BETWEEN METHODOLOGY AND REALITY

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Service-learning, while still a relatively new concept in Ukraine, has a history spanning several decades globally. Its methodological foundations have been extensively developed and systematized by scholars such as Andrew Furco and María Nieves Tapia, who articulated general theoretical frameworks, as well as by Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová, who explored regional adaptations. Additionally, the methodology has been elaborated within specific academic disciplines by numerous researchers, confirming that, in principle, service-learning is a well-established and structured pedagogical approach. However, a critical question emerges when this clearly defined methodology encounters the disruptive reality of war: to what extent can it be consistently applied while implementing service-learning projects under such extreme conditions?

War is an overarching tragedy that profoundly affects all aspects of life, including education. Its impact is predominantly negative and can be categorized into several interrelated dimensions. First, human losses – including mortality, migration, and internal displacement of both students and faculty – disrupt the continuity of educational processes. Second, material losses – such as the destruction of infrastructure, reduced funding, and economic decline – limit institutional capacity. Third, the constant psychological pressure caused by exposure to traumatic information, heightened responsibility, and decision-making under stress further complicates teaching and learning processes. These factors inevitably affect the implementation of service-learning. Paradoxically, however, such conditions may also strengthen motivation for participation in service-learning initiatives, as individuals seek meaningful ways to respond to urgent societal challenges.

Service-learning remains a powerful educational tool fostering collaboration among students, educators, and communities. In wartime, its significance is amplified by the need to reassess societal priorities, address urgent needs, and support community

well-being. At the same time, the implementation of service-learning faces multiple challenges. Educational systems become disrupted due to closures, displacement, and infrastructural damage. Community needs shift rapidly toward survival, safety, psychosocial support, and reconstruction, requiring service-learning initiatives to remain highly adaptive and responsive. Social cohesion and trust – essential for effective partnerships – are often weakened, complicating cooperation and needs assessment. Political instability and legal uncertainty may impose restrictions on mobility and project implementation. Economic decline reduces both funding and community capacity to engage. Ethical considerations become central, requiring heightened attention to participant safety and the avoidance of harm. Furthermore, projects must address trauma and contribute to reconciliation, while coping with compressed timelines that prioritize immediate impact. At the same time, students often demonstrate increased motivation and empathy, though emotional challenges such as stress and despair necessitate supportive measures, including creative activities and structured rest.

Adapting service-learning to wartime conditions requires rethinking the roles of key participants. Students, educators, and community partners must collaborate while acknowledging personal trauma. University leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring safety and managing physical, informational, and reputational risks. Wartime conditions may also shift the balance between "service" and "learning," often emphasizing immediate service outcomes. Nevertheless, maintaining the educational dimension remains essential to preserve the dual purpose of service-learning. Educators are therefore challenged to align disciplinary content with urgent societal needs and transform existing forms of civic engagement into structured service-learning experiences.

Traditionally, the implementation of service-learning follows five stages, each of which is significantly influenced by wartime conditions. The motivation stage, which in peacetime focuses on demonstrating the value of service-learning for personal and societal development, becomes a key factor in sustaining students' engagement in education by emphasizing its immediate relevance. The diagnosis stage is shaped by urgency, often relying on direct community requests, media reports, and observation rather than extensive research, while also requiring an assessment of institutional capacity. During project planning, safety considerations, stakeholder communication, and alignment with academic schedules are critical, though long-term planning may

be replaced by short-term initiatives. Implementation is inherently unstable, as projects may be disrupted by sudden changes; in such cases, reflective activities can substitute for direct engagement. Finally, the closure and repetition stage requires flexible evaluation, as community needs evolve rapidly, making some projects one-time interventions while others may be adapted or replicated.

Across all stages, continuous reflection, documentation, and communication are essential. They support emotional resilience, counter misinformation, and enable the development of scalable solutions for future crises. Through flexibility, ethical awareness, and a balance between immediate and long-term goals, service-learning can remain a transformative educational approach even under extreme conditions.

In light of these considerations, a fundamental question arises: at what point does a project, significantly modified by wartime realities, cease to be service-learning and instead become another form of community engagement? In our view, if a service-learning initiative fulfills at least one clearly defined learning objective within the framework of an academic course, it may still be considered service-learning, even if other methodological principles are only partially implemented or adapted to the constraints of wartime reality.