Comparing the Intended and the Perceived: Administrator Expectations and Student Perceptions of Teacher Roles in Catholic Service-Learning

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Comparing the Intended and the Perceived: Administrator Expectations and Student Perceptions of Teacher Roles in Catholic Service-Learning

Trae Stewart
University of Central Florida

The classroom teacher plays a pivotal role in any formal educational environment. More specifically, how this individual is involved and how s/he structures activities and discussions about a topic depends on the preferred learning style, personal demeanor, and educational philosophy of the teacher. For teachers that employ service-learning pedagogy in their courses, these expectations and factors do not vary. Teachers motivate students, help them to make meaning of experiences, and assist them in making connections for future action. These roles become complicated, however, when novice teachers do not have sufficient pedagogical training and/or are not given ongoing guidance by administrators. Using data from interviews with students and administrators at an urban Catholic high school, the qualifications and roles of the service-learning teachers, and their intended roles as described by administrators, are compared to the perceived roles as voiced by students. Implications and recommendations are discussed with specific attention to administrator communication, types and frequency of reflection activities, and, as a result, tensions of service-based models of experiential education in Catholic schools vis-à-vis the development of social justice.

Introduction
Catholic schools have been the focus of considerable interest and controversy among educational researchers and policy makers since Coleman and Hoffer’s (1987) and Greeley’s (1982) studies linking the academic success of inner-city Black students to their attendance at Catholic schools. More recently, Catholic schools have found themselves under the lens of public school reform, specifically in terms of their role in the voucher system debate (i.e., the use of public tax dollars for private school education). Coupled with these discussions, however, have been criticisms over some religious and private schools’ hiring of uncertified/untrained individuals to teach. The latter issue garners much concern if non-public schools are to be charged with the education of the general public toward a common good.
Catholic education deserves specific attention with regard to the civic good because Catholicism teaches that one’s faith and love for God is demonstrated most clearly in active service to others. By aspiring to the examples set by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Catholics should understand that being agents of transformation and social justice is a duty of every Christian. In fact, according to Pope John Paul II (1995), the benefits of Catholic education’s social justice component reach beyond the students who learn the required curriculum and those individuals oppressed by dominant groups: “Catholic education serves the future of all Americans by teaching and communicating the very virtues on which American democracy rests.”

In spite of this connection, the presence of a religious component in empirical studies of high school service-learning programs has been rare in recent literature, excluding Youniss and Yates’ (1997) analysis of community service’s beneficial effects when combined with a social justice class at a predominately Black, urban Catholic high school in Washington, D.C. This absence is even more bewildering given that community service-learning programs have been implemented at the secondary level for decades. With this in mind, studies that serve to extend the empirical foundations of both service-learning and Catholic education, especially the roles that teachers play in such programs and environments respectively, are creditable.

This article examines the roles of teachers in a Catholic high school service-learning program, as compared through the intentions of program administrators and perceptions by students. Literature on civic engagement and religion, service-learning in Catholic schools, the role of teachers in service-learning, and reflection in experiential education frame a discussion of the findings and their implications. Recommendations are offered with specific attention to administrator communication, types and frequency of reflection activities, and, as a result, tensions of service-based models of experiential education in Catholic schools vis-à-vis development of social justice.

Civic Responsibility & Religion

The connection between religion and secular community engagement has been well documented. Even in the 1800s, Tocqueville (1969) commented that religion should be considered America’s first political institution because of its ability to catalyze civic participation, particularly volunteering, by its members. In fact, individuals most frequently participate in volunteer activities through religious groups (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1992). This finding is not coincidental. Every major Western religion views the performance of good works for the less fortunate as both a virtue and a duty (Serow, 1989), and provides the motives for volunteering by encouraging altruistic values and behaviors (Fischer & Scheffer, 1993). Further, religious organizations have the material resources and human capital needed to support service projects (Dee, 2003; Wilson & Janoski, 1995).

Although he did not use the terminology at the time, Tocqueville also referenced the power of religious associations and structures to generate social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), which has since been linked to civic health. Religion affects associational life by shaping how congregants view and relate to the world and each other. In some cases, interactions are between networks of “good” people who might be engaged in volunteer work and thus serve as a model to emulate. It is unsurprising then that religious social capital supports both religious and secular volunteering (Greeley, 1997; Wuthnow, 1991).

Although one engaged in community service might be touted as a model citizen in some regards, these interactions and expectations can also be seen as a means to acculturate congregants to cultural values and associated practices through a process of internalization of group norms. Clary and Snyder (1991) refer to this process as a “socially-adjustive function.” For some faith-based institutions, community service is one of the most direct ways to help members to deepen religious faith by helping them to connect beliefs to real-life situations (Dalton, 2006). Helping the less fortunate is encouraged, and along with frequent attendance at religious
services, is seen as a sign of religious commitment (Wilson & Janoski, 1995). Out of these religious associations and activities, frequency of attendance at religious services has the strongest impact on civic involvement and giving, even exceeding education (Lopez, Pratap, & Conner, 2007; Sax, 2003; Smidt, 1999; Verba, Schlozman, & Bardy, 1996; Watt, 1991).

**Community Service & Service-Learning in Catholic Education**

Ecclesiastical doctrine, theological philosophies, and cultural practices overtly and covertly influence the learning and extracurricular environments of religiously-affiliated schools (e.g., financed by parish monies, weekly masses, prayers at athletic events, required courses in religious studies, religious as instructors). Given that these schools can therefore be considered extensions of religious organizations, their involvement in producing civically responsible and active citizens is important and with good reason. Private schools, which are comprised mostly of religiously-affiliated institutions, specifically Catholic, have been identified as more effective at promoting civic engagement (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Campbell, 2001; Dee, 2003; Greene, 1998; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer 2001). The explanation for this conclusion, and paralleling the previously discussed causal connections between religion and volunteerism, is that private schools provide and develop human and social capital more than public schools.

Catholicism’s social justice foundations, in particular, appear to have positive impacts on civic responsibility. Catholic high school seniors have higher levels of volunteering and commitment to community (Greene, 1998); Catholic high schools report higher levels of civic participation and exhibit better civic attitudes and knowledge as compared to public school students (Campbell, 2001); and, Catholic schools are better than public schools at promoting adult civic participation (Dee, 2003). Second only to Biblical scripture, Catholicism’s philosophies and principles supporting civic participation and social responsibility are most clearly articulated within the role that the Catholic Church has placed upon catechism, or religious education, and especially in the construction of community through faith and service. Youniss and McLellan (1999) have commented that this connection is evident, and hardly incidental, given that community service hours are routinely required of Catholic high schoolers for graduation. This has specific legitimacy to the “learning” component of the service-learning model.

Written at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1972, and still used today, *To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education* (1972) articulates the purpose of Christian education in terms of the Church’s commitment to the “dignity of the person and the building of community” (§13). Instruction is to be considered always in terms of its relationship with community formation and service, or as part of an integrated whole. Integration implies that religious education as a cognitive activity “is not one more subject alongside the rest,” but rather an expression of the “underlying reality in which the student’s experiences of living and learning achieve their coherence and their deepest meaning” (§103). *To Teach as Jesus Did* offers a threefold “message-community-service” structure through which to conceptualize all education within the Catholic Church. The integration of living and learning is made possible by the Catholic school “developing in its students a commitment to community and to the social skills and virtues needed to achieve it” (§109). Here, community refers not only to the immediate community to which the student belongs, but includes “the larger human community” as well (§107).

*To Teach as Jesus Did* does not prescribe a single model for the implementation of its stated principles; in fact, it encourages experimentation and the development of new and creative forms of schooling (§124). However, it states that a development of commitment to community can only be accomplished if the educative community’s efforts are concerned with “peacekeeping and the achievement of justice” (§109).

The social justice tradition of Catholic education has been called its “defining measure” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998). In contrast to charitable approaches which are argued to encourage dependency by
maintaining social hierarchies and power relationships and by creating an us-them/server-served dichotomy (Strain, 2006), Catholics are expected to submit themselves to “conversion” (metanoia³). In this process, volunteers focus on the individual(s) for whom the work is being done, rather than on the action of service itself (Gutierrez, 1988). They develop a change of heart (Strain, 2006), relational ontology and ethic of care (Noddings, 2002), or empathy for the community member, which allows them to move toward social justice.

Role of Teachers in Service-Learning
Service-learning is an experiential education pedagogy in which students address a genuine need in their community by completing volunteer activities. These service experiences connect explicitly to the academic curriculum in their course through purposive, structured reflection opportunities, thereby engaging the learner in “self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content” (National Service-learning Clearinghouse, 2008).

The combination of service tasks with content learning results in a “pedagogy of engagement” (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003) and requires that the teacher play a distinct role. Most notably in experiential education approaches is the flattening of traditional teacher-student power hierarchies. Because of a classroom teacher’s experience, knowledge, and control over the learning process, traditional manifestations of education are rooted in power dynamics, evidenced most simply by an individual’s ability to influence. In experiential education, the influential role of a teacher remains, but the approach is founded in the shift in roles for both teachers and students. The classroom becomes more student-centered, and teachers relinquish some of the decision-making and problem-solving to their students. Teachers become facilitators of learning by providing students with access to information and engaging them so that they scaffold upon existing schema for new meaning-making. In this approach, teachers challenge students to learn from their personal, real world activities by engaging them in structured reflection. Because learning outcomes are connected directly to students’ personal experiences, they become the expert and are more responsible for the meaning attributed to tasks.

The role of teachers as facilitator in experiential education is based on Kolb’s Cycle (1984). Kolb posited, “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). In this simple definition, Kolb highlights that it is the process of applying experiences that results in learning. This understanding is distinct from more didactic, classroom-based approaches wherein learning is measured by outcomes as prepared and intended by the teacher. For this reason, learning cannot be limited to the classroom alone, as a teacher is not the exclusive provider of knowledge. Students must, in contrast, experientially apply classroom concepts in real-life contexts. In the end, the information becomes familiar and personal and is more likely to be encoded in long-term memory. Kolb succinctly comprises this process into a four-phased cycle: concrete experience – reflective observation – abstract conceptualization – active experimentation.

Past studies have identified the role of talented adult leaders as an integral component of a successful and effective service-learning program. Lewis (1987) points out that these individuals must be able to motivate young people, help them to articulate the meaning of their experiences, and empower students to act on that understanding. Supervisors can offer constructive criticism, positive reinforcement, and a greater base of knowledge about those being served (National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescence, 1991). Teachers must also assist students to reflect on what they are learning and make the connections to prior experiences and future actions (Roberts, 1981; Shumer, 1988). One means by which teachers can accomplish these objectives is by providing broad support and by integrating service participants’ experiences into the classroom (Kendall, 1991). Success of a service-learning program hinges on such support and integration. When effectively accomplished, students’ higher order thinking skills are enhanced (Root & Batchelder, 1994). The achievement of this outcome, however, is contingent upon classroom
teachers’ facilitation of dialogue and understanding of complex tasks (RMC Research Corporation, 2003).

The correlation between the skills, knowledge, and creativity of a classroom teacher and the ultimate success of a service-learning project (Nathan & Kielsmeier, 1991) is also evidenced by the greater infusion of service-learning pedagogical training in teacher education. Evidence continues to mount that teacher education graduates prepared in and committed to implementing service-learning can contribute to K-12 schools (Wade et al., 1999). Service-learning is already found in more than 300 teacher education institutions (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). Teachers trained in service-learning do face obstacles in its implementation in their K-12 classrooms, however. The most common factors inhibiting teachers from using service-learning are lack of time for planning, partnership building, and service projects themselves, transportation, knowledgeable service-learning mentors or full-time program coordinators, opportunities for infusion in an already overcrowded curriculum, and financial support (Anderson, Connor, Grief, Gunsolus, & Hathaway, 1996; Wade, Anderson, Yarbrough, Pickeral, Erickson, & Kromer, 1999).

