1-1-2010

# A Transnational Comparison of Leadership Development: Pedagogical Implications

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## Citation Details

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** A comparative analysis investigated international and American students' development of leadership skills through senior-level service-learning courses.
**Design**: Over 100 service-learning courses from students representing 30 countries were examined at a major university in the United States. U.S. and non-U.S. student leadership and learning outcomes were correlated with instructional techniques.
**Findings**: Facilitating leadership skill development is a function of utilizing transformational rather than traditional classroom teaching techniques.
**Implications**: Transformational pedagogies such as collaborative projects, student-selected readings, and group decision-making in service-learning courses help transform students' views of themselves, their communities, and the world.
**Originality/value:** Few studies have examined the pedagogical elements in service-learning that transform student knowledge and skills.

**Classification**: Research paper

**Keywords**: Service-learning, leadership, civic engagement, transformational learning, pedagogical implications

## POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT
Over twelve years ago, Schumaker (1997) wrote, "The volume of education…continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe. If still more education is to save us, it would have to be an education of a different kind" (p. 208). In the last half-century, the accelerated growth of industrialization and globalization has created an explosion of technology, energy use, population growth, and urbanization that is transforming our world. Graduates of postsecondary institutions are faced with incredible future challenges, but teaching and learning approaches have not adequately adapted in response to the need for educating a new generation of globally informed leaders. As Orr (2004) soberly remarks, "We are still educating the young as if there is no planetary emergency…more of the same kind of education can only make things worse" (p. 27).

The belief that institutions of higher education are responsible for nurturing the leadership development of students is not a new concept (Fuhrmann and Grasha, 1998; Lucas, 1994; Rudolph, 1990). Postsecondary institutions are integral aspects of local, national, and international economies and prepare future leaders for roles in influencing business, environmental, and social policies and practices. Indeed, educational scholars increasingly point to interconnections between social injustices and the environmental degradation that threatens planetary survival (Worldwatch Institute, 2005, 2006) which are reinforced by educational assumptions and practices (Bowers, 1997, 2002; Gruenewald,

2003). As educators of global citizens, we have an urgent responsibility to teach leadership for a sustainable future (Kose, Shields, and Ibrahim, 2008). Moreover, as Leal Filho (2002) asserts, the success of a postsecondary institution should be judged by its ability to educate students for globally informed and responsible leadership.

**The Need for Transformed Educational Practices**
Orr (1992) argues that traditional educational paradigms prepare learners to be successful in dominant business and cultural practices. Such practices by graduates perpetuate unsustainable economic, environmental, and social systems. Instead, postsecondary teaching and learning pedagogies should rely less on traditional models of information transmission and more on transformed instructional approaches that include contextual evaluation of knowledge and application of ideas in community contexts (Cress, 2004). Similarly, Jickling (2004) argues that a globally sustainable future is dependent upon students fully engaging their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to collaboratively judge the "relatively merits of contenting possibilities" (p. 137).

As a means to developing these leadership competencies, Ehrlich (2000) and others (Battistoni, 1997; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2003; Mann and Patrick, 2000) have promoted the vehicle of service-learning as an important educational and pedagogical strategy. The goal is to produce critically, civically, and globally minded graduates who possess problem solving and leadership abilities for more socially equitable and sustainable communities (Colby et al., 2003).

Previous research has demonstrated a positive relationship between service-learning experiences and an array of student development outcomes including critical thinking skills (Kendrick, 1996); problem solving and reflection skills (Cress et al., 2003); communication skills (Jordan, 1994); commitment to helping others (Astin et al., 1999); self-concept (Berger and Milem, 2002); and increased cultural understanding (Weldon and Trautmann, 2003); skills that are foundational for becoming a globally engaged leader (Cress et al., 2001).

But all learners are not alike (Kitano, 1997; Wlodkowski, 1999). Perceptions of the concepts of leadership, democracy, community, and civic engagement vary radically for domestic as well as international students in the United States (Banks, 2008; O'Grady, 2000). For example, American racial/ethnic minority students prefer leadership definition terms like "group collaboration toward a common goal" as opposed to white/Euro-American students who tend to define leadership as "individually leading a group toward a common goal" (Cress et al., 2005).

