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Book Review - Service Learning in Interpreter Education: Strategies for Extending Student Involvement in the Deaf Community

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Book Review

Service Learning in Interpreter Education: Strategies for Extending Student Involvement in the Deaf Community

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As a deaf person who has been an interpreter educator and coordinator of an interpreter education program for many years (Forestal), I read *Service Learning in Interpreter Education* as both reaffirming our program's philosophy of students engaging in community service and redefining service learning. This book has a fresh and reviving approach, as it is student focused as well as Deaf community focused. I have observed for quite some time that many students are losing connection with the Deaf community; they do not have a meaningful depth of exposure to the infrastructure of the Deaf community or Deaf culture, let alone exposure to sign language and its discourse structure. While reading the book, I was struck by the key words: "re-centering" (p. 155), "re-enfranchising" (p. 29), "partnerships" (p. 16), "equal partners" (p. 139), collaboration, and many similar concepts emphasized throughout the book. Service learning, as portrayed in the book, is "community-based learning" (p. 4): It promotes a view students and the Deaf community learning together and working toward reciprocity, a critical aspect of the Deaf community (Holcomb, 2012), and considering each other as equal partners—rather than a view of the Deaf community as dependent, with students volunteering a one-way street.

The central and crucial concept of this book is outlined in Chapter 8, "The Deaf Community Perspective: Reciprocity and Collaboration." Shaw addresses the widening gap between interpreter education programs and the Deaf community and offers ideas about how to make programs more inclusive for community-based learning. This chapter was like a breath of fresh air; one does not often read about a community's perspective—and particularly not about the Deaf community—that is the target of service learning, other than participatory-action research. Mertens & McLaughlin (2004) underscored incorporating the perspectives of the community under study as vital role to qualitative research, including the views and experiences of a specific population. Shaw interviewed members of the Deaf community about their perceptions of the impact that various service learning programs had on them and on their community. The interviews reflect the participants' excitement and the value they saw in such programs: The Deaf members and organizations observed that students were developing Deaf-centric cultural values, and they were more than willing to continue supporting these programs. Shaw also integrates the students' perspectives, gained through interviews, into the following chapter as well. These perspectives are critical components of a transformative paradigm of service learning, in which "knowledge [and understanding] is influenced by human interests [as it] reflects the power and social relationships within society [and] that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society" (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004, p. 3).

In these two chapters, Shaw reinforces the key themes, mentioned earlier, that arise throughout the book, validating the worthiness of interpreter education programs' expanding or implementing a service learning program. Shaw also informs readers that service learning is new to the Deaf community. I found this fact striking; it underscores how important it is for interpreter education programs (IEPs) to revisit the Deaf community and to, for example, hold a forum involving representatives of the IEP and members of local and state organizations to discuss the rationale, approaches, and strategies of a service-learning program. The forum could include discussions of how the Deaf community could support the IEP's students, with the Deaf community being on the receiving end of reciprocity. Such a forum would be also beneficial in eliciting input and ideas from the leaders and members of the Deaf community, effectively making a "re-entry" into IEPs, because, as Shaw indicates, many IEPs seem to have moved away or grown apart from the Deaf community.

As a non-deaf interpreter educator (Russell), I found similar gems in this book, beginning with the content that situates the concept of service learning within a framework of social capital and spatial theory. The discussions of power dynamics and privilege, positioning, shared space, boundaries, and social capital challenge educators to purposefully examine the roots of their service learning approaches to ensure that these concepts serve as the foundation of all decisions that follow. Shaw then stresses in the next chapter that "...service learning must complement existing curriculum rather than stand out as an afterthought" (p. 35). There are examples of other professions that are grappling with embedding service learning into their curricula, and these are contrasted with suggested objectives for interpreter education programs.

The practical nature of Chapter 3, "Implementing Service Learning," is a gift to any educator because it offers sample objectives, structured activities, and sequences for assignments. Shaw walks the reader through the elements required for effective pedagogy, while building a case for partnerships that are sustainable and positive for Deaf communities and programs, which is contrasted well with the material on dealing with student engagement. Shaw draws readers' attention to multiple intelligences, portrayed in the original work of Gardner

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(1983) and Kolb (1984) in order to adapt these intelligences to apply to interpreting. She contrasts a fixed-versus-growth mind-set, and this material could be easily incorporated into pre- and postlearning survey tools, leading to program evidence upon which to assess the impact of service learning on student dispositional traits and mind-sets.

Both reviewers noted that Shaw includes assessment and evaluation of the service learning experience as key elements of the service learning program framework, providing useful arguments for convincing administrative levels and curriculum committees of the importance of service learning. In addition, Shaw describes how academic reflection, an indispensable by-product of service learning, can be taught, so that students become interpreter practitioners, who are “reflective in action” (Schön, 1983, p. 119). Shaw explores what constitutes reflection and how students can develop reflective skills and become critical thinkers. She includes excerpts of students’ journals, providing substantive evidence to support the value of service learning to student learning. Not only has service learning made an impact on students, faculty members, IEPs that offer service learning opportunities, and Deaf community members, its benefits extend exponentially as the students become “evolved” members of the Deaf community as allies.

We appreciate how Shaw has woven Deaf community perspectives and experiences with local IEPs as a foundation for working with the students, resulting in a book that is well organized. Shaw builds a coherent argument for service learning, providing the premises and theories of service learning, before moving on to approaches for implementation of a course to offer service learning, and strategies to imbed service learning in an IEP. She has framed the foundation of her book on current research and praxis outside of interpreter education and the Deaf community, providing a global view of service learning. Most chapters end with recommended readings; both reviewers have taken advantage of these and found them very useful.

We both highly recommend *Service Learning in Interpreter Education: Strategies for Extending Student Involvement in the Deaf Community* for all interpreter education programs, including online programs. This text is also an excellent source for interpreter organizations to design a community service program to connect with the Deaf community in meaningful ways. It also can be a guide for planning for continuing education units (CEUs) for interpreter organization members to ensure that all interpreters, seasoned or novice, continue to develop their connections with the Deaf community. Because interpreter educators continually seek to bridge research and practice in linguistically and culturally sensitive ways, the production of a summary of several of the chapters within this book in American Sign Language would make a positive contribution. We look forward to seeing in what direction Sherry Shaw, a model of exceptional scholarship and critical thinking, takes our field next.

Finally, we note that this text also has valuable material for spoken language interpreter education programs, and translation studies. Students can gain so much from being actively engaged in the linguistic communities in which they will work, regardless of whether the students will become translators, community based interpreters or conference interpreters. Shaw’s work will resonate across our shared approaches to educating interpreters and translators.

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