Reflection in Service-Learning

Reflection is a cognitive act in which an individual compares or applies past experiences and knowledge to more recent ones. This process serves to transform the individual’s schema or belief system on that subject, thereby creating a new model or metaphor (Pape, 1992). In this regard, reflection helps students to see new interpretations of events, much in the same way that one might read a book, looking for new and hidden meanings (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson 2004). The new insights from reflection influence future thoughts and actions.

In service-learning, structured reflection challenges students cognitively about their attitudes and perceptions associated with their service sites and is the variable that differentiates the performance of community service to actually learning from doing service (Bradley, 1997). Reflection is particularly helpful in creating a bridge between volunteer experiences and more esoteric theories or concepts presented in class, thereby informing the student’s understanding of each. As a result, the transformative power of reflection begins to help students to take their experiences from abstract to concrete, and from pointless activity to formal learning. In fact, some practitioners and researchers translate the hyphen in service-learning as “reflection,” which pictographically evidences the connection between service activities and expected learning outcomes.

Toole and Toole (1995) and McCarthy (1996) advocate a curricular model of reflection in service-learning that encompasses three distinct phases: pre-service, in-service, and post-service. This approach contrasts with the pervasive, yet limiting, use of reflection as a summative capstone activity. While the post-service phase is identical to the traditional, summative capstone event, the pre- and in-service phases also assist students in meaning-making. In the pre-service phase, reflection assists students in discovering and confronting any preexisting, underlying beliefs, stereotypes, or presuppositions associated with the communities in which they will be working. Pre-service reflection, or focusing activities (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004), also prepare learners for possible culture shock in their service-learning environment. The in-service reflection assists students grappling with emotions or experiences encountered during the service itself. In-service reflection opportunities also permit more organic, less-formal, project-integrated activities (Eyler, 2001).

Reflection is not without its limitations, however. Wade (1997) notes that reflection may be an amorphous concept, whose malleable, interpretive nature may confuse teachers and students engaged in service-learning.

The word ‘reflection’ is becoming, like many educational terms, a concept that means many things to many people. The diversity of views on what reflective thinking is indicates a confusion in the field about reflective thinking, how it should be taught, and what types of learning outcomes can be reasonably expected from including reflection activities in service-learning programs (p. 94).
Wade (1997) further cautions that teacher and student inexperience with reflection in general can result in inadequate time being provided for such activities, ultimately reducing student learning. Pugach and Johnson (1990) agree that time is a critical element in the reflective process, one that might require a restructuring of the environment or schedule to properly facilitate.

Research has shown that when time is purposefully devoted to service-learning reflection, positive effects result, however. Daudelin (1996) reported that just one hour spent reflecting on a challenging situation with general questions and guidelines, alone or with assistance, could significantly increase learning. In a study surveying 369 youth from 10 different service-learning programs and 25 different classrooms, Blyth, Saito, and Berkas (1997) found that 59% of the students’ teachers used at least 20% of classroom time on reflection activities. An improvement in student critical thinking skills was noted as a result of their activities.

Context of the Study – Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School

Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School (STACHS) is a coeducational, college preparatory, parish high school located in Sun City, a southern California beach community. Sun City is home to approximately 120,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2005), ethnically comprised of almost three-fourths Caucasian, with the remaining percentage divided between 12% Hispanic, 6% Asian-Pacific Islander, and 4% African-American. Sun City’s economy is dominated primarily by tourism and its proximity to the hubs of the Hollywood entertainment industry (US Census Bureau, 2005).

STACHS is comprised of five buildings: East and West wings, library, auditorium, and gymnasium. The school occupies, along with the parish elementary school and the adjacent church and pastoral center, an entire city block in the now expensive and overpopulated beach community of Sun City. STACHS enrollment has soared to 585 students. Male students comprised 55% of the high school’s population, exceeding its female counterpart by 65 students. The ethnic composition of the school is very diverse, although approximately 42% of its 585 students identified as Caucasian. The next most represented ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino composing almost 29% of the population. African-American and Asian/Pacific Islander, including Filipino, which the school distinguishes as its own ethnic group, are the next most represented ethnic groups with about 13.5% each. Native Americans comprise the remaining percentage of students (2%). In addition to ethnic diversity, the high school also reports that 30% of its students are affiliated with a religion other than Roman Catholicism.

Religious Studies Curriculum & Christian Service

Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic High (STACHS) requires that every student complete four religious studies courses and 100 hours of approved Christian Service in order to graduate. Formal school and parish documents indicate that the Christian Service program has four goals: 1) civic (“to encourage responsible participation in the world”), 2) religious (“to form loving disciples”), 3) social awareness (“to serve others outside of their comfort zone”), and 4) social change/justice (“to transform the world”). Service hour requirements are graduated in 10-hour increments over students’ four-years at the high school. For example, students serve 10 hours as freshmen; seniors are required to complete 40 hours.

In addition to the differing number of hours, a specific service recipient population is matched with each religious studies course. The service recipient population and number of hours are purposefully tied to the curricula and used to assist students in learning course content. It should be noted that although STACHS does not refer to its Christian Service program as service-learning, it does meet the requirements to be conceptualized as such due to the matching of service projects/populations to religion course curricula and structured reflection assignments. STACHS’s reflective element is a summative capstone piece required in every religious studies course. The assignment is due at the end of the second semester of each academic year and is generally a 3-5 page paper connecting class topics and service experi-
ences. No ongoing, formative reflections are required. The religious studies courses and associated service populations are described below.

- **Religion 9 – Understanding Catholic Christianity and the Old Testament.** This course provides freshmen from diverse religious backgrounds an understanding of the basics of the Catholic faith, a common vocabulary, and a unified vision of Catholic heritage. It also introduces the students to a critical study of the Hebrew scriptures. To understand how religious doctrine manifests in practice, freshmen are required to serve in a religious community.

