# Democratic and Social Justice Goals in Service-Learning Evaluation: Contemporary Challenges and Conceptual Resources

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*This paper is part of a study on the long-term effects of participation in a comprehensive service-learning program on alumni knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective democratic citizenship. In this article, the larger research project is introduced and its central questions are put into historical context. I contend that critical consideration of the changing context of higher education in recent decades – especially the advent of neoliberalism and a transformation in the meaning of the terms* civic *and* citizenship *– indicates the need for a more robust normative conceptual framework if democratic and justice goals of service-learning are to be incorporated meaningfully into evaluation work. Based on these historical/ideological challenges, I identify some core theoretical problems that must be addressed in evaluating service-learning's outcomes vis-à-vis democracy and social justice, and then explore conceptual resources for developing an adequate framework.*

**D**oes participation in an intensive service-learning experience during college contribute to the development and exercise of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective citizenship in modern democratic society? This is one of the research questions posed at the outset of a three-year-long, in-depth qualitative case study of the impact on alumni of the International and National Voluntary Service Training (INVST) Community Leadership Program (CLP) at the University of Colorado Boulder.[1] Qualitative interviews of 18 alumni from across the program's 24-year history were supplemented by participant observations and analysis of organizational documents – including regular alumni newsletter updates – to identify features of social justice and democratic identity in alumni narratives of their life and career trajectories. The findings help to contextualize and interpret organizational data on subsequent careers of program alumni as well as with evaluating program outcomes – specifically, how well the program achieves its stated goal to "develop engaged citizens and leaders who work for the benefit of humanity and the environment" (INVST Community Studies, 2014).

The task of evaluating the impact of service-learning involves clarifying the intended aims of a program at the outset, and operationalizing these so that they can be measured and assessed (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). It became apparent as the CLP study progressed that the central goals that motivate the service-learning for civic engagement movement must be clarified, not only for purposes of accurately evaluating outcomes of past and present practice, but for the preservation of the democratic and justice character of ser-

vice-learning given efforts toward greater institutionalization in higher education (Furco & Holland, 2009; Speck & Hoppe, 2004).

Over the last decade-and-a-half, an intensifying debate amongst scholars has raised new questions about the role and effectiveness of service-learning programming and other civic engagement initiatives in educating for democratic citizenship (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000; O'Grady, 2000; Varlotta, 1997; Vergee, 2010). Kliewer (2013), for example, poses the question: "Given the degree to which the civic engagement field has been institutionalized in higher education, why has the field failed to achieve clearly defined democratic and justice aims?" (p. 72). He states in the title of his article that, at least as presently practiced, "the civic engagement movement *cannot* achieve democratic and justice aims" (p. 72; emphasis added). This provocative claim is based on the argument that given the ideological forces at work in our broader social and economic contexts, the practice of service-learning fails to promote essential democratic education aims related to social justice, and may in fact serve to reproduce and even legitimate unjust and undemocratic outcomes. Respond-ing to such a claim calls not only for empirical investigation but also conceptual clarification. To conduct meaningful evaluation, the aforementioned "clearly defined democratic and justice aims" must in fact be clearly defined.

Service-learning outcomes cannot be evaluated without attention to the ideological frames that influence popular meanings ascribed to the pedagogy's central goals. The challenges associated with developing an adequate theoretical framework for the evaluation of service-learning programming especially

have to do with a shifting ideological context – specifically, the growing influence of neoliberalism – which has redefined popular notions of "citizenship" and "civic" in consequential ways. Clarifying the substantive meaning of these terms is essential to assessing whether and to what extent these aims have been achieved in programs such as CLP.

Length parameters of the typical journal article preclude providing detailed description or analysis of the qualitative data here; instead, this will be the task of a subsequent article that is being prepared. Nevertheless, rather than presenting this article as a stand-alone conceptual treatise, I have opted, for better or worse (perhaps for better and worse) to situate the theoretical questions and proposals that follow within the larger INVST CLP evaluation project. In doing so, I hope to avoid a pitfall that often attends highly stylized forms of academic writing that, in Medawar's (1963) phrase, presents a "totally misleading narrative" of the relationship of process and outcomes in research (p. 378). As philosopher of education Bridges (2006) observes, philosophers and others whose work is primarily conceptual sidestep such accusations "by their practice of saying nothing by way of preface to their writing about the method they have employed in its derivation and construction" (p. 181). Accordingly, while the conclusions reached in this paper are mainly conceptual and, in principal, valid across a range of evaluation contexts, I have situated these within the specific institutional context from which they emerged. Hopefully, this renders both the usefulness and limitations of my conclusions more transparent.

Information gathered through various sources about CLP alumni revealed a wide array of diverse experiences during and after participation in the program. An adequate conceptual model must allow for situating these various experiences in terms of desired democratic and justice learning, and enable analysis of patterns of both success and failure related to achieving these outcomes. Some of the more dramatic patterns in CLP alumni narratives tracked socially significant categories of difference (race, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.), highlighting the influence on student learning of inequalities among students as well as between students and community partners. Within a pluralist society such as the U.S., democracy and justice educational goals should, ideally, be more or less valid in the case of students who are privileged and for those who are relatively disadvantaged, and provide theoretical guidance for evaluating disparities in how students of different backgrounds and group membership are impacted by participation in service-learning and civic engagement programming.

