SERVICE-LEARNING AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATORS: THE CASE METHOD ON STEROIDS

Gregory Berry
Utah Valley State College
OREM, UTAH, U.S.A.

Marilyn Taylor
University of Missouri at Kansas City
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Abstract

It has been suggested that the service-learning experience represents live cases (i.e., real world, real time) as students actively assist local small businesses and non-profit organizations in becoming more effective and successful [Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2000]. This insight raises questions about the application of service-learning as a teaching tool when compared with the more traditional approaches to teaching cases and with the case research process. This paper examines and compares the service-learning experience with the use of existing case studies as a teaching approach. Service-learning and case-research methodology in general are also compared. Service-learning appears to have some advantages over the use of cases in the classroom (e.g., increasing students' learning).

KEY WORDS: Service-learning, case research, case teaching, pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning [SL] and case teaching can both be powerful pedagogies. This paper explores their similarities as well as their differences. The major commonality explored in section one is that both teaching approaches use primarily qualitative research as the process for gathering data. (See Exhibit 1.) Further, both are interactive pedagogies within the classroom and both provide opportunity for team learning outside the classroom. In addition, both SL and case teaching provide opportunity for facilitated discussion of the students' understanding of real life situations, their analysis of situations, and their logic in developing recommendations for those situations. The paper reviews several types of cases and examines their relationships to SL. The paper argues that the SL experience goes beyond what students experience when learning through the traditional case study approach. SL requires student immersion in real world and real time situations, and responsibility for intervention in the organization through their presence as well as through implementation of recommendations that may emanate from the SL project.

CASE RESEARCH AS A PART OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TRADITION

Case research is distinct from case study because case research is a process while the case study is the actual product of that process, although case research may not result in the development of a case study [Guercini, 2004]. Case research is only one of several options when undertaking social science research. Other options include ethnography, participant observation, and the use of journals and surveys. Interviews, observations, internal and external documents, and observations from field
experiments can also provide sources of social data. These general qualitative research methods overlap with many of the methods used when undertaking case research. The best method for any specific research question depends on what type of questions the researcher uses to guide the investigation, whether the researcher has control over events, and whether the focus is on contemporary or historical phenomena [Yin, 1994].

Participants in both SL and case research use a variety of qualitative research methods including observation, interviews, document analysis, and reflective journals [Perren and Ram, 2004]. [See Exhibit 1.] The SL research question is usually focused on contemporary events, often on the specifics of how or why a process or system works as it does and how it can be improved. Also, SL student-participants have little control over ongoing events. The SL data collection process is much like case research, and the SL action-report is an output that is much like writing up the notes of a case prior to writing the case study itself.

**EXHIBIT ONE**

**Service-Learning (SL)**
A pedagogical approach that involves student interaction in field situations with a balanced exchange of service to an organization (or individual(s)) and for-credit learning for the student under the guidance of an instructor.

**Case Research (CR)**
CR is one of multiple qualitative research methodologies. Its purpose is to develop an intensive understanding of a situation. Sources of data include, but are not limited to, observation, participant observation, public and internal documentation, interviews, and surveys (note: it does not exclude using experimental data results).

**Case Teaching (CT)**
A pedagogical approach that typically (but not always) involves the use of a written case study for purposes of student practice in analysis and, often, decision-making.

Case research is preferred in qualitative research when the focus is on how or why questions [Yin, 1994]. SL shares these attributes, although the SL student is often a participant as well as an observer. Case research typically requires detailed investigation over time [Hartley, 1994]. SL is again similar, although the SL student uses the acquired knowledge to enable action rather than focusing only on documenting findings, and the SL experience is often time-bound to a semester or two. Case research is usually inductive and focused on processes in context. SL similarly uses inductive analysis although the results of the research and analysis are used on behalf of a client organization instead of the development of a case. Case research is especially appropriate for programs that are developing, innovating, or changing. Case research is also effective when the focus is on program improvement or facilitating a more effective process or implementation measures [Patton, 1987]. Again, this aspect is much like SL.