- **Religion 10 – Christian Scripture and the Catholic Church.** This course examines the life of Jesus, the apostles, and the life of the early Christian Community. It also introduces students to the major periods of history of the Catholic Church, including how to interpret, study, and reflect on sacred doctrine. To empathize with Jesus Christ’s role of caretaker and guide, sophomores must volunteer with youth, preferable as a mentor or model.

- **Religion 11 – World Religions and Christian Morality.** This course surveys the major religions of the world in their historical and spiritual contexts. Students also examine issues of personal morality, such as honesty, wholeness, courage, justice, compassion, and respect. Focus is on the tools Christians need to make informed decisions. To provide context to discussions on morality, juniors complete their service hours with the elderly, infirmed, or disabled.

- **Religion 12 – Christian Social Justice and Christian Lifestyles.** In this course, contemporary social problems such as poverty, hunger, racism, and sexism are discussed from a Christian perspective, including an exploration of appropriate, positive, and life-affirming responses to the issues. Students also examine various developmental tasks necessary to live a full adult life. To immerse themselves alongside those most directly affected by social problems, seniors must volunteer with the poor.

### Methodology

**Conceptual Framework**

To explore the role of teachers in a high school service-learning program, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 twelfth grade students and four administrators at an ethically diverse, urban Catholic high school in Southern California. The primary purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the meanings attributed to teachers’ roles in the service-learning program. Design elements were drawn from the grounded theory paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1990). Grounded theorists derive analytic categories inductively from the data, rather than through preconceived or etic sources. For example, data analyses began with individual cases and experiences (Charmaz, 2001), from which analytic categories were synthesized. This was an effort to identify patterned relationships within the data in isolation from previous research findings.

**Procedures**

Announcements were made in all senior level religion classes. At this time, information about the study and parental informed consent forms were distributed. In an attempt to reduce participant attrition later in the study, data collection procedures and expectations of participants were also discussed.

After answering all questions about the study’s procedures and data collection steps, students completed a demographic form which provided the age, gender, ethnic group, and religious affiliation of every student in the senior class. The second purpose for having all students complete the senior demographic form was to ascertain how many students would be interested in participating in the study, and whether they would actually be able to participate according to the pre-determined selection criteria. If students indicated on the data form that they were interested in taking part in the study, they were directed to complete a portion of the form where they could indicate their availability. Senior data sheets were collated according to interest in participating and predetermined selection criteria. The total eligible participant count came to 18.
Administrator recruitment for the study involved significantly fewer steps than were required for the student participants. Administrators were contacted via e-mail and asked if they were willing to sit for an interview, and when they would be available if so. In each e-mail, three to five options of interview times were given. Interviews were arranged and confirmatory emails were sent with the date and setting of each interview.

**Participants**

**Students.** Eighteen twelfth grade students were interviewed (10 females, 8 males). During the hour-long interviews, students were asked about their experiences doing service over the past four years and the purposive connection of service experiences to in-class topics by their teachers. Although the questions acted as a guide, follow-up probing questions were frequently asked.

As a group, the females were much more ethnically and religiously diverse than their male peers. All participants self-identified as Christian, with six out of the ten females self-labeling as Catholic. The remaining four practiced some form of Protestantism, with one female not identifying with any one particular Christian denomination. Of the male participants, seven were Catholic and one was Coptic Orthodox.

Ethnically, the female group was comprised of three African-Americans, two Caucasians, and one Latina. The remaining four identified as biracial, and described their ethnic heritage as a mixture of white and middle eastern, African-American and middle eastern, Asian and Caucasian, and non-specified. The males were less diverse with all but two of the participants being white. The other two male students were Latino and African-American.

**Administrators**

In addition to the 18 high school seniors, interviews were held with four members of the administration. There is ambiguity in the use of the term “administration” for personnel at this particular site; administrators, excluding the principal, must teach at least one course in his/her specialty. To assuage confusion, participants are referred to by their position titles whenever possible.

The principal and vice principal were interviewed individually during the initial recruitment visit to the high school. These individuals were key to grasping the philosophy and goals of the current service program at the high school. Their roles as policy makers at the school made their input even more valuable. This was most true of the vice principal who was Campus Ministry director prior to his administrative duties; this position is typically charged with the overall management of the Christian Service program, and therefore central to the changes in the program over the past years.

The co-directors of Campus Ministry were also interviewed because they hold the central administrative role in the operation of the Christian Service program at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School. They are charged with disseminating information and explaining requirements to the religion teachers. Furthermore, they work directly with the administration to design any programmatic changes.

**Findings**

**Intended Role of Religion Teachers in Students’ Service Experiences**

The faculty of STACHS consists of 43 men and women (see Table 1). The average years of secondary teaching experience among the faculty is 7.3 years and the average years of employment at STACHS is 5.3 years. The faculty is heavily weighted toward inexperience. Less than a quarter of the faculty at the time of the study had worked at STACHS for more than 5 years, and STACHS has experienced difficulty in retaining teachers; at the time of data collection, 17 of STACHS’s teachers were new. This number is even more striking because more than half of the new teachers were also novice teachers, most just having graduated from college the previous spring.

