

Bringle, R. G., Hatcher, J. A., & Jones, S. G. (Eds.). *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research. Volume I: IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Review by Juliet Millican

Despite the plethora of books on research in service-learning, international study programs, and international development, this is the first that brings together strong conceptual frameworks around international service-learning as a distinct discipline. This relatively new field of study draws from service-learning and community engagement programs in the United States and the many “year out” and “study abroad” dimensions of these programs. With community engagement increasingly appearing in the missions of universities across the world, international service-learning is beginning to gain credibility.

Although international service-learning is largely a North American phenomenon, there are a few examples in Europe and Canada, and service-learning and community engagement programs exist in many other parts of the world as well. As a result, this book, edited by key scholars involved in service-learning research, is timely and could offer support to academics and administrators considering the adoption of international experience programs. It covers such areas as course design and intentions, quality assurance and monitoring, and ways to provide hard evidence of program outcomes and intentions.

The book has much of the seriousness and scholarliness that often characterizes the Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis publications, indicating it will be weighty and informative and draw on quantitative data. The images on the front cover depict the range of projects covered within its chapters, chiefly in non-industrialized societies that are typically the target of international volunteering. The experience offered by the global South is often stark and provides rapid learning around culture and difference that will appeal to undergraduates with a sense of adventure. When such experiences are coupled with notions of “service” and “learning,” however, there is always the possibility that the world is represented as a laboratory for students to learn, with insufficient consideration for those in the “lab.” In a book written by and designed for those working in academia and with a focus on learning, such a view is not altogether avoided.

The book's main concerns are with the outcomes for students, their personal and cultural learning, and the values they might develop as global citizens (p. 22). It provides tools for measuring the impact of international service-learning on students and ways to improve academic attainment (p. 59), and suggests that service-learning is essential for the preparation of engaged citizens (p. 57). Local communities are seen as "co-creators of curricula" (rather than just as project beneficiaries; p. 21), and there is some mention of reciprocity and mutual benefit but acknowledgment that "American models of ISL stress impact on students rather than the community—sometimes to an unsettling degree" (p. 193). The book emphasizes that the true benefits of service-learning lie in the learning rather than the service. It moves from context and conceptual frameworks through course design and the associated challenges of research and conducting research into international service-learning. The book ends with a section on lessons from other forms of service-learning and a South African perspective on North American interventions, but overall it contains academic debates held within a higher education context, and the text does not attempt to build closer connections with those who may act as community partners.

The conceptual frameworks outlined in the initial chapters provide the reader with a way of thinking about service-learning and its relevance to other forms of pedagogy. The claims made for its potential are far reaching in terms of how a global experience can also prepare students for active local citizenship. The authors acknowledge from the outset that exchanges need to be mutually beneficial, reciprocal, non-exploitative, and democratic and draw upon Dewey, among others, in discussing values and approaches. However, the focus remains on international service-learning as a pedagogical intervention and the benefits for the student rather than the positive or negative impacts on host communities. The frameworks set up in the early chapters position international service-learning as a way of responding to internationalization and of preparing graduates as U.S. citizens in a globalized world, who are able to act "in the world and for the world" (p. 42) as well as individually and competitively in the marketplace. Different types of international service-learning are discussed, and these include working with immigrant communities at home and supporting students from other cultures as they come to the United States. Nonetheless, the chapters in the "Frameworks" section explicitly present international service-learning as a tool for North American educators and describe its benefits for a student's personal growth, skills development, and cognitive and civic understanding.

The “Design” section of the book does include some awareness of the challenges international service-learning presents: the difficulties of shaking off the “development paradigm,” the importance of co-collaborative design of projects, and the role of critical pedagogy. This section is welcome. It illustrates the deep value of learning through experience shared with people in different contexts, of learning with them rather than just learning about them. It emphasizes the need to recognize our own multiple individual identities and to become self-critical. Consequently, it alludes to the need to deconstruct issues of power, patronage, and service. A chapter on “Reframing Service Learning” introduces concepts from The Highlander folk school, Horton and Freire, notions of mutuality, and the value of listening. It emphasizes the importance of preparation for students at home, cross-cultural competency, and meetings with local immigrant communities as a vehicle to explore cultural bias and difference. It also acknowledges the need to look into community impact and the difficulty of doing this.

Many of the chapters in this section stress the importance of reflection and critical reflection and provide pointers for developing these practices with students. There are practical guidelines for designing reflection exercises drawn from other service-learning and study abroad programs. Images and tables provide models to help students critically view their academic enhancement as well as their civic learning. But while all the chapters in this section provide the reader with useful things to think about, they lack any systematic overview of the key questions a program must address, including sufficient reference to questions of power, equality, and deference. Including Stoecker’s “models of service learning” (2003) and an understanding of community partners’ perspectives (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009) would have been useful here in addressing the difficulties and dilemmas created by partnerships and the importance of giving due consideration to their impact on local communities.

The book’s third section, on research, returns to some of the questions of definition and distinction raised in the first section. Connections with related disciplines are reaffirmed and their pedagogical assumptions re-examined. But again, the focus is on the implications for the student and the academy with only a passing reference to local communities and the difficulty of measuring any kind of impact on a locality. Research examples concern what can be learned about the pedagogy and its effects on students, and while the book is rigorous in its presentation of qualitative and quantitative approaches, it makes no real attempt to link the field with

either participatory or community-based research approaches, or to include working alongside community groups to determine criteria for a program's success.

The chapter on research ethics in international service-learning discusses how university ethics tend to be based on Western values, sensitivities toward the individual rather than the group, and the possibility of approaching these matters differently. It discusses the risks as well as the benefits of any international service-learning project, the importance of ensuring a positive impact on community participants, and the need to protect vulnerable parties from unforeseen outcomes. It draws on a range of international research agreements and alludes to the relevance of community-based research criteria, concluding with some useful guidelines that can be adapted for ethical review boards.

Overall the book makes a serious attempt to ensure that those running international service-learning programs understand the risks as well as the benefits of these programs for students and indigenous communities. The range of chapters and voices that come through provides the reader with plenty to think about when considering whether to embark on either an international service-learning program or a related research project, and how to approach it. These are the things the book sets out to do, and it does them well.

The primary readers of this book will likely be U.S. administrators or academics working for well-resourced universities. The text is U.S.-centric, reflecting a North American perspective throughout, and, as a result, it may be less valuable to readers and institutions in other parts of the world. Only the final chapter is written from a non-U.S. perspective, specifically that of South Africa, and, while taking a critical view of international service-learning as a concept, it does, significantly, discuss outcomes for communities, the value of Mode 2 knowledge (open, transdisciplinary, problem-solving knowledge), the danger of a university's serving its own purposes, and academic elitism. It takes an evidence-based approach to questions of partnership, participation, and reciprocity, and offers concrete suggestions for a post-implementation review of projects with local partners. It is a crucial and welcome addition to the rest of the book, and a testament to the strong contributions that host organizations can make to the field.

About the Reviewer

Juliet Millican is deputy director (academic) of the Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton. She has been involved in the development of student community engagement programs at Brighton since 2003 and has a background in community education and development. She has also worked internationally as an advisor on education and development programs since 1992. Her key research interests are in the transformative potential of community-based learning and the role of higher education in post-conflict recovery; her doctoral research focused on a divided community in the Balkans. She is the author of a number of books on adult literacy and community learning and a range of more recent academic journal articles on community-university engagement.

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