In light of these considerations, I propose a model that synthesizes and balances key elements of ser-

vice-learning's two major theoretical traditions, what I refer to as Freirean-critical and Deweyan-pragmatic (Deans, 1999). The proposed model, which centers a substantive yet flexible conception of democratic identity that is consistent with the civic mission of most universities, incorporates a number of different goals articulated by diverse service-learning scholars and practitioners but which runs explicitly counter to neoliberal redefinitions of democracy and citizenship. By detailing the considerations that motivated the construction of this model, I hope to convey the need for renewed reflexivity and creativity on the part of those who design and evaluate service-learning curricula and programs, a need made all the more pressing by the growing institutionalization of service-learning at many colleges and universities.

## Background

Advocates have long argued that service-learning represents a promising, even imperative, response to the many perceived pedagogical and organizational challenges facing twenty-first century higher education institutions (Stern, 2014; Tinkler, Tinkler, Gersti-Pepin, & Mugisha, 2014; Wofford, 1994). I use the term service-learning inclusively, covering a wide range of opportunities available in the context of higher education, in keeping with the classic and often-cited definition from Bringle and Hatcher (1995):

> Service learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and *an enhanced sense of civic responsibility*. (pp. 112-122; emphasis added)

A standard periodization of modern service-learning's development would likely include its invention in the late 1960s and early 1970s; its continued growth at the margins, leading to the creation of large formal organizations in the 1980s; the explosive development of new forms of practice and organization, followed by a wave of research and theorizing throughout the 1990s and into the early twentieth-first century; and finally, the current phase of service-learning's development, marked by goals of increased institutionalization within colleges and universities. While such a narrative is likely familiar to service-learning scholars and practitioners, rarely noted or critically examined is the relationship of this history to simultaneous processes of marketization and corporatization in higher education.

The roots of service-learning for civic engagement can be traced to transformations that roiled university and college campuses in the late 1960s, especially during what Geiger (2011) terms "the great student rebel-

lion" (p. 61) of 1967 to 1969. Perhaps most notably, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the national organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) linked calls for democratization of their institutions – for both greater student autonomy and participation in official decision-making – with a demand that the university become more involved in pressing issues facing the wider society (Geiger, 2011; Hayden, 2008). During this period, the term "ivory tower" gained new currency as a pejorative, suggesting insularity and impracticality, and was increasingly applied from within and beyond the university walls (Driscoll, 2008). The proliferation of participatory, experiential approaches to teaching and learning was one response to student and faculty demands for greater social relevance (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001).

The marketization of higher education is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011). As Schrecker (2010) suggests, "Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s…[universities] were evolving into ever more bureaucratized organizations with an increasingly market-oriented set of priorities" (p. 154). One of the most important mechanisms of marketization was federal legislation whereby, in the early 1970s, public support for higher education shifted from "institutions to student aid, making students consumers" (Slaughter & Rhoades, p. 436). The logic of free market competition and increasingly corporate models of governance became powerful forces across the entire higher education sector as institutions competed not only for students and tuition dollars but also for research grants and the new opportunities for technology and product development made possible by changes to patent and conflict-of-interest laws in most states (Geiger, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades). By the onset of the 1980s, postsecondary institutions from large research universities to technical and community colleges were working to articulate their place within a new, increasingly globalized economic order (Slaughter & Rhoades). The civic engagement movement – the broader movement with which service-learning was identified – emerged as a response to perceptions of increasing individualism, consumerism, and materialism among students at this time – personal beliefs and attitudes related to the marketization and privatization occurring at the level of institutions.

During the 1980s, service-learning enthusiasts coalesced around new organizations that promised increased cross-institutional coordination and influence; foremost amongst these were the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), created by students in 1984, and Campus Compact, founded by three university presidents in 1985. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the National Community Service Act, which allocated $275 million for k-16 service-learning programs (Myers-Lipton, 1998), inaugurating what was arguably the decade in which service-learning underwent its most vibrant phase of organizational, theoretical, and practical development. Service-learning's ascent to the upper echelons of pedagogical fashion culminated with its christening as the pedagogy of the 1990s across many U.S. campuses (Hironimus-Wendt & Lowell-Troy, 1999).

The INVST CLP was established at the University of Colorado Boulder at the start of this period. At its inception in 1989 as a kind of "domestic Peace Corps" opportunity for college students, the CLP was conceived as a solution to the problems of unmet social needs and of increasingly disaffected/alienated young people as well as the growing influence of "private materialism" (Myers-Lipton, 1998, p. 243) on campuses and in the society at large.

Widespread experimentation in service-learning curricula and organizations supported a wave of empirical research on service-learning's effects and more explicit and systematic theorizing (Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy, 1999). As Timmons (1992) observed, in the early 1990s "most of the support for service-learning comes from educators' beliefs and experiences" (quoted in Myers-Lipton, 1998, p. 245) rather than from research on teaching and learning. From 1990-1994, the CLP's founding director conducted research on program outcomes, which eventually served as the basis for his doctoral dissertation in Sociology (Myers-Lipton, 1994) and a subsequent pair of articles (Myers-Lipton, 1996, 1998). One of these (1996) appeared in the third volume of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, one of several new specialized journals whose creation signaled the increasing production of and demand for service-learning scholarship. Other research on the program was conducted at this time: The CLP was featured in a study by Kraft and Swadener (1994); the Corporation for National Service selected the CLP to be part of a national evaluation of "Learn and Serve America, Higher Education Programs" in 1995; and the program was part of a national study that resulted in the publication of the seminal manual *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning* (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). The legitimation of service-learning research and practice within higher education was well underway, and "early adopters" (Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon, 2010) such as the CLP reflected as well as promoted the pedagogy's growing popularity.