According to the STACHS Parent-Student Handbook, “the key to providing a quality Catholic education is attracting, developing, and retaining outstanding teachers.”
Unfortunately, the differences in salaries offered by adjacent public schools and other private schools make this task quite challenging. In response, STACHS has made attempts in recent years to steadily raise teacher salaries. In addition, individuals leave for a diverse set of reasons, including some outside of the control of STACHS as an organization (e.g., pregnancy, move due to partner’s work). Per the aforementioned characteristic of effective service-learning programs of hiring talented adult leaders, these findings imply that the inexperience and/or attrition of teachers at STACHS might be a contributory element to the effectiveness of the service program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Residency</th>
<th>Number of Faculty</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-14 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Number of Faculty by Length of Residency

Administrators at STACHS understood a connection between teacher qualifications and their subsequent roles in the service program. In fact, Principal June expressed this point of view in her reference to teachers as the “key folks on the school end for the [service] program.” Administrators recently have made efforts to hire religion teachers who had experiences in service-learning, charity work, or pastoral theology, as well as whose religious beliefs most approximate those currently guiding the overall curriculum and philosophy of the school. Specifically, the administration “interviewed a lot of religion people [for] this year and hired…almost [all] new teachers.” The administration’s intense search was made to find individuals that saw service as a key element in their “interpretation of the Catholic faith.” In other words, are they “living it out in a way that [STACHS was] trying to live it out in this program” (Vice Principal Richard). In regards to the qualifications of the religious studies faculty, Principal June boasted that the teachers have “impressive histories of service.” For this reason, service-learning and reflection training was not provided for faculty. More than half of the religion faculty were new to STACHS and all of these individuals, except one, had never taught high school before. Of the remaining teachers, only three had been at the high school for more than two years.

According to administrators, teachers at STACHS have three principal roles vis-à-vis the service program. The first role that religion teachers have in the Christian Service program is to approve the site and adjoined service activity for their students. The second is to monitor and motivate students during the school year to complete their service hours. Vice Principal Richard commented that religion teachers “should be the main promoters [of service activities] and...[in] teaching [students] the value, and kind of helping them, guiding them through [the processes].” These tasks include: “keeping this requirement fresh in the kids’ minds;” “distribution of information and collection of information;” “validating the importance of the work;” and, “affirming the kids for what they do” (Vice Principal Richard).

Teachers’ third role is that of evaluator. Religion teachers, in partnership with the office of Campus Ministry, evaluate the students’ service experiences by assigning an oral and/or written project and by collecting a field log which accounts for students’ completed hours. These assignments are due by a certain date at the end of the second semester; the date is the same for all students in the high school no matter the number of hours that they have been required to complete during that academic year. Campus Ministry then randomly chooses student logs and verifies their validity by calling the listed service sites.

Although the initial steps in teacher service roles are very similar among all religion teachers, disparities exist in student evaluation. Principal June added that variation in follow-up, reflection activities are due primarily to teachers falling behind in the required curricu-
lum. For this reason, teachers “end up assigning a paper most of the time and maybe an individual presentation.” She concluded that the debriefing and reflection components of the service program are areas in need of growth: “[It] would be a really neat thing to do more group discussion and making (sic) sense of it if there was time” (Principal June).

Teachers’ discretion as to the types and numbers of reflective activities is intentional as some classes, even religious studies courses, do not allow for a fluid integration of service-learning into the curriculum. Vice Principal Richard explained that for faculty members “teaching social justice to the seniors, Christian service hours are probably getting referenced every week and using kids reactions to their own interactions that they did that week.” He contrasted this likelihood with an example of a Japanese teacher’s inclusion of service into his/her class. Having taught Japanese at STACHS previously, Vice Principal Richard explained that a Japanese teacher could incorporate service, but it is not “the first thing that’s staring [him/her] in the face when covering the present tense of [a verb].” He further commented that there is “in every grade level…an opportunity for it, but [that] it would depend upon how versed or valued it is to the structure [of the class by the teacher].” This elective approach results in teachers outside of those in the religious studies department never addressing students’ service experiences: “In my other classes we don’t really talk about our service hours. It doesn’t seem like it comes up in any other class environment” (Kelly). Even more problematic is that even though Principal June could see a connection between three out of the four years of religious studies at STACHS, she remained unsure as to whether teachers were actually taking advantage of these connections.

Student Perceptions of Religion Teachers’ Roles
Students were asked about their perceptions of their religion teachers’ actual roles in their service experiences over the four years. The question was asked specifically about the religion teachers because the Christian service requirement is formally overseen by Campus Ministry and is part of the Religious Studies department’s curriculum. Furthermore, as described above, STACHS has made recent efforts to hire religion teachers, who possess the professional and theological background to help realize the program goals.

Students identified four roles that teachers played in their service experiences: 1) manager; 2) reminder—“motivator;” 3) resource person; and, 4) hands-off hypocrites. The first three parallel the aforementioned approving, mentoring/motivating, evaluative roles identified by administrators. The fourth role was unique to the students and offers a critique of some of the teachers’ current roles, and suggests that students desire more direct involvement from their teachers.

Manager
The most common characteristic attributed to the religion teachers by students was that of a manager. Teachers acted like managers by providing parameters under which the service must be carried out, at times providing an orientation to that year’s service requirement, explaining what activities are permissible for credit, and by handling both informational documents and paperwork used to document students’ completed service hours (e.g., reflection papers). Paralleling the first role identified by administrators, teachers approved students’ service sites prior to their engagement by signing a form. Overall, students suggested a peripheral level of involvement of their teachers. Claire, for example, shared: “All they did was…approve of our places. But besides that, the teacher don’t (sic) play that much of a role during my service experiences.”

Reminder—“Motivator.”
In relation to their managerial duties, teachers also reminded students throughout the academic year to complete their service hours. Students did comment, however, that the majority of teachers’ motivational techniques were more threatening/intimidating than motivating.

Tara and Stephanie recounted that teachers shrewdly told the class “to get it done” or “you have to do the work, or you’ll get a zero…or fail.” Barbara, in contrast, commented that although one of her teachers also said that students “should get them done,” the teacher qual-
ified her statement by explaining how service “was good for [students] to do,” how “it helps to make a better person,” “it’s nice to explore different ways of doing things,” and “it’s nice to help out.”

In contrast, Monica commented that her senior religion teacher – a nun – inspired and motivated her by acting as a model; she is “actually up and doing it.” Most striking from her comment, particularly with STACHS’s recent hiring practices in mind, is that she did not feel that “any of the teachers before had done service hours.” Most central to instances like Monica’s, students’ comments suggested that mandatory service is “just more acceptable if [students] feel that they (the teachers) do it too.” Monica provided a non-service metaphor to clarify the seeming hypocrisy: “Like when your parents tell you ‘to go clean your room’ and their room is all messy.”

