

**USING ACADEMIC SERVICE-LEARNING
IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL CURRICULUM
TO FOSTER DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

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Abstract

Both academic service-learning and the development of emotional intelligence skills and behaviors are well-documented as providing valuable contributions to business school education. However, no published work has discussed the effects of pairing these complementary and connected means for promoting holistic cognitive and emotional student development. Three of our business school faculty members have sought to determine if academic service-learning can be used as a vehicle to foster emotional intelligence among students in undergraduate leadership, organizational behavior, and auditing classes. Since Spring '03 semester, eighty-four business and accounting students each spent eight to twelve hours during one semester as part of their required coursework working as volunteers in an assigned nonprofit agency. At the end of the semester, they were given an emotional intelligence questionnaire and asked to write about their service-learning experiences. Their written work was content-analyzed for emotional intelligence themes. The results of the questionnaires and written work indicate that a significant degree of learning about emotional intelligence occurred. While more research is needed, forces that can be engendered by the academic service-learning context - a preview of vulnerability, along with increased awareness of different people in different life circumstances, and a glimpse of an "other-centered" self-definition – along with faculty-facilitated self-reflective processes, would seem to be key in helping students increase their emotionally intelligent skills and behavior.

Introduction

Viewing service-learning in the context of experiential education is not a new concept – in fact, the history of this movement dates back to the late 1960s. Over the last three decades, educators, community leaders, and students have articulated a threefold rationale for combining traditional classroom pedagogies with community service: (1) this combination leads to more effective teaching and learning; (2) it facilitates effective collaborations between the campus and the community; and (3) it helps to prepare students for more effective participation as citizens in the communities in which they will lead their lives (Kupiec, 1993).

Only within about the last seven years, however, have educators reported on efforts to integrate academic service-learning into business school curricula (Collins, 1996; Driscoll et al., 1996; Kolenko et al., 1996; Liu, 1995; Rama, 1998; Trent et al., 1996; and Zlotkowski, 1996). The concepts and models for incorporating service-learning into business school education, including management, leadership, human resource management, and MBA curricula, have been well documented in The American Association for Higher Education series on service-learning in the disciplines (see Godfrey and Grasso, 2000). More recently, Sharifi, et al., have described their use of service-learning to develop competencies in a capstone accounting course (2003).

Within this same initial timeframe that saw business schools' increased attention to service learning, the importance of emotional intelligence was becoming recognized as a vital part of management education (Goleman, 1998; Stuller 1997). "Skills such as motivation, empathy, and team building can work synergistically with intelligence and technical skills to produce the highest level of performance within organizations. For this reason, business organizations are seeking more emotionally intelligent employees and trying to teach these skills to current employees" (Clark et al., 2003, 4-5).

Clark et al (2003) offer a comprehensive review of the parallel development between the management skill and emotional intelligence movements. For instance, both Goleman (1995) and Whetten & Cameron (2001), representing the emotional intelligence and management skills movements

respectively, maintain that “personal and interpersonal skills are essential to success and cannot be substituted with cognitive intelligence or technical skills” (Clark et al, 2003, 6). The emotional intelligence competencies have been recognized as an essential component of graduate management education (Boyatzis et al., 2002). Related work has sought to investigate linkages between emotional intelligence and leadership in a training context (McCambridge et al., 2000).

A review of education pedagogical literature, and business school education literature, in particular, reveals no published results of incorporating academic service-learning with the fostering of students’ emotional intelligence. And yet, these two entities quite naturally belong together as complementary and connected means for promoting holistic student development that is both cognitive and emotional.

The two primary dimensions of emotional intelligence are personal competence and social competence. Personal competence includes *self-awareness* of one’s own emotions and emotional tendencies; *self-regulation*, or the ability to express and manage one’s emotions, especially disruptive emotions and impulses; and *self-motivation*, the ability to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Social competence includes *empathy*, the ability to understand and react sensitively to the emotions that others are feeling; and *social skills*, the ability to build rapport with others, manage relationships and networks, build and lead teams (Goleman, 1998; Weisinger, 1998). Both of these dimensions come into play with academic service-learning, and the four components of academic service-learning (Godfrey and Grasso, 2000, 2) are quite consistent with the personal and social dimensions of emotional intelligence:

1. Students actively participate in organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community.
2. These experiences are integrated into the students’ academic curriculum, and/or structured time is provided for them to think, talk, or write about what they did and saw during their actual service activity.
3. Students have opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities.
4. These experiences help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others (adapted from Cohen, 1994).

