

## Learning Service or Service Learning: Enabling the Civic

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Presently, service learning is utilized as a tool for learning about something other than service, such as: gaining civic dispositions, learning subject matter, practicing inquiry techniques, or questioning inequality. What might happen if, instead, an exploration of service itself grounded classroom studies and field work, fostering explicit consideration and critique of ethics, standards, and distinctive forms of learning through work with others? In this paper, the idea of service learning is turned on its head and “learning service” is considered as a means of enabling the civic, particularly in regard to higher education.

In this paper, service learning is considered as a democratic project. An inversion of service learning to learning service is proposed, described, and considered for its civic promise. This paper is a theoretical/conceptual effort based on experience in the United States. Its proposals, however, have implications for an international audience.

Parker (2003) describes idiocy in its ancient Greek derivation as “private, separate, self-centered—selfish” (p. 2). It was a term of reproach, and its related appellation “idiot” meant someone who did not take part in public life: a person whose citizenship identity never took root. Idiocy was, and is, an obstacle to the quest for fuller realizations of democracy. Service learning aims to combat idiocy, helping students develop dispositions toward public life (Barber, 1992; Gorham, 1992; Battistoni, 2000). However, service learning often operates from a charity model (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Rhoads, 1997). Arguably, charity “disables the civic” (Gorham, 1992, p. 118), silencing the citizen as a political force.

In this article, we neither privilege nor denigrate forms for service learning. Instead, we advance a new metaphor, “learning service,” and we examine its potential to scrutinize service as a democratic force. We ask serious questions about service, including: What kind of public experience does it provide? Does it confront public apathy? Does it nurture human kindness? Does it foster dialogue and deliberation? Does it challenge injustice and inequality? We suggest that learning service recasts service as something to be studied, as well as something to be done. It refocuses thinking, by instructors and students alike, on learning to be civic through service.

Lynne Boyle-Baise utilized learning service as a framework for the studies of a graduate seminar, J762, *Service Learning: Theory and Practice*. She encouraged us, her students, to contemplate meanings of public service through its study, practice, and critique. She invited us to collaboratively reflect and write about our experiences, to tease out the idea’s conceptual power.

Everyone in the seminar decided to participate in this publication. We determined to write in first-person narrative: our first names identify our individual voices and views, while the collective “we” refers to us as a learning group.

We are an ethnically diverse group: our instructor is European American, as are three of us; two students are African American, and one is Taiwanese. Most of us are women, but the group includes one man. Most of us came from departments within the School of Education, but one hailed from the School of Fine Arts. We range in age from the late 20’s to the middle 50’s.

Several questions guide this work: (1) what does it mean to learn service, (2) how can service be taught, and (3) how do students experience the learning of service? Responses to these questions carry implications for service learning in higher education. First, distinctions that framed our consideration of service are described. Next, the teaching of service in the J762 seminar is outlined. Then, students’ views of the seminar are described and discussed. Based on these data, a conceptual framework for learning service is proposed.

### Enabling the Civic

Most scholars agree that service learning is conceptually and pragmatically diverse (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Butin, 2005; Deans, 1999; Robinson, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Charitable acts provide immediate assistance to individuals, allowing students to practice compassion. Civic education efforts lend people-power to programs that help clients help themselves, enhancing students’ sense of social responsibility (Battistoni, 2000). Service for social justice examines injustice, deepening students’ grasp of equity and fostering activism (Robinson, 2000). Community-based-research offers investigative expertise to communities, affording students opportunities to improve social programs (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003).

Service as accompaniment develops greater understandings of local life, allowing students to gain insider views of marginalized groups (Simonelli, Earle, & Story, 2004). To what extent do these forms enable the civic?

Charity supposedly disables the civic, diluting citizen actions (Gorham, 1992). However, charitable giving is an expression of humanism; it represents a reaching out to one's fellow people. "The seeking out of the other man [sic], however distant, is already a relationship with this other man, a relationship in all its directness" (Levinas, 1975/1989, cited in Foos, 1998, p. 18). Charity confronts idiocy as public apathy. The denigration of charity as weakly civic does little to plumb its possibilities or weigh its limits. Instead, its examination as a compassionate act can prove helpful. If service itself is an object of interest, students can ponder the extent to which they make a difference through charity, deciding when it is, for them, sufficiently civic.