Service-learning entered into national political discourse in 1993 when the Clinton administration studied the CLP and two other programs as models for a proposed nationwide program to train college students for community service. This and other interest

from the highest levels of government during the 1990s corresponded to the crystallization and mainstream dominance of the neoliberal paradigm that had already been remaking the U.S. social, political, legal, and economic landscapes since at least the late 1960s. Associated with the New Democrat coalition within the Democratic Party and the Clinton Administration in the U.S., and with Tony Blair and his New Labour Party in the U.K., this new brand of politics became known as the *Third Way*. The Third Way elided old divides between the political right and left with big electoral dividends. Divisions between the public and private sectors were softened or eroded by new "partnerships" established for the private (and profitable) provision of services previously controlled by government (Giddens, 2003, p. 16). In 1996, passage of "welfare reform" was signed into law by a Democratic administration – although "welfare abolition" more accurately describes this approach – fulfilling Clinton's campaign promise to "end welfare as we have come to know it" (Clinton, 1991).

Support for programs such as AmeriCorps was increasingly seen by politicians (and university presidents) on both the right and left as a winning proposition. In the words of Pennsylvania Democratic Senator Harris Wofford, service-learning "holds so much promise for reforming education at all levels, while at the same time renewing our society, national imagination, and collective spirit" (quoted in Myers-Lipton, 1998, p. 244). True, resistance from Republican lawmakers watered down the initial legislation, and prevented Clinton's initial goal of 100,000 volunteers per year from ever being realized (Mulhere, 2014). Nevertheless, it became clear that allying oneself with voluntary service initiatives meant that one could be viewed as a supporter (and reformer!) of higher education while simultaneously addressing social problems, and all this at a minimal cost to government and without divisive battles over social and economic policy. In this historical perspective, the Clinton administration's "new centrism" was similar in substance if not always in style to the "compassionate conservatism" of his successor, George W. Bush. Of course there were at that time many real differences between the two major U.S. political parties – then, as now, partisan polarization at the federal level was on the rise. The embrace of service initiatives cut across these divisions, promising political gains while entailing little to no financial cost – which is to say, little to no political risk.

As neoliberal agendas of privatization and marketization have increasingly come to dominate public institutions, challenges to the viability of a "traditional" university education have been resuscitated (Bok, 2006; Frank & Gabler, 2006). As in the past, these challenges gained traction during a period of eco-

nomic crisis. Critics focus on the question of whether students are ready for employment in the labor market upon graduation and on whether universities are operating such that their products and services might improve the overall competitiveness of the U.S. economy. At the same time, costs associated with attendance are steadily increasing, largely a result of declining support from state legislatures and an increased reliance on tuition subsidized by student financial aid (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011).

During the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the subsequent recession period, many service-learning and voluntary service initiatives feared they would be first on the chopping block. While there was a significant reduction in federal funding for AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America, the feared elimination of service-learning programs by campus administrators never materialized. Indeed, in the run up to the 2008 presidential election, candidates Obama and McCain both unveiled their own national service plan, which were nearly identical in substance (Shear & Waisman, 2008). President Obama signed a bill based on his campaign proposal into law in 2009, reauthorizing earlier federal acts of 1973 and 1990 as the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. This legislation was framed in terms foreshadowing the Obama administration's introduction of a spate of neoliberal reforms aimed at higher education, including a proposal for a system of public labeling of institutions based on graduation and employment figures and increasing public/private partnerships between higher education and the for-profit sector – especially between community colleges and the business community.

Given the combination of pressures facing university and college administrators, embracing service-learning has gained appeal as part of a good strategy for countering criticisms of higher education that targets its alleged insularity vis-à-vis the wider society and, in particular, to the world of work. Support for a few small but well publicized service-learning programs also lends an air of credibility to the trumpeting of renewed commitment to long neglected words like *civic* and *public* in higher education institution charters and mission statements. The idea of *engaged citizenship*, however, has taken on a different meaning, in the context of the neoliberal privatization of formerly public institutions: The engaged citizen is conceived as a *semi-private* citizen, voluntarily providing one's time, labor, and material resources to ameliorate the pressing social needs that government (and by implication, the larger public) is unable or unwilling to address (Meens, 2012), while gaining academic credit and experience to bolster one's resume.

The influence of neoliberal ideology in these developments has gone little noticed by most scholars and practitioners of civic engagement (Kliewer,

2013). More specifically, leading proponents of greater institutionalization (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; Klentzin & Wierzbowski-Kwiatkowak, 2013) typically fail to consider ways that neoliberalism's erosion of the public sphere and transformation of dominant notions of citizenship contribute to the appeal of service-learning among both government officials (Meens, 2012) and university administrators.