Although they share a number of similar characteristics, case research and SL research and analysis are not identical. At their core, case writers are researchers [Hartley, 1994], even though they may also be consultants to an organization that incidentally gave them permission to develop a case study from acquired data. SL participants are students who are participant observers and sort-of consultants who are
using their classroom learning and SL research to solve practical, real-time problems for the organization or client. The case researcher’s purpose is to learn about organizational practices and processes, and this learning often evolves into a case write-up. A case study developed for classroom use attempts to describe an issue, unit, or problem in sufficient detail so that the case can be considered holistically in a realistic context [Patton, 1987]. The case study offers learning opportunities for analysis and perhaps decision-making situations or exercises for students. SL research also attempts to provide context and holistic understanding, but the purpose of the research is to enable near-immediate action. Case research is often more about questions than answers. SL research projects typically take an additional step. They often result in recommendations for improvements once the core questions or issues are understood and sometimes project participants assist in implementation.

THE METHODOLOGY OF CASE RESEARCH

The similarities between case research and SL research are evident when the methodologies of each are considered. Case research uses data collection methods such as in-depth open-ended interviews; direct observation; written documentations including questionnaires, diaries, and journals; as well as internal documents, archival data, and artifacts [Yin, 1994; Meggison, 1980]. SL participants use the same sources of data. Field-based case method is ethnographic in nature and is characterized by the researcher spending time on the research site in personal contact with the people, activities, and operations of the organization. The researcher reflects on the meaning of what is happening at the site while documenting and prior to writing-up these observations [Naumes and Naumes, 1998]. Some case researchers are participant observers who collect data as consultants or as permanent employees of the organization. The SL experience is similar, with SL researchers almost always participating as well as observing. The principles of data collection are the same for both case research and SL since both use multiple sources of data to create a case study database and both are careful to maintain the chain of evidence [Yin, 1994]. A difference may be that the purpose of maintaining the chain of evidence in SL projects is so that the reasoning for the action recommendations can be documented for the client organization.

The case study methodology can be interpreted and utilized in various ways. Factors influencing interpretation and utilization include: the intended utilization of the case data [teaching, research, or record keeping]; the determination of the level of analysis [individual, group, company, or systems of organizations]; the aims of the research [investigative, descriptive, or interpretive]; the types of evidence gathered and used in the case analysis [qualitative, quantitative, or a hybrid model]; and the manner in which the findings resulting from the investigation are used [cross-analysis of more than one case, in-depth analysis of emblematic individual cases, or of cases running counter to general tendencies] [Guercini, 2004].

A distinction must be made between types of data [quantitative or qualitative], data gathering methods [ethnographic or interview, for example], and type of research strategies. Qualitative research and case research cannot be considered synonymous [Guercini, 2004] because case research does not necessarily entail only the use of qualitative evidence [Villardi, 2003]. Indeed, case research may make use of quantitative information, for example, drawing on the results of a field experiment. The methods of data collection cannot consist exclusively of comments offered by interviewees [i.e., observations made by the participant] or the interviewer [ethnographies], since cases are often dependent instead on data collected from archives, databases, third party reports, or combinations of these elements.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research designs for case and SL research are similar in that both are emergent, although the SL experience sometimes depends on how the professor or student group have set up the relationship with the client. Case research is often conducted from a grounded theory perspective because the data is allowed to emerge from the data collection [Glaser and Strauss, 1967]. Both case research and SL start with a set of questions that need to be answered or explored, and understanding evolves as data accumulates. Importantly, data collection in case research is not constrained by pre-determined categories of analysis, an aspect of the methodology that contributes to the depth of the data [Patton, 1987]. In SL, the client may define issues or problems before the SL participants arrive, and this may
create problems, as the initial analysis by the client may be faulty. Similarly in case research the host organization is often requested to define the issues, or even a priori identify the issues. Data collection procedures are rarely linear in either case research or SL projects because of the emergent nature of the collection. One difference may be that SL participants are usually working on a restricted timeline and this limitation may lead participants to more readily accept a client’s diagnosis that further analysis might deem faulty.

Analysis is often difficult in SL and case research because the data collection may be neither systematic nor standardized [Patton, 1987]. There is often difficulty identifying boundaries between the phenomenon and the context, and there are likely more variables of interest than there are data points [Yin, 1994]. A common problem in both case and SL research is that the researcher is unsure how much data to collect because of these amorphous boundaries.

