

Service Learning in South Africa

All people are deserving of quality spaces that meet their physical needs, and contribute to their spiritual well being. The ability of artistry to feed the soul, and in turn our bodies (Bevlin, 1994) is often overlooked. Assuring a balance between artistic and scientific constructs is never more difficult than when our work is undertaken in third world, underprivileged communities. Frequently, the artistic concerns of a project in these impoverished environments take a secondary role to the physical and social issues of meeting basic sustenance needs of the inhabitants. Limited resources, both manufactured and financial, coupled with geographic and cultural disparities, are factors framing this tension. To be successful in these scenarios landscape architects have to overcome these challenges, and ensure the importance of artistic concerns.

Landscape architecture students enrolled at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo had the opportunity to participate in service learning internships engaged in work for underprivileged communities in South Africa. Projects were undertaken in rural public schools, and AIDS support organizations and orphanages. Student responsibilities included the design and construction of numerous projects at a variety of sites in rural and urban areas of South Africa. Students participated in community workshops, design charrettes, and provided the labor for construction of their designs. The internship challenged students to think outside the box, find aesthetic solutions, and come to understand their individual process along the way (Bevlin, 1994).

The internships are a case study with results aligning with current service learning theory. This paper provides an examination of how the learning acquired through service learning is different from that acquired in the traditional classroom setting (Rockquemore et al, 2000). It explores the impact of service learning on the development of professional values in the participants. It also examines the contribution of service learning to the formation of student values, which can affect the utilization, and integration of normative theory and research in the design process as they are value based (Lang, 1987).

The legacy of this internship is its ability to build bridges between ideas, people, and our global community. For students, their design process is refined and enriched. For the communities we worked in, they saw the concern of other people, and that cultural barriers can be broken. Finally, the internship makes a lasting difference in the hearts and minds of those involved, and how they view the world.

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