Institutionalization of service-learning is presently regarded by many civic engagement scholars and practitioners as a promising goal for the movement. In this view, once service-learning has achieved official legitimacy and support its promise for the transformation of higher education can finally and fully be realized (Furco & Holland, 2009). For others – a relative minority – official embrace signals the tragic demise of whatever in service-learning was worth promoting. In this latter perspective, institutionalization involves something akin to what Kenneth Burke (1937) famously called the "bureaucratization of the imaginative" whereby a one-time vital and innovative practice undergoes a "process of dying" as it becomes integrated into relatively inflexible, pre-existing socio-cultural structures. Whatever else one might say concerning prospects for institutionalization, there is little doubt that decisions are being made now concerning the organization, theory, and practice of service-learning that will exert great influence on the shape of things to come. Therefore, as processes of institutionalization gain momentum in many corners, understanding service-learning's long-term impact on students over the past several decades is all the more critical – for judging what the increased institutionalization of present structures and practice likely portends, and for thoughtfully informing and hopefully influencing decisions concerning what forms service-learning ought to take and why.

## Challenges in Evaluating Service-Learning Student Outcomes

The vast majority of service-learning programming explicitly aims to foster civic engagement and promote democratic ideals (Campus Compact, 2003). Does participation in service-learning support increased student civic engagement in the long-term? Does service-learning support the goals of more democratic and justice-oriented citizens, communities, and a more equitable society? To begin to answer these questions, Myers-Lipton's (1995, 1996, 1998) study of the CLP employed a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design with pre- and post-test surveys. He found that participants demonstrated a significant increase in levels of "civic responsibility," "locus of control (societal)," and

"civic behavior," as well as a notable decrease in participants' levels of "modern racism" (1996). These increases were larger than those measured for students in two control groups – one that participated in community service but not service-learning, and another that did not participate in community service or service-learning (1998).

Myers-Lipton (1998) highlighted several critical issues arising from his study, four of which remain common problems in service-learning evaluation efforts in general. First, he could not satisfactorily address the issue of internal validity – since students self-selected into the treatment group, did selection bias influence the results? Second, an independent researcher did not conduct the study; Myers-Lipton was a staff member and instructor at the time as well as the primary investigator, raising the possibility of researcher bias. Third, he could not address the question of whether the effects he measured persisted over time. Finally, quantitative analysis could not answer the question of why the changes he measured had occurred, and so he called for qualitative research to investigate the basis of his results.

Since the time of Myers-Lipton's study, several longitudinal studies have documented modest to significant gains in civic responsibility and pro-social attitudes and actions attributable to service-learning (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Kiely, 2004, 2005; Moely & Ilustre, 2013); some of these studies have surveyed students up to ten years after participating in service-learning programming (Warchal & Ruiz, 2004). The growth of the evidence base concerning the connection of service-learning and civic engagement generally fails, however, to account for the broader dynamics of social and institutional change. As a result, there are construct validity issues related to changes in the prevailing social meaning of the terms in the analysis. Given the advent of neoliberal ideology described above, the question of the meaning of terms such as *civic*, *citizen*, *citizenship*, and *democracy* poses a clear validity threat to such longitudinal studies, which tend to rely upon a standard battery of survey metrics based on decades-old constructs (Moely & Ilustre, 2013; Myers-Lipton, 1998).

In designing a study to provide a (somewhat belated) response to Myers-Lipton's (1998) call for qualitative follow-up to his work, I initially sought to address only the limitations he directly cited. Most important was to answer the question of whether changes in attitudes and behavior persisted over time. I designed a retrospective study examining alumni narratives of their lives and aspirations prior to participation in the CLP, their time in the program, and their professional trajectories since completion. The issue of researcher independence could not be addressed since I, like so many researchers assessing service-

learning outcomes, was at the time a faculty member affiliated with the program under investigation.

I hoped to address the challenge of explaining observed statistical effects, and so used qualitative data and analysis to try to understand the social dynamics that explain diverse outcomes. Alumni were asked to describe their experience prior to and within the program as it related to their activities and identities vis-à-vis democratic citizenship and social justice. In-depth narratives of personal and group experiences within the program allowed for identification of changes over time and across cohorts in how students understood the mission and goals of the program. What precisely constitutes the "treatment" that participants in the CLP received and how this relates to long-term impact itself became a focus for interpretation within the interviews. In some cases, dialogue among participants and between participants and the researcher led to fine-tuning of the distinction between intended and unintended effects.

Words such as civic and citizenship frequently operate as what anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1987) termed "floating" or "shifting signifiers" – they take on different meanings for different users and across use-contexts (pp. 63-64). This is apparent, for instance, when scholars equate "civic engagement" with "community engagement," using these terms interchangeably (Kliewer, 2013, p. 72). *Community engagement* is defined by the Carnegie Foundation as "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and mutual reciprocity" (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2012). In such definitions, "civic" and "community" function as modifiers indicating an orientation toward any group that exists beyond one's own person, friends, and/or family – or, in this case, beyond one's campus.

Fostering such an orientation toward others can support a variety of outcomes. As Butin (2010) writes, "There are surely numerous historical examples of totalitarian regimes that prided themselves on citizens' sense of civic responsibility," so we can safely conclude that, "[service-learning] that enhances students' civic responsibility…does not necessarily also develop a stronger democracy" (p. 12). To use an extreme example, members of the Hitler Youth in Germany of the 1930s and 40s may offer a good approximation of an ideal of "civic mindedness" – members performed extensive voluntary service activities and likely felt a very strong commitment to their local, national (and perceived racial) communities – yet this commitment did not necessarily involve or promote democratic ideals.