Strong democracy insists that citizens do more than watch daily news, vote occasionally, and, for the most part, live a private life (Barber, 1992; Parker, 2003). This stance supposes that ordinary citizens can engage in public discussion; know injustice when they see it; and challenge racism, sexism, and other prejudices that limit self-government. However, Harry Boyte (2000) argues that, in order to be considered a form of democratic education, service learning must specifically teach arts and crafts of public life. Further, students should understand that service is a form of public, political work, undertaken on a personalized, localized stage (Battistoni, 2000). If service itself is an object of interest, students can consider and practice respect, inclusion, deliberation, and collaboration—ideas and skills fundamental to democratic participation.

Service for social justice is rare; less than 1% of service learning activities fall in this category (HUD, 1999, cited in Robinson, 2000). Participating in advocacy projects (e.g., building tenant councils, drafting legislation, or protesting injustice) is, arguably, risky, especially for educators who operate within conservative bureaucracies. A viable alternative is the study of social problems and construction of critical consciousness as a prelude to social action (Deans, 1999; Robinson, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000). For example, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program exemplified justice-oriented service. College students learned with and from incarcerated inmates about issues of crime and justice (Pompa, 2005). Students gained insights about prison life and considered a more humane justice system. In a few cases, students voluntarily initiated change efforts that flowed from class participation, becoming directly involved in social action. If service itself is an object of interest, students can envision activism as a means for civic engagement.

## Teaching the Seminar

Lynne asked us to theorize from practice, to study and enact service, and then to critically review our thoughts and actions. Below, we describe our learning about service and our participation in community-based research.

### *Organizing the Service Project*

Lynne's first task was to arrange a service project upon which students could act and reflect. She visited with her previous partners for service learning, inquiring about efforts that might place us in leadership positions. The Family Resource Center (FRC), a hub for parent education, health information, and fun activities which focused on families with children ages 0-8, wanted to find ways to include more lower-income families in its programs. This need seemed appropriate for our seminar: it allowed us to practice community-based research which utilized our investigative expertise, and it afforded opportunities to interact with underserved families, which in turn prodded our consideration of service for social justice. Leaders of the FRC came to the first seminar, and, together, we developed the gist of the research effort.

We decided to create a short answer survey to seek information from parents in relation to categories of interest to the FRC. Illustrated charts were created to ascertain parent interest in certain programs. Questions were written in plain language to make them easy to grasp for a range of parents. The FRC arranged for us to practice the survey with a racially diverse panel of parents and to receive their feedback. As a result of this meeting, we re-drafted the instrument, eventually working through three drafts. Along the way, our group considered issues of learning *with* local communities. We decided to call ourselves "Friends of the FRC" in order to approach respondents in non-threatening, non-elitist ways.

The FRC used its newsletter to announce the research project and to explain its purpose. We began to show up at scheduled events, talking with parents at moments when their children were busy with center activities. In order to reach beyond program "regulars," the FRC created a special event to draw in more participants for our research.

### *Pondering Service*

As we organized the research project, we learned service. In the seminar, we examined ideas at the core of community engagement. We puzzled through Parker's idea of idiocy as self-centered withdrawal from public life (2003). We asked: Can service learning combat idiocy? We studied Rhoads' (1997) notion of

positionality as the impact of one's role, identity, and standpoint on service. We asked: What views do I bring to service? We contemplated aspects of community partnership, such as otherness, mutuality, community building, and shared control (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Rhoads, 1997). We queried: What does it mean to share power with community partners?

We studied service learning's roots. Like early pioneers in the field, we considered contested, alternative meanings for service as a resource for social needs, as a tool for citizenship education, or as assistance with grassroots work (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). We asked: What are the competing moral and political commitments that undergird interpretations of service?