Moreover, "colleges and universities have usually worried more about the adaptation of foreign or international students to the U.S. and their sometimes problematic use as teaching assistants than about their possible contribution to…education" (Wilson, 1993, p. 5). International students may be the first experience that American students have with someone from another culture. Indeed, Kuhlman (1992) emphasizes the necessity of encouraging opportunities for international students to be educational resources on campus and in the community if institutions are truly committed to internationalizing students' communication skills. Such a strategy lends empowerment to learning through the benefits of diverse epistemologies (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1991; Takaki, 1998; Smith and Schonfeld, 2000). International students offer the opportunity to view the relationship between local and global issues from new perspectives, thereby providing all students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to function effectively in our interconnected world. Such an education helps students acquire the values and motivation needed for promoting equality and social justice around the world (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 2002).

Thus, higher education institutions can better serve the current and future needs of our cities and world by more closely examining the process and outcomes of our teaching

methods and the educational interactions that occur within our global classrooms and communities. Given that over half a million international students are enrolled in American colleges and universities (Kilinic and Granello, 2003), there is significant opportunity to cultivate a communal understanding of and preparation for globally engaged leadership.

**Theoretical Contexts**

From an educational perspective, service-learning is directly linked to Dewey's (1916) assertions on the importance of reflective experience. As Giles and Eyler (1994) highlight, "For Dewey, pedagogy and epistemology were related – his theory of knowledge was related to and derived from his notions of citizenship and democracy" (p. 78).

Such a collaborative learning method is fundamentally grounded in constructivist views of knowledge. According to Phillips (2002), constructivism is a philosophy of learning as a process where learners reflect on their experiences and construct their own understanding of the world in which they live. Vygotsky (1978), a pioneer of constructivism, contends that people construct knowledge through interaction with the world around them. He emphasizes the influence of culture and language in the construction of knowledge.

Similarly, Mezirow (2000) explains that critical reflection is key to inducing transformational learning. Beyond merely informing students, transformational learning is defined by a profound shift in personal perspective where underlying beliefs, values, and truths are questioned, reexamined, and reconstructed. In other words, transformational learning, most often produced by critically reflective pedagogies, is an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavior or increase in the quantity of knowledge (Kegan, 2000).

Multiple authors in the field of service-learning (Bringle and Hatcher, 1998; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Giddings, 2003; Driscoll, 2000) have emphasized the crucial role faculty play in creating transformational service-learning experiences. The epistemological and pedagogical elements selected by faculty serve as the catalysts for creating connections between course content, service-learning experiences, and students' efficacious views on how their knowledge and skills position them for future leadership.

Unfortunately, teaching styles and strategies do not always respond well to meeting the changing needs of diverse student populations nor do they reflect the diversity of the global society in which we live (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995). This is true for service-learning courses just as much as traditional academic courses (Cress et al., 2005). Even though students may be engaged in a community project, service is frequently constructed as an additive pedagogy rather than as a transformational epistemology. In essence, lectures, exams, and course readings often do not provide an adequate framework for students in understanding community issues nor reflection on themselves as members of an interdependent world.

**Research Investigation**

The overarching goal of this investigation was to identify the pedagogical strategies associated with enhanced leadership skills within culturally diverse and globally-representative service- learning classrooms at a major metropolitan university.  Specifically, the research study explored three primary queries:  1) How do international and American students compare in their views of leadership?; 2) How do international and American students compare in their learning experiences via their service-learning course?; and 3) What pedagogical techniques best support students' enhanced understanding and development of leadership skills?