Resource Person

Students also saw their religion teachers as resource persons. In these cases, teachers provided students with information to help them connect with a service site. First, teachers provided information through “a list of certain places that [students] could volunteer” (Claire) or pre-approved sites. Students commented that their senior religion teacher, in particular, was resourceful in this way. Given that the senior religion teacher was also the only former religion teacher identified by student participants as actively engaged in service activities, it is unsurprising that she had contacts and shared them with students. Students also suggested that access to such lists and resource people might facilitate their connecting to service sites and becoming more aware of opportunities.

Some teachers also worked with students to help them find service sites. This relationship proved helpful in some cases when students needed an adult reference in order to serve at a particular site. Benjamin commented specifically to this account, indicating society’s consternation with adolescents: “There is only so much that you can do as a kid, and the people just don’t take you seriously.” Teachers also acted as resource persons by announcing upcoming opportunities during class. Johann’s freshman teacher, for example, received a “letter and read it aloud and said that the church was looking for people to help parking for [Easter] church services” (Johann). Guillermo also learned of his freshman service project via a teacher’s in-class announcement of an opportunity available at the adjacent parish.

Hands-Off Hypocrites

The perception of teachers as resource persons was not universally held by all of the students, however. All 18 students interviewed felt that overall their religion teachers did not have a significant role in their Christian service experiences. Nahid, Tara, and Kelly, in contrast to their peers’ previous comments, claimed that teachers did not discuss the service, outside of mentioning the due dates and what was/was not permissible in terms of service activities. Dennis even felt that his teachers had misdirected the class and could not empathize with their experiences. In fact, like Monica, he characterized his religion teachers as hypocritical vis-à-vis what they taught as religious doctrine in class and how they lived their secular lives – a surprising finding given the faculty’s supposed high level of civic engagement.

They try to show you that God is around every corner and everything, but then working with the elderly and the homeless it didn’t seem that way. Because like, you just, like when I was working with the elderly, you can just hear their bones cracking when you try to help them out of the chair. It just didn’t feel like they should be going through this. Some had deformed feet, and the homeless people just, some of them were crazy, some of them just didn’t know where they were. You couldn’t really see God then. I felt like the religion teachers didn’t know what they were talking about; it just looked like they had never done service hours before. (Dennis)

Nahid felt that besides her senior religion teacher, “the other [teachers] don’t seem to care.” She drew this conclusion because “they didn’t put any effort into helping [students] find [service sites].” Kelly’s frustration did not concern the seeming lack of connection to service sites. In contrast, her interview indicated that students might also expect/want teachers to be
involved beyond the periphery of service — in other words, be “working with that group” of students.

Student criticism of teachers’ seeming apathy about, and disconnect from, their service experiences lastly stem from the lack of formative, structured in-class reflection activities. For this reason, the reflective elements at STACHS hold dual importance in that their absence not only contrasts directly to the intended roles of teachers as voiced by administrators, but also signals how teacher roles are fundamentally linked to student outcomes, for better or worse.

Reflection is a key element in effective service-learning programs. In fact, reflection is considered by some (Honnet & Poulson, 1989) to be the vital link between service and learning, as it creates an opportunity for students to scaffold their new experiences with previously learned academic knowledge and personal experiences to make new meanings (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). At STACHS, a single, clearly discernible pattern of reflective activities was noted: reflective activities in school are limited to the reflection paper that students are required to write at the end of the academic year. Two students noted that they felt that the reflection papers helped them to grasp the holistic importance of the past year’s experiences. Sonya felt that by doing the papers, she was able to look into how she felt during these periods and that this introspection helps the experiences to “kind of sink in.” She also commented that it “makes [her] pick broader subjects [when writing her papers] than [she] wouldn’t [otherwise] go into.”

Some students did mention that during their junior year, their religion teacher extended the reflective activity beyond the printed word and asked students to share their experiences with the rest of the class. Students indicated that this activity consisted of reading their papers aloud. Some students enjoyed hearing about their peers’ experiences, which provided them with a case against which to compare their own service experiences. Students commented that their sharing resembled a factory line where students systematically read their papers and then returned to their seats. James explained this process, noting that students “basically just read their paper and told what they did, why they did it, the experiences that they did and what they learned. [We didn’t have any discussion], that’s it.” Other students remembered that instead of presenting their reflection papers during their freshman year, the teacher had them create a quilt patch to represent their most poignant memory from the past year’s service project(s). Nonetheless, there was no discussion or reflection on what had just been presented.

To highlight the lack of coverage of students’ service experiences in the school, Benjamin added that the time that he had spent reflecting on his experiences during his interview was the most “in-depth [he’s] ever gone into [his] service” because service experiences are brought up “just only when [the] paper is due.” Greg echoed Benjamin’s feelings about the interview as being a reflective tool. However, his comments also indicate the role that reflection can have in helping students to “understand [their service experiences] better by “remember[ing] what [they] did it for and how much it meant to [them] and how [better they are] because of it.” Administrators also made reference to our interview as being a type of self-reflection on the past and future direction of the service program at the high school.

One possible explanation for teachers’ failure to engage students in additional reflection, and clearly unbeknownst to students, is that teachers simply were unknowledgeable about their roles in, process of, and expected outcomes from the service-learning program. In a spontaneous, informal conversation with Mr. Claudio, a new sophomore religion teacher, he noted that he was simply told: “this is how we do it.”

