

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING THROUGH LEARNING CIRCLES

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### **Issue Being Addressed:**

Faculty members use a unique way to learn the pedagogy of service-learning.

### **Actions to consider:**

Through learning circles, faculty members study the pedagogy of service-learning and then develop ways to implement service-learning courses. Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) was awarded a *Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education* (FIPSE) Grant to assist selected faculty in developing effective student-centered teaching practices including poverty, technology, collaborative learning and contextualize learning circles. GRCC established a system of three learning circles, the first group started during the Winter semester of 2004. At the end of this grant cycle, those participating in the service-learning circles will have developed knowledge of and experienced the use of service-learning in their classes. The goal of the FIPSE grant is to use a research model to determine if Grand Rapids Community College could implement the processes of learning circles. The learning circles will be sustained after the completion of the three year grant.

### **Context and setting:**

“Learning circles are small communities of learners among teachers, and others who come together intentionally for the purpose of supporting each other in the process of learning” (Collay, 1). The learning circles at GRCC are comprised of an array of faculty members from various curricular backgrounds. “Members are encouraged to take responsibility for their own development as professionals, to set their own timelines for studying the pedagogy, and to change their teaching” (Collay, 1.) The service-learning circles at GRCC are cyclical as explained below:

- During the first semester of the first year, faculty members meet bi-monthly to learn the pedagogy of service learning.
- During the second semester of the first year, faculty members meet bi-monthly and implement a pilot service-learning project in a course, develop an evaluation tool and learn about a model of peer evaluation.
- During the second year, faculty members meet once a month and implement service-learning into their teaching style
- During the third year, faculty members mentor other faculty who are in the first two stages of the cycle and continue to implement service-learning.

### **Outcomes Achieved:**

- Faculty learned ways to implement reflection and evaluation tools
- Faculty discuss problems with service-learning projects with other members of the circle
- Course requirements and syllabus were altered using service-learning pedagogy.
- Faculty and students become more aware of community issues
- Students are more involved in the community
- An increased number of faculty members are implementing service-learning in their courses
- Faculty dialogue across the curriculum regarding one topic.

### **Sources**

Collay, M., Dunlap, D., Enloe, W., and Gagnon, W. (1998). *Learning Circles: Creating Conditions of Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Conner, F (1993). *Application for the Comprehensive Program 2003: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education*. Unpublished Grant Proposal. Grand Rapids Community College. Grand Rapids, MI.