**Methodology**

Few researchers have attempted to examine the pedagogical elements in service-learning experiences that help transform student knowledge (Butler, 2000). To rectify this situation, data were collected from over two-thousand students enrolled in 150 senior level service-learning courses utilizing pre- and post-test surveys (prior to and following the service experience) at a large urban university. Items included *demographic data* (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity) and students were asked to *self-rate their abilities* on a number of factors (e.g., leadership ability), to note their level of *agreement with a variety of statements* (e.g., colleges should require students to volunteer in the community), and indicate their *personal/career goals* (e.g., become a community leader).

Students were also asked to indicate the type of *course design strategies* utilized by the instructor (e.g., extensive lecturing, discussions on local political issues) and to indicate their level of agreement with a number of *service- learning statements* (e.g., the community work I did helped me to better understand the readings and lectures in the course).

The data were divided into two groups: International (n=92) and American (n=1,137) students. Certainly, variation exists within as well as across these two categorical groupings. However, the decision to compare these two groups was based on the fact that, "International students tend to share certain characteristics, despite their diverse cultural, social, religious, and political backgrounds" (Thomas and Althens, 1989). The two groups were very similar regarding gender (63% female both groups) and age (60% under twenty-five years of age for American students; 58% for International students).

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to hold pretest survey scores constant in order to identify whether any statistically significant differences existed between the student groups on the post-test survey. Chi-square analyses were conducted to examine relationships between teaching techniques and student learning outcomes for each of the student groups. Due to the small number of international students (n=92), regression analyses (such as hierarchical linear modeling or least squares regression) could not be performed to account for other differences in variation including country of origin, academic program, English language proficiency, etc. In addition, recognition that the term "leadership" and variations of the construct are culturally constructed is acknowledged in the findings and discussion.

**Findings**

The data reveal both unique differences and similarities in students' experiences in service-learning and their self reported growth in leadership skills based on pedagogical approaches selected by their faculty. Results are compared across leadership development outcomes, perspectives on the role of education in leadership formation, experiences in service-learning courses, and traditional versus transformational instructional techniques.

*1. Perspectives on Leadership and Related Learning Outcomes*

According to various models in the literature, leadership is a process of understanding one's own skills, knowledge, and values within the context of community groups (Astin and Astin, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Komives et al., 1998; Lipman-Blumen, 2000). Nearly across the board, international students indicated significantly greater gains in leadership and other learning gains than American students as a result of participating in the service-learning experience (see Table 1).

[Take in Table (1)]

Certainly, international students who are still in the throes of understanding American cultural norms could be expected to achieve greater gains on "knowledge of people from different races/cultures." Moreover, students from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Korea) may have had their first opportunity to consider their own individual values, ethics, and leadership ability (Gelfand et al., 2004) in reflecting upon their "understanding of self".

Notable, as well, is that all students (American and international) indicated that the service-learning course increased their leadership ability, interest in developing leadership in others, commitment to civic responsibility, view of themselves as active citizens, and their desire to become community leaders.

Interestingly, international students rated themselves less high on this last item than did American students. This may also be a function of the fact that students from other cultures may not value "standing out" in their communities. For example, in Japan a common colloquialism is, "The nail that sticks up gets pounded down." Therefore, appropriate leadership may be perceived as group action rather than as individual leadership. In addition, one of the lowest gains by American students is an interest in "developing leadership abilities in others." These results suggest that while service-learning courses tend to improve students' individual skills, the process for connecting these skills to a globally informed notion of leadership is challenging.

## 2. Perspectives on Leadership and the Role of Education

International and American students shared quite similar views regarding leadership and the role of colleges in preparing students for future leadership roles (see Table 2). Ironically, while students believe that higher education has a role in preparing students to become active citizens in leading change for the betterment of society (8 out of 10 agreed), they do not believe that colleges should *require* community service as a part of an academic degree (about two-thirds held this belief).

[Take in Table (2)]

American students appear to be more optimistic than are international students about an individual being able to create societal change (83% versus 55%). Still, it should be noted that the question does not ask students to indicate whether they believe that they can personally leverage a community shift. In other words, it could be speculated that American student idealism remains in the abstract (*someone else* can create change), whereas international students may have answered the question from a more personal position. Once again, given that many collectivist cultures place a different kind of value on individual leadership, international students may have felt that it is not culturally appropriate for an individual to try to change the status quo within a local or global community.