Practitioners might have been similarly uninformed as to why particular service recipient groups were chosen and assigned to certain grade levels. Mr. Phillip, a co-director of Campus Ministry, explained that the groups were obviously assigned so that students could begin with service which was most benign or culturally familiar to them and then move incrementally toward the groups with which they had more cognitive, emotional, and cultural dissonance — “a movement from groups to where the service is probably easier to do, to
service where it engages you at a deeper level…” (Mr. Phillip). However, he followed up this comment by admitting that the rationale behind the selection of the target groups had never been verbalized to teachers or even the Directors of Campus Ministry. The insight and quick-wittedness of some individuals notwithstanding, findings suggest that STACHS assumes teachers’ past experiences with service is sufficient to direct a successful service-learning program, thereby slowing disseminating programmatic information to those teachers most directly involved in its implementation and oversight.

Discussion and Recommendations
This study examined the roles of teachers in a Catholic high school service-learning program, as compared through the intentions of program administrators and perceptions by students. In general, a mismatch between the program’s intended purposes and how associated practices manifest in the classroom emerges from the findings. Although teachers did fulfill several of their intended roles as voiced by administrators, they did not meet expectations vis-à-vis the learning element of the program per student recollections. This missing element could be considered serious given that student learning arguably is the primary focus of schools, and comprises half of the service-learning model. A discussion of the structural and procedural elements of STACHS’ service-learning program that possibly played a role follow.

Faculty Backgrounds & Administrator Assumptions
STACHS administration understands the importance of having knowledgeable and passionate adults leading its service initiatives. However, their assumption that a religious studies teacher’s personal and religious conviction is sufficient, and subsequent decision not to offer any training specific to reflection, service, or connections to class content proved unwise. Although these characteristics are undoubtedly helpful, teachers’ own engagement in service is not sufficient to ensure the success of the program alone.

Administrative failure to disseminate information appears to result in students being held accountable for only the minimum requirements of completing the service hours and a single capstone reflective assignment. Teachers’ programmatic uncertainties are exacerbated by their inexperience in the classroom and unfamiliarity with pedagogical methods in general. In the case of STACHS, religion teachers were identified to be novice teachers, most of whom recently finished their undergraduate studies. The weaknesses associated with these teacher characteristics speak directly to the criticisms levied against institutions that continue to hire untrained subject-matter specialists, who are often overwhelmed and struggle to address even basic curricular requirements. Although this study did not focus on the outcomes of students’ involvement and attributed learning, it does highlight the central role that general pedagogical knowledge and classroom experience can play.

Furthermore, the teachers’ noted roles conflict with the expectations of adult leaders in experiential education. Most notably, STACHS teachers’ maintenance of influence over students through fear and threats upheld classroom power hierarchies. It is unsurprising to note then that students were not typically motivated, but seemingly apathetic especially when they felt that their teachers could not empathize with their experiences. Students may equate their negative experiences with service-learning, civic engagement, or even religious service, reducing their potential to engage after graduation.

To address these shortcomings, in-service trainings would provide a structured, well-attended opportunity for the ongoing dissemination of program information. However, to ensure faculty buy-in, high schools can design and implement a trainer-of-trainers (TOT) model. In the case of a high school like STACHS, religion teachers could be the first cohort of trainers to be trained, given the current centralization of the service in their department. Then, these teachers would teach and mentor other teachers about the service program and how to implement effective strategies in their classrooms. This model would also maximize the contact effect and ensure dissemination to and understanding by each teacher.
Reflection
Reflection is purported to be the link between service and learning. This study’s findings support previous cautions that inexperience in leading reflections may result in a teacher’s unsuccessful restructuring of the learning environment and curriculum to allow adequate time for properly facilitated reflections (Pugach & Johnson, 1990; Wade, 1997). This potential manifests at STACHS most clearly in that the sole reflective activity is a single paper that falls at the end of the students’ service year. Per best practices literature, religious studies faculty did not support the integration of students’ experiences into the classroom, nor help them to articulate or understand them through pre- or during-service activities (Kendall, 1991, Lewis, 1987; Roberts, 1981; Shumer, 1988). In fact, it seems that efforts atrophied at the second level of Kolb’s experiential education cycle; there was no focus on future action or problem-solving, which is required for a successful social justice focus per Catholic catechism.

Regardless of number of reflections, the form of reflection used by STACHS is also limiting and should be augmented, as even previously acknowledged by Principal June. Although written reflections are the most commonly recognized and used form of reflection (Morton, 1996; Ramsay, 1990), their effectiveness lies in the possible student-teacher dialogue, especially with regard to students being able to air controversial opinions in a medium that would allow a teacher to help them to explore and challenge their views in a discrete form. Additionally, the journal also acts as a safe space that allows teachers to support any student describing painful experiences or confronting their own privileges and assumptions. These potentialities are lost under STACHS’ current structure, however. By the point of the academic year when students have completed their one reflection, teachers have few remaining opportunities to engage with students about their experiences, opinions, or content connections. From a safety and liability standpoint, teachers may not become aware of any troubling, stressful, or problematic experiences that a student had during his/her service hours until this point. An even greater weakness is evident when we consider that a student might complete his/her service hours in the first two months of the academic year, having to wait seven more months to reflect on the experiences. An equally problematic scenario would be eager students completing the reflection assignment immediately after their first-semester service experiences and ignoring seven months of content that could inform their meaning-making.

Lastly, as all students learn in different ways, reflection opportunities should not take a single form, but rather be designed so that each student will be able to best express their understanding of and learn from their service experiences. In short, service-learning programs should be more process-oriented, rather than focused solely on the final number of completed service hours (i.e., product). Service-learning programs should also encourage students to reflect beyond those designed formally into the curriculum. To encourage formative reflective, high schools should create opportunities for teachers to engage in service with students. Teachers serving at the same sites as students can be used as opportunities to reflect concurrently with students, as well as to pick up anecdotes, examples, and ideas for reflection in the class. Furthermore, the on-site presence of teachers again allows students to equate service with adulthood, create opportunities for infusing student voice through flattened power hierarchies, and motivate students by assuring their complaints of teachers as hypocrites.