**RESEARCH SKILLS REQUIRED**

The research skills required for case and SL research are the same, although SL participants are perhaps more focused on the specific instead of the broader and more theoretical questions of interest to the case researcher. The researcher in both case research and SL needs to:

- Be able to ask good questions,
- Be able to interpret the answers,
- Be a good observer and listener,
- Avoid being trapped by preconceptions,
- Be adaptable and flexible,
- Have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and
- Be sensitive to contradictory evidence [Yin, 1994].

These skills are also generally required of consultants. Teaching cases are often written to put the student in the role of a consultant or a decision-maker [Garvin, 2003].

Although case and SL researchers share certain requirements in terms of research skill, some differences are also apparent. A major difference between SL and case research is that often the problems or issues in SL are unknown even to the participants. SL participants are often expected to identify the problem prior to finding a solution or resolution to the problem. SL participants are likely more focused on the single question of “What is the problem?” and perhaps less interested in broader contextual or theoretical understanding. The SL participants may be more at risk of focusing on symptoms instead of core issues or problems. The SL participant is also pressured by client demands, expectations, and perceptions of the client organization’s employees. SL participants may find that the issue as perceived by the client is not the critical or most significant issue that needs to be dealt with. SL participants tend to adopt informal, personal, and non-standardized procedures when carrying out the investigations (as do consultants) and tend to appreciate pragmatism and seek feasible solutions to problems [Guercini, 2004].

Case research that results in decision-oriented cases for classroom teaching needs to be concerned that the database [i.e., the case] is appropriate to meet the needs of the issue or concept being taught. Classroom cases typically are concerned with issues that require an accumulation of data so that students can use extant theoretical concepts as part of the analysis process, and in teaching cases the decision points or problems are often explicit. These decision-oriented cases are often practical and applied, and attempt to be as reflective of real-life as possible given the constraints of the printed word and a limited number of pages.

**SEVERAL TYPES OF CASES**

There are different ways to classify cases. Some cases may be developed for organizational purposes such as training or record keeping (e.g., with medical files, see Guercini, 2004). This paper, however, focuses on cases within academe where the most useful classification is whether the purpose of the case is for academic research purposes or for pedagogical classroom purposes. Common outcomes for case research include: (a) explaining causal links that are too complex for an experiment or survey, (b) describing an intervention and the real-life content where it occurred, (c) doing an evaluation of an intervention when outcomes are unclear, (d) illustrating certain topics in descriptive mode, or (e)
undertaking a study of a study [Yin, 1994]. Cases developed primarily for research purposes can be used in the classroom, but the purpose of these cases is generally that of analysis. Cases used for classroom teaching can be subdivided into analytical cases or decision-making cases, the latter often being referred to as "the Harvard case method".

SL is mostly focused on the first three case research outcomes noted above. The SL project may even be the study or experiment, and thus is the topic in terms of the final write up for the professor's grading purposes or presentation to the client. Significantly, research cases are often written to be compared to other cases [Stake, 1994], and theory development is a major a part of the design phase of the project [Yin, 1994]. In SL, the write-up or action is usually a stand-alone outcome, and theory development is rarely considered as an explicit outcome. However, some disagree. Saltmarsh et al. [2002], for example, argue that reflection is a critical component of the learning process in SL and that SL reflection sessions can drive theory development. Best practices in SL argue for time to facilitate reflective sessions as a way of guiding students' insight development as a component of their SL experience [Jacoby, 1996; Schoon, 1984]. Some argue that genuine learning [Dewey, 1938] requires four types of learning categories, namely experience, reflection, thinking, and action [Kolb and Kolb, 2005], and that SL includes the four categories.