## 3. Service-Learning Course Experiences

Nearly three-fourths of all students agreed that they felt a responsibility to the community partner, that their work benefited the community, and that the experience prepared them for life after college (see Table 3). Both international and American students also agreed that the course design and syllabus explicated how learning objectives were connected to the service experience. Interestingly, seven out of ten students also indicated that they now have a better understanding of how to take a leadership role in making a positive difference in the community.

[Take in Table (3)]

These responses pose an interesting educational challenge. If students feel responsible to the community and have a better understanding of how to use their leadership knowledge and skills, what can be done to encourage more of them to desire to become community leaders? To investigate this dilemma, the relationship between leadership outcomes and instructional techniques was examined.

### 4. Instructional Techniques that Support Leadership Development

Based on theoretical work by Mezirow (2000) and others (Banks, 2008; Brookfield, 1990), an exploratory factor analysis (principal components method with varimax rotation) was conducted to examine teaching methods and approaches. Two faculty instructional technique constructs emerged: traditional and transformational.

*Traditional* techniques (alpha = .7893) included multiple choice exams, quizzes, grading on a curve, and final exams (seven total items).

*Transformational* techniques (alpha = .9220) included student-selected topics, reflective journals, group decision-making, readings on women/gender issues, and readings on racial/ethnic issues (twelve total items).

The two instructional constructs were compared across student groups (International and American) and correlated (via chi-square analysis) with student outcomes on five measures of leadership: 1) leadership ability; 2) commitment to civic responsibility; 3) view of self as an active citizen; 4) desire to become a community leader; and 5) understanding of how to make a difference in the community. (A scale reliability analysis indicates that these dimensions hold together relatively well as a leadership construct, alpha = .7902.)

Analyses revealed that *traditional* teaching techniques were not statistically significant with any of the leadership outcomes either as a teaching construct (all seven items) or as individual instructional methods for either group of students.

However, two *traditional* instructional techniques (final papers and extensive lecturing) were statistically *negatively* correlated with leadership ability and commitment to civic engagement for both international and American students. Apparently, even though these service-learning courses included a community service component, reliance on *traditional* teaching techniques does not provide an adequate epistemological reflection framework. In fact, such approaches may put students' self-authorship with respect to leadership and civic engagement in jeopardy.

In contrast, faculty who selected *transformational* teaching approaches significantly facilitated American students' growth in leadership. Specifically, *transformational* teaching techniques were significantly positively correlated with leadership ability; commitment to civic responsibility; view of self as an active citizen; desire to become a community leader; and understanding of how to make a difference in the community.

Similarly, international students evidenced gains on four of the five leadership dimensions. View of self as an active citizen was not statistically correlated with any instructional technique. This result is interesting given that seventy percent of international students reported growth on this item.

An additional next step taken in the analysis was to compare American and International students' growth in leadership as a result of the individual *transformational* instructional strategies. The findings are provocative (see Table 4).

[Take in Table (4)]

First, no single teaching technique was significantly correlated with each leadership outcome. This finding behooves faculty to utilize multiple *transformational* teaching

techniques in their classrooms. Moreover, variations in outcomes for American and international students further confirm this proposition. Leadership growth for American students was best enhanced by reflective journals, civic responsibility readings, student selected topics, and social issues discussions. Surprisingly, these four learning strategies were not statistically associated with leadership growth for international students.

International students who participate in student presentations, student developed activities, and group decision making demonstrate statistically significant gains in leadership. While it is true that American students also evidence growth when they are provided with learning choices in the service-learning classroom (e.g., selecting their own topics), the opportunity for interpersonal interactions has the greatest impact on international students. This finding may suggest that international students who are permitted to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that do not require high levels of formal English (such as writing papers, taking exams, or listening to lectures) allows them to prove their capabilities. It may also be the case that international students are using learning styles of group cooperation that are more consistent with their cultural paradigms of leadership.

In addition, international and American students show leadership gains when faculty integrate readings on racial/ethnic issues and women/gender issues. Depending on the academic character of the course and type of service performed, the range of diversity readings needed to understand community issues and groups may vary. But since students often engage with aspects of communities that are relatively unfamiliar (both the people and the issues), background readings and opportunities to discuss the broader social and political contexts appear to add significantly to student knowledge and understanding. Moreover, these efforts contribute to student interest and willingness to be involved with their communities in the future. Apparently, instructors who utilize an array of *transformational* teaching techniques and are explicit about the educational intent behind their service-learning course are more likely to facilitate students' developmental gains in understanding themselves as locally and globally informed leaders.

**Discussion**

While differences exist between American and international students regarding leadership skill development, both sets of learners indicate that transformational pedagogies in their service-learning experiences helped to transform their views of their community, the world, and themselves. They noted a deeper understanding of their leadership abilities, the motivation to engage as a community leader, and enhanced skills for knowing how to make a positive difference in the future.

Parks (2000) describes this kind of shift in critical consciousness as a distinctive mode of meaning making where students "become critically aware of one's own composing of reality" (p. 6). In composing one's self-identity within the context of and in connection to one's community, students examine their own "self authorship" in consistently coordinating beliefs, values, and behaviors (Kegan, 1994). In contrast to traditional forms of teaching and learning (e.g., lecture and quizzes), transformational strategies (e.g., student developed activities) are directly related to effective leadership formation as students consciously choose to act in ethical and responsible ways in relationship to one another, their communities, and their world. As Banks (2008) states, "An important purpose of transformative knowledge is to improve the human condition" (p. 135).

Various researchers in the field of higher education have emphasized that students from different cultures tend to utilize different learning styles (Smith, 1986; Reid, 1987; Dunn et al., 1990; Hyland, 1994; Nelson, 1995). These findings mirror earlier work by Kolb (1984) who asserts that for students to fully integrate new knowledge and skills, they must have opportunities to test and assimilate them in a variety of conceptual and experiential

modalities.  In essence, service-learning courses taught from transformational pedagogical approaches actively engage diverse epistemologies.

Indeed, research based on the Kolb learning cycle indicates that students from different cultures have different learning styles: Asian cultures (concrete experience), North American and northern European cultures (abstract conceptualization), and Latin American cultures (active experimentation) (Rowland and Reza, 2005). According to Smith (1986), students from Asian, Hispanic, and Arabic cultures tend to favor active experimentation or concrete experience learning modes. Students raised in the American culture tend to favor abstract conceptualization and reflection.

Traditional forms of American education have placed heavy emphasis on abstract conceptualization through lectures, readings, and writing papers. As a new pedagogy, service-learning courses have placed more emphasis on active experimentation and concrete experience. What the results above tell us is that for service-learning to positively affect students' leadership ability, instructors must design courses that address the entire array of learners through transformational approaches. American students need reflective journals and diverse readings to make sense of their community-based activities and experiences. International students need opportunities for reflective reading and writing as well, but they also need to make interpersonal connections with classmates and community members. Such approaches acknowledge students' differences in learning styles while simultaneously affirming cultural variations of leadership.

**Conclusion**

As Mezirow (2000) asserts, "Transformational learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight" (p. 8). Central to this process is helping learners critically reflect on, appropriately validate, and effectively act upon their beliefs, interpretations, values, feelings, and ways of being. Utilizing service-learning as a vehicle for developing students' leadership skills can be more fully realized when faculty integrate community service as a transformational rather than additive learning experience. Moreover, these pedagogical and epistemological strategies set the stage for increased intercultural understanding within our cities and global community.