We studied distinctive forms of service, such as multicultural service learning (Boyle-Baise, 2002) and service as accompaniment (Simonelli, Earle, & Story, 2004). We asked: Where does our work with the FRC fit and why? We considered the value of community-based research (Strand et al., 2003). We asked: Where is the community in community-based research?

#### *Conducting Community-based Research*

During the middle part of the seminar, over a six week period, we went to FRC events in pairs or small groups to orally administer the survey. We mostly conducted research on our own time, but two of our weekly seminars were dedicated to field work. In seminar, we described and considered the ongoing inquiry. We probed data for emerging themes. We questioned our sample, realizing that our respondents were middle class parents, not the lower-income, hard-to-reach group that was the aim of our endeavor.

We invited our partners to class, shared our initial findings, and aired our concerns. The FRC was responsive, but uncertain how to reach the targeted parents. Still, the director made some phone calls, gaining entry for us into a lower-income housing project from which she hoped to draw more FRC participants. Members of the seminar went to Resident's Council meetings, a community potluck, and local after-school programs. In all, we gathered 39 surveys, some from hard-to-reach parents.

We pooled our information into an electronic database which was accessible to our community partners. We taught them how to utilize and add to the database to assist their future inquiries. We met with partners during a seminar session and walked through the data with them. They, in turn, mused about possible solutions to the challenges that surfaced.

#### Hearing Student Voices and Views

During the seminar, we kept dialogic journals to recall impressions and raise questions. Lynne wrote responses to our queries, prodding our thoughts about service and creating a memoir of our learning. Then, some time after the seminar ended, we wrote reflections on learning service. Lynne asked us to recall our learning honestly. She explained that only truthful recollections can assist others in traveling similar roads. The following points represent our frank and forthright views.

From our reflections, three themes were suggested: making meaning of service, practicing shared control, and learning from flawed research. These themes are discussed separately, but actually they are interdependent.

#### *Making Meaning of Service*

Our group ranged from curious to well-versed about service learning. All of us came to the course to deepen our grasp of service learning ideas and practices. As Ambica recalled:

My background is in graphic design and visual communication. As a graphic designer, I am increasingly interested in incorporating more service in my work, developing service learning in my graphic design courses and becoming actively engaged in the community I live in. I hoped to expand my experiences with service learning in J762.

Two of us specifically hoped to learn how to access hard-to-reach, lower-income communities. One of us, an international student, wanted to develop cross-cultural understandings of service learning. In regard to the first aim, Michelle noted:

I came to this seminar hoping gain information on how to work with marginalized or hard-to-reach populations of people in order to transfer the ideas and experiences to the issue of working with parents within the school setting: how do we reach the "unreachable"?

In regard to the second aim, Ming-Chu questioned service as rooted in Chinese traditions:

This local service project challenged my assumptions about what it meant to be a server or a receiver of service, as it is culturally rooted in Chinese tradition. I walked into the FRC or government housing and learned how life can be

for local community people. The position of either server or served is not bound by wealth or status. As we encouraged people living in government housing to help us learn, we showed: “you may not have what I have, but you are as valuable as I am.”

All of the students were surprised to find our definitions of service learning limited primarily to charitable views. As Rhondalynn recalled, “I was embarking on a teaching career in ‘service’ with very little guidance beyond my own heartfelt desire to contribute to society and to be a positive influence on young adults.” According to Denisha:

As we explored theoretical concepts of service and otherness, I began to reflect on what it means to really help someone. The notion of working with and not for others resonated deep inside of me. I understood the importance of engaging with the people you serve, but none of my previous experiences with service taught me how you went about working with people as opposed to doing charity work.

All of us expanded our grasp of service, considering its multiple forms. As Ambica recalled:

We talked about important concepts such as mutuality, reciprocity, and collaboration. Prior to my engagement in these classroom discussions, I took a lot of this information for granted when thinking about service. It was beneficial for me to understand the difference between a charitable approach to service from one that focused on mutual benefit and reciprocity.