Teaching cases need to be understood as outcomes of case research. Teaching cases demand that students think actively, either individually, in small groups, or even in large groups of a hundred students or more. In decision cases, or what Peterson [1994] calls interpretative teaching cases, students are expected to interpret and judge the information given to them, then share their interpretations and insights with their classmates. In SL, the reflective and learner-centered classroom sessions provide similar experiences for both professors and students [Ramsey and Fitzgibbons, 2005]. During the SL process, field participants negotiate with real-life clients and often the client's clients, and this up-close-and-personal presence of multiple stakeholders increases the social and economic diversity interaction for the SL participant. These are responsibilities and pressures that students involved in teaching-case analysis do not bear. The necessity for SL participants to engage in problem solving is an attribute of most SL sites [Hecht, 2003]. Negotiation with clients is expected to lead to action, which is a considerably different and more difficult expectation than the typical class discussion and presentation found with the case teaching method. The SL experience leads to both professional and personal growth for students [Lester, et al., 2005].

The teaching case almost always gives the facts of the problem or issue, although sometimes these facts are misrepresented by the participants as presented in the case, or misinterpreted by the student studying the case. SL participants must cope with similar issues. Representatives from the client organization may deliberately or inadvertently misrepresent or misunderstand facts. SL students then may have to convince organizational leaders that their perceptions may be incorrect, especially if these perceptions or incorrect assumptions may be part of the organization's problem.

A classroom case study is useful in aiding student understanding of organizational change and innovation [Hartley, 1994], and the SL experience is at least as effective in teaching about organizational change and innovation. SL is especially effective if the project itself is about the process of innovation or change. At the core of SL is the linking of the academic content with practice in context [Godfrey, 1999; Middleton, 2005]. SL participants deal with the immediate, and so the case for the participants is on the ground. Although history is useful in providing context, the case is immediate and requires immediate response and action. The classroom case builds analytical skills and allows the use of diagnostic skills [Peterson, 1994]. Most SL projects build both analytical and diagnostic skills, but also develop negotiation and implementation skills, which improve both skill levels and academic performance [Brown, 2000]. The SL project is almost always intrinsically a case, one that is focused on providing a product or service of use to the client agency, or the client's clients. In short, most SL experiences place the classroom material in a meaningful context [Zlotowski, 1999] and reinforce that learning is context dependent [Reynolds and Vince, 2004].

There are parallels between SL and teaching cases as pedagogical approaches. First, both approaches put the student into a real-life situation with facts that must be analyzed. In the SL experience, the student may have to make recommendations and perhaps be involved in implementation of these recommendations. If the classroom cases are decision-oriented, the students may also have to make recommendations and then logically follow the implications of the recommendations for implementation. However, the parallels quickly dwindle. To make a medical analogy, cases are cadavers
while SL assignments are analogous to treating live patients [Ruder, 2006]. Generally, the risk to the organization with written cases is minimal since discussion is confined to the classroom. Further, student recommendations within the classroom setting seldom have significant effect on an organization. With teaching cases the student and the setting are divorced because the student is not embedded in the situation and the classroom case study is not real time. Even if one or more members of the organization are present during the case discussion, the situation described within the case may be several years old.

In contrast, SL experiences are always in dynamic real time [Reynolds and Vince, 2004]. One of the difficulties in attempting to compare SL and cases is that there are multiple kinds of SL experiences and multiple kinds of cases. The continuum of SL experiences range from short, light assignments to intensive interventions [Taylor, 2000; Taylor, et al., 1997; Taylor, et al., 1996], but even if the SL assignment is light, the student’s mere presence is an intervention in the organization. (See Table 1 below.) The degree of intervention is directly related to the degree of risk for both the organization and the student. The degree of risk is simply not present in the same degree for the student and organization with the pedagogical use of a case study in the classroom.

TABLE ONE
COMPARING LIGHT AND INTENSE SL EXPERIENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Light SL</th>
<th>Intense SL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student essentially provides labor in exchange for getting a feel of the organization. The experience is then brought back into the classroom and compared with text material. The SL experience is a minor part of the course, perhaps 10% or less. Students are not expected to make significant recommendations for the organization. Light SL may be used at both undergraduate and graduate levels.</td>
<td>Intensive experiences with SL assignments usually comprise a major part of or an entire course. The professor provides guidance with the process, but not with the outcomes. Student (or group) is responsible for garnering and analyzing data to provide recommendations for organizational change. If the project comprises an extended period (perhaps two semesters) the student (or group) may be involved in implementation. Intense experiences are usually reserved for capstone experiences or for advanced students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An example is pharmaceutical students volunteering two hours/week in non-profit settings to serve as receptionists. This SL purpose is to acquaint the students with a wider range of socio-economic strata, similar to what they will serve in their professional roles after graduation. Student responsibility in the classroom is to journalize the experiences and to share their reflections in small groups.</td>
<td>An example is an Executive MBA class with a two-semester project comprising 50% of the credit for two courses. A project might involve facilitating the merger between two organizations. Responsibility in the classroom includes sharing reflections on the process and content with fellow students. Also, students are responsible for connecting their experiences with the two organizations to ongoing classroom topics, and providing ongoing and final reports to the clients.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SERVICE-LEARNING GOES BEYOND USING CASES IN THE CLASSROOM