The further stipulation that such collaboration must involve "mutually beneficial exchange" and that the context of this exchange be structured by "partnership and mutual reciprocity" seeks to limit the definition of engagement to positive forms, but even these provide no guarantee that outcomes will be consonant with democracy and justice goals. What counts as reciprocity will depend upon what different parties to the transaction value, which in turn depends upon their understanding of proper goals of social practice. As the example of the Hitler Youth illustrates, the substantive content of the ideals that individuals and communities organize themselves around matters a great deal for whether increased civic-mindedness, civic responsibility, and civic engagement will be a force for good or ill.

As mentioned previously, Kliewer (2013) argues that contemporary service-learning practice within a higher education context increasingly dominated by neoliberal ideology may in fact facilitate undemocratic and unjust outcomes. He asserts that

> If the civic engagement community cannot adequately respond to neoliberal ideology, we risk producing a type of citizen completely defined in relation to a market society, thereby precluding robust forms of civic engagement in which citizens organize, cooperate, and act outside the bounds of market and economic activity. (p. 73)

In other words, if the conceptions of *civic* and *citizen* that inform service-learning pedagogy are aligned with neoliberal ideology, then achieving outcomes of increased civic engagement may itself be destructive to democratic and justice aims at odds with an individualistic and consumeristic, market-based logic.

Neoliberalism is a term presently applied by scholars across a variety of analytic contexts, and its flexibility and variety of applications raises the question of its true theoretical value. Nevertheless, it provides an indispensable tool for understanding the ascendance over the last forty years of a new policy regime in education that combines elements of previously competing conservative and liberal proposals (Ward, 2012). Neoliberalism positions the citizen as a private consumer (or, in the case of voluntary service, a charitable provider) of individually and socially produced goods (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal critics of public education, for example, argue for greater school choice and voucher systems on the basis that these enable students and parents (the "consumers" of educational services) to "vote with their feet" (Chubb & Moe, 1990) as to which educational product they prefer. This metaphor pictures voting as the expression and pursuit of one's own (or one's child's) private good through a strategy of positioning for maximum social and economic advantage. Such self-maximizing by individuals, neoliberal school reformers argue,

will give rise to efficiency in the overall social and economic system, and this will ultimately benefit everyone involved. In the case of school choice initiatives, the thought is that if parents are able to abandon schools that fail to "produce results," then this will force the poorly performing school to improve in order to retain "customers." As this language of producers and consumers signals, one important way that neoliberal discourse redefines "civic life" is through a displacement of the central metaphor of *the forum* by that of *the market* (Bohman & Rehg, 1997). Under neoliberalism's influence, political processes are increasingly understood not in terms of dialogue among civic equals but rather as transactions between individuals or affinity groups with the purpose of *advancing one's own interests*.

Thus, neoliberal policies are corrosive to one of the foundational principles of democratic culture and politics, namely that a diverse human collective can discover – or perhaps create – a genuinely *public* good. Such a good is public in the sense that it transcends each individual's interests without being antithetical to them, and that this shared interest belongs equally to every citizen qua citizen (Feinberg, 2012). To understand oneself as a citizen is to see oneself as part of a social project in which one's interests necessarily involve and interact with the interests of others – in other words, to apprehend what Tocqueville (1835/1990) termed "self interest rightly understood." This is a very old idea, and to some degree it has animated democratic thought from its inception in ancient Athens (Woodruff, 2005) all the way to the modern period. It found expression during the Enlightenment in Rousseau's notion of the General Will, and it helped fuel the French and American Revolutions, as well as numerous mass movements for social change across the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries and into the twenty-first. It has been revitalized in the academy over the past several decades in the works of contemporary theorists of participatory and deliberative democracy (Bohman, 1998; Hayden, 2008).

## Limitations of Dominant Theoretical Frameworks

Perhaps the most influential proponent of participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy was John Dewey (1927/1946), who argued that the *public* is not something pre-existing and fixed, but rather must be brought into being through intelligent, communicative action. For Dewey, a society of shared interests becomes a democratic community only when its citizens become *conscious* of interdependence as well as individuality, and so achieve solidarity without effacing individual and group differences. Dewey's (1916/1997) vision of democracy was one of a pluralistic community engaged in collaborative inquiry, sometimes but not always through public dialogue and deliberation, into shared problems and their root causes, and coordinating collective action to create inclusive and mutually beneficial solutions.