Our studies included discussions of positionality, or the impact of our cultural/social standpoints on our views and actions in service. Our conversations spurred new understandings of ourselves “in service” with others. As Zack recalled:

I have lived experiences that no one else in the world has. I have to remember, however, that others have lived experiences that I do not have. Service isn’t about helping those “in need,” but is about taking the time to understand my connection to my community and to figure out how to participate in the building of that community.

Ming-Chu began to reconsider her knowledge and values, particularly her views of people living in poverty. As she recalled:

Undertaking learning service stimulated my reflective thinking about my knowledge system

and values. For instance, people who have lived in government housing may not always be lazy, but, instead have bad luck. I had never realized such bad luck can destroy people’s lives until I met a resident at the housing project. As she told us, everything was just out of control and happened in a series of events. Learning service cannot only challenge what we believe, but also provide the chance for human beings to understand and share with each other.

### *Practicing Shared Control*

We studied collaboration, community building, and shared control as abstract ideas, and then we put them to work. We worked collaboratively with agency leaders and parents who regularly used the FRC, but we continually missed the hard-to-reach population that was a target of our inquiry. Through frank discussions with agency leaders, we gained insights into our aim to work *with* a range of community members. As Shelley remembers:

We certainly intended to be involved in a full partnership project where shared control, mutuality, and reciprocity were at the forefront of our service. By missing our “target,” we didn’t quite achieve what we had set out to do. We all learned that well-intended programs can sometimes leave out those individuals who are most intended to be served. I learned that truly shared partnerships are a critical piece to service learning.

Michelle realized that building trust is fundamental to reaching “unreachable” populations:

Our work on this project taught me that work *with* various populations of people, especially “the unreachable,” requires relationship or community building. As I found out, people who have not had success within “the system” are timid and distrustful of anyone they are not familiar with. Therefore, in order to be of service and assistance, building relationships is a must!

Zack and Ambica realized that the class, by fully collaborating with our community partners, developed a new definition of “us.” For Zack: “As we participated in the process of project development, I found myself becoming connected to my home community in ways I had never before been.” For Ambica:

Lynne strongly encouraged us to identify ourselves as friends of the FRC as opposed to a university group providing charity. It was extremely important to understand the emphasis on good

communication skills and on being a good listener when talking to the parents enrolled in the programs. It became evident during this project that the identity of the collaborative group was not divided into an isolated concept of “us” that included the university seminar group but more a universal “us” that included members of the community.

### *Learning from Flawed Research*

The project developed for this class was a first-time effort in community-based research, both for Lynne and for us. Lynne purposely left plans incomplete in order to involve students, as well as community partners, in the ground floor of the project. As a result, all of us learned a great deal about the construction of community-based inquiry. Shelley’s points describe the negotiated, developmental aspect of the research:

I slowly began to understand the key role that mutuality and reciprocity played in service learning. From the very beginning of our project, we strived to create a sense of “teamwork” with the FRC. Together, we examined the goals of the project, which focused on maintaining and creating programs most needed and desired by the families, especially lower-income families. After learning of the FRC goals, we brainstormed with the leaders ideas for achieving them. We concluded that a family survey would be helpful. So, on our own accord, our class drafted a parent survey. We decided that in order to achieve a “teamwork” atmosphere, it was important to gain parent input. Our class decided to involve a few volunteer parents in mock interviews. The input the parents gave us, along with the input from the administrators, allowed us to create a user-friendly form which we believed would provide us with the best information.

Student input and critique were encouraged throughout the research. It was an imperfect project, and some of us were disappointed in the results. Still, we learned valuable things about conducting research, especially investigations that aim to include hard-to-reach populations. As Rhondalynn noted:

I enjoyed the interaction with the parents and children, but at the same time felt we weren’t able to get to the root of the problem. The final report contained significant data for program evaluation, so I believe our project may be considered successful. It was certainly a success in regard to giving us some practical experience.