Academic service-learning provides a real-life context for stimulating students’ emotional intelligence. “The emphasis on equal benefits received by both the student and the client and tight connection to course learning objectives make academic service-learning different from volunteerism, internships, co-op experiences, co-curricular service, and field experiences” (Sharifi et al., 2003, 93). Along with the integral relationship to course learning objectives, the principle elements that distinguish academic service-learning are reciprocity and reflection (Jacoby, 1996, 5).

In part it is the quality of reciprocity – the emphasis on equal benefits for students and clients – that enhances the development and expression of the students’ emotional intelligence, as they both give to and receive from the experience. Academic service-learning and the fostering of emotional intelligence are also complementary processes in their reliance on reflection. Reflection is the intentional process of transforming service-learning experiences into learning (Sharifi et al., 2003). Teaching emotional intelligence similarly relies on self-reflection, frequently through journal keeping, in order to capture students’ learnings and insights about their emotions and behavior.

Clark et al. (2003) have demonstrated that the undergraduate management skills course can be successfully used to improve students’ emotional intelligence scores. We wanted to know if academic service-learning could be similarly used to increase students’ emotional intelligence.

Since the Spring 2003 semester, three faculty members of our business school, teaching junior-senior level undergraduate auditing, leadership, and organizational behavior courses, have been involved in an ongoing, multi-semester exploratory study to determine if academic service-learning does indeed provide an effective vehicle to increase students' emotional intelligence.

Scope of the Research

Participating Students

Sixty-one students, primarily business administration majors, who were enrolled in upper level leadership and organizational behavior courses, and twenty-three students, primarily accounting majors, enrolled in an upper level auditing course, participated in this experiential learning process that combined academic service-learning with a focus on the development of emotional intelligence skills and behaviors. Thirty-seven of the total student group were female; seventeen of them had had previous volunteer experience in a non-profit agency, while twenty women had not. Of the forty-seven male students who participated, twenty-seven had had previous volunteer experience in a non-profit agency, while twenty men had not. While some students in the courses might have known each other, the classes were run entirely separately.

Participating Organizations

The leadership and organizational behavior students were assigned in small groups to non-profit agencies including: The Women's Resource Center, Meals on Wheels, AlaMap (providing medications for those who can't afford them), an assisted living/retirement home, a foodbank, the YMCA, and a housing authority after-school enrichment program. The auditing students were also assigned in small groups to non-profit agencies and local government departments, including: United Way, Salvation Army, YMCA, Red Cross, a county tax department, a hospice home, a housing authority after-school enrichment program, and a recreational and horticulture therapy center for the disabled.

Procedures

Students were each expected to serve at least 8-12 hours in their assigned organization. In the leadership and organizational behavior classes, students were asked to write a final paper that included a discussion of how they saw classroom learnings applied in the context of their agency and their own individual insights and reflections. These papers were then subjected to a content analysis of emotional intelligence themes. Students in all classes completed an emotional intelligence questionnaire that was tailored for this project (see Appendix A for the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire). The reflective comments provided by the auditing students at the end of their questionnaires were content analyzed for specific emotional intelligence themes.

Research Results

Analysis of Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire asked students to indicate on 7-point scales to what extent they felt their course-based academic service-learning experience increased their self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skill. Three questionnaires (two from the leadership course and one from the auditing course) were not included in the analysis because, according to their written comments, these students used the questionnaire to protest the academic service-learning requirement rather than to indicate development of emotional intelligence. These questionnaires were not without value, however, because they showed that students responded honestly. A further indication of reliable responses was the

degree of variability in student scores; students' responses to individual items included the full range, from 1 to 7; their total scores for the five emotional intelligence items ranged from 10 to 33 (out of a possible 35).

Table 1 compares the questionnaire results across the three courses. Tables 2 and 3 compare E.I. questionnaire results by gender and previous non-profit agency experience for the auditing and organizational behavior students. Those item scores shown in bold are higher than the aggregate item scores. The aggregate item scores shown in bold are higher than the aggregate total E.I. score in each table.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Results

	Self-Awareness	Self-Regulation	Self-Motivation	Empathy	Social Skill	Total E.I. Means
Auditing Class (n=23)	4.6	4.3	5.2	5.0	5.2	4.9
Leadership Class (n=23)	4.3	4.1	5.0	5.3	4.5	4.5
Organizational Behavior Class (n=35)	4.2	4.1	4.4	5.1	4.4	4.4
Aggregate Means (n=81)	4.4	4.2	4.9	5.1	4.7	4.6

Table 1 shows that among the auditing students, the item scores for self-awareness (4.6), self-regulation (4.3), self-motivation (5.2), and social skill (5.2) are each higher than the aggregate means for those items (4.4, 4.2, 4.9, and 4.7, respectively). The aggregate results suggest that students' academic service-learning experiences have a greater impact on three of the five dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-motivation, empathy, and social skill. The aggregate mean score for each of these three dimensions is higher than the aggregate total E.I. score (4.9, 5.1, and 4.7 respectively, compared to 4.6).

