Defining Service-Learning

Since Robert Sigmon's seminal article "Service-learning: Three Principles" (1979) helped to establish and formalize the pedagogy, individuals, as well as programs and institutions, have created numerous definitions for "service-learning." Although specific understandings vary, as the field has grown and matured, the range of definitions has begun to converge on several core characteristics of service-learning. A few oft-cited definitions include:

> Service-learning is a "… a course or competency-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (adapted from Bringle and Hatcher 1996, 222). Other definitions do not limit the term "service learning" to curricular contexts, some emphasize the roles offaculty and community members in the process, and others make social justice or systems change an explicit objective …. There is, however, broad consensus that service learning involves the integration of academic material, relevant community-based service activities, and critical reflection in a reciprocal partnership that engages students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives as well as to advance public purposes." *(Bringle & Clayton, 2012, p. 105)*

> Service-learning is a "method under which students… learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with… an institution of higher education…and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students… and includes structured time for the students…to reflect on the service experience." *~ National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.*

> "Service-learning is the various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning…Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems." *~ Thomas Ehrlich, in: Barbara Jacoby and Associates. Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996.*
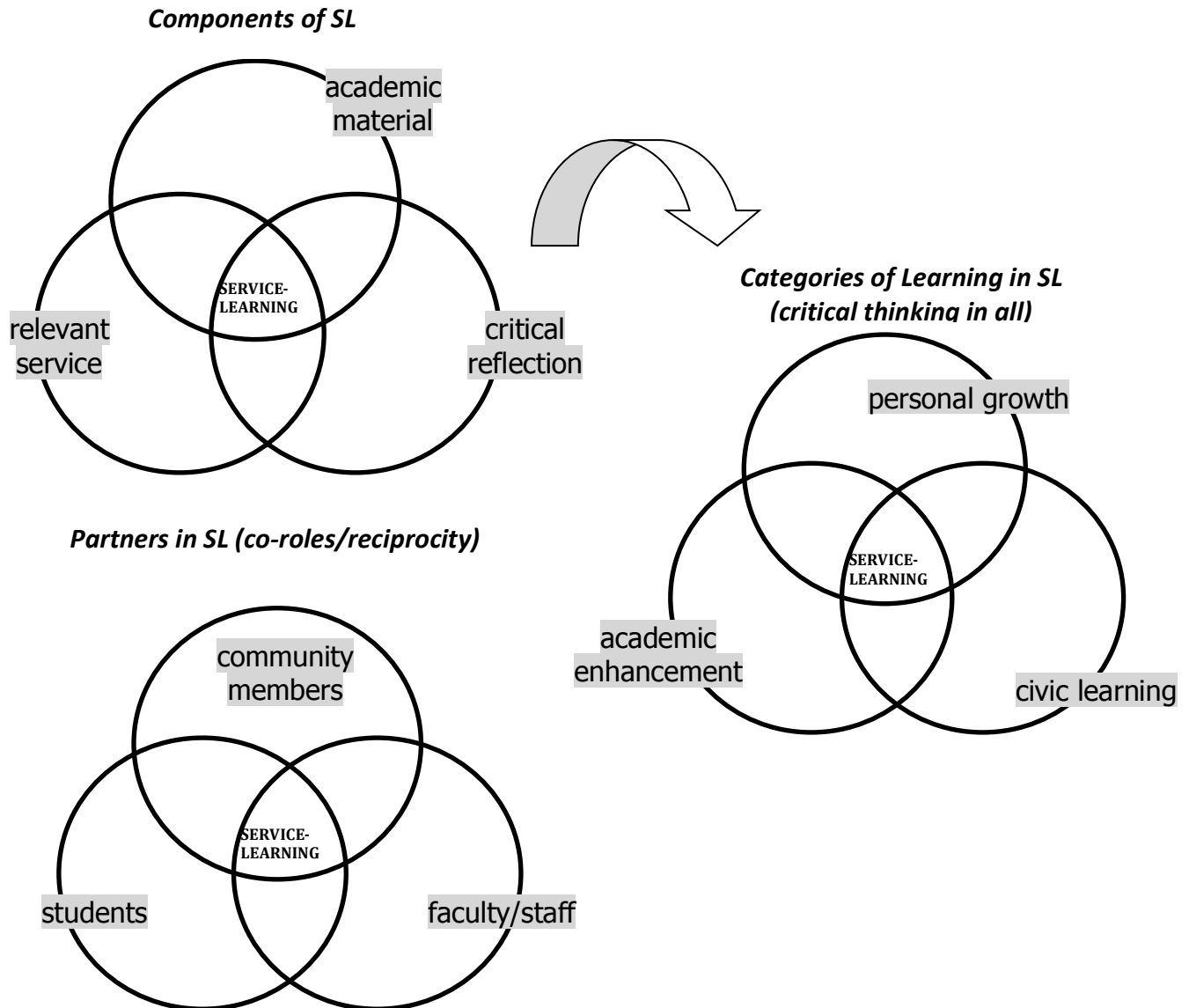

Consensus on the <u>essential elements</u> of the pedagogy:

- integration of learning goals and service goals
- academic learning goals supplemented with at least civic learning goals and often other categories of learning as well (e.g., personal growth, professional development, inter-cultural competence, ethical inquiry, research skills)
- organized, structured process
- reciprocal (co-created) collaboration among students, faculty/staff, community members, and institution that fulfills collective objectives and builds capacity among all partners
- critical reflection on experience to generate learning and improve practice
- assessment of a wide range of outcomes
- duration and intensity sufficient to produce meaningful learning and service

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Conceptualizing Service-Learning as Pedagogy

Service-learning is a collaborative and democratic teaching and learning strategy designed to promote academic enhancement, personal growth, and civic learning and to advance public purposes. Students partner reciprocally with community members and with faculty/staff in experiences related to both academic content and issues of public concern. Through guided reflection, participants examine their experiences critically and articulate specific and actionable learning outcomes, thus enhancing the quality of their learning and of their service/collaboration/public work. Students, faculty, and community members all serve as co-educators, co-learners, co-servers, and co-generators of knowledge.
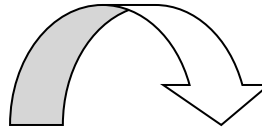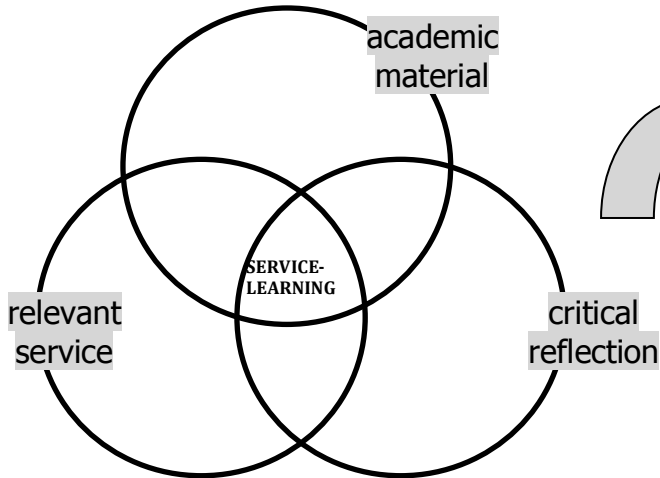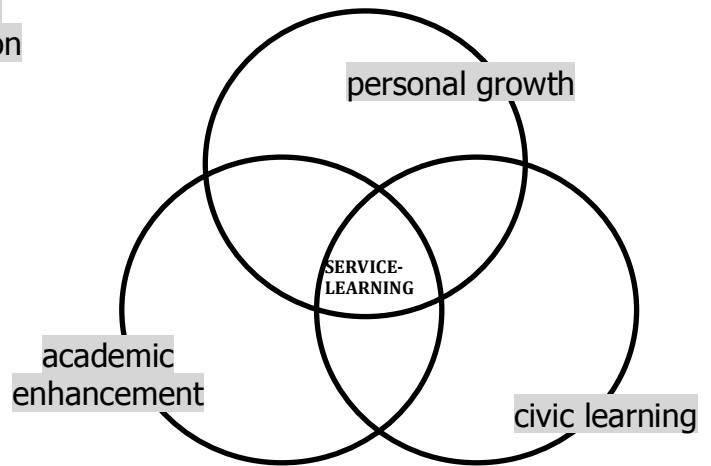
(Clayton 2013)

Components of SL

academic material

SERVICE-LEARNING

relevant service

critical reflection

Categories of Learning in SL (critical thinking in all)

personal growth

SERVICE-LEARNING

academic enhancement

civic learning

Partners in SL (co-roles/reciprocity)

community members

SERVICE-LEARNING

students

faculty/staff

Worksheet

*Bullet out each of these 9 circles as they apply to your own course
(or other teaching and learning context)*

Components of SL

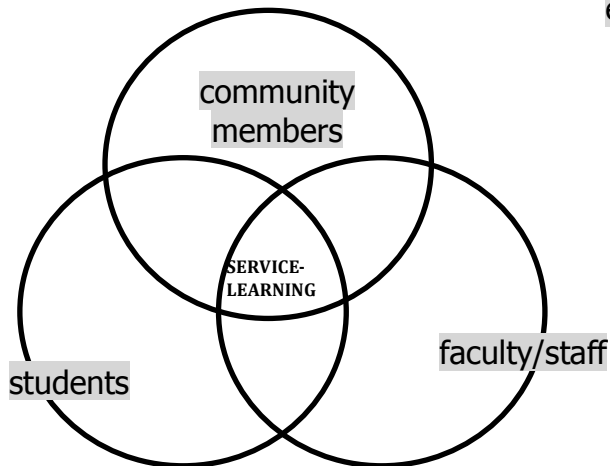academic
material

SERVICE-
LEARNING

relevant
service

critical
reflection

*Categories of Learning in SL
(critical thinking in all)*

personal growth

SERVICE-
LEARNING

academic
enhancement

civic learning

Partners in SL (co-roles/reciprocity)

community
members

SERVICE-
LEARNING

students

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Are there any changes you wish to make to this framework?