We alerted our community partners to our concerns. Together, we changed our tactics in order to reach parents in government housing. According to literature on this form of service, changes in the inquiry process should be expected (Strand et al., 2003). We felt this intervention was a turning point in the investigation. As Michelle remembered:

We were finally able to make contact with the Resident’s Council in our target neighborhood. A few of us attended several Council meetings. To our dismay, most people who attended the meeting were hesitant to talk with us. So, we used the opportunity to learn more about some of the situations people faced. We found out that most of the residents were very distrustful of “outsiders” because of past situations that occurred. We knew from then on that it was going to take more time on our part to build relationships with hard-to-reach parents and to include their voices in this process.

Denisha shared the following conclusions:

As I tried to make sense of the limitations of our work in relation to working with people, I realized that providing service *with* others meant more than a sense of physical presence. To truly work with others you must begin the collaborative process from the beginning. Although we partnered with the leaders of the community organization, we did not include members from the targeted group in our initial design of the project. I would recommend, next time, inviting representatives from the targeted community group to share their ideas on how our work could be most effective.

Shelley captured the essence of learning from flawed research: “We all left with a sense of understanding how glitches might occur in community service projects, for, if we understand our shortcomings, perhaps we can work to fix them!”

### *Rethinking our Service*

We learned service. We unsettled our preconceived notions of service, interrogated our positionality in regard to community work, practiced a distinctive approach to service, revised our service project in-progress to better meet local aims, and continually criticized our perceptions and actions. How did we “get it?”

### *Service as Object*

When service itself was the object of examination, we could ponder it as person, place, and thing. We

studied our subjectivity in regard to it, considered our sense of community with it, and compared our ideas of it. The notion was contested, debated, deconstructed, and reconstructed. We directed our whole attention to making meaning of service, rather than to learning something else through service, as is often the case.

We did not just do service, we stepped back from it and studied its distinctive forms, underlying ethics, and different qualities. We considered the extent to which charity enabled or disabled the civic, examining our motives for giving to others. We wondered if community-based research served the community or just the agency with which we worked. We questioned what it really meant to empower socially marginalized families. Our field work was not the apex of service, but rather a means to an end. Our goal became a fuller grasp of service itself.

### *Service as Civic*

Initially, we thought of service as charity. We lacked conceptual frames and practical tools to imagine civic contribution in other ways. The consideration of service as a relationship with others that was jointly envisioned and implemented expanded our options for service. The notion of positionality was significant for us. As we considered ourselves in relation to others—and they to us—we questioned easy categorizations of “server” and “served.” Several of us had been recipients of charity as children; now we found ourselves situated as “givers.” All of us realized that our target group, hard-to-reach parents, faced problems far more complicated than simple designations of successful/unsuccessful might allow. We interrogated positions of “giver/receiver” and “have/have not,” growing increasingly uncomfortable with these binaries.

We became interested in building community through shared control, another new idea for us. Enabling our civic came to mean finding ways to work with people on a project of need, forming a sense of community among all of us. Enabling our civic meant seeking ways to empower all involved.

### *Action/Reflection*

As posed in Rhoads (1997) and drawn from Friere’s (1970) notion of praxis, action/reflection were inseparable for us. We engaged in an ongoing back-and-forth exchange between thought and practice. We put our conceptual preparation to work, raising questions through service that helped us fully grasp important ideas. We discussed shared control, tried it, “bobbled” it, reconsidered it, and tried it once again. Our actions signified our thoughts and then triggered renewed considerations. Dressing casually, avoiding

titles, and representing ourselves as community friends signified shared control. However, it triggered puzzlement about the extent to which we actually shared control with hard-to-reach parents.

Central to action/reflection was a no-holds-barred stance toward critique. Lynne challenged us to theorize from practice, glean ideas from weak and strong aspects of the service project. This perspective allowed us to approach criticism as something that was healthy and non-threatening. We saw our foibles and faults as learning opportunities.

A sense of joint endeavor helped us struggle with problems and glean insights. We helped to create the service project, so we shared responsibility for its imperfections. Lynne joined us for the field work, experiencing the ups and downs of service with us. We realize that our status as a small graduate seminar afforded more time for Lynne’s engagement, but still we found instructor participation vital. Our theoretical proposals developed from common encounters in real time.