Banks (2008) argues that traditional or "mainstream" teaching and learning reinforces the status quo and dominant power relationships and does not challenge students to examine how their lives are influenced by globalization, or what their roles should be in a global world.  In contrast, "transformative" learning environments help students to acquire the knowledge, values, and skills needed to become "deep citizens".  Clarke (1996) states that a deep citizen, "both in the operation of [his or her] own life and in some of its parameters…[is] conscious of acting in and into a world shared with others…[and is] conscious that the identity of self and the identity of others is co-related and co-creative" (p. 6).

Implications for faculty professional development are clear, instructors must be given new tools and approaches for creating transformational learning communities that connect individual learners with content and community (both inside and outside the classroom). In doing so, students will be able to place themselves in "the context of a diverse world [in order to] draw on difference and commonality to produce a deeper experience of community" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 22) and a deeper sense of themselves as globally prepared leaders.

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Table 1: Perspectives on Leadership and Related Learning Outcomes

| | Self-Ratings (Percentage Stronger /Much Stronger as result of SL course) | US Students | Int'l Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Knowledge of People from Different Races/Cultures | 64 | 82*** |
| 2 | Understanding of Self | 60 | 77*** |
| 3 | Ability to Work Cooperatively | 65 | 84*** |
| 4 | Tolerance of Others with Different Beliefs | 54 | 79*** |
| 5 | Clarity of Personal Values | 48 | 73*** |
| 6 | Sense of Personal Ethics | 50 | 75*** |
| 7 | Awareness of Own Biases and Prejudices | 59 | 73* |
| 8 | Openness to Having My Views Challenged | 52 | 79*** |
| 9 | Ability to Discuss and Negotiate Controversial Issues | 53 | 74*** |
| 10 | Interest in Developing Leadership Abilities in Others | 45 | 66*** |
| 11 | Leadership Ability | 57 | 71* |
| 12 | Commitment to Civic Responsibility | 61 | 70 |
| 13 | Desire to Promote Social Justice and Equity | 56 | 63 |
| 14 | View of Myself as an Active Citizen | 57 | 60 |
| 15 | Desire to Become A Community Leader | 67 | 63 |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 2: Perspectives on Leadership and the Role of Education

| | Opinions (Percentage Agree/Strongly Agree as result of SL course) | US Students | Int'l Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Realistically, an individual can bring about changes in society. | 83 | 55*** |
| 2 | Colleges have a responsibility to prepare graduates to become engaged community members. | 84 | 81 |
| 3 | Service-Learning courses help students prepare for the "real world." | 80 | 82 |
| 4 | Colleges should require students to volunteer in the community as a part of graduation requirements. | 33 | 36 |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3: Service-Learning Course Experiences

| | Learning Experiences<br>(Percentage Agree/Strongly Agree as result of SL course) | US Students | Int'l Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I feel that the community work that I did through this course benefited the community. | 81 | 81 |
| 2 | The goals and objectives of this course and its connection to the community work I did were reflected in the course syllabus. | 80 | 76 |
| 3 | I felt a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner of this course. | 76 | 78 |
| 4 | My participation in this course helped me to connect what I learned to real life situations. | 70 | 76 |
| 5 | I now have a better understanding of how to make a difference in my community | 70 | 74 |

Table 4: Teaching Techniques and Leadership Outcomes

| | Leadership Ability | Commitment to Civic Responsibility | View of Self as Active Citizen | Desire to Become Community Leader | Understand How to Make a Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Reflective Journals* | | US | US | US | US |
| *Collaborative Projects* | US | | | | |
| *Racial/Ethnic Readings* | | US | US<br>Internatl | | US |
| *Women/Gender Readings* | Internatl | US | US | Internatl | US |
| *Group Decision Making* | US | | | Internatl | |
| *Civic Responsibility Readings* | | US | US | US | US |
| *Student Presentations* | Internatl | | | | |
| *Local Political Discussions* | | US | US<br>Internatl | | US |
| *Civic Responsibility Discussions* | | US | | | US |
| *Social Issues Discussions* | US | US | US | | |
| *Student Selected Topics* | US | US | US | | US |
| *Student Developed Activities* | US<br>Internatl | | | Internatl | US<br>Internatl |

(chi-square analysis statistically significant for each student group)