Politics is defined by Deweyan democrats as a process of collective inquiry that, even through contestation and conflict, builds solidarity that constitutes the public as such (Dewey, 1927/1946). A corollary of neoliberalism's erosion of the public sphere, by contrast, is a *depoliticization* of citizenship (Mouffe, 1993, 2000; Young, 2001). Civic engagement, in this view, *should* be minimally political or even apolitical – for if politics is redefined in market terms as social positioning for private advantage, then service to others and politics do not mix. In fact, contemporary engagement initiatives frequently prohibit activities deemed "too political" alongside those that are explicitly religious. AmeriCorps, for example, identifies "attempting to influence legislation," "organizing or engaging in protests, boycotts, strikes," and "conducting a voter registration drive" on its current list of 15 "prohibited activities" (AmeriCorps, 2013). Do such prohibitions suggest that such activities are properly outside the "civic" domain? Interestingly, a major study published by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, 2011) found no relationship (positive or negative) between participation in AmeriCorps State and National service programs and whether a person participated in that most basic form of political engagement – voting; data spanning eight years indicates that people who performed voluntary service for one or more years were no more likely to vote than their similarly situated peers who had expressed interest in the AmeriCorps program but never enrolled.

Academic service-learning is distinct from volunteerism and community service, and so participation in the AmeriCorps program is a poor proxy. However, a group of service-learning scholars and practitioners who convened a conference in 2008 on the challenges facing the civic engagement movement cited the neglect and avoidance of the essentially political nature of engaged citizenship as one of the movement's most consequential failings (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Clearly depoliticization is recognized as an issue in academic service-learning. As Kliewer (2013) notes, these scholars failed to consider, or at least to articulate, the reasons for this failure – whether it might be symptomatic of the influence of neoliberal conceptions of civics and citizenship in the field of service-learning. As Mouffe (2000) argues, Third Way, neoliberal politics has de-politicized democracy in ways that undermine and obscure its implications concerning

social justice. Recognition of the neoliberal redefinition of citizenship and civic engagement is necessary if the problem is to be confronted and addressed and if the interrelated nature of democracy and justice goals is to be recovered.

A depoliticized neoliberal conception of citizenship has now distorted and even supplanted the Deweyan notion that framed the service-learning and civic engagement movement in earlier decades. This perhaps has been supported by some theorists who view Dewey's thought as lacking resources necessary for understanding and critiquing power relations and structural inequality (D'Amico, 1978; Thayer-Bacon, 2008). To address this alleged failing, a more recent strand of "critical" service-learning theory has been explicitly defined in opposition to neoliberal ideology (Giroux, 2008, 2014; Groenke, 2009). Myers-Lipton (1996, 1998) framed his study of the CLP in terms of critical education theory, which, in his characterization, "focuses on how dominant socioeconomic groups maintain power over the educational process, as well as how subordinate groups resist this domination" (p. 245). He approvingly cites McLaren's (1989) statement that the objective of *critical education theory* is "to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices…to heal, repair, and transform the world" (p. 160; quoted in Myers-Lipton, p. 245). Thus, Myers-Lipton's research on the CLP stands in a theoretical tradition inspired primarily by the work of Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (1970, 1998) that remains extremely influential across the field today (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood, & Milan, 2013).

With its attention to issues of power and inequality, as well as the way dominant ideology can disempower and dehumanize both oppressed and oppressor populations, critical educational theory remains a valuable resource in the context of neoliberal ideology. Such approaches "generally reflect a stand *against* repression, poverty, oppression, and injustice as well as *for* justice and equality," and "include disrupting power and co-constructing knowledge" (Kajner et al., 2013, p. 38). Since the time of Myers-Lipton's study, however, awareness of problems in applying critical educational theory in U.S. higher education contexts also has grown (Durst, 2006; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Gabel, 2002). Freire's (1970) foundational work in critical pedagogy is mainly concerned with educational processes that are likely to empower members of disadvantaged populations to become "politically literate" and so to become agents in historical processes. Regarding its relevance for U.S. higher education, Allen and Rossatto (2009) explain that, "Critical pedagogy is premised on the notion of the oppressed student as the idealized subject whose empowerment must take precedence in evaluating, devising, practicing, and imagining schooling" (p. 167).

While service-learning practice informed by critical pedagogy has sought to expose relations of inequality and oppression and then to *empower* students in U.S. institutions of higher education to transform these, Freire (1998) himself warned against the uncritical adoption of his analysis and pedagogical proposals which are specific to colonial and neo-colonial contexts of extreme poverty. More specifically, the very concept of *the oppressed* as a social position is defined in terms of another, that of *the oppressor*. In Freire's sense of these terms, it is unclear whether most students in universities and colleges in the U.S. belong to the former or the latter category. Thus, Allen and Rossatto (2009) pose the question, "Should critical pedagogy be used with U.S. middle- and upper-class White students without significant changes in the theory...itself?" (p. 165). Their answer is: Without significant refinement, no.

What are the potential consequences of engaging in critical pedagogy aimed at the further empowerment of students who are already relatively privileged? Practitioners and scholars have long worried that service-learning experiences may in some cases support students' pre-existing biases and attitudes toward members of marginalized and disadvantaged populations, thereby reinforcing social inequality – it is possible that in some cases "service-learning may simply reinforce students' deficit notions that blame the individual or the so-called culture of poverty for the ills that allowed students to engage in such service in the first place" (Butin, 2010, p. 12). A relatively new body of research focused on the educational experiences of privileged students, primarily in the contexts of exclusive private secondary schools and elite, highly selective colleges and universities, indicates that "the service ethic" frequently promoted in such settings serves a variety of purposes related to the constitution and maintenance of privileged identities for elite students (Gaztambide-Fernandz & Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008).

The pedagogical goals explicit and implicit in service-learning practice undergirded by critical education theory – with the form of engagement conceived as civic and the character conceived as democratic – have typically failed to take into account the actual social position of students in U.S. institutions of higher education. The aim of empowering students as historical agents formed the theoretical basis for Myers-Lipton's (1998) study, and remains influential in much service-learning scholarship and practice. Yet many (if not most) of the students that have participated in the CLP over the years are already privileged – their identities constituted, in part, by confidence in their ability and right to contribute to (and even dic-

tate) social conditions (Howard, 2008). Outcomes of increased empowerment may therefore, in the case of privileged students, be destructive to democratic aims. Democratic renewal may, in many contexts, require that privileged citizens exert less power, become more receptive to the experiences and claims of less advantaged others, and be more able to listen and exercise sociological imagination in deliberative contexts. Accordingly, a theoretical framework to assess service-learning's democratic and justice outcomes will need to attend to dynamics of student dispositions and identity formation, especially dynamics of identification, disidentification, and the desire for new learning across social power differentials. It will not aim to *empower* all students, at least not equally or in the same way.

Freire's critical pedagogy is often invoked by supporters of "transformative" models of service-learning in opposition to "charity" or "volunteer-based" models (Verjee, 2010). A dichotomous distinction between paradigms of charity-based and transformative service-learning, however, may be counterproductive, as it forces a false choice between preserving/reinforcing the status quo and social transformation. Indeed, a variety of democratic "characters" may be compatible with and even required by a genuinely democratic conception of engaged citizenship (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000) – for example, the activist, the volunteer, the negotiator, and the rational deliberator. The distinction between charity-based and transformative service-learning provides little guidance to theory and practice, given that democratic and justice aims will likely crosscut complex social practices. As MacMullen (2011) suggests, in some instances democratic and justice goals may require forms of "status quo bias" in civic education – inculcating, for example, a general commitment to support existing institutional arrangements necessary for meaningful political equality. What is needed, it seems, is a framework that enables principled judgment as to what in the status quo ought to be preserved and what must be transformed if democracy and social justice goals are to be realized, rather than a simple commitment to either "public work" or "social transformation."

## Toward (Re)Constructing a Democratic Justice Framework for Evaluation

To what extent can efforts to evaluate service-learning outcomes help reconstruct and sustain the movement's historic democratic and justice goals? Given the challenges and limitations of prevailing theory discussed above, I argue that the best chance for this lies in a *creative* return to theoretical foundations, whose resources must be interpreted anew in light of contemporary circumstance.

Dewey's ambitious philosophical integration of experience, education, and democracy became the major touchstones for pedagogical and curricular innovation in the late 1960s and early 70s that sought to integrate theory with practice and make university education relevant to pressing social problems (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Saltmarsh, 1996). Because it speaks to issues of social relevance facing the university again today, Dewey's philosophy remains a powerful strategic resource for framing the goals of service-learning. More importantly, Dewey's centering of the issue of the nature and possibilities of a genuine public stands as a desperately needed corrective to the privatization and depoliticization of citizenship that accompany neoliberalism. To highlight the creative, practice-based and context-specific nature of Dewey's normative version of democracy, I refer to the tradition emerging from his thought as the *Deweyan-pragmatic*.

The Deweyan-pragmatic tradition and critical pedagogy of the sort associated with Freire are more compatible at the levels of theory and practice than is sometimes supposed (Deans, 1999). Here, much can be learned from recent work bridging the putative opposition between deliberative and participatory theories of democracy in political philosophy (della Porta, 2013; Hildreth, 2012). Participatory democracy is concerned with structural inequalities, and seeks to fundamentally transform these through democratization of social institutions generally. The participatory citizen is an active (even activist) citizen that shapes public life and policy through direct engagement. Deliberative democracy, by contrast, is characterized by a focus on discursive reasoning about common problems that aims at generating outcomes acceptable to all. With its focus on legitimating political decisions and rational consensus, deliberative democracy to some extent takes status quo background conditions for granted. The deliberative citizen offers reasons and gives due consideration to the reasons provided by others, all of which are subject to mutually acceptable standards of rationality. A rough and ready contrast can be drawn between a deliberative focus on "word" and a participatory focus on "deed" (Hildreth, 2012).

As Hildreth (2012) suggests, participatory and deliberative practices, often treated in the academic literature as competing and contradictory ideals of "genuine" democracy, may be "distributed and sequenced" within a larger normative framework. Drawing upon Dewey, Hildreth suggests that these distinct but complementary democratic "moments" fit within a larger iterative process of cooperative inquiry. Different standards for democratic action can be invoked to assess the requirements of different moments. Indeed, differ-

ent democratic "characters" may be essential for the success of distinct democratic practices.

