

## **Introduction to Diversity Principles in Service-Learning: An Invitation to Reflection and Discussion**

For many years now, I have been working on issues of differences in service learning. My experiences have taught me that we are still at a beginning stage of theory and practice about how these differences should be accounted for in doing service. While we often talk about service as a way to build bridges across differences, it is not clear to me how we can do that before we explore more deeply the differences that exist among those who act for the common good through community service.

This list of proposed "Diversity Principles" is meant to provoke thinking about the topic. Meanwhile, let me share with you what I've thinking these days about issues in this list and from those who have commented on it. The main thought that emerges for me is this:

*The service-learning call to act for the common good is problematic in a pluralistic society, where differences result in multiple and contested interpretations, some of which dominate and others are silent and marginalized.*

Having said this, I don't propose we will quickly "solve" this problem. Neither do I suggest that we become paralyzed by it. Rather, I see in the problem precisely the critical role of educators in framing questions that interrogate the very actions that are taken to provide "service." "Service" can become the occasion to consider how we "read" and "interpret" the "texts" of social realities we enter through service, how these meanings are talked about (literally), and how different meanings and perspectives are negotiated among people, especially among those who have unequal power relationships.

### **Diversity Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning**

The principles listed in the following pages refer to the Wingspread Special Report, developed from an NSEE project. The May 1989 advisory group meeting at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference Center culminated with the drafting of the preamble and the language of the ten Principles, now published in the Special Report.<sup>1</sup> Each of the principles listed below are lifted from that Report, followed by a proposed "**Corollary Diversity Principle.**"

I wrote a corollary diversity principle for each of the "Wingspread Principles" to suggest work that has yet to be done to account for issues of diversity (which includes but is not limited to "cultural differences") in service-learning practice. I offer this exercise for purposes of critical reflection and discussion on service-learning practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Honnet, Ellen Porter, and Susan Paulson. "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning." *Johnson Foundation Conference Publications*. May 1989. <http://www.johnsonfdn.org/principles.html> (accessed February 18, 2009).

Wingspread Principle #1

An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity engages people to notice, reflect on, and participate in dialogues about differences in defining, interpreting and expressing concepts of "responsibility," "action," and "common good."*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #2

An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity encourages a variety of ways to "do" and express "reflection," including nondirective discussion, story-telling, varieties of artistic expression in various media (for examples) in addition to analytic modes regarded as "legitimate" especially in the academy.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #3

An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved. From the outset of the project, participants and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of: (1) what is to be accomplished and (2) what is to be learned.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity respects and acknowledges different cultural practices that shape how people define "goals," develop them, and feel a comfort level with precise definitions or lack thereof. In addition, a program committed to diversity provides time and structure for participants to experience together a process of struggling across differences in coming to consensus and/or principled disagreement in defining what is to be accomplished and what is to be learned.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #4

An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity recognizes that some people may not view themselves primarily in terms of "need." Further, that the concept of "need" may be contested by those who view themselves as having borne the costs of historical legacies of colonialism, slavery, patriarchy, and other forms of subjugation or oppression.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #5

An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity honors varying organizational cultures, some of which may define responsibilities more formally and explicitly according to a more rational-legal model, while others may be organized in more fluid, informal different ways.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #6

An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity respects different cultural approaches that inform different participants about who is to be "matched," by whom, with whom, and how.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #7

An effective program expects genuine, active and sustained organizational commitment.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity respects varying ways by which "commitment" is culturally defined and expressed, and accounts for the possibility that failure to honor commitments may unequally and negatively affect different people involved in the program.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #8

An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity respects culturally different ways by which training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation are defined and expressed.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #9

An effective program ensures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity makes possible the effective participation of low-income working people, single parents, and others who experience constraints defined by different economic and cultural realities.*

Your additions, comments:

Wingspread Principle #10

An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

Corollary Diversity Principle:

*A program committed to diversity commits the necessary resources to encourage expression of voices of diverse participants who might hold different interpretations of the "Principles of Good Practice in Service-Learning" and assumptions that underlie them.*

Your additions, comments: