



## Learning for a Change: Approaches, Ideas and Discussion about CSL, Citizenship Development, and Social Change

**Facilitated by:** Anne Docherty, Storytellers' Foundation and Kerri Klein (CCEDNet)

**Thursday, October 29<sup>th</sup>**

**9am – 11am (Pacific)**

**10am – noon (Mountain)**

**11am – 1pm (Central)**

**Noon – 2pm (Eastern)**

**1pm – 3pm (Atlantic)**

### Introduction

The Community Development Service Learning (CDSL) project was created to explore how intentional learning opportunities could further the goals of social change within Community Economic Development (CED) arenas across Canada. CED is an alternative to conventional approaches to economic development. It is founded on the belief that problems facing communities - unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control - need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way.

Specifically, we looked at the different ways that CED organizations use learning in order to build the skills, knowledge and confidence of local people to act for social, economic, environmental and political change. In this project we describe learning as something we do in order to understand the world around us. We recognize a spectrum of learning environments available to community organizations. We consider these environments education structures in that they offer activities for learning to be fostered. We see CSL as one example of an education structure that bridges the learning spectrum.

FORMAL

NON-FORMAL

INFORMAL

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SPECTRUM OF LEARNING

The project organized activities over two years around a set of four goals. Two of the goals led us to explore relationships with CSL practitioners:

- Build opportunities for formal/non-formal learning organizations to partner with CED organizations to expand community development service learning opportunities that contribute to community needs and assets.
- Build opportunities for students to engage in effective community development service learning, and network with youth leadership and the CED movement to contribute to social and economic change in Canada.

### Project Findings

Over the past two years we've learned how CED organizations have used learning as a bridge to integrate the principles of CED (i.e. participation, sustainability, community-based, asset-based, self-reliance) with outcomes of community change (e.g. decreased poverty, strong local economies, environmental well being, etc.)

We've learned how the act of learning, especially informal learning, shines a light on all aspects of our development (i.e. Values development, skills development, emotional development and interpersonal development) rather than only our cognitive development. This in turn heightens people's intent and motivation to belong to a movement of change rather than only deliver a service or perform a job. We recognize this as citizen development.

We believe that informal learning (the learning of daily life) is rarely tapped in to as a resource for citizen development. We also believe that reflective practice increases an individual's awareness of informal learning and that reflective practice moves the act of learning from transactional to transformational.

In January 2009 we hosted a one day meeting in Toronto with members of two national associations (CACSL and CCEDNet) Following this meeting we hosted a series of tele-learning calls with 3 CSL partnerships. These calls included CSL faculty and/or staff and a CED organization that hosts CSL students.

Learning from these calls included:

- C S L bridges the spectrum of learning (i.e. Formal - Informal)
- CSL offers an opportunity for all involved to learn together as citizens.
- The power dynamics of university life create challenges in approaching a project as citizens learning together
- Reflection is (or should be) embedded into the activities of students.
- Reflection is at risk of becoming a "task" in order to get a grade .
- When time is taken to have reflective conversations between university representatives and CED representatives then CSL projects are more intentional around fostering citizenship development

A conversation has started between community organizations and university/college staff on the possibilities of creating a reflective process to include all people involved in the CSL transaction. The belief is this would bring CSL closer to citizenship development. It would also increase opportunity for the community organization to name the change it is part of which in turn allows students to see themselves as engaged citizens working towards greater social change rather than only a student performing a task for a grade.

However, one of our discoveries in this project was that while many community organizations are operating from their own theories of change, their informal learning approaches are often implicit and not necessarily embedded in the structure of the organization. Thus, it is difficult for organizations to engage in transformational learning partnerships unless they also have the capacity to be intentional about their own learning.

From our conversations with people involved in CSL we've learned that the goal of CSL is to:

- foster transformational learning experiences for students
- Benefit meaningful change in communities.

On this upcoming call we want hear more about the goals of CSL and we want to learn more about:

- How informal learning is used for citizenship development
- The challenges and successes of reflective practice in CSL
- The interest of CSL practitioners to engage in reflective practice alongside students and community organizations
- Whose role it is to facilitate learning in community, and
- In what ways does CSL pay attention to informal learning with the organization and with the student?

We have produced a variety of resources from project activities that are being housed within an on-line learning site. At the end of this call we will introduce the materials, tools, research and further opportunities for learning available on this site