Another interesting finding shown in Table 1, although it may not be statistically significant, is that the auditing class scored a .3 higher total emotional intelligence mean score than the aggregate total E.I. mean score (4.9 compared to 4.6). This score difference suggests an avenue worth pursuing in further research: these auditing students may have had few opportunities to experience hands-on, affective client work-relationships that are directly related to their accounting major. More than one student noted that it felt good to be appreciated and to realize that they could already begin making meaningful contributions to society. These comments indicate a degree of growth in several dimensions of emotional intelligence including self-awareness, self-motivation, empathy, and social skill.

The data available from the auditing and organizational behavior classes (Tables 2 and 3) show some variation of response between males and females and between those who had/had not previous experience working with non-profit agencies. (These data were not available from the leadership class.)

Table 2: A Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Results By Gender and Previous Non-Profit Agency Experience Among Auditing Students

	Self-Awareness	Self-Regulation	Self-Motivation	Empathy	Social Skill	Total E.I. Means
Males with previous experience (3)	4.3	5.0	5.3	5.9	4.7	5.0
Male with no previous experience (7)	4.7	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.0
Females with previous experience (3)	4.3	4.0	5.7	4.0	6.0	5.1
Females with no previous experience (10)	4.8	3.9	5.1	5.4	5.0	4.8
Aggregate Results (n=23)	4.5	4.5	5.3	5.1	5.3	5.0

Table 3: A Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Results By Gender and Previous Non-Profit Agency Experience Among Organizational Behavior Students

	Self-Awareness	Self-Regulation	Self-Motivation	Empathy	Social Skill	Total E.I. Means
Males with previous experience (10)	4.7	4.0	4.3	3.8	3.7	4.1
Male with no previous experience (10)	3.4	3.6	3.4	4.9	3.7	3.8
Females with previous experience (11)	5.5	4.8	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.5
Females with no previous experience (4)	3.3	4.0	4.0	5.8	4.8	4.4
Aggregate Results (n=35)	4.2	4.1	4.4	5.1	4.4	4.5

For instance, the male auditing students (shown in Table 2), whether or not they had had previous non-profit agency experience, had higher total E.I. mean scores than either group of male organizational behavior students, shown in Table 3 (5.0 compared to 4.1 and 3.8).

Of all the groups examined, the female organizational behavior students with previous non-profit agency experience (shown in Table 3), scored consistently higher on each emotional intelligence item, in comparison with all other aggregate item and total E.I. mean score results shown in all three Tables.

Similar to the Table 1 finding, Table 2 also shows that the auditing students' aggregate scores for three dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-motivation, empathy, and social skill are all higher than the total emotional intelligence mean score for students in that course (5.3, 5.1, and 5.3 respectively, compared to 5.0). This is not true, however, for the organizational behavior students shown in Table 3; for the organizational behavior students, the aggregate score for empathy is the only one higher than the total mean E.I. score for those students (5.1 compared to 4.5).

Further research would be needed to determine statistical significance of these findings. The score differentials, however, do tell us that while student experiences are variable, there are intriguing relationships between academic service-learning and students' emotional intelligence development, particularly in relation to self-motivation, empathy, and social skill.

Content Analysis of Students' Comments

We felt encouraged by the E.I. Questionnaire results, which was our first effort to link academic service-learning with the development of students' emotional intelligence skills. We were further encouraged by the content analysis of the students' papers and the comments included with the emotional intelligence questionnaire. These comments revealed the extent of the students' significant learnings about emotional intelligence. The following provides illustrative student comments for each dimension of emotional intelligence.

Self-Awareness

- “I learned that it is hard to be in touch with your emotional intelligence on a day-to-day basis. Activities out of the ordinary, like this service learning experience, helped me realize these other qualities about me and appreciate them more.”
- “Although I theoretically understood the purpose of the assignment, I had no idea that such a task would teach me so much about myself.”

Self-Regulation

- “I learned that it is important to remain calm and concentrated on the subject, listen and analyze and ask questions. I felt like I was important and respected by the client, so it obliged me to behave respectfully.”
- “I learned that it is best to keep my ears open and not make judgments or draw conclusions until everything is said.”