Similarities and differences exist between SL projects and teaching cases in the classroom. Case research in the field involves the researcher both learning about and documenting the case situation, but it is also about creating a product for classroom use [Stake, 1994]. SL is very similar in that SL participants must learn, document, and create a report for the professor or/and the client. However, SL goes another step, including either the service or the implementation of a change or innovation.
Especially if an SL participant is charged with implementation, such implementation goes beyond the experience of working on a classroom case, and can involve real consequences for SL participants as well as the client and the client’s clients. In short, SL creates a responsibility for the SL participants to do their best work and make their greatest effort [Godfrey, Illes, and Berry, 2005]. SL experiences often have a positive effect on the moral and leadership development of SL student participants, and often create a sense of social responsibility in the student [Eyler, et al., 2000].

Classroom teaching of cases usually involves analysis, application of theory, practice in decision-making, and consideration of implementation issues. SL projects go beyond these expectations and demand involvement and action [Billig and Eyler, 2003]. Classroom case studies often make use of student teams for the analysis and presentation, with the professor assigning cases to students and expecting summary presentations without any attempt by the professor to facilitate a case discussion involving the entire class. Students can learn from each other through these presentations, but often learn more from the team analysis and full class discussion [Christensen, 1987; Christensen et al., 1991].

In contrast, SL experiences often encourage the use of teams for data collection, analysis, and for implementation. Thus, the SL experience goes beyond the use of cases in the classroom because SL students must take responsibility for their choice of intervention and the intervention itself in an organization. Difference is found in the action that is required in the SL experience, and the resultant potential consequences from this action for SL participants, the client, and the client’s client.

Case research is useful when one needs to understand some particular problem or situation in depth [Patton, 1987], and an SL team similarly needs to understand problems or situations in depth before action can take place. The purpose of a teaching case is to establish a framework for discussion and debate, whereas the purpose of analysis in SL, once the case data have been collected, is to establish a framework for action. Classroom cases are interactive in that classroom participants must identify, relate, compare, propose answers, and integrate facts and ideas [Peterson, 1994]. SL team members have the same experiences, but the SL team members must defend their solutions to the client as well as to their classmates and the professor. These SL experiences often increase both academic performance and critical thinking skills [Astin and Sax, 1998]. Student perceptions are frequently expanded through the SL experience because of increased awareness of the reality of both the workplace and the community [Stenson, Eyler, and Giles, 2003].

In the classroom, students must consider what the professor wants, and proof of competent thinking and learning is in the presentation and defense of the presentation to the classroom cohort [Peterson, 1994]. In comparison, SL teams must consider what the client wants and what will actually work. The proof of competent thinking and learning in SL is in the implementation of these decisions where real problems are actually solved, all under the added pressure of responsibility for the well being of others [Bringle, 2003]. This sense of responsibility may be a key difference between the SL experience and the classroom experience. In the business school classroom case study, students often judge the results of their decision by the predicted effect on the bottom line. Within SL experiences, the SL participants must consider the effect of their decisions on multiple constituencies including individuals with whom they have become personally acquainted through their embeddedness in the organization [Godfrey, Illes, and Berry, 2005; Jacoby, 1996]. Classroom case analysis results in a suggested answer to the problems presented, but without a real-life trial to examine implementation issues [Peterson, 1994]. Reality-based checks are part of a case analysis in well-run case analysis classes, with perhaps part of the grade being dependent on evidence of empathy. SL participants must practice empathy in real time with real people.