### *Service Leadership*

At the outset of the class, Lynne invited us to become service leaders as well as servant learners. We considered ourselves prepared for the direction of our own service projects and research. Our final assignment was to develop a plan for our future engagement in service. We think this identification deepened our sense of significance for our conceptual and practical work. We “got it” partly because, on many levels, we felt it was crucial to do so.

### Framing a New Approach

What does it mean to learn service? We submit a framework for learning service as forms, motivations, standards, and types of reflection. We do not privilege one form of service or another; instead we suggest degrees to which each type enables the civic.

### *Forms*

Service is not monolithic. In learning service, several questions about form and function are pertinent. What is it that we do in the name of service? How can we learn to differentiate among forms of service?

Charity is the most common form for service learning (Gorham, 1992; Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2004; Rhoads, 1997). Why? Do student/citizens like us simply equate charity with service? A study by Wang and Jackson (2005) sheds light on this question. In a study of over 300 service learners at a large university, these researchers found that students identified charity as the dominant form for

civic involvement. Students reported that they felt more willing than able to perform service, and they felt more comfortable doing charity than acting for change. These findings suggest that students need to learn more about service to understand and address their comfort/discomfort with charitable and activist forms of service.

Simonelli, Earle, and Story (2004) found that even when students learned to serve through accompaniment, they preferred charitable work. As part of an anthropology class, college students lived and worked in Southern Mexico, among a Zapatista minority group. After four days, and disgruntled by the lack of “service,” they asked to meet with their teachers. Students wanted to build a school or make some other visible difference in local life. They failed to grasp their mission as one of shared *communiqué*. The pull of making a difference through giving to others is, apparently, quite strong.

In learning service, students should examine the extent to which charity demonstrates engagement in civic life. Morton (1995) describes “thick” or deep charity as a spiritually based commitment that bears witness to the worth of other persons. He argues that “thick” charity is just as legitimate as project-based or justice-oriented service work. Alternatively, Westheimer and Kahne (2004), among many others, identify charity as weakly civic, emphasizing individual virtue, obscuring needs for collective action, and distracting attention from systemic solutions to social concerns. However, charitable impulses continue to draw students, like ourselves, to service work. In learning service, this conundrum should be addressed. Students should be allowed to question the civic, democratic potential of charity, yet to acknowledge its worth as a genuine outpouring of humanitarian regard.

### *Ethics*

Ethical impulses dictate service forms. The following questions can prompt students’ consideration about their intentions to serve: What motivations spur us to serve? How does service impact our values and views?

From a charitable service perspective, learners serve to help others or to make a difference. As noted earlier, internal dispositions toward deep compassion can spur action. Charity can, however, express attitudes of *noblesse oblige* (O’Grady & Chappell, 2000), or paternalism toward less fortunate (and less capable) others. This latter motivation can stymie a public, collective sense of “we.” With a focus on learning service, reasons for charitable work can be explored, relationships between “server” and “served” can be queried, and implications of service from positions of privilege can be considered.

Henry’s (2005) work is instructive. She cautions against oversimplification of the server/served binary. She finds this comparison “too blunt to reveal the variety of identities that both servers and the served actually live within” (p. 44). Henry urges service learning educators to help students cultivate more sophisticated understandings of their identities, as well as the identities of others, and to search for commonalities with those they serve. Dacheux’s (2005) reflections support this aim. A first generation college student, Dacheux describes the tensions she felt in serving groups much like her own. She balked at feelings of superiority, but she experienced them none-the-less. The server/served binary created a distance between herself and the youth she hoped to help. Several of us, too, experienced service as a strange *déjà vu*: we rendered service as adults that we once received as children. In our case, positionality (Rhoads, 1997), a reference point for our cultural, social, and economic situatedness, provided a means to reflect on our identities and on our relations with those served.

From a democratic service perspective, students can practice a collaborative ethos of service, thinking of themselves as servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977), or leaders who act as learners. Servant leaders respond to problems by listening and learning, and then by offering their resources to assist with community needs. As they learn from and act with others, their effort is recognized as local leadership.

Additionally, students can develop an ethic of caring. To care is to feel and act in empathy *with*, or in responsiveness to the concerns and hopes of others (Noddings, 1984; Rhoads, 1997). Care *with* others, as a collaborative mood of mutual humanness, is at the root of this notion of empathy. Students can recognize that service is as an encounter with strangers (Radest, 1993), and they can consider cultural immersion as a way to develop a sense of care with others. They can accompany or live with strangers for a time in order to develop relationships across diverse cultural groups (Simonelli et al., 2004).

From a justice-oriented service perspective, students can develop critical consciousness or heightened awareness of racism and other forms of injustice (Deans, 1999; Pompa, 2005; Rosenberger, 2000). In trying to connect with the true constituency for our service project, we found two dynamics central to the development of critical consciousness: dialogues with stakeholders, or people actually served, and opportunities for problem-posing. When students talk as equals with stakeholders, they can grasp reality from a “have-not” perspective. When students problem-pose, they can unveil reality and search for more humane ways of living.

### Standards

Learning service ought to focus on outstanding qualities: What kinds of exemplars can be envisioned for each form of service? Are there ways in which quality work can be defined, particularly for each service situation?

As noted above, Morton (1995) suggests that there are “thin” or “thick” interpretations of service. A “thin” translation lacks integrity and depth; a “thick” translation demonstrates both. Integrity of purpose, clear ideas, and well informed actions ought to define standards for service. Some possibilities for outstanding service of various types follow.

“Thick” charity is grounded in unconditional love (Harper, 1999), profound compassion, or humanistic regard for others (Foos, 1998). It is a “there but for the grace of God go I” testament to human equality. “Thick” charity is a reaching out to fellow humans in times of their distress. It is not throwing money at a problem to salve one’s conscience or to hope that the problem will go away. In learning service, students should ponder “thick” aims and ends for charitable work.

From a democratic point of view, expectations are for mutuality and reciprocity: calls to work collaboratively, responsibly, and responsively with community partners are at the heart of service efforts. These standards are roundly discussed in service learning literature. Usually the development of collaborative relations is the province of the instructor. If students were given opportunities to probe and practice collaboration and mutuality, such learning could stand out.

As a case in point, Lynne wrote extensively about “shared control” as a promise to serve *with*, not for, community people as co-learners and co-actors (Boyle-Baise et al., 2001; Boyle-Baise, 2002). However, until the graduate seminar noted above, she did not teach her pre-service teachers to share control for their service experiences. Her previous students lived this ideal, as community partners shared control as co-instructors for service learning, but they were not privy to Lynne’s ruminations on the concept itself. In learning service, standards should be considered by instructors and students alike.

In order to be truly collaborative, partnerships should affirm cultural and social diversity. In our case, the community partnership seemed diverse, but it was limited to agency staff, thus overlooking local leaders. Because we studied shared control, as ideal and real, we wondered why our target service group (hard-to-reach parents) were not at the table when the project was planned. We thought about the kinds of local acuity needed to tap into underserved constituencies as part of public work. The delicate development of partnerships

can be studied, affording students a complicated view of what it means to work *with* a community.

From a justice-oriented view, equity is a standard for service. Equity differs from mutuality in that it confronts power as well as relationship. In service dedicated to developing critical consciousness or preparing for social change, it is important that everyone serves and learns. For example, in the Inside-Out Program (Pompa, 2005) college students and prison inmates learn from the standpoints of each other. Outstanding service, from this stance, should question patronization, support human dignity, and foster interchange. When feasible, students should participate in and learn from experiences of advocacy.

### Reflections

Reflection is a common dimension of service courses. It turns experience into learning as students reconsider their service. However, reflection can differ enormously in tone and intent.

What kinds of reflection might correlate with charitable, democratic, or justice-oriented forms of service?