Self-Motivation

- “This experience did get me motivated to become an active volunteer again. I realized the power I have to make an impact on others by giving my time and efforts.”
- “As I left the board meeting that night I couldn't wait to fulfill my service hours. I was motivated from simply watching 16 women pour their hearts out into something they stood for and believed in.”

Empathy

- “I learned how it is very important when dealing with the needy to be respectful and considerate because they are people with families too and often can feel embarrassed due to their circumstances.”
- “Seeing the less fortunate in their own homes made me realize how lucky I am. It also made me feel for them and want to help them out more.”

Social Skill

- “I exercised a good sense of social skills by building a good relationship with the people at the center.”
- “Observing the inner-workings of the agency led me to evaluate my own role as a group member. Although I certainly had not planned to, I felt as though I took on a leadership role within our service-learning group.”

Conclusions

Incorporating a focus on emotional intelligence in the context of academic service-learning offers a very promising approach to increasing students’ self-insights and enriching their skill development. The results thus far of our efforts to link academic service-learning with the fostering of emotional intelligence indicate that significant learning about emotional intelligence occurred. Furthermore, our students perceived growth and development particularly along the three dimensions of self-motivation, empathy, and social skill.

One reason that academic service-learning works so well as a vehicle for emotional intelligence development may be that the context (nonprofit social service agencies) moves students out of their comfort zone. Exposure to clients whose life circumstances were more difficult and challenging than those of our students seemed to awaken for some students a sense of appreciation for what they had, as well as a kind of awareness of vulnerability (“But for fate, there walk I”), that life can be hard and do hard things to people. Hence, the richer the emotive context of the experience, the greater the potential for significant growth in emotional intelligence. Students who worked with clients in a women’s resource center, for example, seemed to demonstrate higher quality learning about their emotional intelligence than those whose primary exposure to another agency was through attending board meetings. A key principle in using academic service-learning as a vehicle to foster emotional intelligence is that the more the experience moves students’ focus from their heads to their hearts, the deeper their learning about emotional intelligence.

The academic service learning experience, with its built-in reciprocal nature, also provides a way to move students out of their natural young adult narcissism toward a sense of self in the service of others. While more research is needed, these forces - a preview of vulnerability, along with increased awareness of different people in different life circumstances, and a glimpse of an “other-centered” self-definition, coupled with faculty-facilitated self-reflective processes, would seem to be key in helping to foster increased emotionally intelligent skills and behavior among students.

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Appendix A: Self-Assessment of the Effects of a Service-Learning Experience on the Acquisition of Emotional Intelligence Skills and Behaviors*

Self-Awareness

With a high degree of self-awareness, one has the ability to recognize and understand his/her moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effects on others. The hallmark qualities of one's self-awareness are self-confidence and realistic self-assessment.

To what extent do you feel your service-learning experience increased your self-awareness?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To a very small extent			To a moderate extent		To a large extent	

Self-Regulation (Managing Emotions)

With a high degree of self-regulation, one has the ability to control or redirect his/her own disruptive impulses and moods. One also has the ability to suspend judgment – i.e., to think before acting. The hallmark qualities of one's self-regulation are interpersonal trustworthiness, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change.

To what extent do you feel your service-learning experience increased your self-regulation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To a very small extent			To a moderate extent		To a large extent	

Self-Motivation

With a high degree of motivation, one has a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status. In addition, he/she has the ability to pursue goals with energy and persistence. The hallmark qualities of one's motivation are a strong drive to achieve, optimism, even in the face of failure, and organizational commitment.

To what extent do you feel your service-learning experience increased your self-motivation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To a very small extent			To a moderate extent		To a large extent	

Empathy (Relating Well)

With a high degree of empathy, one has the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. He/She is skilled in treating people according to their emotional reactions. The hallmark qualities of one’s empathy are expertise in cross-cultural sensitivity and service to clients and customers.

To what extent do you feel your service-learning experience increased your empathetic ability?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To a very small extent			To a moderate extent		To a large extent	

Social Skill (Emotional Mentoring)

With a high degree of social skill, one is proficient in managing relationships and building networks. In addition, he/she has the ability to find common ground and build rapport. The hallmark qualities of one’s social skill are effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading teams.

To what extent do you feel your service-learning experience increased your social skills?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To a very small extent			To a moderate extent		To a large extent	

Total overall score (out of possible 35 points) _____

What else did you learn about your emotional intelligence from your service-learning experience?

Additional comments about what you learned from your service-learning experience:

*Adapted by Susan L. Manring, Ph.D. with permission from Daniel Goleman (from “What Makes a Leader,” *Harvard Business Review*, November/December 1998, pp. 93-102).