Furthermore, "One of the exciting features about recent work in participatory and deliberative theory is the close connection to practice" (p. 5). In the Deweyan-pragmatic approach, the ultimate test of theory is practical, in whether it enables the realization of valued ends in actual practice. Similarly, the normative ideals that inform service-learning evaluation can be integrated when we attend to the imperatives of democratic practice. Within the context of a long-term evaluation of the INVST CLP's impact, it became clear that despite the influence of a Freirean lexicon of "empowerment," something such as the ideals of democratic solidarity and "growth" (Dewey, 1938) were more flexible in making sense of experience, allowing for the fact that in order to achieve an authentic democratic identity some students need to learn skills associated with receptivity rather than activity and agency. Examining the relationship between college-level service-learning experiences and the long-term civic behaviors and attitudes of participants requires situating these attitudes and behaviors in terms of a framework for understanding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for participation in democratic politics and public life. These activities are essential to what Amy Gutmann (1999) terms the "conscious social reproduction" of the material and cultural conditions of our society. Rooted in the framework of deliberative democracy, Gutmann's conception of democratic character or identity provides a theoretical framework for service-learning evaluation that is flexible enough to provide pedagogical guidance in various U.S. educational contexts. It involves criteria of *non-domination*, *non-repression*, and a *democratic threshold*, which act as a check on the participation that undermines democracy itself, including the unearned privileges enjoyed by many students in higher education.

The democratic threshold is an education equity standard, and is defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective political participation. Gutmann says relatively little about the practical implications of this ideal for actual classroom and community practice – a defensible omission given her claim that the *content* of the democratic threshold is highly context-dependent and so is itself a matter for democratic deliberation. Specifying the content of the democratic threshold is one form that the articulation of a substantive conception of political citizenship might take. For the purposes of studying the INVST CLP, Gutmann's framework – non-domination, non-repression, and a democratic threshold – was supplemented with insights from critical multicultural education, which begins with a Freirean-critical interest in structural inequality, and thoroughly explores prob-

lems related to educating students about privilege as well as how dialogue and deliberation can be achieved in settings where students interact across social power differentials (Sleeter, 1995). Finally, since civic learning is, in this view, concerned with developing the *dispositions* associated with democratic character, an adequate framework also should incorporate work on the psychological and narrative dimensions of identity development, especially "the capacity for civic engagement" (Levine, 2011; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

The resources provided by the critical multiculturalism literature are even more significant in light of the fact that, as Keen and Hall (2009) have demonstrated, dialogue across difference *within the classroom* is a key to understanding the positive effects of service-learning on student dispositions. This was borne out powerfully in the case of the CLP. Researchers must beware of the tendency, evidenced in the scholarly literature, to juxtapose students, who are positioned as privileged, with service recipients or community partners and their constituents, who are often positioned as vulnerable or disadvantaged, as the most important or even sole axis of difference (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Social power and disadvantage are relative to contexts of interaction, and so privilege and oppression are not absolute values (Allen & Rossatto, 2009; Dewey, 1938). Attention to dynamics of privilege and oppression amongst students, even in a group whose members appear to the instructor or researcher to be of similar background and social class, should be registered as theoretically significant variables as well.

In the case of the INVST CLP evaluation study, the theoretical resources above framed a provisional ideal of political citizenship that incorporates qualities of both receptivity and political agency, and which adjudicates trade-offs in terms of what seems likely to support the creation of a genuine public interest (whether in the context of a student cohort, an organization, or wider local, regional, and national communities). While different democratic moments may require different skills and dispositions, there is also almost certainly some common content across diverse democratic characters. The balance between individual or subgroup identifications and "superordinate" (Anderson, 2010) public identifications is a good candidate for a quality that *all* citizens need for politics as cooperative inquiry to function. Thus, the extent to which such identifications inform democratic growth and action became key focal issues for a theoretically informed interpretation and analysis in evaluating the CLP.

## Conclusion

When we consider whether service-learning sup-

ports democracy and justice outcomes we cannot simply look at issues of implementation. On the one hand, there is the view that "As with any teaching strategy, service-learning's value depends on its implementation" (Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998, p. 276). On the other hand, there is a tendency within service-learning evaluation to chalk negative outcomes up to failures of implementation, which effectively insulates the variables nominally under evaluation from critical scrutiny; the assumption that service-learning *necessarily* serves democratic and justice aims *when properly implemented* leads to ad hoc explanations of evidence to the contrary. The historical context and theoretical considerations explored in this paper demonstrate that scholars and practitioners must take a hard look at the structure and substance of the concepts that inform practice if assessment of democratic and justice outcomes is to be meaningful.

A reconstructive synthesis of Deweyan-pragmatic and Freirean-critical theoretical traditions is a good starting point for developing an adequate conceptual framework. This should be supplemented, I have argued, by the well-developed literature on critical multicultural education, which takes seriously the complex ways that students within relevant educational contexts are both privileged and oppressed in relation to different social phenomena, and that some forms of "empowerment" may themselves represent a democratic deficit. Awareness of the issues raised in this paper, and the theoretical resources highlighted for addressing them, will not only aid in the meaningful assessment of the impact of service-learning programming, but also help to clarify the essential features of service-learning worth working to institutionalize, as well as which forms proponents would do well to abandon.

The integration of these theoretical strands in a single framework perhaps appears to be a daunting task. On the contrary, I would suggest that the difficult work has already been done; our present task is to find in what has come before the tools that enable us to respond to our own context in ways that further our ideals. Synthesizing the traditions' most defensible principles and practices is a necessary step if we are to integrate historic goals into a normative framework that, when operationalized, will enable researchers to meaningfully assess whether service-learning practice enhances civic engagement in ways that truly serve democratic and justice aims.

## Notes

[2] See, for example, the University of Colorado Boulder's campus-wide Flagship 2030 Strategic Plan initiative at http://www.colorado.edu/flagship2030/

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