The purpose and type of reflection correlated with charitable endeavors is not always clear. Morton (1995) reveals that in his own courses he used reflection on direct service—such as care for infants at an AIDs center, to prompt insights about systemic racism—with dismal results. Students failed to see connections between their service and course work. It is almost impossible to draw insights about social change from charitable work. Students can instead utilize reflection to deconstruct charity, considering the strengths and weaknesses of giving as a form of civic life.

Deans’ (1999) work with composition classes informs our consideration of reflection. For Deans’ students, language was meaningful. The use of different prepositions signified different aims and ends. In writing *for* the community, composition classes assisted non-profit organizations in their creation of brochures, press releases, and newsletters. Reflective activities focused on completion of the tasks at hand and in a cooperative spirit. In writing *about* community, composition classes engaged in traditional community service (e.g., tutoring youth, or working at a homeless shelter), then drew upon their experiences to write essays of social analysis or cultural critique. Reflection focused on assessment of social issues and on development of social imagination. Reflection in the first case was democratic and collaborative in nature; in the second it was justice-oriented and critical in kind.

In the J762 seminar, we worked with a non-profit organization, conducting an inquiry into the services it provided. As Deans (1999) found, we became highly involved in the research activity, and our reflective



conversations centered on investigation itself. Yet, an overarching focus on learning service prompted us to step back from the immediate project and to consider its limits. We recognized that our task was reformist and attuned to the improvement of programs for a non-profit agency. We realized that we wanted a more transformative task, an opportunity to seek input from and respond to marginalized parents. Our reflections spurred us to modify our actions toward transformative aims. Our experience suggests that both collaborative and critical aims can be considered when reflection is used to learn explicitly about service.

In summary, learning service can turn educators' attention to service itself. Learning service can help students consider "what it takes" to serve, explore the kinds of service they do, and critique the results of the service they accomplish.

#### Daring to Teach Service

What implications can be drawn from an emphasis on learning service for higher education? Public service might become the central, analytic focus of so-called "service learning" classes. Analysis of service might move from discourse in scholarly journals to discussion in college classrooms. Attention to service might be made an explicit aspect of the teaching and learning experience.

Extant standards of "best" practice for service learning might be questioned. As Butin (2005) suggests, there is no objective way to claim goodness for one manner of service learning or another. Rather, there are different aims and ends for service and views of self in service. Students might study service as text, as their engagement in particular sorts of civic acts.

Service can be deconstructed in order that students might puzzle through it from the inside-out. A conceptual framework for service is proposed here. Students and instructors might heighten their perceptions of service through clarification of its forms, ethics, and standards. Students might practice varied foci for reflection based on service form and function.

Educators can recognize the promises and shortcomings of any approach to service, and they can educate students to do the same. They can draw on a wealth of possibilities for service, as pertinent to local community projects. A powerful means of teaching service is to theorize from practice, or to reflect upon public work while doing it. Students can develop their civic understanding through analysis of their service practice.

Students can learn democratic crafts as they learn service. For example, if mutuality becomes a topic of concern for instructor and students, both can ponder meanings, actions, and results of conjoint endeavor. However, if positionality becomes an item of

consideration, instructors and students can wonder about benefits and barriers to the creation of relationships with others. In addition, if students assist in the construction of service projects, they can learn to deliberate, act, and react as part of public negotiations. The public seems to see service learning as a panacea, as something that can combat civic idiocy, invigorate public discourse, and motivate democratic action. It is hard to imagine any pedagogy with such power, but, certainly, service can enable the civic. It can help educate individuals who will take a range of civic actions to meliorate distress, improve democratic life, and/or redress injustice. In order to enable the civic, service should be taught. The following questions are central to this pursuit:

- Why does one do service?
- What does it mean to serve with others?
- What kinds of service might one do?
- In what ways can service enable the civic?
- In what ways can service develop critical consciousness?
- How can students critique the acts of service they do?

The authors hope that this article spurs further discussion of these questions and of the overarching aim to learn service. We recommend the consideration of service itself as an object of study.

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