

## Service-Learning and Educating in Challenging Contexts: International Perspectives

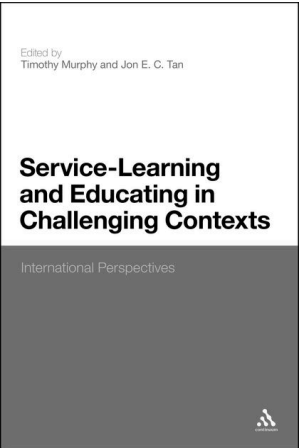
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<b>Author:</b>	Tim Murphy & Jon Tan (2012)	
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Edited by  
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**Service-Learning  
and Educating in  
Challenging Contexts**

International Perspectives



*Service-Learning and Educating in Challenging Contexts: International Perspectives* brings together the valuable contributions of leading researchers around the globe who collectively advocate teacher preparation reform through an integration of service-learning methodology. Editors Murphy and Tan organize the volume with the argument that the most vital component of service-learning pedagogy is the critical reflection it generates in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the service project. As such, service-learning in in-service teacher education is a potential “catalyst for learners to question their presupposed ideas about the world and others...such approaches act to turn the reflective lens on ourselves” (p. 235). *Service-Learning and Educating in Challenging Contexts: International Perspectives* provides insight and understanding of the elements of service-learning for teacher educators around the world. As TESL education begins to explore the possibilities of service learning, this is an important read.

The 200-page volume is divided into two sections. Part I includes three chapters pertaining to service-learning in the United States; Part II includes nine chapters pertaining to service-learning in Europe, South Africa, and Australia. These are a mix of narratives and case studies; each chapter describe the authors’ experiences in implementing service-learning, providing contextual background information and concluding with reflections and suggestions for future practice.

In an increasingly globalized world, there is a growing urgency to provide pre-service teachers with concrete examples and frameworks of how service-learning pedagogies might be enacted. Referencing the disconnect that exists between the teacher workforce and many student communities, contributor Noah Borrero writes that “these cultural disparities place a specific onus on the role of Teacher Education programmes to address the ‘demographic divide’ between teachers and students” (p. 34). Thick descriptions of service learning in the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Germany, and South Africa illustrate how implementing service-learning can bridge community and school life and provide opportunities for educators’ structured reflection in a broader social justice framework of teacher preparation.

Allowing students to construct their meaning through experiential learning, service-learning pedagogy seeks to capitalize on the contributions and knowledge of individuals and communities. As an elementary educator in a school with high poverty, inconsistent staffing, testing and accountability burdens, and diverse populations, I have attempted to use service-learning as a source of increased engagement and community building inside my classroom and the within the larger institution. Classmates of mixed races, cultures, and languages dig their hands together in the dirt of their school gardens while unpacking issues of health and nutrition, sustainability and global warming. As a school, staff, parents, and students, all with various backgrounds and experiences, engage in service together on garden workdays or holiday outreach evenings to the men’s shelter, the senior center, and local organizations to deliver joy in form in food, song, and cards. Children of poverty often see themselves as recipients of goods, services, and knowledge provided by partners and donors. Through service-learning, students reposition themselves as active contributors to their community. Service learning allows the school to promote an asset approach to its “challenging” contexts, providing avenues of reciprocity, embracing the diversity of cultures and experiences of its members, and capitalizing on authentic relationship building through collaborative social endeavors. ESL teachers can employ service learning with equality of voice, reciprocal learning, and critical dialogue and reflection to positively affect their students and schools—as microcosms of the greater world in which they participate. *Service-Learning and Educating in Challenging Contexts: International Perspectives* is an inspirational resource for designing such change.

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