Classroom cases are prepared and vetted by professors or professionals. They are generally accompanied by teaching materials and analytic notes that go beyond what is presented to the student [Peterson, 1994]. In SL, the data collection is undertaken by the team members, and the resultant data are completely their own. Indeed, SL team members know more about their case than the professor knows. In the classroom case study, the students follow the lead of the professor regarding focus and direction. The SL team is more on their own although they usually receive some relatively generic advice from the professor, and some specific advice from the client.

Students have considerably more autonomy during SL experiences as compared to preparation and discussion for case studies. Some argue that this autonomy is critical in internalizing values during the course of the SL experience or in the classroom generally [Deci and Ryan, 2000]. Since classroom cases can be used over and over again, the professor acquires experience with the case and over time
becomes more the expert. In contrast, each SL project is unique, and although the professor may have experience with the SL process, the professor will not have experience or extensive knowledge of the specific project. The professor can be much more a part of a democratic learning community within the SL experience than in a classroom case analysis [Ramsey and Fitzgibbons, 2005]. The learning for the professor is usually higher in initial case discussions as facets of the case situation may be “unpeeled” for the first time [Roethlisberger, 1977]. Ideally, in case teaching the professor’s role in the classroom analysis is that of a facilitator and judge of learning while using the case as a script. In SL reflective sessions, the professor’s role is still that of facilitator, but there is no comparable script as the content of each SL assignment is different. In SL, the professor is only one judge among the multiple constituencies judging the work of the SL participants.

**SERVICE-LEARNING IS REALITY**

SL student participants experience the dynamic reality that case learning attempts to simulate. Within the SL experience, students live in real-life context and situations complete with real-life messiness and confusion. Qualitative research methods used in development of case studies are oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic because these qualitative methods are best suited in understanding the existing reality of the situation [Patton, 1987]. SL participants share this research experience, as most SL projects require participation and personal acquaintance with staff and organizational participants. Thus the SL experience is different from using cases in the classroom, especially composite cases or cases developed only from public sources. This is true even though composite cases are drawn from the author’s experience, and the public-source cases are at least partially drawn from a journalist’s rendition of reality with the case author being a channel for secondary data.

In both case research and SL, students learn that context is not only part of the research design, but is critical to their understanding of the case or problem. This overcomes a common problem of students understanding theory, but not understanding practice [Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002]. Classroom case study students need to understand context and process so that they can undertake the analysis, whereas SL students need to understand context and processes so that they can solve problematic issues as identified by the SL team and by the client. The advantage is that SL creates long-term benefits for many stakeholders, and not just short-term benefits to the student [Papamarcos, 2005].

The theory behind using cases in the classroom and the theory of doing SL projects is similar, but not the same. The theory of using teaching cases in the classroom is that students gain mastery of course content because they use course content, pertinent theory, and class concepts, along with their own reasoning and relevant experience, to understand and approach the theoretical, academic, and organizational problems embedded in the case. In SL, the theory is that students gain mastery of course content through practical experience in the field. Students use course content and pertinent theory, along with their own sense making and experience, to solve genuine and specific organizational problems.

Teaching cases have merit over some other pedagogy because they are typically meaningful to students [Hartley, 1994] and make use of context to provide meaning. With classroom teaching cases, students are exposed to organizational history as well as other information that is part of the context. Teaching cases can provide context and shed light on details of the social process in context. In SL, students are immersed in the context and have to work through the context to solve problems. In a classroom case study, the students can read about response to historical forces and context, pressures, and dynamics of various stakeholder groups [Hartley, 1994]. In SL, students are immersed in a real life experience involving the same informational components, and all parties involved in the SL project learn from each other [Jacoby, 2003]. Thus SL is not only service to a client, but also service to all the stakeholders involved in the process [Kenworthy-U’Ren, 2000].

Students learn from teaching cases, but SL takes this learning to a higher level. In classroom decision cases, students identify the relevant facts, make inferences about these facts, identify problems, determine the possible solutions, identify plusses and minuses for each alternative, and finally make a decision. The proposed solutions to the case issues are tested through logic and feedback from the professor as well as other students. While written cases are closed-end databases that require logic training, SL experiences are more open-ended and thus require more than logic. SL students internalize the learning from these experiences through relatedness [with the client and course content], competence
[getting the job done, and making a difference], all while working in highly autonomous self-managed
teams [Bringle, 2003].

SL does allow students to become holistically acquainted with real life situations, but SL is not time
efficient in all aspects. For example, teaching cases permit student access to senior level decision-
makers, an experience that SL participants may never get during the course of a SL project. Typically, in
teaching cases the professor judges the amount of learning from the case and then gives feedback to the
students. SL has more or less the same process, but in the course of the assignment SL students also
have to negotiate with real people during data collection and prior to implementation of any chosen action
plan. Thus, SL participants are expected to test their alternative solutions against the organizational
expertise of those whose lives and livelihoods will be affected by the solution implementation.

SL offers lessons about the relevance of community needs [Godfrey, Illes, and Berry, 2005], a
personal connection usually missing in a classroom case study. In a classroom case study, the students
must use assumptions, inferences, deductions, and probabilities to make sense of case [Peterson, 1994].
The SL experience involves much of the same learning experiences, although the client’s interpretation of
reality is communicated directly to the student, rather than through the lens of the case writer. Bias is
possible in either situation. The teaching case forces students to accept their limitations, biases, and their
narrowness of experience [Peterson, 1994]; SL is the same, although the SL team is forced to deal with
these limitations as it undertakes action.

Ironically, the use of case studies in the classroom initially developed because of a concern with lack
of reality in the classroom [Peterson, 1994]. At best, however, teaching cases are only a proxy or
representation of reality, while SL is reality. In teaching cases students have little control because cases
are usually chosen by the professor, with questions, focus, and grading all the responsibility of the
professor. SL projects are often chosen and negotiated by student SL teams, with the focus of each
project decided through discussion between the respective client and the SL team. In some SL projects,
of course, the professor may choose the organization, negotiate a preliminary focus with each, and
facilitate the formation of the teams based on various attributes of team members. Once the team enters
the organization, however, the team is expected to create an agreement about the actual project to be
undertaken, which is then monitored by the professor against benchmarks that may be laid out
specifically in an engagement letter or proposal.

Teaching cases have weaknesses. Classroom cases rarely have all the data or information needed to
address the issues or problems posed, and, until recently with near-universal access to the Internet,
students had little opportunity to get more. Further, a weakness of case study pedagogy is that students
can research post-case outcomes on the Internet or elsewhere, and then submit this result as the best
solution or recommendation. Similarly, the SL team rarely has full information, but the SL participants are
in the field where more information is available. Because the project is carried out in real-time, the
available information is valid although not necessarily reliable. Further, the SL team is not privy to the
outcomes of the implementation of a particular decision or recommendation as the outcomes have not yet
occurred.

Often, a SL team has more information that it can adequately process given time and resource
limitations. Cases, by definition, are partial descriptions of situations and omit detail, although they
provide enough information to enable decision-making. Not all SL engagements necessarily require
decision-making for the organization, although almost all organizational tasks will require at least some
decision-making. Teaching cases usually focus on one or two issues so that the lack of full context or
information may not be devastating. SL however is holistic, and in an ideal situation the SL team will have
full access to context and complexity.

Short teaching cases are often more stark in their contrast with the SL experience. Brief teaching
cases are used to illustrate a simple or single point or issue and often miss messy context. When
teaching cases are fictional or composite in nature, all contexts are suspect or at least artificial. In
contrast to these types of cases, the SL experience is full of context (and if anything too complex!), the
opposite of fictional or artificial. For teaching purposes, a case may not contain a complete or accurate
rendition of actual events [Yin, 1994], whereas the SL situation is an accurate rendition of the situation, at
least as perceived by the SL participant.

Both the teaching case and the SL experience share a common aspect in that the student’s term of
responsibility is usually fleeting (although not always), and is usually confined to a single semester. In SL
projects the professor bears longer term responsibility to the organization on behalf of the university, a
responsibility the professor generally does not bear if the cases chosen have been developed by others. Whereas a teaching case may focus on a firm crisis or threat [Peterson, 1994], SL participants are more likely to have temporary involvement in ongoing normal organizational programs or practices. When asked to problem solve, SL teams usually provide a fix or incremental improvement for a real organization but for a much smaller issue or problem than typically discussed in the classroom case.

