to rethinking the purpose and usefulness of higher education. Within the space constraints of a chapter, it is impossible to exhaust all of the issues facing the wicked problem of higher education delivery and transformation. However, there is one notable absence: the issue of access. I can envision an opportunity for a critical examination of these issues of access and equity in future works, especially as the opportunities for e-service-learning continues to grow and concern about the digital divide remains very real. That being said, the exciting opportunity that he highlights is the ability to re-imagine higher education, leverage technology to create community, and highlight one's work in service-learning and civic engagement to shift the expectations and models of higher education. In his vision, social media can be a tool to promote civic ideals, the openness of online courses can disseminate knowledge across stakeholders, and the creative, collaborative capacity of joint projects can

be ever-expanded across geographies. Community-engaged teaching with technology, connectivism, and the decentralization of knowledge bases can have implications for the field, while strengthening values of community and public purpose for all of higher education.

Strait and Nordyke have put together a timely and useful resource for imagining and reconsidering the role of technology as a support, facilitator, and space for service-learning and civic engagement to take place. As a scholar-practitioner with significant experience in using technology in the classroom, I found this book to be an immensely helpful tool for those at any level of technology adoption. The contributors give us a catalyst to spark creative thinking about the delivery of service-learning education while retaining a focus on the values and quality of community engagement. Whether you look toward this brave new world of technology to expand your practice or deepen its impact, this volume is an essential resource.

References

Turkle, S. (2012). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.

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About the Reviewer

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