Service-Learning’s Residence in Religious Studies
STACHS Christian Service program is further complicated by its residence in the Department of Religion. Glennon (2002) notes that an inherent tension exists when infusing service-learning in religious studies courses. The tension stems from the risk of undermining the academic pedagogy of service-learning in favor of charity or social responsibility models supported by religious doctrines. These critiques are often linked to the semantics behind the use of the term “community service,” or in this case “Christian service,” rather than “service-learning.” Although such critiques are well-founded in the cases where program coordinators and curriculum designers do not understand the dif-
ferences between the two, other times schools choose to use “community service” because it does not require explanation to community partners, and matches more succinctly with religious teachings.

Regardless, these issues are made real by STACHS teachers’ apparent focus on the service act, as evidenced by their preoccupation with the students’ fulfillment of their service hours and failure to engage students in connected learning activities. This outcome, which is linked to teacher backgrounds, hiring, and training, obstructs Catholicism’s “defining measure” of social justice through *metanoia*. In contrast, STACHS’ approach appears to tend toward charity, which has been labeled as a condescending, patronizing, one-way relationship that reinforces social hierarchies and encourages dependency (Strain, 2006).

To address these tensions, all STACHS teachers should be expected to discuss connections between students’ service experiences and their disciplinary content topics. The cross-curricular presence would demonstrate the importance of the service requirement to students through normalization. Furthermore, the incorporation of service in every content class at the school would create a “service schema” on which teachers and students can scaffold future lessons. This possibility is particularly exciting for high schools as cross-curricular opportunities are limited given the large enrollment of students and content specializations of teachers.

**Conclusion**

Given the central role that teachers play, administrators of service-learning programs need to take special care in their selection, hiring, and training of those teachers charged with the implementation and management of service-related and reflection activities. When possible, teachers who have impressive histories of, and current interests in, service should be considered. In other instances, concerted efforts must be made to familiarize all teachers with the goals of the service-learning program and the process that will facilitate the achievement of those goals, including instructional techniques and reflective lessons. This recommendation resonates particularly for religious schools that might hire novice teachers without adequate preparation in general pedagogical methods. Moreover, assumptions that teachers understand the expectations further limit program impact and should be addressed by in-service trainings.

Finally, by limiting reflection to a single, summative experience, connection to the course content and thus opportunities to move learning to more critical and problem-oriented stages of the experiential education cycle are lessened, if not lost. For teachers unsure of how to create or lead effective reflections, empowering students by shifting more power and control to them could alleviate this pressure, demonstrate importance of self-reflection, and empower them to find their own voices in and out of the classroom.

**References**


Comparing the Intended and the Perceived

1 Author would like to acknowledge the critical guidance received from anonymous peer reviewers.

2 In 1 Corinthians (13:13), St. Paul enumerates the three Divine virtues: “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Love, the greatest of the three virtues, is to be demonstrated by Christians toward their God and toward fellow human beings as a testament of love for God. Because Catholics, like all Christians, believe that God created [humans] in His own image (Gen. 1:27), they believe that it is their role to complete the duties according to His purpose (Rom., 8:28) while maintaining a “Christian spirit” (i.e., to have a spirit like Christ’s).

Upon the eve of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, he gave his followers a “new commandment,” which would ultimately remind them that they are his disciples: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John, 13:34). Such acts of righteousness will best separate the children of God from the children of the devil (1 John, 3:10), will prove who has fulfilled the whole law (Gal., 5:14), and, hence, will be that on which they will be judged.

For this reason, Catholics must contribute to the well-being of their neighbors - “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke, 6:31). However, the connection of this principle to acts of service is most evident in the seven corporal works of mercy: 1) to feed the hungry; 2) to give drink to the thirsty; 3) to clothe the naked; 4) to visit the imprisoned; 5) to shelter the homeless; 6) to visit the sick; and 7) to bury the dead. They are called “corporal” from the Latin word corpus, meaning “body,” because they pertain to the physical and temporal welfare of one’s neighbors (i.e., the “body” of the Church, or its “community;” Trese, 1991, p. 164).

3 Metanoia comes from the ancient Greek μετάνοια, which is often translated as the act or process of changing one’s mind, reorientation of one’s way of life, or, prior to Vatican II, a spiritual conversion. Implied in the latter meaning is a feeling of penitence, repentance, or regret, which calls into question the motives behind the service act (i.e., altruistic vs. self-interest).

4 The study’s protocol and accompanying application to conduct research on human subjects was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Southern California. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the school and participants.

5 Each student had attended the high school for all four years, had completed all previously required community service hours, and had not attended summer school classes to complete deficient hours. All participating students also had returned signed parental consent forms.

6 Charity is etymologically rooted in the Latin word caritas, the Vulgate rendering of New Testament Greek word ἀγάπη (agape πις), or “love.” Caritas is often translated as “dearness,” “fondness,” “affection,” or “love founded on esteem,” as well as to those senses connected to Christian use (OED, 2008). In the latter cases, caritas passed through church language to popular use via the Anglo-French cherté to the modern French charité. The contemporary meaning of charity, however, derives from a semantic melding of


agape and dilectio – two words previously kept distinct in the Vulgate. Agape was at times rendered by
dilectio, implying action based on feelings of high
esteem or love, but more frequently by caritas.
Subsequent translations of the New Testament differ-
entiated dilectio by “love” and caritas by “charity.”
By 1881, “love” had been substituted in all instances.
What is important to note here is that although the
translation of charity was dropped over time, the
original intent in some uses of the word agape and
how it was understood in Latin was action-oriented
and approximates more of the contemporary notion
of charity wherein someone performs some action to
benefit another out of affection (i.e., Christian broth-
erly love).
Agape (ἁγάπη) is an Ancient Greek word meaning
“brotherly love,” in the sense of caring for one’s fel-
low humans (fellowship). Agape, as adopted from the
New Testament, is now more commonly associated
with Christian fellowship or “Christian love” (of God
or Christ or fellow Christians). In this meaning, agape
correlates with charity when acts of compassion are
performed out of such love.