SERVICE-LEARNING IS ACTION

The action orientation of SL is the most significant aspect of SL that surpasses the pedagogy found in the use of teaching cases. SL action is also a step beyond the processes of doing case research in the field. Teaching cases are focused on understanding and then analyzing an organizational function or system [Stake, 1994], while in SL the focus is more simply on understanding the context so that a plan can be formulated to solve specific problems and action taken. Teaching cases describe phenomena with the case itself as a body of data and with the case writer’s analysis or interpretation included in the Instructor’s Manual, Teaching or Analytic Note. Teaching cases are used to illustrate a point, a condition, a category, or something important for instruction [Stake, 1994], but SL students live the case and thus experience the point, the condition, or the category instead of just reading about it. In SL the end point is not the decision but the action following the decision.

There are often real consequences for the client and the client’s clients in SL projects. Godfrey [2000] argues that service to others is fundamentally a moral act, and this aspect of experience is often missing in the classroom case study. SL students use classroom learning to make sense of the context in the field and then to reach conclusions so action can be taken. Ideally, in SL, the academic material enhances the service side, and vice versa [Papamarcos, 2005]. Student recommendations in teaching cases are academic and stay in the classroom, and are therefore safe and without consequences [Stake, 1994]. Recommendations in SL projects are almost always followed up with action in the field, therefore real consequences to the client, the client’s clients, and possibly to the SL student personally.

Classroom teaching cases assist student readers in construction of knowledge [Stake, 1994]. In SL, students construct their knowledge through combining their classroom learning with their real-life experience in the field. Students discover insights into the human condition through classroom case study. SL extends this experience and learning because of the reality of the situation. Some classroom cases have an emotional undertone that can draw students in, but SL is rarely without this personal emotional attachment. Students use their prior classroom knowledge to make sense of the teaching case [Peterson, 1994], and similarly students make use of prior classroom knowledge to make sense of their task while undertaking their SL project.

CONCLUSIONS

The SL project is like a classroom case study, plus:

- Students do the research and data collection – this isn’t given to them.
- Students argue and debate among themselves and with the client in terms of problem definition and alternative choices for action – this isn’t given to them.
- Action and implementation is expected after decisions are made – this is not an academic exercise.
- The client and the client’s clients, as well as the professor and the peer cohort provide input into the overall evaluation of the student - thus providing much more real evaluation process than classroom evaluation only.
- There are real life consequences for multiple stakeholders in SL, whereas consequences in the classroom are rarely more serious than a poor grade.

There are many similarities between case teaching and SL as pedagogies. Chief among them is that both are grounded in the case research process. Further, both pedagogies place the students in situ with opportunity to practice higher-order learning skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Both pedagogies use inductive reasoning, emphasize decision-making, and evaluate the implications of those decisions.

However, there are sharp differences between case teaching and SL. A major contrast is the degree of responsibility and risk to the students and organization. With a student involved in analysis of a written
case study, the risk to the constituencies --- student, professor, and organization --- is minimal. With a SL project team immersed in an organization, the risks are borne by multiple stakeholders. The differential in the degree of risk related to the students’ decisions is immense. SL participants bear sanction from a myriad of stakeholders.

Both pedagogies expose students to real situations. However, the teaching case is static and the professor accumulates experience when the case is used multiple times. In sharp contrast, SL experiences are dynamic and real time and so the professor’s expertise related to the specific SL experience is significantly limited, since the SL experience is essentially not replicable. Both teaching cases and SL pedagogies offer significant benefits beyond textbook learning. However, the SL experience incorporates responsibilities for the student participant as both a case researcher and a case study student plus the responsibilities analogous to that of a consultant responsible to multiple constituencies.

The comparabilities between case teaching and SL as pedagogies are many. However, the contrasts between the two are also clear. Each provides significant learning opportunity for the student and the professor, but the comparisons suggest that SL offers a significant increment in terms of learning potential.

REFERENCES


Zlotkowski, E. “Pedagogy and engagement.” In R.G. Bringle, R. James, and E.A. Malloy (eds.), *Colleges and Universities as Citizens* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), pp. 96-120.